



# WOMEN IN OUR CULTURE



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# **WOMEN IN OUR CULTURE**

Women make an immeasurable contribution to our society – one that is still not adequately acknowledged by conventional history.

From innovative artists and writers, service personnel, farmers, actresses, to the women who campaigned for social reform, this booklet highlights a small but diverse range of women and provides some insight into their lives and achievements. The booklet features images of items from local museum collections related to the women and their lives such as photographs, newspaper clippings, uniforms, sculptures, medals, and paintings.

This booklet is a snapshot into collections from local museums such as National Trust properties, local authority museums, and museum from the independent sector in Northern Ireland about women's experiences and the impact they have had on different aspects of Northern Ireland's culture.

To find out more about the women identified in this booklet take a visit to the local museums who hold further information.



**Watercolour by Clara Irwin, photograph by Mary Boyle. Both images are from Armagh County Museum.**

# MARY BOYLE & CLARA IRWIN

## Artists

At the start of the 20th century two unsung women artists from county Armagh captured their world through different media. Photographer Mary Boyle and painter Clara Irwin were friends who frequently accompanied each other on artistic excursions, and it is fascinating to see how in their talented hands, the camera and paintbrush interpreted the same scene differently.



**Print by John Raphael Smith, after portrait by Joshua Reynolds,  
from Armagh Robinson Library and No. 5 Vicar's Hill.**

# ELIZABETH MONTAGU

**(1718-1800), Authoress**

Elizabeth Montagu, cousin of the Armagh Robinson Library's founder Richard Robinson, led the Bluestocking Society, a group of educated, intellectual women who met at literary salons.

Image reproduced by kind permission of the Governors and Guardians of Armagh Robinson Library.



**This bronze bust by sculptor Elizabeth O’Kane was commissioned for City Hall by Belfast City Council in 2004.**

# MARY ANN MC CRACKEN

**(1770-1866), Social Reformer**

Mary Ann Mc Cracken shared the radical politics of her famous brother, Henry Joy McCracken. However Mary Ann was also a well-educated and successful businesswoman in her own right. She was a fervent campaigner for the rights of Belfast’s women, children and poor, for the abolition of slavery and for the revival of Irish music, language and poetry.



Late 19th century photo of Carrickfergus from Carrickfergus Museum.

# SARAH HARRISON COE

(1875 – 1963), Authoress

Sarah Harrison Coe was raised in Victorian 'Old Carrickfergus' within the town walls. Her childhood was spent with her family living in Lancasterian Street at a time when children were supposed to be 'seen and not heard'. However, young Sarah was an inquisitive only child and became a keen observer of the daily life going on around her.

In later life, she was encouraged to put these memories down on paper for posterity. With her descriptive style and a keen eye for detail, thanks to her, we have a wonderfully rich historical source to aid us in our understanding of Carrickfergus during that period.

Published by the Carrickfergus and District Historical Society, Mrs Coe's original manuscript is held in the archives of Carrickfergus Museum.



**1917-1918 Government Rolling Mills (Woolston, Southampton) Ladies football team. May Trill sits in the centre of the photo holding the ball. Courtesy Patrick Brennan**

# MAY TRAILL

**Ballylough, Co. Antrim (born 1894 or 1896)**

WWI gave women opportunities that would not otherwise have been open to them. In 1914, May Trill was studying in Warwickshire. She took up the driving duties of the college chauffer and, later, the college's electrician, after both men joined the army.

By 1917, May was employed as the electric driver at the power-house of the government rolling mills near Southampton, "a post never before undertaken by any woman of these countries."

In January 1918, she was the star player in a "patriotic football match" between the ladies of Southampton and Portsmouth. The Northern Constitution reported that her "skill and energy were greatly admired by a big holiday crowd ... May Trill, who is only 22, seems thorough whether at work or at play."



Newspaper cutting showing May Hezlett captioned 'Ladies' Golf Champion, 1899. Irish Ladies' Champion, 1899'. Coleraine Museum Collection

# MISS MAY HEZLET

(1882-1978), Golf Champion

Like all of her sisters, May Hezlett of Bovagh House, Co. Londonderry was encouraged by her mother to play competitive golf from a very young age. In 1894, aged just twelve, she won her first ladies competition, the Magill Cup. May went on to win the Ladies Amateur Championship in 1899, 1902, and 1907.

May published 'Ladies' Golf' in 1904; it was to become the definitive guide to women's golf. She was progressive in her outlook and encouraged other women to find an active outlet in life.



Images of Anne Acheson from Craigavon Museum Services.

# ANNE ACHESON

(1882-1962), Sculptress

During her lifetime Anne Acheson was one of Britain's leading sculptors. She was also the first woman to be elected as fellow of the Royal Society of British Sculptors.

During W.W.1. Acheson was a volunteer for the Surgical Requisites Association. Acheson worked with another sculptor to invent the first anatomically accurate splints.

Acheson was one of the first civilians to receive a CBE from King George V in recognition of her work.



*Nancy MacLennan (later Countess of Enniskillen)  
1968, United Nations correspondent of  
The New York Times*

**Framed photograph of Nancy MacLennan, from the National Trust, Florence Court.**

# NANCY MACLENNON

**(1917-1998), Authoress**

Nancy, Countess of Florence Court, Nancy was a noted New York Times journalist before her marriage to the 6th Earl of Enniskillen. She was also a member of the United States Foreign Office, with postings in Egypt, Japan and Kenya, where she would meet and marry the 6th Earl of Enniskillen.

Lady Enniskillen wrote several books, including 'Florence Court My Irish Home' which can be found in the Library at Florence Court.



Photographs of Betty McCabe courtesy of HMS Caroline and Caroline Simmonds.

# REBECCA 'BETTY' MCCABE

(1921-2006), Royal Navy Personnel

Not long after the devastating Blitz attacks in 1941 in Belfast, Betty signed up to the Women's Royal Naval Service, known as the Wrens. Attached to HMS Caroline as a maintenance Wren, her main duties involved charging and maintaining banks of batteries as well as ensuring electrical contacts were all in working order.

Towards the end of the war, Betty changed roles transferring to the signals Distribution Office located in Belfast Castle. She was on duty the night of 4th June 1944 when the signal was given to deploy ships for D-Day.

In 1946, Betty married Alfred James 'Jim' Simmonds; they had met during the war whilst attached to HMS Caroline. The couple had a daughter whom they named Caroline after the ship.

"AT HOME" ALWAYS TO THE HONOURABLE.

*Mrs. Amanda M. Ros,*

AUTHORESS

Iddesleigh,  
Ireland.

Telegrams :  
" Iddesleigh, Ireland."

Amanda McKittrick-Ros' Calling Card from Larne Museum.

# AMANDA MCKITTRICK ROS

(1860-1939), Authoress

Larne Museum's archives contain items relating to Amanda McKittrick Ros. Said to be the world's worst writer; Amanda wasn't daunted by criticism engaging in battles of words with critics, solicitors and anyone who wronged her.

Amanda was born in Drumaness, Co Down on the 8th December 1860. She later moved to Larne as a teacher at Millbrook National School and married the local stationmaster, Andre Ross. The success of her first novel enabled her to build her hom 'Iddesleigh' on Curran Road, where Olderfleet Primary School now stands.



Image of 'Sapphowoman' comic by Gillian McKnight, at Linen Hall Library.

# GILLIAN MCKNIGHT

## Writer

'Sapphowoman and the Belfast Dykes' is a comic from the Linen Hall Library collection.

It came out in 1989, shortly after Belfast's first lesbian group, Sappho, was established and after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1982. It was written by Gillian McKnight, under the pseudonym 'Gaye Mae Kincaid' who used the pseudonym due to the stigma surrounding homosexuality in Northern Ireland at the time.



Martha Esler, Courtesy of Mid Antrim Museum

# MARTHA ESLER

## Farmer and Homemaker

Martha Esler lived with her brother Paul, in a traditional manner on their farm at Moorfields near Ballymena, until the mid 1990s. Their system of mixed farming supplied produce, both for themselves and for sale, including milk, butter, potatoes and meat.

The Eslers' used a horse for farm work until the 1960s, at a time when most of their farming neighbours had tractors. In the house Martha used an open peat fire for heat and cooking. Water was brought from an outhouse and clothes washed by hand.



Signed photograph of Bunty Turner, from Milford House Collection.

# BUNTY TURNER

## Actress

Bunty Turner is a famous actress from Co. Down. She succeeded Julie Andrews in the role of Eliza Doolittle in 'My Fair Lady' from 1963 to 1966 touring in London, South Africa and Australia. She now lives in Sydney Australia.



Photograph of 'The Mairi Fountain', from the National Trust, Mount Stewart.

# EDITH LONDONDERRY

(1878-1959), Marchioness

Edith, Lady Londonderry was a generous and committed Patron of the Arts, who invested heavily in encouraging the works of artists in both literature and the decorative arts. A favourite Sculptress of hers was Margaret Wrightson, who completed the Bronze Statue of Lady Mairi Elizabeth Vane-Tempest in 1928. During her lifetime, Edith commissioned many sculptures of her family, and many of these can be seen today in the Collection at Mount Stewart.

This sculpture titled 'The Mairi Fountain' is the centrepiece in Mount Stewart's Mairi Garden.



THE LATE MRS. BRIDGETT.

Portrait of Anne Bridgett, from the Museum of Orange Heritage.

# ANNIE BRIDGETT

(1865 – 1915), Worshipful Mistress

Annie Bridgett was Worshipful Mistress of Ladies First Loyal Orange Lodge No. 1, Sandy Row, Belfast, and Senior Deputy Grand Mistress of Ireland. She was a prominent member of several societies, including the Independent Order of Rechabites and the Independent Order of Good Templars, as a supporter of total abstinence.

She was also a keen Unionist and supporter of the South Belfast Women's Unionist Association, and an enthusiastic fundraiser for Orange charities.



**'The Three Marys' by Margaret Clarke, from Newry and Mourne Museum.**

# MARGARET CLARKE

**(1884-1961), Artist**

On display in Newry and Mourne Museum are three pieces by Margaret Clarke. A Newry born woman who became a renowned portrait artist.

This painting 'The Three Marys' was inspired by the women who visited Jesus's tomb.



Image of a bas relief sculpture by Rosamund Praeger, from North Down Museum.

# SOPHIA ROSAMUND PRAEGER

(1867-1954), Sculptress, illustrator and author

Sophia 'Rosamund' Praeger was one of the most important women artists working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland. She was a painter, illustrator and author of children's books, but is best-known however, for her work as a sculptor. Her work falls into four categories; architectural decoration, memorials, portraiture and small-scale domestic sculpture in either statuette or bas-relief form.

Praeger played a significant role in the late Victorian and early twentieth-century Irish art world. She was made an Academician, one of the first women to receive the honour, of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1927. Other honours included an MA in 1938 from Queen's University and an MBE in 1939. She was appointed the first women president of the Ulster Academy of Arts in 1941.



Photograph of exhibition display from the Northern Ireland War Memorial.

# ELIZABETH J DICKSON

(1911 - 2003), Volunteer with St John Ambulance

Thousands of women from Northern Ireland volunteered for the Red Cross, St John Ambulance Brigade and Civil Defence Nursing Reserve during the Belfast Blitz in 1941.

Elizabeth J Dickson served with St John Ambulance and was awarded the Civil Defence Long Service Medal after 15 years of continuous service.

A photograph of Elizabeth and her medals are on display in the Northern Ireland War Memorial.



**Photographs of Sergeant MacMillan with the RUC Women's Section and of her uniform, from the Police Museum.**

# MARION MACMILLAN

**Police Sergeant**

Marion MacMillan was the first female police officer in Belfast and set up what was the RUC Women's Section in the 1940's. The Ministry of Home Affairs gave approval to the enrolment of women as members of the R.U.C. on 16th April 1943 due to wartime pressures. Sergeant MacMillan was head of the Branch and later became the first Woman District Inspector.



Photograph of Mina Lowry Lenox Conyngham, from the National Trust, Springhill.

# MINA LOWRY LENOX CONYNGHAM

(1866-1961), Last resident of Springhill

Mina Lowry Lenox Conyngham was born in 1866 in Rockdale House near Sandholes, located just outside Cookstown. She lived through the Great War and World War II and she threw herself into helping others and found strength to support her causes from home.

Locally she raised funds for supplies and huts to be built for the Ulster regiments during the Great War and she facilitated the US army while they requisitioned the grounds at Springhill some 30 years on. Strong-willed and never shy to speak up Mina put pen to paper to what is now the 'go-to' book on Springhill called the 'Old Ulster House'. She also showed many talents by writing music and publishing the ever-researchable 'An Old Ulster House'.

Mina died in 1961 at Springhill, a life spanning over 9 decades. She was the last of the Lenox-Conyngham's to live in the house before the National Trust took it over.



Photograph of Bridget Bond from Tower Museum, DCSDC Museum & Visitor Service

# BRIDGET BOND

(1925-1990), Civil Rights Leader

Bridget Bond was a well-known leader in the civil rights movement in Ireland, especially Derry where she dedicated most of her spare time, while juggling the demands of being a mother to a young family. Mrs Bond was a member of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and her efforts to secure housing for the Catholics of Derry mushroomed into one of the most multifaceted and mass-supported issues of any civil rights movement.

Additionally, Mrs Bond played a major role in the creation of the Bloody Sunday Monument and can be credited as being the one who 'started the fight for Civil Rights when it was neither fashionable nor popular.'

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Linen Hall Library

Mid-Antrim Museum

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Mount Stewart (National Trust)

Museum of Orange Heritage

Newry and Mourne Museum

North Down Museum

Northern Ireland War Memorial

Police Museum

Springhill (National Trust)

Tower Museum

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