



Kathleen Lynn and Madeline French Mullen with St. Ullan's Hospital patients, c.1920. Photo: Courtesy of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

New book on Mayo revolutionary, social campaigner and medical doctor



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A NEW book that explores the life of Irish politician, suffrage activist, revolutionary, social campaigner and medical doctor Dr. Kathleen Lynn will be published by UCD Press this month.

Dr. Lynn (1874-1955) was born in Mullafarry, near Killala. The book, introduced and edited by Dr. Mary McAuliffe and Harriet Wheelock, explores her remarkable life.

Through a careful selection of excerpts from Lynn's extensive personal diaries, which commence in 1916 and continue almost daily until her death in 1955, *The Diaries of Kathleen Lynn: A Life Revealed through Personal Writing* provides an extraordinarily close insight into Lynn's social, private and political life, and her relationship with many of the key political figures of Ireland in the first half of the 20th century.

A committed revolutionary, Lynn meticulously recorded her involvement in the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War. Like her distant cousin Countess Markievicz, Lynn fought with the Irish Citizen Army in 1916, and, as its chief medical officer, was one of the few women officers in the ICA. Having been elected vice-president of Sinn Féin in 1917, Lynn also played a prominent role in the War of Independence and the Civil War, and she became one of the anti-treaty women elected to the Dáil in 1923.

Apart from her political activities, Lynn's diaries also cover her work as a medical doctor, including the 1918-19 Spanish Flu pandemic, the establishment of St. Ultan's Hospital for Infants in 1919, and the fight against tuberculosis (TB) in Ireland. Working with her St. Ultan's colleagues, including Dr Dorothy Stopford Price, Lynn fostered international research into TB eradication and, in 1937, St. Ultan's became the first hospital in Europe to implement an inoculation scheme, which prevented TB.

The diaries also demonstrate her commitment to better housing and education for all, particularly those caught in the vicious cycle of poverty in the Dublin slums. Her interest in child-centred education, which led her to invite Maria Montessori to Ireland in 1930, is also well documented in her diaries.

Commenting on the new publication, Dr. McAuliffe said: "Kathleen Lynn's diaries demonstrate the revolutionary, socialist and feminist fervour of the pre-1922 radical women, what motivated them and the work they did for women, workers and Ireland.

"The diaries are also revealing of the difficult roads these radical political women had to travel in the new Free State, which viewed women through the constraining lens of marriage, motherhood and domesticity. Women like Lynn were regarded and

often treated as threats to the establishment, and the diaries reveal the supportive networks built between political women, who worked together for social and political change long after the revolution was over.”

Dr. McAuliffe said that while Lynn’s name is well known, the fullness of her life of continuous activism, including her battles with the Catholic hierarchy over women’s healthcare, her contributions to women workers’ rights and equality, and her lifelong relationship with fellow suffragist, revolutionary and social campaigner, Madeline ffrench-Mullen is mostly ignored or forgotten.

Co-editor Harriet Wheelock added: “Few political women of the revolutionary period and the Free State have left behind as substantial an archive as Kathleen Lynn. Our motivation behind this book was to make her diaries more widely accessible. Past archival practices have, in many cases, marginalised or silenced the voices of women and, in a previously male dominated profession, women’s archives were often considered of less value, or only of relevance to domestic issues. This view has obscured the role and important contributions of many women in the social, political and - in Lynn’s case - medical worlds.”

Published by UCD Press, *The Diaries of Kathleen Lynn: A Life Revealed through Personal Writing* will be available nationwide from October 30.

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[Back to top](#) ↑

