

Commemorating the 1916 Easter Rising - A case study of Margaret Skinnider's contributions.

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I have not yet completed my project; interviews, further analysis and more reading about theories of commemoration are necessary.

However, I intend to publish an extensive work which will dispel some of the myths about women like Margaret Skinnider; I will provide in-depth analysis of her contribution to the fighting that took place in 1916; her interactions with both the para-military and bohemian circles which drove the Rising; and a summary of her subsequent contributions to Irish history.

This analysis will be compared and contrasted with the commemorative material available concerning Margaret from previous 1916 celebrations.

The 1916 Easter Rising was the first in a series of events which catalysed the establishment of an independent Irish Republic. Among the thousands of rebels who fought were many women, who perhaps have not received enough credit for their sacrifices.

Margaret Skinnider was an incredibly interesting figure, who provided us with much of the information we have today about the Easter Rising of 1916. She donated her correspondence, gave interviews and wrote memoirs. I read and studied these memoirs and correspondence when I traveled to Dublin this summer for research purposes.

I compared and contrasted Margaret's reports of events with the official ones published by the Irish Government; her influence was immediately apparent, but my reading led me to further investigate why she felt she had been done an injustice by the state.

I found three main causes for her complaints:

- 1) The overall vilification of the 1916 Easter Rising rebels - initially, the rebellion did not receive a positive response. Even when people's sympathies shifted, Margaret received very little credit for her contributions (which included leading sniper action against the British Army). The 'cult of hero worship' did not extend to her, and was limited mainly to the men who had been executed.
- 2) Margaret did not receive a government pension as the other members of the Rising and their families had.
- 3) As a radical feminist, a republic which was not 'for all' had never been part of her vision. In her writing, she expressed disappointment in the result of the long struggle for independence.



Madam asked me to write this all down. Later she showed what I had written to the man who was to be Commander-in-chief of the Republican army in Dublin, James Connolly. He knew Beggar's Bush barracks well enough to see that my map was correct and believed the plan practicable enough to carry out in case conscription should become a fact in Ireland

The process involved in receiving approval to conduct interviews is fairly long and complex. There are many components and forms involved in it. In order to conduct interviews, recruitment sheets, participant information sheets, consent forms, question lists/guidelines and an ethics form are required. The people at CUREC (central university research ethics committee) are very helpful and accommodating, and the guidelines are very clear. I look forward to conducting interviews with some of the leading historians which took part in the 2016 commemorative committee later this year.

Archival research required a lot of time and effort as well as preparation, but it was very rewarding. A lot of preparatory reading was necessary to understand the archives which I analysed. I found the correspondence between Margaret Skinnider and another rebel, Countess Markievicz. It revealed a lot about the tensions between the leaders of the Rising and the logistics of battle strategies. The Countess was so impressed with Margaret's descriptive skills that she asked her to write reports from battle. These have been used time and time again by historians in attempts to piece together what happened over the course of the Rising.



It is important to consider that Margaret Skinnider had a very complex relationship with the Irish state; suspicion of her was fueled by rumors that she was an anarchist, and unfounded claims about her lifestyle. Recent commemorations of the Rising have given women more credit and showed their contributions in a more positive light, but there is still a lot of work to be done; the commemoration of women tends to be placed in the same category as the commemoration of children and civilians; women still are not being recognised as the military figures they were in the Rising, and this should be remedied.



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