

Proceedings 2008

Annual General Meeting 2008

Colonel Donal O'Carroll, who was presiding for the last time at the conclusion of the tenth year of his presidency, opened the Annual General Meeting, which was held at the Officers' Mess, Cathal Brugha Barracks, at 11.15 a.m. on Saturday 6 December 2008. The Minutes of the 2007 Annual General Meeting were circulated and approved, and the officers gave their accustomed reports. The incumbent officers, who hold office from year to year, were re-elected. Of seven members of the Council, who had been elected in 2005 to serve for three years, one, Colonel Gerald Aherne, chose to retire. The others — Captain Labhrás Joye, Commandant Victor Laing, Commandant Martin Lenihan, Jane Leonard, Peter Mulready and Dr. David Murphy — were elected for three further years.

Dr. Harman Murtagh

The Annual General Meeting was notable for being the occasion on which Dr. Harman Murtagh was elected President. When he assumed the chair, Dr. Murtagh said that he was sensible of the honour those assembled had done him in placing their confidence in him to serve as their president for the ensuing five years. He spoke of his great pleasure in accepting the appointment, and of the mixture of humility and anxiety with which he approached the task. He promised to do his utmost to lead the Society forward, sustaining its scholarly role, while simultaneously maintaining its character as a 'society' of 'folk of military, academic or indeed other backgrounds', sharing a common interest.

He continued:

We are in our sixtieth year, and undoubtedly one of the major factors to have sustained us thus far is our strength as a group, a fraternity, a 'society'.

Traditionalists amongst you will be reassured that next only to Colonel O'Carroll and our good but absent friend, Lieutenant-Colonel Jim Coyle, I am, as it happens, the most senior member of the Council, which I joined, as editor of *The Irish Sword*, in 1974. So, whatever my virtues or my faults, my election is, I suppose, a classic example of Buggins' turn.

My roots in the Society are very deep, however. My father, Diarmuid Murtagh, was one of the Society's founder members and its correspondence secretary until his death in 1956.

I can recall — just about — outings of the Society as long ago as the 1950s. I knew most of the great names in the Society's history: Sir Charles Petrie, our first president; Gerry Hayes-McCoy, the father of modern Irish military history; Gerald Simms, my teacher and later my supervisor in Trinity; the legendary Dan Bryan — a particular friend of mine; Kevin Danaher, our second president — I remember well the splendid selection process by which he was chosen as the council's nominee, devised and conducted by Dr. Leon O Broin. Then there was General Pat Hogan, whom I first met about 1960, when he organised a tour for the Society to the Butler Castles of South Tipperary and to Clonmel, where we were addressed by Eugene O'Neill. I don't recall meeting Henry Mangan or Dick Hayes, but certainly I remember very clearly my father talking about them and scooting off to meet them, when we came to Dublin. And there are so many more: Don O Broin, Olaf MacNeill, Brian Clark, Micheline Kerney Walsh, Peter Young, Liam O Briain, Pat Hally. The list goes on ...

Together with the support we have always received from the army, probably the greatest strength of the Society is the tremendous loyalty of the membership, which is most evident in the selfless commitment of the officers and council to its success. And this brings me to perhaps the personification of this spirit of loyalty, commitment and dedication: namely, our outgoing president, Colonel Donal O'Carroll.

Donal has led the Society for ten years with enormous distinction, energy and dash, and very much from the front. Lectures, tours, conferences, commemorations, publications, the annual dinner, representing us in public and very much more besides have received his meticulous attention and absolute commitment to maintaining the highest standards, and placing the Society to the forefront at all times. Often, when nobody else has been available to organise a tour, review a book, find a suitable proposer of a vote of thanks, or whatever, he has taken on the task without complaint.

So we owe him a very great debt of gratitude. I think we may safely congratulate him on a job well done; and I want to thank him heartily for his service to the Society, and to say that he is an inspiration for the future. I hope that as ex-president, he will continue to give us the benefit of his valued experience, advice and support.

Membership

Colonel Patrick Kirby, the Honorary Membership Secretary, informed the Annual General Meeting that regular membership of the Society stood at 663 compared with 674 at the start of the corresponding period in 2007. During 2008 there had been 13 deaths (including those of a Vice-President — Professor J.L. McCracken — and five Life Members) and 7 resignations. 28 persons had been struck-off for non-payment of subscriptions. *The Irish Sword* continued to be sent to numerous institutions and libraries, with the Department of Foreign Affairs supporting the despatch of the journal to thirty-six institutions, and subscribing for 35 further copies. The circulation of the journal, as effected by post, stood at 874 copies.

Regular Members	663	Subscribing Institutions	88
Honorary Members	10	Exchange	14
Life Members	41	Copyright	13
Honorary Institutions	9	Department of Foreign Affairs	71
Total:			909

Accounts

The Honorary Treasurer reported that the financial position of the Society was notably healthy. Income during the year had been €33,821 (compared with €29,985 in 2007). Expenditure had been €22,392 (compared with €29,038 in 2007): here the difference reflected the fact that payment had been made for two (rather than three) issues of *The Irish Sword*. The accounts disclosed an excess of €11,429 of income over expenditure for the year, and allowed for a balance forward in the Capital Account of €62,980, compared with €54,563 in 2007.

The accounts were approved, as was the re-appointment as auditor of Mr. Gerard Tully, of the firm of Rynne Tully Ward.

Lectures

Seven lectures were delivered at Griffith College on Fridays during the lecture seasons in spring and autumn. Their themes were as follows:

- ‘Michael Collins and the intelligence war’, by Dr. Anne Dolan.
 ‘Hell has many different names — the raid on Dieppe, August 1942’, by Dr. Ian Speller.
 ‘W.T. Cosgrave: from Sinn Féin councillor to execution cell in Kilmainham Jail, 1916’, by Mr. Anthony Jordan.
 ‘The Coast Watching Service, 1939-45’, by Dr. Michael Kennedy.
 ‘The Enniskilleners’ defence of the Erne Valley, 1689-90’, by Dr. Harman Murtagh.
 ‘The French service record of Theobald Wolfe Tone’, by Dr. Sylvie Kleinman.
 ‘Mulcahy and Collins: a fortuitous leadership’, by Professor Risteárd Mulcahy.

These meetings had generally been well-attended. The audience at Professor Mulcahy’s lecture had filled the room to the extent of its capacity.

Field Days: Erne Valley and Portlester

The Society’s summer tour took place over the holiday weekend 31 May-2 June, when a group of 56 visited the Monaghan-Fermanagh-Cavan area by coach and car. Following lunch on Saturday at the Cúil Darach restaurant in Clones, the group heard a talk by Colonel Donal O’Carroll on the battle of Clones, where Owen Roe O’Neill suffered a reverse in 1643 at the hands of the Laggan army of the brothers Sir Robert and Sir William Stewart. Afterwards the members booked into the Cavan Crystal Hotel. On Sunday the group departed for Lough Erne, and a cruise on the M.V. *Kestrel* from Enniskillen to Castle Archdale at the northern end of the Lough. Following lunch at the Oaks restaurant, the group visited Castle Archdale museum at the former 2nd World War flying-boat base. In the evening, the customary communal dinner was held in the hotel, where the fare was excellent. On Monday the group headed for Crom Castle for a talk by Dr. Murtagh on the 1689 siege of the castle. This was followed by a move to north of Lisnaskea for a talk on the action which was a prelude to the battle of Newtownbutler. Following lunch at the Donn Carragh Hotel in Lisnaskea, the group proceeded to Newtownbutler where Dr. Murtagh spoke on the battle there in 1689. Following a lively question and answer session, the group headed for home. The organiser of the field -day was Commandant Paul Mullally.

The autumn field day, of which Commandant Paul Mullally was also the organiser, took place on Sunday 31 August 2008, when 43 members travelled to County Meath by coach and by car to tour the battlefield at Portlester, where Owen Roe O’Neill defeated Lord Moore in 1643. After a light lunch in the Hilimar Hotel, Kinnegad, the tour commenced with an introductory talk at the hotel by Colonel O’Carroll. Thereafter, the group visited the site of Ticroughan Castle, a towerhouse, now vanished, strengthened by earthen fortifications the marks of which could be discerned on the ground aided by an aerial photograph. Ticroughan Castle had been the residence of Sir Luke FitzGerald, whose daughter, Elena, was to marry Owen Roe’s son, Colonel Henry O’Neill. FitzGerald provided O’Neill with a gun, one of two that were used to bombard Portlester

Castle. At the site of the battle of Portlester Colonel O'Carroll spoke on the battle at which the army of Owen Roe O'Neill triumphed and Lord Moore was killed in action. The site of the former corn mill, about a mile away, where supporting action took place, was also visited. An excellent dinner, attended by 36 members, was provided in Trim Castle Hotel. Afterward, Colonel William Ringrose told the diners that this was the last occasion on which Colonel O'Carroll would preside as President on a field tour. He paid tribute to the work the President had put into the tours over the past ten years and to the depth of his knowledge of the many battles about which he had spoken.

Overseas Tour

Between 10 and 14 September 2008 a group of thirty members visited Verdun and other sites in eastern France associated with the First World War. The tour was conducted on behalf of the Society by the firm Lee Travel of Cork.

The Irish Sword

Dr. Kenneth Ferguson reported that two issues of *The Irish Sword*, No. 102 (Winter 2007) and No. 103 (Summer 2008), had been circulated together in April 2008. Material was in hand for two further general issues of the journal, and, more distantly, for an issue devoted to Austria. The first of the forthcoming issues, No. 104 (Winter 2008), was expected to appear early in 2009. It was anticipated that *The Irish Sword* would also be publishing materials flowing from a conference that the Society was planning for later in 2009 to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the War of Independence, 1919-21.

In thanking contributors, Dr. Ferguson dwelt on the ever-loyal support of Colonel O'Carroll, who had dutifully reviewed books and written obituaries as one of the many burdens of the presidential office. He hoped that retirement might give Colonel O'Carroll the leisure to turn into articles some of the insights that he had gained over the years in conducting battlefield visits. The editor's glance also rested on Mr. Eoghan Ó hAnnracháin, whose articles had been appearing in most of the issues that he had edited. He said that Mr. Ó hAnnracháin had used the advantage of residence in Luxembourg to travel widely on the Continent, exploring picturesque places with an Irish connection. He had shown enormous diligence in extracting from archives in Paris and elsewhere in France a great quantity of biographical information about individual soldiers, notably those who had been admitted to the *Invalides* or had served in the galleys, or been imprisoned in the Bastille. While the articles of Eoghan Ó hAnnracháin could be found too in many of the local historical journals, it seemed to the Honorary Editor that *The Irish Sword* had a special place in that contributor's estimation, and he in turn regarded Eoghan Ó hAnnracháin as the journal's pre-eminent current contributor.

Irish Commission for Military History

Mr. J. P. Mulready, the Secretary General of the Irish Commission for Military History, reported to the A.G.M. on the activities of the International Commission in 2008. The XXXIVth Annual Congress, which Mr. Mulready and Commandant McGoldrick had attended, was held in Trieste from 31 August to 5

September 2008, and was devoted to the theme ‘Military conflicts and civilian population: limited wars, total wars and asymmetric wars’. Professor Alan Kramer of Trinity College, Dublin, representing the Society, presented a paper entitled ‘German War Crimes 1914/1941: Continuity or Break?’ Professor Jorit Wintjes of Würzburg University, who is also a member of the Society, presented a paper entitled ‘Total War: The Ancient Perspective’. The event was attended by 280 delegates and accompanying persons from 37 countries. 63 papers were presented, of which 41 were in English. The Congress also featured a books roundtable and a young scholars’ workshop.

Dr. Patrick McCarthy, Chairman of the Society’s Books Committee, contributed reviews of nine books of Irish interest for inclusion in Tome 30 of the *Bibliographie Internationale* of the International Commission. Tome 29, which was published in September 2008, contains eight of Dr. McCarthy’s reviews.

In 2009 the Annual Congress, the XXXVth, will be held in Porto from 30 August to 4 September, on the theme ‘Warfare in the Age of Napoleon: precedents, military campaigns and lasting impacts’. Members interested in attending this event will find full details on the Congress website www.xxxvcongressicmh2009.com. The 2010 Congress is due to be held in Amsterdam on the theme of ‘Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency’. The 2011 Congress will be in Rio de Janeiro, and that of 2012 in Paris.

Annual Dinner

131 persons attended the annual dinner, which took place in St. Patrick’s Hall, Dublin Castle, on the evening of Saturday, 6 December 2008. Dr. Harman Murtagh, the newly-elected President, and his wife Ann received the guests. Dr. Patrick McCarthy toasted the guests. Mr. Brian Lenihan, T.D., Minister for Finance, who was the guest of honour and principal speaker, alluded to his upbringing in the garrison town of Athlone. Dr. Murtagh spoke appreciatively of the work of his predecessor, Colonel O’Carroll, in terms similar to those he had employed earlier in the day at the Annual General Meeting.

The Dinner was organised by a committee consisting of Commandant Martin Lenihan (Chairman), Colonel Patrick Kirby, and Commandant Louis O’Brien. Commandant O’Brien acted as Master of Ceremonies.

Acknowledgements

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In respect of the business of the International Commission of Military History, grateful acknowledgment is made to the Department of Defence, which is accustomed both to effect the transfer of the sum of 650 Swiss francs due annually as a subscription to the Commission, and to provide a subvention to the Society which covers the cost of sending a speaker to the annual congresses.