

## Episode Two-The Women of Easter Rising

### **Intro 0:00-0:30**

Hello, I am Sam Amenn, and this is the second episode of the Art of Asymmetrical Warfare Podcast. Since this month is Women's History Month, today we will be taking a deep dive into the women who fought and supported Easter Rising.

Theme song: Symphony no. 5 in Cm, Op. 67 - III. Allegro

### **Women's Role in Easter Rising 0:31-1:56**

I think it's common for most people to consider Easter Rising and the Anglo-Irish War that followed to be a man's game and this perception comes from who wrote the histories as well as the participants own efforts to come to terms with what happened between 1916 and 1923, but it's furthest from the truth. There were plenty of women who fought during Easter Rising, served as couriers, as spies, as secretaries as nurses who took care of the men, who cook, who mended their uniforms and who afterwards pushed for prisoner release and prison reform, who raised funds for the families who had been affected by the Rising and this effort continues into the Anglo-Irish War. R. F. Foster's book *Vivid Faces* does a great job explaining how revolutionary Ireland truly was, during this period and how there was this huge feminist movement that was growing and who were led by people like Kathleen Clarke and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and you had giants like Constance Markievicz who was leading the way for women's rights and that all ends late 1920s, once the free Irish state government was formed with Cosgrave's Administration and DeValera takes it further. So, there is also this let down for everyone in Ireland but particularly for the female members of the IRA and Cumann na mBan, which was the female auxiliary unit and Sinn Fein.

### **Constance Markievicz 1:57-7:24**

You cannot talk about the women of Easter Rising or even the women of the Anglo-Irish war, which first talking about the force of nature that is Constance Markievicz. Constance was born into an Anglo-Irish family and she was sister of Eva Goore-Booth, who was another famous Irish rebel. She wanted to be a painter, so she went to Paris to study and when she was in Paris she met this Polish guy who was originally from Ukraine who was named Casimir Markievicz and somehow, one way or another, he adopted the title Count, so when she married him, she became Countess Markievicz. Although she seems to have hate that name. She seems to have preferred Madame. They return to Dublin in the early 1900s and that is when she becomes really committed to politics and to helping the poor and those who are struggling. And she makes a huge splash when she enters politics. She joins Sein Finn in 1909, she joins the Daughters of Ireland, she helps found Cumann na mBan, she is arrested in 1911 for protesting King George's visit to Ireland, she joins the women's suffragettes protesting against Churchill's election to Parliament during the Manchester Northwest by-election and Churchill loses that election and historians have given the suffragettes credit for that. She founds the Fianna Eireen with Bulmer Hobson in 1909 which is basically a boys scout group teaching boys how to shoot and then in 1913, she provides food for the worker and families who are involved in the union strike, which

is now known as the 1913 lockout. That is a huge moment for her because that's when she meets Jim Larkin and James Connolly who will then create the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Citizen Army is a paramilitary group dedicated to fighting for worker's rights. So, they see Irish nationalism and Irish republicanism connected to this bigger struggle for socialism and freeing the workers. So, she becomes very involved in the Irish Citizen Army. It seems that Connolly trusts her to a certain extent. She becomes an officer within the army and that's why she is fighting in Easter Rising. She joins Michael Mallin's unit at St. Stephen's Green, which is the south side of Dublin, and when she's there, one of the first things she does, she ends up killing a British police officer and this has a huge impact on everyone around her and also it seems to be a defining moment for her as well because she still remembers it after Easter Rising. They fight at St. Stephen's Green into Tuesday and on Wednesday they're pushed out and they have to retreat into the Royal College of Surgeons where she hides out for the rest of the Rising and takes potshots at British soldiers, so she becomes a semi-sniper. When they surrender, she is taken to Kilmainham jail and she is the only woman to be put on trial and sentenced for executions. Her sentence is later commuted to life imprisonment because she was a woman and the British drew a line at executing women. However, there's some controversy about her trial, because if you read certain historians they really try to play up how hysterical she was, and there was kind of a rumor that she asked to be spared because she was a woman and I think a lot of that comes out of again this kind of sexist narrative that developed around Easter Rising and around the IRA where women didn't have a place or a woman's place was in the background, right, because that was also the narrative that emerged after the civil war and after Ireland becomes a nation. But I also think it comes out of Constance herself. Constance is—it seems like either you loved her, or you hated her. There really was no middle ground with her (laughs) and she made a number of enemies during her life time. But I don't think—even if she was, you know, she did break down on trial, I don't think it takes away from her bravery at all, especially since after she's released from jail, she immediately joins the cause again. She becomes a Sinn Féin member, she's the first woman to be elected to British parliament, but because Sinn Féin had the rule where you wouldn't sit in British Parliament because it's an illegitimate body, she never takes her seat. I read somewhere that there's a portrait of her though in Parliament, which was interesting to me. So, she's the first woman to be elected to Parliament. She is the first woman to be part of a European cabinet when the first Dáil is convened. She becomes the Minister of Labor and during the war, she is arrested a number of times. She ends up serving five terms in jail. During the Irish Civil War, she is *heavily* anti-treaty and is arrested, thrown in jail again, and goes on hunger strike and is released a month later, which is kind of interesting when one considers what happened to some of the other prisoners during the Irish civil war. After the civil war, she joins Eamon DeValera's new political party. So, after the civil war, Eamon DeValera is still Sinn Féin, but he's being pushed out and he doesn't agree with their parliamentary absenteeism because now they're boycotting the Irish parliament. So what's happening is that Cosgrave's administration basically has no serious opposition and Eamon DeValera wants to get back into politics so he creates his own party which is Fianna Fáil and Constance joins that party and wins election in 1926, but she dies in 1927 before she can take her seat.

Constance is a complicated woman who seems to have lived a very complicated and challenging life. Because she dedicates herself to the Irish cause, she has a very strained relationship with her husband who, at some point, returns to Ukraine for a while and then she comes back because he's with her when she dies. And her relationship with her daughter is very

difficult because she left her daughter basically with her parents so she could go fight for Ireland. And I think she had a hard time too, adjusting to Ireland after the Irish Civil War and then all her time in prison and fighting took a toll of her body and that's why she died so young. I think she's in her fifties when she dies. So, she is a very inspiring figure, but I think she's also a very complicated figure. And that also colors some of the narrative that developed around her after the conflict.

### **Kathleen Clarke 7:25-10:22**

This woman should be a giant in Irish history if there's any justice, she would be as big as Michael Collins or Eamon DeValera. I am of course talking about Kathleen Clarke. Kathleen was born to a prominent Fenian family. Her uncle served in the same jail as Tom Clarke served time in. Her uncle, when he was released, brought Tom Clarke home, and introduced him to Kathleen who was about twenty years younger than Clarke.

Kathleen sometimes gets overshadowed by her husband I think, because her husband planned the Rising and he died during Easter Rising. He was executed for being one of its leaders and he recreated the IRB and he had a reputation, you know, of being a very rabid Fenian. He was arrested for the dynamite campaign I think in 1878. But Kathleen is just as radical and just as important. One of the reasons she wasn't with her husband during Easter Rising was because Tom told her to stay behind and help rebuild the IRB in case Easter Rising failed. And that's exactly what she did.

She was arrested briefly but she was released and after she was released, she established the Irish Volunteer Dependents' Fund which provided financial support to the widows and children left behind after Easter Rising. She worked with others to rebuild the IRB and help create the IRA. She also threw her support behind Sinn Fein and supported Eamon DeValera as president of Sinn Fein. During the rising she lost her husband Tom Clarke, her brother Ned Daly, who was also executed, and one of their best friends, Sean MacDiarmada. She had also been pregnant with a child, but she didn't tell Tom this when she saw him one last time in jail. But after the rising she would lose that child. Kathleen was elected to the second Dail. She wanted to run during the first Dail when Constance Markievicz ran and Winifred Carney, but she was given a seat that was impossible to win. She was anti-treaty and she was arrested a number of times. She became a founding member of Fianna Fail. She became the first lord mayor of Dublin. She served as a district judge on the Republican courts in Dublin during the Anglo-Irish war. She was against the constitution of Ireland because it placed women in a lower position than had been afforded in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, which Pearse had read during Easter Rising. She left Fianna Fail after they refused to ask for clemency for the IRA members who bombed London during WWII. She helped found the Irish Red Cross. She was constantly fighting for women's rights. She never forgot her feminist roots.

So, she's just this huge pillar I think for womanhood and woman kind in Ireland and as a feminist, she should be an icon for woman around the world. She's definitely someone worth knowing and worth researching. She's a different kind of Irish rebel. She's not like Constance where she fought during Easter Rising, but her contribution may even be more important because she was there to pick up the pieces after the Rising failed. She held herself together after

she lost, you know, her husband, her brother and her friend and she thought about those who were also going to be affected by the rising in ways that the men didn't and that's why she created the Irish Volunteers Dependents' Fund and she kept to her principles after the war and she never forgot that Ireland would never be truly free unless the woman in Ireland were free.

### **Maria Winifred Carney 10:23-13:54**

Another woman who should be associated with Easter Rising is Maria Winifred Carney. Carney was born in Bangor and grew up in Belfast she was born to a lower middle-class family. Her father was protestant, her mother was Catholic, and her father left them when she was very young. She became the first woman in Belfast to qualify as a secretary and shorthand typist. And this enabled her to get involved with the Irish Textile's Union in Belfast and that's where she meets James Connolly and Jim Larkin and she becomes very involved with the socialist movement and the worker right's movement. She and Connolly hit it off very well and in 1912 she becomes his personal secretary and they kind of become inseparable. I think there is a narrative that has developed that she was just a hero worshipping secretary who, you know, thought her boss could do no wrong, but judging from Connolly's papers and her papers, their relationship was far more equal than that. He made her an escort for members of his family, he asked for her personally to show up at Easter Rising, which she does. She arrives with a Webley revolver and a typewriter and she known as the typist with the Webley revolver, which I think is maybe one of the coolest names ever. And she sits with him in the General Post Office during the entire Rising. So when they're being bombarded, she's there typing out orders, when the city is catching on fire, she's there taking care of a wounded Connolly, when Pearse and Connolly tell her to run because the building's unstable, she stays by their side and she's one of the last people to leave along with Pearse and Connolly. When they surrender, she's still there by Connolly's side and when he was executed, she was, she was devastated. She serves her time in Mountjoy. She's released on Christmas 1916. And along with Constance Markievicz, she is one of the only women to run for election in 1918 and that's because both the British and Sinn Fein were trying to figure out, so we let women run this time around. Do they have the right to vote? Can they stand for election? And even, once they make that decision a lot of women didn't even bother because they were given seats that were going to be impossible to win. So, Constance wins her seat and becomes the first woman elected to British parliament but Winifred loses her seat and after that she um does everything she can to support the Anglo-Irish War and then the civil war happens and she's anti-treaty and she's arrested several times but after that war she loses faith in politics and she goes back up to Belfast and she works with the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union. While working there, she meets a man named George McBride, who was a Protestant and who fought in the British army during the Somme which again highlights this overlooked fact that many nationalist Irishmen fought in the war because they thought it was right, but when they came back they either remained loyal to England or they actually joined the IRA. It's a facet that should be explored a little further.

So, she marries him and when she marries him, she loses a number of friends and family members and he loses a number of friends and family members, but they make it work and they stay together until 1943 when she dies. And they fight for socialism and worker's rights together. And after she dies, MacBride never remarries.

Winifred is a perfect example of a woman who would get overlooked because she didn't carry- she carried a gun, but she didn't fire. She didn't shoot anyone. She didn't kill anyone. Even during the Anglo-Irish War. She wasn't this bigger than life figure like Constance Markievicz and she didn't have the name of a famous Irish rebel, like Kathleen Clarke. But she was, her position was just as important and her contribution was just as important, but she was writing out all the orders that Pearse and Connolly were trying to give to the units. She was able to provide care to James Connolly, who was one of the rising leaders, so her impact is easier to brush aside but that doesn't make it any less important.

### **Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington 13:55-18:07**

The next woman we're going to discuss is as much a victim of Easter Rising as she is a strong, Irish rebel and feminist. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was born to a strong Fenian family. Her father was a MP for the Irish Parliamentary Party. Her family was close to James Joyce who introduced her to Francis Skeffington, her future husband. They would marry in 1903 at University Chapel in St. Stephen's Green and they took each other's names to demonstrate how much respect they had for one another. So, Hanna's name is Sheehy, and Francis' name is Skeffington. Together they fought for Irish nationalism and Irish independence as well as women's rights, and Francis was a pacifist, but Hanna seemed to be a bit more the firecracker in the family. She was arrested in 1912 for smashing the windows of Dublin Castle which was the center of authority for the British in Ireland and she spent a few months in jail for that. She was arrested again for trying to present leaflets to Bonar Law and Edmund Carson and she assaulted a police officer apparently during that. Again, she went to jail and she went on hunger strike for five days and was released. She helped found the Irish Women's Franchise League which was a militant group that fought for Ireland's independence and to include women's rights in the Home Rule bill because Hanna felt that the Home rule Bill didn't do enough for Irish Women. It would become the largest suffragette group for Ireland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. She provided food to workers during the 1913 lockout and she was heavily inspired by James Connolly. She was fiercely opposed to the First World War as was her husband.

But I think, unfortunately, what she is most known for is the death of her husband. During Easter Rising, Hanna did not fight but she provided food and care to the men when she could. Francis was a pacifist so he didn't believe in violence, but he tried to help anyway he could, and he gets picked up by a British officer Captain Bowen-Colthurst and he is taken to jail, and Hanna doesn't know. And two other Irish men are arrested and thrown into jail with Francis. And then later I think this was the Thursday of the Rising, so one more day and Pearse would surrender. And for whatever reason, Colthurst takes the three out of prison and brings them into a courtyard and shoots them. And then he tries to cover up that he shot them. And so, Francis doesn't come home, obviously, and Hanna starts to get worried. So, she and her daughter go to the local prison and ask around because maybe he just got picked up because things are chaotic right now in Ireland during the Rising. The British deny knowing anything about him. And so she asked for a couple of days and then I think someone tells her what actually happens and she pushed for an inquiry and it probably wouldn't have gone anywhere if another British officer, Francis Vane, had not also asked for an inquiry. So eventually the British given in and they found out that Colthurst was-like they claim he was insane, and they allow him to disappear and live in Canada. So, no real justice for poor Hanna or Francis.

After the Rising, she tours the US to talk about her husband's death and talk about the Irish cause and the women's rights and while she is there she becomes Ireland's representative to the League for Small and Subject Nationalities and she publishes *British Militarism as I have Known* which is banned in the UK. When she returns to Ireland, she is forced to go through the UK where she is arrested. She's eventually released, she goes back to the US to participate in the Irish Race Convention in New York which is again another convention to fight for Irish Rights. She returns to Ireland, she becomes an executive of Sinn Fein and during the Irish Civil War, she's anti-treaty and when that ends and when Eamon DeValera creates Fianna Fail, she becomes an executive of Fianna Fail. She becomes an editor for *An Phoblacht* a journal for the IRA. In 1933, she's the one who is arrested for going into Northern Ireland. There had been a ban, banning her from Northern Ireland. When she went on trial, she said she didn't not recognize partition, so she didn't recognize the ban. She went to jail for a few months before being released. She launched *the Irish Citizen* a newspaper founded to further the cause of Women's suffrage and women feminism. Hanna like Kathleen Clarke should be a bigger figure in Irish History than she is. I think she's another giant that gets overlooked and overshadowed. Again, her contribution to Easter Rising is not the violent, you know, she didn't fight with the boys um but I think her presence is felt and her contribution to the greater fight for Irish independence and women's rights should be acknowledged

### **Molly Osgood (Childers) 18:08-21:00**

The next woman we're going to discussion actually has more to do with the preparation for the Rising than the Rising itself.

Her name was Molly Osgood, also known as Molly Childers and she was the wife of Erskine Childers, who was a British writer who believed in Irish nationalism. Molly Osgood was born to a Boston family and she was born disabled at a young age and she could never walk without her crutches as she grew older. She met Erskine Childers in 1903. They were married in 1904 at Trinity College in Boston. And then she became a member of the Committee for Relief in Belgium and was a trustee of the Irish White Cross where Erskine was also an executive committee member. That's what brought her to Europe at the time of the Rising.

Molly and Erskine were in charge of a small group of nationalists purchasing about 1500 Mauser rifles and 49,000 rounds of ammunition from a German company. They were planning to take the weapons and bring them to Ireland. So, the British knew this was happening, but Molly and Erskine spread rumors that the weapons were being brought in through fishing boats. So, while the British are running around, trying to find these fishing boats, Molly and Erskine take the boat off the coast of Wales and sail from Wales to Ireland and when they arrive hundreds of Irish Volunteers are waiting for them to help unload as quickly as possible. The British find out and they send a number of policemen to stop them. But they're too late. As the rebels are disappearing the citizens throw rotten fruit at the police who open fire. And the skirmish is known as the bachelor's walk massacre. As you can imagine this success was huge. You know the Irish Volunteers were incredibly proud. The Childers couple were incredibly proud that they were able to pull this off and it does make a difference, I think, in terms to how long Easter Rising lasts.

Molly wasn't involved in Easter Rising but she doesn't support her husband during the Anglo-Irish War and then during the Irish Civil War, they're anti-treatyites and Erskine becomes enemy number one for the Cosgrave government for reasons we won't get into in this episode. And so, when he is captured, he is executed because he had a revolver on him, and it turns out the revolver was the one that Michael Collins gave him. And the Cosgrave government had passed a law that if you were caught with a weapon you would be signaled out for execution. So, he's executed, and Molly has to survive on her own. So, what she does is she joined the Women's International league for Peace and Freedom, the one of the world's oldest peace organizations. It would later with merged with into the UNESCO of the United Nations. And then their son actually, Erskine Hamilton Childers, will become Ireland's 4<sup>th</sup> president.

So again, Molly is a perfect example of someone you could easily overlook. I think Erskine does get a lot of credit for the Howth gun smuggling episode, but her presence and her contribution was just as vital as her husband. And she is one of those women, who I think, suffered the most from Easter Rising and the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War because her husband was on the run, he was arrested, and then later he is killed by his own fellow rebels. So, kind of perfect example of a contribution that could be overlooked if you really wanted to, but you shouldn't because it was just as vital as anyone else's contribution.

### **Conclusion 21:01-**

As we've seen from this episode, the idea that women didn't participate in Easter Rising and beyond is ridiculous. I hope you enjoyed this episode and I hope you'll back. If you enjoyed this episode, please go to our website, [www.samswarroom.com](http://www.samswarroom.com) where you can find supplementary material, book reviews, and a transcript of this podcast. Thank you and look forward to discussing asymmetrical warfare with you another time.