

## Bratacha 2013 – Festival of Flags & Emblems by Michael Merrigan

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Bratacha 2013 – Festival of Flags and Emblems.

The Genealogical Society of Ireland is unique amongst the family and local history organisations on the island in its promotion of the study of two closely related studies, heraldry, and vexillology, as part of its main objectives alongside genealogy. The link between heraldry and genealogy is well understood and, indeed, several genealogical organisations around the world include heraldry in their activities and, often, in the actual name of the organisation. However, given the obvious link between heraldry and flags, this Society decided to include vexillology as an area of study. Vexillology is the study of the history, symbolism and usage of flags and emblems and the origin of the term itself is credited to the American scholar, Dr Whitney Smith (1940-2016), and dates from 1957 and, indeed, formalised by Smith in 1961 with the publication of *'The Flag Bulletin'*.

The Society is the only Irish member of the International Federation of Vexillological Associations or FIAV for short, (*Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques*), to which, it was elected in 2015 at the congress in Sydney, Australia, having applied for membership at the congress held in Rotterdam in The Netherlands in 2013. The renowned vexillologist, Russian born and long-time Irish resident, Stan Zamyatin, represented the Society at the Sydney congress and, along with the GSI Board's delegate Tom Conlan, he represented the Society in Rotterdam. Attendance at both events was with the financial assistance of Dún

Laoghaire Rathdown County Council following the success of the international festival of flags and emblems in 2013.

Ten years ago in May 2013, Ireland's first festival of flags and emblems was held in Dún Laoghaire starting on 'Europe Day' May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, the National Maritime Institute/Museum of Ireland, Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company (now dissolved) and the Genealogical Society of Ireland, as the "lead organisations", worked with a host of other groups and societies over many months to deliver the programme of events. These included a major exhibition, a wonderfully unique concert, seminars and talks, Ireland's first international parade of flags and emblems, and the unveiling of the 'Mountains to the Sea' flag. The GSI Directors at the time, including Tom Conlon, Eddie Gahan, Stan Zamyatin, Ciarán Hurley, Michael Merrigan and festival financial controller, Billy Saunderson, were pivotal in the planning and successful organisation of this important event.

The Ireland of 2013 was a much different place, doom and gloom filled our news bulletins as the economic crash and the austerity demanded to receive the embarrassing bailouts under the supervision of the EU and the IMF were devastating families and businesses throughout our republic. High unemployment and emigration had returned with a vengeance, indeed, over the previous two to three years an air of national despair had descended upon us and, for many, particularly adults under forty years of age, this was a catastrophic calamity with no hope for the future. Older adults remembered previous recessions and understood that such are cyclical in nature – but the long lines at the Employment Exchanges stretching out along the streets, and containing people from all walks of life, left nobody in any doubt about the seriousness of the situation. The anger and despair of the population was palpable as many firmly believed, despite the very significant and obvious external triggers for the crash, that Ireland's dire situation was largely brought about by an incompetent, ideologically blinkered and economically illiterate government. That may or may not be entirely true, but the electorate was unforgiving and delivered its judgement on that government through the ballot box.

The coalition government of Fianna Fáil, the Green Party and some Independents was decimated in the General Election of 26<sup>th</sup> February 2011 with the Green Party losing all its six Teachtaí Dála (MPs) and Fianna Fáil reduced from 71 TDs to just 20 TDs. The new government, a coalition of Fine Gael and the Labour Party, had a monumental task of steering a course out of this economic and financial crisis. However, this involved across the board cuts in pay, social welfare payments, reduction or loss of grant aid, increased taxes, and the curtailment of a range of government services at national and local level. Businesses closed, unemployment soared, and house mortgage-holders went into default in their tens of thousands as the bailout and part-nationalisation of the banks, and the infamous almost blanket guarantees to bondholders, reverberated throughout the economy. Over the following years, the new government sought to stimulate the economy and in doing so, looked for ways to revitalise our tourism industry by appealing to our worldwide Irish diaspora and so, 'The Gathering Ireland 2013' was born.

At the start of 2013 we knew that it was going to be a very busy and exciting year in Ireland with events arranged to coincide with Ireland's Presidency of the European Union, our 40th Anniversary of joining the European Economic Community, the 'European Union Year of the Citizen', the nationwide festival of 'The Gathering Ireland 2013' and, of course, 'Bliain na Gaeilge 2013'.

Important commemorations were also to be held to mark the 100th anniversary of the ‘1913 Lockout’ in Dublin, however, it seems that the 70th anniversary of the closing of the last British Crown Office in Dublin in 1943 was conveniently overlooked. The office of the Ulster King of Arms, the British Crown’s heraldic officer for Ireland, lingered on in Dublin Castle after independence in 1922 and arguably operated in an anomalous legal position without the necessary domestic legislative authority from 1936. The delivery of heraldic services by the ‘office’ of the Chief Herald of Ireland dates from 1943, however, it too had no legislative basis for its operation until May 2005. Indeed, the 2011 *‘Programme for Government’* of the Fine Gael and Labour Party coalition committed the Minister for Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan, TD, to addressing the wholly unsatisfactory legislative position of the State’s delivery of heraldic services. Heraldry and the use of coats-of-arms, emblems and flags are deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and political history and heritage of the island of Ireland.

At the time, in 2013, the continuing controversy in Belfast regarding the flying of the ‘Union Flag’ over City Hall reopened the often difficult and fractious debate on identities and contested space in Northern Ireland. Many viewed this problem as unfinished business from the Belfast Agreements of 1998 (aka “Good Friday Agreement”) which sought to bring about a framework for a shared space and future for both traditions in Northern Ireland. It was clear that the ‘flags issue’ in Northern Ireland had to be addressed politically, and in civil society, with sensitivity, mutual respect and understanding. This theme of understanding the history, heritage, culture, and identities associated with flags and emblems was the inspiration behind the Society’s proposal for an event for *‘The Gathering’*. Each local authority in Ireland was charged by the government to invite the submission of proposals for events to be funded by the State and local government funds and to be coordinated locally by a Steering Group of officials and local stakeholders.

The Society’s proposal for an event for *‘The Gathering’* was *‘Bratacha 2013 – Festival of Flags & Emblems’*. This proposal was designated as a ‘key event’ by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. *Bratacha 2013* (Irish for ‘flags’) was to be hosted by the Society in conjunction with the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company (now dissolved), the County Council, and the National Maritime Institute of Ireland from May 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

There were over twenty-five other participating organisations covering many areas of interest to the genealogist, historian, local historian, military or naval historian, social historian and, of course, heraldists and vexillologists. The programme was designed to suit both the specialist and the enthusiast—but more importantly, it catered for the curious seeking to learn more about the history, heritage, culture, and identities associated with flags and emblems.

The lectures and seminars, all free and open to the public, explored the events that shaped the lives and times of our ancestors as either ‘flag wavers or followers’ down through the centuries. This emphasis allowed for people to explore any family’s links to these events and what resources are available for family history research generally. The event also featured an exhibition of flags and emblems, a history and genealogy village, Ireland’s first *Heraldic Colloquium*; a major musical event and a *‘parade of flags’* through the town of Dún Laoghaire.

But why an ‘Heraldic Colloquium’? Well, back in 2002, Ireland hosted the *International Congress of Genealogical & Heraldic Sciences* in Dublin Castle. This congress also coincided with the 450th anniversary of the establishment of Ulster’s Office by King Edward VI in February 1552. This ‘crown office’ was the heraldic authority for Ireland and it remained in

Dublin Castle until 1943, some twenty-one years after independence, when the heraldic functions of the office were transferred to London and amalgamated with the Norrey King of Arms.

Although Ulster's Office closed in 1943, its operation in Ireland from 1936 was legislatively anomalous, to say the least, following the enactment by Dáil Éireann of the *Executive Authority (External Relations) Act, 1936*, which, it was said at the time, "reduced His Majesty to a mere cypher" at the behest of the Dublin government. In 1943, without a proper legislative basis, the State began delivering heraldic services at the newly named '*Genealogical Office*' headed by the Chief Herald of Ireland.

For about forty years the 'office' provided an excellent heraldic service to the State, corporate bodies, and individuals from home and overseas. However, in the mid-1980s to the late 1990s the 'office' operated in a world of its own which, unfortunately produced the 'bogus chiefs' scandal and certain grants of arms which seemed strangely to be out of step with the constitutional position of the State as a republic. In 1997, the government finally brought in legislation to underpin the operation of the State's heraldic services, unfortunately, section 13 of the *National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997*, is fundamentally flawed. Attempts by this Society in 2006 with the *Genealogy & Heraldry Bill* and in 2008 with the *National Cultural Institutions (Amendment) Bill* to provide a proper legislative basis for Irish heraldry have thus far been unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the Society did succeed in having the matter included in the Programme for Government in 2011, but alas, nothing materialised, and the situation remains unresolved to this day. However, the Society has since presented a new version of its *National Cultural Institutions (Amendment) Bill* to Senators for their consideration.

Ireland's first '*Heraldic Colloquium*' was held in the old Council Chamber at the County Hall, Dún Laoghaire, on Saturday May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013. International speakers were invited to discuss various issues relating to heraldry in Ireland in the twenty-first century and, no doubt, many still view heraldry as something, in which, modern democratic republics shouldn't dabble. Whatever our views on heraldry are, we cannot deny that heraldic symbols abound in Ireland from sports clubs to local authorities to the State institutions.


Excellent chaired by Dr James O'Higgins-Norman, Vice Chairperson, of the Clans of Ireland, participants were drawn from the main bodies concerned with Irish heraldic matters, including the Clans of Ireland, Genealogical Society of Ireland, and the Standing Council of Irish Chiefs & Chieftains.

The '*Heraldic Colloquium*' considered matters relating to the current state of Irish heraldic services. Just prior to the colloquium, Prof. Noel Cox of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, outlined the current legal position of Irish heraldry in articles published in the Society's Annual Journal and in the '*Gazette*' and, in doing so, provided the historical context in which Irish heraldry developed. Professor Cox delivered a presentation to the colloquium on the legal position as detailed in his articles, including one for the TCD Law Journal.

Mr. Florent Battestini of France stressed the need to 'embrace modernity' in the construction of a framework for heraldry in a republic. The renowned lecturer in genealogy, Mr. Seán Murphy, MA, questioned the appropriateness of heraldry in a republic. Mr. Murphy's concerns over elitism, cost, and the legacy of problems with the 'bogus chiefs' affair, were shared by all present.

Mr. Francis M. O'Donnell of the Clans of Ireland argued the need for a holistic approach to the provision of heraldic services to include clan/sept arms and a recognition of a distinctively Gaelic emblematic heritage. All participants viewed the government's intention, at the time, to amend the *National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997*, as an opportunity to address the anomalous legal position of Irish heraldry and to provide for equity of access to heraldic services.

The Bratacha 2013 Steering Group published a full colour e-magazine to promote *Bratacha 2013 – Festival of Flags & Emblems*. Produced by Eileen and Michael Munnely of Irish Lives Remembered Ltd in Dundalk, this e-magazine was probably the first use of this medium to promote an event in Ireland. The e-magazine had articles on genealogy, heraldry, vexillology, local history, maritime history, and a full guide to all the *Bratacha 2013* events. The e-magazine had a full listing of the topics covered by the lectures and seminars, including biographies of the expert speakers from Ireland and overseas. All the lectures and seminars were open to the public and were free of charge.



## BRATACHA 2013

### Programme of Events

**Thursday May 9 – Europe Day**  
 4.00pm Cabinteely Park  
 Official opening of BRATACHA 2013 by An Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore TD.  
 Opening of "Europe in Bloom" herbageous exhibit  
 7.30pm National Maritime Museum of Ireland, Haigh Terrace  
 Opening of exhibition of Flags and Emblems  
 9.00pm Royal Marine Hotel  
 Traditional Irish Music

**Schedule of Lectures and Seminars**  
 Provisional Timetable: subject to change  
 Come along - no registration required

**Friday May 10**  
 11.00am Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Hall Lectures and Seminars (See separate Schedule)  
 11.00am Venue to be announced  
 History and Genealogy Village  
 8.00pm Pavilion Theatre  
 Concert: The Fighting Irish... in victory, in defeat - the music lives on

**Saturday May 11**  
 10.00am Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Hall Lectures and Seminars (See separate Schedule)  
 11.00am Venue to be announced  
 History and Genealogy Village  
 3.00pm People's Park, Town Centre, and Seafont Parade of Flags, with marching bands, community groups and organisations, vintage cars, etc.

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**FRIDAY, 10th MAY - ASSEMBLY ROOM**

11:00 Tricolour: Flag of European Revolution  
 11:30 A trilogy of lectures  
 • Flags of the Rising - *Lar Jaye*  
 • Tricolore - *Florent Battestini*  
 • Godfather of the Tricolour; Thomas Francis Meagher - *Martin Hearne*  
 1:30 Break  
 2:00 Genetic Genealogy: Flag of the Future  
 Panel discussion led by *Gianpiero Cavalleri*, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland  
 3:00-5:00 The Flagless People: Traveller and Roma Identity - Panel Discussion

**FRIDAY, 10th MAY - COUNCIL CHAMBER**

11:00 Badge of Honour: Defence Force Insignia - *Michael Rowan*  
 12:00 Vexillology - *Graham Bartram*  
 1:00 Break  
 1:30 Break  
 2:00 Drogheda: Banners, Bunting, Emblems and Flags - *Brendan Matthews*  
 3:00-5:00 Military Colloquium - *Drs Níav Gallagher, Stephen Harrison and John Jeremiah Cronin* - Chair - TBA

**SATURDAY 11th MAY – ASSEMBLY ROOM**

9:30 32 nations: The County Colours: GAA and Local Identity - *Michael Cronin*  
 10:30 For An Equal Ireland: Banners of the Trade Union and Lockout - *Francis Devine*  
 11:30 Harp and Crown: Symbols of Irish Loyalty - *Rev. Prof. Brian Kennaway*  
 12:30 Flags of the Celtic Nations – Myth, Ancient Identity or Dissent - Panel  
 2:30-4:00 Hedge School - see [www.bratacha.com](http://www.bratacha.com) for details

**SATURDAY 11th MAY – COUNCIL CHAMBER**

10:00 The Myth of the Irish Heraldic Authority - *Prof. Noel Cox*  
 11:00 Heraldic Colloquium - Open Floor Debate  
 1:00 Break  
 1:30 Who created the E.U. Flag? - *Sean J. Murphy*  
 2:30-3:30 Vexillology: An introduction to the study of flags - *Stanislav Zamyatin*

**Bratacha Parade Sat 11<sup>th</sup> May 2013 @ 3pm; Steward Duty Points**



**Steward Duty Points**

1	Queen's Hill Park St
2	Park Rd/Py Sme St
3	Warrington Place
4	Medfield Ave
5	Adelaide St
6	Conry Avenue
7	High Street
8	Northumberland Ave
9	Malins St
10	Marion Road @ Patrick St
11	Conroy Road
12	Blanchfield St
13	Warrington McCarroll St
14	George St/ Warrington St
15	George St/ Conroy St
16	Conroy St/ Conroy St, S Area
17	Charlemont Ave
18	Conroy North/Donnell St
19	People's Car Park
20	Approach to Castle Park
21	East Pier
22	Harbour
23	Harbour

**Possible Traffic Diversion Point (Garda)**

11A	George St/ York Road
18B	Conroy North/Donnell St

**Legend:**  
 Parade Route (red line)  
 Key Duty Point (Garda & Steward) (18)  
 Duty Point (Steward) (19)  
 Possible Traffic Diversion Point (Garda) (11A, 18B)

*Bratacha 2013 brochure.*

'Bratacha 2013' was officially launched on Europe Day, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, at a special ceremony in Cabinteely Park marking Ireland's EU presidency and celebrating our shared European heritage. As said above, this event was the first of its kind in Ireland to be devoted to the symbolism and history of flags and emblems.

An Tánaiste, Éamon Gilmore, TD, officially opened the festival and presented the festival flag, designed by Andrew Gerard Ball, to the Festival's special guest, Mr. Graham Bartram, Chief Vexillologist with The Flag Institute in the United Kingdom. Mr. Bartram is a world-renowned

expert on flags and emblems and was a representative of the International Federation of Vexillological Associations (FIAV) at the event.

Why have a festival flag? One would have thought the need for such at a “festival of flags” was rather obvious, however, with so many participants in the event, the Steering Group adopted a unifying ‘logo’ for use on promotional materials. This ‘logo’ captured the nature of the event as a *Festival of Flags* – but it soon became apparent that this ‘logo’ wouldn’t fly!

Therefore, as with similar events held throughout the world, the Steering Group commissioned a specially designed flag to be flown during the Festival. *Bratacha 2013* was to have its very own flag. This is exactly the procedure observed by FIAV, International Federation of Vexillological Associations, when its members host conferences or festivals throughout the world. The design brief for the *Bratacha 2013* flag was that it should be “significant, distinctive and contemporary” and be “easily recognisable and identifiable” when flying in a high wind or not. The flag design was taken from the County motto *‘Ó Chuan go Sliabh’* (Irish: *‘From Harbour to Mountain’*) which has been very loosely and commonly translated as *“from the Mountains to the Sea”* and depicts a stylised mountain by the sea with the shamrock taken from the 1994 coat-of-arms of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.



An Tánaiste Éamon Gilmore, Richard Shakespeare, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and special guest, Graham Bartram, The Flag Institute (UK), unveiling the “Mountains to the Sea” flag designed by the late Andrew Gerard Ball. This flag was flown over the County Hall at weekends until circa 2019.

The design concept by my late partner, Australian born and long-time Dún Laoghaire resident, Andrew Gerard Ball (1964-2021), was based on the current logo of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and with the shamrock (or trefoil) taken from the coat-of-arms of the County Council joining the traditional heraldic design with the modern logo. The addition of the

shamrock (or trefoil) from the coat-of-arms provides the design with a major signifier of 'Ireland' and of Irish heritage which is particularly important in the year of *The Gathering Ireland*.

Artist and former lecturer, Frank Lee Cooper, provided the professional graphics for the original design concept. The finished flag was described as “a beautifully modern and distinctive representation of entire County of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown – “*from the Mountains to the Sea*” and could, in time, become a wonderfully identifiable flag for the relatively young County of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown”.

The official festival flag was crafted in cloth by the bespoke Dublin flag-makers, O'Regan's of Pearse Street, and was officially presented at the unveiling of "*Europe in Bloom*" in Cabinteely Park on Thursday May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The flag was flown throughout the Town of Dún Laoghaire and along the seafront during the festival and from County Hall at weekends from 2013 to 2019.

Later in the evening of Thursday May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Mr. Bartram officially opened the *Exhibition of Flags and Emblems* at the National Maritime Museum of Ireland. The exhibition proved to be an enormous success with the largest ever daily attendance recorded by the Museum including many overseas visitors. The exhibition was assembled by Hon. Curator and Vexillologist, Mr. Stan Zamyatin, with an incredibly enthusiastic and gifted team. One of the overseas attendees at *Bratacha 2013*, Mr. Florent Battestini of France, donated a flag of the *Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem* to this unique educational and cultural exhibition. Entry to the exhibition was free-of-charge during *Bratacha 2013*. The exhibition was open until the end of June 2013.



*Exhibition of Flags and Emblems* at the National Maritime Museum of Ireland.

On Friday May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the ‘*History & Genealogy Village*’ and the Lecture/Seminar Programme commenced and continued until 18.00hrs on Saturday May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The lectures and seminars were of exceptional quality delivered by renowned experts in the various subjects covered from genealogy, history, military history, genetics, cultural identities to vexillology.

The vexillological and heraldic topics covered in the seminars were: Flags of the Rising; Flags of Unity & Dissent; Defence Forces Insignia & Flags; GAA, County Colours & Identity; Thomas Francis Meagher and the Irish Tricolour; The Lockout & Irish Trade Unionism; The European Flag – Its Symbolism & Design; Flags & Emblems of the Clans of Ireland; Naval and Maritime Flags & Emblems; and Northern Ireland – Flags and Emblems of Unity, Division & Dissent.

Amongst the non-flag related subjects covered were genetic genealogy and the ‘*Irish DNA Atlas*’ with Dr Gianpiero Cavalleri of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI).

However, attendances, especially on Friday, were far less than expected possibly due to several factors including, the very inclement weather (cold with heavy showers and hailstones), university exams, the specialist nature of the subjects and a looming strike on the provincial bus services forcing overseas visitors to leave Dublin on Friday and Saturday to avoid the stoppage on Sunday. It must be said that the publicity afforded to this aspect of the festival programme was far from adequate and, in many ways, too little and too late, which was regrettable.

Many members of the Society assisted at several stalls in the ‘*History & Genealogy Village*’ located in an empty office space behind the County Hall in Dún Laoghaire. I won’t attempt to list any of them here from memory, suffice to say that they were numerous despite the horrible weather.

We are all familiar with the music and songs of Irish wars and battles. We have heard them at football matches, in pubs, on TV and radio. Individually, they are powerful pieces, so when assembled chronologically with a narration, the songs and music provided a uniquely fascinating musical journey through Irish recorded history from the arrival of Christianity in the fifth century to the War of Independence (1919-1921).

On the Friday night, the world premiere of ‘*The Fighting Irish – in defeat, in victory – the music lives on*’ concert of tunes associated with Irish battles and wars was a phenomenal success with a packed house at the Pavilion Theatre in Dún Laoghaire. The music was provided by *The Bonny Men* under the direction of the renowned Uilleann Piper, Maitiú Ó Casaide, with the narration by Irish broadcaster, writer and historian, Dr Myles Dungan, of RTE’s ‘*The History Show*’.

The concert opened with the first public performance of the ‘*Ode to Laoghaire*’ which I composed to mark the 1550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of High King Laoghaire and to mark the dawn of Irish recorded history. It was published earlier by the Holyhead Dún Laoghaire Link Organisation in ‘*Wavelink*’ in November 2001 (ISSN 1649-1564) as it was written in 1998 during the ‘*Dún Laoghaire 1500*’. The piece was powerfully delivered by actor Ciarán Kenny followed by tunes and songs spanning nearly a millennium of Irish history—in defeat, in victory—the music lives on. At the conclusion of the concert, which was filmed by Dermot O’Hanlon and photographed by Robert MacDonald, MA, the performance received several standing ovations, and the audience were treated to a wonderful encore.



There are two videos of the concert on the Society's YouTube channel <https://www.YouTube.com/c/GenealogicalSocietyOfIrelandGSI>.

On Saturday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the *Parade of Flags* through the streets of Dún Laoghaire produced a spectacular vista of colour which brightened up a very dull and rather cold day. Parade participants included, local voluntary and community organisations, representatives of the various ethnic communities in Ireland, Irish Army Colour Party, Irish Air Corps Pipe Band, Tallaght Youth Band and other bands, overseas visitors from the Celtic nations, vintage cars clubs, motorcycle clubs, scouting organisations, schools, colleges, and many more.

The streets lined with flags of the EU Member States were filled with spectators from all over the world. Along with the exhibition, this was undoubtedly the most successful part of the festival. There is an excellent short video of the parade on the Society's YouTube channel <https://www.YouTube.com/c/GenealogicalSocietyOfIrelandGSI>.

The Steering Group had erected flags through the length of the town's main street, George's Street, and on some adjacent streets. This provided a wonderfully colourful vista of the main street with the festival flag bunting crisscrossing the street from end to end. The street decoration remained in place for the rest of the year.



Parade of Flags.

When the '*Parade of Flags*' ended at Newtownsmith on the seafront, the Steering Group had arranged refreshments for all participants. This mammoth task was undertaken by volunteers in various locations including the Dún Laoghaire Club on Eblana Avenue which catered for the members of the Irish Army Colour Party, Irish Air Corps Pipe Band, Gardaí, Civil Defence, St. John's Ambulance and National Ambulance Service who participated in the parade; the Dominican Convent School on Convent Road which dealt with the other bands and marching groups with the assistance of local restaurants and takeaways, including Angela Rea of the

Miami Café; McDonald's offered vouchers for the younger participants; while Dunphy's Pub on Lower George's Street was the "watering-hole" of choice for the organisers and some participants, including the GSI members. Tom, Anne and Stephen Dunphy, and Andrew Gerard Ball, catered for a packed bar with loads of beautiful sandwiches and Dunphy's famous homemade soup – just what we needed after a cold day on parade.



More images from the day.

So, what legacy did *'The Gathering Ireland, 2013'* leave for the communities that rallied to the national cause at this time of difficult economic recovery and extremely tight financial resources?

We must remember that hundreds of organisations and community groups around the country hosted special events to mark *'The Gathering'* many, even at the early planning stage, started thinking of its legacy, if any. These various events were enjoyable and even very memorable for both organisers and participants alike, but had all this hard work and community endeavour produced anything likely to be sustainable?

When our overseas family members and, of course, those newly found quite distant cousins went back home, tourism bodies crunched the visitor numbers, it wasn't long before many local communities began to question whether any tangible benefits would accrue for their areas. No doubt, many viewed *'The Gathering'* in purely economic terms with an increase in seasonal employment to meet the long awaited up-turn in overseas visitor numbers. Others looked to *'The Gathering'* as potentially providing a watershed of creativity in the cultural and heritage

sectors fostering a new awareness, appreciation and knowledge of our nation's history, heritage, and culture.

Communities coordinated by *Ireland Reaching Out* and other groups took up the challenge of researching 'reverse genealogy' and, of course, their own local history. By all accounts, this was a wonderful journey of discovery which reconnected the local communities with their own past and reached out across the globe to the descendants of our emigrants. Local graveyards were cleaned, surveyed and memorials recorded, school and church registers consulted, and local histories written. Many new local history and heritage publications emerged and very often with exciting and original research material.

This community effort had a legacy potential because these local publications contributed significantly to our knowledge and understanding of the history and folklore of the areas concerned. Alas, all too often, copies of these wonderful local publications were never deposited with the local library service and went out-of-print leaving this material inaccessible to students, researchers, or future generations. This Society, through the pages of the 'Gazette' at the time, encouraged the County Steering Groups established to promote 'The Gathering' in each part of the country to ensure that copies of any publications by local groups were lodged with the National Library of Ireland and with their County Library.

In the case of 'Bratacha 2013', any legacy is rather more difficult to assess and, most certainly, this was due to the diversity of the organisations and interests involved in the festival. For the Society itself, we progressed with our promotion of an awareness, appreciation, and knowledge of our heraldic and vexillological heritage through our membership of FIAV, in our publications and on social media. The Society established two specialist branches 'Heraldry Ireland' and 'Vexillology Ireland' to promote the study of these subjects and to facilitate cooperation and collaboration between persons with these interests.

In 2015, with the very generous financial assistance of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, the Society published Stan Zamyatin's '**Flagging Ireland – Irish Guide to Flag Design**' (ISBN: 978-1-898471-03-5: Price €10.00 plus p+p) – a 50-page, full colour illustrated guide with articles on all aspects of flag design.

As for the experience of working with so many diverse organisations and in such a large 'steering group' of volunteers, opinions are very mixed, however, many participants would privately admit to the obvious difficulties of different operating and administrative methods and, most crucially, governance cultures. This was especially the case noting, of course, this Society's well-known and long-held aversion to "ad-hockery" in the operation of committees. In this regard all credit must go to the County Council's Richard Shakespeare (now acting City Manager of Dublin City Council). Mr. Shakespeare's determination, guidance and excellent people management skills were to the fore throughout and, of course, this was aided in no small way by the careful financial administration of the event by our own Billy Saunderson who ensured adherence to budgets and that all expenditure was properly recorded.

The GSI's Tom Conlon and Stan Zamyatin, the Council's Heritage Officer, Tim Carey (now with the Electoral Commission), and Garda John Paul Durkan (now retired and recently chosen as a Fine Gael candidate for the Local Elections in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown in June 2024), deserve special mention for their personal hard work, including recruiting and supervising teams of volunteers, in the preparation for the festival and at the event itself. Without their

commitment, and seemingly inexhaustible energy, few of the events could have been staged at all.

Besides the Society's representatives named above, the Steering Group included Richard Shakespeare and County Heritage Officer, Tim Carey, MA, (Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council); Gerry Dunne (Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company); Garda John Paul Durkan, Lorie Kelly, Noel Vaughan, Ray Traynor, Breasal Ó Caollaí (National Maritime Institute/Museum); Frances Fletcher (Hon. Secretary) and Ann Joyce (Dún Laoghaire Community Association); Patricia McGuirk (PR & Marketing); Fiona Fitzsimons, MA, (Eneclann); Peter Fry (Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Chamber of Commerce); the renowned local artist and arts educator, Veronica Heywood and, of course, others representing various participating societies and groups.

Some of the other participating organisations were Ancestor Network Ltd, Dún Laoghaire Business Association, Celtic League, Eneclann, European Movement Ireland, FindMyPast, Four Courts Press, Guild of One-Name Studies, History Ireland Magazine, IrelandsDNA, Irish DNA Atlas, Irish Jewish Genealogical Society, Irish Lives Remembered e-Magazine, 1913 Centenary Committee (Dún Laoghaire & Bray), FlyLeaf Press and Irish Roots Magazine.

Ten years on from *Bratacha 2013* and it remains the largest collaborative public community event held in Dún Laoghaire to date and, as such, a huge credit to all involved.

Michael Merrigan, MA, FGSI, is the General Secretary and Company Secretary of the Genealogical Society of Ireland, of which, he is a co-founder. He is also a co-founder of the 'Irish DNA Atlas' a collaborative genetic research project between the Society and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. He is a former Independent County Councillor on Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and a member of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity & Nationalism (LSE, London), Guild of One-Name Studies, Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland, The Heraldry Society (UK) and the long-time editor of '*Ireland's Genealogical Gazette*' the monthly newsletter of the Genealogical Society of Ireland.