

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **DR MARIAN LYONS**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, on 8 June 2011, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature *honoris causa*, on **MARY DOLORES CULLEN**

A Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle (Chancellor, members of the University and Distinguished guests) The National University of Ireland is proud to honour the distinguished career of Mary Cullen.

Mary is a graduate of University College, Dublin where she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and English, and then a Master of Arts in History. In 1968 she began her teaching career in St Patrick's College Maynooth when she was appointed a lecturer in History on a part-time basis by the then Professor of Modern History, Tomás Ó Fiaich. Mary's appointment was an historic landmark in the history of the College as she was the first woman to become a member of the academic staff. In 1971 she was appointed a full-time lecturer and together, she and Professor Ó Fiaich set about building up the History Department, introducing tutorials and lecturing to large groups of students in classhalls including Music Hall and Callan Hall. In the 1980s Mary once again broke new ground in the Irish university sector when she brought the fruits of a new generation of scholars working on the history of women, to her undergraduate students, introducing ground-breaking modules on theoretical aspects of women's history and on the history of women in nineteenth-century Ireland. Down to her retirement from her post as Senior Lecturer in 1994, Mary was a valued and highly respected member of the History Department and of the academic staff of this institution. Through her role in founding the Women's Forum and in many other ways, Mary contributed significantly to the advancement of women's issues in the college.

Among her former colleagues she is deservedly admired and held in great affection as a woman with deep personal convictions and principles. Among her students, of whom I am proud to say I am one, Mary is recognized as an accomplished, affirming, inspiring and exacting teacher who constantly urged us to be open-minded, searching, critical, and disciplined in our approach to historical research and to be focused, lucid, balanced and coherent in crafting historical analysis. Fortunately, beyond her retirement from Maynooth, Mary's enduring and inspiring commitment to feminism and to teaching, and her unrelenting enthusiasm for fostering research in this field, have been borne out by her continued involvement in teaching women's

history to graduate students at the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies at Trinity College Dublin.

Mary Cullen's name is synonymous with women's history and that of feminism in Ireland. Throughout her career, as academic and intellectual activist, she has been influential in promoting awareness of both, in the academy and in Irish society. As a young woman, mother and academic, Mary became a committed feminist. When women's history began to develop in the early 1970s, thanks to the impetus of the women's movement and the works of Germaine Greer among others, she became increasingly interested in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women's movements in Ireland, and specifically the thinking behind these expressions of feminism. Indeed, to this day she is widely acknowledged as the leading authority on this aspect of women's history in Ireland. Mary has made many enduring contributions to cultivating the scholarly study of women's history in Ireland.

One of the most significant came about in 1989 when she co-founded (together with Margaret MacCurtain) the highly successful Women's History Association of Ireland. In another important initiative, Mary was instrumental in negotiating the deposit of the Hilda Tweedy papers – the first major archival collection dedicated to the history of an Irish women's movement (the Irish Housewives Association) – in the National Archives of Ireland. She also persuaded Hilda Tweedy to publish a history of the Irish Housewives Association entitled *A link in the chain* in 1992. In these ways, Mary helped begin the process of bringing collections of papers recounting the history of women's movements in Ireland into the public domain. As a consequence she helped make it possible for a new generation of scholars to pursue doctoral and postdoctoral research in the rapidly expanding field.

Since the 1980s, through her scholarly output of four edited collections of essays and more than fourteen articles, Mary has probed themes ranging from the role of women as breadwinners in labouring households in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland, and the relationship between feminism, suffrage and citizenship, to theoretical discussions on the feminist challenge to patriarchy. In her challenging and ground-breaking articles, a number of which appear in the canonical *Field Day Anthology* and the *New History of Ireland Volume VII*, Mary has been instrumental in progressively raising awareness among scholars and wider Irish society alike of the need to

appreciate the significance of feminism for both women and men, in the present as well as in the past.

But her role has been much greater than this. In addition to her own scholarship, Mary has made a particularly significant contribution to our understanding of women's history and feminism by bringing together scholars researching in these areas, and by working consistently and often behind the scenes to have their research published. Her selfless commitment to fostering pioneering and often challenging research, combined with her successful collaboration with her academic peers, is borne out in her publication of the influential *Girls don't do honours: Irish women in education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* in 1987, and later in her collaboration with Maria Luddy of the University of Warwick, with whom she produced two seminal edited volumes in 1995 and 2001 respectively entitled *Women, power and consciousness in nineteenth-century Ireland: eight biographical studies* and *Female activists: Irish women and change, 1900-1960*. In a fitting tribute to Mary's contribution to scholarship, later this year Arlen House Press will publish a collection of her essays in a volume entitled *Telling it our way: essays in gender history*.

It is important to emphasize the role that Mary Cullen played in bridging the very considerable gap that existed between the College and the wider community of Maynooth and beyond. Throughout her career, Mary has demonstrated a genuine personal commitment to bringing the latest scholarly research on various aspects of Irish and local history, feminism and women's history, to the wider community.

Through her active engagement in public lecturing, her publication of articles on aspects of Maynooth's history in the *Maynooth Newsletter*, her role in protecting the locality's built heritage, notably Carton House and Maynooth Castle, and her delivery of extra mural courses on women's studies and women's history both here in Maynooth and in places such as Kilbarrack in conjunction with the College's Centre for Adult Education, Mary made an important contribution to civic life and lifelong learning well before it was either fashionable or profitable to do so. Furthermore, her contributions within the academic sphere were complemented by her work as community activist in the drive to enhance educational provision in Maynooth, most notably through her involvement with the Parents' Committee which negotiated the establishment of the local post-primary school in 1970.

In short, throughout her life and in her coterminous roles as educator, intellectual and community activist, Mary Cullen has demonstrated an enduring and genuine commitment to the Swiss philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau's maxim '*try to manage that you may go beyond yourself, beware of ever doing less*'.

Today, Mary, we warmly salute you and your achievements as a most worthy recipient of this degree.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hanc meam filiam, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Litteris, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.