Women in Newry and Mourne in the 20th century

27th May 2016 – 30th April 2017
Members of Newry’s Barnardo’s Committee, December 1989
Newry and Mourne Museum

Features Mrs. Velma Lyons (left) group Treasurer, presenting a cheque for £1,000 to Mrs Margaret Magee from Barnardos.

Front cover image:
The Three Marys by the Newry-born artist Margaret Clarke RHA
(1884 - 1961)
Newry and Mourne Museum and courtesy of Fiana Griffin
Réamhrá an Chathaoirligh

Is cúis mhór áthais domh réamhrá a scríobh don leabhrán seo atá ag gabháil leis an taispeántas sealadach de chuid iarsmalann an Iúir agus Mhúrn, “Mná an Iúir agus Mhúrn san 20ú haois”.

Cíorann an taispeántas ollmhór seo saol agus saothar na mban agus na héachtaí a bhain siad amach ní amháin i gceantar an Iúir agus Mhúrn ach níos faide i gcéin, rólanna lárnacha sa teach, i gcúrsaí gnó, oideachais agus spóirt chomh maith le cúrsaí ealaíon, polaitíochta, agus go leor eile nach iad de ghnáthimeachtaí an tsaoil le linn an dá chogadh domhanda.

Taispeánfar réimse leathan déantán, grianghrafanna, doiciméad, mínealaíona, éadaí agus oiriúintí pearsanta. Tabharfaidh an taispeántas léargas géarchúiseach dúinn ar na gnéithe áirithe de stáir agus d’oidhreacht na mbán a bhfuil neamart déanta orthu. Cuirfear béim ar na mbán agus ar na athruithe ar bheatha an ghnáthdhuine de thairbhce a gcuid iarachtaí le céad bliain anuas.

Thar cheann na hIarsmalainne, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a thabhairt d’achan uile duine a ghéill d’iarratas na hIarsmalainne i dtaca le déantáin, doiciméid agus eolas. Is mór mór dúinn a gcuidiú fial, flaithiúil.

An Comhairleoir Mícheál Ó Ruáin
Cathaoirleach Chomhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin

Chairman’s Foreword

I am delighted to write the foreword to this booklet which accompanies “Women in Newry and Mourne in the 20th century”, a temporary exhibition at Newry and Mourne Museum.

This major exhibition will explore the role and achievements of women with local connections in the Newry and Mourne area and farther afield, in home life, business, education, sport, politics, church life, both world wars and the arts.

A wide range of artefacts, including photographs, documents, objects, fine art, personal accessories and costume are on display. They will help us gain an insight into this neglected aspect of local history and heritage and highlight the important part played by women in the development of society in the Newry and Mourne area over the last one hundred years.

On behalf of the Museum, I would like to thank all those who responded to the Museum’s appeal for artefacts, documents and information. Their generosity is much appreciated.

Councillor Mickey Ruane
Chair of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Introduction

Throughout the 20th century the role of women has changed and expanded as more roles and career opportunities have become open to them.

Legislation was used to bar women from certain occupations, but has also been used to better the position of women.

A major achievement was women’s right to vote. In the years before the First World War, the campaign for the right for women to vote in British parliamentary elections gained momentum, and by 1911 suffrage societies were established in Warrenpoint and Newry. Notable in the suffrage campaign was Dr Elizabeth Gould Bell. Dr Bell was born at Springhill House, Altnaveigh, near Newry and was the first female medical graduate in Ireland, graduating from the Royal University of Ireland in 1893. After qualifying, she set up a medical practice in Belfast and was a member of the Irish Women’s Suffrage Society.

During the First World War, qualified nurses joined the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service, while other women joined organisations such as the Voluntary Aid Detachments. A smaller number of women from the district served as medical doctors. These included Dr Elizabeth Bell who was in charge of a hospital ward in Malta and Dr Mary Irene Adams who served with The Scottish Women’s Hospitals as an Assistant Medical Officer in France.

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In 1917 the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was set up for women to undertake support roles behind the front line, such as working as mechanics, drivers and typists. One of those who enrolled in the Corps was Clara Crozier from Newry. She died from influenza at a military barracks in Fermoy, Co. Cork, in 1918 and is the only female to have a First World War Commonwealth War Grave in Newry.

During the Second World War there were many wartime roles open to women. These ranged from the Women’s Voluntary Service to women working in munitions factories, but as with the First World War, many of these roles became unavailable when men returned from war.

Of particular importance from the middle of the century onwards, was the gradual removal of the ‘Marriage Bar’, which applied to careers such as teaching and the civil service. This meant that married women could continue with their careers after marriage. Locally, this was not abolished in local government until the early 1970s.

Politically, with a few notable exceptions, there have been very few women who served as councillors in local government in the 20th century. For example in Newry Urban District Council, there was a dearth of women councillors from 1923 until it was dissolved in 1973.

By 1977 there were three female councillors in the new Newry and Mourne District Council, but it was not until 1999 that there was a female Chairperson of Council: Josephine O’Hare.
Women have made vital contributions to society through voluntary work and in a range of organisations. Locally, women have been integral, through their committee work, organisational abilities and teaching roles, to the continued strength of the local performing arts sector.

A number of local women have also excelled in sports including Violet McBride from Kilkeel, who captained the Great Britain women’s hockey team which won the Bronze Medal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Others, such as Belle O’Loughlin, a member of St. Peter’s Camogie Club, Warrenpoint and President of the Camogie Association of Ireland from 1994 – 1997, have been important ambassadors and advocates for their sport, at a local and national level.

Some women established their own businesses, including Gerda Hay-Edie who set up Mourne Textiles Ltd in the mid 20th century, while others continued on with their fathers’ or husbands’ businesses such as Catherine Boden, who ran a bottling business in Newry in the early 20th century.

Margaret Anderson
*Courtesy of Elizabeth Warnock*

From Ballinran, Kilkeel, Margaret (back row, left) pictured with other nurses, joined Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service (Reserve) in 1916. She was awarded the Royal Red Cross for war service. From 1921 until 1924 she nursed in the Middle East and in 1926 returned home to work as a matron at a temporary hospital in the Silent Valley, near Kilkeel. During the Second World War she served in the nursing reserve. An obituary, following her death in 1956, described her as Mourné’s Florence Nightingale.

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Gerda Hay-Edie (1919-1997) demonstrating weaving techniques in her workshop with children from Kilkeel Primary School, 1979
*Newry and Mourne Museum*

Originally from Norway, Gerda set up Mourne Textiles Ltd. workshop and design studio at Killowen, near Rostrevor in 1952. From 1953-1963 the main production was upholstery fabrics and rugs, and Gerda collaborated with London-based designers including Robin Day and Terence Conran. From 1963-73 her focus was on the weaving and designing of couture tweeds for designers such as Sybil Connolly and Hardy Amies. The workshop is one of the last remaining handloom weaving workshops in Northern Ireland.
Members of the Mothers’ Union, St. Patrick’s Parish Church, Newry, 1974

Newry and Mourne Museum

This photograph was taken to celebrate their Silver Jubilee. The Mothers’ Union is a group within the Church of Ireland that undertakes charitable work in support of families.
Sarah Ann Maginnis – “Lady Councillor”
Greag Mac a’ tSaoir

Sarah Ann ‘Nannie’ Maginnis stood as one of five Sinn Féin candidates in the 1920 local government elections for Newry’s West Ward, the only female candidate to stand in Newry. In these elections the female electors of the West Ward outnumbered their male counterparts by 847 to 732, a situation mirrored in the two other wards. The Newry Reporter, 8 January 1920, noted that ‘were it not for the introduction of the P.R. system, the women of Newry, if organised as such, could have ‘swept the town’ and formed a council of eighteen ladies’.

By 1920, Maginnis, a fifty year old widow, was a central figure in Cumann na mBan locally. Her house was used as a meeting place for senior republican figures and as a safe house, arms were hidden there and despatches relayed through her. In an election in which 82.6% of the electorate voted, Maginnis polled 102 votes, after transfers, falling four votes short of the quota needed to be returned in the final count.

Very few women secured a seat in these 1920 elections, some of those elected included Julia McMordie to Belfast Corporation and Emily Crowe to Limerick Corporation.

Labour candidate W. F. Cunningham had campaigned successfully in both the South and West Wards and could only take one seat. At the first meeting of the newly elected council the issue of co-opting someone onto the council in his place arose. Councillor Philip J. McQuaid, her Sinn Féin colleague, proposed that Maginnis be co-opted. She had narrowly missed election, and would have secured a seat had Cunningham not stood in the ward. Maginnis was the daughter of Mary Ann Green, who had numerous rental properties in the town centre and indeed she herself owned properties, including the Chapel Street house in which Cunningham lived. As his landlady Cunningham must surely have known her well but he failed to support her bid, instead proposing that Alex Fisher be co-opted. His proposal found no support. The Nationalist party proposed their own candidate, James Morgan, and with the support of the Unionist councilors, his election was assured.

One June 20th 1921 Andrew Boyd was disqualified as a councillor on grounds of non-attendance. Joseph Connellan, Sinn Féin councillor and editor of the Frontier Sentinel, proposed at the council meeting of July 4th that Maginnis be co-opted. On this occasion W.F. Cunningham seconded the motion noting that she ‘might be an acquisition to the board’. The motion, which was also enthusiastically supported by Council Chairman Hugh John McConville, passed unanimously.
The Magennis ‘clan’ pictured in 1926

*Courtesy of Dr Eoin Magennis*

From left: Nano Magennis (née Aiken), daughter-in-law, Sarah Ann ‘Nannie’ Maginnis, Evy Magennis, Aileen Grogan (née Magennis), Marcie Quinn (née Magennis) and Theresa Magennis.
Ada Bodart –
First World War Heroine
Joanne Cummins

Ada Doherty was born in William Street, Newry in July 1874. Her family were involved with the public and social life of Newry for many years. Her uncle, Robert Hogg Doherty, was the Town Clerk for 40 years from 1868 to 1908.

Whilst working as a governess in Brussels she met and married Phillip Bodart. By the outbreak of the First World War she was widowed with two small children.

With her knowledge of French, German and Flemish she was well placed to assist her friend, Nurse Edith Cavell, to help Allied soldiers and prisoners of war in German-occupied Belgium escape to neutral Holland. Her home was used as a refuge for the soldiers, and also housed the printing equipment used to produce the false papers and identity cards needed for their escape. Disguised as a peasant woman she would lead the soldiers, dressed as Belgian workmen, to the border.

From November 1914 until August 1915 they helped hundreds of fugitives escape. When they were betrayed, Bodart and Cavell were arrested, along with other members of the underground network.

Both women were sentenced to death. On the intervention of the Spanish Minister to Belgium, the Marquis de Villalobar, Bodart’s sentence was commuted to fifteen years’ imprisonment with hard labour in a German prison. She served three years before being released at the end of the war.

From living a comfortable life before the war, her activities, and subsequent imprisonment left her destitute. In a letter written to ‘Your Excellency’, 14th May 1919 she explains her family’s plight:

“The circumstances in [which] I and my two children at present is very sad, as we have lost all. . . I am obliged to live in a very small furnished flat, almost starving. I feel quite sure that the rich English Government will not leave a poor widow and her two children without help. . . . I simply reclaim the money I spent during my nine months of work, which amounts only to a few thousand francs.” (Courtesy of the National Archives, Kew, FO 388/513)

In recognition of her work she was awarded many honours from the British, French and Belgian governments, including an OBE, Légion d’honneur (French), Croix de Guerre avec Palme (French), Chevalier de l’ordre de la Couronne (Belgium).

After a 36 year absence she returned to Newry to visit her cousin in August 1929. During her visit she was interviewed about her experiences by the Newry Reporter.

When she died in Brussels in 1936, Belgian ex-servicemen raised the funds to pay for her funeral.

In 1928 Ada appeared in the film Dawn, depicting the role she herself had played during the war. The film was initially refused a certificate by the British Board of Film Censors. She returned her OBE to Sir Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Secretary as a protest against his “display of hostility” to the film.
Margaret Clarke RHA -
a Newry artist
Ken Abraham

The daughter of Patrick Crilley, a hackler in the flax trade, Margaret Clarke was born at 17 Thomas Street in Newry on 1st August 1884. Although little is known of her early life, the 1901 Census of Ireland records that the Crilley family had moved to Kiln Street and notes that Margaret Crilley was a teacher in the National School. Having a gift for drawing, she attended night classes at Newry Municipal Technical School from the age of 21. Motivated by a desire to better herself and a strong belief in the importance of art in education, Margaret Crilley’s ambitions lay in teaching art. These ambitions were nurtured by her art instructor in Newry, Minnie Nagle.

Miss Nagle had been a medal winner in the South Kensington Board of Education art exams in the 1890s and, between 1905 and 1907, Crilley took the same exams, also with first class results. This success paved the way to a scholarship at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art and her arrival in Dublin introduced her to a completely new artistic world.

Maintaining herself in Dublin through scholarships, Crilley worked for her Art Teacher’s Certificate while studying painting under the renowned Irish artist, Sir William Orpen. She won silver and bronze medals in the British Board of Education Art Competitions while working with Orpen and became his teaching assistant in 1911. Crilley also modelled for Orpen on several occasions including his An Aran Islander. Orpen greatly admired Crilley’s own work and she was widely regarded as his favourite pupil. She exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy for the first time in 1913.

Margaret Clarke, pictured with her son, David, as a baby, c.1920. Harry and Margaret Clarke had three children, Ann (b. 1916), Michael (b. 1919) and David who was born in 1920
Courtesy of Fiana Griffin
During the inter-war years, Margaret Clarke (she ceased signing her paintings as Margaret Crilley after her marriage) established herself as one of Ireland’s most important portrait painters. Among the public figures painted by her are Éamon de Valera, the Irish President and John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin. Clarke became a full member of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1927.

After the death of Harry Clarke in 1931, Clarke took over the management of his studios on North Frederick Street in Dublin with her son, David, and daughter, Ann. She still found time to paint and her work during these years shows an interest in still life and landscape. A solo exhibition of her work was held in 1939 and, in 1943, Clarke became involved in the Irish Exhibition of Living Art.

Margaret Clarke never painted after the early 1950s. She died in 1961 and is buried in Redford Cemetery, Greystones, County Wicklow. Her paintings are found in the National Gallery of Ireland, the Ulster Museum and in collections in Cork and Limerick. A number of private collectors also own her work.

Margaret Crilley chose various family members, including her sister Mary, as models. Studies of the stained glass artist, Harry Clarke, whom Margaret married in 1914, were also completed. With her husband and Seán Keating, another of Orpen’s pupils, she visited the Aran Islands, then the ‘mecca’ for young Irish artists in the aftermath of the Celtic Revival. Clarke’s awareness of the Celtic Revival, however, did not extend to her joining Cumann na mBan – the women’s branch of the Irish Volunteers - like many women artists at that time.
The Role in and Contribution of Women to the Performing Arts in the Newry & Mourne Area in the 20th Century

Mary Goss

Women have been central to the success of the local performing arts sector throughout the 20th century. Many have been multi-talented and involved in a wide variety of roles from teaching, performing, production, organisation, committee membership to set design.

Analysis of documents and conversations with some of those who have been involved in the sector, have provided well over one hundred names of women who contributed to the performing arts during the last century.

Some stand out because of their diverse roles and varied disciplines including Kathleen Bell, Ethel Fitzpatrick, Mary McManus, Margaret Nolan and Hilda O’Neill.

Others such as Lilian McArdle-Trodden became household names early in their careers as a result of their success as performers before going on to share their expertise with the next generation.

Some women, such as Mary Glaze, were not in the public eye themselves but brought life-changing opportunities to the young people of the district through their teaching. Those with particular gifts and talents and great generosity such as Myrtle Bradley and Anne Boyle did much of their work backstage to ensure that performances were professionally presented.

Many women have provided a life-long commitment to the performing arts sector. The work of administrators such as Alma Brown, Eileen Mooney and Kate O’Hanlon has contributed to the success and sustainability of the voluntary arts sector. This has been underpinned by the scores of women who have given countless hours to committee work and voluntary support during productions and performances.
It would be impossible to name all those who have been involved in the sector, but their legacy lives on through the continuing vitality of the performing arts in Newry and Mourne.

Ethel Fitzpatrick was a life-long Committee member, former Chairperson, and the first female President of Newry Musical Feis; an inspiring teacher her pupils regularly won first prize in Verse Speaking and Drama at her beloved Feis. She was involved in a range of groups, including the Newry Musical Feis, Newry Pantomime Society, The Abbey Players and Newry Musical Society, as a committee member and a performer. Alma Brown, a highly regarded pianist and church organist, has been an office bearer with Newry Musical Feis for more than 55 years and has held the positions of Music Secretary, Honorary Secretary and Chairperson. She vacated her Chairperson post to assume the role of Feis President following the death of Miss Fitzpatrick in 2015.

Sheila Nolan pictured after winning the All Ireland and International Championship, 1971
Courtesy of Sheila Nolan

A regular competitor at Newry Musical Feis until 1971, Sheila also danced throughout Ireland and Scotland as well as Europe and America. She opened her own dancing school in Newry in 1971 and has adjudicated at dancing competitions nationally and internationally. She has been a Committee member of Newry Musical Feis for more than 45 years and became its first female Secretary for the Irish Dance Section in 2011.
Women’s Groups
Conor Keenan

The Women’s Institute (WI), Inner Wheel, Soroptimists and Legion of Mary were all founded within a 40 year period, between 1897 and 1934. They are associated with female empowerment and creating a sense of purpose and fulfillment through championing good causes and charitable works.

The suffrage movement was a major factor in the organisation of women’s groups coupled with a determination for women to use their talents and abilities in ways that did not conform to the contemporary stereotypes.

The WI was founded in 1897 in Canada. The first WI group in the British Isles was established at Llanfair PG, North Wales in 1915, and was formed to encourage countrywomen to get involved in growing and preserving food to increase British food supplies during the First World War. By the end of 1919, there were 1,405 active groups in Britain. The first groups in Northern Ireland were set up in Garvagh, County Londonderry and Newcastle, County Down in 1932.

Soroptimist International was founded in Oakland, California in 1921, and has grown to become a worldwide organisation of around 3,000 clubs, striving to ‘achieve the best for women’. The Belfast club was founded in 1928, with Dublin following ten years later. The Dublin club was initially presided over by Agnes O’Farrelly, also a founding member of Cumman na mBan and close friend of Roger Casement. There are thirteen clubs in Northern Ireland, including one in Newry and Mourne and one in Downpatrick.

The Inner Wheel was founded in Manchester in 1924 as a charitable vehicle for women in the area, with a strong link to The Rotary Club. It has grown into a global movement with over 100,000 members in 108 countries. District 16 is made up of 18 clubs throughout Ireland, from Londonderry in the north to Waterford in the south. Newry is the third oldest club in Ireland, established in 1948.

The Legion of Mary, which has a largely female membership, has more than 4 million members in over 170 countries, due in part to a legacy of years of Irish missionary work. Instituted by Dubliner Frank Duff in 1921, the organisation was created as a structured lay people’s contribution to the Catholic Church. The Legion is termed a ‘Marian’ organisation, after its dedication to Mary, and has a strong local presence in the Newry and Mourne area.
Members of The Inner Wheel Club of Newry at a District Rally, Coleraine University, June 1982
Newry and Mourne Museum

Back row (left to right): Meryl Hingieranii, Elizabeth Hamilton, Velma Lyons, Eileen Duggan and Sadie Mackle.
Front row (seated, left to right): Sheila Magowan, Betty Clarke (President), Ruby Hodgett (Vice President) and Lillian Connolly.
Margaret Alexis Reside -
a Newry Solicitor
Noreen Cunningham

Born on the 2nd July 1906, Margaret was a daughter of Alexander Fisher, a solicitor in Newry. The family lived at Coolbawn in Warrenpoint and Margaret was educated at Alexandra College, Dublin, Methodist College, Belfast and Wakefield High School, Yorkshire.

The passing of the Sex Disqualification Act in 1919 allowed women to practice law and in 1922 the first of a small group of female solicitors were admitted to the legal profession. By 1931 there was in the region of 100 qualified female solicitors in the British Isles.

Margaret graduated from Queen’s University of Belfast at the age of 20 and joined the family firm of Fisher and Fisher in Newry, qualifying as a solicitor in 1927. Her sister Dorothy qualified two years later.

Just before the onset of Second World War, Margaret and Dorothy took over the running of the family firm. They were involved in many legal cases, including preparing the brief for Counsel concerning the collision between the Lady Cavan and the Alder in Carlingford Lough in 1937.

In 1949 this partnership was terminated, with Margaret carrying on the legal practice of Fisher and Fisher. Her professionalism and diligence on her client’s behalf was well known and in legal circles a ‘Fisher Brief’ was famous for its attention to detail.

In 1947 Margaret married Gerald Reside, who was an architect and engineer in Newry. They shared similar interests, particularly Margaret’s keen interest in gardening.

During the 1940s and 1950s, they created an extensive garden at their home at Killowen Cottage on the shores of Carlingford Lough.
The garden at Killowen Cottage was featured on television on several occasions including UTV’s *How Does Your Garden Grow?* in 1986. Margaret Reside was chairperson of the National Trust Gardens Committee for many years and the Resides regularly opened their garden to the public under the National Trust’s Garden Scheme.

Margaret was also active in local societies. She was a founder member of The Inner Wheel Club of Newry, which had been established in 1948 for the wives and daughters of local members of The Rotary Club.

Major and Mrs Reside passed away within months of each other in 1999.
The Role of Women during the Second World War

Dympna Tumilty

The opportunities for women during the Second World War had grown significantly, both at home and abroad, from those of the First World War.

Technological advances in aircraft design meant that civil defence was increasingly important. The Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS) for Civil Defence enrolled and trained women to assist the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) wardens in the event of an air raid. They also helped in the distribution of gas masks, evacuating children to the countryside, and organising first aid classes, recycling campaigns, dances and concerts.

In January 1945 there was a meeting at Alexandra Café, Warrenpoint when the first consignment of clothes and bed linen collected by the members of the WVS in Warrenpoint and Rostrevor, were handed over to Lady Stronge, MBE., Chairman, WVS, Northern Ireland. Miss Mary Barcroft, organiser for South Down, reported that the trained membership had risen to 1,050, with a total membership of 2,516. Work parties had made clothes and toys, and 1,086 members had their blood analysed for transfusion purposes, with 207 called as blood donors.

At the beginning of the war, nursing was the usual career choice for women, but later on, more wartime roles became available for women. The Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS) was popular, particularly when the naval base in Londonderry became an important strategic site and much of the administration work was carried out by about 300 ‘Wrens’. Another option for women was to join the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF).

Many women worked in the mills around the local area, and during the war Bessbrook Spinning Mill produced equipment essential to the war effort. Tents and uniforms were just some of the items that were made, with 22,323,365 yards of cloth being used.

Rationing had a large impact on the running of households by women, as they had to be more resourceful with their family’s food and clothes. Classes were organised and newspaper articles featured government sponsored articles on household economy, including recipes and growing vegetables. Being close to the border, the lure of smuggling also appealed to many women, as goods such as butter and sugar were more readily available in the Republic of Ireland.
The Second World War temporarily provided women with an enhanced role in society due to the varied occupations that were available. With the end of the war, these roles reverted back to the men who had returned from war.

Due to rationing, suggestions on how to make food tasty, nutritious and to go further, were aimed at housewives through a massive publicity campaign organised by the Ministry of Food. During the Second World War 40 million ‘Food Facts’ advertisements were printed each week in newspapers.

From Castle Street, Newry, Bridget worked as a nurse in England during the Second World War. The photograph is from her Travel Permit Card which was issued to those travelling during the war.

Ministry of Food advert from the Newry Reporter, Saturday 24 February 1945

Courtesy of The Newry Reporter
The Marriage Bar
Declan Carroll

In the early part of the 20th century the role of women was redefined for a short time. The advent of the First World War saw many women taking jobs in factories, shops and offices as men went off to fight. The number of women in the civil service increased by 1751%. In 1918 the Representation of the People Act changed the voting system so that women over 30 were given the vote and allowed to stand for Parliament for the first time.

But when the troops started to return home many women found themselves surplus to requirements at work. The 1919 Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act forced most women to leave their wartime roles as men came home and factories switched to peacetime production.

This situation was exacerbated in 1921 when, due to economic depression and high male unemployment, a marriage bar was introduced in certain occupations. Such measures had already been in existence in the UK in certain areas of employment since the 19th century, for example the Post Office.

This bar meant that married women were prevented from working in particular occupations. These included the civil service, factory work, clerical work, teaching in some local authorities and service industry jobs were also affected. Female civil servants had to resign (unless granted a waiver) when they married.

In Ireland, north and south, similar bars were introduced. The marriage bar in the south of Ireland was introduced in 1932. The only profession on both sides of the border employing substantial numbers of women was teaching, 69% of which were women. But the marriage bar confined women to the lower rungs of the occupation.

In some cases women found a way around the bars by marrying in secret and then living apart from their husband, or by having a very long engagement.

The marriage bar was gradually lifted in the UK from 1944 onwards. It was removed for all teachers in 1944, in the Civil Service and most local government and the post office in 1954. In certain areas, including some union offices, the marriage bar survived into the 1960s.

However, in Northern Ireland this bar was still maintained in the Civil Service and local government until the early 1970s. In the Republic of Ireland the marriage bar for primary school teachers was abolished in 1957, while the bar in the public service was removed in July 1973, following the report of the first Commission on the Status of Women.
Until the 1970s, women usually occupied clerical or secretarial roles in local government. Maureen Daly was one of several women, including Maura Turley and Maisie Keenan, who worked in Newry Urban District Council. Maureen worked as secretary to the Clerk of Council, Gerald Cronin. A reference he wrote for her in 1954, stated; ‘…on many occasions during my absence she accepted full responsibility for dealing with correspondence addressed to me.’
Maureen Daly pictured with members of the Newpoint Players
c. 1960s
Newry and Mourne Museum

Maureen was involved in the performing arts, particularly the Newpoint Players, and is pictured from left: Anne Brady, Sam Russell, Maureen Daly and Owen Mooney.
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Compiled by Noreen Cunningham and Dr Ken Abraham

Every effort has been made to correctly attribute photographs used in this booklet and accompanying exhibition.
Molly Cummins, née McAlister, pictured in the grounds of Donaghmore Primary School, near Newry
_Courtesy of The Cummins Family_

Principal at Donaghmore Primary School from 1910 – 1947, Molly took over the role from her sister, Jeannie McAlister after her marriage to Christopher McClean. Molly married David Cummins in 1916, and their five children were born in the schoolhouse. The school was built in 1859 by the Presbyterian Church. After the nearby National School was closed in 1911, pupils moved to the Donaghmore Primary School. One of the terms of the agreement for running the school, was that the Principal was appointed by the Presbyterian Church, and the assistant teacher by the Rector of the Church of Ireland.
Kilkeel Knitting Mills, 1979
Newry and Mourne Museum

Established by Edith and Kurt Sekules, Jewish refugees, in 1950. The factory made their own-label knitwear and commissioned Arran hand-knits. This small business employed a number of local women, and its wares were exported to department stores throughout the world.

Back cover image:
Picture taken at the State Banquet held in Dublin Castle in honour of the State Visit of HM Queen Elizabeth II to Ireland, May 2011. From left: Mary McAleese, President of Ireland (1997-2011), HM Queen Elizabeth II, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and Martin McAleese.
Courtesy of Áras an Uachtaráin and Professor Mary McAleese

Professor McAleese lived in Rostrevor, County Down, after her parents moved there from Belfast in the 1970s.