

Ó Siochfhradha, Pádraig ('An Seabhaic')

by Lesa Ní Mhunchaile

Ó Siochfhradha, Pádraig ('An Seabhaic') (1883–1964), teacher, writer and Irish language activist, was born 10 March 1883 in Burnham East, near Dingle, Co. Kerry, one of nine children of gamekeeper Patrick Sugrue and his wife, Ellen Cleary. Mícheál Ó Siochfhradha (1901?–1986), dramatist and author, was his brother. Pádraig attended the CBS in Dingle until he was 16, where he was educated through English. He learned to read and write Irish from a local schoolmaster and with the assistance of the Irish-grammar books of Eugene O'Growney (qv). He initiated a class in a neighbour's house in 1903 to teach reading and writing Irish to native speakers. After a meeting with Tomás Bán Ó Concheanainn (1870–1961) in Dingle in 1905, he was recruited as a Conradh na Gaeilge *timire* or travelling teacher, in the Uibh Ráthach Gaeltacht in Kerry. He trained as a teacher in Coláiste na Mumhan and it was reported in *An Claidheamh Soluis* on 15 September 1906 that he had passed his college exams. By 1908 he was working as a *timire* in the Déise Gaeltacht in Waterford. The same year he was involved in the establishment of Coláiste an Daingean and later functioned as its representative at Comhdháil Choláiste Gaeilge na hÉireann in 1913. He was professor at the college during the summer courses held there until around 1921. He was teaching in Kildare in 1910 but appears to have remained there for only a short period. Two years later he had returned to Co. Kerry and from then until 1922 he taught and worked as a *timire* there and also in Fermoy and in the Déise. The time he spent as a *timire* in Uibh Ráthach appears to have had an adverse affect on his health due to the great distances he covered by bicycle, his untiring energy and long periods spent fasting.

A prolific writer, he wrote under the pseudonym 'An Seabhaic'. It is reported he was given this name on account of the speed with which he travelled while working as a *timire*, but according to Risteárd Ó Glaisne (qv) (1927–2003), he chose this name for himself when entering an oireachtas competition (Ó Glaisne, 197). He is best remembered for the works *An baile seo 'gainne* (1913) and *Jimín Mháire Thaidhg* (1921). These were re-issued by Pádraig Ua Maoileoin (1913–2002) under the title *Seoda an tSeabhaic* (1974). His first publication was an essay on the status of Irish-speakers in Dublin, published in *Banba* (May 1902). From 1908 onwards, he was editor of the bilingual journal *An Lóchrann* (1907–13) in which he published articles on the place names and folklore he had collected. He was also involved in the second series of the journal, published between 1916 and 1921. Other works include *Seáinín, nó eachtra mic mí-rialta* (1922) and *Caibilidí as leabhar mhóirín* (1934), first published in *An Lóchrann* and *An Claidheamh Soluis*. A collection of proverbs from Munster was published under the title *Seanfhocail na mumhan* (1926). He was responsible for bringing Brian Ó Ceallaigh (qv) and Tomás Ó Criomhthain (qv) into contact with one another and was asked by Ó Ceallaigh to edit both of

Ó Criomhthain's works: *Allagar na hInise* (1928) and *An tOileánach* (1929). Ó Siochfhradha gave both works their titles.

He provided modern Irish-language versions of the following works: *An ceithearnach caolriabhach* (1910); *Cath fionn trágha* (1913); *Eachtra thaidhg mhic céin go Tír Freisean* (1933); *Bruidhean Eochaidh Bhig Dheirg* (nd) and *Tóraíocht an ghiolla dheacair agus a chapaill* (1939). He edited *Laoithe na féinne* (1941) and *Tóraíocht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* (c.1939). He published *Beatha Theobald Wolfe Tone* (1933) based on Tone's (qv) account of his own life. He also translated a number of works from English into Irish: Lady Gregory's (qv) *Spreading the news* under the title *Dubhairt sé dabhairt sé* (1931) and Seumas MacManus's (qv) *The resurrection of Dinny O'Dowd* under the title *Eis-éirghe Dhonnacha* (1933). His interest in place names is reflected in a collection of place names from Corca Dhuibhne, Co. Kerry entitled *Triochoa-chéad Chorca Dhuibhne: i. tiomargadh ar a log-ainmneacha agus ar sheanchas a ghabhann leo san, mar aon le sloinnteach agus ainmneacha daoine* (1939). He co-wrote *Ceapadóireacht chainnte agus scríobhtha* (nd) with Seoirse Mac Niocaill. Together with Fr Dónall Ó Tuathail (1881–1922) he published a Munster Irish version of *Láimhleabhar Mhódha na ráithe* (1920). He was also the author of numerous schoolbooks including grammars, dictionaries and school editions of a number of works.

Ó Siochfhradha won several oireachtas competitions for his writing and was also awarded a special prize in the 1918 oireachtas violin competition. He won first prize in the competition *Scéal ón tSean-Ghaeilge nó ón Mheán-Ghaeilge a chur i nGaeilge na haimsire seo*, published as *Cath Fionntrágha* (1911). He won a prize in 1912 for 'Bailliúchán ainmneacha bailte fearainn, aibhne, sruthán, cnoc, carraigreacha srl. de dhúthaigh nár deineadh a leithéid fúthu cheana' ('A collection of names of townlands, rivers, streams, hills, rocks etc., never before accounted for'). He co-wrote 'Tráchtas ar mharcaíocht .i. seaneolas sinsir na nGael ar an aimsir, ag tabhairt comharthaí fearthana agus stoirme agus gach uile shórt comhartha ar an aimsir is eol do na seandaoine' ('Thesis on horseriding, i.e. traditional knowledge of our Irish ancestors on the weather, providing examples of signs of rain and storms and every type of weather known to the old people') with Risteard Mac Crócaigh (1885–1918), which won an oireachtas award in 1916. It was published in *An Claidheamh Soluis* during September of that year.

He was an active member of Conradh na Gaeilge and elected to its Coiste Gnó at the 1910 ard-fheis but resigned from the committee in 1916, possibly as a result of dissatisfaction at the election of Seán T. O'Kelly (qv) as general secretary of Conradh rather than Fionán Mac Coluim (1875–1966). A directive to *timirí* and travelling teachers not to assist *An Lóchrann*, due to be re-issued under his and Seán Tóibín's (1887–1971) directorship, may also have been a factor.

He joined the Irish Volunteers shortly after their foundation in 1913 and became commanding officer of the Corca Dhuibhne Volunteers from 1917 to 1921. On

Good Friday 1916 Austin Stack (qv) sent him to Dublin to seek information about the arrangements for the rising. He continued his involvement with the republican movement after the rising and was incarcerated in Ireland and Britain six times between 1918 and 1922. He was imprisoned in Galway in 1918, for example, along with other members of the Coiste Gnó. In 1921 he was transferred from a camp on Bishop's island in Cork Harbour to one on Bere island where he was elected head of the prisoners. He was chairman of Kerry county council during the early 1920s, a judge in the Sinn Féin courts and between 1920 and 1922 a *timire* in Kerry. He did not take part in the civil war but worked towards bringing about peace between both sides.

From 1923 to 1926 he was commissioner for Leitrim County Council and Roscommon and Longford Health Boards and was subsequently transferred to the Department of Education in Dublin. There he was involved in the project to establish the coláistí ullmhúcháin (preparatory colleges). *Fáinne an Lae* reported (28 June 1924) that he was one of the *féitheoirí* (supervisors) of the new *Gaeltachtaí* to be founded in Dublin. Between 1925 and 1926 he was a member of Coimisiún na Gaeltachta and was active in the establishment of Coláiste Mhuire as well as other Irish-language schools in Dublin. He left the public service in 1936 and worked initially as editor and later as director of publishers, the Educational Company of Ireland and Talbot Press. He was also the first editor of An Gúm publishing company.

When the oireachtas competition was re-established, Ó Siochfhradha delivered the main speech and presented prizes at the competition on 4 November 1939. He also functioned as chairman of the organising committee and president of the competition for a number of years. From its inception in 1923 he was active in An Comhar Drámaíochta and collected the titles of all the dramas produced by the company under the title *Clár na ndrámáí a léiríodh go poiblí i mBaile Átha Cliath, 1922–49*. He subsequently presented these to the NLI.

An avid collector of Irish folklore, Ó Siochfhradha began collecting around 1902. He was a founding member of the Folklore Society of Ireland and became its first president. A regular contributor to the society's journal *Béaloides*, in 1932 he published *An Seanchaí Muimhneach: I. meascra de bhéaloides ilchinéal ó An Lóchrann 1907–13*.

On the establishment of the Irish Manuscripts Commission in 1928 he was its first secretary. Together with Fionán Mac Coluim and Colm Ó Lochlainn (qv) he founded An Claisceadal in 1927. A founding member of Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge in 1943, he was also involved in Muintir Bhréanainn, a society for Irish speakers from Kerry living in Dublin. In addition, he assisted in founding Cumann Ghaelach na hEaglaise and Na Cairde Gaelacha. He was also active in Foras Muirí na hÉireann and served as its president for a while. His interest in placenames is reflected in his

involvement in An Cumann Logainmneacha and An Coimisiún Logainmneacha and his role as president of both societies.

Éamon de Valera (qv) appointed him to Seanad Éireann in 1946 and he made all his contributions to debates through Irish. He was also a member of the UCD governing body.

He married Siobhán Ní Shúilleabháin, a teacher who was a member of Cumann na mBan and they had one son. Ó Siochfhradha died 19 November 1964 and bequeathed his books and manuscripts to Kerry county library. He was buried in Deansgrange cemetery, Co. Dublin.

Anon., *Kerry's Fighting story 1916–21* (nd); Muiris Ó Droighneán, *Taighde i gcomhair stair litridheachta na nua-Ghaedhilge ó 1882 anuas* (1936); *Irisleabhar Mhuighe Nuadhat* (1963); *Amárach*, 27 Nov. 1964; *Feasta*, Dec. 1964, Jan. 1965, 4–6; Risteard Ó Glaisne, *Scríbhneoirí na nua-ré 1* (1974), 197–214; *Feasta*, June 1975; Seán Ó Coileáin, 'Tomás Ó Criomhthain, Brian Ó Ceallaigh agus An Seabhac', *Scríobh*, iv (1979), 159–87; *Feasta*, Mar. 1983; Donncha Ó Súilleabháin, *Athbheochan na Gaeilge: cnuasach aistí* (1998); Donncha Ó Súilleabháin, *Cath na Gaeilge sa chóras oideachais* (1988); Donncha Ó Súilleabháin, *Na timirí i ré tosaigh an chonartha 1893–1927* (1990); Philip O'Leary, *The prose literature of the Gaelic revival 1881–1921* (1994); *Beathaisnéis 1882–1982*, v, 236–40