

Pearse (Brady), Margaret

by Anne Dolan and William Murphy

Pearse (Brady), Margaret (1857–1932), nationalist and dáil deputy, was born in Dublin, the daughter of Patrick Brady, coal merchant, and his wife, Brigid Brady (née Savage) of Oldtown, Co. Dublin. Educated by the Sisters of St Vincent de Paul, she worked in a stationer's shop until she became the second wife of James Pearse, monumental sculptor, on 24 October 1877. They had four children: Margaret, Patrick (qv), William (qv) and Mary Brigid. Of a strong nationalist background, she imbued her children with her firmly held beliefs. On the death of her husband, she managed, with the help of her sons, to continue his monumental sculpture business in Great Brunswick (latterly Pearse) Street. In 1908 she joined her sons and daughters at St Enda's school, taking charge of the domestic arrangements at the school. She was remembered affectionately by many of the pupils.

Aware of her sons' intentions, she fully supported them as they left St Enda's at Easter 1916, sewing medals onto the clothes of the St Enda's boys before they marched to the GPO. Following the execution of her two sons, she adopted their cause wholeheartedly and saw it as her purpose to perpetuate their memory and do as she thought they would have done. She envisaged St Enda's as their lasting monument and reopened the college in the autumn of 1916 at Cullenswood House, Rathmines. With the help of American aid she bought the Hermitage in 1920. She toured the United States in 1924 and raised a further \$10,000. The school, however, declined and she resented the interference of the fund-raising committees. Though she was unqualified, she began to teach, and taught little more than endless catechism lessons. The school operated at a loss until 1935.

In political terms she also seemed ill-equipped to cope with the prominent position her sons' fame had bequeathed her. However, she was eager to help in the independence struggle and protected many men on the run. Elected to the dáil in 1921, she spoke against the treaty, invoking her sons at every turn. She was defeated in her constituency, Dublin County, in 1922. During the civil war her home was raided by Free State soldiers, incidents echoing the often violent intrusions of the Black and Tans during the war of independence. In many respects she was considered a figurehead, a representative of her two dead sons. She spoke at the reception that followed the first dáil, was elected to the Co. Dublin board of guardians, was on the executive of Fianna Fáil, started the printing presses for the first copy of the *Irish Press* (5 September 1931) and spoke regularly in Ireland and America, giving her 'Pat and Willie' speech. These positions were a tribute to her bereavement, an alignment with the tradition of 1916 she had now come to embody.

Some, however, objected to her status: by 1922 the Cumann na mBan convention debated her removal from its executive; Kathleen Clarke (qv) felt she distorted the

truth of 1916, diminishing the importance of her husband, Tom Clarke (qv). Eager to perpetuate the exaggerated vision of her sons, she denounced those who dared to question them, including John Devoy (qv), who had lauded Tom Clarke as the main revolutionary figure of the rising. She was criticised for turning her sons into party political figures, finding, first in Liam Mellows (qv), whom she sheltered in 1916, and second in Éamon de Valera (qv), the successor to Patrick. Remembered most as the mother figure of Patrick Pearse's plays and poems, she died 22 April 1932 at St Enda's. She was accorded a state funeral, and her body lay in state at City Hall before burial at Glasnevin cemetery. Her funeral was one of the largest in the history of the state and Éamon de Valera's graveside oration was broadcast on 2RN. A death mask was taken by Jerome Connor (qv).

Her daughters, Margaret Pearse (1878–1968) and Mary Brigid Pearse (1888–1947), both lived in the shadow of their brother Patrick. Margaret was born on 4 August 1878 at 27 Great Brunswick Street, and Mary Brigid was born on 29 September 1888, by which time the family had moved to Newbridge Avenue, Sandymount. They were both educated at the Holy Faith convent, Glasnevin, Dublin, and neither married nor consistently sought paid employment, but further resemblances are scarce and they were often on poor terms.

Robust, intelligent, and dogmatic, Margaret was close to Patrick. She shared his interest in education and together they travelled to Belgium in June 1905. In 1907 she founded an infant school at the family home in Leeson Park, and this may have encouraged Patrick to establish St Enda's. Margaret was an important support at St Enda's, running a preparatory school, teaching French, acting as matron and keeping in touch with the boys over the summer. Mary Brigid 'was a pitifully delicate child, always ailing and nearly always confined to bed' (Mary Brigid Pearse, 80); she may have been the model for the sickly boy in Patrick's story 'Eoineen na néin'. She was close to Willie, sharing his artistic inclinations. They established the Leinster Stage Society, for which she wrote some original pieces and adapted some Dickens for the stage. They had moderate success until a calamitous run at the Cork opera house in 1912.

The sisters reacted very differently to their brothers' revolutionary activity. Margaret was supportive and gloried in their sacrifice, while Mary Brigid, who had gone to the GPO in an attempt to persuade them to come home, avoided the city centre in later life. Margaret helped her mother to run St Enda's, taking on more and more of the teaching responsibilities. She inherited the school and grounds on her mother's death and kept the enterprise limping along until 1935. Mary Brigid, while in many ways estranged from the family, remained financially dependent. She continued to write, having already one dreadful novel, *The Murphys of Ballystack*, published in 1917. She also wrote some children's stories and contributed articles to magazines such as *Our Boys*: it published several articles by her on the childhood of her brother in 1926 and 1927. An extended version of these was published as *The home life of Pádraig Pearse* (1934). If this signalled that Mary Brigid was thoroughly reconciled to

her brother's place in history, then it was the cause of further division with Margaret, as they squabbled over royalties accruing from a brief autobiographical fragment of Patrick's that formed part of the book. Mary Brigid made several broadcasts about Patrick's life in 1939. She died suddenly 13 November 1947 at 6 Beaufort Villas, Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin.

Margaret became the public face of the Pearse family legacy. She was elected a TD, winning the eighth and final seat for Fianna Fáil in the constituency of Co. Dublin in 1933. She polled better, but lost out, when it became a five-seat constituency in 1937. She became a senator in 1938 and remained so (often on the taoiseach's nomination) until her death. She had a close relationship with Éamon de Valera, serving on Fianna Fáil's national executive and as an honorary treasurer for many years. She continued to live in the Hermitage, allowing it to house a Red Cross hospital during the second world war. In 1966 she received an honorary D.Litt. from the NUI, with other relatives of those executed in 1916. In the same year she announced that on her death she would leave the then decaying Hermitage to a religious foundation rather than the state, but was quickly persuaded to change her mind. She died 7 November 1968 at Linden convalescent home (where she spent her final years).

'Violation of Patrick Pearse's home', Republican handbill (1922), NLI, ILB 300 p8, item 54; *Irish Independent*, 23–27 Apr. 1932; *Irish Press*, 23–28 Apr. 1932, 13 Nov 1947; *Ir. Times*, 23–27 Apr. 1932, 13 Nov. 1947, 8, 11 Nov. 1968; Desmond Ryan, 'Obituary of Mrs Pearse', NLI, MS 21,092; *Catholic Bulletin*, xxii, 5 (May 1932), 373; Louis Le Roux, *Patrick H. Pearse* (1932), 1–3; *Capuchin Annual* (1933, 1942); Desmond Ryan, *Remembering Sion: a chronicle of storm and quiet* (1934); Mary Brigid Pearse, *The home life of Pádraig Pearse* (1934); Margaret Pearse, 'Patrick and Willie Pearse', *Capuchin Annual* (1943), 86–8; Hedley McCay, *Padraic Pearse – a new biography* (1966), 9–11; David Thornley, 'Patrick Pearse – the evolution of a republican', *Leaders and men of the Easter rising: Dublin 1916*, ed. F. X. Martin (1967), 152–3; Eamon de Barra, 'A valiant woman', *Capuchin Annual* (1969), 53–6; David Thornley, 'Patrick Pearse and the Pearse family', *Studies*, lx (1971), 332–46; Séamas Ó Buachalla (ed.), *The letters of P. H. Pearse* (1980); Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable revolutionaries* (1983), 119, 126, 159, 165–6, 202; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: the triumph of failure* (1990 ed.), 3–6, 119–20, 195, 273, 314–15, 321, 328–33; Walker; Elaine Sissons, *Pearse's patriots: St Enda's and the cult of boyhood* (2004), 31