

NO LONGER FORGOTTEN:

Cork Women of the Revolution

Mary MacSwiney

Mary MacSwiney was born in Surrey on 27th March 1872 to John MacSwiney, a native of Cork, and Mary Wilkinson, an English Catholic with strong Irish nationalist opinions.

She was the eldest of seven, and her brother was Terence MacSwiney. As a child, she developed a seriously infected foot, which eventually had to be amputated, and she was fitted with a surgical boot, but she had a severe limp all her life. She was one of two Irish Catholic women studying in the teaching programme in Cambridge University which accepted one hundred, the majority of whom were men. After receiving her teaching diploma, Mary started working in a boarding school directed by nuns of the Order of St. Benedict in Farnboro, England. She seriously considered entering the religious life during this time, but in the end, she became a member of a lay organisation, the Third Order of St. Benedict. When her mother died in 1904, she returned to Cork to assume a matriarchal role over the MacSwiney family. Mary's first political association was with the Irish suffrage movement, and she became a member of the Munster Women's Franchise League. She believed that women's suffrage and Home Rule for Ireland were compatible goals. However, other members of the suffrage movement did not agree with the fact that Mary was helping men of the Irish Volunteers. While Mary believed in the justice and relevance of women's suffrage, she believed that the cause of a free Ireland was more urgent, and she resigned from the Munster Women's Franchise League in November 1914. She also joined Cumann na mBán in 1914, and the inaugural meeting of the Cork branch of Cumann na mBan was held in the MacSwiney house in



May 1914. She was a teacher at St. Angela's during this time, and on 2nd May 1916, she was arrested by British soldiers in front of her students for her part in aiding Irish Volunteers as a member of Cumann na mBán. On 3rd May 1916, she was dismissed abruptly from her teaching post due to her radical politics. New schools were reluctant to employ a known political radical, so Mary decided to open her own school later that year, Scoil Íte, which enrolled boys up to the age of 10 and girls up to the secondary grades. This school had a strong Nationalist emphasis, and Mary established there a philosophy of education which was in accordance with her beliefs, combining careful moral and religious training with a high standard of intellectual work. After her brother Terence died on hunger strike in 1920, Mary was elected for Sinn Féin to the Cork Borough constituency, taking her seat in the Second Dáil in 1921. Mary MacSwiney died on 8th March 1942.



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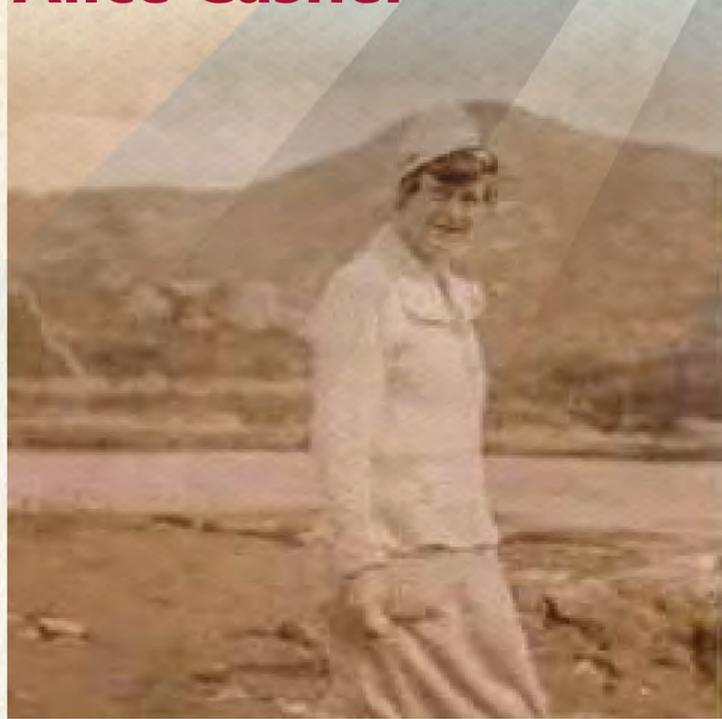
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Alice Cashel



Alice was born on 17 July 1878 and grew up in Limerick and Cork. She trained as a teacher, receiving her degree from the Royal University of Ireland. In Cork she became friendly with the politically active McCurtain and MacSwiney families. She joined Sinn Féin in 1907 and in 1914, together with Mary and Annie MacSwiney formed the Cork branch of Cumann na mBán.

During the Easter Rising she received orders from Tadhg Barry in Cork to use a "good Protestant name" and to organise cars from a local garage to go to Kerry to collect the arms being delivered on the Aud. The interception of the boat and the arrest of Roger Casement meant the abandonment of this plan.

She was given a written record of the week's events by Séan Hegarty and trusted with getting the document to John Devoy in New York. She memorised the document,

destroyed it and then wrote it out again when she arrived in the US. She stayed there until January 1917 when she returned to Cork as a teacher in St. Ita's, the school founded by Annie and Mary MacSwiney. By 1918 she had moved to Galway where she lived in her brother in law James O'Mara's house, Cashel House near the Twelve Bens in Connemara. She was a Cumann na mBán organiser and moved all around the country, mostly on her bicycle. She founded many of the Cumann na mBán branches in the north of the country, including all of those in Donegal. She spent many months 'on the run' due to her republican activities and served as a Sinn Féin judge in the alternative courts set up all around the country to undermine the British justice system. In 1919 James O'Mara was elected to the First Dáil and was sent to the US. Alice was to lie low and look after his oyster fishing business.

Her identity was well known to local police who were concerned that she would try to land guns from America. She spent a week in prison in Galway during this time. As a result of this she was co-opted by Sinn Féin onto Galway County Council in June 1920. By March 1921, she was acting chairman of the council.

Eventually her home was raided by the Black and Tans and she fled to Dublin and from there to France where she was able to confer with future President Sean T. O'Kelly. She was arrested in January 1921 and remained in prison in the company of many other female rebels until July of that year. When released she moved to Dublin where she worked in Erskine Childers' office until the Treaty was signed. She then returned to Galway where she objected to Galway County Council's support for the Treaty. In later life she wrote a book for young adults called *The Lights of Leaca Bán*, taught in schools in the early years of the State. She lived in Roundstone Co. Galway until her death in February 1958. She was buried in Galway city with full military honours.



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Annie MacSwiney

Annie MacSwiney was born on 9th September 1883. She was the younger sister of Terence and Mary MacSwiney.

Annie was a friend of Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, having got to know her in Newman College (now University College Dublin) while obtaining a degree in Science there. After she got her university degree, she taught in Ventnor, a finishing school on the Isle of Wight. Her niece Máire (Terence's daughter) says of her in her memoir that she was "an inveterate letter writer". When Mary MacSwiney founded the school, Scoil Íte in Wellington Road in Cork in 1916, she asked Annie to join her and work there. Annie was a teacher of English and Maths at Scoil Íte. She was very particular about the correct use of the English language, and she also taught elocution. She spoke with an Oxford accent. She also deemed it important to teach etiquette to her students, for example, how to enter a room gracefully and how to hand a scissors to someone! She had a great intellect but was not as practical as Mary when it came to school administration. When Mary died, Annie continued as principal of the school, but she had to close Scoil Íte in June 1954 due to her ill-health. Annie died in 1954.



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Leslie Price deBarra

Leslie Price was born in Dublin on 9 January 1893, one of six children of Michael and Mary Price. After she left school she began training as a teacher. She came from a nationalist family, two of her brothers were members of the Irish Volunteers and she was a member of Cumann na mBán.

During the Easter Rising of 1916, she was stationed both at the GPO and then at the Hibernian Bank. She acted as courier, moving ammunition and messages between rebel headquarters at the GPO and other posts around the city.

By 1918, Leslie was a member of the Cumann na mBán executive and represented West Cork in the organisation. She left the teaching profession and became a full organiser for Cumann na mBán, travelling throughout the country to encourage women to join. By 1917, the organisation had grown from 17 branches to over 600.

She was a close friend of Michael Collins throughout the War of Independence and during this time became engaged to Charlie Hurley, a member of the West Cork Flying Column. He was killed during the Crossbarry Ambush in March 1921.

Leslie married Charlie's commander and close friend Tom Barry in Vaughan's Hotel in Dublin on 22 August 1921 while the Truce leading up to the Anglo Irish Treaty was in place. Guests at their wedding included Michael Collins and Éamon deValera along with many others who ended up on opposing sides during the Civil War. Her husband, Tom Barry was a staunch Republican and against the Treaty. It is interesting though that while she was



busy in the GPO during the Easter Rising, he was serving with the British Army in Mesopotamia.

During the Second World War, Leslie became involved in organising care for children orphaned by the war. This led to her involvement with the Irish Red Cross, an organisation she represented at international level for many years. She was chairperson of the organisation from 1950 until 1973. She was involved with the setting up of the VHI in the late 1950s and in 1962, she was instrumental in launching the Freedom from Hunger Campaign which later became Gorta.

She lived with her husband Tom on Cork's Patrick Street until his death in 1980. In 1979 she was awarded the Henry Dunant medal, the highest honour awarded by the Red Cross. Today she is remembered by the Leslie Ban deBarra Trophy, awarded to the Cork Carer of the Year. She died on 9 April 1984 and is buried with her husband in Cork.



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Muriel Murphy MacSwiney

Muriel was born on 8 June 1892, daughter of the wealthy Murphy Cork brewing and distilling family. They lived in a large house called Carrigmore in Montenotte and Muriel was educated in England. She anticipated the coming cultural and political change in Ireland and rejected her family's belief system.

At Christmas 1915 she met Terence MacSwiney at the Fleischmann's home in Cork. Her family didn't approve of their relationship or of her interest in socialism and nationalism. She left a life of comfort and privilege to marry Terence. Their wedding took place in Bromyard in Herefordshire in 1917 during MacSwiney's internment at the open prison in Frongoch. Fellow Cork woman and nationalist activist Geraldine O' Sullivan, later Neeson was her bridesmaid.

The couple spent very little time together as Terence was so often under arrest. Their daughter Máire was born while he was in prison in Belfast. Following his death on hunger strike in Brixton Prison, Muriel played an important role in the propaganda activities of the first Dáil, travelling to America with her sister-in-law Mary in 1920-22 where they gave evidence to the American Commission on Conditions in Ireland and advocated for Ireland's claim to independence in a series of lectures across the US. Muriel was the first woman ever awarded the Freedom of New York city.

After partition and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922 she took the defeated anti-treaty side and later joined the Communist Party. She left Ireland with her daughter, Máire, in December 1923, and spent the rest of her life in a nomadic existence, mostly in Germany, France, and England. In 1932 Terence MacSwiney's elder sister Mary, a prominent figure within the nationalist movement before and after his death, removed Máire, her niece from her boarding school in Germany to Ireland. The two sisters-in-law did not get on well together, and Muriel claimed that her daughter had been kidnapped. Legal attempts to regain her failed and Máire continued to be cared for by her aunts Mary and Annie in Cork.

Muriel's later activities are obscure. She was granted a pension by the Irish government in 1950, and she surfaced briefly on the fringes of left-wing politics in London in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She had another, later daughter whose identity is protected by Máire MacSwiney Brugha's family

She died in the care of this daughter in Maidstone in Kent never having reconciled with her daughter Máire or her family.



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Josephine O'Donoghue (nee McCoy)

Josephine was born in Rathmore, Co Kerry, the youngest of James and Brigid McCoy's ten children. She was raised in Cork city and in 1910, she moved to Wales where she married Coleridge Marchment (alias Brown) in 1913.

They had two children, Reggie and Gerald. Josephine is said to have remarked that her husband's family was "hostile to Catholics... they did not want the children to be brought up in the faith". Tensions increased when Josephine moved in with her in-laws after Coleridge enlisted in the British army for war service in Flanders. She was not happy with the new living arrangement and ultimately returned to Cork taking her infant son Gerald with her, but leaving the elder boy Reggie in the temporary care of her in-laws.

After Coleridge was killed in late 1917, his family refused requests to return Reggie to Ireland, forcing Josephine to sue for custody. At the court hearing, a letter from Coleridge was produced, written without his wife's knowledge, stating that he wished his sons to be raised in the Protestant faith by his sisters in the event of his death. The judge granted them permanent guardianship of Reggie.

Josephine returned to Cork and began work at Victoria (now Collins) Barracks, the British army's Sixth Division headquarters. She was quickly promoted to head of civilian clerks and typists, managing a staff of twenty five. Lacking the financial resources to continue her custody battle, she sought alternative recourse. In September 1919, republican priest, Fr Dominic O'Connor put her in touch with Florrie O'Donoghue, head of IRA intelligence in Cork. She began passing O'Donoghue secret army reports, with the understanding that the IRA would reunite her with her son. While army officers recognised that they had a leak in their headquarters and dismissed some suspect civilian staff, they never discovered the truth about Josephine's undercover work.

In December 1920, IRA intelligence officer Florrie O'Donoghue travelled to Wales to kidnap Josephine's seven-year old son. O'Donoghue and two armed IRA volunteers invaded the in-laws' home, drove Reggie to a safe-house in Manchester, and eventually had him smuggled back to Cork. Reggie was subsequently hidden



in different safe houses near Cork, where his mother was able to visit him. During this period, Josephine and Florrie became romantically involved and married secretly in April 1921. She continued working at Victoria Barracks until the July 1921 Truce.

Florrie O'Donoghue opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty and served as Adjutant-General for the anti-Treaty IRA. He refused to take part in the Civil War and set up the Neutral IRA organisation to try to find a peace settlement. He later became a noted historian of the revolutionary period.

The couple lived in Cork and where they raised six children: Reggie and Gerald by Josephine's first marriage (both adopted by O'Donoghue) and four additional children. Shortly before their deaths (Josephine in 1966 and Florrie in 1967), the couple wrote a joint memoir, *Florence and Josephine O'Donoghue's War of Independence* explaining the remarkable events that led to their 45-year marriage.



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Cecilia Saunders Gallagher



Cecilia Saunders Gallagher was born in Cork in 1889. She was one of ten children and her family owned a successful horticultural nursery. Cecilia was a pupil at Miss Kelly's private school at South Mall in Cork and later at Belrive, the Faithful Companions of Jesus boarding school in Liverpool.

Cecilia worked as a bank clerk in the Provincial Bank and later in the National Land Bank. She kept a number of diaries during her lifetime that illustrated her keen interest in Irish politics. Early diary entries recorded the events of the First World War, the blowing up of King Street police barracks, the hunger strike and funeral of Lord Mayor of Cork Terence MacSwiney, and the burning of Cork in December 1920.

Cecilia married Frank Gallagher on 24 May 1922. The Saunders family were friends of the Gallagher family and Cecilia knew Frank growing up. Gallagher worked as a journalist, first in Cork and then in Dublin and London. He became involved in the movement for Irish Independence and was appointed to the publicity staff of the Sinn Féin organisation where he organised the formation of Sinn Féin clubs and volunteer corps throughout Ireland.

In March 1920 Gallagher was arrested in Dublin and spent 40 days on hunger strike. During the Civil War, he and Cecilia supported the Republican side. Along with hundreds of other anti-treaty campaigners, Gallagher was arrested and interned on 10 Oct 1922 without trial. Cecilia was among several hundred women imprisoned during the Civil War and the couple spent their first Christmas as a married couple in different wings of Mountjoy Jail. Cecilia was imprisoned primarily because her husband was a leading dissident republican journalist. She remained at Mountjoy until her transfer on 6 Feb 1923 to Kilmainham Jail.

During her internment, Cecilia provides us with entertaining accounts of the daily lives of the women political prisoners, interspersed with her concern for the health of her husband. Conditions in the Jail were grim but the group leaders kept their spirits high by arranging games, lessons, and entertainment.

On 1 May 1923 Cecilia was moved to the North Dublin Union and was finally released on 28 September 1923. She died in Dublin in 1967.



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Hannah Duggan

Hannah Duggan was born in Cork city in 1901. Known to her family and friends as 'Pidge', she spent a part of her childhood in Dublin where she gained an honours certificate from King's Inn National School. When Pidge was fifteen years old she and her family moved to Scotland when her father was appointed manager of the Glasgow branch of Scottish Legal Life. The family's move to Glasgow was a direct result of the 1916 Rising when the firm's Dublin offices were burnt down during the fighting.



In 1917, Pidge joined the Anne Devlin branch of Cumann na mBán attached to "A" Company under Captain Joe Robinson, at Risk Street, Calton.

Robinson was a key figure in the fight for Irish independence and played a significant role in the growth of the Fianna organisation in both Ireland and Scotland. In early 1918 he was arrested on charges of raiding for munitions and sentenced to ten years penal servitude. While Robinson was incarcerated during the War of Independence, Pidge played an active role in revolutionary activities and her home was often used to store weapons and ammunition that would later be transported to Dublin.

On Robinson's early release from prison in March 1922 he was appointed Divisional Commander of the Scottish IRA. During this time, Pidge, with an address at 23 Bank Street Hillhead, acted as dispatch and ammunition carrier for Robinson from Scotland to Ireland.

Robinson was arrested again by the Scottish authorities in early 1923 and deported to Ireland where he spent eleven weeks in Mountjoy. On his release from prison, Robinson and Pidge got engaged and were married in October 1923. They gave up all their revolutionary activities and moved to Bray, Co. Wicklow where Robinson worked as a painter and decorator until his death in 1955. Following Robinson's death, Pidge moved to Sandymount and died in 1987 aged 86.



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