

Visits of the Hands of the Cause of God to Ireland by Betsy Omidvaran

Abstract

This paper presents an overview of all known visits by Hands of the Cause of God, the highest-ranking officers of the Bahá'í Faith, to Ireland, and reviews the many sources available to a historian who wants to delve into this fascinating but largely uninvestigated topic – including back issues of New Day and national newspapers. Included is a timeline of the known visits between 1952 and 1986.

Introduction

The Hands of the Cause of God have played a role in the progress of the Bahá'í Faith that is unique in religious history and the Bahá'í community in Ireland was a part of this. For the first time in an independent religion, there was a clear line of succession from the Founder to His successors, and an appointed group of people was specifically charged with protecting its coherence during a transition period between the appointed successors and the clearly delineated elected body charged with governance of the religion into the future.

There were at least four believers referred to as such by Bahá'u'lláh and at least four by his appointed Successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As with many other aspects of the development of the administration, however, it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's successor, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian, who clarified and systematised the appointment, roles and purposes of the Hands of the Cause. He appointed at least ten posthumously, and then, between 1951 and 1957, appointed 32 during their lifetimes, of which 27 were still alive when he died on 4 November 1957. Most of these 32 were appointed in three contingents, but five were appointed individually during the period. The three contingents were 12 appointments on 24 December 1951, seven appointments on 29 February 1952 and eight appointments on 2 October 1957.

These 27 men and women led the world-wide Bahá'í community through the last five and a half years of the Ten Year Plan up to the election of the Universal House of Justice in April 1963, a period which is often termed the interregnum (literally 'between reigns,' that is, between the ministries of the Guardian and then of the House of Justice).

The Ten Year Plan was one of a series of Plans for the development of the Bahá'í Faith. As the Guardian systematised the institution of the Hand of the Cause, so he systematised other aspects of the Bahá'í administration, devising a series of Plans, each with specific goals. At first, these were varying plans assigned to individual National Spiritual Assemblies. The Ten Year Plan was the first worldwide plan, lasting from 1953 to 1963. The Guardian passed away in 1957, before this plan was completed, and the 27 Hands of the Cause administered the world Bahá'í community until the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963.

This was followed by a succession of plans decided by the House of Justice. After a one-year hiatus, there was a Nine Year Plan from 1964-1973. Then after another one-year hiatus, there was a Five Year Plan from 1974-1979, a Seven-Year Plan from 1979-1986 and a Six Year Plan from 1986-1992. The latter saw the last visit of a Hand of the Cause to Ireland.

In Ireland for many years there had been the smallest handful of believers. In 1948, a Local Assembly was formed in Dublin and slowly the Bahá'í community in Ireland began to grow and to spread.

Visits by Hands of the Cause to Ireland

The connection of the Hands of the Cause with the Faith in Ireland is most strongly felt through the presence of George Townshend, a Church of Ireland clergyman and convert, who left the ministry in 1947 and was appointed a Hand of the Cause in December 1951 with the first contingent of twelve. He passed away a few months before the Guardian in 1957.

The first to set foot in Ireland, other than George Townshend, was Leroy Ioas, who was born in 1896. His parents both became Bahá'ís in 1898. The family was very active in the Bahá'í community and they all met 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his travels in America in 1912. Leroy was appointed by the Guardian to the International Bahá'í Council in 1950 and as a Hand of the Cause in the first contingent in December 1951. He arrived in Haifa in March 1952 to act as the Secretary-General of the International Bahá'í Council, as well as assistant secretary to the Guardian, and

rendered services in many aspects of the work in Haifa over the following years.

His first visit to Ireland was very brief. In February (or March) 1952 on his way to the World Centre, he stopped in Shannon airport¹ and phoned George Townshend, who was living in Dublin.

His second visit to Ireland was in 1955, when he came for one day to visit George Townshend. In her book about her father, Anita Ioas Chapman says the following concerning the last two years of his life, when he was ill much of the time:

He thought back on the long years of struggle to build communities and develop strength in the believers ... He remembered his travels and the long day spent in Dublin with fellow Hand of the Cause George Townshend – whose dearest wish was to meet Shoghi Effendi – when Leroy talked hour after hour about the Guardian and Haifa and led Townshend on a visit to the World Centre right from his sick bed.²

In 1961, during the interregnum, he visited for the third and last time, for the Summer School which took place at Mourne Grange, Kilkeel in Northern Ireland from 26 August to 5 September. It was part of a trip to the British Isles to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911. He arrived at the Summer School, accompanied by his wife, Sylvia, who was also a member of the International Bahá'í Council, on 3 September, in time for the exact anniversary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival in the British Isles. A special programme had been prepared on the life and Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, including a reading of his first public talk in the West. There was a special letter from the Hands of the Cause in Haifa to the British community and a cable to the School.³ Mr. Ioas passed away 22 July 1965.

Another Hand of the Cause who played a role in significant developments of the Faith in Ireland was Mr William Sears. He was born 28 March 1911 and died 25 March 1992 and was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the last continent in October 1957, one month before the passing of the Guardian. His first visit to Ireland was in October 1968. He spoke at a Conference at the Hazíratu'l-Quds in Dublin, 41 Morehampton Road, for all the

Bahá'ís in Ireland north and south, over the weekend of 11-13 October.

He was received by President Eamon de Valera on Tuesday, 15 October and presented him with a copy of his book, *God Loves Laughter*. This was announced in the Social and Personal column of *The Irish Times* of 16 October (p. 13) as follows: "The President yesterday received Mr. William B. Sears, California ... ' It was also mentioned in *The Irish Press* (p. 10). Mr Sears recounts this experience in his book, *Tokoloshe*.⁴ 'I had coffee with President Eamon de Valera during his final days in the presidential residence in Dublin, and he told me that one of the first ambassadors he had appointed had been named Sears. I left him an autographed copy of GOD LOVES LAUGHTER, my light-hearted book about the Bahá'í Faith. "I'll have my secretary read it to me," he said. "There's nothing in here that could embarrass a young girl, is there?"' He says that when he and Phil O'Brien returned from touring the grounds, the President rapped on the window and invited them to have a photograph taken with him. This photo has hung in the National Bahá'í Centre with other photos of Irish Presidents and may do so again.

Mr Sears then travelled to Northern Ireland, where he met the Bahá'ís there in the Local Bahá'í Centre in Belfast, the Local Assemblies of Belfast, Bangor and Castlereagh on the sixteenth and all the friends on the seventeenth. This was part of a major trip to the British Isles from 7 September to 31 October.

His second and last visit to Ireland was in 1972, when he represented the Universal House of Justice at the first National Convention of the Republic of Ireland.⁵

A third Hand of the Cause who played a significant role in the development of the Cause in Ireland was Mr John Robarts, who was born 2 November 1901 and died 18 June 1991. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause in the last contingent in October 1957.

He visited Ireland at least five times. The first visit was in October 1970, when he visited Belfast 22-22 October, then Limerick and then was present at a weekend school in Dublin, 24-25 October. Intensive efforts to make the Bahá'í Faith known had been taking place in Limerick. The first person converted after Mr Robarts's visit and this was swiftly followed by an individual in

Dublin and others in Limerick. Mr Robarts visited again with his wife Audrey in 1976 for the Summer School in Newtown School.

He visited again 23-24 May 1981, where he delivered a message from the Universal House of Justice on the importance of daily prayer. There are a number of photos of this, including a very large group photo.⁶

He attended the Dublin International Conference on 25-27 June 1982, with Collis Featherstone, another Hand of the Cause who was representing the Universal House of Justice. During the Conference, he spoke about 'The Local Spiritual Assembly – A Divine Institution' and on the subject of teaching.⁷

His last visit, the last visit of any Hand of the Cause and the only one during the Six Year Plan, was in 1986, when he and Audrey made an extensive tour of the country. They were in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal for the inauguration of the local Hazíratu'l-Quds, where they were photographed planting a tree. They also visited Co. Limerick, where there was a special gathering for older people. They met the National Assembly in Adare, Co. Limerick, then went to Cork, the National Hazíratu'l-Quds in Dublin and to the Northern Ireland Summer School.⁸

Mr Collis Featherstone, mentioned above, visited twice. He was born on 5 May 1913 and died on 29 September 1990 in Kathmandu. His first visit was from 8-10 June 1973. The only record I have found of this visit was that it was announced in the Feastletter in May of 1973.

His second visit was as the representative of the Universal House of Justice at the International Conference in Dublin from 25-27 June 1982. He also attended the International Conference in Manila in May as part of a four-month round-the-world trip. At the Dublin Conference he spoke on 'The Pattern of Bahá'í Life' and on the role of the individual believer. During the Conference there was a reception for prominent people, including the Ambassador of Australia, which was where Mr Featherstone came from.

In addition to Mr Ioas, two other Hands of the Cause visited during the 1950s. Hermann Grossmann visited three times. He visited George Townshend for one day in February 1955, the day before Leroy Ioas came. He was at the Summer School in Northern Ireland in 1956 and visited again in the summer of 1958. I have no other information about these visits, two of which were during the Ten Year Plan and one during the interregnum. Mr Grossmann

was born in 1899 and died on 7 July 1968. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause on 24 December 1951 in the first contingent.

The other Hand of the Cause to visit during the 1950s was Dhikru'lláh Khadem. This was either in 1952 or 1953. *New Day*, in an article written at the time of his second visit in 1984,⁹ says that it was in 1953, but his biography, written by his wife, Javidukht Khadem,¹⁰ says that it was in August of 1952. There is a photo of this visit. She also says that he had 'a deep love for Ireland that only grew more intense with subsequent visits.'¹¹ With regard to the use of the plural 'visits', however, there is no detail of more than one subsequent visit.

Mr. Khadem's second visit was for the Summer School, 11-18 August 1984.¹² *New Day* for July/August for that year says that he gave most of the sessions at the school, which took place in Kings Hospital in Dublin. There is a photo of the Summer School. Mr Khadem was born in 1904 and died on 13 November 1986. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the second contingent on 29 February 1952.

Besides Mr Grossmann and Mr Ioas, the only Hand of the Cause to visit during the Interregnum or the Ten Year Plan was General Shu'á'u'lláh Alá'í, who visited three times altogether. General Alá'í was born in Iran on 16 November 1889 and died on the same date in 1984. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause in the second contingent in 1952. According to *The Bahá'í Journal* (August 1961), he visited on 10-12 April 1961, but there are no details as to exactly where he went. He visited again on 12 June 1967, as recorded by O.Z. Whitehead in *New Day* of February 1993.

His third and final visit was in the week following National Convention in 1975.¹³ National Convention that year was the weekend of the 26-27 April. During this visit, he addressed two meetings, one in Limerick, attended by Bahá'ís from Cork, Galway, Clonmel, Wexford, Waterford, Carlow and Kilkenny, and another meeting in Dublin. There is a photograph of him in the National Hazíratu'l-Quds in 1975.¹⁴

There was a one-year period between the end of the Ten Year Plan with the election of the Universal House of Justice and the beginning of the Nine Year Plan, which lasted from 1964 to 1973. During that year two Hands of the Cause visited Ireland. The first was Abu'l-Qásim Faizí, who was born in Iran in 1906 and died 19 November 1980. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the

third contingent in 1957. Mr Faizí visited Ireland three times altogether.

The first time was in late May 1963, the month after the election of the first Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í World Congress. O.Z. Whitehead describes this in his article on the visits of Mr Faizí, which was serialized in four editions of *New Day*, April, May, June and July/August 1993. On the evening of his first day, there was a meeting for the Bahá'ís of Dublin in the late Adib Taherzadeh's sitting room. On his second day, Mr Faizí, Zebby and Adib went to St. Patrick's Cathedral and in the afternoon, Adib took him to Belfast to meet the friends there.

The second visit was in 3-4 January 1966, with his wife, Gloria. In the evening they gave a talk in the home of Weston and Mary Huxtable, in which Mr Faizí addressed the difficult situation in many European countries. The next day, they went to Belfast. Zebby concludes his essay by describing Mr Faizí's ability to encourage individual believers and the sixteen letters that Mr Faizí wrote to him during the remainder of his life. Of interest to our subject here, Mr Faizí strongly encouraged Zebby to write about the early believers and spoke about the importance of everyone doing so as much as possible. He quotes him as saying,

it is my firm belief that in future the people of the world will prove thirsty to read books and recollections about the followers of the Bahá'í Faith in all lands. They will no more read books which are detrimental to the souls, hearts and minds of themselves and their children.' (*ND* July/August 1993, p. 4)

He urged Zebby to follow the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who 'spent many a night in giving sketches of the lives of early believers ...'

Mr. Faizí's final visit to Ireland was 10-15 September 1974, as part of extensive travels in the US and Europe. He visited Dublin, Bray, Waterford and Limerick. In Limerick, he spoke to believers from all over the island.¹⁵

Also during the year between the Ten Year Plan and the Nine Year Plan, in January of 1964, John Ferraby paid his first of four visits to Ireland. O.Z. Whitehead has described these four visits in an unpublished essay. His next visit was in December of 1964. He

visited again 11 to 14 April of 1967 and 14 January of 1969. [Zebby says 1971, 'about three years later,' but this probably refers to the visit of 1969.] Mr Ferraby was born 9 January 1914 and died on 5 September 1973. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause with the third contingent in October 1957.

During the Nine Year Plan 1964-73, there was a steady flow of visits by Hands of the Cause. Tarázu'lláh Samandarí was born 16 October 1875 and was the only Hand of the cause who had met Bahá'u'lláh. Thus his presence was particularly special to the necessarily small number of Bahá'ís who were on hand to meet him during his visit in 1965 at the age of 90. I do not know the exact dates or the venue of the meeting(s), but the British *Bahá'í Journal* of July 1965 says 'a few weeks ago.' He gathered friends from all communities north and south. Mr Samandarí was appointed with the first contingent in 1951 and passed away 2 September 1968.

Jalál Khazeh was the special guest at two Summer Schools held in the Hall School, Monkstown, the first and second in the Republic, 13-27 July 1968 and 5-15 July 1969. Mr Khazeh was born 24 February 1897 in Iran. From 1963-1968 he lived in South America. In 1969, he made an extended visit to Europe before moving back to Iran. He was in hiding from 1979-84, then escaped and lived out his life in Canada, where he died 21 February 1990. He was appointed individually on 7 December 1953.

Dr Ugo Giachery visited twice. From 8-9 May 1971, he visited Dublin and on 4-5 November 1972 he attended the first National Teaching Conference in the Republic, speaking in several sessions on the qualities of the Guardian and his experiences in helping to build up the World Centre.¹⁶ Dr Giachery was born 13 May 1896. In 1969, he and Angeline settled in Monaco and visited many European countries over the next few years. He was appointed in the first contingent in December 1951 and died 5 July 1982 in Western Samoa.

Hand of the Cause Paul Haney was probably here during the Nine Year Plan, in August 1971. In a letter dated 2 March 1975, he mentioned that he met friends in Dublin at that time, on his way to the North Atlantic Oceanic Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland. I have no other reference to this visit. Mr Haney was born six months after his parents' pilgrimage in 1909. His mother was pregnant at the time and 'Abdu'l-Bahá named him Paul 'for the

outside world' and He also named him 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which He said was his 'real name.'¹⁷ He was appointed individually 19 March 1954 and was killed in a car accident in Haifa on 3 December 1982.

Mr Haney came to the Summer School 2-16 August 1975.¹⁸ He spoke about the functioning of Local and National Assemblies, as well as the individual within the administration. He also explained the work of the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre.

Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir was born 4 April 1923 in Iran, pioneered with his wife to the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia during the Ten Year Plan, for which they were made Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. He was appointed a Hand of the Cause in the third contingent 2 October 1957, and spent much of the next twenty years, until he died 29 December 1979, travelling around the world visiting Bahá'ís and teaching, especially in very remote locations, but including Europe and North America.

He visited Ireland three times. The first time was 6-7 July 1973.¹⁹ On 6 July, he met in the National Centre with believers from Dublin, Dun Laoghaire, Bray, Kilkenny and Waterford. On 7 July he consulted with the National Assembly, then travelled to Limerick, where he recommended a goal of increasing the number of believers; a goal of 300 was decided.

His second visit was to Summer School in August 1974 (Annual Report 131). His third visit was 15-17 June 1979.²⁰ On 16 June, he spoke in the Prince of Wales Hotel in Athlone to believers from eight communities, but I have as yet found no record of where else he went. Lists in the book, *Dr. Muhájir*, confirm that he visited Ireland in 1973, 1974 and 1979.

In 1978, during the Five Year Plan, both 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm and 'Alí-Akbar Furútan visited, the only time either of them visited Ireland.

Mr Furútan was born 29 April 1905 and was appointed with the first contingent in 1951. He visited the Summer School from 21-28 August 1978. It was announced in the Feastletter of June 1978, but was never reported in *New Day*, the next issue of which appeared in September 1979.

Rúhíyyih Khánúm was born 8 August 1910 and was appointed individually on 26 March 1952. She visited for the week 10-17 September 1978, which is described in detail in *New Day* of

September 1979. On Sunday 10 September, she spoke to Bahá'ís in Carrickfergus Town Hall in Northern Ireland, also giving some news interviews and attended a reception. Then she headed south and spoke to Bahá'ís, who travelled from all over, at the Derrylea Hotel in Dundalk, Co. Louth on 12 September.

Then in the evening of 15 September, she spoke at the largest public meeting for some time, on the general subject of the Bahá'í Faith, in the Royal Hibernian Hotel in Dublin. (Her visit was the first time the National Assembly decided to seek media coverage, which was a historic policy change.) She had a number of such interviews, including one in *The Irish Independent* and another in RTÉ Radio's 'The Church in Action.'

On 16-17 September, there was a Conference at the Player Wills Theatre in Dublin, the largest venue up to that point for a Bahá'í Conference in Ireland, where she gave three long sessions including a frank question and answer session.

There are a number of other possible visits by other Hands of the Cause. There are records in the archives files of preparations for a visit by Dorothy Baker in 1947. This would have been before her appointment as a Hand of the Cause with the first contingent in 1951. However, the only evidence that she did in fact visit was her own CV prepared for the National Assembly of the United States in which 'Eire' appears on her list of countries visited.

Also, there is record of preparations for a visit by Enoch Olinga. The *Bahá'í Journal* of May 1972 says: 'Mr. Enoch Olinga will be spending nearly 3 weeks with us and will be able to visit a number of centres in England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.' However, there is scant reference to the trip afterwards, with no details of itinerary and no mention anywhere else that he was ever here.

Conclusion

This is a very basic outline of all the visits of Hands of the Cause to the island of Ireland that I have been able to document in a short space. There may be others, and there is a slight possibility that some of these did not actually happen. In all, out of 32 appointed during their lifetimes, 17 visited (or lived) in Ireland and they paid a total of 39 separate visits (not including George Townshend) between the years 1952 and 1986. This paper, it is

hoped, is a beginning toward more fully describing and evaluating their activities and influence in Ireland.

Timeline

February 1952: Mr Leroy Ioas

August 1952 (or 1953): Mr Dhikru'lláh Khadem

Ten-Year Plan (1953-1963)

February 1955: Mr Leroy Ioas

February 1955: Mr Hermann Grossmann

1956: Mr Hermann Grossman

Summer 1958: Mr Hermann Grossmann

10-12 April 1961: Gen. Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í

September 1961: Mr Leroy Ioas

1963-1964

May 1963: Mr Abu'l-Qásim Faizí

January 1964: Mr John Ferraby

Nine-Year Plan (1964-1973)

December 1964: Mr John Ferraby

1965: Mr Tarázu'lláh Samandarí

January 1966: Mr Abu'l-Qásim Faizí

April 1967: Mr John Ferraby

June 1967: Gen. Shu'á'u'lláh Alá'í

July 1968: Mr Jalál Khazeh

October 1968: Mr William Sears

January 1969: Mr John Ferraby

July 1969: Mr Jalál Khazeh

October 1970: Mr John Robarts

May 1971: Dr Ugo Giachery

May 1972: Mr Enoch Olinga?

1973-1974

June 1973: Mr Collis Featherstone

July 1973: Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir

Five-Year Plan (1974-1979)

August 1974: Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir

September 1974: Mr Abu'l-Qásim Faizí

After Convention 1975: Gen. Shu'á'u'lláh 'Alá'í

August 1975: Mr Paul Haney

August 1976: Mr John Robarts

August 1978: Mr 'Alí-Akbar Furútan

September 1978: 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm

Seven-Year Plan (1979-1986)

June 1979: Dr Rahmatu'lláh Muhájir

May 1981: Mr John Robarts

June 1982: Mr Collis Featherstone

June 1982: Mr John Robarts

August 1984: Mr Dhikru'lláh Khadem

Six-Year Plan (1986-1992)

August/September 1986: Mr John Robarts

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2. Anita Ioas Chapman *Leroy Ioas* (Oxford, George Ronald), p. 345.
3. Reference.
4. William Sears *Tokoloshe* (South Africa), pp. 183-4.
5. *New Day*.
6. *Ibid.*, #35, July 1981, pp. 10-11.
7. *Ibid.*, #37, August/September 1982.
8. *Ibid.*, #57, December 1986, pp. 7-9.
9. *Ibid.*, #45, July/August 1984, p. 3.
10. Javidukht Khadem *Dhikru'lláh Khadem*, p. 60.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
12. *New Day* #45, pp. 4-5.
13. *Ibid.*, #19, June 1975, pp. 2-3.
14. *Ibid.*, #47, November/December 1984, p. 2.
15. *Ibid.*, #16, November 1974, pp. 5-6.
16. Vol. 1, #4, Sharaf/December 129.
17. Barron Harper *Lights of Fortitude* (Oxford, George Ronald), p. 157.

18. *New Day* September 1975.
19. *Ibid.*, October 1973, Vol. II, No. 8.
20. *Ibid.*, September 1979.

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