

EXPERIENCE
Glasnevin
IRELAND'S NATIONAL CEMETERY



Image courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland. Brighid O'Mullane in Cumann na mBan uniform.

Q. Look closely at the pin on her tie - it looks very like a famous Irish brooch - can you guess the name of the brooch?



Key Words

Republic
Propaganda



Discussion Points

The War of Independence
Cumann na mBan
The Anglo-Irish Treaty
The Irish Civil War



Classroom Links

Eras of change and conflict:
The changing role of women in the 19th and 20th centuries

Politics, conflict & society:
1916 and the foundation of the State

Brighid O'Mullane

Brighid O'Mullane was born in 1893 and lived in Co. Sligo.

She became involved in **Cumann na mBan** after meeting Countess Plunkett (mother of Joseph Plukett one of the leaders of the 1916 Rising). She encouraged Brighid to set up a branch of the organisation in Sligo. Headquarters then asked Brighid to organise branches throughout the country.

When travelling to other counties, Brighid travelled by train, but used a bicycle to get from town to town – sometimes travelling 60 miles a day! Nationalist organisations were made illegal in 1918 so she had to stay in safe houses and was always 'on the run'.

In 1919, Brighid was imprisoned for two months and kept in solitary confinement in Sligo Gaol. Brighid continued to work as an organiser and set up Cumann na mBan branches in many counties including: Antrim, Meath, Kildare and Wexford.

Brighid stated that she had, 'a good deal of prejudice to overcome on the part of the parents, who did not mind their boys taking part in a military movement, but who had never heard of, and were reluctant to accept, the idea of a body of gun-women'.

She tried to ensure that all new branches (of Cumann na mBan) received training from 'the local doctor or nurse to give the branch a course of first-aid lectures, and an I.R.A. officer to instruct them in drill, signalling, despatch-carrying, cleaning and unloading arms.' Bureau of Military History, Witness Statement of Brighid O'Mullane.

The Black and Tans arrived in Ireland in 1920. Brighid recalled that she 'cycled without a light as I knew the Black and Tan lorries would be travelling through the country. When I heard the sound of the approaching lorries, I had to take refuge.'

Time to Research!

- Q. What does this evidence (from Brighid's statement) reveal about certain attitudes towards women at this time?**
- Q. Does the training described match with any Cumann na mBan activities that you have already discussed?**



Badge worn by Cumann na mBan members.

A truce was called in the summer of 1921 and at that stage there were over 1,000 Cumann na mBan branches in Ireland. Brighid, along with most Cumann na mBan members, did not support the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

She began new work in 1922 when she was put in charge of propaganda. She set up a monthly newspaper called *Cumann na mBan*. It featured writings from other members including Countess Markievicz (below) who was President of the organisation at this time.



Image courtesy of The National Library of Ireland.

Countess Markievicz was involved in many important events in history including: The 1913 Lock-Out, The 1916 Rising, The 1918 General Election, The First Dáil, The War of Independence and The Civil War. Students could research these different topics and share their findings with the class.

The Battle of Dublin started in June 1922 and marked the beginning of the Civil War, it continued in different parts of Ireland until May 1923.



The Four Courts suffered heavy damage during the Civil War. Many important historical documents were destroyed as the Irish Public Record Office was housed there. A virtual reconstruction of the Records Treasury is being developed in Beyond 2022 - see <https://beyond2022.ie/> to learn more.

During the Civil War, Brighid acted as a courier for the anti-Treaty side and often crossed the city as fighting continued. She also worked to produce a weekly news bulletin. In November 1922 Brighid was arrested by Free State troops. She was imprisoned for close to one year and was sent to different prisons (including Kilmainham). Many of the women that she was imprisoned with knew Brighid from her work as a Cumann na mBan organiser. She was as an active member of Cumann na mBan until 1927. She later went on to become a founding member of the Irish Red Cross.



Brighid O'Mullane died in 1967 and was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery.