

ADA ENGLISH: PATRIOT AND PSYCHIATRIST. By Brendan Kelly. Pp 192. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. 2014. €45 hardback; €22.45 paperback.

Brendan Kelly's *Ada English: Patriot and Psychiatrist* is a fitting example of how a biography can surpass the basic role of recounting a life story. This book provides a valuable contribution towards an evolving area of scholarship. Biographical accounts have become a central medium in the recovery and writing of Irish women's history. Ada English is an important and yet, to date, vastly overlooked character. Born in 1875 in Mullingar, English dedicated her life to social and political reform in Ireland until her death in 1944. Kelly describes her as a 'pioneering Irish psychiatrist who was deeply involved in Irish medicine and politics during an especially tumultuous period in Ireland's history.' English was in fact a significant player during the tumultuous period of the early twentieth century. She was actively involved with the Gaelic League, Cumann na mBan and Sinn Féin. English rose through the ranks to become president of a local Cumann na mBan in Galway. During the War of Independence she was arrested and imprisoned in Galway Jail for her activities. She was sentenced to nine months without hard labour for being in possession of documents relating to Cumann na mBan. At her trial, English stood defiantly and declared that the court had no right to try her as they 'were in the pay of the enemy.'

When the Second Dáil convened in August 1921, English was elected for the National University of Ireland constituency, she took her seat unopposed. Months later the Anglo-Irish Treaty was put to the Dáil and English strongly opposed it, a stance that she would maintain throughout her life. English made stirring speeches in the Dáil during the Treaty debates and she, along with the five other female TDs, wore mourning black. It is particularly apt that Kelly has published this book during the decade of centenaries, ensuring that English finds a

deserved place in the remembrance of events which led to the creation of the Irish Free State. This is an indispensable biography from this perspective.

However, this book goes further than adding to our awareness of women's activities during the Irish revolutionary years. Kelly also provides a fascinating account of the history of women in education from secondary school through to university, with a particular focus on the study of medicine. English studied at the Catholic University Medical School, which later became UCD's Medical Faculty. She went on to work at the Mater Misericordiae, Richmond Asylum and Temple Street, before taking up the post of assistant medical superintendent at Connaught District Lunatic Asylum in Ballinasloe. English served in Ballinasloe until her retirement, which was less than two years before her death. English's career is further traced in a dedicated chapter alongside accounts of her female contemporaries including Kathleen Lynn, Dorothy Price, Brigid Lyons Thornthorn and Eleanora Fleury. This is an engaging chapter and one that will be of particular interest to scholars of medical history.

The history of medicine is perhaps one of the most vital aspects of this book. Kelly has a unique background; he possesses a PhD in history and is a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry. This background ensures that the author provides a revealing history of psychiatry while examining English's career in Ballinasloe. This includes the modernisation of lunatic asylums in Ireland as well as medical developments such as the use of electroconvulsive therapy and the introduction of occupational therapy. English was dedicated to the improvement of the psychiatric system in Ireland and was devoted to her patients. At her own request, when English died in 1944 she was buried in Creagh Cemetery beside the Ballinsloe Hospital where she had worked for so many years. English died without recording her own experiences. She did not leave behind diaries or even a body of letters which a historian could draw from. There is no witness statement from English amongst the resources of the Bureau

of Military History; English died before the State began gathering such information in 1947.

It is a credit to Brendan Kelly that he has exhausted the records of organisations, the personal papers of others, as well as newspaper accounts and State papers to reconstruct such an engaging and important life history of Ada English, a woman who may have remained overlooked and would surely have been forgotten by the next generation.

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