

Jacob, Rosamond

by Bridget Hourican

Jacob, Rosamond (1888–1960), suffragist, republican, and writer, was born 13 October 1888 in Waterford city, third child of Louis Jacob (1841–1907) and Henrietta Jacob (née Harvey; 1849–1919). Louis Jacob worked in his father-in-law's house-agent and stockbroking firm in Waterford. Both he and his wife were born into quaker families but identified themselves as humanist agnostics; this and their support for Irish nationalism led to their isolation from the Waterford protestant community. Rosamond was taught by Maria Walpole, a family friend, and at the age of ten attended Newtown School, a quaker establishment. As she was miserable there, she left after a year and resumed home schooling; from 1902 to 1906 she learnt French and German at the protestant girls' high school. Her home background helped shape her cultural and political activism; she was agnostic, republican, feminist, and vegetarian and had socialist (and in later life, pacifist) tendencies. From early adulthood she was an inveterate member of numerous political and cultural societies, such as the Gaelic League, the National League, and Inghinidhe na hÉireann, a nationalist women's organisation founded in 1900. In 1906 she was a founding member of Waterford's Sinn Féin club and that year she began to learn Irish, which she was subsequently able to speak and write proficiently. The strong catholic ethos of the Gaelic League ran up against her feminist and unorthodox religious beliefs and helped turn her into what she described as a 'bitter anti-cleric and freethinker' (Doyle, 172). She quickly aligned herself to the radical wing of both nationalism and feminism and joined the Irishwomen's Franchise League, founded by her friend Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington (qv) in 1908 as the first Irish suffrage society prepared to use militant tactics. A republican, she regarded the first world war as an imperial war, and she demonstrated against the recruitment campaign of John Redmond (qv). Though she joined Cumann na mBan, founded in 1914 as a women's auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers, she disparaged its quiescence towards Redmond, and was critical that the home rule bill contained no provisions for female suffrage. Jacob's politics also encompassed social activism; she was involved with Friends' Relief, a quaker charity group, and was elected secretary of the committee for social reform in Waterford, which addressed problems such as gambling and drinking.

In 1917 she was chosen to represent Waterford as a delegate at the Sinn Féin convention, where she won a commitment to women's suffrage. The following year she canvassed for Éamon de Valera (qv) but was subsequently disillusioned by the lack of female representation in the dáil. In 1920, a year after her mother's death, Jacob moved to Dublin and initially lodged with Skeffington in Belgrave Road, Rathmines. During the civil war she sided with the republicans but put the interests of peace first and was one of the formidable group of women assembled by Maud Gonne (qv) in July 1922 to demand a ceasefire from both provisional government

and anti-treaty forces. This came to nothing. Six months later, after Sinn Féin's publicity department were uncovered hiding in Skeffington's house, Jacob was briefly imprisoned in Mountjoy, where she shared a cell with the republican writer Dorothy Macardle (qv). As secretary (1920–27) of the Irishwomen's International League, founded in 1916 as the Irish branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, she was delegate to a congress in Vienna in 1921 and to Prague in 1929, and was among the organisers of the congress held in Dublin in 1926. In April 1926 she resigned from Sinn Féin, and later joined Fianna Fáil. During the 1930s, in the face of her growing disillusionment with the emerging state, which she found oppressive, patriarchal, and overtly catholic, she became involved in various global movements including the International Disarmament Declaration Committee. This led to an unsuccessful attempt to form an anti-capital-punishment group in Dublin. In 1931, as Irish delegate for the Friends of the Soviet Union, she travelled to the USSR, and reported favourably on conditions there, in lectures in Dublin.

Jacob was also a writer of prose and fiction who wrote her first novel, *Callaghan*, in 1915, though she was unable to find a publisher until 1920, when it appeared under the pseudonym 'F. Winthrop'. It deals in a radical manner with the relationship between a protestant suffragist and a catholic nationalist, and ends gloomily. Her next published work was a history book, *The rise of the United Irishmen, 1791–1794* (1937) which focuses on the origin, ideals, and internal workings of the society and its relations with similar reform bodies in Britain. She relied principally on the works of T. W. Tone (qv), R. R. Madden (qv), W. E. H. Lecky (qv), and William Drennan (qv), as well as the files of the *Northern Star*. The book was well received: both *Irish Historical Studies* and Robert Dudley Edwards (qv) in the *Dublin Magazine* termed it a stimulating, readable account in which Jacob distinguishes clearly between her own views and those of her subjects. Edwards found her republicanism useful in that it allowed her to take issue with Lecky, but unhelpful in that it coloured her view of eighteenth-century politics. Both reviews faulted her for insufficient use of sources and inadequate historical perspective. The success of her history book enabled Jacob to find a publisher the following year for her novel, *The troubled house* (1938), written seventeen years previously. Set during the war of independence, it is an avant-garde critique of war and patriarchy and strongly hints at a lesbian relationship between two of its protagonists. Her next work, *The rebel's wife* (1957), started as a historical memoir of Wolfe Tone's wife Matilda, but as Jacob was unable to find a publisher she rewrote it as historical fiction.

Jacob remained politically active until her death in the Meath hospital in Dublin on 11 October 1960 after being knocked down in a road accident. All her books are currently out of print; hers is a maverick, original voice, best showcased perhaps in her unpublished, incomplete autobiography and her political essays for the *Irish Citizen* and *Ireland Today*, some of which are collected in Margaret Ward's feminist anthology, *In their own voice* (1995).

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*IHS*, i (1938–9), 89–90, *Dublin Magazine*, xiii (July–Sept. 1937), 70–72; *Pax*, xiv (1960), 3; Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Smashing times: history of the Irish women's suffrage movement* (1984); Cliona Murphy, *The women's suffrage movement and Irish society* (1989); Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable revolutionaries* (1989); ead., *Maud Gonne* (1990); ead. (ed.), *In their own voice: women and Irish nationalism* (1995); ead., *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington: a life* (1997); Richard S. Harrison, *A biographical dictionary of Irish quakers* (1997); Damian Doyle, 'Rosamund Jacob', Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy, ed. *Female activists: Irish women and change* (2001), 169–92