



NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh

# PATH BREAKING WOMEN

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IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL  
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Eirinn

# PATH BREAKING WOMEN

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## PATH BREAKING WOMEN OF NUI GALWAY: 1912-1922 AND BEYOND

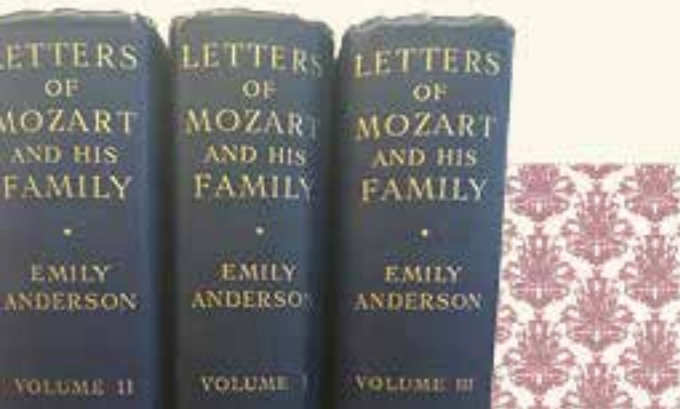
is a response to the state's Decade of Centenaries programme. The latter fosters inclusive reflection on the events and forces that propelled the establishment of independent Ireland and set its trajectory over the last 100 years. As such, it is an apt time to make visible and revalue the varied and significant contributions of women to public life over this period, including the national university, and also to consider how events in the public domain shaped the horizon of possibility available to women in the "new Ireland". In this spirit, Path Breaking Women of NUI Galway foregrounds a selection of 12 women from diverse social, political and religious backgrounds. Each one is a former faculty

member or student who made remarkable but little-known contributions across the arts, sciences and political life, in the years before and after 1916, or subsequently in the first decades of Irish independence. The exhibition underlines the context of social reform campaigns that animated Ireland in the early 20th century, including struggles for suffrage and women's access to education and professional employment, as well as later efforts for progressive social change and women's rights in modernising Ireland. In doing so, it aims to encourage dialogue and reflection on the roles of women in the university and Irish society more generally and on what can be learned from the past to assist in addressing the gender equality challenges of the present.

– N. Reilly



Alice Jacqueline Perry  
Mary Donovan-O'Sullivan  
Emily Anderson  
Ada English  
Síle ní Chinneide  
Celia Quinn Lynch  
Margaret Heavey  
Maureen McHugh O'Carroll  
Máirín de Valera  
Nora Niland  
Caitlín Maude  
Lorna Reynolds





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Alice Jacqueline Perry circa 1906, reproduced by kind permission of NUI Galway Archives.

**Alice Jacqueline Perry** (1885-1969) was born in Galway and educated at the local High School and Queen's College, Galway, graduating with a first-class honours BE (1906).

Her father and uncle were engineers and her sisters and aunt were university graduates. She was the first woman engineer in Ireland or Britain, a much lauded achievement. Alice Perry's mother, Martha, died in 1905 and her father, James, died shortly after her graduation. She was appointed Interim County Surveyor in place of her father, which saw her travelling around the county during the winter months inspecting roads, bridges and buildings for the council. This was a remarkable public role for a young woman. She was not appointed to the permanent position, ending the career of the country's first woman county engineer, and subsequently worked as a factory inspector in England and Scotland. In 1916 Alice Perry married John Shaw who was killed the following year in the First World War. She converted to the Church of Christian Science and emigrated to Boston, USA where she published several volumes of religious poetry as Alice Jacqueline Shaw. She died in Los Angeles in April, 1969.

– M. Clancy

#### *Context*

*The decade before 1916 was a dynamic period of activism in Ireland for and against Home Rule, votes for women, rights for workers, social welfare reforms and Gaelic cultural revival. While Queen's College, Galway admitted female students in the 1880s, very few women completed degrees in engineering. Alice Perry was among a small number of women worldwide to achieve this path breaking distinction. After the dramatic events of World War I and the Easter Rising in 1916, like many from a similar social and religious background, Alice Perry made a life outside of Ireland.*

– N. Reilly





**Mary Donovan** (1887-1966) was born in Galway and educated in the Dominican Convent and Queen's College Galway.



A prize-winning scholar in school and university, she gained a BA (1908) and took first place in Ireland in the MA (1909). In 1914, she was appointed the first Professor of History at UCG, a position she held until the 1950s. She was active in women's suffrage, arguing for equality in wages, education and the professions, and acting as suffrage librarian. Mary Donovan, who married UCG graduate Jeremiah O'Sullivan in 1915, engaged in war-work and recruiting during the First World War. She was visible on academic committees and was elected to the Governing Body, UCG, the Senate of the National University of Ireland, and the Royal Irish Academy. She represented the NUI at international historical congresses. Locally, Donovan O'Sullivan supported the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society, and edited the society journal. She was especially known for *Old Galway* (1942) and in 1943, she was awarded a D. Litt for published works. She looked to European influences, campaigned for a modern art gallery in Galway and was active in organised mid-twentieth century feminism including the Women Graduates Association. Mary Donovan O'Sullivan died in July 1966 and is buried in Galway.

– M. Clancy

#### Context

*The Irish Universities Act 1908 dissolved the Queen's Colleges in the south of Ireland, establishing two universities on the island: the National University of Ireland, consisting of UCG, UCC and UCD, and Queen's University Belfast. Ostensibly a solution to the long running question of how to ensure equitable provision of university education for Catholics in Ireland, the act also reflected a major achievement for women who were now admitted to all degrees and offices of the new National University of Ireland. The university and Mary Donovan benefited from this legislation as she commenced her tenure as UCG's first female professor in 1914. In the same year, World War I broke out and implementation of home rule was postponed – events that would shape Mary Donovan's role as a public historian.*

– N. Reilly

Mary Donovan O'Sullivan, circa 1940s, reproduced by kind permission of NUI Galway Archives.



*Emily Anderson as a child, The Anderson Family Photographs, reproduced by kind permission of NUI Galway Archives.*



**Emily Anderson**  
(1891-1962), born in Galway and educated in University College Galway (BA, 1911), was from a prominent academic family.

Her father, Alexander Anderson, was president of the university, her aunt, Bessie Anderson, and her sisters, Elizabeth and Helen, were graduates. Her mother, Emily, was active in social reform and war-work. A prize-winning student, Emily Anderson spent time studying and working in Germany and Barbados before returning to Galway to become first Professor of German in 1917. In 1920, Anderson moved to London and was one of the first women to work in the British Foreign Office, recently open to women under the law. During the Second World War, Anderson undertook intelligence work in the Middle-East, for which she received an OBE. An accomplished linguist and scholar, Emily Anderson's hugely important works *The Letters of Mozart and his Family* (1938) and *The Letters of Beethoven* (1961) received critical international acclaim and she was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. Anderson left her estate to charities in England and Ireland. She made provision in The Royal Philharmonic Society for an annual award, the International Emily Anderson Prize for young violinists. Music for Galway together with NUI Galway, holds an annual concert in her memory. Emily Anderson died in London in 1962.

– M. Clancy

#### *Context*

*The first decade of the 20th century was a period of expansion for women's suffrage organisations. Efforts to achieve equality in higher education went hand in hand with struggles for women's citizenship rights. It was a time of great social inequality and visible poverty – many progressive, middleclass people, such as the Andersons, were engaged in social reform activities. Between 1911 and 1917 Emily Anderson left Galway to study and teach abroad. She returned to a transformed Ireland in 1917 before deciding to move to London in 1920 as the war of independence intensified.*

– N. Reilly

**Ada (Adeline) English** (1875-1944) was born in County Kerry, raised in Mullingar, County Westmeath and educated by the Loreto Order and the Catholic Medical School (Cecelia Street, Dublin).



She graduated in 1903 (MB, B.Ch, BAO), one of the first women doctors in Ireland. In 1904, she was appointed assistant medical officer in Ballinasloe District Asylum, County Galway, where she worked for the next forty years. In June, 1914, she was appointed to the position of Lecturer in Mental Diseases in University College Galway. Ada English was active in social, cultural and political work in public health, nationalist politics, Irish language and manufacturing revival, and sport. She participated in the revolutionary period and was court-martialled and jailed in Galway. In another defining act, Ada English was returned to the Second Dáil (parliament) representing the National University (1921-1922). Subsequently, Dr. English, who held strong Catholic and republican principles, worked as a reforming psychiatrist instead of in parliamentary politics. She was promoted Resident Medical Superintendent only in 1941, the year before she retired. Ada English was a strong family woman, known for her love of sport and animals. She died in January 1944 and is buried in Ballinasloe.

– M. Clancy

#### *Context*

*Ada English devoted most of her adult life to improving the conditions and prognoses of patients with mental illness in the care of the Ballinasloe hospital where she worked. Particular challenges facing this work at the time were chronic overcrowding, shortages of basic goods during World War II, and management of tuberculosis. Despite many constraints, progressive innovations in care were developed in Ballinasloe in the early 20th century, including therapeutic participation of patients in horticultural activities and social outings. The Mental Treatment Act 1945, introduced one year after the death of Ada English brought many of the reforms she had strived to achieve.*

– N. Reilly



*Ada English circa 1910, reproduced with kind permission of Gill and Macmillan.*



Síle Ní Chinnéide circa 1950, reproduced by kind permission of the NUI Galway Archives.



**Síle Ní Chinnéide** (1900 – 1980) was born into a Catholic nationalist family in Waterford. She was active in the Irish language revival.

Having received a BA and MA in History from UCC she was appointed Lecturer in History (through Irish) at UCG in 1927, advancing to Associate Professor of History in 1965, and retiring in 1970. Síle Ní Chinnéide was a striking figure on campus, known for smoking cigarillos in a holder. She taught a wide range of historical periods and authored works on local and European history, notably *An tSean-Eoraip* (1947). Her teaching and research emphasised Ireland's relationship with Europe. A spirited public historian, she regularly contributed to newspapers and radio, and co-edited the *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and History Society*, as well as the society's Irish-language journal, *Galvia*, which she helped to found in 1954. Síle Ní Chinnéide influenced generations of students and scholars. She aspired to a non-sectarian united Ireland and a culturally liberal Catholicism, dismissing conventional concerns about “un-Christian reading”. As historian Nadia Smith recounts, she advised students “it would do them no harm to read certain works on the Vatican Index of Forbidden Books.”

– M. O’Cinneide

#### *Context*

*Síle Ní Chinnéide's first post at UCG was one of a set of Irish lectureships in History, Economics and Mathematics created to advance the Free State's commitment to teaching through Irish. This approach was consolidated by the University College Galway Act, 1929, which greatly increased funding to UCG to expand the number of faculty and staff proficient in Irish. Síle Ní Chinnéide supported compulsory Irish language policies, a standpoint that was closely connected to her promotion of economic history as a disciplinary approach and of internal migration as a way to combat poverty in Gaeltacht regions.*

– M. O’Cinneide

A Frenchman's impressions of  
County Cork in 1790  
1897-1900  
IN THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND



**Celia Quinn** (1908-1989) was born in Duras House, Kinvara, County Galway to Mary (née McDonagh) and John Quinn. Her birthplace was the location of the founding meeting of the Abbey Theatre.

Educated at Loreto College St. Stephen's Green, UCG (BA 1927; BComm 1928) and UCD (HDipEd 1932), Celia Quinn taught in Dublin until 1936 when she married Dr James B Lynch – Fianna Fáil TD and Senator from 1932 until his death, aged 52, in 1954. Now, sole parent of seven children under 18, Celia Lynch secured the Fianna Fáil candidacy for Dublin South Central and was elected to Dáil Eireann. In 1958, she was appointed first woman Fianna Fáil whip. She worked on housing issues and for “housewives and widows”. A long-time Dublin Corporation member, she also represented Ireland in the Council of Europe parliament (1967-1969). Returned for six terms, Celia Lynch was the longest serving woman TD when she retired in 1977, noting her “one regret” was the failure of Ballymun’s social housing. Profiled in 1969 as one of only three female TDs, she offered this explanation for women’s absence from politics: “When a girl gets married ... well her mind goes on that. But marriage takes nothing out of men at all.”

– N. Reilly



#### *Context*

*Ireland has a long record of chronic underrepresentation of women in parliament. In 2016, just over one fifth of TDs are female. In 1921, women comprised five per cent of the Second Dáil (six TDs), including UCG's Ada English. However, this “high” was not exceeded until 1981 when some seven per cent of deputies were women (11 TDs). Over the 23 years (1954-1977) that Celia Lynch served as TD the percentage of female deputies remained below four per cent (5 TDs). In this context, her long tenure in Dáil Eireann and Maureen's O'Carroll's election as the Labour Party's first woman TD were remarkable achievements.*

– N. Reilly



*Celia Lynch circa 1930, reproduced by kind permission of the family of Celia Lynch.*



*Margaret Heavey circa 1938, reproduced by kind permission of the editors of Bliainiris.*



**Margaret Heavey**  
(Mairéad Ní Éimhigh)  
(1908-1980) was born  
in Athenry, County  
Galway, the eldest child  
of Alice (née Kirwan)  
and Thomas Heavey.

She attended Presentation National School and from there enrolled in UCG, earning a BA (1927) and H. Dip Ed and MA (both 1928). She was awarded a prestigious University Travelling Studentship in Classics, which allowed her to study in Munich. In 1931, Margaret Heavey returned to UCG and was appointed Lecturer in Latin and Greek through Irish. Her deep love of the classics and enthusiasm for her subject inspired generations of students. A gifted linguist, she published several translations of Greek and Latin texts into Irish and was appointed Professor of Ancient Classics in 1958. Beyond academic life, Margaret Heavey authored a number of religious pamphlets. She was a popular aunt of a large family and cared for her elderly mother for many years. She also served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1970 – 1976) and introduced important new services for students before retiring in 1977. In a generous bequest she provided for the creation the university's annual Athenry Prizes for excellent students in classics. The NUI Galway Margaret Heavey Memorial Lecture commemorates her outstanding contribution to the discipline and the university.

– N. Reilly

#### *Context*

*As Margaret Heavey commenced her career at UCG the 1932 “marriage bar” was introduced, requiring women working in the civil and public service to resign upon marriage. The first Fianna Fáil government was formed in 1932. It promised republican policies, removal of the oath of allegiance to the British crown, and industrialisation. A six-year economic war with Britain ensued exacerbating poverty, particularly in rural Ireland and De Valera’s 1937 constitution was adopted by referendum. The National University Women Graduates’ Association had joined with other women’s organisations to vigorously protest the draft constitution’s discriminatory provisions on women with limited success.*

– N. Reilly

**Maureen McHugh** (1913-1984) was born in Dublin to Elizabeth (née O'Dowd) and Michael McHugh – a Galway native, journalist, Irish language revivalist, and participant in the 1916 Rising.

A scholarship student educated at Gortnor Abbey, Mayo, Maureen McHugh initially became a novice nun and enrolled in UCG (Arts) in 1932. Leaving convent life, she worked as a civil servant and teacher until 1936 when she married Gerard O'Carroll, a cabinet maker. Maureen O'Carroll subsequently became a trade union activist and, in 1947, co-founded the Lower Prices Council, spearheading a major campaign against the rising prices of basic household goods. In 1954, she secured a hard fought seat in Dáil Éireann for Dublin North Central, becoming the Labour Party's first female deputy (TD) and chief whip (1954-1957). As TD, Maureen O'Carroll worked for women's entry into the police force, consumer rights and to end the stigma of illegitimacy. Her husband, Gerard O'Carroll, died in 1965 when the youngest of their ten children was ten years old. The mother of actors and writers, Brendan O'Carroll and Eilish O'Carroll, Maureen O'Carroll later worked for Dublin City Council on behalf of homeless women and children and continued to be a tireless champion of economic and social causes.

– N. Reilly

#### *Context*

*The first decade of the Irish Free State, when Maureen McHugh attended Gortnor Abbey and enrolled in UCG, was a time of fraught public debate about the role of women and the protection of “public morals” in newly independent Ireland. From the 1920s on, the state sought to reverse prior constitutional commitments to the equality of men and women, emphasising instead women’s “duties in the home”. Supported by the Catholic hierarchy, and against the protests of women’s organisations, legislation was introduced to limit women’s involvement in juries and civil service employment and later to ban all information and devices relating to contraception.*

– N. Reilly

*Maureen O'Carroll circa 1954, reproduced by kind permission of Eilish O'Carroll.*







*Máirín de Valera circa 1956, reproduced by kind permission of UCD-OFM Partnership*

**Máirín de Valera** (1912-1984) was born in Dublin, the second child of Sinéad (née Flanagan) and Éamon de Valera, later president of Ireland.

She was educated at Loreto College, St Stephen's Green and studied at UCD, earning a BA (1935) and MSc (1936) in botany. She also studied in England, Wales and Sweden, specialising in phycology, the study of algae. In 1939, Máirín De Valera came to work at UCG as an assistant in the Department of Natural History. She taught all of the botanical courses offered to students through English and Irish. Her exhaustive field research on marine algae in Galway – conducted on bicycle up and down coast areas – was the basis of her PhD (NUI, 1945). Máirín De Valera was appointed Lecturer in Botany at UCG in 1947 and first Professor of Botany in 1962, a post she held until 1977. Throughout her career she was an exacting and devoted teacher and researcher. She co-founded the British Phycological Society in 1951 and published over 25 scientific papers. Máirín De Valera possessed an unequalled knowledge of the species of the west coast of Ireland. The red algae genus *Devaleraea* was named for her in 1982. In 2006, the university's field research station in the Burren was renamed the Máirín de Valera Research Station. After her death, she was remembered fondly by colleagues as a lively raconteur with a great sense of humour.

– N. Reilly

#### *Context*

*Máirín De Valera's arrival at UCG in 1939 coincided with the outbreak of World War II. In contrast to her life of quiet scientific endeavour in the West of Ireland, over the next two decades, Éamon de Valera would continue to exert a profound influence on the direction of the nation, from a socially conservative, insular and Catholic perspective. At the same time, resisting much external pressure, De Valera's government maintained a resolute policy of neutrality throughout the war – a position which won him cross party and popular support.*

– N. Reilly



**Nora Niland (1913-1988)** was born in County Galway and educated in the Galway Technical School. She studied at night towards a degree in UCG (BA, 1943) while working as a librarian in Galway.

In 1945, Nora Niland was appointed county librarian, Sligo. She set out to develop library and museum services, locating new premises and, crucially, recognising the importance of the Yeats family legacy to Sligo. By the late 1950s, Nora Niland was establishing a modern art collection, locating art works and raising funds in Ireland and internationally. The much-expanded Niland Collection is now available to the public at the Model, Sligo while the Yeats Summer School, which she helped to set up, is an established international annual event. Niland encouraged primary school reading, loaned art for academic events, was associated with Galway cultural societies and spoke on Yeats. She had strong ties with her family in Galway and was a founding member and chair of the substantial family business. Nora Niland was an influential county librarian and curator, who believed in the power of books and art to help shape rural and national public life. She died in 1988 and is buried near to where she grew up in County Galway.

– M. Clancy

#### *Context*

*After Nora Niland took up her post as county librarian, the Censorship of Publications Act 1946 replaced the 1929 Act, making further provision for the censorship of books and periodicals in the name of protecting “public morals.” For decades to come, regardless of their personal views, librarians were obliged to implement censorship laws that banned works by Ireland’s most famous writers, from James Joyce and Kate O’Brien to Frank O’Connor and Maura Laverty. More positively, the Public Libraries Act 1947 was also introduced at this time. Its purpose was to support overdue improvements in the local administration of libraries and to encourage more widespread reading among the public.*

– N. Reilly

*Nora Niland circa 1963, The Eccles Photographic Collection, reproduced by kind permission of the Sligo County Libraries.*



**The  
Niland  
Collection**



Caitlín Maude circa 1970s, reproduced by kind permission of the RTE Press Centre.

**Caitlín Maude** (1941-1982) was born in County Galway and educated in Coláiste Chroí Mhuire, An Spidéal and UCG (BA 1962).



She was interested in writing, song and music from a young age, winning prizes for sean-nós (old style) singing. In 1962, her original play, *An Lasair-Choille* (The Goldfinch), written with the poet Michael Hartnett, was first performed in Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe. In 1964, in Dublin, she took the lead role of Máire, an unmarried pregnant woman, in Mairéad Ní Ghráda's play, *An Triail*, a courageous step on the part of writer and actor in the face of stigma and silence on the subject. Irish-language singing, poetry and theatre continued to define the distinctive artistic work of Caitlín Maude. In 1975, Gael-Linn released an album, *Caitlín*. Later, television extended her fame and she performed at arts events in Scotland and Ireland. Caitlín Maude was prominent in public protests of the 1960s and 1970s, especially on questions of the Irish language and the social, economic and political place of the West of Ireland. She was influential in laying foundations for subsequent achievements, an inspiring voice of Irish-language arts and civil politics from the 1960s until her untimely death in 1982.

– M. Clancy

#### Context

*The issue of “unmarried mothers” preoccupied church and state authorities from the inception of the Irish Free State until the 1980s. Extramarital sex and childbirth were viewed as shameful, with the brunt of social stigma falling on women. The role of the Magdalene laundries in this regard has been well documented. An Triail addressed these themes directly. Attracting Irish speakers and non-Irish speakers alike, the play was critically acclaimed at home and abroad. Reviews commended Caitlín Maude for her “compelling and moving performance” and “remarkable haunting face”. Undoubtedly, her talents were instrumental in stimulating much needed open discussion of this hidden side of modern Ireland.*

– N. Reilly



**Lorna Reynolds** (1911-2003) was born in Jamaica to parents Teresa (née Hickey) and Michael Reynolds, a staff sergeant in the Royal Engineers.



Lorna Reynolds circa 1990, reproduced by kind permission of the family of Lorna Reynolds.



The family returned to Ireland in 1912 and lived in Birr, County Offaly and later in Dublin where she attended the Dominican College, Eccles Street, Dublin and studied English at UCD (BA 1933; MA 1935; PhD 1940). After 30 years teaching at UCD, Lorna Reynolds was appointed Professor of Modern English at UCG in 1966. She was a highly regarded editor, literary scholar and public speaker. Her work as editor of the *University Review* was especially appreciated. She authored a critically acclaimed biography of Kate O'Brien and was an accomplished poet and short story writer. While at UCG, she collaborated with Robert O'Driscoll at University of Toronto, coediting several volumes of Yeats Studies. Lorna Reynolds championed progressive causes and contributed to the advancement of women in Irish society and academic life. Typical of her dynamism, in the 1970s she mobilised a campaign to try to restore the derelict Georgian theatre in Eyrecourt, County Galway. She had a lifelong interest in Italy, travelling, and cooking. A book of her recipes was published in 1990. On retiring, she returned to live in Dublin, with frequent visits to Eyrecourt. She is buried in Clonohill Cemetery, Birr.

– N. Reilly

#### Context

*In 1995, Lorna Reynolds recounted “many happy memories” of Galway from childhood to her time at UCG during the “heady days of the Lemass era”. She explained her move to Galway as follows: “when new professorships were being instituted in University College Dublin and I (as a woman, no doubt) was expected to be satisfied with an Associate Professorship, the chair of English in Galway became unexpectedly vacant .... It would not be easy to leave Dublin where my mother, my brother, most of my friends lived, where my students represented a constant and delightful challenge. A knowledge of Irish was necessary for any position in University College Galway. Would my Irish, dormant for so long, be up to it? I decided to try.”*

– N. Reilly

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