

Moclair (Horne), Delia

by Turlough O'Riordan

Moclair (Horne), Delia (1895–1971), obstetrician, was born Bridget Angela on 8 January 1895 at John Street, Cashel, Co. Tipperary, the home of her parents Patrick and Margaret (née Carew) Moclair. She was the youngest of seven children. Patrick Moclair had endured a farm eviction, infamous in the locality, in March 1888. It was ordered by his landlord, the unionist politician Arthur Smith Barry (qv). A local organiser during the Plan of Campaign, Patrick was imprisoned a number of times, eventually regaining his homestead in 1911. He served on the local board of guardians and South Tipperary County Council while living in Ballinree, Cashel.

Moclair was educated at the Presentation convent, Cashel, and the Ursuline convent, Waterford, and went on to study medicine at UCD, graduating MB, B.Ch., BAO (1921) and DPH (1922). She was a fluent Irish speaker and a keen mezzo-soprano singer, and won the Denis O'Sullivan medal at the 1921 Feis Ceoil, thereafter often performing at concerts and social events.

She was nominated and unanimously elected as the first woman assistant master (1922) of the National Maternity Hospital, Dublin (where she had trained in obstetrics), by Sir Andrew Horne (qv) 'in face of some opposition from the more conservative Governors' (Strong, 75). She served three consecutive annual terms (1922–25), two alongside Andrew Horne Jr (qv). The dual posts of assistant master were residential posts. They subsequently undertook postgraduate work together in Vienna in the late 1920s, before establishing a private practice together in Dublin. (Horne's subsequent unsuccessful application for the master post, blocked by the catholic Archbishop of Dublin due to his attendance at TCD, led them to share rooms in Merrion Square).

Moclair married Horne on 8 September 1926 at St Andrew's Church, Westland Row, Dublin, and they had a son Andrew (1931–46) and twin daughters, Margaret and Patricia, who became a social worker and a doctor respectively. They first lived and practised on Merrion Square, before moving to Cowper Drive, Rathmines, Dublin.

Demonstrating compassion towards mothers and their newborn babies, Moclair often remarked 'the midwife knows more than we do' (Farmar, 74), instilling maternal confidence in new mothers with her calming manner and supportive outlook. Pioneering pre-marriage courses with catholic social services, she also delivered health and hygiene courses to young women and mothers in vocational schools around the country. A social activist, alongside Dorothy Stopford-Price (qv), she testified before the Carrigan committee, established by Minister for Health James Kenny in June 1930 to review existing law concerning sexual offences in Ireland. Representing the Irish Women Doctors' Committee (whose fifty-four

members signed a five-page submission to the committee), Moclair characterised Irish adolescents and women as more trusting and innocent than their British counterparts, their timidity requiring an older age of sexual consent than that which prevailed in Britain. Calling for enhanced educational instruction to combat widespread ignorance about sexual reproduction and health among women, both Moclair and Stopford-Price shared their personal knowledge of cases where thirteen-year-old girls had recently become mothers. Arguing that a climate of widespread secrecy prevailed regarding sexual offences, grounded in a culture of shame that resulted in significant underreporting of offences, they noted young girls only admitted rape or sexual assault if they became pregnant. Similar in tone and content to testimony from other women experts, the committee's findings largely ignored this testimony; the transcripts remained sealed in the National Archives until 1999.

Moclair was president and chair (1959–60) of the Women's National Health Association from the late 1920s, then concerned with eliminating tuberculosis and improving childhood health. A committed catholic, she was a member of St Joan's Alliance (a catholic feminist organisation), St Vincent de Paul, the Linen Guild (supporting babies born in the National Maternity Hospital, and their mothers), the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau and various other voluntary catholic bodies as well as her local catholic parish, St Andrew's, Westland Row, Dublin. President (1963–6) of the board of management of Peamount Hospital, Newcastle, Co. Dublin, she was also an examiner for the Central Midwives Board of Ireland. Delia Moclair died on 23 November 1971 at Dr Steevens' Hospital, Dublin, of renal failure.

GRO (death cert.); www.irishgenealogy.ie (birth record, accessed July 2019); *Medical students register, The National Maternity Hospital and Annual reports of the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dublin (1923–26)*, passim; *Thom, 1924–40*, passim; *Irish medical and hospital directory 1966–67*; Tony Farmar, *Holles Street 1894–1994: the National Maternity Hospital – a centenary hospital (1994)*, passim; John M. Strong, *Andrew Horne thirty years a master (1999)*; James M. Smith, 'The politics of sexual knowledge: the origins of Ireland's containment culture and the Carrigan Report (1931)', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 13 (2), April 2004; RAMI: History of Medicine section, 'Interview with Dr Patricia Horne, conducted by Dr Ida Milne, Dec. 2012 and Feb. 2013', *Living medical history project 2012–13* (typed transcript RCPI Archives); *Freeman's Journal*, 8 May 1921; 20 May 1924; *Ir. Independent*, 27 Sept. 1926; *Ir. Press*, 15 Apr. 1939; 24 Apr. 1959; 2 Dec. 1971; *Ir. Times*, 20 Oct. 1954; 17 Jan. 1953; 22 Apr. 1960; 23 Apr. 1965; *The Nationalist* (Tipperary), 21 June 1924