

CELTIC LEAGUE ACHIEVEMENTS

The Celtic League was founded in 1961 at the Welsh National Eisteddfod in Rhosllanerchrugog, North Wales, in the Plaid Cymru tent. The following year in Cardiff representatives of all six Celtic countries were present and in the combined minutes for the first and second meetings it was recorded that the aim of the League was *"To foster national rights of the Celtic Nations, Political (including governing their own affairs), Cultural and Economics."*



Alan Heusaff, a founder of the League and its first General Secretary

This was indeed a bold and courageous step at the time and with the assistance of the national parties and movements (Plaid Cymru, SNP, Mec Vannin, Mebyon Kernow and the Movement for the Organisation of Brittany) and the dedication of its first General Secretary, Alan Heusaff, the League was established with active branches in all six Celtic countries. It is certainly worth mentioning that all the work of the League was and is done on a voluntary unpaid basis. The organisation is funded only by membership fees, sales of our publications and the fund-raising activities of our branches. Many officers in the various positions of General Secretary, Asst. General Secretary, Director of Information, Editor of Carn and Treasurer have worked tirelessly over long years, some for decades, in promoting the League and its aims. Similarly in our national and other branches the Secretaries, Chairmen, Treasurers and many members operated to put interceltism into practice. It would be impossible to mention all.

In those early years, the League began publishing a small quarterly newsletter, Celtic News, and then an annual volume of about 150 pages which ran until 1973. A memorandum was then addressed to the United Nations making the case for self-government for Brittany, Wales and Scotland and a memorandum was made to the European Commission of Human Rights on the discrimination by the French state against Breton speakers. The League operated cautiously with regard to the opinions of the leaders of the national parties, but in 1969 this came to a head when opinions voiced by the Honorary President, Gwynfor Evans, on French repression in Brittany, the Civil Rights movement in the North of Ireland and his idea of a 'Brittanic' federation, put him at variance to the views of most in the League and with the constitution of the League itself. At its 1971 AGM the League decided to operate as a totally independent voice and dropped the position of Honorary President and later Honorary Vice Presidents.

Discussion in the League, particularly from the Breton and Irish Branches highlighted the need to address the type of society desirable in free Celtic nations. So, the Constitution was expanded to include what became known as the social commitment. This was a statement that the Celtic peoples would only be truly free in societies where economic affairs were controlled by and for the benefit of all. This placed the League firmly to the left of centre.



Patricia Bridson, International Secretary and League Treasurer who was CARN Editor for 28 years.

The Celtic League has developed over the decades. The constitution and aims were amended over the years and the main aim now states, *"The fundamental aim of the Celtic League is to support, through peaceful means, the struggle of the Celtic Nations, Alba, Breizh, Cymru, Éire, Kernow and Mannin to win or to secure the political, cultural, social and economic freedom they need for their survival and development as distinct nations."* Commitments are made in the constitution to work for the restoration of the Celtic

languages, to foster interceltic solidarity and co-operation, to publicising our struggles and achievements, to furthering the establishment of organised relations between the Celtic nations and, as outlined above, to

socially just societies. The full constitution is available on our website at www.celticleague.net.

From 1973 the League has published a quarterly magazine, CARN, with articles on political, linguistic and cultural affairs in the Celtic Nations and every issue has contained articles in every Celtic language. Carn is unique especially in bringing all the Celtic languages together in one publication. In addition to Carn, the League also published other material over the years. One such (in the Irish Branch) was *A Black Paper On Irish Education*. Liam S Andrews. A substantial volume was published in the mid 1980's in honour of Alan Heusaff, *'For a Celtic Future'*, (Editor, Cathal Ó Luain).

In the late seventies anti-militarist activities began in Mannin. These expanded into the Military Monitoring Campaign adopted by the League, which gained a new stature for the League. See the full account of this elsewhere in this issue.

In the early part of the 1990's the League engaged with CONSEU (Organisation for European Nations without a State) and representatives from our organisation were invited to the CONSEU conference in Barcelona in 1996 to launch the 'Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights' and signed the declaration on behalf of the Celtic nations.

Other significant events in the League's history have involved measures taken against the infiltration from the extreme right of the colonial powers. Inter-Celtic events and bilateral inter-Celtic visits were organised. Other activities included solidarity manifestations at commemorations, the organisation of summer schools on history and culture with language courses and conferences, including the involvement in joint events with organisations like Greenpeace, CND and Friends of the Earth. In addition, branches have arranged visits of political leaders for lectures, published an annual inter-Celtic historical calendar, assisted in elections, held pickets and demonstrations, and campaigned for prisoners' rights. Our Branches and members have supported the editor of Carn and the General Secretary and Director of Information on a diverse range of issues from military monitoring to linguistic and political issues through to socio economic campaigns.

Bernard Moffatt, Asst. General Secretary and Director Military Monitoring who also served as General Secretary for many years

The League developed its web site in the seventies. Since the mid 1990's the volume of press releases to the media, with Moffatt acting as Director of Information, increased steadily. The use of the Celtic League News group has ensured the greater availability of developments within the Celtic countries to League members, the general public, like minded organisations and the broader community in our countries and beyond. Celtic League News has given the League the opportunity to publicise information about the work that the organisation does to a worldwide audience, while at the same time increasing the dissemination of overtly political nationalist news from within the Celtic countries, especially the smaller nations, in a way that would have been more difficult to achieve otherwise.

The launch of a new multilingual website in 2010 was a major development for the League, because it allows us to reach out to an even wider audience so that we can, in the words of our Constitution, make our national struggles and achievement better known abroad.

A major achievement for the League was the granting of United Nations Roster consultative status in 2010, following submissions from the General Secretary, Rhisiart Tal-e-bot. The significance of this development should not be underestimated, because a long list of international organisations is rejected each year from many countries in the world who have applied and failed to gain recognition by the UN. Recognition allows the League to designate official representatives to the United Nations Headquarters in New



ECOSOC UN LOGO

York and the United Nations offices in Geneva and Vienna and to participate in events and activities of the UN with an official voice.

The League is positive about its role as an accredited UN NGO with Roster consultative status accorded by the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Committee). The League responds to requests from ECOSOC or DESA to present views or submissions and is an enthusiastic supporter of ALL agencies of the UN including the International Maritime Organisation and the International Labour Organisation. The Celtic League submission to the '2021 ECOSOC High-Level Segment' has been published. A letter to the General Secretary of the League has confirmed this. The submission was prepared for the Celtic League General Council by the Assistant General Secretary. It is one of 393 submissions from NGOs globally. These can all be found at the links included in the letter from the United Nations Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC). <https://www.un.org/.../2021-ECOSOC-HLS-Written-Statements...>



Flags of the Celtic Nations in the Parade of Flags at Bratacha 2013

The Celtic League participated in the *Bratacha 2013 International Festival of Flags and Emblems*, in Dún Laoighre, south Dublin. A presentation '*Flags of the Celtic Nations – Myth, Ancient Identity or Dissent*' was delivered on the history of our flags with speakers from all six nations. The League also took part in the Parade of Flags in a special section for the Celtic Nations. In the permanent exhibition of the flags of all countries flown in the parade, in the Mariners Chapel in Dún Laoighre, there is also a special section for the Celtic flags.



Cathal Ó Luain,
Convenor of the
League since the
early 90s, was *Carn*
Editor in the late
70s/early 80s

In 2016 all Celtic League countries participated in the *Interceltic 1916 Commemoration and Ceremony* organised by the Irish Branch. Led by the Tricolour and a piper with the flags of the Irish Republic, Irish Citizen Army and Cumman na mBan, followed by the Celtic League banner and the flags of the individual Celtic nations the procession made its way to the 1916 monument in Glasnevin cemetery where orations were delivered.

It can with fairness be said that the League and its activities have had a pivotal role in increasing the level of interceltic consciousness and making our struggles better known in our own countries and abroad. The Celtic League has provided its membership with a political voice and a vehicle to express that voice over a sixty-year period that still has no equivalent today. The League needs to continue to make progress in the dissemination of its aims and objectives and to work towards the further acceptance of them within the Celtic countries, but we also now need to begin working towards the actual establishment of a body where these aims become manifest.

Since the initial meeting of the Celtic League the peoples of the Celtic countries are still struggling for the political, cultural and economic freedom of their territories, but there have been significant developments towards this end in the latter part of the last 60 years. Most notably, we have the radically changed situation in Alba with the growth in support for the SNP. While the first Independence Referendum did not succeed

there is increasing support for independence and a firm commitment to hold another referendum within the term of the present SNP/Green Party coalition government. With increased support this should succeed. Unfortunately, the position of the Gáidhlig language in the last native speaking areas is precarious. In Cymru the powers of the Welsh Assembly have been increased with knock on effects for the benefit of Wales and of the Welsh language. In Ireland the Northern Protocol, which emerged with Brexit, has signalled a further step towards the end of Partition, although the DUP is threatening to collapse the Local Assembly because of it and the Westminster Government is seeking to renege on it. An Irish Language Act for the North is promised. Irish medium education saw great growth in the Republic, but this has now ground to halt due to the Dublin Government rules and native speaking areas continue to shrink. Cornwall saw recognition in 2014, by the Westminster government after a 15-year campaign of the Cornish as a national minority under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Cornish Language has undergone a revival. In Brittany while the struggle for the language and reunification of Breizh continues with the same intensity the French Constitutional Court ruling on Molac's Law on the language is a severe blow. The Manx language has had great success in recent decades. On the political front however, there is disappointment that opportunities for Mannin to move towards full independence have not been taken.

The League returned to Rhosllanerchrugog in Cymru for its 40th AGM, in the Miners' Institute, to honour its founding location. For the 50th Anniversary of the Celtic League a seminar was organised and held at the AGM in Falkirk, Alba, with many presentations. One of the key addresses of that seminar was from the League's General Secretary, Rhisiart Tal-e-bot on the achievements of the League. Another was a keynote address given on behalf of Peter Berresford Ellis (the well known author on Celtic issues and CL activist in the London Branch) by the late Prof. Ken MacKinnon. Erwan Fourère, the son of the then recently deceased Yann Fourère (one of the founding members of the Celtic League) gave an address on his father's work over his lifetime for Brittany and for the League. The seminar was addressed by Seamus Filbin (Alba), the sole surviving founder member. See article in Alba section on Seamus

At the 50th AGM the new Celtic League flag (see last page) was launched and was flown outside the Council Chambers in Falkirk (venue for the meeting, thanks to the invitation of the SNP controlled Council). The previous flag, which was in use, the Celtic Knot – symbol of the Celtic League – in yellow on a green background, had been developed in Alba with assistance from Rob Gibson and Scottish Idea, who also produced sweat shirts and hoodies. Gi Keltiek, Breton Branch Secretary developed and financed the production of the new flag which is a composite of the flags of the six Celtic Nations with the Celtic Knot at its centre and our thanks go to him for all the work associated with that.

For this 60th Anniversary of the founding of the Celtic League, and in this time of Covid, a different approach was taken. It was decided to have a special double issue of our magazine *CARN* which would carry in depth reviews of the political and language situation in each Celtic nation. The brief given was to review in particular the decades of the 21st century and what the prognosis would be for the future. Some authors took an earlier starting point to outline the developments which led to the political position and the state of our languages at the end of the last century. These reviews are extremely interesting and informative. We are sure these will add to the overall understanding of the political and language situations in each of our six nations. In addition, a somewhat different approach was taken with regard to the articles in the Celtic languages. Authors were asked to write on their experiences in another Celtic nation, so we have each of the six nations covered by an author from a different nation giving their views on that nation or experience in it. The reviews of the political and language situations in each Celtic nation make for interesting insights. They give us the reality as viewed by activists and experts and show the progress and the failings in the different countries and the hopes for the future and dangers.

Rhisiart Tal-e-bot, General Secretary, Cathal Ó Luain, Convenor



Rhisiart Tal-e-bot, General Secretary since 2006 and Editor of *Carn* since 2013