

RECLAIM THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Annual Report for 2023

1. Introduction

Reclaim the Enlightenment arguably had its most successful year to date. Whether members looked to a future United Ireland or were merely in despair at the state of government in Northern Ireland the appetite for enlightened reform seemed to grow apace.

In what was the 225th anniversary of the 1798 rebellion we particularly focussed on the radical ideas of the United Irishmen and their continued relevance today.

All this was reflected in the rapid growth of our membership and often full houses at our events.

During the year the campaign held nine events which included two major ones, and a significant conference. The Campaign acted as co-partner in a significant festival and also launched the Assembly Rooms Alliance with the objective of saving that historic building for appropriate public use.

2. Annual General Meeting.

At the Annual General Meeting held on 22 March the Annual Report and Accounts for 2022 were adopted.

The following committee members were re-elected:

Peter Collins, Frank Costello, John Gray, Francis Kane, John Lyness, Ann Marrion McCambridge, Stephen McCracken, Terry McKeown, Claire Mitchell, Anthony Russell, Bill Shaw, and Fergus Whelan.

In addition the following were elected;

Alan Millar, Owen Morton, Fiona Pegrum, and James Ward.

The following officers were re-elected:

Chair. John Gray.

Vice-Chair. Bill Shaw.

Secretary. Stephen McCracken.

Treasurer. Terry McKeown.

3. Finance

Our financial performance during the year was more than satisfactory with a surplus in the year of £4,474.88 as compared with a deficit of £334.75 in 2022 and at year end we had a balance to hand of £6,729.30. Our income in the year of £11,571.36 was much lower than the £27,000.26 in 2022 but this was entirely because we were in receipt of fewer grants. Our basic operational income showed a marked increase to £5,176.36 as compared with £2,541 in 2022. It was particularly encouraging that income from membership subscriptions increased to £955.85 from £549.89. Donations showed a dramatic increase from £137.97 to £1,684.15 as a result of our new policy of holding free events but inviting donations from attendees.

4. Grants

We are grateful to the following bodies that provided grants during the year.

Belfast City Council; £1,690 for the Harps Alive/ Cruit Eireann Festival held in 2022.

The Community Relations Council; £705 for the education conference.

Conrad na Gaelige; £2,000 for the Harps Alive/ Cruit Eireann Festival held in 2023.

The Association of Educational Psychologists; £2,000 for the education conference.

5. Membership

This grew to a record level of 167.

6. Publications

A second edition of John Gray's, *Cave Hill and the United Irishmen* was published. Plans were afoot for at least three publications in 2024.

7. Events.

25 January

Alternative Burns night.

We were determined to reclaim Robert Burns as a key figure in the radical enlightenment.

A full house in the Deer's Head was informed and entertained by John Gray, Angeline Kelly King, David Lennon, and Alan Milar with a quiz masterminded by John Lyness.

22 March

AGM and talk by Fiona Pegrum on 'The Sampson family'.

15 May

Claire Mitchell, 'Exploring the ideas in *The Lost Limb*'.

Mark Doherty, 'The abolitionist watch makers of Belfast'

24 June

Walking tour, 'Following the United Irishmen on the Cave Hill'. This was attended by 52 people and by popular demand it was repeated on 2 September when another 30 came.

14 July - Bastille Day

We celebrate this day annually. In this the 225th anniversary of the 1798 rebellion the theme was.

'Reclaiming the United Irish vision of a civic republic'. In a year which saw the succession of another hereditary monarch this seemed particularly relevant.

John Gray, Fergus Whelan, Fiona Pegrum, and Alan Millar spoke. Music was provided by Otherish while Paddy Cullivan put on a masterly performance.

The occasion in St Joseph's was attended by a full house of 70.

30 September

Harps Alive/ An Chruit Bheo/ Harp Leevin Festival

Held in partnership with Harp Ireland/ Cruit Éireann RTE was responsible for arranging venues and logistics while Harp Ireland contracted with performers and devised the programme.

In the preceding week workshops were held in four primary schools in the four quarters of the city; Braniel Primary School, Botanic Primary School, Gaelscoil ma BhFál, and Hazelwood integrated Primary School.

Workshops were held in;

First Presbyterian Church, St Joseph's, Shankill Road Library and Turas.

A recital was held in An Cultúrlann and the film 'Beart Bunting' was shown in the Linen Hall Library along with a lecture on Bunting.

The major concert of the festival was held in First Presbyterian Church and was followed by a late-night session in the Deer's Head.

All events were well attended.

This was a north/ south collaboration, and a linked programme of events took place in Dublin on the weekend of 21/22 October when Mark Doherty was a speaker.

25 October

Black Lives Expo

We manned a stall at this event in St Georges Market and announced our plans to co-ordinate a conference in 2024 addressing the critical issues affecting migrant communities

11 November

Education conference.

Entitled 'Is our education system failing our children' this conference held in the Duncairn Centre outlined a history of failure and the dashing of radical hopes for a more humane and inclusive education system. It focussed on present sectarian and class divisions with their consequent underperformance and proposed reforms.

A range of both lay and academic speakers addressed the conference.

Niall Comer, Jim Curran, John Gray, Angeline Kelly King, Cath Lowther, John Lyness, Ann Marrion, Alan Millar, Matthew Milliken, Stephen Roulston, and Fergus Whelan.

Terry McKeown and Fiona Pegrum acted as facilitators.

45 people attended the conference.

Particular thanks are due to Ann Marrion who led on the organisation of the conference with the support of Stephen McCracken and Francis Kane.

It is planned to publish the proceedings of the conference in 2024.

30 November

Wolfe Tone 225

RTE was represented on the organising committee for this conference in Clifton House held to mark the 225th anniversary of the death of Wolfe Tone. Three of our committee members were speakers at the conference.

8. Assembly Rooms Alliance

RTE was responsible for the formation of the Assembly Rooms Alliance at a meeting held on 27 February. The purpose of the alliance which is governed by a memorandum of understanding is to save the historic assembly rooms for appropriate public use.

From January onwards we were assured that the City Council was in discussions with the owners, Castlebrooke, but no information on this process was forthcoming.

On 30 September during the Harp Festival we held a demonstration outside the Assembly Rooms at which we made it clear that our patience was running out.

At year end it was becoming clear that the patience of many councillors was also exhausted. In the meantime, we commenced discussions with a major possible new partner with an interest in saving the building.

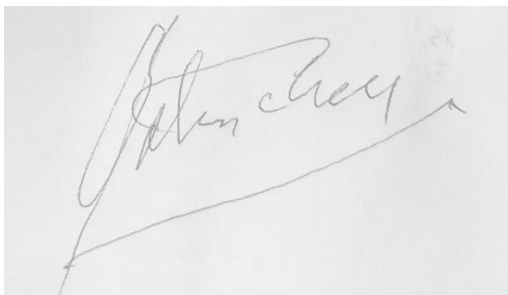
RTE remains responsible for the administration of the Alliance.

9. Thanks.

Thanks are due to the support given by our now expanded membership and to our committee which is notable for its remarkable commitment in many ways to the cause. Thanks are also due to the variety of venues that have hosted our events.

John Gray

Chair

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'John Gray'. There is a long horizontal line drawn below the signature.