

# Freedom For All Ireland Hibernian Tour 2022 LAOH Report



June 2022



# FFAI Tour

## Tuesday April 19 - Friday April 29, 2022

- ▶ There were 51 Hibernians traveling by coach
- ▶ 15 were LAOH members
  - ▶ National Board: Vice President Marilyn Madigan, FFAI Chair Dolores Desch, Webmaster Brianna Curran
  - ▶ National FFAI Committee: Kathleen Savage, Cathy Reinholdt, Nancy Tindal-Sponsel, Rita O'Hara
- ▶ We stayed in Armagh City, Derry, Belfast and Dublin
- ▶ The tour was organized by AOH National Chairman Martin Galvin and AOH National Vice President Sean Pender
- ▶ Purpose of the tour:
  - ▶ Meet with the groups that we donate to through the FFAI Christmas Appeal and hear what they are working on
  - ▶ Learn about the intricate history of the Conflict
  - ▶ Gain a better understanding of the current social and political climate on the island

# Day 1

- ▶ Our first stop was at Carrickmore Memorial Garden in Tyrone where we met the National Graves Association of Tyrone and presented them with our donation. They were very thankful for the funds which go into maintaining and improving multiple monuments in Tyrone.



Photo by Nuala Purcell

# Day 1 - continued

- ▶ That evening we attended an event where we met Denise Mullen, daughter of Denis Mullen who was murdered by the Glennane Gang in 1979. The UVF man who killed her father served 16 years and was released under the Good Friday Agreement. In 2019 he sent death threats to Denise. Denise continues to call for justice for all victims and has been active politically as a member of Aontu.



# Day 2

- ▶ The tour took us to the Hill of the O'Neill where we met with Frankie Quinn of EALU. We presented a check to EALU and Frank updated us on the work that his group does. There is a real issue with PTSD and providing services to the community, especially the Republican political prisoners. Frankie thanked the LAOH for their generosity explaining the funds go a long way to helping provide critical therapy services.



- ▶ We also heard about a new project that Paedar Thompson of Relatives for Justice (RFJ) is working on regarding the victims of the Troubles who had connections to the GAA. His research is ongoing, and we will hear back from Paedar when the project is completed.



# Day 2- Continued



Photo by Nuala Purcell

- ▶ We attended the Relatives for Justice launch of their report on collusion and the murder of American Citizen Liam Ryan at the Battery Bar in Ardboe. Liam was killed by a loyalist death squad after they burst into the bar which he owned and opened fire with automatic weapons. Another man, Michael Devlin was also killed. Eyewitness accounts revealed that the RUC were slow to respond and were disrespectful to the family and other victims, seen and heard joking at the crime scene.
- ▶ The report that RFJ published uncovers significant indicators of collusion in this case and in over a dozen others where the same weapons were used. Liam's wife has applied for a new inquest.
- ▶ It was a very emotional day for the family, some of whom were there the night of the murder and had not been back since. They described their trauma and loss as well as the need for justice for Liam.

## Day 3



- ▶ We arrived in Derry and visited the George McBrearty mural. George was shot and killed in 1981 by undercover British Army members in Derry. You can also see the Mural of Patsy O'Hara to the right of George's mural.



- ▶ Patsy O'Hara was on the Hunger Strike with Bobby Sands. We met up with Tony O'Hara, IRA Blanketman and brother of Patsy at the monument to the Ten 1981 Republican Hunger Strikers. He talked about the sacrifices made by the Hunger Strikers and all who were working for civil rights during the conflict.

## Day 3 - Continued

- ▶ We met with Colm Eastwood, leader of the SDLP at the Gasworks in Derry.
- ▶ Colm talked about the social issues and political issues faced in the current climate. Housing, Employment, lack of a functioning Executive government at Stormont, Brexit and Legacy legislation.



# Day 4

- ▶ We were received at the Guildhall by Mayor Graham Warke. He was joined by council members - Aontu's Emmet Doyle and Sinn Féin's Conor Heaney
- ▶ Mayor Warke was very gracious and although a member of the DUP he is well respected by his colleagues from all parties and by most residents for his outreach to all in the community.
- ▶ He talked about building a better future for all people in the community which was reflected during his term according to his constituents. He also talked about the negative impact that a 'visa' requirement (currently being suggested by the UK government) would have on tourism and revenue to the Derry Strabane district.
- ▶ He was joined by his chief advisor and son, little five-year-old Ollie who stole the show!
- ▶ Mayor Warke finished his term in May and immediately announced that he was leaving the DUP.



# Day 4 - Continued

- ▶ We then headed over to the Museum of Free Derry where we heard from Tony Doherty and John Kelly. Tony's father Patrick and John's 17-year-old brother Michael were murdered on Bloody Sunday by the British Army.
- ▶ They described the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday Commemoration which was held in January. Throughout the year continue to commemorate and educate visitors on the impact that this massacre had on the community.
- ▶ We presented the Christmas Appeal checks and Tony and John thanked us for our support over the years. The donations they receive from the Christmas Appeal goes back into their education programs and exhibits.



# Day 4 - AOH Hall

- ▶ We visited our brothers at the AOH hall in Derry.
- ▶ We were warmly welcomed by leadership from Derry and from Donegal
- ▶ We had a great night of fellowship and craic! We even found our old friend and Hibernian Brother Malachy McAllister!



# Day 5

- ▶ This was a day of sightseeing! We had spent so many days learning about the events of the troubles, the need was real for a day on the coast.
- ▶ We headed to Slieve League in Donegal for a much-needed respite and gorgeous ocean views.



## Day 6

- ▶ We headed off to Belfast, and on the way stopped in at the Republican Centre Gulladuf for the book launch of the Free Statism and the Good Old IRA. Author Danny Morrison and RFJ Deputy Director Andree Murphy led the discussion.

- ▶ The community center had a wall of honor for those who gave their lives for Irish freedom.



# Day 6

- ▶ We headed south to Bellaghy for a Political history tour of the area. Tour Guide Colum Scullion, cellmate of Bobby Sands provided commentary and history of the area from the planters to the present time.
- ▶ We visited the graves of cousins Francis Hughes and Thomas McElwee who both died in the 1981 Hunger Strikes.



# Day 6 - Continued

- ▶ We headed to the Crosskeys Inn for dinner. The music was fantastic, and the craic was ninety! The Cottage dates to the 1600's and is family run.



Photo by Nuala Purcell



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Photo by Nuala Purcell



Photo by Nuala Purcell



Photo by Nuala Purcell

# Day 7

- ▶ In Belfast we visited the site of the Springhill Westrock Massacre and met with the families. On July 9, 1972 British Army snipers murdered FIVE unarmed and innocent Irish citizens, severely wounding two others. Among those murdered were 3 children, Margaret Gargan(13), John Dougal(16), David McCafferty(15) also father-of-six Patrick Butler (38) and local parish priest Fr Noel Fitzpatrick(42). Their murders were never properly investigated, and the families told us that the inquest is scheduled to occur in 2023.



## Day 7 - Continued

- ▶ We attended a Legacy Justice event at the Europa Hotel open to the public which focused on Plastic Bullets cases, the New Lodge six murders, Ormeau Road killings and recent Police Ombudsman reports. This discussion was led by Andree Murphy, Deputy Director of Relatives for Justice, and was attended by family and friends, justice advocates, the press. The PSNI was invited and attended but left halfway through the event.
- ▶ Mark Kelly, Fiona O'Hagan and Bosco Kennedy participated as panelists, and each told their stories of the impact of violence on their family and the lasting effect of a lack of investigation into their deaths. Mark Kelly's 12-year-old sister Carol Ann was killed by a plastic bullet fired by a British Army Soldier, Bosco Kennedys 15-year-old brother was killed at the Sean Graham Bookies shop by UDA gunmen and Fiona's Husband Sinn Fein Councilor Bernard O'Hagan was killed by the UDA/UFF.



# Day 7 - Continued

- ▶ In the rule of Law Deficit discussion led by Professor Mark McGovern we heard of the current system that families and their legal representatives face to get a legacy inquest and the impact that the Amnesty Legislation will have on these cases. Relatives for Justice Director Mark Thompson, Niall Murphy of KRW Law and Patricia Coyle of Harte Coyle and Collins Solicitors were panelists.



# Day 7 - Continued

- ▶ That evening we had dinner at the Crumlin Gaol which was the jail where many Irish Republicans were held during the conflict. It now serves as a museum and event spot. It was an emotional night for Fra McCann and Malachy McAllister who both served time there and described the cruel and inhumane treatment that Republican prisoners were subjected to including physical abuse and glass shards hidden in their meals.



Photo by Nuala Purcell



Photo by Nuala Purcell



Photo by Nuala Purcell



Photo by Nuala Purcell



Photo by Dolores Desch

# Day 8

- ▶ We toured the City Cemetery and Milltown Cemetery. At Milltown we visited the Republican Plot. The National Graves of Belfast use the funds we donate to maintain these graves to honor the Irish Volunteers who died on active service.



# Day 8 - Christmas Appeal Grants 2022

- ▶ We then headed to the Houben Center at Holy Cross to visit our friend, Father Gary Donegan and “the Wingman” Brian McKee. We met with the groups who had not yet been presented with our donations and we presented them at this event.



Photo by Nuala Purcell



Photo by Nuala Purcell

Fr. Gary Donegan and Brian (The Wingman) McKee



Photo by Nuala Purcell

Ballymurphy Families Committee



Photo by Nuala Purcell

Green Cross



Photo by Nuala Purcell

# Day 8 - Christmas Appeal Grants 2022

- ▶ We also heard from the recipients about what this donation means to them. The link to this event is at the end of this document.



Greater New Lodge Cultural Society



St. Patrick's Center, Downpatrick



Kathleen Savage and Joe Doherty



Relatives for Justice



Jim O'Neill and Robert Allsopp Memorial Flute Band

# Day 8 - Christmas Appeal Grants 2022



Bridges Beyond Boxing, Belfast



National Graves Association, Belfast



The Witness Project - Sean Murray



Duchas Oiriail - South Armagh



Omagh Thunder Basketball



The Passionist Peace and Reconciliation Office (Holy Cross)

# Day 9

- ▶ We headed to Dublin where we took a tour of the Oireachtas while our National Board members met with the Department of Foreign Affairs. Ciaran Madden and Helena Nolan were there with their staff.
- ▶ We expressed our strong opposition to the Legacy legislation bill and the need for open and full investigations, inquests and other mechanisms to get the truth for families. The new legislation takes out the objectivity and the open investigative approach and grants immunity to those that come forward. Families are opposed to this, and we explained that the LAOH stands with the families against this bill.



Photo by Nuala Purcell

# Day 9 - Continued

- ▶ We also met with several members of the Oireachtas Good Friday Agreement Committee from Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. Again, we expressed our commitment to getting the truth for families. All the members we met with agreed with us and opposed the UK Amnesty bill.
- ▶ We also met with US ambassador Claire Cronin and explained the Legislation as well as the legacy issues still faced by the families we met with and countless others. She welcomed us and was very interested in our input.



# Day 10

- ▶ We attended a discussion at the Pearse House led by Irish Historian Ruan O'Donnell. We heard from historian Robert Collins who talked about his new book: *Noraid and the Northern Ireland Troubles 1970-1994*.
- ▶ We also met with Frances Black a founder and Chair of **Ireland's Future** and Independent member of the Seanad Eireann and Niall Ó Donnghaile Leader of Sinn Féin in the Seanad. Niall is also a member of the Good Friday Agreement Committee. They talked of the efforts on the Irish Unity referendum and the planning and preparation being done. Ireland's Future has been hosting town hall meetings across the island which are broadcasted and can be found on their website. They will be holding events through the year and announced a major event in October which will be held in Dublin.



# Important Links

- ▶ Ireland's Future: <https://irelandsfuture.com/>
- ▶ Graham Warke interview about resigning from the DUP:
  - ▶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-61714255>
- ▶ Springhill Westrock Massacre Rally: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC9DvEQvFHI>
- ▶ Hibernian Grants 2022 - Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIAlYCuwO5w>
- ▶ Relatives for Justice: <https://www.relativesforjustice.com/>
- ▶ Sean Graham Bookies Murder: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=298285245515480>
- ▶ Mark Kelly Plastic Bullets campaign: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/mark-northern-ireland-campaigners-psni-sinn-fein-b968758.html>
- ▶ Liam Ryan Report Webinar: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XCkA\\_v-6D0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XCkA_v-6D0)
- ▶ Bloody Sunday Commemoration - Belfast: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n6GN3NgjME>
- ▶ Women in the Conflict: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5uTpdXYs3w&t=155s>
- ▶ The RFJ GAA Legacy Project: <https://www.rfjgaa.com/>