

Mayo

They lived at Creagh Villa following the family's move to Castlebar during 1900 as the town was the H. Q. for the Congested District Board until its dissolution. She witnessed the extremely rural poverty throughout the county of Mayo while she travelled with her father as he explained the attempts of the CDB to develop crafts for communities. In Mayo Muriel Gahan had an idyllic childhood for ten years. [\[v\]](#)

Her father Townsend Gahan worked for The Congested District Board . It was a body set up to improve the conditions of people in the poorest areas in the West of Ireland. (*Brian Hoban*) [\[vi\]](#)

During the autumn of 1900 the family moved to Castlebar to a residence at Creagh Villa. Shortly after moving to Creagh Villa Townsend Gahan established croquet also tennis courts. Muriel Gahan enjoyed an idyllic childhood in Castlebar with children's parties and concerts being the norm for the upper middle class in the town. In 1919 her brother Mac developed meningitis but unfortunately died. It was decided that Muriel & her mother would return to Castlebar. They moved to Maryland House (*situated between Castlebar Railway Station & the Military Aerodrome*). Maryland House was a seven bedroomed house situated on grounds of twenty - eight acres. The family were at the centre of social life in Castlebar with frequent dances & in the big hall at Maryland.[\[vii\]](#)

The family moved to Castlebar in County Mayo during 1919. Travelling around Mayo with her father for his work gave Muriel Gahan an insight into the depths of the poverty that existed in western rural communities. [\[viii\]](#)

Friends

Her family were friendly with Canon J. O Hannay (*alias George A. Birmingham*) in Westport. They participated in cycling trips to Croagh Patrick or to join the Blossie-Lynch family for tennis at their Partry home. (*Hoban*) [\[ix\]](#)

Education

Muriel Gahan's attended St. Winifred's school during 1910 in Bangor, north Wales at the age of thirteen. She returned for further studies in Alexandra College in Dublin, (*where she encountered her lifelong friend / collaborator Olivia Cruikshank Hughes.*) She remarked later that it was '*The Alexandra*' that provided her education. '*They taught us to be leaders*' as she added a mischievous smile; '*leaders of what, I'm not quite sure.*' [\[x\]](#)

During 1910 Muriel Gahan was sent to St. Winifred's School for girls in Bangor north Wales. [\[xi\]](#)

Muriel Gahan was educated at home under the care of a governess as a young child. She later attended a girls' school St Winifred's in Llanfairfechan, Wales. She returned to Ireland during 1914 for two years to attend Alexandra College. Whilst there she met her lifelong friend & collaborator Olivia Cruikshank. [\[xii\]](#)

Sports

Her sports choice was field hockey, she played for Maid of the Mountains team. During 1926, she embarked on a career as a painter / decorator with an all - female firm The Modern Decorator during 1927. [\[xiii\]](#)

Civil War

The Gahan family did not experience any trouble at all during the Civil War due to the goodwill that existed with Townsend Gahan. Also the great work that he had voluntary for the people over the years. [\[xiv\]](#)

Dublin

Following the dissolution of the Congested District Board, Townsend Gahan continued with his employment with the Land Commission. He worked up to the time of his retirement during 1926. The family sold the contents of Maryland then moved back to Dublin. (*Brian Hoban*) [\[xv\]](#)

When her father retired during 1926 Muriel Gahan returned to Dublin. [\[xvi\]](#)

Employment

In 1927 Muriel Gahan began her career as a painter & decorator with an all-female firm The Modern Decorator (.) [\[xvii\]](#)

Through her work Muriel Gahan first came into contact with the United Irishwomen (*a group Founded in 1910*) that she joined during 1929 when her friend Hughes invited her to paint the Group's stand for the Royal Dublin Society (*RDS*) spring show. Muriel Gahan left her position during 1930. [\[xviii\]](#)

Rural Crafts

During 1929 Muriel Gahan joined the United Irishwomen. (*The name changed during 1935 meant the organization became known as Irish Countrywomen's Association*) Her decision to retire from her job during 1930 enabled her to pursue a new direction. She searched in Mayo for a weaver to demonstrate the weaving of homespun tweed for the 1930 Spring Show that resulted in the eventual discovery of Patrick Madden of Belmullet in North Mayo. She opened a shop with other members of United Irishwomen in Dublin that was called The Country Shop on St. Stephen's Green. Her intention to provide employment to isolated rural craft workers & proper prices for their crafts. [\[xix\]](#)

Muriel Gahan devoted her life to the preservation of rural crafts for the betterment of the life of women in rural Ireland. She travelled around Ireland visiting rural craftspeople. She adopted the motto '*Deeds not Words*' also it was the motto of the Society of United Irishwomen of which she was a member. (*Hoban*) [\[xx\]](#)

With several other United Irishwomen a sales depot was opened in Dublin called The Country Shop on Stephen's Green. This assisted the work of isolated rural craft workers who were unable to achieve proper prices for their work. [\[xxi\]](#)

Commission

During 1932 Muriel Gahan commissioned the first Aran jumper. [\[xxii\]](#)

Vawn Corrigan credited Muriel Gahan with the introduction of the adult Aran jumper (*as we know it today*) when she commissioned the first one during 1932. [\[xxiii\]](#)

Society

During 1933 Muriel Gahan launched the Irish Homespun Society as an effort to preserve the Country's traditions. Several Exhibitions were held during the annual Dublin Spring Show. [\[xxiv\]](#)

In 1935 she launched the [Irish Homespun Society](#) in an effort to preserve some of the country's traditions, and was elected chair of the group in 1941. [\[xxv\]](#)

I C A

Muriel Gahan was the driving force behind the Irish Country Markets Limited; a cooperative society that marketed crafts and produce during 1946. She acted as chairwomen until 1975. [\[xxvi\]](#)

Her achievements included her major role in forming The Irish Countrywomen's Association also the Country Markets. (*Hoban*) [\[xxvii\]](#)

During 1935 the United Irishwomen changed their name to the Irish Countrywomen's Association (*ICA*). Through the ICA Muriel Gahan met Lucy Franks, Mainie Jellett also Vida Lentaigne. She served on its industries, art, also general purposes committee during 1948. She was heavily involved in Irish Country Markets Ltd. from 1946 that a cooperative Society to market crafts & produce. [\[xxviii\]](#)

Arts Council

Muriel Gahan was a founding member of the Arts Council in 1951. As a member of the RDS from 1946; she served on its Industries, arts also general purposes committees during 1948. She was appointed to the Council of the Arts & Crafts Society of Ireland also the National Savings Committee during 1956. [\[xxix\]](#)

Muriel Gahan was one of the a founding members of The Arts Council during 1951. [\[xxx\]](#)

Exhibitions

Exhibitions were held at the annual Dublin Spring Show in the RDS. She was a member of the RDS from 1946. [\[xxxi\]](#)

Honorary Positions

She was chairwoman of the Country Markets Ltd. until 1975. [\[xxxii\]](#)

She was elected the first female vice-president of the RDS during 1976. [\[xxxiii\]](#)

She became the first female vice - president of the RDS in 1976. Muriel Gahan acted as chairwomen of the ICA until 1975. She was awarded an honorary life membership of the ICA in recognition of her work. [\[xxxiv\]](#)

Awards

During 1974 Muriel Gahan received the Allied Irish Banks Community Development Award. In 1984 she received the Plunkett Award for Cooperative Endeavour. [\[xxxv\]](#)

An Grianán

She was instrumental in the ICA's secured funding from Kellogg Foundation of America for the residential training college at Termonfeckin, Co. Louth that opened during 1954. [\[xxxvi\]](#)

An Grianán College opened during 1954. Muriel Gahan was central to the ICA's securing funds from the Kellogg Foundation of America for An Grianán (*a residential Training College at Termonfeckin, County Louth.*) [\[xxxvii\]](#)

Museum of Irish History

On 7th April 2011 the Muriel Gahan Museum of Irish History was opened at An Grianán. The museum houses several items of Irish history, craft & culture. The ICA President Anne Marie Denninson declared *'We are delighted to open the Muriel Gahan Museum here at An Grianán. Muriel was instrumental in the development of the ICA & we're pleased to honour her with this collection on the occasion of the opening of the Muriel Gahan Museum. We are proud to say that the ICA still lives by her motto: 'Deeds not Words.'* [\[xxxviii\]](#)

On 7th April 2011 The Muriel Gahan Museum of Irish History was opened at An Grianán. The museum is now home to numerous items of Irish history, craft & culture. [\[xxxix\]](#)

Honorary Doctorate

Muriel Gahan received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Dublin during 1978. [\[xli\]](#)

Muriel Gahan received an Honorary Doctorate from Trinity College. Dublin. (*Hoban*) [\[xlii\]](#)

During 1978 Muriel Gahan was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Trinity College Dublin. [\[xliii\]](#)

Retirement

Muriel Gahan retired from the ICA during 1992. She then lived in Shankill, Dublin. Later she moved into St Mary's Nursing Home, Ballsbridge. [\[xliv\]](#)

Demise

Muriel Gahan's demise occurred during 1995. [\[xlv\]](#)

Muriel Gahan's demise occurred at St Mary's Nursing Home Ballsbridge on 12th July 1995. [\[xlvi\]](#)

Footnotes

[\[v\]](#) A Women of Craft and Creativity (<https://www.irishtimes.com/>) [Assessed 17th July 2019]

[\[vi\]](#) Muriel Gahan (<https://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/castlebar/history/muriel-gahan.html>) [Assessed 10th January 2022]

[\[vii\]](#) Ibid.

[\[viii\]](#) Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[\[ix\]](#) Muriel Gahan (<https://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/castlebar/history/muriel-gahan.html>) [Assessed 10th January 2022]

[\[x\]](#) A Women of Craft and Creativity (<https://www.irishtimes.com/>) [Assessed 17th July 2019]

[\[xi\]](#) Ibid.

[xii] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xiii] Ibid.

[xiv] Muriel Gahan (<https://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/castlebar/history/muriel-gahan.html>) [Assessed 10th January 2022]

[xv] Ibid.

[xvi] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xvii] Ibid.

[xviii] Ibid.

[xix] A Women of Craft and Creativity (<https://www.irishtimes.com/>) [Assessed 17th July 2019]

[xx] Muriel Gahan (<https://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/castlebar/history/muriel-gahan.html>) [Assessed 10th January 2022]

[xxi] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxii] A Women of Craft and Creativity (<https://www.irishtimes.com/>) [Assessed 17th July 2019]

[xxiii] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

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[xxv] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxvi] A Women of Craft and Creativity (<https://www.irishtimes.com/>) [Assessed 17th July 2019]

[xxvii] Muriel Gahan (<https://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/castlebar/history/muriel-gahan.html>) [Assessed 10th January 2022]

[xxviii] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxix] A Women of Craft and Creativity (<https://www.irishtimes.com/>) [Assessed 17th July 2019]

[xxx] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxxi] Ibid

[xxxii] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxxiii] A Women of Craft and Creativity (<https://www.irishtimes.com/>) [Assessed 17th July 2019]

[xxxiv] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxxv] Ibid

[xxxvi] Biography of Muriel Gahan (https://www.biographies.net/biography/muriel_gahan/m/0c41w1y) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxxvii] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxxviii] Biography of Muriel Gahan (https://www.biographies.net/biography/muriel_gahan/m/0c41w1y) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xxxix] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xl] Ibid.

[xli] Biography of Muriel Gahan (https://www.biographies.net/biography/muriel_gahan/m/0c41w1y) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xlii] Muriel Gahan (<https://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/castlebar/history/muriel-gahan.html>) [Assessed 10th January 2022]

[xliii] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xliv] Ibid

[xlv] Biography of Muriel Gahan (https://www.biographies.net/biography/muriel_gahan/m/0c41w1y) [Assessed 19th July 2019]

[xlvi] Muriel Gahan (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muriel_Gahan) [Assessed 19th July 2019]