## St. Joseph's Community College, Charlestown, Cumann na mBan East Mayo & South Sligo Brigade Members



Kate Carroll 1892 to 1924

Kate Carroll,

Captain of the Cumann na mBan Charlestown Branch,

East Mayo Brigade

#### Introduction

Our project is an in-depth look at the women from our locality who were involved in the Cumann na mBan movement between 1918-1923.

It examines the structure of the East Mayo/South Sligo Brigades, and the valuable duties these women carried out during the War of Independence and the Civil War.

It reveals the hardships and boycotting they had to endure in the pursuit of independence.

Through our research we have unearthed a profile of prominent members of Cumann na mBan and the duties they carried out. Together with help from family members, local people, past pupils and the military archives, we believe we have pieced together new research, and unseen photos of these women. Above all, we have attempted to tell their story, to put a face to a name and preserve their memory and achievements for future generations.

This project has extended beyond the gates of our school and has slowly engaged the people we have interviewed, the grandparents, the great-aunts, the local historians, family and friends. It has drawn them into the history we wish to tell, and with that, their interest in the heritage and story of our community has evolved.

Our project started last October when the TY History class started to research Primary Sources from the Military Archives online. Our objective was to uncover local men and women who were involved in the struggle for Irish Independence. It wasn't long before familiar surnames and townlands began to crop up. Class members found relatives involved. The oral history and heritage from grandparents and their stories of Black and Tans in the locality and hidden guns had us hooked.

What was striking was the amount of women involved. The more we investigated the more enthralled we became. The first breakthrough came when a member of our group asked at home about a woman she discovered in the archives from her townland, Nora Kelly. The next day she proudly displayed in school a picture of the lady, her medal and another neighbour Bridget Finn who was also in Cumann na mBan. She received them from a neighbouring family who were only too happy to share her story.

The next picture we managed to track down was that of Maria Marren. Her son passed on the photo by way of his grandson, who was completing teaching practice in the school at the time.

By now, we had realised the importance of the information we were entrusted with and our responsibility to have these women written back into history. We could see how much it meant to the descendants involved. It was important to try and record this history and uncover the faces lost over the last 100 years.

#### Written Out of History

In the Ernie O'Malley book, 'The Men Will Talk to Me- The Mayo Interviews' (Ernie O, 2014)he interviewed many men involved in the War of Independence and the Civil War and told their stories and

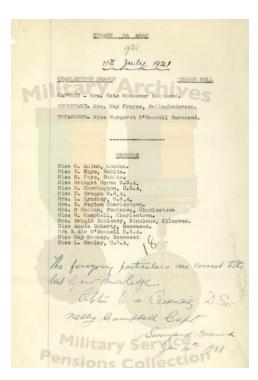
their experiences. However, there were no interviews with the women involved. In 2014, his son Cormac K.H O'Malley went back and edited the book, mentioning the absence of women and their contribution in the Civil War and War of Independence. In an extract of the book, O'Malley highlights this. 'One thing missing from these interviews is any recognition of the tremendous work undertaken by the women of the Cumann na mBan and the youth of Na Fianna Éireann. The women played an equal part in the national struggle and without their aid in carrying arms and dispatches, providing food and shelter, and generally giving full backing to the men, it would have been impossible to carry on.(Ernie O, 2014)

#### Structure of the East Mayo Swinford District

The Swinford District Cumann na mBan recorded a membership of 297 members in July 1921, 18 in the Charlestown Branch & 33 in the Barnacogue Branch. This number had increased to 489 by the 1st of July 1922. Miss Plunkett from Cumann na mBan HQ visited Swinford in February 1922 and addressed the district members.

	Swinload	District Douncil
Buinford	11th July 1921	District Council 1st July 1922 45 members
Tullmaenea	61 members.	139 menbeas
Whaelestown	18 members.	10 members
Mulick	attached to Swinford brand	106 members
Ballydrum	do	30 members
Lislachagh	olo.	24 members.
Killassee	do.	102 members.
Total.	279 members	489 member.

**Swinford District Members** 



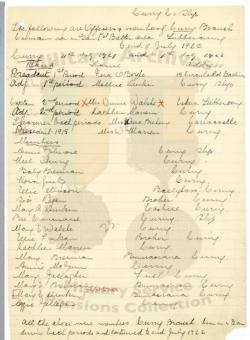
**Charlestown Members** 

#### South Sligo Tubbercurry District

The Tubbercurry District Branch recorded 126 members on the 11th of July 1921. This was reduced to 77 by the 1st of July 1922. Some branches were disbanded, most likely due to the Treaty. Brigid O'Mullane, Hon. Secretary of Cumann na mBan in 1938 appointed Dr. Brennan, Tubbercurry as Verification Officer for pension applications. (Archives, 2022)

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Tubbrenery 21	membres	21 menbers.
Kilmaetigue 16	members	16 members





South Sligo Members (Archives, 2022)

Cumann na mBan Uniform (McCoole, 2017)

**Curry Members** (Archives, 2022)

#### **Profile of the Members**

#### **Maria Marren**

#### Cumann na mBan Captain, Bunnanadden Company Sligo Brigade



Maria Marren (née Stenson) was attached to the Bunnanadden Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Ballymote) Sligo Brigade Cumann na mBan. The Stenson house (pictured above) was used for IRA meetings. The members parked their bicycles outside. The Stenson house was a place where 'boys on the run' always found a welcome and never wanted for food or shelter. (Marren, 2022)

#### **Family**

Maria's brother Patrick Stenson, active in the IRA, was captured by the National Army in 1923 and shot while a prisoner on the roadside outside Charlestown. Maria said, "father died with grief shortly after."

#### War of Independence

Duties included dispatch work, intelligence, and first aid. Supplying information that led to the capture and disarming of eight RIC policemen in Bunnanadden in Barracks; catering for the local 'Flying Column'.

Maria organised an IRA fundraising dance which was raided by the Black and Tans. She was arrested at this time. She also transported ammunition from East Mayo to South Sligo. (Archives, 2022)

#### **House Riddled with Bullets**

Maria took the Anti-Treaty side in the Civil War. Her home was raided by the National Army resulting in the arrest of two Volunteers. The house was riddled with bullets by Free State Troops. (Phoblacht, 1928)





Maria with her brother 'Packy' who was killed in 1923. Their home was raided on the day of the funeral.

Maria passed away in 1978.

#### **Available All the Time**

Cumann na mBan

Michael Farry 2020

I led them away from the hide-out and under intense fire

I lay flat. They threatened to shoot me if I didn't tell them.

The sound of firing gave the men the chance to escape.

Not absent.

I assisted the Aclare Company to boycott the police and while in charge of my uncle's shop refused to give them food or drink and canvassed for the National Loan.

Never absent.

There was powder and fuse and other stuff left

Under a big couch in a room leading into the kitchen.

I Had that packed with stuff. They never raided the house.

No absence.

Fed out of my pocket two British Soldiers captured

By Aclare Company for six weeks and helped to conceal them in a back room Of my uncle's house.

Always ready.

Attended near at hand at Ballisodare on occasion of holdup

Of Dublin and Sligo train when two police were

Killed and British officers were disarmed.

Always available.

Was fired on and almost shot by a raiding party on Palm Sunday 1923,

the seventh raid that day, had to sleep away from home for some time.

Available at any time.

My home was raided by Black and Tans, RIC and The Free State Forces until

1923 when my brother was killed while a prisoner on the road side near Charlestown.

Available all the time.

In the house our land in a backwards place Prisoners arrested by IRA

We're held for two weeks. I Had to cook for these

And their guards.

Absent.

From arrest January 1923, until release October 1923 in Sligo, Athlone, Buncrana,

Kilmainham and North Dublin Union Prisons.

From the applications of the following Sligo Cumann na mBan members in the online Military Service Pensions Collection: Nano/Annie McCrann, Mary Nicholson, Annie Parkinson, Minnie Moylan, Mary Nealon, Mai Trainor, Annie Deignan, Jennie O'Rorke, Maria Marren, Catherine Mc Donagh, Brigid Noone. (Farry, 2020)

#### **Nora Kelly**

## **Cumann na mBan Barnacogue Branch East Mayo Brigade**

Nora Kelly nee Colleran from Carn, Charlestown was a member of Barnacogue Company, Swinford District Council, East Mayo Brigade. She was in service with Cumann na mBan between the 1st of April 1919 and the 30th of September 1923. (Kelly, 2021)

#### **Duties**

During the War of Independence, Nora carried dispatches and housed guns and ammunition for the IRA. She was also involved in fundraising and scout duty in Charlestown. During the Civil War Nora continued intelligence work and smuggled arms for the IRA. She also concealed and fed men on the run. Nora states in her unsuccessful application for a military pension that her people were boycotted and stopped by the Free State Party from doing their work. She was stopped from going to town and followed by a Free State Soldier. (Archives, 2022)





Nora Kelly and her medal (Kelly, 2021)

#### East Mayo Brigade

Nora was married to Patrick Kelly, Captain of the East Mayo Brigade. He was involved in major IRA activities in Charlestown including attacking the RIC Barracks. He was part of a firing party surrounding the barracks in May 1921 and an ambush of RIC patrol in June 1921.



Nora pictured in Carn

#### **Draped in the Tricolour**

Nora passed away in 1973, her casket was draped in the Tricolour. She received a Guard of Honour from former Officers and Volunteers of the East Mayo Brigade which was led by Commandant Patrick Finn and Capt. John Haran representing the South Sligo Brigade. (People, 1973)

#### **Bridget McDermott**

#### **Cumann na mBan Intelligence Officer London Battalion**

Bridget McDermott nee Towey was born in Castleduff, Carracastle, Ballaghderreen in 1896. Bridget worked as a National School Teacher.



(McDermott, 2022)

#### Cumann na mBan

Bridget was a member of Cumann na mBan, London from 1920-1922 while working as a teacher. Bridget travelled between Dublin, London and Ballaghderreen, and on such trips she carried short arms and dispatches. She became secretary at the Peckham Branch during the period 1st April 1920 to 31st March 1921 and joined Irish Self Determination in 1918. During the Civil War she kept a large arms dump at 3 Upper Hall Street, Peckham.

#### **Brixton Prison**

During her time in London, Bridget was an appointed visitor to Brixton Prison. She obtained a permit from the Governor and took dispatches from prisoners to G.H.Q including Frank Shouldice from Ballaghadereen, who was involved in the 1916 Rising. She carried messages to the IRA outside and even to Dublin. (Archives, 2022)

#### Sentenced to Death

In 1922, Mayo was shocked by the shooting dead of Honora Kelly, a mother of ten from Sonnagh Charlestown. Her 18-year-old neighbour Michael McIntyre who was anti-treaty, was convicted of the murder and sentenced to death. On a journey from Castlebar to Sligo Gaol, McIntyre was freed by the local IRA. Bridget McDermott helped McIntyre to flee the country. He travelled in disguise, and she passed him off as her brother bringing him from Bailieboro to Chester, Wales through Holyhead. Paperwork on file indicates McDermott's claim for a military service pension was successful after appeal. (Archives, 2022)

# MAYO TRAGEDY. Farmer's Wife Shot Dead MANSLAUGHTER VERDICT.

A pathetic story of the circumstances under which Mrs. Honora Kelly (47), a farmer's wife, of Sonnagh, was shot dead, on May 28, was told at the resumed inquest, which was held in the Town Hall, Charlestown, on Friday, 9th inst, by Mr. P. O'Connor, solicitor, coroner for East Mayo.

(Champion, 1922)

Bridget married Michael McDermott from Rooskey. She died in 1983. Her obituary recalls her role in Cumann na mBan and her prominent association with the Fight for Independence. (Western, 1983)

#### **Annie Lundy**

## **Cumann na mBan Charlestown Branch East Mayo Brigade**

Annie Lundy nee Doherty was born in 1885 in Speck, Charlestown. She was the eldest of a large family known locally as 'Peter the Navy' Doherty. She worked at the shop of Thomas Gallagher, Barrack St, Charlestown. (Bermingham S. L., 2022)

#### **Activities**

Annie Lundy was a member of the Charlestown Branch, 1st Battalion, East Mayo Brigade, Cumann na mBan under the command of Kate McGeever (née Carroll). Annie took part in first-aid training; dispatch work; fundraising; transport and care of arms and sheltering IRA men on the run.

#### **Accidentally Shot**

On March the 3rd 1922, Annie was working in Gallagher's shop. Commandants Cassidy and Mulrennan were having breakfast upstairs when the Black and Tans were spotted outside and entered the shop. Annie went upstairs with Mary Kate Dunleavy whose family owned the shop. They were handed four revolvers to hide by the IRA men, who then exited through the back. As Annie Lundy put the revolvers in a basket, one accidentally went off. The bullet struck under her left eye and lodged in her neck. Annie went to the Maher Hospital Dublin to have the bullet removed and spent two months there in recovery. (Archives, 2022)

#### <u>Later Life</u>

Annie married James Lundy of Hagfield in 1930 and this is where she lived the rest of her life. (Genelogy, 2022) Despite her injuries, Annie was refused a military pension. It was deemed she did not receive the wound or injury while engaged in military service. Annie passed away in 1972.

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1930 Amis Doherty Will Spinster Tecerrow Charlestown Historical Doler	haly to	Mehart bold	Lecenson Charlestown		Spinster	Sull	annie Doherty	1930

Marriage Certificate

#### **Family**

Annie's sister Ethel Doherty ran the Charlestown Post Office on Main Street. The building was later owned by her nephew Sean Sullivan who also ran a business from the premises. The Post Office is pictured below with the donkey and cart outside. (Bermingham S. L., 2022)



Doherty's Post Office

Photo: Cathal Henry

#### **Bridget and Margaret Henry**

#### **Barnacogue Company East Mayo Brigade**

Sisters Bea & Margaret Henry were members of the Barnacogue Cumann na mBan. Margaret represented the branch at East Mayo Brigade meetings in Swinford. They were from a large family born in Barnalyra to Michael and Catherine née O'Neill. (Neary, 2022)

#### **Margaret Henry**

Margaret joined Cumann na mBan in 1918. She took part in fundraising; care of arms and ammunition; dispatch work; scout work and first aid training. Taking the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War (June 1922 – May 1923), Margaret Henry tended to IRA men after an ambush of National Forces at Glore near Kiltimagh. Margaret married James Mulligan of Madogue in 1942.

Was always an active member and in
Was always an active member and in Continual touch with my Captain and carned
most of dispatches which came through our Gumann
Cur. house was raided for documents and amunition
in 1921 by Antish millitary.
Signature (or Mark) of Applicant Margard Genry, Barracogu Swinford
(Archives 2022)

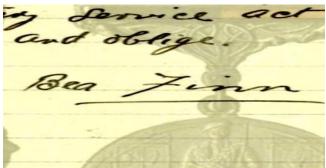
(Archives, 2022)



Bridget Finn (pictured) (Kelly, 2021)

#### Bridget Finn (née Henry)

Bridget was born in 1899 in Barnacogue and later moved to Carn when she married Patrick Finn Battalion Commander of East Mayo Brigade in 1927. In her role in Cumann na mBan Bridget carried dispatches for both the Company Captain and Battalion Officer. She carried munitions through enemy lines, and she was also involved in intelligence work and scouting for the Active Service Unit (Flying Column). During the Civil War Finn rendered first aid to wounded and kept IRA men on the run. Bridget Finn's pension application was unsuccessful. (Archives, 2022)She died in 1936 aged just 37. (Genelogy, 2022)



(Archives, 2022)

Signature of Bridget Finn

#### **Una Breheny**

#### **Cumann na mBan Treasurer Curry Branch Sligo Brigade**

Una Breheny née Forkan was born in Carracastle, Ballaghderreen in 1898. She married Patrick Breheny on the 3rd of March 1924 in Curry, County Sligo. (Walsh, 2021)

#### Cumann na mBan

On her pension application form Una Breheny claimed for service with Cumann na mBan in the service periods between the 1st of April 1919 and the 30th of September 1923. During the War of Independence, Una served as Branch Treasurer; was involved in fund raising; sent parcels to prisoners; carried dispatches; kept a number of IRA members on the run at her home up to the time of the Chaffpool ambush in October 1920. Una continued to provide food for them after that date; she stored and cared for arms; sent clothes, food and cigarettes to Active Service Unit members and men on the run. She brought arms to IRA members prior to their capture. (Archives, 2022)



#### The Civil War

During the Civil War Una Breheny: carried out dispatches and acted as a link between IRA units in counties Mayo and Sligo. She kept arms; provided food, clothes to IRA members on the run. She cared for wounded IRA members particularly an IRA member named Bernard Brennan wounded during an engagement with National Army forces near subject's home in March 1923 when another local IRA

member Patrick Stenson was killed. Una trailed two unnamed women spies from Tubbercurry to Charlestown where they were arrested by the IRA, and she was put in charge of them in Charlestown. (Archives, 2022)



She lived to see her nineties but sadly passed in late December 1991-early January 1992. Although Una's pension application was unsuccessful, she served her country with distinction. Una still has a large number of relatives in Charlestown today. (Walsh, 2021)

#### **Mary Gallagher**

### Cumann na mBan Barnacogue Branch East Mayo Brigade

Mary Gallagher was from Barnacogue, Swinford. She joined the Cumann na mBan in April 1919 and became treasurer of the branch. She carried out routine activities with her branch- training, learning First Aid, collecting funds for the I.R.A. She was a cousin of Bridget Finn, who was her commanding officer whilst in Cumann na mBan.

#### **Duties**

During the War of Independence, Mary took part in fundraising, care of arms and ammunition, dispatch work, sheltering I.R.A members, scout work and first aid training. During the truce period, Mary catered for the I.R.A training camp in Killeen, near Charlestown. Taking the Anti-Treaty side in the Civil War, Mary took part in similar activities including tending to I.R.A member Neilan at her home for the night after the Glore Ambush, Kiltimagh.

July 1422 = 31. March 1923

By assisting It of and attending to wounded after, glore ambush,

thus Searched by Military several times of a woman searcher named Meafrey in Swinford hasbital and (BAS)

March. 19.23 - Sep 19.23

Intelligence through a Soldier manual Durkin who was a member of Swinford Garrison, raised funds by dances for several Purposes

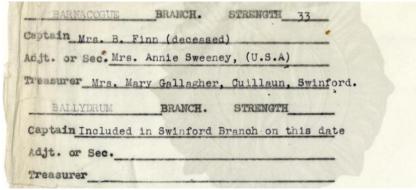
Including White Cross.

(Archives,

2022)

#### **Arms and Catering**

There was a dump at her house about a field away. She had a number of rifles but couldn't say exactly how many. They were rolled up in sacking. She had them for a couple of weeks and in the event of a raid, she hid them away safely. On one occasion she got information from the border off a policeman named Smith, that there was to be a general round-up. She passed the word onto the Volunteers- Finn, Mulligan, Higgins and Kelly who were in the dugout about a mile away. The men got away safely. During the Civil War, she carried out duties the same as before. Men came and stopped overnight. She scouted for them while they rested. She visited Volunteers in the dugout and brought them food for weeks. She washed and darned their clothes also. Her house was raided several times.



(Archives, 2022)

#### **Kate Carroll**

#### **Cumann na mBan Captain**

#### **Charlestown East Mayo Brigade**

Kate Carroll was captain of the Charlestown branch of Cumann na mBan. She is listed in the military archives as commanding officer for most of the pension applications from the area. including Annie Lundy who was shot during military activities in Charlestown in 1922.



Kate Carroll 1892 to 1924

(Bermingham S. L., 2022)

Born Catherine Carroll in 1892 to John and Ellen nee Higgins. John was a shop-keeper on The Square, Charlestown. Catharine married James McGeever on the 26th of December 1923. James lived a few doors down from her on The Square. (Genelogy, 2022)However, Tragedy struck nine month later when Kate fell ill and sadly passed at the age of 32. At the time of her passing she was surrounded by loved ones, husband James, father John, mother Ellen, sister Mary and her cousin John Gavaghan. (People, Western, 1924)



Countess Markieviez



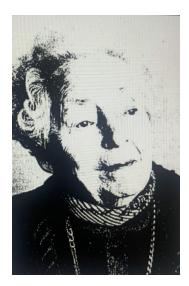
This postcard addressed to Kate Carroll has a post mark from the year 1923. It was kindly passed on by family relatives. The family story attached states that the postcard was sent from Cumann na mBan member Countess Markievicz. (Bermingham, Liam Gavaghan File, 2016)In the same year she was elected as a Sinn Fein TD but refused to swear allegiance to the king and did not take her seat in The Dail.

#### Mary Ellen McGuinn

#### **Secretary Curry Branch**

#### **South Sligo Brigade**

Mary Ellen McGuinn was born Mary Ellen Durcan on the 27th of January, 1894, in the townland of Buncrannagh near Curry, Co. Sligo. Mary was Branch Secretary of the Curry Branch Cumann na mBan. During the War of Independence, she claims that she took part in dispatch work; storing arms and ammunition; tending to her brother who was wounded in a fight with 'Black and Tans'; catering for IRA men on the run and first-aid training.





Taking the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War (June 1922 - May 1923), Mary Ellen McGuinn states that she took part in similar activity including sheltering members of 'Flying Column' (Active Service Unit) under the command of Frank Carthy and hiding arms for brother John "Stoker" Durcan (DP1488) who was killed in at action at Ballymote, County Sligo on 13 September 1922.

#### O'Donovan Rossa Funeral

Mary Ellen had a love for books, the Irish language and history, and when O'Donovan Rossa's body was brought home from New York in 1915 to be laid to rest in Glasnevin, Mary Ellen as a young woman was there to hear Padraig Pearse read the oration at the graveside. She heard Pearse's prophetic words that

"success was in failure, when cause was great," and like many young women her age lived to see those words bear fruit. (Western, Western People, 1997)

#### 1916 Rising

In 1916, she and her friend Katie Gilligan were in Dublin on Easter Monday when the Rising took place. They were stopped on the way to an exam hall by volunteers and told to go home. They did this and for four days they watched the destruction of the city from a three-storied window overlooking the Liffey, as the Helga bombarded O'Connell Street and the G.P.O.

After the War of Independence, Mary Ellen went back to college and became a school teacher. in 1941, she was appointed principal of Curry Girls N.S. She lived to be 103, and died in 1996.

#### **Conclusion**

We learned that we enjoy research, finding a new piece of information and how it might lead to the next. We found ourselves constantly asking questions and hungry for answers.

We learned that reaching out takes courage. It can be difficult to ask, especially when you are unsure of the answer. As time goes by you become more assured. As the profiles of the women begin to fall into place, you are more inclined to push on and ask for information that is needed.

It became apparent very early on how poorly these women were treated by the pensions application board. Despite obvious service, their applications for a pension was unsuccessful. An example of this is the case of Annie Lundy, who despite being shot hiding revolvers was deemed not to be actively involved in service. Bridget McDermott was only successful after appeal.

The Editors of the Ernie O'Malley Interviews also mentioned the fact that the women were not recorded.

'As the events passed into the realm of history, the time has come to write it down.' (McCoole, No Ordinary Women, 2003)

We hope to go a little bit further to correct this. We are going to have a local exhibition with a profile of the local Cumann na mBan menbers, those in this essay and those we haven't discovered yet. We will invite family member and celebrate that aspect of their life which has been hidden for so long.



Pictured in the Jackie Clarke Museum with the Cumann na mBan uniform of Linda Keirns March 2022

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