

# CREGGAN

## *The Next Chapter*



Compiled by  
Garbhán Downey & Conal McFeely

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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.

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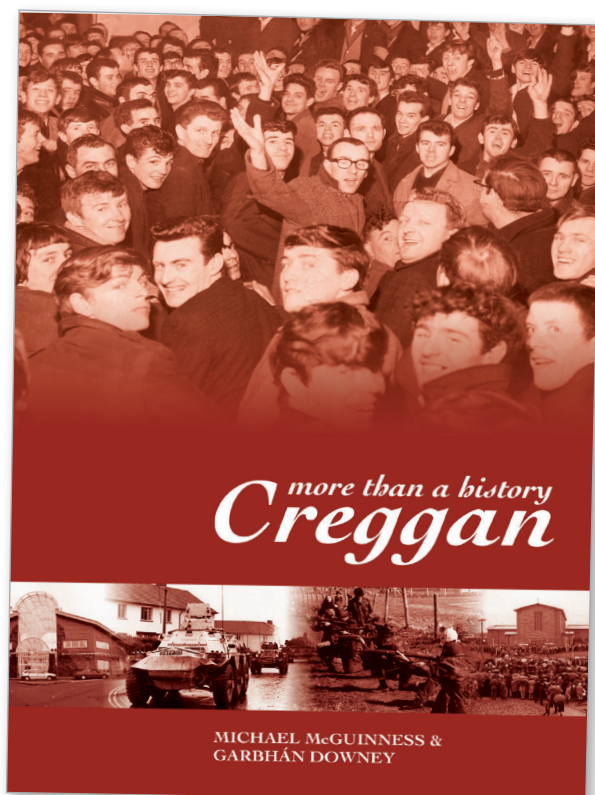
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Only space and time limit our content, not merit or relevance, so mea culpa for any omissions.

## 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.





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## 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.



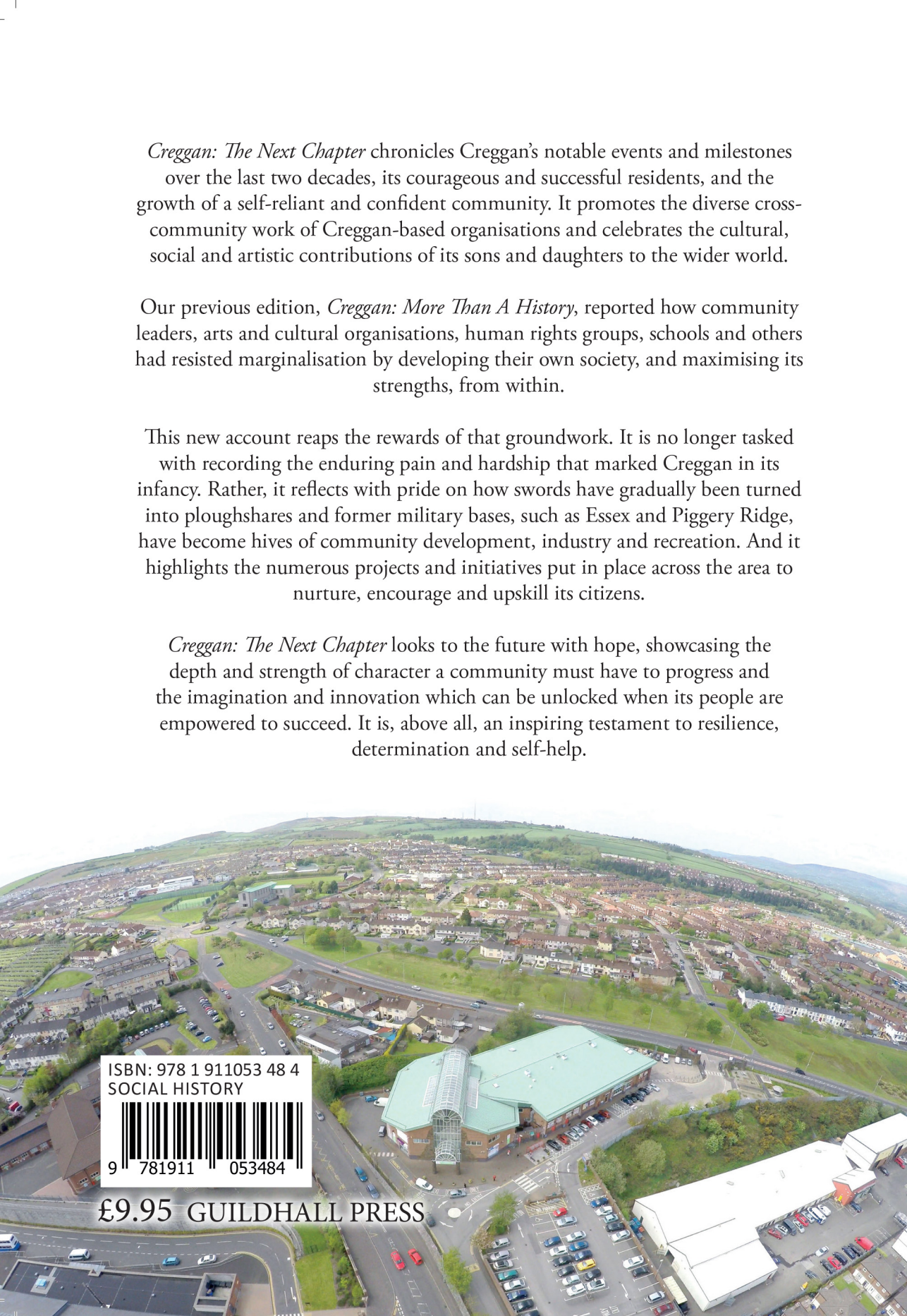


*Creggan: The Next Chapter* chronicles Creggan's notable events and milestones over the last two decades, its courageous and successful residents, and the growth of a self-reliant and confident community. It promotes the diverse cross-community work of Creggan-based organisations and celebrates the cultural,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



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