



Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Plaques in East Entrance, City Hall
Date:	Friday 19 February 2010
Reporting Officer:	Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager Ext. 6020

Relevant Background Information

In September 1999, the Policy & Resources Committee agreed that a large number of plaques, previously displayed in the Robing Room and Reception Hall, should be moved to the East Entrance area, following the refurbishment of the Robing Room. At that time, the Head of Civic Buildings reported that there were over 200 plaques in the City Hall collection, most of which had been presented to the Council by visitors; he noted that the collection was only going to increase. He reported that they had been displayed at an inappropriate height and in no particular order and the Committee agreed that they should be grouped under *Cities* and *Organisations*, *Naval* and *Regimental* themes and repositioned in the East Entrance/East Staircase area.

In 2002 an Advisory Panel of external experts was established to examine ways of achieving a more favourable balance of artworks and artefacts within the City Hall. The Advisory Panel made a number of recommendations, reported to the Policy & Resources Committee in February 2003, including one that stated that "the large numbers of plaques in the east Entrance should be archived; they are of little historical or artistic value and could be replaced by items of greater merit".

In February 2004, the Policy & Resources Committee agreed that the plaques under the headings of *Cities* and *Organisations* (located on the ground floor East Entrance) should be archived but deferred consideration of those under the headings *Naval* and *Regimental* (located on the landing area of the staircase).

All the remaining plaques (i.e. *Naval* and *Regimental*) were removed during the major refurbishment of the City Hall and at its meeting on 16 October 2009 the Memorabilia Working Group agreed that any decision to relocate them should be considered within the wider context of City Hall memorabilia and the fact that the East Entrance area had now been designated to be used for community exhibitions; the Working Group agreed that the plaques should not be replaced in the interim.

The decision of the Working Group not to replace the plaques was discussed at the meeting of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on 23 October and became the subject of a vote, when the Committee agreed to refer the question of the plaques back to the Memorabilia Working Group for further consideration.

The Council, however, at its meeting on 2 November 2009, agreed that the plaques should be replaced on a temporary basis and that the Memorabilia Working Group give

consideration to their location on a permanent basis.

At the end of November, when the Remembrance Day commemoration events were over, the plaques were removed. This led to discussion and a vote at the meeting of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on 11 December, since the Council minute had not defined what was meant by "temporary" and there had been genuine confusion over the issue. The Committee was informed that, given the debate that had taken place at the Committee's meeting on 23 October, it was understood that the plaques were to be displayed only during the month of November while the various wreath-laying ceremonies took place.

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee was also informed at its meeting on 11 December 2009 that research in relation to the plaques was underway and that a report would be submitted to the Memorabilia Working Group in the near future outlining which plaques should be replaced.

Key Issues

The Good Relations Manager has sought the advice of two local experts, who are recognised as having particular authority in their respective specialist fields i.e. naval and regimental memorabilia. The external experts are aware of the importance of the City Hall in the life of Belfast and of the sensitivity of this subject.

In each case, the expert has submitted a list highlighting which plaques are of greatest importance or which have the closest relationship to the city of Belfast (see lists attached).

In the list of 42 *Naval* plaques, the expert¹ has highlighted the 16 that are of significance; he is not aware of the other names on the list and assumes that they are from ships that merely visited Belfast.

In the list of 64 *Regimental* plaques, the expert² has highlighted the 23 that have a clear and unequivocal relationship with Belfast; the others have a tenuous connection and she suggests that the plaques may have been presented during the course of casual visits.

It is therefore recommended that the reduced number of plaques (39 from 106) identified as having a close or significant relationship with the city of Belfast should be retained as being of greatest value and interest, to be replaced in the East Staircase area on a permanent basis, and that appropriate explanatory signage be provided.

The Committee will be aware that external organisations have been very grateful for items given by the Council on long-term loan e.g. Schomberg House, which now proudly houses the *Accounts of the Paymasters General of 1690*. Members may therefore wish to consider offering on long-term loan, or donating, the remainder of the plaques to appropriate organisations, which would certainly appreciate receiving them.

The Sea Cadets or Naval Association and the NI War Memorial Home Front Exhibition or Somme Association have been suggested as possible recipients for the naval and regimental plaques respectively and a formal handover ceremony could be arranged. Members may wish to suggest other suitable organisations.

¹ Lieutenant Commander Wm Adams MBE, RN, RSO(T), HMS Hibernia, Thiepval Barracks

² Amanda Moreno MA, Head of Collections, NI Regimental Museums

Financial Implications

Minimal – included within existing budgets.

Recommendation

The Memorabilia Working Group considered this report at its meeting on 4 February 2010 and agreed unanimously with the recommendations outlined above.

Members pointed out that 2 additional plaques – from the *Royal Sussex Regiment* and the *Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas* – also had significant local connections. The *Royal Sussex Regiment* had been formed in Belfast in 1701 and was originally known as the Belfast Regiment; in addition, the Regiment had been granted the Freedom of the City of Belfast in 1961. The Gurkhas had been founded by General Frederick Young, from Culdaff in Donegal and have strong connections with the predecessors of the Irish Fusiliers. (A full list of the plaques is attached as Appendix 1).

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee is therefore requested to endorse the recommendations of the Memorabilia Working Group and agree that:

- the reduced number of plaques identified as having a close or significant relationship with the city of Belfast, with the addition of those from the *Royal Sussex Regiment* and the *Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas*, should be retained as being of greatest value and interest, to be replaced in the East Staircase area on a permanent basis, with appropriate explanatory signage.
- the remaining plaques be offered on long-term loan, or donated, to an appropriate external agency, as outlined in the report.

Officer to contact for further information

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