

Ulster History Circle®



Annual Report and Accounts 2023-2024



Sean Hollywood Plaque

12h December 2023 at 11.30 am

Front Row, I-r Cormac McKinney-Principal St. Colman's, Helena Young - Newry Maritime Association, Patricia Slevin (Sean's sister), Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte, Chris Spurr - Chairman Ulster History Circle, Dr. Eibhlin Mhic Aoidh - Vice Chair Ulster History Circle.

Back Row, I-r David Pearse - Actor and past pupil, Kenneth Irvine - Ulster History Circle, Donal O'Hanlon - Chairman/Director Newpoint Players, Sean Og McAteer - Secretary Down County County GAA, Rory McShane, James McArevey - Chairman Newry Maritime Association.

Photo – courtesy of Liz Boyle.

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Contents:

Members of the Ulster History Circle	page	2
Chairman's Foreword.....	page	3
The 2023-2024 Blue Plaque Programme.....	page	4
Images from the 2023-2024 Blue Plaque Programme.....	page	5
Financial Summary.....	page	6
Proposing, Funding and Achieving a Blue Plaque.....	page	7
The Dictionary of Ulster Biography.....	page	7
Further Images from the Circle's 2023-2024 Blue Plaque Programme.....	page	8

Members of the Ulster History Circle 2023-2024

Officers:

Mr Chris Spurr	Chairman	
Dr. Eibhlin Mhic Aoidh	Vice-Chair	
Mary Delargy	Secretary	(appointed UHC June 2023)
Maud Hamill	Treasurer	

Mike Catto, Tim Clifford (resigned August 2023), Dr. Peter Collins, Dr. David Hume MBE, Nuala McAllister Hart (resigned June 2023), Kenneth Irvine, Liam Logan, Leslie McKeague, Seamus McKee, Brian McKeown (resigned September 2023), Alister McReynolds, Patricia Pyne (appointed October 2023), Trevor Parkhill MBE, Richard Froggatt - Editor- The Dictionary of Ulster Biography.

This report covers the period from April 2023 to March 2024. There was a total of 10 meetings held and the Annual General Meeting took place in May prior to the regular monthly meeting.

A Background Note

The Ulster History Circle was founded nearly forty 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 273 plaques to celebrate achievers, in every county and city in Northern Ireland, and in many towns and villages too. There are eleven Circle plaques in the Republic of Ireland, four in Donegal, two in Co Monaghan, and five in County 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 of 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 2023-2024 Foreword

Throughout the past year the Ulster History Circle's work to erect commemorative blue plaques and organise unveiling ceremonies has continued to progress and a total of ten plaques have been put up across five of the nine counties of Ulster and in Belfast city.

In April 2023 Conway Square in Newtownards, Co Down saw the unveiling of a plaque to the statesman Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh KG; in May the artist Gladys Maccabe was commemorated at her former studio on Stranmillis Road, Belfast, and in Co Armagh in June, Lurgan College hosted a plaque to past pupil Dr Mollie McGeown, nephrologist, and health service pioneer. Two plaques were unveiled in September, the first in Armagh City to Hugh Breen, mathematician, and astronomer at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, and in Cootehill, Co Cavan, the novelist, publisher and businesswoman Mary Anne Sadlier of Montreal and New York was commemorated. In November three plaque ceremonies took place, in Cullyhanna, Co Armagh to Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich, archbishop, historian, scholar, and Gael at the place of his birth exactly 100 years before; in Derrylin, Co Fermanagh, on Armistice Day to Monica de Wichfeld (née Massy-Beresford), a leader of the Danish resistance in World War II, and in Larne, Co Antrim to Dr James McHenry, Ulster-Scots writer and US consul in Londonderry in the 1840s. 2023 ended with the unveiling in December in Newry of a plaque to Sean Hollywood, teacher, actor and director, civil rights activist, hurler, and Gael, on what would have been his 80th birthday, at St Colman's College where he taught. On International Women's Day in March 2024, we were pleased to return to the Circle's annual practice of commemorating a woman of achievement with a plaque to Maighr ad Nic Mhaic in, Irish speaker, translator, writer, and scholar of Russian, at her former school, St Dominic's Grammar, in Belfast. All our plaque unveilings are individual, distinct, and exceptional, and the first citizens of the cities and boroughs concerned, and family members of the persons commemorated attended many of the unveiling ceremonies.

Thanks are due to those bodies who have supported the plaques we have put up during the past year: Ards and North Down Borough Council; Belfast City Council; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Cavan County Council; Foras na Gaeilge; the Ulster-Scots Agency, and Newry Maritime Association. Several of these organizations have committed to a partnership with the Circle for one annual plaque or more. The Circle was also extremely grateful to receive a kind donation from the Sadlier family in America.

Our volunteer members continue to give their invaluable support to the Circle, generously sharing their expertise and knowledge. All deserve thanks for the contribution they make to our efforts, especially those who volunteer to lead a plaque unveiling. The Circle now has an internal complaints procedure in place, and this has been accepted by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. Three members left our committee during the year, and two were welcomed.

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 at www.ulsterbiography.co.uk

The Circle always has a busy programme of plaque unveilings in progress, but it is possible to propose a person of achievement for consideration. However, it is advisable to understand that many of the proposals we receive for a blue plaque are not always accepted. It is also important to remember that as well as a suggestion of where a plaque might be located, any new plaque proposal must also indicate how this might be funded, as the Circle has no money of our own. To discover more about our plaque programme, I encourage you to read the information included in this Annual Report, or to access the How the Scheme Works page on our website at www.ulsterhistorycircle.org.uk

In conclusion, it is my pleasure once again to thank all those who have supported the Ulster History Circle across the past year, both with funding and in friendship, and to thank in advance those who will do so in the future.

Chris Spurr, Chairman, May 2024.



The Blue Plaque Programme 2023-2024

Plaque Number	Person Commemorated	Location of Plaque	Date of Unveiling	Unveiled by	Funding Body
264	Robert Stewart Viscount Castlereagh (1769-1822) Statesman	Ards Art Centre Town Hall Conway Square Newtownards	19th April	Mayor-Councillor Karen Douglas and Lady Rose Lauritzen of Mount Stewart	Ards and North Down Borough Council.
265	Gladys Maccabe (1918-2018) Artist, Writer, Critic	17 Stranmillis Road Belfast	23rd May	Professor Chris Maccabe, son	Belfast City Council
266	Mollie McGeown (1923-2004) Physician, Nephrologist Health Service Pioneer	Lurgan College College Walk Lurgan	23rd June	Johnny Freeland, grandson	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
267	Hugh Breen (1791-1848) Mathematician Astronomer	19 Abbey Street Armagh City	15th September	Professor Michael Burton, Director of Armagh Observatory and Planetarium	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
268	Mary Anne Sadlier (1820-1903) Novelist, Editor, Publisher, Businesswoman Montreal and New York	Cootehill Library Bridge Street Cootehill Cavan	21st September	Councillor Philip Brady, Cathaoirleach of Cavan County Council	Cavan County Council
269	Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich (1923-1990) Archbishop of Armagh, Historian, Scholar, Gael	'An Chrosbhóthar' 58 Killybane Road, Cullyhanna	3rd November	Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland, Eamon Martin	Foras na Gaeilge
270	Monica de Wichfeld (nee Massy-Beresford) (1894-1945) Danish Resistance Leader WWII	Kinawley Parish Church 146 Main Street Derrylin	11th November	Lady Vibeke Dunleath of Ballywalter Park	Ulster-Scots Agency
271	Dr. James McHenry (1785-1845) Ulster-Scots Writer American Consul Londonderry	Larne Museum and Arts Centre, 2 Victoria Road, Larne	24th November	Jane Allen D.L. Co. Antrim	Ulster-Scots Agency
272	Sean Hollywood (1943-1998) Teacher, Actor and Director Civil Rights Leader Hurler, Footballer, Gael	St. Colman's College Violet Hill Newry	12th December	Patricia Stevin Bronagh McGoldrick Rita Finn Rory Gough Sisters and nephew of Sean Hollywood	Newry Maritime Association
273	Maighread Nic Mhaicín (1899-1983) Translator, Writer, Scholar of Russian	St. Dominic's Grammar School Falls Road Belfast	2024 8th March	Two senior St. Dominic students	Foras na Gaeilge



Robert Stewart Plaque.

- Mayor - Ards and North Down Borough Council, Councillor Karen Douglas and Lady Rose Lauritzen unveil the blue plaque.
- Peter and Lady Rose Lauritzen, Mount Stewart, Mayor Councillor Karen Douglas, Chris Spurr, Chairman - UHC.
- Robin Elliott from NTVV with Chris Spurr.

The Blue Plaque Programme 2023-2024



Gladys Maccabe Plaque.

- Professor Chris Maccabe, son of Gladys Maccabe unveils the blue plaque.
- I.r. Catherine McKeever, President - Ulster Society of Women Artists, Chris Maccabe, Chris Spurr, Chairman - Ulster History Circle, Jenny Maccabe, Mike Catto, Ulster History Circle.
- Philip Donald with Seamus McKee, Ulster History Circle.



Mollie McGeown Plaque.

- Johnny Freeland unveils the blue plaque to his grandmother.
- I.r. Headmaster of Lurgan College, Kyle McCallan MBE, Dr. Peter and Alison Freeland, Johnny Freeland, Chris Spurr, Chairman - Ulster History Circle, Paul and Janice Freeland.
- Guests enjoying the unveiling ceremony.



Hugh Breen Plaque.

- Professor Michael Burton, Director - Armagh Observatory and Planetarium unveils the Blue Plaque watched by Chris Spurr, Chairman - Ulster History Circle, Lord Mayor of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council, Councillor Margaret Tinsley and Sean Bardon, curator of Armagh County Museum.
- Chris Spurr, Michael Burton, Councillor Margaret Tinsley and Matthew McMahon of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium.
- Kieran McConville, Creggan Local History Society, Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh, Vice Chair - Ulster History Circle and Gearóid Trimble, Foras na Gaeilge.



Mary Anne Sadlier Plaque.

- Cathaoirleach of Cavan County Council, Councillor Philip Brady unveils the blue plaque.
- I.r. Councillor Sarah O'Reilly, Cllr.Clifford Kelly, Leslie McKeague, Ulster History Circle, Niamh Smyth TD, Cllr. Aiden Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach Cllr. Philip Brady, Eoin Doyle, Cllr. Madeleine Argue, Chris Spurr, Chairman - Ulster History Circle and Cavan County Librarian, Emma Clancy.
- I.r. Jonathan Smyth, author with Leslie McKeague, Ulster History Circle, Niamh Smyth TD and Patricia Smyth.



Ulster History Circle

Financial Summary 2023-2024

Receipts and Payments Account for the year ended 31st March 2024

Receipts		Payments	
Belfast City Council	£1,300	Plaque Manufacture and Fitting	(£6,380)
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon BC	£2,600	Plaque Design	(£120)
Cavan County Council	£1,294	Meeting Expenses	(£1,145)
Foras na Gaeilge	£2,600	Events	(£1,035)
Newry Maritime Association (Plaque sponsored by Modern Fireplace & Monumental Works Limited)	£1,300	Administration	(£314)
Ulster Scots Agency	£5,400	Printing and Stationery	(£165)
Total Grant Income	£14,494	Insurance	(£543)
Other income - Donations	£838	Internet Charges	(£756)
		Accounting	-
		Total Expenditure	(£10,458)
Total Income	£15,332	Net Income	£4,875

Statement of Assets/Liabilities

Opening Resources	£9,037
Net Income	£4,875

Net Assets carried forward £13,912

Represented by:	
Balance per Bank Statement	£14,105
Uncashed Cheques	(£193)
Net Bank Balance	£13,912



Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Plaque.

- Guests gather at the house on Kiltybane Road, Cullyhanna.
- Eibhlin Mhic Aoidh, Vice Chair - Ulster History Circle at the microphone with I.r. - Kieran McConville, Chair-Creggan Local History Society, Maria Nic Fhearchair, Councillor Valerie Harte, Chair of Newry Mourne & Down District Council.
- I.r. Tom Ó Fiaich nephew of the Cardinal, Kieran McConville, Valerie Harte, Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin, Maria Nic Fhearchair and Eibhlin Mhic Aoidh.



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 2024.

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

Ulster History Circle Annual Report 2023-2024



Monica de Wichfeld Plaque

- Chris Spurr, Chairman - Ulster History Circle, Lord Brian Dunleath, Lady Vibeke Dunleath and Ian Crozier, CEO Ulster - Scots Agency, sponsor of the blue plaque.
- I.r. Seamus McKee - UHC, Lord and Lady Dunleath, Rev Alastair Donaldson of Kinawley Parish, Chris Spurr, Chairman - UHC, Leslie McKeague and Alistair McReynolds, Ulster History Circle.
- Lady Vibeke Dunleath unveils the blue plaque with Lord Brian Dunleath, and Marianne Magnusson from Denmark.



Dr. James McHenry Plaque.

- Jane Allen. DL.for Co. Antrim unveils the blue plaque.
- I.r. Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Councillor Gerardine Mulvenna, Ian Crozier CEO, Ulster-Scots Agency, Jane Allen. D.L., Dr. David Hume, MBE, Gordon Lyons, Minister for Communities, Paul Roelle, United States Consulate office, Belfast, and Chris Spurr, Chairman - Ulster History Circle.
- Ian Crozier, Paul Roelle, Dr. David Hume MBE, Mayor Gerardine Mulvenna, Chris Spurr and Kenneth Irvine, Ulster History Circle.



Sean Hollywood Plaque.

- Principal of St. Colman's College, Cormac McKinney.
- The family of Sean Hollywood unveil the blue plaque, I.r. - Rita Finn, Rory Gough, Patricia Slevin and Bronagh McGoldrick
- I.r. James McAreyve, Chairman - Newry Maritime Association. Sean Og McAteer, Secretary - Down County GAA, Michael Keenan (MF&MW - sponsor of blue plaque) and Rory McShane.



Maighr ad Nic Mhaic in Plaque.

- The family and extended families of Maighr ad.
- Two senior pupils from St. Dominic's unveil the blue plaque. Included in the photo Vice Principal Philip McMaster, Rory Galway - Chair Board of Governors and Dr. Andrea Rainey, St. Dominic's.
- I.r. Chris Spurr, Chairman - Ulster History Circle, Dr. Peter Collins, Ulster History Circle, Professor Fionnt an de Br un, Professor Maxim Fomin, Mary Delargy, Ulster History Circle, Vice Chair - Ulster History Circle, Dr. Eibhl in Mhic Aidh and Dr. Gear oid Trimble - Foras na Gaeilge.