Herstory

profiles of eight Ulster-Scots women

Ulster-Scots Community Network

www.ulster-scots.com

Introduction

Although women make up more than 50% of the population in most countries and societies, 'Herstory' (or women's history) has been very much neglected until very recently. This is partially because throughout human history women have tended to play a subordinate role to their fathers, brothers and sons.

In the past, women's lives and the opportunities available to them were greatly restricted. In Ulster, apart from those fortunate enough to be born into (or to marry into) the aristocracy and the upper middle classes, most women's lives would have revolved around childbearing and childrearing and, of course, housework. Economically, rural women would have combined these roles with working in agriculture whereas their urban counterparts would most likely have been engaged in textile production. However, domestic service, shop work, office work, nursing and teaching would have also provided employment for considerable numbers of women.

Comparatively few women until very recent times would have had access to anything we might equate with a decent education or the professions such as law, medicine, accountancy or academia. Apart from a few high-profile individuals, women's involvement in politics and in public life was very modest until the second half of the twentieth century.

'Herstory', a term coined in the late 1960s by feminist critics of

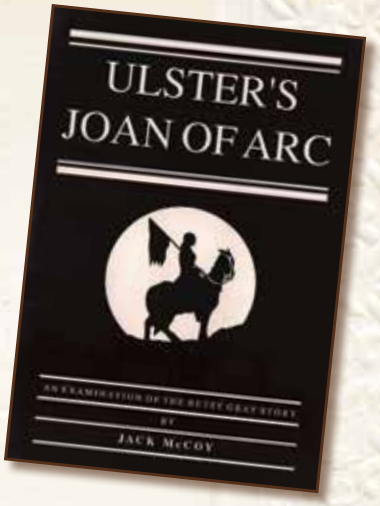
conventionally written history, is history written from a feminist perspective, emphasizing the role of women, or told from a woman's point of view. The word is arrived at by changing the initial his in history to her, as if history were derived from his + story. Actually the word history was coined by Herodotus, 'the father of history', and is derived from the ancient Greek word, ἱστορία (historía), meaning 'inquiry or knowledge acquired by investigation'. In Homer's writings, a histor is one who reports, having made a thorough investigation of the facts. The word has absolutely nothing to do with the male possessive pronoun.

This publication looks at the lives of eight interesting and significant Ulster-Scots women and their role in history. By definition, the lives of these women are far from typical of the women of their respective eras. They are quite exceptional women.

The subject of many poems and ballads, Betsy Gray was allegedly

Elizabeth Gray

(died 1798)



the daughter of Hans Gray, a United Irishman and prosperous north Down Presbyterian farmer. According to W. G. Lyttle in Betsy Gray, or the Hearts of Down, Betsy was a striking young woman:

possessed of wondrous beauty, a beauty enriched and enhanced by a warm heart, an ardent temperament and lady-like accomplishments. Her beauty and goodness formed a theme for every tongue wherever she went, and many a wealthy suitor sought her hand in marriage.

In the heady days of early June 1798 she joined her brother George and Willie Boal, her fiancé, to participate in the 'Turn oot', as the United Irish rebellion of 1798 is called in the Ulster-Scots communities of eastern Ulster. The trio were present at the Battle of Ballynahinch on 13 June 1798, Betsy mounted on a white horse, dressed in green and brandishing a sword. Escaping from Ballynahinch after battle, Betsy, her brother and lover were intercepted and killed by the Yeomanry two miles outside the town.

As a novel, W. G. Lyttle's book is a reckless mixture of fact and fiction which suggests an analogy with cinema. As Richard Holmes, the military historian rather than the literary biographer of the same name, has observed in a different context: 'Hollywood

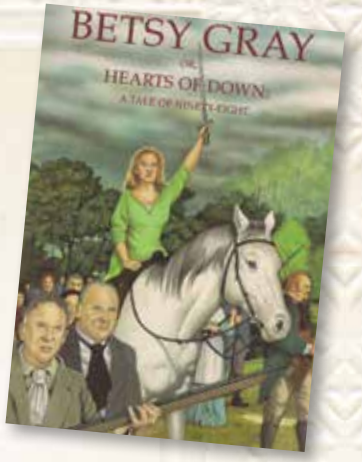
is entertainment rather than history, though its tendency to use the past as the vehicle for story telling blurs fact and fiction so that the latter assumes, however unintentionally, the authority of the former'.

Lyttle's story contains real historical figures such as the Revd William Steel Dickson, the Revd Thomas Ledlie Birch and Archibald Warwick (called William in the novel). The book also describes real events such as the hanging of William Orr (14 October 1797), the Battle of Saintfield (9 June 1798) and the Battle of Ballynahinch (13 June 1798).

Indeed, it is difficult to disentangle fact and fiction because Lyttle assembled a large number of personal anecdotes and reminiscences of 1798. He then added some detail from the documentary sources he read. It was never intended as a definitive history of the events of June 1798. Did Betsy Gray exist? Where did she come from?

The traditional answer to the latter question is Six Road Ends at Gransha in north Down. Mary Ann McCracken, sister of Henry Joy McCracken, states that she came from Killinchy and Mary Ann McCracken, in A. T. Q. Stewart's estimation, is usually a reliable witness. A third claim is advanced for Tullyniskey, near Waringsford.

With respect to the former, she is, at best, a shadowy figure. In



Henry II (London, 1973) W. L. Warren memorably described Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry II's wife, as 'a figure of legend and romance, but not of history.' The same may be said with even greater force of Betsy Gray. She may well have existed but she may not have played the role ascribed to her. However, we are also obliged to note that the basic facts of Lyttle's story were not challenged by local people at the time.

More than a decade ago A. T. Q. Stewart contributed a delightful essay entitled 'The Ghost of Betsy Gray' to a volume published to mark the bicentenary of the 1798 rebellion in County Down.

The essay opens with Dr Stewart recalling family Christmases at the home of an uncle in the 1930s. The uncle, married to his mother's sister, was a Belfast businessman and veteran of the Battle of the Somme. At some point during the course of the day the uncle would take down an old volume from his shelves and declaim in mock-heroic tones 'Betsy Gray, or the Hearts of Down!' Stewart observes: 'Many Christmases would pass before I pondered the incongruity of this yoking of Unionism and the United Irishmen, the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Ballynahinch'. Why did this book find favour with his uncle? Two reasons suggest themselves: his uncle hailed from Killinchy and some of his ancestors had been out in 1798. Clearly, geography, ancestry and local pride play a major part.

This pride is very evident in J. J. Shaw's observations written in 1888:

You are not, nor am I, ashamed of the fact that our ancestors were United Irishmen. We do not fear to speak of '98. Had we lived in '98 we should probably have been rebels ourselves, just as our rebellious forefathers, were they now alive, would be contented and loyal subjects of the empire.

In 1968 Aiken McClelland wrote:

For many years after its first publication, this was a standard book in almost every County Down home, and though a vast number of books has been written about the rebellion of 1798, many have gleaned their knowledge of the insurrection solely from Betsy Gray. This may be regrettable from a purely historical viewpoint, but the average reader cares little about the complex political and economic factors which underlay the insurrection. He is content to read with pride how his poorly armed ancestors defeated the English troops at Saintfield, and to thrill with horror at the murder of poor, defenceless Betsy Gray.

In A.T.Q. Stewart's estimation, that was 'the matter in a nutshell'.

Mary Ann McCracken

(1770-1866)

Born on 8 July 1770, Mary Ann McCracken – known as Mary within the family – was the sixth child of Captain John McCracken, a Belfast shipowner and rope maker, and Ann Joy, daughter of Francis Joy, who had founded the Belfast News-Letter and General Advertiser in 1737. Mary Ann had a sister, Margaret, and four brothers: Francis, William, Henry Joy and John. She was very close to Henry and in later life she became the jealous guardian of her brother's reputation. However, Mary Ann ought to be remembered as an extremely impressive and formidable individual in her own right.

Mary Ann was only three years younger than her brother and, as a result, they were educated together at David Manson's school, a co-educational establishment, where the ethos was to teach 'by way of amusement' and reward rather than punishment. Together, they imbibed the radicalism of William Godwin (1756-1836), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759- 1797) and Tom Paine (1737- 1809). Other members of the family did not espouse their radical politics. She fully supported Henry's decision to join the Society of United Irishmen in March 1795, when it was on the cusp of becoming a clandestine revolutionary and military organisation.

After the Battle of Antrim on 7 June 1798 Henry Joy McCracken, Jemmy Hope and others took refuge on Slemish and then hid in the hills of south Antrim. While hiding there Mary Ann sought him out and brought him much-needed clothes and money. She was arranging for a ship to take him to America when he was recognised by three Carrickfergus yeomen and arrested near the town on 7 July 1798.

On 16 July McCracken was transferred from Carrickfergus gaol to the Artillery Barracks in Belfast. Mary Ann visited him there and attended the court martial in the Assembly Rooms at noon on 17 July. Later that afternoon, she walked with her brother hand-in-hand to the gallows. She subsequently confessed: 'I did not weep till then'. At 5:00pm he was hanged outside the old market house in Cornmarket, built on land which his great-great-grandfather had given to the town.

General Nugent (the British commanding officer) allowed the body to be cut down quickly and entrusted it to Mary Ann. She arranged for a surgeon to resuscitate her brother but his efforts proved unavailing. McCracken was buried in the old graveyard of St George's church in High Street. After Henry's death she defied family opposition and brought up his illegitimate daughter Maria in the family home.

Mary Ann was a successful businesswoman (in the muslin

trade) and a great philanthropist. Throughout her long life she campaigned tirelessly for causes as varied as the welfare of women and children, the abolition of 'the diabolical system of slavery', and political equality for women. She had a particularly keen interest in the affairs of the Charitable Institution (better known today as Clifton House) which her uncles had helped to found in 1771.

Although she had a sweet tooth, Mary Ann abstained from eating sugar as an earnest of her opposition to slavery and led the Women's Abolitionary committee in Belfast during the height of the anti-slavery movement. As 'an old woman within 17 days of 89' she was in Belfast docks, handing out anti-slavery tracts to those emigrating to the United States, where slavery was still practised. In 1859 she wrote to Dr R. R. Madden, the biographer of the United Irishmen, bitterly observing: 'I am both ashamed and sorry to think that Belfast has so far degenerated in regard to the Anti-Slavery Cause'.

Nevertheless, on other occasions she was more than happy to acknowledge progress. The avowed aims of the United Irishmen were parliamentary reform, religious equality and free trade. By the mid 1860s Ireland had experienced two measures of parliamentary reform (in 1800 as a byproduct of the Act of Union and the Great Reform Act of 1832) and was on eve of a third, the

Second Reform Act. Catholic Emancipation, although delayed for generation, contrary to the wishes of Pitt and Castlereagh, had been achieved in 1829 and the Church of Ireland was about to be disestablished. Belfast and its environs were flourishing under the Act of Union. As Emerson Tennent, one of Belfast's two MPs, observed in the House of Commons in 1834: 'The north of Ireland had, every five years, found its trade doubled since the Union'. Well might Mary Ann muse 'in thinking of those who were gone, and how delighted they would have been at the changes that have now taken place ...'

Mary Ann never married but she was evidently more than a little in love with Thomas Russell whom she described as 'a model of manly beauty'. Unfortunately Russell was to suffer the same unhappy fate as her much loved brother, being hanged in Downpatrick for his sorry role in Emmet's rebellion on 21 October 1803.

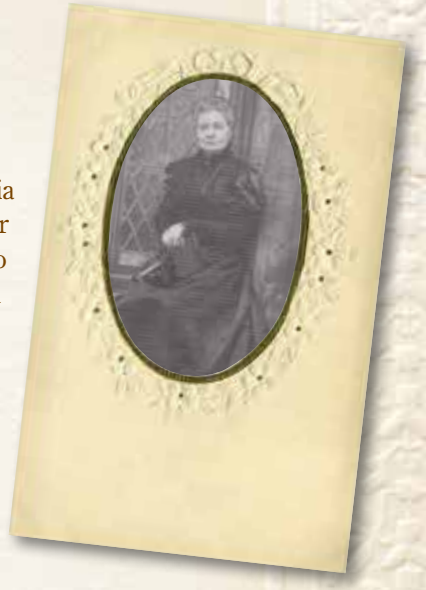
Unlike her brother, Mary Ann enjoyed a long and useful life and died, aged 96, on 26 July 1866, well into the Victorian era. She was buried in Clifton Street in the shadow of the poorhouse

to which she had devoted so much of her time and energy. Her grave remained unmarked until her brother's alleged remains were exhumed from St George's church in High Street and placed in his sister's grave in 1909, the headstone recording that she 'wept by her brother's scaffold'.

A blue plaque was placed by the Ulster History Circle on the house at 62 Donegall Pass, Belfast, where she lived for much of her later life.

Margaret Byers

(1832-1912)



Margaret Byers, the founder of Victoria College in Belfast, was a pioneer of higher education for girls. Her vision was 'to provide for girls an education ... as thorough as that which is afforded to boys in schools of the highest order'. She placed greater emphasis on providing young women with an education which would enable them to earn a living rather than lady-like accomplishments to please their prospective husbands.

Born in the year of the Great Reform Act, she was the daughter of Andrew Morrow, of Windsor Hall, Rathfriland, County Down. He owned a flax mill and was an elder in his local Presbyterian church but he died when Margaret was eight. She was sent to be raised by uncles in Stoke-on-Trent. She was educated at the Ladies' College, Nottingham.

In 1852 she married Revd John Byers of Tullyallen, County Armagh. The pair went off to Shanghai to become missionaries. However, John became seriously ill and, immediately after giving birth to her son, she was advised that her husband had not very long to live. She was only twenty years old. John Byers did not survive the journey home and died at sea.

Through a brief stay in New York she became familiar with the American educational system which she greatly admired, not least because there was very little distinction between the quality of education boys received and that given to girls.

On her return home Margaret declined a modest pension from the American missionary organization in which she and her late husband had served. She was resolute in her determination to make her own way in the world and began teaching in a very traditional girls' school in Cookstown in 1854. She was unhappy in Cookstown and in 1859 she opened her own school, the Ladies Collegiate School, initially in Wellington Place, in Belfast, which was based on her rather more challenging ideas, some of which she acquired during her brief stay in the United States. While French and needlework were taught, her more imaginative curriculum included modern history, natural science, Latin and Greek, subjects which girls were not then normally taught.

In 1873 she built a new school at Lower Crescent in south Belfast (now the Crescent Arts Centre) and this was to be the school's home until the move to the present Cranmore site in the early 1970s.

In 1878 she was a member of a delegation to London organised by her friend Isabella Tod to persuade Disraeli's Conservative Government to extend the benefits of the Intermediate Education bill to girls. Margaret Byers is credited with persuading Lord Cairns, the Lord Chancellor, of the merits of the case. Lord Cairns, one of the most prominent Conservative politicians in the second half of the nineteenth century, was a Belfast man. As Hugh McCalmont Cairns, he was one of the two MPs for Belfast between 1852 and 1866 and as Lord Chancellor, he memorably continued to teach Sunday school.

In 1887, the year which marked the fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, she re-named the school Victoria College.

Victoria College rapidly acquired an enviable reputation for academic excellence, competitive examinations in the 1880s and 1890s demonstrating that Victoria College was indeed one of the most formidable academic establishments in Ireland.

Former pupils of Victoria College were among the first female graduates of the new Queen's University in Belfast as a result

of the energy and enthusiasm of Mrs Byers who had fought for equal terms for women eligible for higher education.

Famous past pupils of Victoria College include writer and medieval scholar Helen Waddell, sculptress Anne Acheson, the entrepreneur Nicky Kinnaird, opera singers Rebekah Coffey and Giselle Allen, BBC presenter Wendy Austin and Dame Joan Harbison, former chief executive of the Equality Commission.

Like her friend Isabella Tod, Margaret Byers was an energetic woman with a wide range of social interests. She devoted herself to the welfare of families and the poor, temperance, prisons and hospitals. She founded the Victoria orphans' homes at Ligoniel, which survived until the 1950s. Like Isabella Tod, she was a supporter of women's suffrage, but disapproved of the violent tactics of some suffragettes. Again, like Isabella Tod, she was an enthusiastic Liberal Unionist, that is to say, a Liberal who parted company with W. E. Gladstone when he espoused Home Rule. She did not cease to be a Liberal but she believed that liberal values were best secured within the framework of the Union.

In 1905 she was awarded an LL.D. from Trinity College, Dublin, thus becoming the first Ulsterwoman to be awarded an honorary degree from any university. In 1908 she was appointed to the Senate of the new Queen's University of Belfast.

John Byers, her son, was Professor of Midwifery at Queen's University and was knighted in 1906.

She is buried in Belfast's City cemetery. A blue plaque has been erected by the Ulster History Circle on the Crescent Arts Centre, Lower Crescent. Margaret Byers is the subject of an excellent short biography by Alison Jordan.

Isabella Tod

(1836-1896)

The historian Maria Luddy has observed that 'to write the life of Isabella Maria Susan Tod is to write a history of feminist activism in Ireland from the 1860s to the time of her death in 1896'. A philanthropist, suffragist and unionist, the range of this formidable and largely forgotten woman's political and social activities is truly impressive. By the time of her death on 8 December 1896, she had done much to deserve the title of 'the most prominent woman in late nineteenth-century Belfast'.

Isabella Tod was born in Edinburgh on 18 May 1836. Her father, James Banks Tod, was an Edinburgh merchant; her mother, Maria Isabella Waddell, was a native of County Monaghan. Isabella Tod was proud of her Scottish ancestry and Presbyterian heritage. She was conscious that one of her father's ancestors had signed the Solemn League and Covenant in Holywood, County Down, in 1646 and that the Revd Charles Masterton, another ancestor, had been one of the leading Presbyterian ministers in seventeenth-century Belfast. That her great-grandfather had served as a colonel in the Volunteers in 1782 was also a source of pride.

In the 1860s Isabella Tod settled in Belfast, earning her living from her writing and journalism. She was a contributor to the Dublin University Magazine, an independent literary cultural and political magazine, and The Banner of Ulster, a Presbyterian newspaper published thrice weekly. In the 1880s she wrote leaders in the Northern Whig, the Conservative Belfast News Letter's Liberal counterpart and rival.

She was the only woman called upon to give evidence to a select committee inquiry on the reform of the married women's property law in 1868 and served on the executive of the Married Women's Property Committee in London from 1873 to 1874.

She successfully campaigned for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869. Under the terms of this legislation, any woman suspected of being a prostitute could be arrested and be forced to undergo medical examination for venereal disease. Tod opposed these acts as an infringement of women's civil liberties, as a legitimisation of 'the sexual double standard' (whereby men were permitted to 'sow their wild oats' but women were expected to be chaste) and as connivance at prostitution.

She was a life-long advocate of temperance and in 1874 she and Margaret Byers formed the Belfast Women's Temperance Association.

She was a consistent advocate of access to secondary and tertiary education for girls. The Ladies' Collegiate School Belfast (1859), the Queen's Institute Dublin (1861), Alexandra College Dublin (1866), and the Belfast Ladies' Institute (1867)

owe their existence to Tod's campaigns. In her publication entitled On the Education of Girls of the Middle Classes (1874), she called for practical education along the lines provided by the Belfast Ladies' Institute, which she had helped establish in 1867, to enable middle class women to earn a living. She pressured government to include girls within the terms of the Intermediate Education act of 1878.

In February 1872 she embarked upon the first Irish campaign to secure the vote for women, addressing meetings at Belfast, Carrickfergus, Coleraine and Londonderry. The meeting in Belfast on 6 February attracted an audience of 500. On 21 February she addressed a meeting in Dublin which resulted in the establishment of a suffrage committee which evolved into the Dublin Women's Suffrage Society. In 1873 she formed the North of Ireland Women's Suffrage Society, the first women's suffrage association in Ireland

She also addressed meetings in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. She visited London annually during the parliamentary session to lobby politicians. In 1884 she authored a pamphlet entitled Women and the new franchise Bill: a letter to an Ulster member of parliament. Like many, if not most, Ulster Presbyterians – and she was a very active member of the Presbyterian Church – before 1885 or 1886, she was a Liberal in politics but capable of co-operating very effectively, if

circumstances required it, with Conservative politicians.

Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule split the Liberal Party, produced realignment in British politics and sundered many old friendships. This too was Isabella Tod's experience: old friends and fellow campaigners became political opponents.

She reacted to the introduction of Gladstone's first Home Rule bill in 1886 by establishing a branch of the London-based Women's Liberal Federation in Belfast. In 1888 when the Women's Liberal Federation eventually split on the Home Rule issue Tod established the Women's Liberal Unionist Association.

On 16 June 1892, the eve of the Ulster Unionist Convention, she held a very successful Conversazione in the Ulster Hall for MPs, journalists and other distinguished visitors. She took the opportunity to deliver a very forceful speech, explaining her support for the continuance of the Union. In essence, she was a Unionist because she equated Unionism with progress:

I knew that all the social work in which I had taken so prominent a part for twenty years was in danger, and most of it could not exist for a day under a petty legislature of the character which would be inevitable … What we dread is the complete dislocation of all

society, especially in regard to commercial affairs and organised freedom of action.

She enjoyed poor health for the last ten years of her life and died of 'pulmonary illness' on 8 December 1896. She is buried in Balmoral cemetery.

Isabella Tod possessed political skills of a very high order, skills which would have surpassed those of many a contemporary male politician. She dominated any group or organisation with which she was involved. Kate Courtney, wife of Leonard Courtney, Liberal Unionist parliamentary candidate and future Lord Courtney of Penwith, visited Belfast in 1890 and witnessed Isabella Tod in action at a Unionist meeting and concluded:

… Miss Tod is wonderful herself but she is constantly ill, and she does not seem to have the gift and perhaps not quite the inclination to insist on these ladies working apart from her … she [Tod] probably does not see that she overpowers others and prevents them from doing much.

As a result her death in 1896 left a huge gap in the movement. So much so that the North of Ireland Women's Suffrage Society without her became a branch of the Irish Women's Suffrage & Local Government Association.

Amy Carmichael, one of the famous Christian missionaries of

Amy Carmichael

(1867-1951)

the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, was born on 16 December 1867 into an affluent family of Presbyterian flour-mill owners in Millisle, County Down. She was the eldest of David and Catherine Carmichael's seven children.

As a child, she deplored the fact that her eyes were brown rather than blue. She often prayed that Jesus would change her eye colour and was disappointed when this did not happen. However, as an adult she realized that, because most Indian people have brown eyes, she found readier acceptance in the Indian subcontinent.

Amy's father died when she was 18 and the family found themselves in greatly reduced circumstances because the family business was in crisis. As a result, the family moved to Belfast.

One Sunday morning in Ormeau Avenue, Amy was among crowds of well-dressed churchgoers when she saw an elderly beggar woman being ignored by all around. Amy became distressed at the plight of Belfast's urban poor and the way in which they were systematically ignored by respectable church goers. In the mid 1880s she and her friend Kate Mitchell founded the Welcome

Hall on Cambrai Street (off the Shankill Road) as an outreach ministry to the 'Shawlies' (the mill girls who wore shawls instead of hats) who worked in the linen mills in the north Belfast, then the greatest centre of the linen industry in the world. Her message of invitation to the 'Shawlies' was 'Come one, come all to the Welcome Hall – and come in your working clothes!'

At the Keswick Convention of 1887 she heard Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission (CIM), speak about missionary life. She became convinced that she had a vocation for missionary endeavour. She applied to CIM and lived in London at the training house for women. She was about to sail for China when it was decided that her health rendered her unfit for the work. She suffered from neuralgia, a disease of the nervous system which made her whole body weak and ache and which would often confine her to bed for weeks. She postponed her missionary career with the CIM and became involved instead with the Church Missionary Society, an evangelical Anglican society.

Although Amy's initial missionary endeavours were in Japan and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), she moved to the Tinnevelly

district of India in the mid-1890s where she became an itinerant missionary. She was to dedicate the remaining fifty-five years of her life to the people of the subcontinent. In her autobiographical writings she was to observe: 'One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving'. Her life was to provide eloquent testimony to the truth of that assertion.

In 1900 she settled in Dohnavur, thirty miles from the southern tip of India, where she began rescuing children from the Hindu practice of temple prostitution. Dohnavur Fellowship, the name of her organization, was soon actively involved in the rescue, care, feeding, and education of hundreds of children. Sensitive to Indian culture, members of the Dohnavur Fellowship wore Indian dress and the children were given Indian names. She herself dressed in Indian clothes, dyed her skin dark with coffee, and often travelled long distances on India's hot and dusty roads to rescue a single child from a life of suffering.

Her unstinting efforts won the admiration of Queen Mary, the wife of George V, the King-Emperor. In 1916 Amy founded the 'Sisters of the Common Life', a spiritual support group. In 1918 she was awarded Kaiser-i-Hinds Medal for service to India. In 1925 she broke ties with all mission societies after a takeover attempt. In 1929 a hospital was added to the Dohnavur Fellowhip. In 1931 she was injured by a fall. In 1935 her health worsened

and she became bed-ridden. She died, aged 83, on 18 January 1951 and is buried at Dohnavur. At her request no stone be put over her grave. Instead, the children she had cared for put a bird bath over it with the single inscription: 'Amma', the Tamil word for mother.

A prolific and gifted author, Amy penned almost forty books, thirteen of which were written during the twenty-year period when she was largely bedridden. Many of these books are still in print today and continue to be a source of blessing and encouragement to readers throughout the world.

The Ulster History Circle has erected two plaques to commemorate the life of Amy Carmichael: one at the Baptist Church in Millisle (which was originally the village school which Amy attended) and the other at the Welcome Evangelical Church in Cambrai Street, Belfast. However, Amy Carmichael's most impressive memorial is the continuing work of Dohnavur Fellowship, almost sixty years after her death.

The Christian Church is growing faster in China than anywhere else in the world. There may be as many

Isabel Deane Mitchell

(1879-1917)

as 150 million Christians in China today. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) sent Dr Joseph Hunter and Elizabeth Jayne Smyth, his wife, to China in 1869. This marked the beginning of a sustained missionary effort in Manchuria, where between 1869 and 1951 91 Irish Presbyterian missionaries served. Thirty-one of these were ordained. Forty-nine were female. Twenty-five were medically qualified. They cooperated closely with missionaries from the United Free Church of Scotland and the Danish Lutheran Church. Despite many trials and tribulations the efforts of these Presbyterian missionaries continue to bear fruit to this day. Many of the congregations started by PCI missionaries are now flourishing with, in some cases, membership numbering several thousands.

Isabel Mitchell was born in 1879. She was the daughter of the Revd D. K. Mitchell, the Minister of Crumlin Road Presbyterian Church, and his Scottish-born wife.

Isabel (Ida to her family) grew up in a home which predisposed

her to a life devoted to evangelical outreach. David, her brother, became a minister and served as a chaplain with the 36th (Ulster) Division during the Great War. Her sister Janie married a missionary and another sister married a local clergyman. In 1897, just before she was about to go to university, Ida heard Mrs Sara Greig, wife of Dr James Greig, a PCI medical missionary who served in Manchuria between 1889 and 1926, give a talk about missionary work in that country. The lecture had a profound impact on Ida and inspired her to study medicine and to go to China as a medical missionary.

After a faltering start, Isabel graduated from Glasgow University in July 1903, having won four medals and two prizes during the course of her university career. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 delayed her departure to Manchuria but during this period she worked as a house-surgeon in Manchester.

On 12 November 1905 she arrived in Fukumen where she worked alongside the Revd and Mrs Fred O'Neill and Miss Sara McWilliams. Ida was instrumental in opening a new women's hospital in Fukumen which opened on 16 October 1909. Annie O'Neill, a granddaughter of the Revd and Mrs Fred O'Neill, has described it as 'the first modern hospital' in Fukumen. Ida was an excellent doctor and her reputation spread far and wide. In 1910 she returned home on a year's furlough but ill-health delayed her

planned return. The exact nature of her illness remains obscure but she underwent an operation in Glasgow in early 1912. To the surprise of many and to her own delight, she received medical permission to return to China in the autumn of 1912.

Ida possessed an iron will but a frail body. As a child she had not been robust. Her fragile health may well have been permanently undermined by her strenuous efforts in the years before the Great War. On 16 March 1917 she complained of being tired. The next day she had a sore throat and was subsequently diagnosed as having diphtheria. She was expected to make a full recovery but she died on 23 March.

At her funeral service Elder Shang said:

Our doctor has given her life for us. For twelve years she has been at the call of any one who suffered. She was like a man in her strength, and rose at any hour of the night or day to help us. Her name is known and revered through all this country.

Elder Shang acknowledged her contribution to the life of the Church and expressed their sorrow at her passing but observed that 'her work was done, and as a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die, so she who did so much by her life, will do even more by her death, and we must bow to God's will.'

She was buried at Kirin, the home of her sister Janie, who was married to Revd James McWhirter, another PCI missionary whose home church was also Crumlin Road and who served in China between 1908 and 1945.

Ida's letters home to her mother and her poetry are preserved in an edited collection compiled by F. W. S. O'Neill entitled Dr Isabel Mitchell of Manchuria (James Clarke & Co., London, 1917). The editor acknowledged the guidance of Helen Waddell in preparing the book for publication.

Ida Mitchell was not the only PCI missionary who died in the service of Christ in Manchuria. Two other female PCI missionaries immediately spring to mind. Miss Ruth Dickson, who grew up in the Eglish congregation and who was matron of the Mission Hospital in Newchang Port, died of fever and malnutrition on 24 December 1944 in a Japanese internment camp. Dr Annie Gillespie, who grew up in the Sandys Street congregation in Newry, went to China to assist her brother the Revd William Gillespie at Kwangchengtzu, in December 1896 but died of dysentery only eight months later on 5 July 1897.

Dehra Dun is in the Doon valley, north of New Delhi, the Indian

Dehra Parker

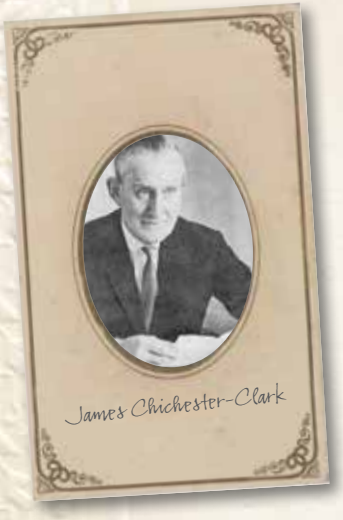
(1882-1963)

capital. Dehra Dun is surrounded by the Himalayas in the north, the Shavalik Hills to the south, the river Ganges in the east, and the river Yamuna in the west. It was here in a military hospital that Dame Dehra Parker, the longest-serving woman MP in the Northern Ireland House of Commons and Northern Ireland's first and only female Cabinet Minister, was born on 13 August 1882.

Dame Dehra was the only child of James Kerr-Fisher of Kilrea and Annie Kerr Forsythe. She was educated in America, where her father owned extensive property, and in Germany.

She married twice. On 11 December 1901 she married her first husband, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Peel Dawson Spencer Chichester, formerly of the Irish Guards and the Royal Irish Rifles, who died aged 48 in December 1921. He had been very briefly the Unionist MP for South Londonderry at Westminster. On 4 June 1928 she married Admiral Henry Wise Parker CB CMG, her second husband.

As Dehra Chichester, Dame Dehra was one of two women elected to the first Northern Ireland House of Commons on 24 May 1921, the other being Julia McMordie, who represented South Belfast between 1921 and 1925. Dehra was elected for the



multi-member Londonderry seat. She polled 8,709 first-preference votes and was elected to the third of the five seats in the constituency. She secured re-election in 1925. Following her second marriage Dehra stood down at the 1929 General Election and was replaced by Captain James Lennox-Conyningham Chichester-Clark RN, her son-in-law. She returned to the Northern Ireland House of Commons, as Dehra Parker, at a by-election in March 1933 following the death of her son-in-law.

Proportional representation had been abolished in 1929 and the multi-member Londonderry constituency was replaced by five single-member constituencies and it was for one of these – South Londonderry – she was elected. She represented this constituency without interruption until her resignation in June 1960.

Throughout her years as an MP Dehra Parker never once voted against the Unionist Party in the division lobbies. Her party loyalty was rewarded in December 1937 by her appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Education, a junior ministerial post. Thus, Dehra Parker became the first woman to hold junior office in Stormont. Revd Professor Robert Corkey

stepped down as Minister of Education on 17 February 1944. In practice, he was sacked. Almost a month later Dehra resigned for what she described as 'personal reasons'. This obscured the fact that the real cause of her resignation was her acrimonious relationship with Professor Corkey. Dehra Parker might have been expected to succeed Corkey but she did not.

Thus it fell to Lieutenant-Colonel S. H. Hall-Thompson to frame what was to become the 1947 Education Act, the Northern Ireland equivalent of the Butler Education Act of 1944. On this occasion Dehra Parker might have been expected to succeed Hall-Thompson but surprisingly she did not. Incidentally, Hall-Thompson was the first Minister of Education to sit in the House of Commons.

Dehra Parker remained on the back benches until 1949 when she was appointed Minister for Health and Local Government. This appointment was significant for two reasons. First, Dehra Parker became the only woman to be ever appointed to the Northern Ireland Cabinet. Secondly, and this distinction was contingent on the first, she became the only woman to become a member of the Northern Ireland Privy Council. Captain Terence O'Neill, the MP for Bannside and her nephew, served as her Private Parliamentary Secretary from 23 February 1948 to 10 November 1953.

In 1949 she also became a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, having previously been awarded the OBE.

As Minister for Health and Local Government, Dehra Parker was Northern Ireland's equivalent of Aneurin (Nye) Bevan because she was responsible for establishing the National Health Service in Northern Ireland. She also piloted a number of Housing bills through the House of Commons. One particularly controversial bill decontrolled rents in the private rented sector. This was at variance with housing legislation in Great Britain and provoked the resignation of Edmund Warnock, the Minister of Home Affairs, who described the legislation as 'unjust'.

After suffering a stroke, she resigned as Minister of Health and Local Government on 13 March 1957. She resigned from the House of Commons in 1960 and was succeeded by Major James Chichester-Clark, formerly of the Irish Guards, her grandson.

Dame Dehra's political instincts could not be described as conciliatory. On the contrary, she was pugnacious and rarely missed an opportunity to score points off her nationalist opponents and, even more so, independent unionists whom she, as a loyal member of the Unionist Party, viewed with unalloyed contempt. John Oliver, a distinguished senior civil servant,

remembered Dame Dehra as 'capricious, an adroit politician and a most formidable operator'.

She died, aged 81, at her home, Shanemullagh House, Castledawson, County Londonderry, on 28 November 1963. She was buried in the grounds of Christ Church, Castledawson.

Dame Dehra lived to see her nephew Terence O'Neill succeed Viscount Brookeborough as Northern Ireland's fourth Prime Minister. He in turn was succeeded by her grandson James Chichester-Clark as Northern Ireland's fifth Prime Minister. Some people allege this had been her game plan all along. This may well be true. However, while she may conceivably have played a role in securing the premiership for her nephew, it seems somewhat improbable that she orchestrated the succession of her grandson in 1969 from beyond the grave.

Helen Waddell

(1889-1965)

Revd Hugh Waddell, Helen's father, was one of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's first missionaries to China. In the early summer of 1871 Hugh Waddell was obliged to return home because of ill-health. He never returned to China but served as a missionary in Japan and became a lecturer in the Imperial University, Tokyo. Thus, Helen Waddell, his tenth and youngest child, and her playwright brother Samuel Waddell (whose pseudonym was Rutherford Mayne) were both born in Japan in 1889 and 1878 respectively.

Helen spent the first eleven years of her life in Japan before her family returned to Belfast. Her mother died shortly afterwards, and her father re-married. Then Hugh Waddell himself died, leaving his younger children in the care of their step-mother. Following the marriage of her elder sister Meg, Helen was left at home to care for Mrs Waddell, whose health was deteriorating.

Helen was educated at Victoria College and Queen's University, Belfast, from which she graduated with a first-class honours degree in English in 1911. She was unable to pursue her academic career until 1920 because she assumed responsibility for looking after her invalid step-mother.

Nevertheless, during the intervening years she published her first book, Lyrics from the Chinese (1915). The Spoilt Buddha,

her first play, was performed at the Opera House by the Ulster Literary Society. She also contributed articles to national newspapers, including the Manchester Guardian.

The death of her step-mother in 1920 allowed Helen to enrol in Somerville College, Oxford, to study for her doctorate. A travelling fellowship from Lady Margaret Hall in 1923 enabled her to conduct research in Paris. Her study of the secular origins of the stage resulted in the publication of The Wandering Scholars, her first major book, in 1927.

The 'Goliards' (or 'wandering scholars') were a group of clergy who wrote satirical poetry in Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They moved from university to university throughout France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and England and protested at the shortcomings of the Church, not least the abuses and corruption which were widespread within the medieval institution, through their songs and poetry. The book was published with only a tiny print run because it was erroneously believed to lack popular appeal, but it rapidly went through three editions within a year because it received such widespread critical acclaim. The book secured for Helen the A. C. Benson Foundation silver medal of the Royal Society of Literature, the first woman to win the prestigious award and accolade.

In 1929 Helen published Medieval Latin Lyrics, effectively

a companion volume to The Wandering Scholars, consisting of further translations of the poetry of the Goliards. A second anthology, More Latin Lyrics, was compiled in the 1940s but was not published until after her death.

From 1929 to the outbreak of the Second World War every book she published enjoyed stunning success. For example, Peter Abelard (1933), the tragic love story of Abelard and Heloise, went into thirty editions. Helen became a celebrity, mixing with Royalty (including Queen Mary), members of the Cabinet (including the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin) and the upper echelons of Society. She was able to count W. B. Yeats, Virginia Woolf, Rose Macaulay, Siegfried Sassoon and Max Beerbohm among her friends.

She continued to write articles to various journals, to lecture and to broadcast and became assistant editor of The Nineteenth Century, the monthly literary magazine founded in 1877 by Sir James Knowles as a forum for intellectual debate.

Although she never married, she had a close relationship with Otto Kyllmann of the Constable publishing house. Appreciating that despite her celebrity, Helen was short of money, he offered her permanent employment at Constable. Queen's University holds an interesting archive of correspondence between Kyllmann and Helen, which was donated by Helen's niece after Helen's death.

Helen was conscious of her Scottish ancestry but felt that 'after 300 years of Irish climate and Irish land' she was 'no longer Scottish' and that her language was 'English with the Irish idiom'. She counted the Revd James Porter of Greyabbey, the Northern Star's celebrated satirist who was hanged outside his own meetinghouse in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion, among her ancestors. Although not stridently political, her sympathies were broadly nationalist rather than unionist. She was never exactly an admirer of Sir Edward Carson.

Waddell received honorary degrees from Columbia (New York), Queen's University (Belfast), Durham and St. Andrews. A cruel debilitating neurological disease put an end to her writing career in 1950 and for the last ten years of her life she was completely incapacitated. Although she died in London on 5 March 1965, during these years she largely lived with her sister Meg at Kilmacrew House, near Banbridge. She is buried, along side her mother and grandmother, in the neighbouring churchyard of Magherally, where Meg's husband, J.D. Martin, was rector. The Ulster History Circle has since erected a blue plaque at Kilmacrew House.

This publication contains profiles of eight interesting Ulster-Scots women:

Elizabeth Gray *(died 1798)*

Mary Ann McCracken *(1770-1866)*

Margaret Byers *(1832-1912)*

Isabella Tod *(1836-1896)*

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951)

Isabel Deane (Ida) Mitchell *(1879-1917)*

Dehra Parker *(1882-1963)*

Helen Waddell *(1889-1965)*

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