

**BELLAGHY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
TRUSTEE REPORT
2023 - 2024**

Establishment and Objectives

Bellaghy Historical Society is a voluntary organisation, established in 2000 to promote education, knowledge and understanding of local, national and international history.

This objective is achieved through

- The provision and promotion of equal opportunities for the membership for activities undertaken by the Society regardless of religious belief, political opinion, race, age, marital status or sexual orientation, men and women generally, persons with a disability and persons without and persons with dependents and persons without;
- The pursuance of original research that is made available to all;
- The sharing of information amongst the members of the Society so as to add to the body of knowledge;
- The organisation of talks and other educational events that will provide members and the general public with relevant information, knowledge or skills to pursue individual or group research;
- Developing and delivering a programme of talks and activities on topics relevant to the history of the area of Bellaghy, Ireland and worldwide but with a particular focus on historical events and characters that have impacted on the locality of Bellaghy and its people;
- Building a local archive of documents (or photocopies of documents), illustrations and artefacts relating to the local history of Bellaghy and the surrounding area;
- Arranging guided local history walks in Bellaghy and surrounding area;
- The collection and recording of oral histories;
- Mounting exhibitions of an historical nature;
- Creating and maintaining an internet Bellaghy Historical Society website;
- The publication of a range of books, leaflets and resource materials relating to the local history of the area;
- Acting as a resource for material and information for schools, libraries, media, museums etc;
- Engagement with any and all other organisations from the Bellaghy area and surrounding district that have a shared interest in the promotion of the area, it's history and people;
- The extension of any of the above and developing additional activities as opportunities arise.

Activity

The Society meets on the second Tuesday of each month between October and May in the Old School House, Castle Street, Bellaghy when guest speakers are invited to present to members on a varied range of topics of historical interest.

Members of the Society were saddened to learn of the death in April 2024 of Mrs Patricia Lowry, one of the founding members of the Society. Mrs Lowry was noted for her boundless energy and enthusiasm for local history and it is testimony to her and all her efforts and encouragement that the Society will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2024

A full programme of lectures was delivered (October 2023 to May 2024), details of which are included below.

The Society's AGM took place on 14th May 2024, minutes of which are available.

Seamus McErlean continues to hold both the role of Chairperson and Secretary which he has indicated is demanding and needs to be considered further at the next meeting of the committee (August 2024, date to be agreed).

Dermot Keenan has indicated his intension to withdraw from his role as member of the committee for personal reasons. However, a decision about his replacement was not taken at the AGM (14th May 2024). This may be reconsidered by the committee at a later date.

A new website has been developed and can be accessed at:

Website: www.bellaghyhistoricalsociety.co.uk

Email: bellaghyhs@gmail.com

This report has been compiled on behalf of the Committee of the Bellaghy Historical Society by its chairperson Seamus McErlean



Seamus McErlean (Mr)
Chairperson
Bellaghy Historical Society
2 Sherbourne Park
Magherafelt
BT45 6JR

BELLAGHY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2023 - 2024

All talks commence at 8.00pm, Old School House, Castle Street, Bellaghy

October Tuesday 10th	Mills in NI (South Derry) Sebastian Graham
November Tuesday 14th	The History of Lowering Lough Neagh - When, Why and How? Dr Liam Campbell
December Tuesday 12th	Local Townlands Thomas McErlean
January Tuesday 9th	The Earliest Evidence for Farming in Ireland Brendan Gormley
February Tuesday 13th	Archaeology of the A6 Road Scheme Dungiven to Drumahoe Jonathan Barkley
March Tuesday 12th	Pictures of Bellaghy George McIntyre
April Tuesday 9th	United Irishmen and South Derry: Exploring the 1798 Leaders from South Derry and what really happened Stephen McCracken
May Tuesday 14th	Why the Emergency - and a Double Agent - Really! Clive Scoular

ADMISSION: £4 (including refreshments)

CHAIRPERSON: Seamus McErlean

BELLAGHY HISTORICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES - 1st AUGUST 2023

1. Welcome

Present

Seamus McErlean (chair)
Linda Boyle
Ena Hammond
Kathleen McKenna
George McIntyre
Pat Brennan

Apologies

Peter McKenna

Absent

Richard Keenan
Dermot Keenan

2. Minutes 23rd August 2022

The minutes of the last Committee meeting of 23rd August 2022 were read and agreed as being an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

- **Secretarial Support** - it had been agreed at the previous meeting that Seamus would assume the role of chairperson and secretary. This was endorsed by members at the AGM on Tuesday 16th May 2023
- **Accommodation / Venue** - following the previous meeting, enquiries were made into the possibility of obtaining another venue in which to hold meetings (there was speculation that the Old School by be taken over as a business enterprise). The hire costs of HomePlace were considered to be prohibitive (in excess of the Society's budget) and no other suitable spaces was found to be available (Bawn / Church / Community venues)
- **Website** - this issue is addressed at item 7 below
- **Lecture Programme** - Seamus updated members on some of the challenges of printing and distributing the lecture programme. The printing issue has been resolved (Seamus will print posters). Linda has agreed to distribute posters to all business and similar outlets in Bellaghy.

- **Engagement with Churches (membership)** - there had been much discussion at the previous meeting about the significant reduction of members from both the Church of Ireland and Presbyterian churches and it was agreed that Seamus would pursue this issue. Seamus advised that despite his efforts to make contact with representatives of both churches, he'd had no response from either. The parish secretary of the Catholic church includes details of lectures in the weekly bulletin.

Action: After discussion, it was agreed that one church contact may be Richard Frew. Members were asked to provide a contact address and / or telephone number for Richard and that Seamus would make contact with him

4. Review of 2022/23 Lecture Programme

Members reviewed and discussed the content of the 2022/23 lecture programme. Aside from the difficulties with heating and the inclement weather, the programme was considered to have been a success, most notably Thomas McErlean's talk on Church Island (March 2023 with attracted 42 attendees) and George McIntyre's presentation on Pictures of Bellaghy (December 2022 which had few attendees due to the weather but nevertheless generated considerable discussion and interaction with those present). It was agreed that George's presentation should be repeated when it is hoped that more members may be able to attend.

The presentation by Jonathan Barkley (February 2023 on the excavation / archaeology of the A6 Toome to Castledawson) was also considered to be a highlight and members noted that Jonathan is scheduled to return in February 2024 when he will present on the excavation / archaeology of the A^ from Dungiven to Drumahoe.

The April 2023 talk by Roland Spottiswoode on the Spottiswoode Family in Ireland and the May 2023 lecture on FJ Bigger and the Irish Language by Stiofán ÓDireáin were both well received. Both talks were considered to be informative, well researched and the speakers highly knowledgeable. There were suggestions that given the volume of material, there may have been space for each lecture to be presented over two sessions.

Other presentations, Maura Johnston (November 2022 on local language and dialects entitled From Aftergrass to Yellow Boots) and Clive Scoular (December 2022 on the War of Independence, Civil War and the Impact on NI) were also regarded as having been interesting and successful presentations.

The Committee noted observations / comments from attendees during the course of the year regarding the quality of the projection of presentations and seat lay-out. These comments are noted and steps taken to address same. This matter will be kept under review

5. Funding Update

Seamus updated members on his application to the Mid-Ulster Council regarding funding. The application had covered (i) the updating, maintenance and sustainability of the Society's website and (ii) funding of the lecture programme.

In total, Seamus had submitted a funding request for £3,500-£4,000. Applicants had been advised by Council that due to financial challenges and difficulties at Stormont, funding would be significantly reduced. In the end, the Society has received funding of £750 which will cover the lecture programme but decisions will have to be made regarding the future of the website (see item 7 below).

6. Annual Fees

A decision had been taken last year in the light of the current economic recession to change the arrangements for annual fees / admission fee. The arrangement whereby members paid an annual fee (£10 if in employment and £5 for others - students, persons over 65 years) was abolished and the admission fee (previously £1 members / £3 non-members) was set at £3 for everyone (this included attendance at the lecture and refreshments).

After some discussion, it was agreed by members to increase the admission fee to £4 for everyone. Annual fees would still not apply.

7. Website Update

Seamus provided an update on discussions with the Society's website designer regarding (i) updating the site, (ii) maintenance, (iii) training, (iv) hosting and (iv) domain fees.

Hosting and domain fees (even if the site was not updated) will cost £300 over 5 years i.e., £30 each for hosting and domain name per annum paid for 5 years in advance.

Updating the site, adding lecture notes, responding to emails from people searching their family roots, ensuring that all information is up to date (sections are currently 7 years out of date) and the provision of training for members would cost between £2,000 and £2,500.

The hosting / domain name expires on 14th August 2023.

Given the cost of restoring / maintaining the site, members agreed that regrettably, the site should be closed. Seamus advised that he had saved all the information from the site as Word Documents as they may be useful in future in some format.

There was discussion about using Facebook as a way of raising awareness of the Society and its activities.

Action: Seamus to contact the web designer and advise him that the site is to be closed.

Action: Seamus to explore the possibility of Facebook and will liaise with George (original site builder) to consider options for the Society

8. Draft Programme 2023/24

Draft programme for 2023/24 was circulated and discussed.

March and April (2024) have still to be completed and some further discussions with presenters will be necessary e.g., regarding title and content of presentation and fees.

The possible speaker for March / April had not responded to communications from Seamus however, if he does and arrangements can be agreed, George McIntyre has agreed to fill the remaining slot with his presentation on Pictures of Bellaghy (first delivered in December 2022).

There was discussion about ending the season in April (as opposed to May) and perhaps starting in September (as opposed to October). It was felt that this would require further discussion with the wider membership and views sought.

Action: Discussion to be held with membership regarding the duration of the lecture season.

Seamus has had some discussions with Cathy Brown about a future joint event with Seamus Heaney HomePlace (possibly in 2024 to fit with the HomePlace schedule).

Possible themes / topics for the joint event (which needs to cover history, literature, culture) include:

- Traditional music
- A Band
- Irish / Scottish music
- DNA (former speaker at HomePlace - world leader in DNA research / ancestry)
- Vikings
- John Scullion (world drumming champion)

Action: Members to share any ideas with Seamus in advance of his meeting with Cathy (a date for which has not been set yet).

9. AoB

Date of Next Meeting - to be agreed (depending on content and distribution of programme)