

## **Chairman's Statement 2015**

Good morning, everybody.

I would firstly like to welcome you all to the 2015 Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Local History Societies. I would like to especially welcome the Mayor of County Cork, Councillor Alan Coleman, and Doreen McBride and her husband George who are representing our sister organisation, the Federation of Ulster Local Studies.

Last year we had our AGM in Clontarf to coincide with the commemoration of the Battle of Clontarf, one thousand years previously. This year, it is a special pleasure to be in Kinsale to coincide with the commemoration of an event that took place one hundred years ago, namely the sinking of the Lusitania. Our business is local history and while one might say that these two events being of national and international significance are not specifically local history, they did have a strong local impact and hence do come within our ambit.

Our aims are to promote interest in local history and our activities since the last AGM have reflected those aims. Since our last AGM we have had two significant trips to places of historical interest in Scotland and in Devon/Cornwall. These were organised in conjunction with the Federation of Ulster Local Studies who share our aims and objectives. These trips are always over-subscribed and one of our challenges for the future is to try to figure out a way of meeting the demand in a more comprehensive way.

Another joint event with the Ulster Federation was a very interesting and well-attended seminar in Dundalk in October entitled, "Hidden Histories – The Unfolding Story of Ireland in WW1".

One of the ongoing projects which has involved both Federations is the Hidden Gems/Forgotten People project. In this, we encourage individuals and societies to carry out a small piece of local research on some largely forgotten piece of local history or person whose details are worth recording on a special website we have set up for this purpose. Some of these mini-history projects have been transferred to polystyrene display panels which are available for lending to any local history society which would like to borrow them. A number of societies have availed of this during the year. Even though it has been operational for a while, this project will be launched officially by President Higgins on 8<sup>th</sup> October in the National Library.

Our PRO, Larry Breen, has been a very busy man during the past twelve months. As well as organising the two trips to Scotland and England and the Hidden Gems project, he is also the point man for circulating details of society events to all the member societies; he is the editor of the on-line quarterly newsletter; administers the website and edits our flagship publication, Local History Review. This is a wonderful publication, designed and typeset by JJ Woods, and I would encourage you to buy copies of the latest edition for yourselves and for sale at society meetings. Larry had an interesting e-mail at Christmas from somebody who had had an article accepted for the 2012 edition of Local History Review. As a result of that publication, the author was invited to present at a number of history festivals and to contribute articles on his topic to other journals in Ireland and the USA. He concluded his e-mail to Larry by saying, "Without the help and assistance from organisations such as yours, various gems of historic detail would remain undiscovered and untold. Keep up the great work." It is encouraging to get feedback like that.

Amongst its promotional activities during the year, the Federation had stands at the "Celebrating the Past" exhibition in Cork in October and at the "Back to our Past" exhibition at the RDS in Dublin, also in October. These generated a fair amount of interest. Following those exhibitions, we realised that we needed a new leaflet explaining the aims of the

Federation. Larry and JJ Woods collaborated in the design and production of the new tri-fold leaflet which you have all been given.

A number of societies have expressed an interest in oral history and how one goes about recording it. To address this need, we are organising a seminar to be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October in the Teachers' Club, Parnell Square, Dublin. This is being organised by committee members, Michael Gaynor and Betty Quinn. I would like to make a comment on the location of this seminar in Dublin. After our last workshop in Athlone on the use of social media by local history societies, the feedback we got from many non-Dublin societies was that it should not have been held in Athlone but in a place that was easy for everybody to get to, namely Dublin! Maybe we should have one in the real capital and see what happens!

You will be glad to hear that Larry Breen has already started planning our next English field trip which will be to the English Midlands and which will cover places such as Warwick, Stratford and Oxford.

There is one other topic which I want to mention and that is Climate Change. Government has recently invited the Federation to participate in an advisory group to deal with the issue of the impact of climate change on our built and archaeological heritage. Whether we agree or disagree that climate change is man-made, it is happening. Average temperatures are rising and sea levels are also rising. Storms are becoming stronger and more frequent. Historic buildings and archaeological sites could be vulnerable to wind damage or flooding or coastal erosion. Government is concerned enough about the impact on our heritage to start the process of preparing a plan to try to protect as much of this heritage as is feasible. This is a huge task and the work is only just beginning. I will keep you informed about this and the possible role of local history societies in the work.

I would like to conclude by thanking the committee for their work and support to me during the year. In particular, I would like to mention Larry Breen who has been responsible for so many of the activities throughout the year, including the organisation of this AGM. He has been ably assisted by JJ Woods who contributes much to our activities. Special thanks are due to Dermot Ryan of the Kinsale History Society who suggested that we have the AGM here in Kinsale and helped with the arrangements.

Thank you all very much.