

14

members of the First Dáil signed over their authority to hard-core republicans: the newly resurgent Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Now in her sixties, Mary was beginning to suffer a variety of illnesses and was going blind due to cataracts. She had to reduce her political activity to writing furious letters to the newspapers. The mainstay in her frustrated life was Terence's now-teenaged daughter, Máire Óg, whom she lovingly reared after his death. Although she remained an unrepentant republican to the very end, her political activities continued to decrease until her death at her Dublin home in the spring of 1942. She is buried in Cork City, near her brother.

## Kathleen Clarke

1878-1972

*Revolutionary, senator and the first female lord mayor of Dublin*

Kathleen Daly was born into a political family in Limerick in 1878. Her father, Edward, and his brother, John, were active Fenians and had both served time in prison. When Edward died, aged only forty-one, Uncle John cared for Kathleen and her nine siblings. With his history in the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and his experiences in the notorious Portland Jail, he was a major political influence on the family. When he was voted mayor of Limerick in 1899, one of his first acts was to remove the royal coat of arms from the wall of Limerick Town Hall.

Kathleen's biographer and grand-niece, Helen Litton, describes her relative as 'forthright, outspoken and passionate, with a single-minded commitment to one idea above all others'. Kathleen herself said her family occasionally described her as pig-headed. She certainly demonstrated an independent streak at the age of eighteen when she started and ran a successful dressmaking business by herself, refusing to go into the family bakery because she did not wish to be 'under' her older sisters. Later she would manage her courtship and marriage in a similarly stubborn manner.

At the age of twenty-one, Kathleen met and fell in love with the forty-year-old Thomas J Clarke, a Fenian who had just completed a fifteen-year stretch in Portland Jail for 'Treason-Felony'. He was a member of the old IRB and, having lived much of his life in the USA, had become a key member of Clan na Gael, an Irish-American pro-independence organisation. Tom was a well-respected revolutionary, but, according to the Dalys, not much of a catch for Kathleen, being relatively old and completely penniless. Kathleen ignored all opposition. She went to New York in 1901 to be with Tom, and married him the day after she got there. Their first son was born in 1902, followed by two more boys in 1908 and 1910 respectively.

The Clarkes were passionately committed to the ideal of Irish independence. In New York they joined Clan na Gael, the Gaelic Society and the Irish Volunteers, and ran a newspaper, the *Gaelic American*. They raised funds and planned for the future. After six years of store-keeping and market-gardening punctuated by active politics, they returned to Dublin in 1907 to realise their dream.

The Clarkes considered their fellow countrymen and women in Edwardian Dublin to be apathetic about the struggle for self-determination, and they threw themselves into the task of shaking things up. They started a bookshop in Amiens Street and, later, one in Parnell Street, which became popular nationalist haunts. Tom started another newspaper, *Irish Freedom*,

and set up the militaristic Irish Volunteers, which Kathleen's only brother, Ned, immediately joined. Kathleen was a founder member of Cumann na mBan in 1914. The Volunteers courted controversy from the outset by refusing to kow-tow to the Irish Parliamentary Party (led by Charles Stewart Parnell's successor, John Redmond), on the grounds that they were too closely aligned with the Establishment at Westminster, whose authority the Volunteers refused to recognise. Kathleen courted controversy of her own when, under her presidency, Cumann na mBan ran first-aid classes and rifle practice – not activities in which the chauvinistic Volunteers wanted to see their women engaged. In this way the years went by in a whirr of subversive activity until that fateful day: Monday, 24 April 1916.

Some time before the Easter Rising in Dublin, the Supreme Council of the IRB had placed Kathleen in a position of special responsibility. In the event of the arrest and/or death of the leaders, it would be her job to pass on their plans and decisions to key men all over the country so that their network of intelligence would not collapse. Therefore, she had to be kept informed of all the decisions made by the Council, memorise all the relevant personnel and avoid imprisonment. She was also responsible for the welfare of the Volunteers' families should anything happen to their menfolk.

When Tom set out on the morning of Easter Monday, Kathleen knew that it was quite possible she would never see him again. By the end of Easter Week she knew that he and his comrades had surrendered and that, as the first signatory on the Proclamation of Independence, Tom would be among the first to be executed. She was right: Tom Clarke was shot dead by a firing squad on Wednesday, 3 May, and Kathleen's brother, Ned Daly, was shot on Thursday, 4 May. Shortly afterwards, Kathleen lost the baby she had been expecting.

Demonstrating what Constance Markievicz later called 'a hero's soul',

Kathleen focussed determinedly on the work that had been assigned to her by her husband. By the end of the first week following the executions, she had established the Irish Volunteers' Dependants' Fund, which financially supported families of dead and imprisoned Volunteers.

In 1917 Kathleen was elected to the Sinn Féin executive under Eamon de Valera. In 1918, after two years of being continually watched and followed by 'G-men', she was arrested as part of a round-up of Sinn Féin activists and jailed in Holloway Women's Prison, north London. Sharing her imprisonment were Countess Constance Markievicz and Madame Maud Gonne MacBride.

Kathleen's attitude to the two aristocratic revolutionaries was mixed. Something of an inverted snob, she did not care for their backgrounds. They came from the 'English element', as she called it, while she felt herself to be 'purely Irish'. In addition, 'little Mrs Clarke' found herself being patronised relentlessly by the ladies who had a much higher profile than she. Maud Gonne was released early, but Kathleen and the Countess continued a combustible inmate relationship; the tactless Constance seemed to forget the role Kathleen had played and how heavy her losses had been. Despite their constant bickering, however, the two revolutionaries remained close, and after their release in early 1919, Kathleen provided the homeless Countess with somewhere to live.

The bloody years of 1919–1921 saw the War of Independence raging uncontrollably. Martial law was declared, there were curfews across the country, mercenaries known as Black and Tans were shipped in to intimidate the populace, and republicans were on the run. The Black and Tans (named for the colour of their uniform) were untrained, undisciplined and deeply unpopular, and did much to turn public opinion in favour of the rebels. Kathleen herself was kept under surveillance by detectives, and her house and her mother's house in Limerick were continually raided by the army. Things took a turn for the worse in 1920 when the army demolished

Kathleen's mother's house, burnt the contents and beat up her mother and sisters who were living there. Despite this continual harassment, Kathleen remained politically active, attending Sinn Féin meetings and sheltering rebels. During the War of Independence, the republicans set up judicial courts to supplant those run by the British administration. Kathleen became chairperson of the north Dublin judiciary, and then president of the Court of Conscience and the Children's Court.

In July 1921 a truce was called. Five months later, Michael Collins and his five colleagues signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which partitioned Ireland, and by early the following year civil war was raging between anti- and pro-Treaty factions. Kathleen was a hard-line republican and vociferously anti-Treaty; she believed that acceptance of it betrayed the ideals for which her husband, brother and others had died. She continued to be harassed by the military – but this time the military were her own countrymen in the Irish Free State Army.

In 1926 Kathleen joined Eamon de Valera when he broke away from Sinn Féin and formed the Fianna Fáil party. Ideologically she also moved from the military to the political, reasoning that the people had had enough of war and that changing policy was acceptable so long as the objective remained the same. But the election in September 1927 saw her defeated by a Cumann na nGaedheal candidate in north Dublin, thus ending her brief career as a TD.

Instead, Kathleen was nominated a member of the Senate, where she served until its abolition in 1936. It was her only paid job in politics. Throughout the 1930s she became less and less enamoured of Fianna Fáil, even though she remained a member of its executive. She was publicly critical of many of the party's policies – particularly of the 1937 Constitution and its treatment of women, which she and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington loudly condemned.

In 1939 Kathleen was still a member of the Fianna Fáil executive and a

Fianna Fáil member of Dublin Corporation. In June of that year her name was put forward to stand as lord mayor of Dublin, and she was won the majority vote: she was the first woman to be elected to the office. Her first action was reminiscent of her Uncle John's priorities as mayor of Limerick forty years previously: out went the many portraits of British royalty, including an enormous one of Queen Victoria herself; out too went other 'colonial trappings', such as the previous lord mayor's English-made chain of office, which she replaced with an Irish-made chain; in came the Clarke family crest, which featured the first motto in Irish to be seen in the Mansion House. Kathleen was the incumbent during the beginning of World War II and supported Irish neutrality. She did not support IRA bombing in England during wartime, but opposed the imprisonment of IRA members by de Valera's government. When her term as mayor was up in 1941, she resigned from public life. She resigned from Fianna Fáil in disaffection in 1943.

Kathleen spent the 1940s on the boards of various hospitals and maintaining the graves of the nationalist dead. She tried unsuccessfully to stand for election to the Dáil in 1948. In 1965 she moved to Liverpool to live with her youngest son, Emmet, and in 1966 she received an honorary doctorate from the National University of Ireland. Although she suffered ill health all her life, Kathleen Clarke lived to the age of ninety-four. She was given a State funeral in Dublin and is buried at Dean's Grange cemetery, Dublin.





*Mary MacSwiney,*  
1872-1942



*Kathleen Clarke,*  
1878-1972