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New CAIN documents highlight unresolved political issues 30 years on | Derry Now

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A new batch of documents added to Ulster University's CAIN archive demonstrate how important issues affecting Northern Irish politics twenty years ago remain pertinent today.

The newly released material provides a valuable insight into the period between 1991-1992, mostly notably in relation to the Brooke/Mayhew talks.

In addition, it also charts developments in Anglo-Irish relations for these years, ongoing discussions around various political and security matters, as well as important issues such as fair employment, the Irish language and community relations.

The Brooke/Mayhew negotiations took place to secure "a new, more broadly based agreement" which would replace the Anglo

Irish Agreement.

On the 14 March, 1991, the first roundtable negotiations, excluding Sinn Fein, took place in an attempt to end the political stalemate in N.I., and continued through to November 1992.

Although they appeared to achieve little the Brooke/Mayhew talks were the first to have "three strands", the relationships within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and between London and Dublin. A basis had been laid for future discussions.

The CAIN website, whose workers are based at the Magee campus in Derry, provides an extensive range of information and source material on the conflict and politics from 1968 to the present day. The site is used by a worldwide audience and has received more than 22 million visits since it was launched in March 1997.

Earlier this year, the Derry News revealed that it was under threat of closure but thanks to a staunch defence of the site mounted by academics and researchers, Ulster University announced a nine-month reprieve while funding options are explored.

Around 340 documents relating to the years 1991 and 1992 have been added to the CAIN website as part of ongoing work involving the Ulster University and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

The latest additions will bring to more than 2,600 the number of PRONI records available on CAIN.

Dr Brendan Lynn, CAIN Deputy Director, said the archive is delighted to have been able to continue its cooperation with PRONI and to update the existing section with material dealing with the years 1991 and 1992.

Mr Lynn commented: "CAIN has always sought to work with and individuals, groups and organisations with relevant information

relating to the Northern Ireland 'troubles' in order to make it available on-line.

"An obvious example of this has been the partnership that CAIN has developed with The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). As the official archive for Northern Ireland, one of PRONI's many responsibilities is to receive government records from the early 1920s onwards and to make them available for researchers.

"The development of 'PRONI Records on CAIN' therefore provides people with an opportunity to gain access to a selection of material from the official files, that to date, chart the period from 1968 to 1992.

"Looking ahead both CAIN and PRONI hope to continue this work to enable researchers to examine the events and personalities involved in the evolving 'peace process' of the 1990s which culminated with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998."

'Political stalemate'

In terms of the latest documents, one of the most striking features of this material is that some of the issues which are so prominent today are the same ones which confronted politicians and policy makers back then.

"For instance the search for an end to the political stalemate in Northern Ireland was dominated by a series of long, drawn out discussions – often referred to as the Brooke/Mayhew talks of 1991-1992. Whilst these were ultimately to end in failure they did leave behind an important template that was to be used at a later date," Mr Lynn added.

Dr Michael Willis, PRONI Director, has welcomed the publication of previously secret records through a continuing partnership between

PRONI and Conflict Archive on the INternet (CAIN).

He said: “PRONI’s mission is to identify, preserve and promote public access to Northern Ireland’s archival heritage.

“This latest addition of official documents to the CAIN website enhances the opportunity to view and read key documents from the time. It is an invaluable resource for anyone studying our recent past.”

To access the documents you can visit: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/>

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