

Chairman's Statement 2016

Deputy Mayor, ladies and gentlemen.

You are all very welcome to this Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Local History Societies. I would in particular like to welcome the representatives of our sister organisation, the Federation for Ulster Local Studies, who have come from Banbridge, West Belfast, Carrickfergus and Benburb to be with us here today.

I am very pleased that the Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society invited us to have this year's AGM in my native city of Limerick. It was here that my interest in history was first stimulated by my parents and especially by my maternal grandmother who had had the experience of being evicted as a young child and of having to live in a stable for a period. Two of her prized possessions were two bullet cases picked up from the ruins of 1916 which she presented to me when she realised that I had an interest in history. I mention my grandmother just to show that we can all inculcate an interest in history in the next generation if we make the effort.

We hear a lot about social housing nowadays and the difficulty of finding suitable sites that won't attract objections at the planning stage. There were similar problems in the 1930s, so Limerick Corporation found the ideal site – the courtyard of King John's Castle! The tops of the houses could be seen above the parapets of the castle and I remember, as a schoolboy, being upset by this ongoing desecration (as I saw it) of a historic site.

Fortunately in more recent years the houses were removed and the castle has been restored to the condition you see today. I think it is a sign of our progress as a nation and of the growing interest in history that even in the current dire need of social housing nobody would think of the courtyard of a medieval castle as a suitable site.

This growing interest in history has been given impetus by the current Decade of Centenaries that started three years ago and also by the process of putting archives on line, such as the Census Returns, the Bureau of Military History Records, the Military Pensions Records and more recently the 1916 Court Martial files. This is reflected also in the increasing membership of the Federation in recent years which is now over 160.

Our last AGM was held in Kinsale to coincide with the commemoration of the sinking of the Lusitania. Since then we have had a number of events, starting

with the joint visit to North Down/South Antrim in July where we visited the Somme Heritage Centre, Mount Stewart and Carrickfergus.

In October, three of our committee members manned a stand at the *Cork Celebrates the Past* exhibition. On the following day, the Federation organised a very interesting seminar in Dublin on the recording of oral history and this was followed shortly afterwards by the highlight of the year, the official launch of the *Hidden Gems and Forgotten People* project by the President, Michael D. O'Higgins. This was very well attended by members of both federations, who enjoyed the event and the subsequent interaction with the President and his wife.

Local History Day in Dublin on 20th February featured a paper by Larry Breen on the *Hidden Gems and Forgotten People* project and he also organised a very interesting and well-planned visit to the English Midlands in April which was attended by fifty-one people from both federations.

I have now completed three years as chairman and I feel it is the right time to step down and allow somebody else to make their contribution. I have enjoyed my time as chairman, learned a lot of history and made many new friendships – north and south of the border. I have been fortunate in having an excellent committee for the three years and I would like to thank them for their contributions, individually and collectively during that period. I would like to particularly thank our Secretary, Betty Quinn, our Treasurer, Mairead Byrne and of course the main mover, both behind the scenes and front of stage, Larry Breen.

I would also like to thank our hosts, the Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society for their hospitality and help in organising this event.

Thank you all and enjoy the rest of the weekend in this most historic city.