

THE BUBBLING HAS NOT YET SUBSIDED

An introduction to the diaries of Madeleine French Mullen

The Rising of the People 1916

Whatever one's idea about the Easter Rising, there is no doubt that we are dealing with an exceptional generation of Irish men and women. It is not just that they took on the might of the British Empire, they fought for social justice. They weren't fooled by the promises of that time and the idea of the favoured Irish elite taking over from the British whether they were Anglo-Irish, Protestant or Catholic. Their values and norms differed substantially from the mainstream society of that time. They were the instigators of an ethos with ambitions we still aspire to today.

The Proclamation of the Irish Republic is the only proclamation of its era that mentions women equally, beginning with 'Irishmen and Irishwomen'. Their rising triggered dramatic cultural changes that have defined our social structures for the past 100 years.

Madeleine French Mullen, an Irish Catholic, is a second cousin of my father in law. Her parents had 4 children. Madeleine and her brother Douglas fought in the rising. None of the children left issue.

In my opinion, these men and women first and foremost fought a social revolution. They were looking for Social Justice for all Irish Citizens. Their aim was to improve the quality of life and the living conditions of the poor in the centre of Dublin. Madeleine was one of them. She actively campaigned to provide school dinners for poor children and worked in the soup kitchens during the 1913 lockout. She joined the labour movement to give assistance distributing food in Connolly's Free Food Organisation set up for unemployed workers and their families. Her vision was to make life better for the ordinary working classes and their families.

Madeleine was introduced to politics by her father St Laurence French Mullen, a surgeon in the Royal Navy. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell. There is documented evidence that Madeleine's father contributed financial support to Parnell's funeral, with his name appearing on a receipt from Fanagan's Funeral Establishment.ⁱ She remained supportive of international socialist movements particularly in Europe and the Soviet Union.

The Rising began when members of the IRB, Irish Volunteer Force and Irish Citizen Armyⁱⁱ successfully took over preselected buildings around Dublin with little resistance.ⁱⁱⁱ Over 200 members of Cumann na mBan, the women's auxiliary branch of the Irish Volunteers actively fought in the Rising.

During the Rising, Madeleine served as a lieutenant in the Irish Citizen Army. She fought with Michael Mallin on St Stephen's Green and the College of Surgeons Garrison. She commanded fifteen women. Her duties included commandeering vehicles, removing civilians from the area, guarding entries to the Green and tending the wounded. Her brother Douglas fought with Éamon Ceannt at the South Dublin Union which is now part of James' Hospital. The garrison held out for 6 days and was not captured. The diaries testify how they reluctantly surrendered their position under Pearse's surrender order,^{iv}

'I shall never forget the breaking of that awful news.... And it was a heartbreaking scene when the news was told and they all crowded round the Commandant and Countess Markiewicz to shake their hand for the last time... We left a garrison of 117 men and 12 women.'

She was arrested when the Garrison surrendered on 30th April. She and Kathleen Lynn, her lifelong companion, were initially held in the same cell in Kilmainham Goal and afterwards in separate cells in Mountjoy Gaol. On her day of arrest, she was the witness to the Will and Testament of Countess Markievicz who feared she would be executed. Madeleine was released from Mountjoy on the 5th June.

After the rising she worked for the Connolly Co-Operative Society, seeking to find work for unemployed activists. She was a prime mover in setting up a shirt factory in Liberty Hall. Together with Kathleen Lynn, she founded St Ultan's children's hospital for infants in 1919.

In 1920, at a time when women held very little political power, Madeleine ffrench Mullen and Dr Kathleen Lynn were elected members to the Rathmines and Rathgar Urban District Council. Rathmines at that time was a bastion of Unionist sentiment and had until 1922 a Unionist majority.

Under de Valera's leadership post 1916, women's roles were reduced to support positions rather than active fighters as they had been under James Connolly. Many refused to accept this edict and continued to be involved in wearing arms and intelligence work.^v

On the 4th of October 1920, a little article appears in the Catholic Press in Sydney NSW stating "*Miss Madeleine ffrench Mullen, UCD, Rathmines, was arrested and charged with obstructing the military by cycling after them.*" We can assume that she was gathering intelligence about the military patrols and was still active despite the restrictions.

The Diaries finish with the words of Michael O'Rahilly song 'Thou Art Not Conquered Yet, Dear Land', whose songs were instrumental in inspiring the London-Irish to join the Rising.

This is a generation that I have no difficulty identifying with. I share with Madeleine the rejection of the established institutions which benefit only the few, oppose eco-friendly solutions or let go of the control of Ireland's natural resources for short term financial gain. It is therefore impossible for me to consider the revolution irrelevant. These men and women started a struggle that continues to be fought today. It seems to me that the citizens of today no longer live under the British crown but under corporations.

Marlene ffrench Mullen

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i <http://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/fonsie-mealy-auctioneers/catalogue-id-srfons10009/lot-26043138-9a62-4f35-86fc-a4430181da74>

ii The ICA, the Irish Citizen Army) was formed in November 1913 for the protection of workers, following incidents of brutality suffered by workers at the hands of the police force. James Connolly, one of the founders of the ICA, saw to it that women were treated equally in the movement, and women's equality was an integral part of its philosophy. This is reflected in the use of the gender-neutral term 'citizen'.

iii The buildings included the General Post Office, the Four Courts, Jacob's Factory, Boland's Mill, The South Dublin Union, St. Stephen's Green, and the College of Surgeons. It is believed to have been a strategic mistake that the Telephone Exchange, then a few hundred yards beyond the Ha'penny Bridge and therefore a vital position was neglected or failed to take, p68.

iv It read: "In order to prevent the further slaughter of Dublin citizens, and in the hope of saving the lives of our followers now surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered, the members of the Provisional Government present at headquarters have agreed to an unconditional surrender, and the commandants of the various districts in the City and County will order their commands to lay down arms."

v Guerilla Warfare in The Irish War of Independence, 1919 – 1921. Joseph McKenna, 2011. Page 114.