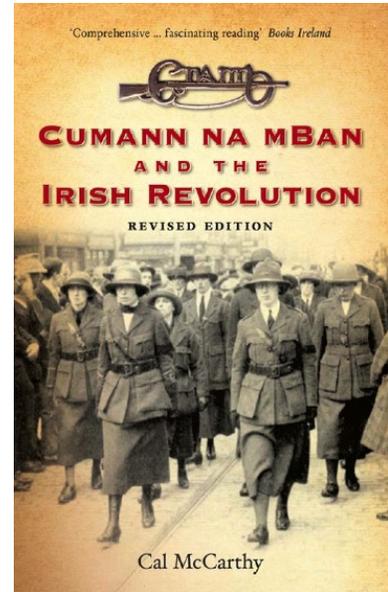


**REVISED EDITION  
NOW AVAILABLE**

## **CUMANN NA MBAN AND THE IRISH REVOLUTION**

**Cal McCarthy**

Cumann na mBan, a women's support group to the Irish Volunteers, was formed in 1914. Historian Cal McCarthy expands our understanding of the organisation and dispels many of the myths that surrounded Cumann na mBan in the first study to move Cumann na mBan from the traditional sphere of women's history to their place in Irish nationalist history. This revised edition is published to coincide with the 2014 centenary of the foundation of Cumann na mBan and uses new source material to complement and update the original research.



Nationalist in outlook, the aims of Cumann na mBan centred on arming Irish men, generating propaganda and presenting a united Irish opposition to English rule. Members included such high-profile figures as Countess Markievicz and the MacSwiney sisters. After participation in the 1916 Rising, members played crucial roles in intelligence work, transporting arms, nursing wounded men, providing safe houses, and supporting IRA men in prison. They also boosted attendance at republican election rallies, funerals and protest marches.

In 1922 the leadership overwhelmingly rejected the Treaty, causing a split and the formation of Cumann na Saoirse (Free State Cumann na mBan). The Free State government's awareness of Cumann na mBan's assistance to the IRA resulted in widespread imprisonment of Republican women during the Civil War. The Free State victory effectively ended the organisation's influence.

But, for a time at least, Cumann na mBan had placed equality for women on the political agenda and demonstrated women could be as politically active and capable as men.

**Cal McCarthy** from Cork studied history and economics at University College Cork before going on to work as a civil servant. During a career break he completed his MPhil thesis on the 1918 election. He currently works with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. His previous books include *Green, Blue & Grey – The Irish in the American Civil War* (2009) and *The Wreck of the Neva* (2013).

***Cumann na mBan and the Irish Revolution*** by Cal McCarthy is published by The Collins Press, price €12.99. It is available in all good bookshops and online from [www.collinspress.ie](http://www.collinspress.ie).

978-1-84889-2224 • €12.99/£10.99 • Paperback & eBook • 198 x 128 mm • 320 pp

For further information, photographs, images or interviews with the author please contact:  
Gillian Hennessy: Tel: 021-4347717 / e-mail: [gillian@collinspress.ie](mailto:gillian@collinspress.ie)  
Con Collins: Mob: 087-2513922 / e-mail: [con.collins@collinspress.ie](mailto:con.collins@collinspress.ie)

## Notes for the Editor

The **first informal meetings** to discuss the formation of Cumann na mBan took place in the Queen's Theatre on Brunswick Street (now Pearse Street).

The **inaugural meeting** of the group was in Wynn's Hotel on Thursday 2 April 1914 but was not well advertised. The attendance (about 100 ladies) was tiny in comparison to that of the Irish Volunteers' first meeting (about 5,000 men).

Cumann na mBan literally translates as '**council of women**' but the organisation itself tended to translate it as 'Irishwomen's Council'.

Cumann na mBan walked that middle ground between **radical feminism and traditional concepts of the female role**. They also tried to find a balance between feminism and politics. The *Irish Citizen* reported on an outburst by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington at one meeting, stating 'the unwomanly in the audience smiled to themselves and thought deep thoughts on the nature of men who cannot buy a rifle unless a woman collects the money'.

Sinn Féin was the **first party to admit women** into their ranks on a similar basis to men.

**Inghinidhe na nÉireann** were incorporated into Cumann na mBan on 23 May 1914. One of their founders was Maud Gonne, the love interest of W. B. Yeats.

Cumann na mBan had to work hard to hold **diverse shades of Irish separatism** together.

The Ladies' Land League, formed in 1881, was the **first mass women's group** in Ireland.

**New material** includes departmental records related to Military Service Pension applications. This material helps to adjust the Dublin bias contained in the Bureau of Military History's Witness Statements, and builds a more multi-regional profile of the organisation.

**Witness Statements** include more from the leaders than from the rank and file, and more from Dublin regions than provincial areas.

### Important names in Cumann na mBan included:

- **Jennie Wyse Power** was a veteran of the Ladies' Land League, the Irish Women's Franchise League and Inghinidhe na hÉireann.
- **Hanna Sheehy Skeffington**: Hanna Sheehy and her husband Francis Skeffington took the unusual step of combining their surnames and became known as the Sheehy Skeffingtons.
- **Mary MacSwiney** was a committed suffragist whose brother Terence was Lord Mayor of Cork and died on hunger strike in Brixton Prison.
- **Constance Markievicz** was a committed feminist and a radical nationalist who concentrated more of her energies on the Irish Citizen Army.
- **Louise Gavan Duffy** was a noted Irish scholar who had been one of the first women to graduate from University College Dublin (UCD) in 1911.
- **Agnes MacNeill** was the wife of the Volunteer leader Eoin MacNeill.
- **Mary Colum** was a teacher in Padraig Pearse's St Enda's school and was married to the poet and Irish Volunteer Pádraic Colum.
- **Nancy O'Rahilly** was the wife of the famous Fenian Michael O'Rahilly.

For further information, photographs, images or interviews with the author please contact:

Gillian Hennessy: Tel: 021-4347717 / e-mail: [gillian@collinspress.ie](mailto:gillian@collinspress.ie)  
Con Collins: Mob: 087-2513922 / e-mail: [con.collins@collinspress.ie](mailto:con.collins@collinspress.ie)