

THE  
PRESENT DUTY  
OF  
IRISHWOMEN.

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The Contribution of Irish Women  
as documented in the Archival Record

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# TIMELINE

Contagious Diseases Act  
– enforced female examinations **1864**

**1880s** Women's Land Leagues were  
established throughout Ireland

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland  
admits female students for the first time **1885**

**1898** Women granted right to vote and stand  
for election in Rural District Councils

Irish Women's Franchise  
League established **1908**

**1910** Irish Countrywomen's  
Association established

Ulster Women's Unionist  
Council established **1911**

**1914** Cumann na mBan  
established

Women over 30 granted right  
to vote in General Elections **1918**

**1919** Countess Markievicz elected first female MP at  
Westminster 1918 and Minister for Labour in the  
first Dáil Éireann 1919

Dehra Chichester and Julia McMordie  
elected first female MPs in NI Parliament **1921**

**1923** First female accepted as a member  
of the Royal Hibernian Academy

Marriage Bar introduced  
in the Republic of Ireland **1932**

**1957** Marriage Bar repealed  
for primary school teachers

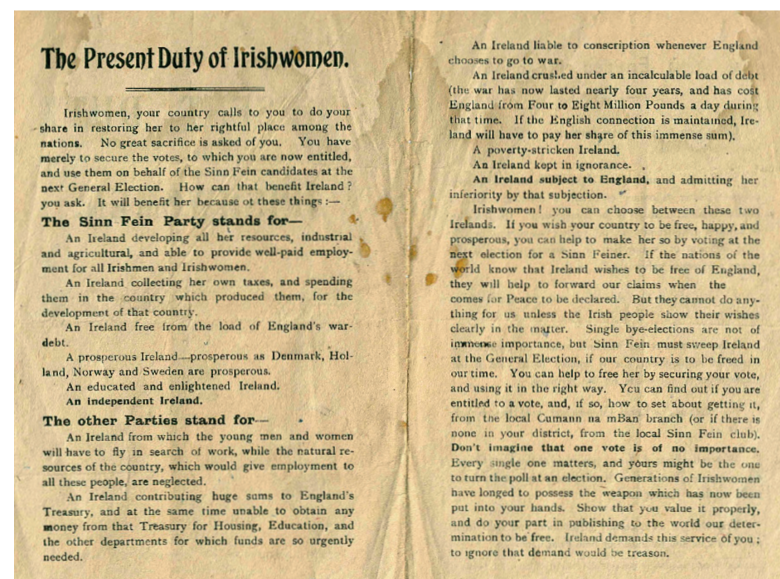
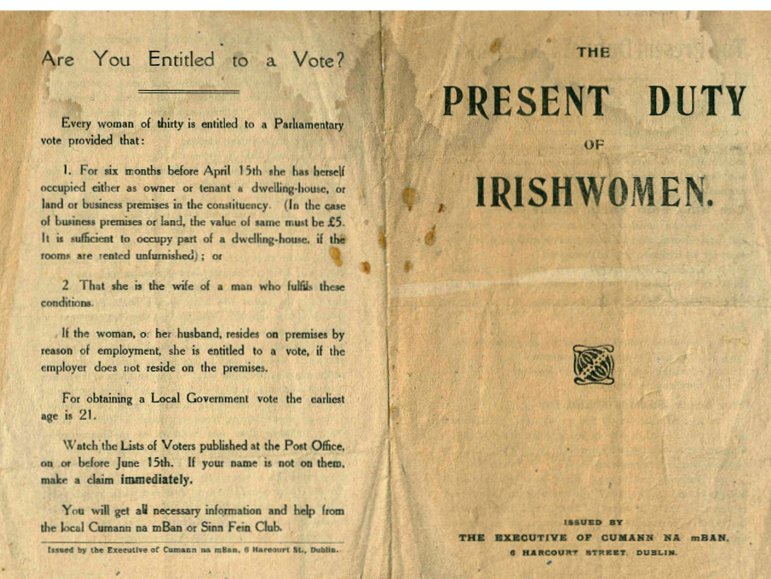
Marriage Bar repealed for civil servants and  
National Women's Council established **1973**

**1977** Employment Equality  
Act introduced

Law of Criminal  
Conversation repealed **1981**

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The IAR is funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Northern Ireland and the Heritage Council and the work of the IAR would not be possible without this assistance for which we are most grateful. The pack has been funded by the Heritage Council and we would like to thank the Heritage Council for their continued support and help with this project. It would not be possible to make these resources available without the archives services and cultural institutions that safeguard this rich heritage and we would like to thank all of those who so kindly contributed to the project.

The pack was written and produced by two of the IAR Steering Group members Joanne Rothwell and Natalie Milne and designed by Red Heaven Design - [www.redheavendesign.com](http://www.redheavendesign.com)

# INTRODUCTION

The Irish Archives Resource (IAR) is an online portal to archive collections across Ireland, north and south. The goal of the IAR is to introduce people to the wealth of archival resources available in Ireland. This resource pack is the first in a series of educational packs organised by topic that the IAR hope to produce in order to highlight these resources.

This Resource Pack on “The Present Duty of Irishwomen” is designed to highlight archival resources that document Irish women and their contributions to Irish life. It highlights the difference Irishwomen have made to Irish life and the sense of duty that leads Irish women to contribute to their communities.



*“Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience.”*

*Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

# WOMEN IN ACADEMIC LIFE

The pursuit of an education was often the first step towards giving a voice to women in society. A petition was submitted to the Board of Trinity College in 1892 in support of the admission of women to the College. The petition was signed by 10,000 Irishwomen.

This was rejected by the Board but in 1903 the Board agreed to open degrees in Arts and Medicine to women. In 1904 the first female student Marion Weir Johnson entered Trinity College.

In 1885, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland admitted female students for the first time. In 1896, Dr Emily Wini-fred Dickson was elected the first woman fellow of the Royal

College of Surgeons in Ireland. The carving of this new path for women in society was often very difficult and this is evidenced by the diary of Margaret Tierney Downes and Janie E. Reynolds, who were among the first female students in University College Cork.

However, despite these difficulties, and the less than positive response of academics and some of the male students, many women, such as Olive Purser, chose to follow this path and became successful academics, overcoming the obstacles they encountered.

NAME	PROFESSION OR TITLE	ADDRESS
J. M. M. M. M. M.	Lady Nicks, Artist.	14 6 Oakey St Chelsea London
Constance Wilde	(wife of Oscar Wilde)	16 Tite Street, Chelsea London
Eliza Noble	(writer)	1 Margaret Street, London
Clara Stephens	(writer)	84, Chancery Lane
Hannah Fisher	Artist	48 Bellamy Crescent - W. London
Hannah Johnson	(portrait painter)	17 St Mary St W. London
Mrs. Johnson	(writer)	14 St Mary St W. London
Georgina M. King	Painter	9 Bellon St W. London
Anna Johnson	Painter	16 Bellon Studios St W.
Blanche C. Baines	Painter	5, Belair Terrace, W. London
Ann M. G. Gae	Painter of (St. M.)	Brook St W. London
Laura C. Johnson		London London House
Mary S. Pease		Mill Hill, W. London
E. Bayley		Severalls, Fenchurch St.
S. Stiles		24 Clyde Road.
P. M. J. Dunn		Stoke Newington
Mary Stokes		24 Clyde Road
Raith Mary Berton	Art Student	Cothgibbon House, Dartmouth
Sarah Walker	Science Student & Undergraduate U.S.	17 South Mall, Cork.



**IE-TC-D-MUN-P-1-2441**  
Trinity College Dublin Memorial organised by the Central Association of Irish Schoolmistresses in favour of education for women. Signed by over 10,000 women and presented to the Board of Trinity June 1892. By permission of the Board of Trinity College, University of Dublin.

**IE-TC-D-MUN-WOMEN-7-1**  
Photograph of the first eight women graduates of medicine from TCD, 20 December 1906. Eileen McCutchan, Lizzie B. Craig, Muriel Barnett, EB Douglas, Eith Marion O'Shaughnessy, Anne Jane Sanderson, Madeline S. Baker and B. Stafford. By permission of the Board of Trinity College, University of Dublin.

## WOMEN IN ACADEMIC LIFE

IE/UC/COUNCIL/17/153

Letter from Margaret Tierney Downes regarding her poor treatment at Queen's University, Cork.  
By Permission of University Archives, University College Cork.

2 Synnott Place  
Dublin  
March 15. 87

Gentlemen—  
As the "reply" I have received in your name does not appear to be in any sense a suitable one, I beg to ask you to appoint a time without any more delay when you will hear my complaints against Professors <sup>Notes</sup> and those who have directly or indirectly abetted his inexcusable insolence. I shall expect a definite reply at once. Of course I keep a copy of this letter, as I have done and shall continue to do, of all those which I have been or may be compelled to write, by the various injustices I have suffered in connection with the Queen's College, Cork. — Margaret Tierney Downes  
To the Council, Queen's College, Cork.

26<sup>th</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> 1883

To the Council  
of Queen's College, Cork  
Dear Sirs.

With reference to your recent resolution for the admission of ladies into the Arts classes of our College. I beg most respectfully to say I must decline to receive them into mine.

I much regret that I should find myself at variance with you in this matter, and remain  
Yours Obedt Serv<sup>t</sup>  
R. H. Mills

U/Council/19/51<sup>(1)</sup>

To the Members of Council  
Queen's College, Cork.

Gentlemen

I would feel much obliged, if you would kindly consider an order made by you with reference to the admittance of lady students to the dissecting-room, viz that ladies should be allowed to dissect only on condition that at least <sup>two</sup> of them would take out Anatomy and that the portion of the dissecting-room occupied by them, should be screened off from that occupied by the other students.

I have completed my first year's lectures and have taken out one session in Anatomy in this College but owing to your order am prevented from taking out the present Summer Session in that subject. In other Colleges and in a College kindred to this, the Queen's College Belfast, men and women are allowed to dissect on the same body and in this College the sentiment which

U/Council/19/53

advocates the isolation of ladies when dissecting, is not inculcated on in any other subject as in the lectures of Operative Surgery, Medicines &c. Besides in being limited to one "subject" and in not being allowed to see the dissection of the other students women are severely handicapped and prevented from forming an earlier and more intimate acquaintance with the subject of Anatomy.

Being Gentlemen that I have already commenced my medical education and have taken out my first year's dissections in this College, and that it would entail considerable expense to leave home to complete my studies in another institution. I hope you will kindly see your way to consider and grant my application.

I am Gentlemen  
yours very truly  
Janie E. Reynolds

IE/UC/Council/16/265

Letter from R. Horner Mills, Professor of Jurisprudence and Political Economy, Queen's College Cork, to the Council, 20 November 1883, referring to their decision to admit women to Arts lectures – "I beg most respectfully to say I must decline to receive them into mine."  
By permission of University Archives  
University College Cork.

IE/UC/Council/19/51

Letter from Janie E. Reynolds, to the Council, QCC, asking that ladies would be allowed to dissect on the condition that at least two of them would take Anatomy and that the part of the dissecting room occupied by them should be screened off. By permission of University Archives, University College Cork.



### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

What difficulties did women encounter when pursuing an education in 19th and early 20th century Ireland?  
Why were Arts and Medicine considered suitable degrees for women?

# WOMEN AND THE VOTE

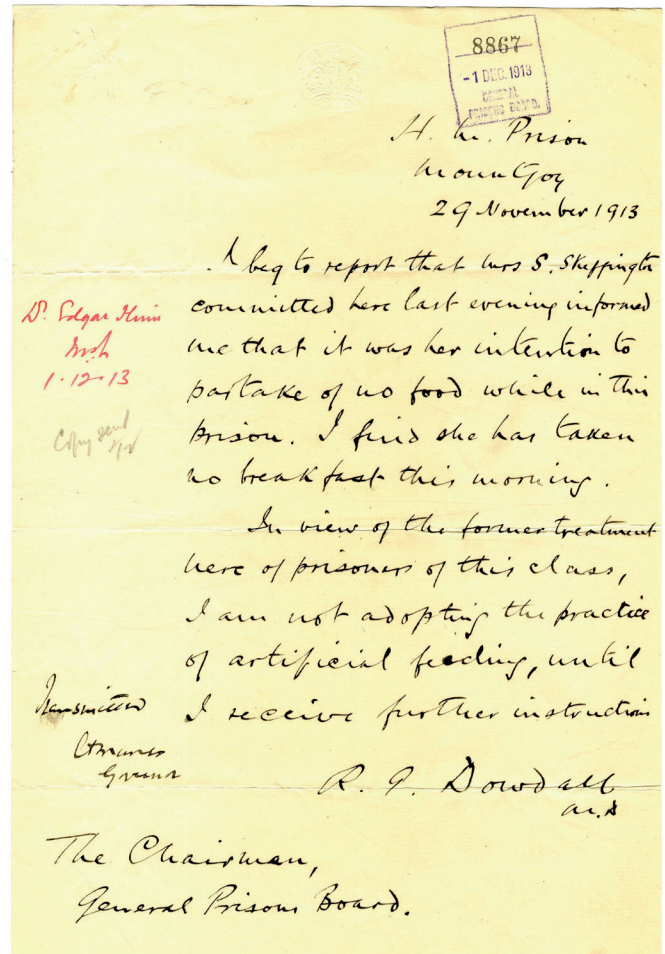
In November 1908 the Irish Women's Franchise League was set up to seek the vote for women in Ireland. The organisation was closely aligned to the UK's Women's Social and Political Union, or Suffragettes, as they became known. Irishwomen were very active in their pursuit of the vote. Many, including one of their founder members Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, were arrested.

In 1914 New Scotland Yard wrote to the National Gallery of Ireland advising them to be vigilant against the threat of suffragette attacks following the attack by Mary Richardson on Diego Velasquez's "The Rockeby Venus" at the National Gallery in London. A number of the women arrested went on hunger strike in protest and were force-fed by the authorities as a result.

Women across Ireland and the UK were granted the right to vote in the Representation of the People Act, 1918 under the following terms:

- **Women aged 30 or over (men aged 21 or over)**
- **Member of the Local Government Register or married to a member or a property owner**
- **Graduate voting in a university constitution**

Many of the active suffragettes in Ireland became involved in the pursuit of nationalist and unionist goals and the fight for the vote was, to some extent, eclipsed by their participation in the nationalist and unionist politics of the day.



IE/GPB/SFRG/1/7

General Prisons Board file on Hanna Sheehy Skeffington during her period in custody, November 1913-December 1913. By permission of the National Archives of Ireland.

WOMEN AND THE VOTE



RTE Cashman Collection 0504/002  
Daily Sketch newspaper article showing Hannah Sheehy- Skeffington addressing a protest meeting by the walls of Mountjoy, 1914. By permission of the RTE Stills Library.



RTE Cashman Collection 0507/014  
Image of Suffragette Arrest, 1914. By permission of the RTE Stills Library.

CONFIDENTIAL

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has to acquaint you that there is reason to apprehend special activity during the present week on the part of the Militant Suffragettes and their supporters; and he thinks that it would be well therefore to impress upon all persons employed at Galleries and Museums the necessity for being very much on the alert to prevent any damage to the exhibits.

Letter to the National Gallery of Ireland from New Scotland Yard, 18 May 1914. Confidential New Scotland Yard letter highlighting the activity of 'militant suffragettes and their supporters' to the National Gallery of Ireland. By permission of the National Gallery of Ireland.

Committed	Offence	Sentence	(COP)
Sheehy, Skeffington, Hanna Palmer, Margaret Murray, Margaret Murray, Jane	20-6-15 Wilful damage to glass.	40/- or 1 cal. mo. & bail or 3 cal. mo. to follow.	Allowed privileges of 1st class H.M. under Churchill rule save permission to follow own trade & have visits & letters more often than once a fortnight. These privileges were granted later, also permission to talk under conditions to be arranged by the Governor's Visiting Committee. (They were allowed to talk at convalescence & to work together and talk four afternoons a week). A lady doctor was allowed to visit & Murphy professionally. Their solicitor was given 12m permission. These prisoners refused food 15-3-17 in sympathy with convicts Leigh & Evans (see below). Special privileges withdrawn 15/8. Not forcibly fed. Released on termination of sentence 29-8-17.
Houston, Kathleen Heater, Margaret Webb, Milda Lloyd, Maud	12-7-15 Malicious damage to glass	6 cal. months as 1st class H.M. etc.	Usual privileges of class & daily visits & letters granted by Visiting Ctee under Rule 251. Professional visits of one doctor allowed by Govt. to Heater & Heah. Permission also given by Govt. to associate & converse with one another and with four prisoners above. Eligible for release 12-12-15. Released by H.M. on memorial for commutation of sentence 29-8-17.
Haker, Lizzie Evans, Gladys Leigh, Mary	2-8-15 Sent for Conspiracy ac. total 12-7-15	For trial	Asked to be allowed to exercise separately from other untried prisoners. Visiting Ctee refused and H.M. approved. Allowed to interview solicitor together, but not to associate and converse at other times.
Haker, Lizzie Evans, Gladys Leigh, Mary	6-8-15 Conspiracy ac. & assault 7-8-15 Explosion 6-8-15 Conspiracy ac.	7 cal. mo. H.M. 2 years P.D. 2 years P.D. 2 years P.D.	Asked for recognition as 1st class H.M. etc. Refused. Sent on hunger strike 12-8-17. Labor released by H.M. on grounds of health on 12-8-17. Evans and Leigh forcibly fed from 20-8-17. Leigh released on medical licence on 21-8-17. Evans similarly released 3-10-17 to go to hospital. Not recognized.
Cousins, Margaret Conroy, Margaret Hoskins, Barbara Purser, Isabel	20-1-15 Wilful damage to glass 30-1-15 do	1 cal. mo. H.M. & bail 20/- & fine to follow.	Not eligible for "Churchill" treatment. Cousins/Conroy, Hoskins sent to Millmount on 20-1-15. Purser on 20-1-15. Allowed own clothes by Governor. (Underneath of "under Churchill rule"). Applied for recognition as 1st class H.M. etc. this was not granted but conditions of her release were practically as ordered. Wg. allowed special room with fire, association & talk at convalescence. 1st class H.M. etc. writing, special letters for reason absent, by order of Govt. sent on hunger strike on 2-8-15 for recognition as 1st class H.M. etc. Hoskins released on grounds of health on 9-8-15. On same date continuous association & daily visits, one daily letter, permission to follow own work, on hard labor, own food granted by Govt. Took food from 9-8-15. There had been no forcible feeding. Cousins and Conroy released 27-8-15 on termination of sentence. Purser, who was eligible for release 20-1-17, was released by H.M. on memorial for commutation of sentence 17-2-15.
Palmer, Marguerite Kahil, Annie Ryan, Dora	16-6-15 Wilful damage to glass.	25 or 6 weeks.	Allowed treatment as 1st class H.M. etc. under "Churchill rule". As one of the applications depended on the discretion of the Visiting Ctee, prisoners went on hunger strike on 16-6-15. They were released under the "Cat & Mouse" Act on 16-6-15, until 20-7-15, but were not recognized. Sentence remitted by H.M. on 2-10-15. Not forcibly fed.

IE/GPB/SFRG/1/18  
List of suffragette prisoners and other prisoners who went on hunger strike during the period 1912-1917. By permission of the National Archives of Ireland.

Sheehy-Skeffington addressing a protest meeting under the prison walls.  
 rebellion through a megaphone. How a suffragette "mouse" was cheered in her prison cell.



TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- Were hunger strikes by suffragettes a good tactic?
- Did the Representation of the People Act provide true universal suffrage?
- Were Irishwomen right to focus on nationalist and unionist politics?



# WOMEN AND POLITICS

Although unable to vote in local elections until 1898 or in national elections until 1918 women were interested in, and did participate in, political life in Ireland. In particular, local branches of the Women's Land League were established throughout Ireland in the 1880s and the Women's Land League was very important to the success of the Land League Movement, especially in keeping the Land League functioning following the arrests of the leaders of the Irish Land League in 1881. Although not eligible for election in County or City Councils, in 1899 women were eligible to stand for their Rural District Council and were able to contribute to local political life through this means as a result. In 1899, thirty-one women were elected as rural district councillors, some of whom are mentioned in the following list.

Mrs. Brannigan	Drogheda Rural District Council
Mrs. Leonard	Dunshauglin Rural District Council
Francoise Edgeworth	Granard Rural District Council
Ms. Gertrude McNamara	Loughrea Rural District Council
Lady Sophia Grattan Bellew	Mountbellew Rural District Council
Lady Augusta Clonbrock	Mountbellew Rural District Council
Mary Burke	Mountbellew Rural District Council
Mrs. Everard	Navan Rural District Council
Mrs. Dargan	Rathdrum Rural District Council
Miss O'Brien	Rathdrum Rural District Council
Miss Welpy	South Dublin Rural District Council



## WOMEN AND POLITICS

Mrs Maud Walsh was the first woman to be elected to an urban district council when she was elected to Tralee Urban District Council on 15th January 1914.

Women were also able to sit on the Boards of Poor Law Unions, the Boards responsible for the operation of the Workhouses, Fever Hospitals and services such as Boarding-Out of Children and the inoculation programme. Following the local elections in 1918 women were eligible to sit on City and County Councils.

In January 1911 the Ulster Women's Unionist Council was established with the goal of resisting the introduction of Home Rule in Ireland and to work with the all-male Ulster Unionist Council towards this goal.

In April 1914 Cumann na mBan was established to support the nationalist cause in Ireland.

The women of Cumann na mBan were hugely important during the 1916 Rising, carrying orders to Volunteer Groups throughout the Country and also participating in the action during the Rising.

After the Rising Cumann na mBan campaigned for Sinn Féin and exhorted women to use their newly acquired right to vote for Sinn Féin in the 1918 General Election and were also active participants in local politics. The Ulster Women's Unionist Council was also quick to recognise the importance of seeking the support of female voters and they became involved in the registration of women voters in support of the unionist cause.

June 11th 1914.  
5, Eaton Place,  
S.W.

Dear Lady Londonderry,

Thank you for your letter enclosing the Memorandum for submission to me by the Ulster Women's Unionist Council. I can well understand the difference of opinion having arisen owing to the persistent conduct of the Government in refusing to hold out any hopes of our being allowed to have an expression of opinion on the subject of Home Rule by the electors of the United Kingdom. At the same time I think it would be a mistake to depart from the policy hitherto prevailing of trying to influence the constituencies in Great Britain and I am still myself devoting a great deal of my time to that object. The Women's Council have already collected a most handsome contribution to the Defence Funds and I believe the hospital and other arrangements in which they are so interested are very far advanced, and I have no doubt that further money will be forthcoming for such a laudable object, when it is required. I am therefore of opinion that the monies referred to in the memorandum should be devoted to influencing in the way hitherto adopted the English constituencies.

With very many kind regards,  
I remain,  
Sincerely Yours,  
Edward Carson.

2. The other members of the Committee point out that the above course would mean that after the small funds now in hand have been exhausted in the Campaign work for which it has been collected, such work would come to an end, and with it would end all necessity for the existence of the Council unless it is to be kept in existence merely for the purpose of collecting money to be handed over to outside bodies, such as the Medical Board, or local equipment Committees over whose actions in expending the money the Council would have no control.

They consider that, having collected over £5,000 for the Carson Fund, the women of Ulster have done their duty in the matter of Hospital and Military equipment and that all their energies should now be directed to a vigorous "missionary" work in England and Scotland, including the provision of a sufficient fund to send out a large number of workers in the event of a General Election; and further that enough has now been promised by English friends both in money and materials to equip any hospitals that may be required.

The return of the Unionist Party to power would save Ulster both from Home Rule and from Civil War; and the result of a General Election is therefore as vital to the people of Ulster as to any party in Great Britain.

The funds of the Council should therefore be devoted to the extension and vigorous prosecution of a campaign by speakers, canvassers and distribution of literature in order to rouse public opinion in England and Scotland.

These are as briefly as possible the two views and Sir Edward Carson is asked to express his opinion as to which should

be adopted as the policy of the Council.

Both parties are agreed that, not merely by the terms of the Declaration which they signed, but by their affection for and trust in their leader, they are bound and will strive earnestly to carry out any wish he may express in the matter.

D. 2688 Ulster Women's Unionist Council Papers Memorandum submitted by Lady Londonderry in June 1914 on behalf of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council to Sir Edward Carson with regard to a dispute over how to use the funds raised by the Women's Council. Reproduced with permission of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

Rathdrum Rural District. 17

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (IRELAND) ACT, 1898.  
61 and 62 Vic., cap. 37.

MINUTES of Proceedings of the Rural District Council, under the above-mentioned Act,  
at a Meeting held on Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> day of August 1899

Present - In the Chair, Mr. William Byrne Kice C.M.P.

Other Councillors - Mr. Dargan, Miss O'Brien, Colonel Tottenham, Colonel Kemmis, Major Tottenham, Messrs G. Short, Turner, J. Byrne, J. Giffney, G. Byrne, M. Doyle, P. Farrell, Hanlon, Minagh Kemmis, Malloy, John Byrne, James Byrne Higgins, Ellison, Fogarty, Healy, P. Short, Sadin, W. G. Murphy and W. Lullen

D. Edgar Flinn Esq Inspector was also present -

WCA/RDCR/M/1  
Rathdrum Rural District Council Minute Book, 1899. By permission of Wicklow County Archives.

## WOMEN AND POLITICS

Countess Markievicz was elected a member of the first Dáil Éireann and served as Minister for Labour 1919-1922.

In 1921 Dehra Chichester (later Parker) and Julia McMordie members of the Unionist Party were elected to the Northern Ireland parliament. Alice Cashel, a member of Cumann na mBan, was elected as Vice-Chairman to Galway County Council in June 1921.

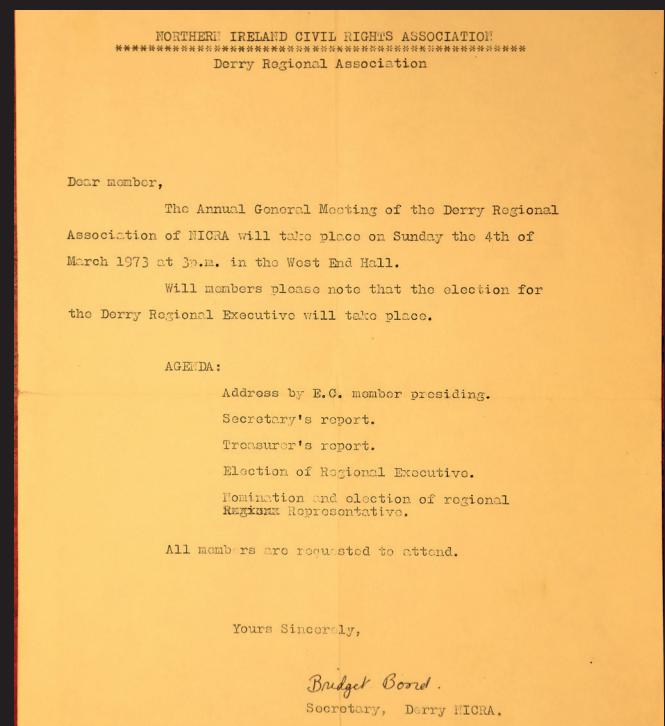
In 1921 Kathleen Clarke, Ada English, Mary MacSwiney, Kathleen O'Callaghan and Margaret Pearse were elected to the second Dáil Éireann. Ellen Costello, Alice Stopford Green, Ellen Cuffé and Jennie Wyse Power were appointed to Seanad Éireann in 1922.

Lady Craigavon, wife of James Craig, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland documents the role of women in the Unionist cause in her diaries which are available as part

of the Craigavon papers (GB-0255-PRONI-D1415). In the 1960s women were very active in the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. Bridget Bond actively campaigned against the unequal housing system in Derry/Londonderry and became a leading figure of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland and member of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association.

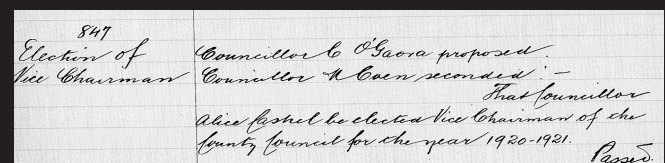
In a by-election of 1969 Bernadette Devlin was elected to the Westminster parliament on a campaign to fight for civil rights in Northern Ireland. She participated in the Battle of the Bogside with residents and was convicted in December 1969 of incitement to riot and jailed briefly.

There has yet to be a female Taoiseach for the Republic of Ireland but Mary Harney was appointed the first female Tánaiste in 1997. There has not yet been a female First Minister in Northern Ireland.



### Bridget Bond Collection

Notification of meeting of Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association Meeting 4th March 1973 signed by Bridget Bond. By permission of Tower Museum Archive, Derry City and Strabane District Council Museum Service.



D4131/K Lissadell Papers.

By permission of the depositor and the Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

IE/GC/1/3 Election of Alice Cashel, 18 June 1921.

By permission of Galway City and County Archives.



### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

What was the role of the Women's Land League?

How did women contribute to political life prior to having a right to vote in General Elections?

What similarities existed between the Ulster Women's Unionist Council and Cumann na mBan?

# WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

Participating in charitable and philanthropic works were considered acceptable roles for women where, as “moral guardians”, they could act to improve the lives of the poor in practical ways.

Women were often involved in the establishment of “Lying-In” or maternity hospitals. Mrs Martha McTier was one of the founding members of the Belfast Lying-In hospital in 1794 and in 1838 a group of twelve ladies formed the Waterford Maternity Hospital Committee in Waterford City to provide a similar service.

The work of “rescue” or rehabilitation of prostitutes and unmarried mothers was left to orders of nuns and to “all-female” operated Protestant charities (often with male members on their Boards of Governors), such as the Asylum for Penitent Females, the Prison Gate Mission and the Dublin By Lamp-light Mission.

Women were able to use their role in rural life to improve their conditions and to become more involved in public life. Women were first admitted to the Royal Dublin Society in 1885 on associate membership when the Royal Agricultural Society merged with the Royal Dublin Society. Women were admitted to full membership in the 1921 Bye-Laws having previously been Lady Associates. Mary Hutton, first female council member was elected to the RDS in the 1928-1929 term.

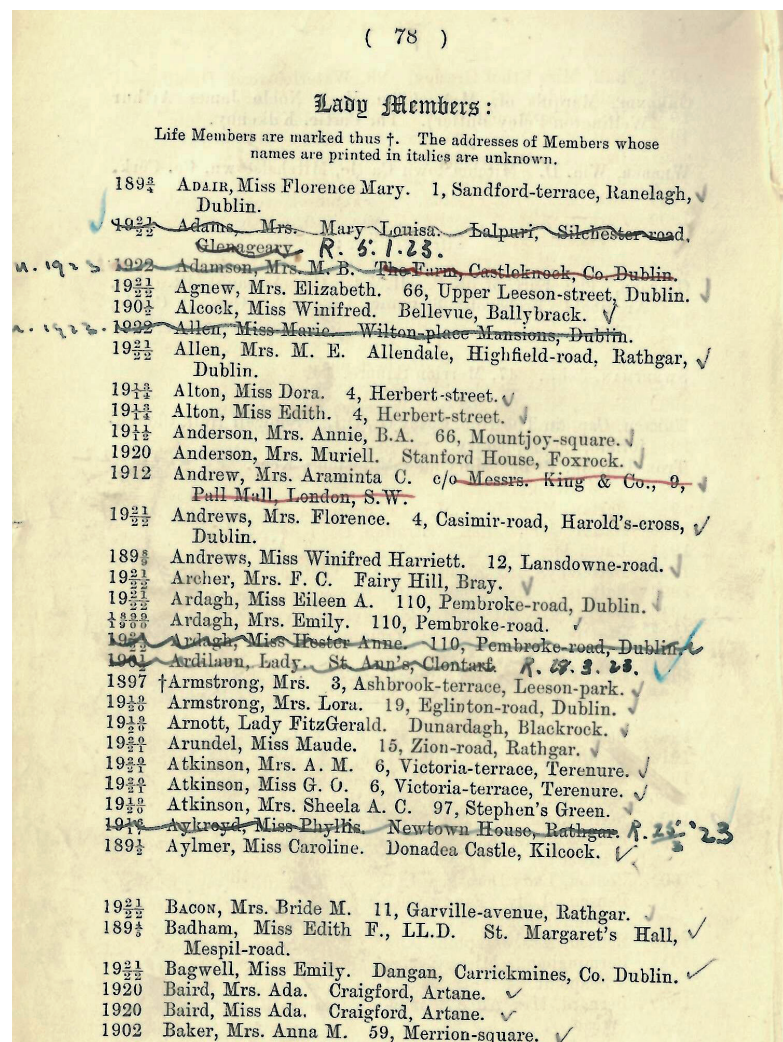
The Irish Countrywomen’s Association was established in May 1910 and was initially called the United Irishwomen. Its aim was “to improve the standard of life in rural Ireland through education and co-operative effort”. The United Irishwomen were non-denominational and non-party political and were instrumental in improving the lives of rural women

in Ireland.

In 1977 the ICA passed a resolution calling on the government to immediately repeal “the outdated legislation concerning criminal conversation and loss of consortium under which, in effect, the courts can treat and value a woman in money terms, implying she is a chattel belonging to her husband.” The law of criminal conversation was abolished under the Family Law Act, 1981.

In 1932 the Irish government introduced the Marriage Bar requiring women to leave paid employment on marriage. The marriage bar was lifted in 1957 for primary teachers but remained in place for civil servants until 1973. In 1970 the Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) was introduced and in 1977 the Employment Equality Act was introduced in the Republic of Ireland.

List of Lady Members Royal Dublin Society, 1922.  
By permission of RDS Library and Archives.



# Waterford Maternity Hospital,

1838 to 1898.

IN the year 1838 some ladies, interested in the welfare of the poor women amongst whom they visited, and satisfied by their own observation that such an institution was urgently needed, founded the Maternity or Lying-in Hospital, which last year attained its diamond jubilee. The names of the first committee of ladies were as follows—Mrs. Harris, Mrs. T. Harris, Mrs. E. Strangman, Mrs. F. P. Cherry, Mrs. McCance, Miss Watson, Mrs. Frazer, Mrs. Power, Mrs. Nevins, Mrs. Peet, Mrs. Mackesy, Treasurer and Secretary; and Mrs. J. Elliott. The medical men of that day willingly gave their sympathy and help. Drs. Mackesy, Dr. Burkitt, and above all, Dr. John Elliott, freely placed their care and skill at its disposal. When the latter, through age and infirmity, became unable to continue his incessant attention, his mantle fell upon Dr. George Mackesy, who from 1879 to 1891 worked almost single-handed, and gave ungrudgingly his services when required.

Though the names of that first committee of ladies read now like a chapter from ancient history, and are all forgotten, their work still lives on. During the sixty years which have passed the Hospital has been doing a quiet useful work, not attracting much public attention, for it does not advertise, but saving life, alleviating suffering, and preventing in many cases life-long misery. From its foundation in 1838 up to November 28th, 1898, 6,286 women have passed through its wards. A perusal of the records of these cases shows many critical operations performed, many dangerous illnesses encountered, but with the happy result that out of that large number only 23 deaths took place. When we remember how many of the poor creatures who come in there are often miserably under-fed and clothed, and too often, alas, the subjects of ill-usage outside, surely we must allow that this is a record for which the Committee may well feel thankful. The Hospital has also done good service in training nurses for this special work, and with one or two exceptions all those thus employed in this town have been taught their business there, and after having served a certain time, with due preparation, and after examination by the doctor, have received certificates to that effect.

But the Committee desire to call public attention to its present condition and its present needs. As far as its efficiency is concerned, they are glad to be able to give a good report. The matron is a highly qualified nurse, holding a certificate from the Coombe Lying-in Hospital, Dublin, most kind and capable. Nine of the leading physicians of the City are on the honorary visiting list, freely and generously giving their aid at all times when required, and the Committee take this opportunity of returning them their most grateful thanks.

But although managed with the strictest economy, as will be seen in the report, the Hospital has only just succeeded in holding its head above water, often, indeed, perilously nearly going under altogether. Dr. Ringrose Atkins, that beloved and lamented helper of every good work, used to give one of his admirable lectures every second year for the benefit of its funds, and the sum so raised enabled the Committee to meet the deficit. That source of help is now, alas, closed for ever.

The altered circumstances, owing to various causes, of many who used to subscribe, the deaths of many old and tried friends, have compelled the Committee to make this special appeal for help, which may be given in two ways. First, by annual subscriptions, which must be after all the chief dependence of all charitable institutions; and secondly, by special donations to form a reserve fund upon which they can draw for exceptional needs, and which will help them to make both ends meet at the end of each year.

They appeal to all, for the cause is surely one which pleads for itself.

To all who have hearts to feel for the suffering poor, to every man of woman born, to every woman who out of her own experience can realize the need of such help at such a time, to every husband and father, who in his own home has known somewhat of the anxiety and sickening dread which is felt when the life of the wife and mother is hovering in the balance,

Shall they appeal in vain? They feel sure they will not. Will you—every one who reads this appeal—do something to help them to carry on this old-established and most valuable charity?

Contributions will be received most gratefully by Mrs. W. H. FENNESSY, Grange, Hon. Secretary; Mrs. FRANCES JACOB, Rock Villa, Waterford, Hon. Treasurer.

COLLECTORS—Mrs. Burke, National Bank; Mrs. Ford, St. Otteran Terrace; Mrs. J. J. O'Sullivan, the Mall; Mrs. James Otway, Fairmount; Mrs. George Nolan, Annville; Mrs. Ridgway, Riverview House; Mrs. Shortis, the Mall; Mrs. John Strangman, Summerland,

Donations already given or promised—

Dowager Lady Carew	...	...	...	£1	0	0
John Strangman	..	...	..	5	0	0
Mrs. J. Strangman...	...	...	..	5	0	0

# Waterford Mater Hospital, 1838 to 1945

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

3

### Royal Dublin Society.

FOUNDED A.D. 1731. INCORPORATED A.D. 1759.

*Patron—HIS MAJESTY THE KING.*  
*Vice-Patron—HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, IRISH FREE STATE.*

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Royal Dublin Society Council Members, 1928-1929 showing Mary Hutton who was elected to the Industries, Art and General Purposes Committee. By permission of RDS Library and Archives.

**BANCRACH NA TUACHÉ**  
**Irish Countrywomen's Association**

Office Hours: 9.30-5.30

Please address all communications to:  
 The Secretary  
 Central Office  
 58 Merrion Road  
 Dublin 4  
 Telephone 680453

PRESS RELEASE  
AUTUMN COUNCIL MEETING  
BEECHMOUNT HOTEL, NAVAN, CO. MEATH  
SATURDAY, 5th NOVEMBER, 1977.

It is expected that at least 500 delegates, representing Guilds from all over Ireland, will attend the Autumn Council Meeting of the Irish Countrywomen's Association, on Saturday, 5th November 1977 in the Beechmount Hotel, Navan, Co.Meath.

The Morning Session, which is devoted to domestic and financial affairs, is private.

However, we would be very pleased if you could attend the Afternoon Session, beginning at 2.30 p.m., which will be chaired by our National President, Mrs. Patsy Lawlor.

Mrs. Lawlor, who led the Irish delegation to the recent Triennial Conference of the Associated Countrywomen of the World, in Nairobi, Kenya, will use the theme of the Conference "BUILDING FOR TO-MORROW" for her Presidential address.

Waterford Federation will propose for discussion: "I.C.A. CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO SECURE THE IMMEDIATE REPEAL OF THE OUTDATED LEGISLATION CONCERNING CRIMINAL CONVERSATION AND LOSS OF CONSORTIUM UNDER WHICH, IN EFFECT, THE COURTS CAN TREAT AND VALUE A WOMAN IN MONEY TERMS, IMPLYING SHE IS A CHATTEL BELONGING TO HER HUSBAND".

Progress reports from the National Executive, the Grianan Adult Education College, the Horticultural College, and the I.C.A. delegates to Nairobi, will also be given.

Mary Hanahoe,  
Press & Publicity Officer,  
Irish Countrywomen's Association,  
Tel. (01) 680453.

PT10/77/ Official Publication: "Irish Countrywoman". Tel. 684052

MS 39,353 24,  
Irish Countrywomen's Association  
Collection, Press Release 5th November  
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**TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**  
 What role could women play in public life?  
 How did women contribute to rural life in Ireland?  
 What impact did the Marriage Bar have on women's lives?

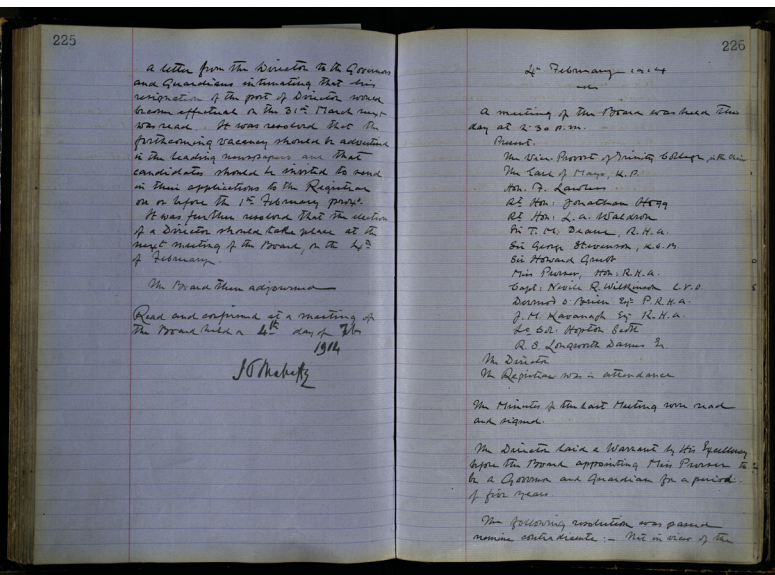
# WOMEN AND THE ARTS AND CULTURE

Women have made a huge contribution to the Arts in Ireland and worked hard to become recognised as professional artists, writers and playwrights. Sarah Purser, an artist, who founded An Túr Gloine was appointed to the Board of Governors and Guardians of the National Gallery of Ireland in 1914. She assisted in the establishment of the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art and the Friends of the National Collections. She became the first female member of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1923.

In 1904 the Abbey Theatre was founded by Lady Augusta Gregory and W.B. Yeats and the premises for the Abbey was purchased with the patronage of Miss Annie Horniman. In her plays Teresa Deevy confronted the limited choices available to women in the Ireland of the 1930s, for example

in her play “Katie Roche”. Deevy questioned the level of censorship in Ireland, writing to the Irish Times on 20 October 1936 “Who are the censors? “By what right do they hold office? And how, in case of proved incompetence, can they be removed?”

Travel presented women with an opportunity to escape the strictures of life in Ireland and to experience different cultures. Mabel Calhoun, a primary school teacher in Derry, was an amateur archaeologist and extensive traveller. Letitia and Naomi Overend, who donated their estate in Airfield, Dublin to the Irish state, travelled extensively and filmed their trips to exotic locations and these films form part of the Overend collection (IE/IFA/15).



National Gallery of Ireland Minute Book 1905-1915. By permission of the National Gallery of Ireland



An Túr Gloine Archive, Centre for the Study of Irish Art. By permission of the National Gallery of Ireland



## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- How did women contribute to the Arts in Ireland?
- Was Teresa Deevy right to question the censor?
- What benefits could travel provide to women?

# WOMEN AND HEALTH

Women's health and the right of women to have ownership of their own bodies was, and continues to be, an important feature of women's rights movements all over the world.

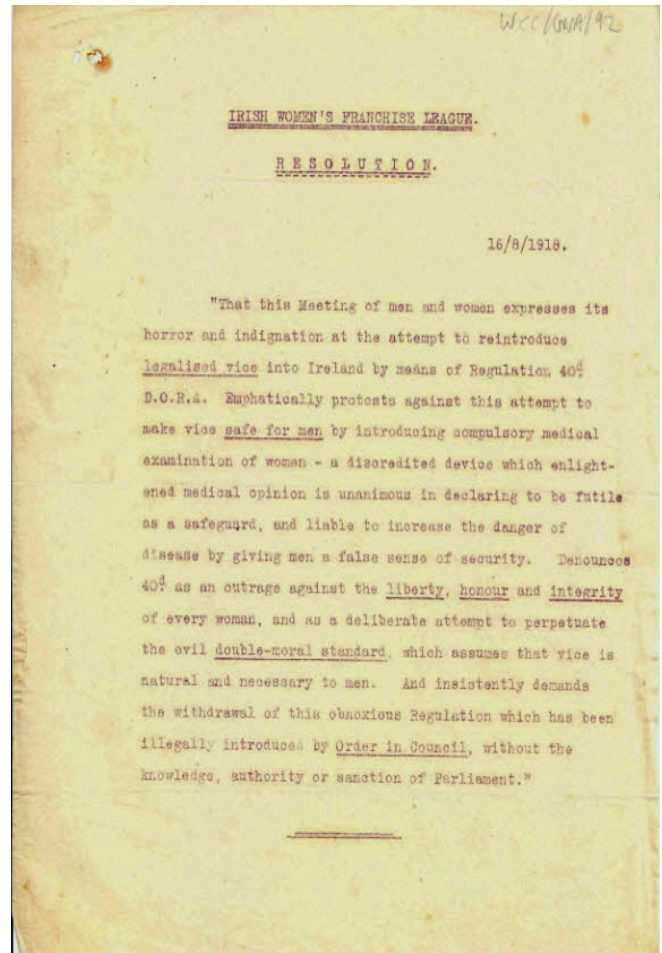
The Contagious Diseases Act, 1864 permitted the compulsory medical inspection of prostitutes for venereal disease in military camps in England and Ireland. Any woman found on the street could be arrested by a police officer on suspicion of being a prostitute and a magistrate could order her to submit to a fortnightly internal examination. There was no enforced examination of men. Any woman found to have syphilis or gonorrhoea would be detained in a lock hospital for up to nine months.

The Ladies National Association was formed in 1869 in England to oppose the Act and its double standard and had branches in Belfast, Cork and Dublin.

The Contagious Diseases Acts were repealed in 1889 but the later Defence of the Realm Act, 1914, or DORA, re-introduced in section 40d the right of authorities to inspect and punish "infected women" who had sexual intercourse with soldiers. The Irish Women's Franchise League wrote to condemn the introduction of Regulation 40d and its attempt to "make vice safe for men".

In 1930 the National Birth Control Council was formed in the UK and the Ministry of Health allowed local authorities to give birth control advice in welfare centres. The birth control pill and other forms of contraception were available to women in the UK, including Northern Ireland. However, when abortion was made legal in the UK under the Abortion Act, 1967 Northern Ireland MPs secured an exemption for Northern Ireland in the legislation.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1935 made it illegal for contraceptives to be sold in Saorstát Éireann. The 1929 Censorship of Publications Act made it illegal to sell or distribute any publications about contraception or abortion. In 1971 Senator Mary Robinson attempted to bring a bill to liberalise the law on contraception in Ireland to the Seanad but the bill was not allowed a reading.



IE/WCC/GNA/92 Resolution from Irish Women's Franchise League.  
By permission of Waterford City and County Archive

The Irish Women's Liberation Movement travelled by train to Belfast where they were able to purchase contraceptives and returned to Connolly Station on what became known as the "contraceptive train". In 1979 the Health (Family Planning) Act was introduced providing limited access to contraceptives by prescription and in 1985 the Health (Family Planning) (Amendment) Act allowed contraceptives to be sold in specified places without a prescription to those over 18. This has since been superseded by the Health (Family Planning) Amendment Act, 1993.



## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

What was the significance for women of the Contagious Diseases Act, 1864?  
In what ways did women's healthcare differ in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?  
What impact did the "contraception train" have?



# FURTHER SOURCES

## **Irish Archives Resource Portal**

[www.iar.ie](http://www.iar.ie)

## **Guide to Sources for Women's History**

### **Women and Irish Society Exhibition**

RTE Stills Library

[www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1666-women-and-society](http://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1666-women-and-society)

### **National Archives of Ireland Research Guide**

[www.nationalarchives.ie/research/research-guides-and-articles/guide-to-sources-on-womens-history](http://www.nationalarchives.ie/research/research-guides-and-articles/guide-to-sources-on-womens-history)

### **Public Record Office of Northern Ireland Research Guide**

[www.proni.gov.uk/guide\\_to\\_sources\\_for\\_womens\\_history\\_-\\_may\\_2013.pdf](http://www.proni.gov.uk/guide_to_sources_for_womens_history_-_may_2013.pdf)

### **Women in Irish History**

National Library of Ireland Research Guide

[www.nli.ie/en/manuscript-research-guides.aspx](http://www.nli.ie/en/manuscript-research-guides.aspx)

### **Discovering Women in Irish History**

[womeninhistory.scoilnet.ie/content/main.html](http://womeninhistory.scoilnet.ie/content/main.html)

### **Women's History Association of Ireland**

[www.womenshistoryassociation.com](http://www.womenshistoryassociation.com)

### **Women's Museum of Ireland**

[www.womensmuseumofireland.ie](http://www.womensmuseumofireland.ie)

### **Female Activists: Irish Women and Change 1900-1960**

Maria Cullen and Maria Luddy, editors (Dublin, Woodfield Press, 2003)

### **A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870-1920**

R. Cullen Owens (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 2005)

### **Women in Dublin University 1904-1954**

Olive Purser (Dublin, Dublin University Press, 1954)

THE  
PRESENT DUTY  
OF  
IRISHWOMEN.

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The Contribution of Irish Women  
as documented in the Archival Record

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