**FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF MARGARET SKINNIDER’S**

**DEATH**

**COMMEMORATIVE EVENT AT CORNAGILTA**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESSES BY DEIRDRE O’CONNOR (INTO) AND STEPHEN COYLE Scottish Historian and Author**

**EVENT ATTENDED BY INTO OFFICERS**

**On Sunday 24th October a wreath-laying ceremony at the Margaret Skinnider monument in Cornagilta, Scotstown, marking the fiftieth anniversary of Margaret Skinnider’s death (10th October 1971), preceded formal addresses from Deirdre O’Connor, Deputy General Secretary and Treasurer INTO and Stephen Coyle, Scottish historian and author. The attendance included Seamus Grundy Chairman and Niamh Harris Secretary Monaghan Branch INTO. At the commencement of proceedings Josephine O’Hagan, Chairperson of the Margaret Skinnider Appreciation Society (MSAS) welcomed everybody for coming. It was an opportune time for such an event to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Margaret Skinnider, who made such a contribution to Irish life, and whose father came from Cornagilta. In acknowledgement of Ms Skininder’s life-work a wreath was laid by guest speakers Deirdre O’Connor and Stephen Coyle at the recently-erected monument.**

In expressing her pleasure at being invited to the event, Deirdre O’Connor spoke of her admiration of Margaret Skinnider. Skinnider was a role model for her commitment to education and trade unionism and particularly as an INTO activist. Founded in 1868 the Irish National Teachers Organisation was the oldest and largest teachers’ trade union in Ireland and represents teachers on an all island basis. Ms O’Connor cited the excellence of historian Niamh Purcell’s history of the INTO, *Kindling the Flame* and referred to Purcell’s 2016 Vere Foster lecture on Margaret Skinnider’s life and achievements.

Born, raised and trained as a teacher in Scotland, Margaret’s earliest activism took root in her association with the British militant Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) and after settling in Ireland from 1919 onwards she worked for the Transport and General Workers’ Union and for the Workers’ Union of Ireland. She joined the INTO in 1928, having been appointed as a teacher in the Sisters of Charity primary school in Kings Inn Street in Dublin’s inner city. Hers was a powerful voice when the INTO went on strike in 1946 over long-held grievances on pay and pension matters, and she was a member of the Strike Administration Committee.

Skinnider was elected to the Central Executive Committee of the union in 1949 and was an INTO representative on the Roe Commission established that year to review teachers’ salaries. One of the recommendations of the Commission was that women teacher’s pay would be the same as that of single men and in this we can see the staunchly- held stance of Margaret Skinnider for the women’s’ cause of equality. Among her many concerns were equal pay for men and women, the condition of school buildings, class sizes, children with special needs and the marriage ban on women from holding state-salaried jobs. She was elected unopposed as President of the INTO in 1956, represented the teachers of Ireland at a world conference in Manila (the Philippines) and in 1960 was elected Chairperson of the ICTU Women’s’ Advisory Committee in recognition of her lifetime of activism in the trade union movement.

In conclusion Ms O’Connor warmly thanked the MSAS committee for inviting her to speak at Cornagilta, a place which was dear to Margaret Skinnider’s heart. It was her hope that many more teachers from far and near would visit the ancestral birthplace of one who had given so much to the causes which she had served.

Stephen Coyle, a Glaswegian of Donegal and Fermanagh parentage gave a detailed account of the early life and background of Margaret Skinnider. Her father, James, came to Scotland in the mid 1870s and his trade was that of stone-mason. He married Jane Doud in 1880 and they lived in Coatbridge, which at that time was about ten miles from Glasgow. Margaret, the second youngest of seven children was born in Coatbridge in 1892. At a later stage her father sustained a serious injury to his leg at a workplace and the family moved to Glasgow where he began a thriving and successful second-hand-clothes business. Because of his improved circumstances they were now living quite comfortably and Margaret succeeded at the teachers’ training college at Craiglockart where she majored in mathematics. Glasgow was a seed-bed of socialism in the early years of the 20th Century and militant politics was reflected in the various teachers unions. By this time Conradh na Gaeilge- The Gaelic League- was strong in the city and Margaret Skinnider was in the Anne Devlin branch of Conradh. Fianna Éireann, founded by Countess Markievicz and Bulmer Hobson in 1909 was, within a couple of years, going strong in Glasgow and the newly qualified teacher, Margaret Skinnider was now a keen student of the Irish language, a supporter of the suffragette movement fighting to improve the lot of women and a member of a rifle club. Rifle clubs were formed so that the women-folk could help in defending the British Empire.

Countess Markievicz, on a visit to Glasgow, heard about the young militant and soon Margaret Skinnider was enlisted with others to find materials of war-explosives and detonators- for use in future action in Ireland. On Markievicz’s invitation Skinnider came to Dublin during the Christmas school-holidays of 1915 and, by successfully doing an outline survey of Beggars’ Bush military barracks within a matter of minutes, she got an early introduction to James Connolly and was accepted into the Citizen Army. Margaret Skinnider served under Michael in St Stephen’s Green and the College of Surgeons during Easter Week 1916. She was wounded in action, receiving three bullets in her back and spent seven weeks in hospital before returning to Scotland to recuperate.

Mr Coyle then related how Skinnider and Nora Connolly daughter of James went to America fund-raising for the dependents of the volunteers killed during Easter Week and for the families of those imprisoned because of the Rising. It was while she was in America that she wrote her autobiography *Doing My Bit for Ireland* to boost the fund-raising. While she was in America her father died. By 1919 Margaret was back again in Ireland, joined the Fairview Branch (Dublin) of Cumann na mBan and later was director of training for the whole organisation. In October 1921 her mother, Jane, was a passenger on the *SS Rowan* sailing from Glasgow to Dublin when they collided with the *SS Camack* in fog. Another ship the *SS Clan Malcolm* responded to the distressed call for help but, in the dark, it too collided with the *SS Rowan* which sank within minutes with the loss of many lives and Jane Skinnider.

During the civil war Margaret Skinnider took the anti-treaty side and was imprisoned in Mountjoy Gaol and later The North Dublin Union. After the civil war she quickly settled into civilian life but did not return to Glasgow.

In conclusion Coyle said that we haven’t much information on Margaret Skinnider in the intervening years between 1923 and 1928. However, her career after 1928 was well documented because of her role in the INTO. He was taking this opportunity to congratulate MSAS for all their dedication over seven years and he particularly thanked Patsy Brady, Pat (Phat) McKenna and Anthony Watterson for visiting the Skinnider family plot in St Kentigern’s Cemetery in Glasgow in 2015. He thanked the MSAS committee for having the Scottish flag as well as the Irish Tricolour flanking the monument. Nor could he let the occasion pass without mentioning the name of James McCarra from Augherakalton, in the parish of Tydavnet, who distinguished himself in action in County Galway in 1916 and later in Glasgow in 1921. He had visited McCarra’s grave in Urbleshanny earlier that morning. Stephen was delighted to meet his friend of long standing Pádraig Ó Baoighill from Rann na Feirsde and Monaghan Town. They had many happy days over the years while Pádraig was in Scotland on research for his books *Ceann Tíre/ Earragháidheal: Ár gCómharsanaigh Ghaelacha, Filí Náisiúnta na hAlban: Robbie Burns-An Nasc le hÉireann,* agus *Conradh na Gaeilge in Albain agus Aistí Albanacha Eile.*

Chairperson Josephine O’Hagan thanked everybody who had made the event such a memorable one. She thanked Patrick and Mary Rafferty who willingly donated the site for the monument and commended Pat McKenna on his outstanding craftsmanship in its construction. She thanked the committee of the Cornagilta Old School Heritage Centre for facilitating the serving of refreshments (prepared by Mary Rafferty) after the formalities. Secretary of the Heritage Centre Committee, Marian McQuillan, had made herself available at the centre on Saturday and manned the venue from 11.30 am on Sunday, lighting fires and having the place in pristine order for after-speech visitors. She would like also to thank Fergal and Theresa Brady for making available their extensive premises for parking beside the centre. She paid tribute to John and Margaret Treanor from Crockcor for the marvellous night’s welcome and entertainment which they hosted on the previous night in their *Teachín Bán*. It was no surprise to her that the *Teachín Bán,* furnished with the traditional hearth, floor furniture and dresser, should be such a favourite with visitors from home and abroad. Josephine then presided over the following presentations:

A bouquet of local flora presented by Angela O’Hagan Sec. MSAS to Deirdre O’Connor:

A framed photograph of James McCarra (memorial card) presented by Patsy Brady to Stephen Coyle;

Copies of *Margaret Skinnider 1916 Heroine- The Monaghan Connection* to Deirdre O’Connor, Seamus Grundy and Niamh Harris

An inscribed silver dish (6 inch diameter) presented by Stephen Coyle, on behalf of the Easter Rising 1916 Centenary Committee (Scotland) to Pat McKenna for placing a stone from the original Skinnider house on the Skinnider plot in St Kentigern’s Cemetery. Pat had chiselled a cruciform design on the stone.

At the conclusion of formal proceedings and before refreshments local teacher and Cornagilta native, Sonya Hackett played our national anthem on bagpipes .

Footnote: Three members of the MSAS committee, Pat McKenna, Anthony Watterson and Patsy Brady laid a wreath on the grave of Margaret Skinnider in Glasnevin Cemetery on 10th of October. All wreaths and the floral bouquet were supplied by local botanist/florist Michelle McQuillan-Treanor.