

Mna na Eireann - Women of Ireland

International Women's Week Supported by Greenwich Council Women's Equality Unit

Issue 3 1999

Right Here Right Now

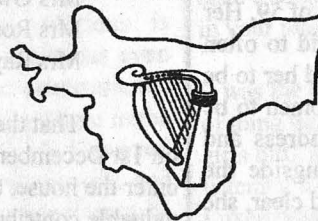
Fáilte - Welcome to this special edition annual Newsletter. The Irish in Greenwich Project have always worked with and for those groups who are often marginalised by society. Current projects in partnership with Greenwich education for young people and work with arer elders groups proves this commitment.

This Newsletter is a celebration of Irish Womens Acheivements. We feel it is important espically as we approach the millennium the Project, reflect upon women past and present to provide inspiration for the future. Greenwich of course has a special place in these celebrations.

Local Women Profile

Goretti Anglim was born into a family of great musical tradition .Goretti moved to England and South East London some time ago. She has made a significant contribution to traditional Irish Music on the London Circuit. Her family who were born in London are upholding the family's strong musical tradition Her daughter Carlene has featured on radio numerous times. An accomplished musician Carlene featured on last years Young Musicians of the Year awards.

Goretti Anglim has been teaching traditional Irish music classes for the last three years. The classes run by the Project take place at West Greenwich Hse. Classes are in ten week blocks and take place throughout the year at subsidised fees. Please contact Project for details.



IRISH
in greenwich

Telephone 0181 - 854 - 4466

Facsimile 0181 - 854 -2992

22 - 24a New Greens Rd

Woolwich, SE18 6JY

Rail - Woolwich Arsenal -Buses- 177,180,386

Contents

Women in Struggle
Women in Armed conflict
Greenwich Agenda for Equality
Poetry
Profile
Modern Irish Women
Robert Hamill Campaign

International Women's Day Cultural Event

The Woolwich Catholic club in association with the Irish in Greenwich Project will be holding a special cultural celebration on **Friday the 12th March 1999**. The event which is open to everyone will feature an exhibition, literature and further information about and for women of Irish descent. An Irish Band, dance exhibition, full buffet and licensed bar. Tickets can bought on the night at the Woolwich Catholic Club but advance booking is advised. Tickets 2.50 inc . Full Buffet contact Project or Club on 0181- 858 - 3973

Women in Greenwich

The 1991 Census identified a population of over a quarter of a million Irish Born people in London. Of these over half are women. In Greenwich the Irish Population is the largest ethnic minority in the borough. 22% of the Irish born population are of pensionable age compared to the next biggest group('Other Asian') at 5.12. (1991, Census).

The Irish in Greenwich Pensioners Association are a social and cultural network for our Irish elders. The Group have been in exsistance since 1983. There is no official funding but we do receive help and occasionally Grants from our affiliate the Irish in Greenwich Project. These past two years have been particularly busy with group breaks and regular dinner & dance's. We know have over 50 members in our association. We were one of the founder members of the new London Irish Elders Forum (LIEF) which seeks to bring Irish elders together from all over London and to highlight and campaign on issues of interest to our group i.e free travel in Ireland, Returning to Ireland, funding for elders groups.

If you or someone you know would like to join in with the activities of the local Irish Elders group, Greenwich , please contact the Project alternatively ring the groups secretary May Sheehan on 0181 -691 - 5899. The Group currently meet at St John Fisher Church R.C parish hall, Kidbrooke Rd, Blackheath on the 1st and 3rd wednesday of each mounth.

Women in struggle for Freedom & Justice

Constance Markievicz, (nee Gore-Booth) 1868 - 1927.

Sentenced to death in the 1916 Easter Rising (commuted to imprisonment), elected the first woman MP standing for Sinn Fein in St Patrick's Division in Dublin, but refused to take up her seat in 1918. Although imprisoned 5 times in the last ten years of her life she was elected to the first Dail in 1919 and became the first ever Minister for Labour, the only woman in the cabinet.

At the age of 40, Constance became totally absorbed in fighting for Irish freedom, until her death in 1927 at the age of 59. Her lifestyle, although eccentric for its day (she was said to often turn up to meetings in ballgown and ermine) showed her to be light years ahead of her Irish sisters, fighting for women to be recognised politically and socially. She was foundress and President of the Fianna Eireann and worked alongside the suffragettes in England. Her beliefs were distinct and clear, she fought for votes for women but did not compromise on her fight for a free socialist Ireland.

She would not accept watered down versions of either. For Constance, there could not be a socialist republic born of 1916 that institutionalised women as lesser intelligent human beings, nor could there be an independence struggle that rid Ireland of the shackles of British capitalism but left Ireland with her own home grown version. Her energy and commitment it seemed, was boundless. Even when those closest to her died, namely James Connolly, in the 1916 Rising, she was said to have cried in prison but continued the fight as he would have done, going on to publish a booklet on his beliefs and the teachings of the Church.

Constance was second to Connolly in the Rising, a strange yet dignified figure dressed in the green uniform of Irish Citizens Army, drilling her Fianna ready for battle. Hers was the only death sentence to be commuted to imprisonment because she was a woman, to which she was said to comment bitterly 'haven't you the decency to shoot me.'

- An extract from a lecture entitled *Women, Ideals and The Nation' delivered* to the Students National Literary Society, Dublin and published as a pamphlet by Inghinidhe na hEireann in 1909 and reissued by the Cumann na mBan in 1918.

'Now, I am not going to discuss the subtle psychological question of why it was that so few women in Ireland have been prominent in the national struggle, or to try to discover how they lost in the dark ages of persecution the magnificent legacy of Maeve, Fheas, Macha and their other great fighting ancestors.....Arm your souls with noble and free ideas. Arm your minds with the histories of and memories of your county and her martyrs, her language and a knowledge of her arts and her industries....May this inspiration towards life and freedom among the women of Ireland bring forth a Joan of Arc to free our nation!' Constance Markievicz

At her final resting place, Glasnevin Cemetery all the Irish National, Republican and Labour organisations were represented: Sinn Fein, Fianna Eireann, Inghinidhe na hEireann, Cumann na mBan, Fianna Fail and Eamonn De Valera gave a poignant address to the patriot at rest. **Beannacht De ar a hanam dilis** (The blessing of God on her dear soul).

Exert from Hansard House of Commons

NO.4 Notices of Motions:24th November 1989

65

16

21:11:89

NANCY ASTOR'S SEVENTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

Mrs Marion Roe
 Dame Janet Fookes
 Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody
 Mrs Rosie Barnes
 Mrs Ray Michie

* 22

That the house recognises the seventieth anniversary on 1st December of the late Nancy Astor, the first woman to enter the house, taking her seat; records its appreciation of the valuable contributions made to the work of this house by the 139 women elected since this date; and further recognises the 10th anniversary in 1990 of the foaming of the 300 Group and looks to it to continue its efforts to encourage more women into public life and this House.

As an amendment to Mrs Marion Roe's proposed motion (Nancy Seventieth Anniversary):

Mr Jeremy Corbyn
 Mr Tony Banks

Line 2, after 'seat' insert 'but recalls that the first women elected to the House of Commons was Constance Markievicz, who true to her republican principles and belief in Irish freedom, did not take up her seat;'. 21:11:89 (a1)

Women in Armed conflict

"I am oppressed as a woman but I am also oppressed because I'm Irish. Everyone in this country is oppressed and we can't successfully end our oppression as women until we first end the oppression of our country. But I don't think that's the end of it. It happened before when women took the back seat. But when women today have gone through too much no way will they allow that to happen" Ogligh na Eireann, Volunteer Mairead Farrell - Shot dead by SAS in Gibraltar 1988.

Greenwich Agenda for Women's Equality

The Irish in Greenwich Project have endorsed the Greenwich Agenda for Women's Equality. The agenda is a programme of action to promote equality between men and women. It is modelled on the Beijing Global Platform for Action - World Conference on Women - Beijing, China in 1995. Issues have been identified for women in a Greenwich Context, it is envisaged that a multi agency body will hold an overview of the work to achieve its objectives. Of the 12 'Critical Areas of Concern representing the main obstacles to women's advancement :- education & training, inequalities & unequal access to health care, poverty, violence, inequalities & managing natural resources, production, mechanisms to promote advancement, rights of girls, armed conflict, human rights & the media.

Ireland's Women Patron Saint

Saint Brigid (c. 455-c. 525)

St. Brigid is one of the three patrons saints of Ireland together with St Patrick and St Columcille. Few ascertainable facts are known about her life, but it is suggested that her father was a Druid and her mother may have been sold a slave when Brigid was still a young child. According to one tradition Brigid herself was sold to a Druid whom she later converted.

Her determination to live as a Christian religious is demonstrated by her refusal to marry (some traditions even mention a match with the King of Ulster). Some circumstantial evidence suggests that she may become a leading figure in the cult of the goddess Brigid or some sun god. However, while the goddess was patron of poetry, metalwork and medicine, the historical St. Brigid, had no connection with these arts.

St. Brigid founded a church and a monastery in Cill Dara (Church of the Oak) now known as Kildare, probably towards the end of the 5th century. As abbess, Brigid soon became the most important Christian leader in Leinster. Although an early story credits her consecration as a Bishop and she is represented with the bishop's crozier (staff) in at least one early monument, she had, in fact her own bishop, Conlaed. Nevertheless, she and the later abbesses of Kildare, exercised authority over all churches and church lands attached to the monastery in Kildare. These extended not only throughout most of Leinster but to those parts of her parish as far away as Kilfenora, in north Clare.

St. Brigid's Kildare foundation was unique in Ireland in that it was a double monastery with males and females who lived apart but followed the same rule and used the same church.

Brigid it seems, travelled widely throughout central Ireland, perhaps as far as to the west coast and may have converted several women who held important positions in pagan cults. At any rate, her example inspired countless women to follow a vocation into religious life. Most of all St. Brigid is noted for her impassioned charity.

Brigid was known as 'Mary of the Gael' and became the most beloved of all the saints in the Gaelic speaking world. Her feast day is observed on 1st February, the first day of Spring. Her feast day is celebrated by lighting fires and the nuns at her convent in Kildare are said to have tended a sacred fire (which no man was allowed to approach) for many generations.

She died in 525 and was buried at the right hand side of the altar in Kildare. But in 1185 St Malachy had her remains placed in the grave containing St. Patrick and St. Columcille. Her cult, probably carried by Irish missionaries, attained remarkable popularity not only in Britain and Brittany but in areas of Belgium, Italy and Germany. Part of her skull is in the church of St John the Baptist in Lumiar, a suburb of Lisbon, Portugal, where there is a curious tradition that Broicsech, the Saint's mother, had been a native of that country's Hispania region, from which she had been taken captive by Irish raiders.

Poetry & Literary Corner

First Holy Communion

The thing about having
a cross and a chain was
you could run the chain
across your chin
taste the metal
in your mouth.

It was the kind
of thing that older
girls did. Like
listening to Radio
Luxembourg or wearing
white knee highs
over Sunflower tights.

So what a lace-making
morning this was,
getting a silver cross
and chain,
shining in its own
bed of cotton wool.

I ran it across
my chain immediately,
put the cross in my mouth.
Heading up the road
with my white cup
overflowing,
white rosary beads
in white plastic box.
White new veil,
White knee high socks,
white soft strapped shoes,
white leather missal,
white dress that
did three sisters
and could have been

lacier, but anyway,
new three tiered slip

-I'd have sung Waltzing
Matilda if I thought that I
couldn't be heard -

only to arrive
at the altar
with bare thighs
smudging together
naked under the whole
shebang,
the shimmering
best pair ever
left in my bedroom
still wrapped
in their red-and-white
Roche's Stores bag.

Martina Evans

Project Library

The Project have a large selection of books including poetry, novels, history and plays. Many of the Projects books may be of special interest to Women of Irish Descent. All members of the Project are entitled to use the library resource and facilities of the Project.

The Irish Bookfair

If you like that poem and want to hear Martina Evans live she will be appearing on Saturday 21st March 1.00pm start at the London Irish Literary Festival, London Irish Centre, 52 Camden Square. The three day festival features many women contributors including Bridget O'Connor, Ena May, Gretta Curren Browne and Caitrina Ruane from the West Belfast Community Festival.

*Admission 2.50 - Children Free,
Full children's programme all weekend
For more details ring 0181- 694 -9393.*

Sinead O'Connor - b 12th Dec 1966, Glenageary

Singer songwriter Sinead O'Connor is one of the most interesting women artists of our day . She has successfully combined a highly distinctive vocal style with controversial lyrics and views. Her first break came when U2 guitarist The Edge asked her to sing on his solo album 'The Captive'. She was then quickly signed up by Ensign Records and on November 1987 her solo album, *The Lion and The Cobra* was released - an album which crosses every musical border from pseudo-hip hop to fuzzed out psychedelia. A month later, Sinead appeared on Top Of The Pops with her single 'Mandinka' Her angry and impassioned stage performance coupled with her unique appearance (shaven head) captured and bewildered the audience. The song that really transformed her career was 'Nothing Compares 2U' (written by Prince). taken from her second album *I Do Not Want What I haven't Got* which was a huge success. Her fourth album, *Universal Mother* adopts a more anguished self - confessional approach, tinged throughout with haunting celtic melodies. Throughout her career Sinead has never shyed away from controversy. At a States Arts Centre in New Jersey she refused to go on stage after 'Star Spangled Banner' was played and in 1992 she tore up a photo of the pope on Us television. As a consequence of this, boycotts and ceremonial record buntings were organised and Frank Signora even threatened to 'kick her ass'!

Despite the controversy in her life, Sinead has continued fight for her beliefs and remains one of the most important singer songwriters of her generation.

Justice and Human Rights - The case of Robert Hamill

Diane Hamill sister of Robert has been tireless in her devotion for the truth, she has been vigorously campaigning for an open public enquiry into the events surrounding her brothers murder. An articulate an emotional speaker hers is a campaign fraught with persecution and intimidation from Loyalist neighbours and security forces on a daily basis. This harrowing episode has all the echoes of the Stephen Lawrence case, a discredited officer involved in the Lawrence case has just taken up a senior post in the RUC. In Ireland this case has the sort of impact for many that Stephen Lawrence had in London. Michael Mansfield QC lawyer for Lawrence campaign has pledged his backing to the campaign and plans a visit to the justice group in Armagh.

It was the 27th April 1997. Robert Hamill and a Group of friends were heading for a dance at St Patricks Hall a Social Club in Portadown primarily used by Catholic's. On their way home they spotted a group of loyalist drinkers up ahead. Normally they would have taken a taxi home. They spotted a RUC land rover parked on the corner beside the group and assumed this might afford them protection if things were to turn nasty. From the direction they were walking the group would have known they were Catholic's.

As they approached the group cautiously someone lunged at Robert from the crowd, as Robert fell to the ground the mob proceeded to continuously kick and beat him into a state of unconsciousness. Two women Siobahn and Joanne who were cousins of Robert were present at the scene, they screamed for help and assistance.

The attack happened in full view of the Landrover. Four RUC officers armed with pistols and machine guns sat and watched., the van was located 20 yards away. It was only some time after the attack when an ambulance arrived that the RUC officers got out of their van, no arrests were made no crime scene declared. Twelve days later after laying in a coma Robert Hamill died leaving behind two small children.

One year after Roberts death six men were arrested, nearly another year has passed and the trail of one Paul Hobson for murder begins. The Hamill family are not expecting a conviction. Of the four RUC officers sitting directly in front of the attack one has been called to testify, he maintains he saw the defendant aim a kick at the defendant but cannot say whether it connected. No action against the RUC has been taken.

The Irish in Greenwich Project have extended our solidarity to the Hamill campaign for a public enquiry into Roberts death. If you would like to find out more information contact:- Diane Hamill, Robert Hamill Justice Office, C/O Rosemary Nelson.

Useful Telephone Numbers

London Irish Women's Centre	0171 249 7318
Irish in Greenwich Project	0181 305 2545
(For Sólás Anois - Irish women's domestic violence Project & Refuge & Greenwich Irish Pensioners Association)	
Victim Support Greenwich	0181 854 1113
Screening Helpline	0171 729 2229
Greenwich Women's Aid	0181 305 0309