

Life-size bronze sculpture of James Connolly unveiled in Belfast



A life-size bronze sculpture of Edinburgh born socialist James Connolly has been unveiled in Belfast

The sculpture which weighs 200 kilograms, was designed by artist Steve Feeny and funded by Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Connolly was born in St Patrick's Roman Catholic parish, in the Cowgate district of Edinburgh known as "Little Ireland" on 5th June 1868 to Irish immigrant parents.

Aged 14, he joined the British Army and served nearly seven years before deserting when his battalion was due to go to India.

He returned to Scotland and married Lillie Reynolds in 1890 before becoming secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation. He also became involved with the Independent Labour Party which Keir Hardie had formed in 1893.

Connolly then moved to Dublin where he formed the Irish Socialist Republican Party before emigrating to the United States in September 1903.

While in America he was a member of the Socialist Labor Party of America, the Socialist Party of America (1909) and the Industrial Workers of the World, and founded the Irish Socialist Federation in New York.

On his return to Ireland in 1910 he was right-hand man to James Larkin in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

In 1913 he founded the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), an armed and well-trained body of labour men whose aim was to defend workers and strikers, from brutality of the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

On Easter Monday, 24th April, he led the Headquarters Battalion of 220 men from Liberty Hall to the General Post Office and commanded military operations there throughout the week.

During the course of the 'uprising' he was shot and badly injured. He was subsequently arrested, convicted and sentenced to death for his part in the events.

Despite only having days to live, he was executed at Kilmainham Gaol after dawn on 12th May 1916 His injuries meant that he was unable to stand up and was tied to a chair before being shot by a firing squad.

Connolly had close links with Belfast and from 1911 until his execution he and his family lived at Glenalina Terrace on the Falls Road.

The statue was unveiled by Connolly's great grandson James Connolly Heron who said: "I feel in some ways that I have come home.

"This is west Belfast and the Falls Road is very much the spiritual home of James Connolly.

"He had many homes. He was a son of Edinburgh; he was a son of New York; he was a son of Dublin and a very proud son of Belfast.

"His family forged their politics in and around this area."

A plaque in his memory is currently displayed at his birthplace in the Cowgate, whilst a statue stands under the bridge at Beresford Place in front of Dublin's Custom House. In addition Dublin's main railway station is named after him.

Another statue stands in Union Park Chicago and there is a bust displayed in Troy, New York.

In 2002 he was voted 64th 'Greatest Briton' by members of the public following a BBC TV Production.