Ulster History Circle®

Annual Report and Accounts
2020 - 2021

Registered as a charity with the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland: NIC100124

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Members of the Ulster History Circle 2020-2021

Officers:

Mr Chris Spurr	Chairman
Vacant	Vice-Chair
Mrs Maud Hamill	Secretary
Mrs Mairead Ferguson	Treasurer

Dr Peter Collins
Mr Richard Froggatt — *Editor:* — *The Dictionary of Ulster Biography* (Resigned August 2020)
Dr Myrtle Hill
Dr. Nuala McAllister Hart
Dr David Hume MBE
Mr Kenneth Irvine
Mr Liam Logan
Mr Leslie McKeague
Mr Seamus McKee
Mr Brian McKeown
Mr Trevor Parkhill MBE

This report covers the period from April 2020 to March 2021 . Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were no Committee meetings held during this period. The Annual General Meeting, usually held in May, was also postponed until a later unknown date.

A Background Note

The Ulster History Circle (the Circle) was founded over thirty years ago by James Hawthorne, the then Controller of BBC Northern Ireland. Observing how people of achievement were often commemorated elsewhere by plaques, he realised there was no universal scheme in place locally to celebrate those persons whose achievements had made a significant contribution to the history of Ulster. Mr Hawthorne considered there was an opportunity for a blue plaque programme and his inspiration created The Ulster History Circle. The first Circle plaque was to the artist William Conor and is on Stranmillis Road, Belfast, opposite Botanic Gardens.

Since this beginning in the mid 1980s, the Circle has put up 249 plaques to celebrate achievers, in every county and city in Northern Ireland, and in many towns and villages too. There are nine Circle plaques in the Republic of Ireland, four in Co Donegal, two in Co Monaghan and three in Co Cavan. Every year the blue plaque programme continues to expand, thanks to those who support its activities. There is no similar body within the whole island of Ireland doing what the Circle does. With no monies of its own, The Ulster History Circle relies on finance from outside funders, and its activities depend on the efforts of its members, a wholly volunteer working committee, which has a number limited by constitution, to twenty.

Annual Report 2020-2021 Foreword

For more than a year the Ulster History Circle's work to erect commemorative blue plaques has been halted due to Covid-19 restrictions on holding gatherings such as our plaque unveilings. Therefore, the number of plaques in situ remains as was when our plaque events were suspended in March 2020, and across this past year there are only a small number of matters to report about a few of those plaques we have in our care.

As our plaque programme remains on hold, we have agreed that it is not necessary to convene our regular monthly committee meetings where we plan and decide the progress of future plaques. Also, our 2020 AGM is still to take place. The intention is that our meetings will resume as soon as regulations permit sizable gatherings indoors between individuals from multiple households and the organising of outdoor gatherings for a significant number of guests. The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has been kept informed of the position.

The Circle website includes a statement to say that our plaque programme is temporarily halted and that no further plaque nominations are being considered until we are able to deliver the considerable backlog of unveilings we have incurred since March 2020.

There has been some small movement over the year concerning plaques already unveiled. The Francis Ledwidge plaque at the former Ebrington Barracks in Derry-Londonderry was reinstated in July after renovation work at the site was completed. In September past the plaque to Ernest Walton at Methodist College, Belfast, was transferred temporarily from one building to another to facilitate TV filming at the college, and near the end of 2020 our plaques to Lord Kelvin and Robert Shipboy McAdam were returned to the newly renovated Kelvin House in central Belfast.

Last summer the Circle was contacted by the Best of Belfast podcast who were hoping to feature six of our plaques in a documentary series. Permission was readily given, and podcasts to Danny Blanchflower, Sir Otto Jaffe, Lilian Bland, Sir John Lavery, Helen Lewis, and Sir Samuel Davidson are now online. Lilian Bland is among other Circle plaque persons featured in the online BBC Bitesize History Makers for KS3 in Northern Ireland. The fifteen learner guides in this series include eleven people commemorated by Circle plaques. Discover Northern Ireland has selected pairs of Circle plaques, county by county, to encourage 'staycation' tourism.

In the absence of our regular meetings, Circle members have been kept informed about matters of interest in a series of monthly updates. Our volunteer members are keen to be busy again with the plaque programme, and all deserve the greatest of thanks for their patience at this time. To discover more about our work, I encourage you to access our website.

The Dictionary of Ulster Biography represents an important part of the Circle's work and includes thousands of entries. The Dictionary, much broader in scope than our plaque programme, offers a rich and continually expanding base of entries, all written and edited in a voluntary capacity to an extremely high standard, and has its own dedicated website.

Our programme of unveilings will begin again when conditions allow that gatherings such as the Circle's plaque events can happen once more. 2021 is the first year since 2013 that the Circle has not held a plaque unveiling for a woman of achievement to mark International Women's Day in March, and we hope that next year the pattern will resume. I thank all those who continue to offer the Ulster History Circle support across these exceptional times, and the Circle sincerely hopes that we will be able to recommence our plaque programme later in 2021.

Chris Spurr, Chairman, May 2021.

Ulster History Circle

Financial Summary 2020-2021

Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31st March 2021

Receipts	**£**	**£**
Ulster-Scots Agency	4,800	
Total Grant Income	**4,800**	
Other Income - McKelvey Construction	630	
Total Income		**5,430**

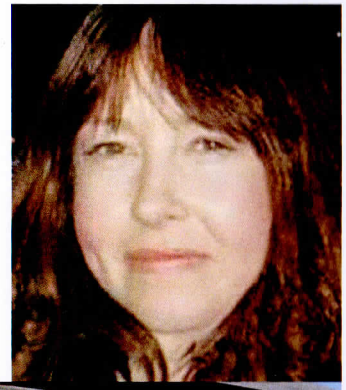
Payments	**£**
Plaque Manufacture & Fitting	(990)
Plaque design	-
Meeting Expenses	-
Events	-
Administration	(41)
Printing & Stationery	-
Insurance	-
Internet Charges	(781)
Accounting	(50)
Other	-
Total expenditure	**(1,862)**
Net income	**3,568**

Statement of assets / (liabilities)		
Opening resources	8.732	
Net income	3,568	
Net assets carried forward		**12,300**
Represented by:		
Balance per bank statement		**12,335**
Uncashed cheques		(35)
Net bank balance		**12.300**

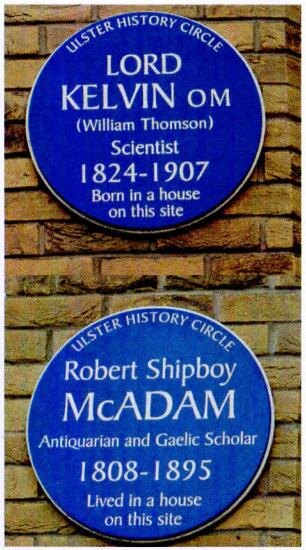
The Blue Plaque in Photographs

The team who are responsible for the design, manufacture and erecting blue plaques throughout the nine historical counties of Ulster.....

In Belfast, freelance designer GILLIAN MCCOURT creates the plaque face, and has been responsible for the design of more than 200 Ulster History Circle blue plaques.



In Newry, PAUL & STEPHEN BRADY proprietors of ISD (Infinite Signs & Design Ltd), supply and erect the blue plaques.



Plaques reinstated at the newly renovated KELVIN HOUSE College Square East, Belfast.

Proposing, Funding, and Achieving a Blue Plaque

An Ulster History Circle blue plaque unites a person with a location in their life, and the Circle carries out careful and extensive research into the site of each plaque. Street Indexes are checked over, site visits made, and owners and tenants consulted for permission to allow the plaque on their premises. These activities can take considerable time, especially when seeking permission to put up a plaque. The plaque wording is carefully chosen; invitations are designed and issued; a person to unveil the plaque invited; guest speakers arranged, as each unveiling is accompanied by a talk on the person being honoured, and family members, as well as members of professional bodies associated with the plaque recipient, are contacted and invited. The whole is carefully planned and co-ordinated, towards creating a single special event.

- a person must be deceased at least twenty years, unless they would have reached their 100th birthday by the date of the proposed plaque unveiling.
- the person must be associated with Ulster (nine counties) by reason of birth, education, work, residence, or vocation.
- the person should be acknowledged and recognised as having made a significant contribution to education, industry, commerce, science, arts and literature, international affairs or other calling anywhere in the world.
- the person must have a building associated with them in Ulster: a place of birth, education, residence, work, or similar.
- the Circle's plaques are to persons of achievement and do not commemorate buildings, places, organisations or movements.

A proposal for a plaque should contain the reasons for a person's nomination, a short biographical note, and a suggestion of where a plaque might be located. All proposals should also give an indication of how the plaque will be funded. The Circle has no funds of its own, and relies on such as local authorities, businesses, organisations, and individuals to pay for its plaques.

Each proposal is carefully considered by the Circle committee, and if accepted, it joins the list of prospective plaques. The list always has a considerable number of plaques pending, so a new acceptance can take considerable time to process. The Circle undertakes all the necessary work as outlined above in order to achieve the plaque unveiling but can only undertake a plaque project when funding is agreed beforehand, and in place. Proposals for plaques can be submitted to the Circle at:: ulsterhistorycircle1@gmail.com

The Circle's website has undergone a significant improvement and redevelopment and can be accessed at: www.ulsterhistorycircle.org.uk

The Dictionary of Ulster Biography

The Dictionary of Ulster Biography (DUB) has its origins in the published work (1993) of the same name, compiled by Kate Newmann. Its initial 1644 entries were digitised by the Circle in 2007, and form the basis of the present on-line *DUB*, which is edited, in a voluntary capacity, by the Circle to a very high standard. Many of the original entries now include additional details, and new entries are added every month, with the result that the *DUB* currently offers information on over two thousand people. By publishing on-line, the *DUB* benefits from regular updating, and there are many contemporary entries, for although a person must be deceased to be included in the dictionary, the 20-year delay related to blue plaques does not apply. The *DUB* contains biographical information on all the persons commemorated in the Circle's Blue Plaque Programme, including many of those people celebrated by the Circle's plaques up until March 2021.

The *DUB* has the special advantage of being free for all to access, and is easily searchable. It is recognised as a valuable reference source, and the *DUB* website receives tens of thousands of visitors every year from across the world.

As with the Circle's plaques, the *DUB* concerns itself with persons born in, or strongly associated with Ulster. The Editor always welcomes suggestions for entries from new contributors, who will receive full acknowledgement of authorship, and copyright, although there is no payment made for entries.

The Editor can be contacted at the *DUB* website, which is at: www.newulsterbiography.co.uk