

Constance Gore-Booth

IN THE CAUSE OF IRELAND

Painter, Actor, Wife and Mother

In the latter part of her life Constance tried to explain how her shift to militant republicanism had developed. She had rented a cottage, to paint at Balally near Sandyford, about a mile from the then tram terminus. She found there a bundle of newspapers containing copies of *"The Peasant"* and *"Sinn Féin"* left by the previous tenant, Padraic Colum. She began to read them and her opinions and beliefs were challenged and engaged and ultimately transformed. It was unlikely this was the start or end of that process. Dublin was small and she moved in circles that overlapped nationalist, republican and revolutionary groups.

She met Arthur Griffith (President of *Sinn Féin*) in George Russell's house in 1908 and later Bulmer Hobson who was on the executive of *Sinn Féin*. Bulmer Hobson was the Editor of the I.R.B. journal *"Irish Freedom"* and a member of the Drumcondra branch of *Sinn Féin*. The I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood) was a secret, avowedly militant revolutionary organisation with the aim of removing the British influence in Ireland and setting up an Irish Parliament independent of the British Empire. It was Bulmer Hobson who facilitated her membership of *Sinn Féin* and she was elected to the executive of *Sinn Féin* in August 1909. The I.R.B. had a policy of secretly subverting nationalist and cultural organisations with its members, organising their election to Committees and Executives so that they became I.R.B. puppets unbeknownst to the general membership.

Constance who had spent her life looking for a cause greater than herself now appeared to have found it. The cause was Ireland and Ireland's freedom. Soon after her meeting with Arthur Griffith, Constance attended a *Sinn Féin* meeting in the Rotunda and Bulmer Hobson introduced her to Helena Moloney who was recruiting for *Inghinidhe na h'Éireann* (Daughters of Eireann). *Inghinidhe na h'Éireann* was founded in 1900 and organised classes for children in Gaelic, Irish History, Music, Art and Drama.



Constance Gore-Booth
'View of a Lodge near Lissadell House'
© Niland Collection / Model Sligo



Casimir and Constance dressed for a
Fancy Dress Ball in Dublin Castle with
Madeline Wynne (Constance's Cousin)
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Constance with her stepson Stanislaus and daughter Maeve
© Gore-Booth Family Collection

They were an avowedly nationalist organisation and their classes were designed to awaken in children a love for all things Gaelic and Irish. Their drama classes provided a means of income generation when they began to host public productions of suitably nationalist drama and involved them working with W. G. Fay amongst others. Constance joined the organisation and the first meeting she attended was after a soirée in Dublin Castle. In a blue velvet cloak wearing her diamonds she was a trifle overdressed for the company. In November 1908 they began publishing *"Bean na h'Éireann"* and Constance was on the publication committee. She became the gardening correspondent and henceforth the destruction of any and all garden evils from slugs to greenfly were but a rehearsal for the removal of British influence in Ireland:

"...a good Nationalist should look upon slugs in the garden in much the same way as she looks on the English in Ireland and only regret that she cannot crush the Nation's enemies with the same ease that she can the garden's..."

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