



Clockwise from left: Kathleen Lynn outside the Four Courts with Countess Markievicz (far left); Lynn worked with Dublin's poor and children at the Rotunda and other hospitals; UCD's Mary Daly outside Dublin's City Hall, where Lynn served during the 1916 insurrection.

IRISH INDEPENDENT/NPA, STEVE HUMPHREYS



The rebel commander who founded a hospital

Prof Mary Daly on the inspirational doctor Kathleen Lynn, who fought with the Citizen Army and for the health of Dublin's poor

KATHLEEN LYNN belongs to the first generation of Irish women doctors. The daughter of a Church of Ireland clergyman, at first sight she seems to be an unlikely graduate of the Catholic University Medical School. But when she graduated in 1899, that School admitted women students, whereas Trinity College, her more natural home, did not.

After graduation she studied in the United States (not a common career path at the time for UCD/Catholic University medical graduates, they were more likely to study in Vienna, Paris or in Germany), but the USA offered much wider opportunities for women.

There, many of the pioneering generation of women doctors worked in institutions that they had established and which were under their control — this offered a mechanism for overcoming the gender discrimination which was rife at the time.

In 1909, having returned to Ireland, Lynn became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. She failed to secure a position in the Adelaide Hospital because she was a woman. However, Sir Patrick Dun's and

the Rotunda Hospital proved to be more accommodating. From 1910–1916 she held a position at the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital — the first female resident doctor, combining this with a private practice in Rathmines.

This active medical career did not preclude an equally active role in political affairs. Her story gives us an insight into the political ferment that characterised Dublin 100 years ago, and the lives of a remarkable generation of educated women.

Kathleen Lynn was active in the suffrage movement at a time when the campaign for female suffrage was becoming increasingly militant. The campaign was closely linked with Irish Home Rule, because the Irish Party held the balance of power in Westminster at the time, but John Redmond refused to use their power to demand votes for women. As a consequence most politically-active Irishwomen joined more radical groups.

During the 1913 Dublin lock-out, which saw tens of thousands of Dublin labourers and their families in dire circumstances, Kathleen Lynn worked in Liberty Hall with Constance Markievicz to provide food and care for destitute families. This was an

experience that made her acutely aware of their lives and medical needs.

Her involvement with Liberty Hall and James Connolly led her to join the Irish Citizen Army, which admitted women and men. Connolly appointed Lynn Chief Medical Officer to the Irish Citizen Army. She gave the Citizen Army ambulance and first aid training, and was involved in weapons smuggling. She also taught first aid to Cumann na mBan, the female wing of the Irish Volunteers.

During the Rising, Lynn was appointed Captain in the Irish Citizen Army and second-in-command of City Hall. She took full command when Seán Connolly was killed, until they were forced to surrender. She was then imprisoned in Kilmainham Gaol until 1917.

She spent a further spell in prison in 1918. When Sinn Féin was reorganised in 1917, she became a vice-president and in

SNAPSHOT

KATHLEEN FLORENCE LYNN

Born: Killala, Co Mayo, 28 January 1874

Educated: School in England and Germany; college at UCD and in USA

Affiliation: Irish Citizen Army

Career: Doctor (qualified 1899), TD (1923–27)

Died: Ballsbridge, Dublin, 14 September 1955

1922, like most republican women, she sided with the anti-Treaty side.

But although Lynn was elected to Dáil Éireann in 1923, by this time she was concentrating on her medical life. In 1919 she and a number of other politically-active medical women founded St Ultan's in Charlemont Street. The initial focus was on treating syphilitic infants — Cumann na mBan was convinced that soldiers returning from the war were killing Irish infants — in truth syphilis was endemic in sections of the Dublin working class. St Ultan's soon began to treat other illnesses.

Although the range of treatments available for sick infants was very limited, St Ultan's provided personal care for the infants of Dublin's poorest families at a time when there was an acute shortage of paediatric beds. The hospital's 52 beds — or cots — accounted for a quarter of beds available for sick children in Dublin at the time.

She had diverse motives for founding St Ultan's — it provided medical care for sick children like those she had met in Liberty Hall, and a supportive environment for their mothers. St Ultan's also offered Lynn and her fellow women doctors a place where they could shape their own medical careers, and make a distinctive contribution. Kathleen Lynn died in 1955 and was buried with full military honours.

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