

CREGGAN

The Next Chapter



Compiled by
Garbhán Downey & Conal McFeely

CREGGAN

The Next Chapter

GUILDHALL PRESS

First published by Guildhall Press, March 2022.

© Guildhall Press 2022

Guildhall Press
Ráth Mór Centre
Bligh's Lane
Derry
BT48 0LZ
info@ghpress.com
www.ghpress.com

Typeset and designed by Hive Studios – www.hivestudio.org

Images copyright of contributors.

Cover images (c) ZUMA Press Inc/Alamy Stock Photo, *Derry Journal*, Hive Studios and Hugh Gallagher.

ISBN 978 1 911053 48 4



Delivered by

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY
COMMUNITY FUND



Derry City & Strabane
District Council
Comhairle Chathair
Dhoire & Cheantar
an tSrátha Báin
Derry Cittie & Strábane
Destrict Cooncil



COMMUNITY
RELATIONS
COUNCIL
Equity | Diversity | Interdependence

Guildhall Press acknowledge the financial support of Derry City and Strabane District Council, Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and the National Lottery Dormant Accounts Fund NI. Derry City and Strabane District Council accepts no responsibility for any actions arising out of this publication or written information funded by it.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

For our friend Micky McGuinness
and the people of Creggan,
past and present.

Ní neart go cur le chéile –
There is no strength without unity.

Acknowledgements

This publication has received financial support from the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council which aims to promote a pluralist society characterised by equity, respect for diversity and recognition of interdependence. The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Community Relations Council. We greatly appreciate their support and also that received from Derry City and Strabane District Council.

Guildhall Press is grateful to receive ongoing assistance from the Dormant Accounts Fund NI delivered by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Our thanks to the many individuals who contributed to the research, image content and production of this book: Kevin Higgsley, Conal McFeely, Garbhán Downey, Joe McAllister, Peter McCartney, Ciaran Downey, Anne Molloy, Carol Cunningham, Barbara Sweeney, Richie McRory, Meagan Sharkey, Amie Gallagher, Rachel Harkin, Brendan Mc Keever, Declan Ferry, Gerry Colhoun, Clare Wright, Oisín Farrell, Kieran McFadden, Jim Hughes, McGuinness family, Willie McCrudden, Cian Daire Mac Ficheallaigh, Adrian Kerr, John Kelly, Maeve McLaughlin, Declan McLaughlin, Siobhan Mallon, Raymond Craig, Gerry Quinn, Eamonn O'Donnell, Shauna Deery, Jim Collins, Sharon Meenan, Margaret McGlinchey, Donna Fahy, Tony O'Doherty, Brónagh and Louise Gallagher, Conghaile McLaughlin, Lynda Friel, Fidelma Heaney, Joan Murray, Hugh Gallagher, Emmett McLaughlin, Danny Cassidy, Vinny Cunningham, Rory Donaghy, Seamus Breslin, Trevor Temple, Eddie Breslin, James McClean, Mark McCleary, Kat Healy, Gary Donnelly, James Kee, Adrian Bird, Stewart McClean, Derek Moore, Jim Brown, George McGowan, Louise McIntyre, Kieran Connor, John Gill, Lorcan Doherty and Sean McLaughlin.

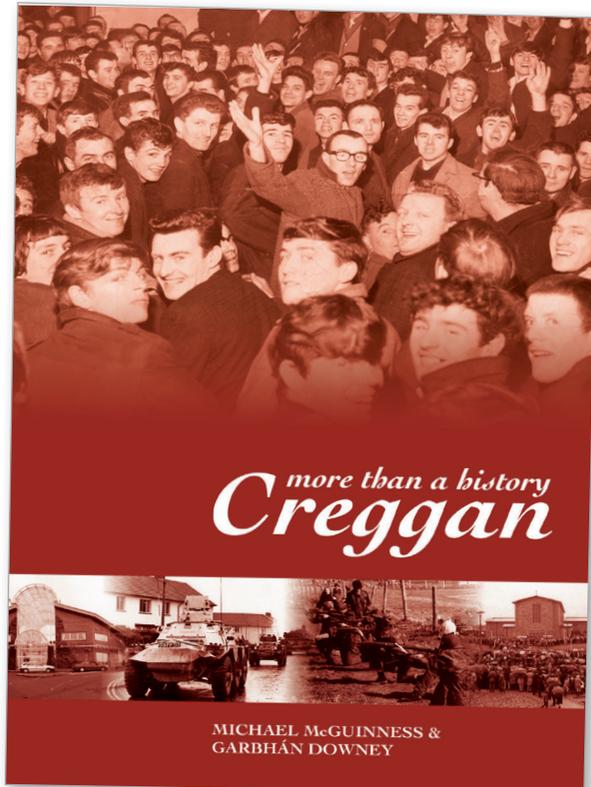
Our gratitude also to St Cecilia's College, St Joseph's Boys' School, Bligh's Lane Nursery, Holy Child PS, St John's PS, St Mary's College, Creggan Enterprises, Colmcille Press, Hive Studios, Lifehack, Unheard Voices, Eurospar, NW Carnival Initiative, Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership, Seán Dolans GAC, Trojans Youth and Community Group, Old Library Trust, UV Arts, Housing Executive, Creggan 50+ Club, Apex Housing Association, Creggan Community Collective, NW Counselling, The Bloody Sunday Trust (Derry Model), Community Foundation NI, Pat Finucane Centre, Sollus Centre, Resurgam Trust, NW Cultural Partnership, Project Orange, Londonderry Bands Forum, Creggan Pre-school & Training Trust, Creggan Day Care, NW Taxi Proprietors, Creggan Country Park, Bayview Medical Practice, Medicare Pharmacy, Foyle Foot and Ankle Clinic, McClafferty Funeral Directors, *Derry Journal* and *Derry News*.

Only space and time limit our content, not merit or relevance, so mea culpa for any omissions.

The Editors

Garbhán Downey co-authored *Creggan: More Than A History* with Michael McGuinness in 2000. In 2018, he established Colmcille Press publishing house at Ráth Mór.

Conal McFeely has been active in the field of community development and trade unions for nearly 50 years and is currently Creggan Enterprises' Development Executive. He is a founder member of Creggan Enterprises/Ráth Mór, established in 1991 to promote and defend the economic, social, environmental, health and cultural needs of Creggan and its environs. In 2018 Conal was given a lifetime achievement award by the Third Sector for his dedication to community development and peacebuilding.



Contents

Introduction – Creggan: Making History	8
Chapter 1 – Creggan’s Got Talent	
A Cultural Sea-change: Setting Out for the ‘Far Side of Revenge’	12
Ráth Mór as a Cultural Hub	14
The Cinema Sisters: Brónagh and Louise Gallagher	17
Hugh Gallagher: Creggan’s Candid Cameraman	25
Guildhall Press: Telling the Story of Derry	28
Colmcille Press: Marking 1500 Years of Great Derry Writing	34
Willie Curran: Citizen Journalist	37
Blast Furnace: Forging a New Generation of Talent	38
Ráth Mór Biodiversity Garden	41
North West Carnival Initiative: World-Class Art Delivery	43
Vinny Cunningham: A Life Behind the Lens	47
Seán Dolans Gaelic Athletic Club	51
Trojans Youth and Community Group	55
James McClean: Pride and Passion	59
Chapter 2 – Spiritual and Educational Guidance	
St Mary’s Church: A Place of Healing on Fanad Drive	66
Holy Child Primary School: An Oasis and a Beacon	68
St Cecilia’s College: Creggan Girls and Derry Girls	70
St Mary’s College: Never Far From Creggan’s Heart	73
St Joseph’s Boys’ School: On the Frontline of Change	75
St Peter’s High School Closes Its Doors	77
St John’s Primary School: Celebrating 50 Years of Service to Creggan	79
Chapter 3 – The Spirit of Self-Help	
Creggan Enterprises: A Social Revolution	82
Infrastructure Developments in Creggan	95

Meeting the Covid-19 Challenge	98
Addressing Creggan's Health Inequalities	117
Ráth Mór 50+ Club: The Beating Heart of Creggan	121
The World's Greatest Shirt-Makers	124
The Focus Project: Empowering Women in the Community	127
Lifhack: Changing Perceptions and Turning Young Lives Around	131
Hive Studios: Bridging the Digital Divide	137
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership: Empowering and Connecting the Community	140
Tony O'Doherty: Continuous Community Development is Key	143
A Voice of Youth: Aspirations for Creggan	148
Housing Executive: Reimagining Creggan	149
Creggan: An Increasingly Diverse Community	151
Creggan Country Park: An Oasis of Calm	152
Derry City Cemetery: A Shared Resting Space	154
North West Counselling: Caring for Creggan	159

Chapter 4 – From Troubled Past to Confident Future

Bloody Sunday: 50 Years On	162
Creggan: Living with Legacy, Planning for Peace	165
Unheard Voices: Going Beyond The Silence	167
Quiet Diplomacy: A Community Path to Peacebuilding	171
Maurice Healy: Quiet Diplomat and Unsung Hero	176
North West Cultural Partnership: A Diverse Cultural Exchange	178
Project Orange: Community Partnership Building	180
Resurgam Trust: Sharing Knowledge for Wider Community Benefit	181
Socio-economic Challenges Still Facing Creggan	184
Where Now for Creggan?	187



Introduction

Creggan: Making History

In December 2000, two years after he helped bring the Good Friday Agreement into being, our neighbour John Hume visited Ráth Mór in his role as MP for Foyle to launch the first definitive history of this area, *Creggan: More Than A History*, with the benediction that it was now time for the area to enjoy 'a bright, brand new day'. He is pictured above with authors Garbhán Downey and Michael McGuinness.

In many respects, that work towards positive change had already started, with the establishment of the Creggan Enterprises social economy initiative in 1991 and the subsequent opening of the Ráth Mór Centre, home to Guildhall Press, in 1995. Even prior to the emergence of the peace process, the community itself had for many decades taken the lead in undoing the damage done by generations of chronic disadvantage, discrimination and conflict.

The previous book recorded how community leaders, sporting associations, arts and media groups, trade unionists and human rights groups, schools and churches, had resisted marginalisation by developing their own society, and maximising its strengths, from within.

In many respects, this new book reaps the rewards of that groundwork. It is no longer tasked with chronicling the enduring pain and hardship that marked Creggan in its infancy. Rather, it reflects with pride on how swords have gradually been turned into ploughshares, and former military bases, such as Essex and Piggery Ridge, have become hives of community development, industry and recreation. This is indeed recording Creggan's next chapter.

Today there are 60 businesses and projects employing 300 people at Ráth Mór. It is a complete village in itself, supporting everything from undertakers to a medical centre. The supermarket was an exemplar of best practice during the Covid-19 lockdowns, setting up a free relay system to service thousands of vulnerable and housebound residents. The pharmacy established itself as a vaccine centre, while the taxi firm ran the home deliveries.

In the many offices and buildings across the Ráth Mór site you will find publishers, film-makers, music-makers, designers, artists and carnival producers. There are on-site crèches and playgroups for youngsters, while older children come across the street from the nearby schools to get their lunch in the cafes here. Teenagers in the Lifehack Project take the first steps to work or enjoy social activities, when they're not fundraising for charity. While the 50+ and Older Men's Clubs provide myriad activities – and comradeship – for the senior generations.

None of this existed 30 years ago – and none of this would have existed without community determination.

Creggan's struggle is by no means over, however. Its population remains among the most disadvantaged on this island. A job in Derry, if you are fortunate enough to acquire one, will earn you less than half of what you would get in Belfast, and about a third of what you what get in Dublin. Only one in seven school leavers can get a place in their preferred university course in the North West. And there is still a major challenge regarding gatekeeping and bureaucracy, and with accessing state funding for those who need it most.

For all that, John Hume's dream – that people in Derry would have the means and opportunity to study and earn their living in high-quality jobs at home – has never diminished.

A new generation of leaders has taken up the mantel to deliver that 'bright, brand new day', and Creggan, as always, is at the forefront of that campaign.



Creggan: The Next Chapter chronicles Creggan's notable events and milestones over the last two decades, its courageous and successful residents, and the growth of a self-reliant and confident community. It promotes the diverse cross-community work of Creggan-based organisations and celebrates the cultural, social and artistic contributions of its sons and daughters to the wider world.

Our previous edition, *Creggan: More Than A History*, reported how community leaders, arts and cultural organisations, human rights groups, schools and others had resisted marginalisation by developing their own society, and maximising its strengths, from within.

This new account reaps the rewards of that groundwork. It is no longer tasked with recording the enduring pain and hardship that marked Creggan in its infancy. Rather, it reflects with pride on how swords have gradually been turned into ploughshares and former military bases, such as Essex and Piggery Ridge, have become hives of community development, industry and recreation. And it highlights the numerous projects and initiatives put in place across the area to nurture, encourage and upskill its citizens.

Creggan: The Next Chapter looks to the future with hope, showcasing the depth and strength of character a community must have to progress and the imagination and innovation which can be unlocked when its people are empowered to succeed. It is, above all, an inspiring testament to resilience, determination and self-help.

ISBN: 978 1 911053 48 4
SOCIAL HISTORY



£9.95 GUILDHALL PRESS

