

1 Mobilising for the War Effort

In early August 1914 rumours surrounding the emerging crisis in Europe abounded, creating what Emily Wynne, living in the village of Avoca in County Wicklow, described as ‘a sort of pause in crisis, no definite news, making one feel unsettling suspense’.¹ The news on 4 August that the United Kingdom was at war was almost a relief, a sense of the tension having broken, though few women at home in Ireland could have had any idea of how much this European war would dominate their lives for the next four years. The Irish press generally reacted with muted enthusiasm to the European crisis, recognising its role as a useful distraction from the civil war brewing in Ireland. Indeed, the European war forestalled the domestic crisis between unionists and nationalists over Home Rule. Violence had erupted in Dublin in July 1914 with the Bachelors Walk shooting of civilians by soldiers, but the entry of the United Kingdom into the Great War resulted in a temporary, conditional sense of unity and common purpose on the island of Ireland. As observed by Catriona Pennell, war in Europe paradoxically meant peace at home in Ireland.² Wynne commented on 5 August 1914 that ‘Mr Redmond’s declaration of National Volunteers helping to guard Ireland has produced much satisfaction and a great rapprochement of all parties in the south’ and that the unionist response to the nationalist declaration was a ‘great thing’, that the unionists had received it ‘with such unanimous appreciation and understanding’.³ However, by 2 September 1914 she was already regretting that Ulster ‘has absolutely declined to make any advance or relax their attitude of suspicion in the South in the least after Redmond’s speech’.⁴

¹ TCD, Ms 10247/12/47 Folio 2: Diary of Emily Wynne, 4 Aug. 1914. Emily Wynne (1872–1958) was a textile artist and later managed the Avoca Woollen Mills with her sisters Winifred and Veronica.

² Pennell, *A kingdom united*, p. 165.

³ John Redmond (1856–1918) was an Irish Parliamentary Party MP in the House of Commons. He led the IPP from 1910 to 1918.

⁴ Diary of Emily Wynne, 5 Aug. 1914, 2 Sept. 1914.

Keith Jeffery refers to the ‘unexpectedly’ wide support for the war across the Irish political spectrum in 1914 and observes that dissent was initially confined to a ‘tiny minority of extreme separatists’.⁵ There were more similarities than differences in the Irish and British responses to war in 1914: there were comparable feelings of anxiety, shock and concern, and Irish people rallied to the support of charitable relief efforts.⁶ Jeffery calculates that between a quarter and a third of the available young men in Ireland (those aged between fifteen and thirty-five in the 1911 census) served in the First World War, which he notes is a strikingly high proportion when the absence of conscription in Ireland is considered.⁷ Between 1914 and 1918 about 206,000 Irish men served in the British forces.⁸ They were encouraged to do so by recruitment posters which emphasised women’s vulnerability to cajole or shame men into enlisting. The posters asked readers ‘Have you any women folk worth defending?’ and exhorted them to ‘remember the women of Belgium’. Drawing on traditional images of Irish womanhood and classical female mythological figures, the propaganda typically emphasised the gendered norms of wartime service: men’s role was to protect their woman folk at home.⁹

Irish women however also contributed to the war effort themselves, echoing the specific female war service that emerged in all belligerent countries in 1914. In Ireland, as in Australia and South Africa, Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire, women knitted socks, prepared parcels of ‘comforts’, organised war charities, nursed wounded soldiers and cared for the families of enlisted men.¹⁰ On 17 August 1914 thirty-four Dublin nurses serving with the Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) left for ‘an unknown destination’ on the troop ship *SS City of Benares*.¹¹ Another twelve Irish professional nurses

⁵ Jeffery, *1916: a global history*, pp. 110–111.

⁶ Pennell, *A kingdom united*, pp. 194–195.

⁷ Jeffery, *1916: a global history*, pp. 110–111.

⁸ These numbers increase when one includes the numerous Irish men who enlisted or were conscripted into units in Britain, the colonies and the United States. See Fitzpatrick, ‘The logic of collective sacrifice’, p. 1018. See also Fitzpatrick, ‘Ireland and the Great War’, p. 231.

⁹ Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War and the geography of remembrance*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁰ Bill Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914–1918* (Johannesburg, 2007), pp. 178–179; Bruce Scates and Ralene Frances, *Women and the Great War* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 44–46; Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and voluntary action in the First World War* (New York, 2014), pp. 37–39; Yigit Akin, ‘War, women and the state: the politics of sacrifice in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War’ *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2014), pp. 22–24.

¹¹ McEwen, *It’s a long way to Tipperary*, p. 49; *Irish Independent*, 19 Aug. 1914.

had mobilised for the front the previous week to serve with the Belgian Army.¹² Many Irish nurses applied to the QAIMNS reserve as soon as war was declared in August 1914. Four nurses from the Mater Misericordia Hospital joined the reserve in August 1914, shortly after war was declared. Thirteen nurses from the Royal City of Dublin Hospital, Baggot Street, joined the QAIMNS reserve between August and December 1914 and by the end of the war, the Royal City of Dublin Hospital and the Meath Hospital had each contributed twenty-six nurses in total to the war service. The successful applicants came from all over Ireland.¹³

Women also threw themselves into war relief activities on the home front. Within a week of the war's outbreak Red Cross working parties had been established in Dublin – in Stillorgan, Blackrock, Newtown Park and Booterstown.¹⁴ By the end of September 1914, Emily Wynne had made plans for starting a work party to make soldiers' clothing, collected subscriptions for a fund for the soldiers and contributed to a parish collection for the Prince of Wales Fund, while her sister Veronica had begun attending ambulance classes.¹⁵ Letitia Overend was similarly preoccupied with organising St John Ambulance first aid meetings and preparing bandages and parcels for Irish soldiers.¹⁶ Civil mobilisation offered women an alternative national service, parallel to that performed by men in the armed forces.¹⁷ Charities, specifically to support the war effort, sprang up all over Ireland in autumn 1914 and continued over the following four years. These included one organised by Monica Roberts in Dublin, which provided parcels of comforts for soldiers; similar initiatives in Kilkenny led by Pauline Loftus and Kathleen Pilsworth; and the Galway War Fund Association organised by Lady Clonbrock.¹⁸ Parishes, schools, colleges and other local communities became mobilising sites for war work. The War Charities Act, implemented in Britain in 1916, was not extended to Ireland; the Chief Secretary and the Irish Office

¹² *Irish Independent*, 17 Aug. 1914.

¹³ Horgan-Ryan, 'Irish military nursing in the Great War', p. 92.

¹⁴ *Irish Life*, 14 Aug. 1914. ¹⁵ Diary of Emily Wynne, 13–27 Aug. 1914.

¹⁶ Diary of Letitia Overend, 15, 20, 22 Aug., 14, 22 Sept. 1914.

¹⁷ Nursing in particular was viewed as the female version of military service, see Margaret H. Darrow, 'French volunteer nursing and the myth of war experience in World War I' *American Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 1 (Feb. 1996), p. 86.

¹⁸ DCA/RDFA, Monica Roberts Collection, volume 1; IWM, WWS: B.O. 11/15 *Report of the National Scheme of coordination of voluntary effort resulting from the formation of the director general of voluntary organisations department*, p. 31; Marilyn Silverman and P.H. Gulliver, *In the valley of the Nore: a social history of Thomastown, County Kilkenny 1840–1983* (Dublin, 1986), p. 166; NLI, MS 35,796 (4): Clonbrock papers, Report of the Galway War Fund Association 1917–1918.

having argued that it was not necessary and that it would be difficult to administer efficiently in the absence of a central authority.¹⁹ The absence of the Act makes it more difficult to ascertain the full extent of wartime volunteering.²⁰ However, the number of women involved in the various war charities was likely to have been considerable. Many of the families of the more than 206,000 Irishmen (including more than 5,000 officers) serving with the British forces, participated in some war charity work.²¹ Emilie Harmsworth, a married woman in Dublin, prepared parcels of comforts to send to her brother Henry in the British Army but was also preoccupied with assisting Belgian refugees arriving in Ireland: 'I am very busy getting clothes and things for poor people and refugees, sometimes I don't get in till 10 o'clock at night'.²²

George H. Heenan, an elderly British Navy veteran living in Blackrock, County Dublin, observed in his diary that 'all the women in these parts' were knitting for soldiers in October and November 1914, leading to a shortage of wooden needles in Dublin.²³ Emily Shirley in Monaghan recorded in October 1914 that 'we knit at all times and seasons!'.²⁴ The anti-war suffragists despaired of this sudden pre-occupation; L.A.M. Priestley McCracken wrote to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington in October 1914 that it was 'dreadfully difficult to get women to be interested in anything beyond knitting socks or sewing shirts for soldiers'.²⁵ Some of this enthusiasm was short-lived but many remained active in the war effort throughout its duration. Shirley, widow of a Conservative Party MP and mother of a British Army officer, was involved with a myriad of activities in Monaghan from August 1914 until her death in May 1918, including running a Red Cross work party, collecting sphagnum moss, preparing parcels of comforts for POWs, and helping with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association.²⁶

¹⁹ HC Deb 14 Aug. 1916 vol. 85 cc 1592–1611.

²⁰ Grant, *Philanthropy and voluntary action in the First World War*, p. 114.

²¹ Fitzpatrick, 'The logic of collective sacrifice', p. 1017. According to Fitzpatrick, a couple of thousand officers were mobilised at the start of the war and a further 3,700 officers had obtained direct commissions in the army and navy by early 1916.

²² NLI, Ms 46, 536/2/14-20: Letter from Emilie Harmsworth to Henry Telford-Maffett, 13 Oct. 1914.

²³ IWM, GH.S. Heenan papers, Diary of George Hammersley Heenan, 4 Oct. 1914, 19 Nov. 1914. George Frederick Hammersley Heenan (1834–1926) was born in King's County, Ireland. After serving in the British Navy he worked as an engineer in the public works department in India. He returned to live in Dublin in 1897 but moved to England in the aftermath of the Great War.

²⁴ PRONI, D3531/J/2/22 Shirley papers, Diary of E. Shirley, 10 Oct. 1914.

²⁵ NLI, Ms 22,667: LAM Priestley McCracken to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, 21 Oct. 1914.

²⁶ Diary of E. Shirley, 1914–1918.

Most of the voluntary work for the war effort in Ireland came under the remit of the joint committee of the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) and St John Ambulance Association (SJAA), which will generally be referred to as the Red Cross in this chapter. In September 1914 the Irish district of the SJAA and the Dublin section of the BRCS agreed to cooperate for the duration of the war, forming a joint headquarters in Dublin. They established two committees: one for Leinster, Munster and Connaught, and another for Ulster where the VADs took instruction from the Belfast branch of the BRCS.²⁷ Reports published by the British Red Cross in the immediate aftermath of the war suggested that there were less than 6,000 women in Ireland enrolled with the BRCS and SJAA during the war. However, the recent digitisation of the British Red Cross membership records has made it possible to ascertain more reliable figures and to conduct in-depth analysis of the membership for the first time.

Noticeably higher numbers for Irish recruitment are evident, revealing the widespread popularity of the Red Cross in wartime Ireland. In total, there were approx. 174,624 women enrolled with the British Red Cross during the war, of whom at least 13,585 had addresses in Ireland.²⁸ The Irish women comprised 7.8 per cent of the total, a significant figure given Ireland's female population was just 9.4 per cent of the United Kingdom at the time.²⁹ Table 1.1 demonstrates that similar proportions of the population were involved with the organisation: in Ireland, 1.4 per cent of the total female population aged between twenty and fifty-four (those most likely to have participated in Red Cross work) were members of the wartime British Red Cross, compared to 1.7 per cent of the relevant age group of British women.

Irish women were almost as likely as their British counterparts to join the BRCS or SJAA, despite the wartime political upheaval and Ireland's predominantly rural population. This is especially noteworthy given the widespread public perception that war service was confined to a small sector of the Irish population with most people opposed to the war.

²⁷ Margaret Downes, 'The civilian war effort' in David Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Ireland and the First World War* (Dublin, 1985), p. 28.

²⁸ I am grateful to the British Red Cross Archives for providing me with a database of all the Red Cross membership records from the First World War and to Daniel Purcell for his assistance with the data analysis. Total numbers of women enrolled with the Red Cross are necessarily somewhat approximate. There are 244,157 membership record cards in total, of which 42,046 refer to men, but there are many duplicates in the collection. Examination of the 16,849 records with Irish addresses (including 972 men) indicates that 13.6 per cent are duplicates, extrapolating this percentage to the entire database suggests a total figure of 174,624 for women's membership cards.

²⁹ Brian R. Mitchell, *Abstract of British historical statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 10.

Table 1.1 *British Red Cross membership in Ireland and Britain*

	British Red Cross membership	Female population aged 20–54 in 1911	Percentage of Red Cross membership among age group
Britain	161,039	920,700	1.7
Ireland	13,585	968,400	1.4
United Kingdom	174,624	10,259,100	1.7

Source: Mitchell, *Abstract of British historical statistics*, pp. 12–14
British Red Cross records from the First World War.

The Red Cross membership records provide great insight into the profile of the Irish female volunteer for the war effort. These membership rolls were, as noted by Sue Hawkins, created retrospectively after the war ended. In April 1919 pre-printed cards were sent to County Directors for distribution among the local detachments, with instructions for a card to be completed for each member and returned to the VAD Headquarters in London.³⁰ Due to the post-hoc nature of the collection, the rolls are incomplete with many cards missing sections and other women omitted entirely who are known to have been members.³¹ Nevertheless, they are an invaluable source for understanding women's voluntary mobilisation.

The following sample is derived from examination of 200 records of female volunteers with an Irish address.³² The sample demonstrates the diverse social profile of Irish women involved with the British Red Cross and the wide variety of roles performed by them. Of those who had completed education when recorded in the 1911 census, 33.3 per cent were in paid occupations. These were largely in traditional female occupations such as dressmakers, domestic servants, nurses and teachers. Thirteen of the women were trained nurses who were paid by the Red Cross for training and supervising the VADs.³³ War service was evidently not restricted to the privileged few but rather included a broad section of the population, indicating the significant levels of support for the war effort in Ireland. The numbers of women in paid employment and from low-quality houses suggest a wider class base than frequently assumed. Although most (66.3 per cent) of the women in the sample were living in

³⁰ Sue Hawkins, 'First World War VAD stories from the British Red Cross Archives: the Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital' *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2018), p. 293.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294. ³² British Red Cross Archive World War I service records.

³³ Christine Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: allied nurses of the First World War* (Oxford, 2014), p. 20.

first-class housing according to the 1911 census, a further 31.5 per cent were living in second-class and just 4 per cent in third-class housing. These classifications indicate the quality of the housing, reflecting the building material, number of rooms and presence of windows.³⁴ Just over half (55.1 per cent) of the women were living in households with at least one live-in servant.

Popular and historical accounts of the British Red Cross typically portray the VAD members as uniformly young, middle- to upper-class women who performed nursing work. They are described as 'amateur war nurses' who stepped beyond societal norms to fulfil heroic deeds at the front, epitomised by the archetypal figure of Vera Brittain.³⁵ Eileen O'Reilly concluded in relation to Ireland that only women with plenty of free time and independent means could afford to engage in voluntary war work.³⁶ This was certainly true of most full-time nursing positions with the Red Cross. From 1915 VAD nurses working in military hospitals received £20 per year, rising to a maximum of £30 but the far greater number employed in auxiliary hospitals received pay only 'in exceptional circumstances'. The pay levels have been described as 'paltry and tokenistic', especially given the costs involved in training to become a VAD nurse and for the uniform.³⁷

Nursing however comprised just one proportion of the roles performed by women. Contrary to the popular view, only c. 70,000 of the total Red Cross records refer specifically to nursing duties.³⁸ The Irish records indicate that close to 600 Irish women served in hospitals outside the United Kingdom, and at least 3,000 more in hospitals in Ireland and Great Britain.³⁹ Many of the women volunteered at the twenty-seven auxiliary hospitals established in Ireland during the war. By July 1917, Irish auxiliary hospitals provided 1,680 beds for sick and wounded soldiers, 2.8 per cent of the total beds in the United Kingdom.⁴⁰ Each of these hospitals depended upon local support and often came under the

³⁴ E.M. Crawford (ed.), *Counting the people: a survey of Irish censuses, 1813–1911* (Dublin, 2003), p. 49. The lowest class, fourth class, defined housing consisting of one room made of mud; a third-class house was also made of mud but had two to four rooms, while a second-class house had five to nine rooms with windows. A first-class dwelling was classified as superior to those in the preceding classes.

³⁵ Hawkins, 'First World War VAD stories from the British Red Cross Archives', pp. 292–293; Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting forces, writing women: identity and ideology in the First World War* (London, 1994), p. 31.

³⁶ O'Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war work', p. 66.

³⁷ Hawkins, 'First World War VAD stories from the British Red Cross Archives', p. 299. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³⁹ *The Red Cross in Ireland*; 'Memoranda on Red Cross Work in Ireland', pp. 727, 728.

⁴⁰ BRCA: 'British Red Cross Summary of work for July 1917', p. 4.

patronage of local gentry.⁴¹ A Red Cross hospital also opened in Dublin Castle, the seat of the British administration in Ireland, in January 1915 with support from Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon, known as Lady Aberdeen, the wife of the Lord Lieutenant.⁴²

These volunteer nurses worked alongside professional nurses serving in military organisations including the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service and the QAIMNS reserve as well as the Territorial Force Nursing Service. Most Irish military nurses served in France, but some also served in Macedonia, East Africa, Malta, Italy, Mesopotamia and Egypt. They worked in a variety of locations: base hospitals, stationary hospitals, casualty-clearing stations and on hospital trains. Many Irish nurses worked as part of small surgical teams in casualty-clearing stations close to the front lines while others worked in hospitals built at military bases on the northern French coast.⁴³ The enlistment of nurses in the military services left gaps in personnel in Ireland. Several supervisory staff enlisted, including the matrons of Mercer's hospital and Cork Street Fever Hospital in Dublin, and the Irish superintendent of the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses. In 1915 Ireland was apparently 'straining every nerve' to supply trained nurses for war service, resulting in shortages at home: '[there] was hardly a nurse to be got here for private cases for love or money – all volunteering'.⁴⁴

Despite the contemporary and historiographic emphasis on nursing, there were other ways in which Irish women participated in the war effort. In 1915 a General Service section of the VAD was established which included varied roles including cook, laundress, clerk, telephonist and chauffeur.⁴⁵ The *Red Cross* journal noted that the members of the Dublin city branch had interpreted 'Red Cross service in a wider sense' than purely nursing work. Irish members also knitted clothes, produced hospital supplies, provided refreshments for soldiers departing for overseas service and recreation rooms for soldiers' wives, arranged fundraising events and prepared parcels of comforts to send to men at the front.⁴⁶ Preparing parcels of comforts and clothes for soldiers was a popular activity in Ireland. These parcels served as a vital link between home

⁴¹ For more discussion of the involvement of the Irish gentry in the war effort, see Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgeway, *The Country House and the Great War: Irish and British experiences* (Dublin, 2016).

⁴² O'Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war work', pp. 55–58.

⁴³ Graffin, 'Hope and experience', p. 145.

⁴⁴ McEwen, *It's a long way to Tipperary*, p. 55. See also *Lady of the House*, 15 Jan. 1915. *Irish Life*, 14 Aug. 1914.

⁴⁵ Neil R. Storey and Molly Housego, *Women in the First World War* (Oxford, 2011), p. 24.

⁴⁶ *The Red Cross*, 15 Apr. 1915. 'Memoranda on Red Cross in Ireland', pp. 726–731.

and battle front and a means for women to express ‘solidarity with their nation’.⁴⁷ In Red Cross workrooms in Dublin 300 women knitted 20,000 pairs of socks and 10,000 mufflers for servicemen.⁴⁸ There were ninety-six Red Cross work parties spread across Ireland, which reported to the Central Red Cross workrooms in Dublin and Belfast.⁴⁹

There were similarities between the activities of the work parties and that of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot (IWHSD), one of the largest organisations in wartime Ireland. There were 1,300 women registered at the IWHSD headquarters and over 6,000 women workers on the registers of its eighty-four sub-depots spread across Ireland. Its purpose was to manufacture and supply dressings, bandages and other surgical appliances for hospitals treating wounded soldiers.⁵⁰ Individual depots had initially been established in the summer of 1915 in Waterford, but it subsequently came under the remit of the Red Cross.⁵¹ One of its primary activities was the collection and treatment of sphagnum moss to use as surgical dressings to replace cotton wool, which was in short supply during the war. This effort was led by the Royal College of Science in Dublin, which in November 1915 became the headquarters for sphagnum moss collecting in Ireland. In March 1916, the War Office commissioned 5,000 moss dressings a month from the Irish organisation.⁵² Between 1917 and 1918 fifty-seven hospitals across the war front were supplied with dressings made in Irish depots.⁵³ Collecting sphagnum moss was an arduous task, requiring the collector to clamber over wet boggy ground, often in adverse weather conditions.⁵⁴ VAD members, schoolchildren, girl guides, boy scouts and parish groups all participated in collecting the moss throughout the year.⁵⁵ The organisation depended

⁴⁷ Paul Ward, ‘“Women of Britain say go”: Women’s patriotism in the First World War’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. xii, no. 1 (2001), p. 31.

⁴⁸ Grayzel, ‘Women’s mobilisation for war’.

⁴⁹ *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem 1914–1919*, pp. 264–266.

⁵⁰ ‘Memoranda on Red Cross Work in Ireland’, p. 727; Thekla Bowser, *The story of British VAD work in the Great War* (London, 1918), p. 147.

⁵¹ IWM, WWS: B.O. 11/15: *Report of the National Scheme of coordination of voluntary effort resulting from the formation of the director general of voluntary organisations department*, p. 30; *Irish Life*, 23 Feb. 1919.

⁵² Elsie Henry, ‘Nov. 1915’, ‘23 Feb. 1916’ and ‘22 Mar. 1916’ in Clara Cullen (ed.), *The world upturning: Elsie Henry’s Irish wartime diaries 1913–1919* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 128, 137, 140.

⁵³ *Annual report of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot 1917–1918* (Dublin, 1918).

⁵⁴ *Third annual report of the sphagnum department of the Irish War Hospital Supply Organisation* (Dublin, 1919), p. 9.

⁵⁵ Clara Cullen, ‘War work on the home front: The Central Sphagnum Depot for Ireland at the Royal College of Science for Ireland, 1915–19’ in David Durnin and Ian Miller (eds.), *Medicine, health and Irish experiences of conflict, 1914–45* (Manchester, 2017), p. 160.

upon funds raised locally in Ireland, usually in the areas surrounding the sub-depots.⁵⁶

There were sub-depots for the IWHSD, Red Cross work parties and BRCS and SJAA divisions and detachments in almost every county in Ireland. The only counties with no IWHSD sub-depots in 1918 were Antrim, Fermanagh, Sligo, Leitrim and Longford.⁵⁷ There was a separate sphagnum moss association in Ulster, established in Belfast in October 1915 by Mrs G.A. Milliken with the support of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council.⁵⁸ The Ulster Sphagnum Moss Association had depots in Belfast and Londonderry and their dressings were sent to Scotland and London for sorting.⁵⁹ The BRCS and SJAA divisions and detachments were heavily concentrated in Leinster (the majority in Dublin) and Ulster, with few divisions and members in Munster and Connaught.⁶⁰ Dublin and Ulster had the highest population densities but the percentage of the relevant population involved with the Red Cross was also much lower in Connaught and Munster. Charitable work for the war effort was typically clustered in urban areas where there were more individuals with the necessary leisure time and where collective pressure could play a role in encouraging involvement. Sir John Lumsden, director of the Irish division of the SJAA, praised the provincial contribution to the war hospital supply depots and acknowledged the increased difficulties associated with war work in rural areas, including long journeys and 'unenlightened prejudices to be overcome'.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the geographical spread of the various war work groups indicates widespread regional support for the war effort with, for example, fourteen Red Cross work parties located in the north-west of Ireland, in County Donegal.⁶²

Most of the Irish women enrolled with the Red Cross or involved with the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot were involved solely in a part-time capacity, such as providing a few hours a week service in either a hospital supply depot or a work party. Such service was less restrictive and

⁵⁶ *Annual report of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot 1917–18* (Dublin, 1918), p. 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–35.

⁵⁸ This is most likely Beatrice Milliken of Ormeau, County Down, married to George Milliken, a dentist. She was aged twenty-one in 1911 and was a Presbyterian. The 1911 census record.

⁵⁹ IWM, WWS, L.R. 34/1: Report of the Belfast Sphagnum Moss Depot from Oct. 1915 to 1916 (Belfast, 1919).

⁶⁰ A total of 38.6 per cent of all Red Cross personnel were based in Dublin and 30 per cent in Ulster with just 3 per cent in Connaught: 'Memorandum on the Red Cross'.

⁶¹ OMARC PP/AIR/ 2513, Financial report of the St John Ambulance Brigade, 30 Sept. 1916. John Lumsden (1869–1944), a physician, founded the St John Ambulance Brigade in Ireland in 1904.

⁶² *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem 1914–1919*, pp. 264–266.

included a more diverse range of the population, enabling the participation of older women, those with domestic responsibilities and those obliged to work outside the home. The members of the Kilgarvan sphagnum moss depot in County Kerry, for instance, were described in April 1917 as 'all poor'. Elsie Henry, a middle-class Dublin woman and the quartermaster of the IWHSD, observed that the voluntary workers were 'mostly farmers' daughters, whose mothers do all their share of the home work in their absence, one post-office girl and two or three old Biddies'.⁶³ While voluntary work was more accessible to upper-class women, class was most important in determining the type of voluntary work performed by women.

Among the sample of 200 Red Cross volunteers, the average time spent in service with the Red Cross was twenty-five months. The level of commitment during their period of service ranged from Mollie Brown, who served full-time in military hospitals in England and France from April 1915 to May 1918, to Jeanie Hill, who volunteered for 250 hours between 1918 and 1919 at the Great Northern Railway Red Cross buffet in Belfast. The type of work undertaken and the time given were unsurprisingly affected by age, marital status and the social class of the worker. Mollie Brown, aged thirty on her enlistment in 1915, was not married and had no paid occupation. Her father was a solicitor and the chairman of the Kildare County Council. They lived in a first-class house with two servants in 1911. Jeanie Hill, the wife of a stationmaster, was married with two children by the 1911 census and had no live-in servants to assist her with domestic responsibilities.

Many women volunteered for a couple of afternoons a week in a work party or hospital supply depot. A total of 116 women in the sample served in hospitals for at least some of the war (sixty-three in Great Britain, thirty overseas and the remainder solely in Ireland). Non-nursing members were involved in creating garments for the soldiers and producing hospital supplies in work parties and war hospital supply depots. Twenty-four were primarily occupied with collecting sphagnum moss. Multiple generations of the same family could be involved performing different tasks. As a young girl in wartime Dublin, Evelyn Mercer knit socks for soldiers while her mother served as a voluntary nurse and her grandmother in Kerry collected sphagnum moss.⁶⁴ Similarly Amy

⁶³ Elsie Henry, '13 April 1917' in Cullen (ed.), *The world upturning*, p. 186. Born in London Alice (Elsie) Henry (1881–1956) married Augustine Henry, a botanist, in 1908, and they subsequently moved to Dublin. During 1915–1919 she was quartermaster of the sphagnum department at the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot.

⁶⁴ G.H.S. Heenan papers MS 67/196/1: 'Account of the outbreak of WWI and the Rising by Heenan's grandniece, Miss Evelyn AV Mercer'.

Hadden from Clare volunteered part-time with the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot from 1916 to 1919, while her daughter Kathleen was a full-time voluntary nurse in Wicklow and her son George served with the Royal Army Medical Corps.⁶⁵

The profile of those in leadership positions differed somewhat from the sample of rank-and-file members, as evident in examination of 137 women who served as work party leaders or divisional commandants in the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance Association.⁶⁶ These women were typically married, middle-aged and from a middle- to upper-class Protestant background; 65 per cent were married and the average age in 1914 was 42.2 years. The social class profile is indicated by the fact that 85.4 per cent lived in first-class housing and the same proportion had at least one live-in servant. There were several titled ladies among the sample and Maeve O’Riordan suggests that war work for these women presented an opportunity to fulfil their roles as ‘local leaders within the patriarchal tradition’, extending beyond their more typical estate-based charitable contributions.⁶⁷ In some cases however the bulk of the voluntary work was performed by others, often the social inferiors of the Big House family. Lady Inchiquin, for example, delegated much of the wartime work of the County Clare Needlework Guild to Ada de L. Willis, the wife of her estate manager.⁶⁸ Protestants, mostly Anglicans, dominated the leadership of the divisions as well as the work parties. The various Protestant denominations made up 89.1 per cent of the sample, with just fifteen Catholics among those identified. The strong influence of the Protestant churches in war relief work is further evident in the eighteen clergymen’s wives among the leaders.

Religion was an important factor in dictating Irish women’s participation in the Red Cross. Of the original sample of 200 women, most were from Protestant backgrounds with just 45 or 22.5 per cent listed as Catholics in the census. With Catholics making up 73.9 per cent of the general population in 1911, this is a significant underrepresentation and suggests that there was an exceptionally high level of support for the war effort among Irish Protestants.⁶⁹ Catholics were also under-represented among the Irishmen who enlisted in the armed forces, which David Fitzpatrick attributes to Ulster’s disproportionately high contribution to the army.⁷⁰ Eighty-one of the women in the Red Cross sample were

⁶⁵ BRCA, Service records for Amy and Kathleen Hadden; 1911 census records for Hadden family and www.worldwar1veterans.com/.

⁶⁶ ‘Memorandum on the Red Cross’, p. 670.

⁶⁷ O’Riordan, ‘Titled women and voluntary war work’, pp. 361–362. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁶⁹ *Census of Ireland for the year 1911*, pp. xlvi–xlvii.

⁷⁰ Fitzpatrick, ‘The logic of collective sacrifice’, p. 1025.

living in Ulster when they enrolled, compared to seventy-one from Leinster, thirty-five from Munster and thirteen from Connaught. However, the predominance of Protestants in the organisation is also apparent among the leadership, despite just 34 per cent of that sample coming from Ulster.

The disproportionate distribution of Protestants among the leadership of the Red Cross divisions was noted with anxiety by the *Irish Catholic*, who were concerned that the British Red Cross included Protestant proselytisers who were preying upon the vulnerable wives of absent soldiers, under the guise of war relief work. The SJAA was treated with particular suspicion with one anonymous letter writer describing it as a 'Protestant imitation of a Catholic religious order' and warning *Irish Catholic* readers to stay clear of the association for fear of its proselytising intentions. In contrast, another letter writer argued that the only method of countering the threat of proselytism from the Red Cross was for large numbers of Catholic ladies to join the organisation and to secure proper representation on the committees.⁷¹

Religion and Mobilisation

Philanthropy in early twentieth-century Ireland was typically divided on religious lines with limited cooperation between Protestant and Catholic charities due to suspicion of proselytism. There was much greater involvement of Anglican women in philanthropic organisations, performing both benevolent and reformist work. For middle- and upper-class Protestant women, charitable work was considered a suitable occupation, especially for those without families of their own, and was viewed as an affirmation of women's traditional role as the maternal caregiver.⁷² The more limited philanthropy by lay Catholic women can be attributed to the significant number of Catholic nuns who amounted to what Oonagh Walsh describes as a 'ready-made philanthropic army', thus reducing the necessity for further organisation by lay women.⁷³ Unlike Protestant women, Catholic women were unable to create enduring independent secular societies. The Catholic clergy maintained a strong control over female philanthropy creating a particularly conservative Catholic social action.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Irish Catholic*, 24 Oct. 1914, 28 Nov. 1914.

⁷² Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 5; Oonagh Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin: philanthropy, politics and education in the early twentieth century* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 90–95.

⁷³ Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin*; p. 87; Luddy, *Women and philanthropy*, p. 53.

⁷⁴ Luddy, *Women and philanthropy*, pp. 23, 35.

The Great War however brought a growing awareness of the role Catholic women could perform in society through philanthropic work. In 1917 the *Catholic Bulletin* wrote of the important role the Church could play in the realm of social work once the war ended.⁷⁵ The Jesuit journal *Irish Monthly* also saw the war as necessitating greater involvement from lay Catholic women in philanthropy. In July 1917 Fr McKenna, writing in the *Irish Monthly*, argued that women's influence would be essential in the reconstruction and adaptation of society to the new post-war world.⁷⁶ This wartime promotion of Catholic women's social action was not unique to Ireland. Emily Machen has described strikingly similar commentary in French Catholic journals during the war.⁷⁷ However, in Ireland, unlike France, the Catholic social action promoted in such articles was rarely explicitly connected with the war effort and there was little attention paid to women's participation in war relief activities on the home front. One of the few incidences of overt praise for women's war work in any of the wartime Catholic journals in Ireland was a report in the *Irish Catholic* in December 1914 praising the Newry branch of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians for their work sending scapulars to Irish Catholic soldiers at the front. The editor encouraged other ladies' auxiliaries of the AOH to follow suit, arguing that 'no more genuinely charitable work could possibly be imagined'.⁷⁸ Indeed, the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland towards the war effort was somewhat ambivalent.

Initially the war received the support of the majority of the Church hierarchy. In his work on the Catholic Church in wartime, Jerome Aan der Wiel emphasises the opposition of the Archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh, to the war effort.⁷⁹ Walsh was nonetheless a member of various committees associated with Irish war relief work, including that of the Dublin Castle Red Cross Hospital.⁸⁰ The church hierarchy were

⁷⁵ *Catholic Bulletin*, Dec. 1916.

⁷⁶ L. McKenna, 'An Irish Catholic Women's League' *Irish Monthly*, vol. xlv, no. 528 (June 1917), pp. 355, 362.

⁷⁷ Emily Machen, 'Women, war and religious leadership: Catholics, Protestants and Jews in France during the First World War' *Minerva Journal of Women and War*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 2010), p. 30.

⁷⁸ *Irish Catholic*, 12 Dec. 1914.

⁷⁹ Jerome Aan de Wiel, 'Archbishop Walsh and Mgr. Curran's opposition to the British war effort in Dublin, 1914–1918' *Irish Sword*, vol. 22, no. 88 (2000), pp. 193–204. William Walsh (1841–1921) was the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin from 1885 to 1921.

⁸⁰ See, for example, DDA, Walsh Papers/1914/387/2/Laity: Letter from Lady Aberdeen to Archbishop Walsh, 20 Dec. 1914; Letter from May Starkie to Walsh, 19 Nov. 1914; 1915/378/9/Laity: Letter from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers' Central Advisory Committee to Walsh, 6 Oct. 1915; 1916/385/7/Laity: Letter from Sybil Powerscourt to Walsh, 26 Apr. 1916.

particularly involved in 'Catholic issues' connected to the war; for example the Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Michael Logue, was especially concerned with ensuring a sufficient supply of Catholic chaplains for Irish soldiers and with the care of Catholic Belgians, 3,000 of whom were given refuge in Ireland.⁸¹ Priests encouraged their congregations to subscribe towards funds established for the Belgians' relief, raising £28,352 by March 1915. Lay Catholic women assisted with the Sunday collections and organised fundraising events for the refugees themselves.⁸² The Irish Volunteer and later Sinn Féin activist Kevin O'Shiel recalled the participation of his family in activities to support the Belgian refugees: 'The women-folk of my family, in common with most other families, whatever their religion or politics, busied themselves from morning to night on all manner of work for those new guests of the nation – knitting, sewing, and making garments and cooking and packing food for them'.⁸³

Proselytism was a significant concern, however. Mary Lynch, on behalf of the Cork Temporary Home for Belgian Refugee Women and Children Committee, wrote to Walsh concerned that the Society of Friends were receiving Belgian refugees in Dublin, even though 'the refugees are doubtless all Catholics'.⁸⁴ In his 1916 Lenten Pastoral, Cardinal Logue drew attention to what he saw as 'campaigns conducted by certain Protestants for the proselytism of Belgian refugees'.⁸⁵ Logue was likely referring to Portadown, where it was reported that three Belgian families had converted from Catholicism to Anglicanism, allegedly due to the influence of local Church of Ireland women. The conversions 'caused ill feeling amongst religious bodies in the town'.⁸⁶ The Belgian refugees committee investigated the matter, resulting in the transfer of one of the Belgian families and a ban on further refugees being sent to Portadown.⁸⁷

Catholic women were also involved in other parish-based war relief activities, including assisting with the National Egg Collection and

⁸¹ *Irish Catholic directory and almanac for 1915* (Dublin, 1915), p. 543; *Irish Catholic directory for 1916* (Dublin, 1916), p. 529; Grayson, *Dublin's Greater Wars*, p. 30.

⁸² *Irish Catholic directory and almanac for 1915*, p. 541; *Irish Catholic directory for 1916*, p. 504; *Irish Catholic*, 28 Nov. 1914; Dublin Diocesan Archives, Walsh/1914/387/2/Laity: Letter from Mrs Breda Morgan-Browne to Archbishop Walsh, 12 Oct. 1914.

⁸³ BMH WS 1770 Kevin O'Sheil.

⁸⁴ DDA, Walsh/1914/378/1/Laity: Letter from Mary Lynch to Archbishop Walsh, 1914.

⁸⁵ Lenten Pastoral by Cardinal Logue, 6 Feb. 1916 in *Irish Catholic directory and Almanac for 1917* (Dublin, 1917), p. 505.

⁸⁶ UCDA, P105: Minute Book of the Belgian Refugees' Committee, 18 Aug. 1915.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 Sept. 1915, 17 Sept. 1915, 6 Oct. 1915, 20 Oct. 1915.

supporting soldiers in local regiments.⁸⁸ In Newbliss, County Monaghan, women gathered in the Catholic Young Men's Recreation Rooms to organise the sending of comforts to soldiers. The local parish priest chaired the meeting and most of the women elected to the committee were Catholics.⁸⁹ In her memoir, republican activist Kathleen Keyes McDonnell recalled with disgust the widespread support for the Red Cross in Bandon, County Cork, in autumn 1914. She described how 'even prominent Catholics foregathered in the Allen Institute, notorious loyalist stronghold', and attended classes and meetings in furtherance of Britain's war effort. She asserted that the involvement of Catholics in such an endeavour was 'unknown in Bandon history up to that time'.⁹⁰

Despite this parish-level associational war work by women, the Catholic Church in Ireland was unusual in Europe for its reticence in promoting involvement in the war effort. The Irish Catholic hierarchy gave particular effort to the support of Belgian refugees, a cause less controversial and potentially divisive than outwardly supporting the British Army. The Church also drew parallels between the Belgian and Irish case, both small nations invaded by a larger neighbour seeking to 'plant' their own communities to spread Protestantism.⁹¹ Although Catholic social action was promoted in the religious press, it was not explicitly connected to the war effort and there was otherwise little discussion of the changing roles for women in wartime. This differed significantly from France, where Catholic journals frequently praised women's involvement in wartime work, with women's war service viewed as proving the patriotism of the Catholic community and the 'centrality of Catholicism to the French nation'.⁹² Women were depended upon by the Catholic Church to uphold morale and patriotism on the home front.⁹³ In Germany, Catholic women were over-represented in wartime nursing and the war opened up opportunities for leadership roles for Catholic women in religious organisations and charity networks.⁹⁴ The strong links

⁸⁸ The vast majority of Cavan donations to the National Egg Collection in 1915 came from Catholic women, *Anglo-Celt*, 13 Nov. 1915.

⁸⁹ *Anglo-Celt*, 28 Nov. 1914. See also a report of a similar meeting organised by a Catholic priest in Castlepollard in November 1915, *Anglo-Celt*, 27 Nov. 1915.

⁹⁰ Kathleen Keyes McDonnell, *There is a bridge at Bandon: a personal account of the Irish War of Independence* (Cork, 1972), p. 31.

⁹¹ *Irish Catholic*, 12 Dec. 1914.

⁹² Emily Machen, 'Soldiers of faith behind the Lines: religious women and community patriotism during the First World War in France' *Women's History Review*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2013), pp. 33–34, 36.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹⁴ Patrick Houlihan, *Catholicism and the Great War: religion and everyday life in Germany and Austria Hungary, 1914–1922* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 177–179.

between the Catholic Church in Ireland and the nationalist movement limited the extent of the Church's public support for the war effort and contributed to the marginalisation of Catholic women's war work.

The Protestant churches were noticeably more active in promoting women's role in the war effort. The three largest Anglican women's organisations, the Mothers' Union, Girls' Friendly Society and Young Women's Christian Association, all diverted their usual work to war relief activities.⁹⁵ Several of the diocesan presidents of the Mothers' Union played a prominent leadership role in the war effort. Lady Farnham, president of the Kilmore Mothers' Union until 1915, was centrally involved in the Irishwomen's Association which provided parcels for Irish prisoners of war while Lady Clonbrock, president of the Killaloe diocesan branch led several local activities in Galway such as providing comforts for soldiers serving with the Connaught Rangers.⁹⁶ Alice Crozier, wife of the Archbishop of Armagh and president of the Armagh Union, was the leader of a Red Cross work party.⁹⁷ Appeals and praise for women's war work were common features in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, unlike the Catholic press. In August 1914 the Bishop of Ossory placed the nursing work of women on equal footing with the army service of men while the Armagh diocesan synod in November 1915 recorded its 'profound admiration of the work done by women of the country both at home and abroad'.⁹⁸ The Presbyterian and Methodist churches similarly highlighted the contribution of their female members to the war effort. Church-led activities included work parties led by Presbyterian women to make comforts for the front, and the provision of recreation rooms for soldiers and sailors in Dublin and Queenstown which were staffed by Methodist women who also paid regular visits to wounded soldiers.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ RCBL, MS 749: Minute book of the organising committee of the Mothers' Union of Ireland 1912–1921; MS 578: Minute books of the Central Council and executive committee of the Girls' Friendly Society, 1914–1918 and MS 624: Minute Book of the Irish Divisional Council of the YWCA, 1914–1918. YWCA Newsletter, 1914–1918; *Thirty-ninth report and associates list of the Girls' Friendly society in Ireland for year ending 31 December 1915* (Dublin, 1916).

⁹⁶ NLI, MS 18,616/2–8 Farnham papers: Letters and other material relating to Lady Farnham's charitable work in County Cavan during the Great War and materials relating to the Girls' Friendly Society and Mothers' Union; MS 35,796 (4) Clonbrock papers: Report of the Galway War Fund Association 1917–1918.

⁹⁷ 'Memorandum on the Red Cross in Ireland'.

⁹⁸ *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 14 Aug. 1914, 5 Nov. 1915. See also J.A. Maconchy (ed.), *Journal of the general synod of the Church of Ireland holden in Dublin MDCCCCXVII* (Dublin, 1917), p. liii.

⁹⁹ *Minutes of the proceeding of the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1916–1920*, vol. XIII (Belfast, 1920), p. 82; *Annual report of the Methodist Home Mission and contingent fund and of the General Mission* (Ireland) (Dublin, 1915), pp. 29–32.

Religion-linked war service to ideals of sacrifice and duty and provided an associational environment for such activities. Cooperation, however, between Catholic and Protestant women proved controversial and difficult to sustain in Ireland. The Easter Rising and 1918 anti-conscription campaign also created further division between the Catholic Church hierarchy and the British war effort.

Politics and Mobilisation

Politics and competing forms of patriotism also created divisions between the various war charities in Ireland. Women from various political backgrounds worked together in many of the war relief organisations. For instance, the volunteers at the Royal College of Science were a mix of unionists and nationalists from both the Home Rule tradition and republican movement.¹⁰⁰ Eileen O'Reilly has similarly observed the involvement of the families of both unionist and nationalist politicians in the County Cavan war effort.¹⁰¹ However, divisions between Ulster and the rest of Ireland were accentuated through the proto-partitionist arrangement of war relief work, evident in the formation of separate Red Cross committees for Ulster and the remaining three provinces. There were also separate sphagnum moss associations and there is no evidence of communication between the sphagnum department coordinated by the Royal College of Science and the Ulster Sphagnum Moss Association. The reports of each association make no reference to each other with both implying that their organisation was the first in Ireland.¹⁰² The lack of cooperation between the two organisations and the two separate Red Cross committees represent the growing isolation of Ulster unionists and the accentuation of a partitionist mindset. The need for special treatment for Ulster had been acknowledged by 1914 and it was clear by summer 1916 that this special provision would involve the exclusion of six counties from the jurisdiction of a Dublin parliament.¹⁰³ The acceptance of the Ulster Unionist Council of partition in 1916 resulted in distress among some members of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC) at the proposed loss of the border counties of Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Cullen, 'War work on the home front', p. 165.

¹⁰¹ O'Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war work', pp. 63–64.

¹⁰² IWM, L.R. 121/1: 'Red Cross work at the Royal College of Science' (1919).

¹⁰³ Patrick Buckland, *Ulster Unionism and the origins of Northern Ireland 1886–1922* (Dublin, 1973), p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ Diane Urquhart, 'Unionism, orangeism and war' *Women's History Review*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2018), p. 475.

The Ulster Women's Unionist Council was largely responsible for organising and directing war relief work in the northern province. It was well placed to do so, having established nursing, driving and signalling corps in 1913 to support the Ulster Volunteer Force in preparation for civil war. The UWUC used war service as a means of maintaining and promoting a distinct Ulster identity and providing a practical demonstration of its loyalty to Britain.¹⁰⁵ For the council, the unionist political truce on the outbreak of war in 1914 was in part a façade.¹⁰⁶ It was explicit about its intentions and prioritisation of its political agenda over wartime cooperation with the south. The Council organised its own voluntary activities and mobilised its members to specified actions, establishing a gift fund for soldiers, a prisoner of war fund and Ulster Volunteer Force hospitals in Belfast and France.¹⁰⁷ These were substantial initiatives: each month in 1917 the Council sent over £1,500 worth of foodstuffs and comforts to Ulster soldiers at the front and in prisoner of war camps while the Ulster Volunteer Force Hospital in Belfast cared for thousands of soldiers between 1916 and 1920.¹⁰⁸ The South Belfast Women's Unionist Association, a branch of the UWUC, also organised the visiting of families of men serving in the Ulster division.¹⁰⁹ Many of the voluntary war work initiatives in Ulster were led either by the UWUC directly or by women active in the organisation, including the Ulster Sphagnum Moss Association.

The unionist agenda of the activities and their reluctance to cooperate with southern Irish organisations are evident in the efforts to help Irish prisoners of war. Prisoners of war endured harsh conditions and depended upon the parcels of food and clothing sent from their home countries. In many prison camps, the men's food came almost exclusively from external charities and individuals. This was the case for prisoners held by Germany from 1916 to 1918.¹¹⁰ In early 1915 the Irishwomen's Association was established to provide parcels of food and clothing for Irish prisoners of war and parcels of comforts for Irish

¹⁰⁵ Diane Urquhart (ed.), *The minutes of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council and the Executive Committee 1911–1940* (Dublin, 2001), Council Minutes of the UWUC, 18 Aug. 1914, p. 188.

¹⁰⁶ Urquhart, 'Unionism, orangeism and war', p. 472.

¹⁰⁷ PRONI, D2846/1/8/53: Letter from Richard Dawson Bates to Lady Londonderry, 12 Oct. 1916; Urquhart (ed.), *The minutes of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council and the Executive Committee*, p. xix, Council Minutes of the UWUC, 18 Aug. 1914, p. 188.

¹⁰⁸ D1507/A/25/3: Catherine Dawson Bates, *The spirit of the Province* (1917); Graffin, 'Hope and experience', p. 150.

¹⁰⁹ PRONI, D1633/2/20: Diary of Lilian Spender, Jan. 1915 to Sept. 1915.

¹¹⁰ Branden Little, 'Civil society and relief organisations for war' in *1914–1918 online* International Encyclopaedia of the First World War (Dec. 2014).

regiments at the front.¹¹¹ This was a similar organisation to the Ulster Women's Gift Fund, but the Irishwomen's Association attempted to draw support from all sectors of the population. It advertised its activities in both the *Church of Ireland Gazette* and the *Irish Catholic*, taking care in the latter case to emphasise its apolitical and non-sectarian nature: 'politics will be entirely ignored in the work of this organisation'.¹¹² Its list of patronesses included members of both denominations and a mix of those connected to constitutional nationalist and unionist politics.¹¹³ Calling upon a sense of Irish patriotism, they appealed to 'all who love Ireland and who know and appreciate the bravery and patriotism of her soldiers'.¹¹⁴ However, the UWUC were resistant to any attempts at inter-denominational cooperation. They informed the Lord Mayor of Belfast in May 1918 that they 'would have nothing to do with any movement that was not solely for the Ulster Women's Gift Fund'. It was explained that if members wished 'they could do something for the IWA later but just now it has to be the UWGF solely and entirely'.¹¹⁵ The focus on specifically Ulster activity was partly motivated by concern that the UWUC was being negatively affected by its prioritising of war work. John Hamill, secretary to the UWUC and a member of the Ulster Unionist Council, reminded Lady Theresa Londonderry, president of the UWUC, in January 1916 that 'although the winning of the war is our first consideration we must not forget our original and principal work'.¹¹⁶ This was echoed a year later by Richard Dawson Bates, another UUC member, who argued for the continuation of the UWUC's political agenda.¹¹⁷

The outbreak of rebellion in April 1916 (discussed in Chapter 5) further cemented divisions between unionists and nationalists and made cooperation more difficult. The Rising appeared to confirm for unionists the inherent disloyalty of nationalists.¹¹⁸ Catherine Bates, sister of Richard Dawson Bates, and a member of the UWUC and the British Red Cross, outlined the Ulster Unionist attitude towards the war effort in a

¹¹¹ NLI, MS 35,796 (3): Clonbrock papers, pamphlet issued by the Irishwomen's Association in Feb. 1915.

¹¹² *Irish Catholic*, 12 June 1915.

¹¹³ For example, the unionists Countess of Fingall (Catholic) and Rachel Mahaffy (Church of Ireland), and the constitutional nationalists Ada Redmond (Church of England) and Lady Kenmare (Catholic).

¹¹⁴ Pamphlet issued by the Irishwomen's Association in Feb. 1915.

¹¹⁵ PRONI, D1507/A/27/8: Letter from Mr W. King Stevenson (UWGF hon. Treasurer) to Mrs Ainsworth Barr (UWGF hon. Secretary), 6 May 1918.

¹¹⁶ PRONI, D2846/1/8/36: Letter from John Hamill to Lady Londonderry, 3 Jan. 1916. Theresa Vane-Tempest Stewart (1856–1919), widow of the 6th Marquis of Londonderry, was a founding member and first president of the UWUC.

¹¹⁷ D2846/1/1/8/65: Letter from Richard Dawson Bates to Lady Londonderry, 3 Jan. 1917.

¹¹⁸ Michael Laffan, *The partition of Ireland 1911–25* (Dundalk, 1983), p. 50.

1917 pamphlet titled 'The spirit of the province'. 'England's difficulty had again been nationalist Ireland's opportunity to rebel, pillage and murder, while England's difficulty had once again been Ulster's opportunity to prove her loyalty, her love, her Imperialism'.¹¹⁹

Though barely a week long, the Easter 1916 rebellion left a major impact upon those who lived through it and upon the course of Irish politics. Public opinion in nationalist Ireland gradually changed in favour of the rebels, particularly after the execution of sixteen men accused of leading the rebellion. The military coercion that followed the Rising further affected attitudes towards the British government and the relationship between civil society and the state.¹²⁰ Growing political tension combined with war weariness strained the mobilisation process. This war weariness in the latter half of the war was not unique to Ireland. John Horne's work demonstrates that the second half of the war tested social cohesion, national identity and the legitimacy of the state in various combatant countries. In some cases, this led to a refusal to engage further with the war effort and in others to heightened determination to continue until victory.¹²¹ Both responses are evident in Ireland, demonstrating the plurality of the home front experience.

Mobilising support for the war effort became more fraught. Maeve O'Riordan has noted the difficulties faced by Lady Inchiquin in her fundraising attempts in County Clare, a region known for its violence and strong republican movement.¹²² Women associated with the relief effort experienced increased hostility, especially in rural Ireland. Elsie Henry recorded in her diary attacks on the voluntary workers of the sphagnum moss depot in Kilgarvan, County Kerry in 1917:

The collecting has been difficult as the Kilgarvan people have boycotted the workers, and also at first tried to prevent the collection of moss. They attacked the moss-gatherers one day, men and women, and one woman scratched Miss Constable's face so badly that blood poisoning resulted. There is a strange and active bitterness, which does not exist around Kenmare itself. The feeling is all anti-English but the Kenmare depot itself has not encountered any resistance.¹²³

The Kilgarvan depot nevertheless produced 1,832 sphagnum moss dressings per month in 1917, a 28.5 per cent increase of the 1916 output.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ PRONI, D1507/A/25/3: Dawson Bates, *The spirit of the Province*.

¹²⁰ Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising, Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford, 2010, 2016), p. 279.

¹²¹ John Horne, 'Our war, our history' in Horne (ed.), *Our war*, p. 7. See also John Horne, 'Remobilising for "total war": France and Britain, 1917–1918' in Horne (ed.), *State, society and mobilisation*, pp. 195–211.

¹²² O'Riordan, 'Titled women and voluntary war work', p. 363.

¹²³ Elsie Henry, '13 April 1917', p. 186.

¹²⁴ *Annual report of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot 1917–1918* (Dublin, 1918).

Although physical attacks of this nature appear to have been rare, the tense political situation was nonetheless affecting the war effort across the country. Pauline Loftus's organisation in Kilkenny, a county less typically associated with Sinn Féin support or revolutionary upheaval, also faced difficulties in the latter half of the war due to the 'political unrest'.¹²⁵ In September 1918, Sir John Lumsden admitted to 15th Baron Inchiquin that 'Sinn Féin and other adverse factors' were creating challenges for their work in rural districts.¹²⁶

However, there was a parallel surge of support for the war effort in 1917 and 1918, evident in the outputs of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot and the results of fundraising appeals for the Red Cross. The annual report of the IWHSD for 1917–1918 admitted that there were fewer active workers on the books but suggested it was due to competing calls for 'women's service in Red Cross and government work' and the 'novelty of depot work having worn off'.¹²⁷ Despite this drop off in volunteers, the number of surgical dressings produced from the sphagnum moss depots increased steadily from 1916 to 1918 (from 183,628 dressings produced in 1916 to 398,889 dressings produced in 1918) as shown in Table 1.2.¹²⁸

Thirteen new sub-depots were established between late 1916 and early 1918, indicating continued levels of enthusiasm for the organisation and the war effort.¹²⁹ The Galway sub-depot was established in October 1916. It operated two days a week and had forty regular workers who produced a variety of field dressings and bandages. The workers held fetes in the grounds of the university to raise funds to cover the running cost of the depot. By the end of the war the depot had produced 45,768 surgical dressings for the troops.¹³⁰ The reports of fundraising for the Red Cross also suggest continued extensive levels of support for the war effort in Ireland after the 1916 Rising. Ireland's contributions to the Red Cross 'Our Day' appeal in 1917 and 1918 were particularly high, with the 1917 contribution from the southern provinces five times that raised in 1916, while there was a further 25.8 per cent increase in 1918 in the Irish contribution.¹³¹ The surge in support in 1917 and 1918 suggests that the

¹²⁵ Grant, *Philanthropy and voluntary action in the First World War*, p. 78.

¹²⁶ O'Riordan, 'Titled women and voluntary war work', p. 364.

¹²⁷ *Annual report of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot 1917–1918*, p. 5.

¹²⁸ *Third Annual report of the sphagnum department of the Irish War Hospital Supply Organisation* (Dublin, 1919), p. 11.

¹²⁹ *Annual report of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot 1917–1918*, p. 36.

¹³⁰ Henry, *Galway and the Great War*, p. 109.

¹³¹ Figures for southern Ireland derived from *The Red Cross in Ireland*, p. 38 and the figures for Ulster from 'Memoranda on Red Cross Work in Ireland', p. 731.

Table 1.2 *Irish War Hospital Supply Depot productivity, 1916–1917*

Category	1916	1917	Percentage change (%)
Number of workers	4,551	4,863	+6.9
Average attendance per working day	1,474	1,324	−10.2
Income	£13,748	£19,607	+42.6
Output (number of items)	970,000	1,900,000	+95.9

Source: *Annual reports of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot 1916–1918* (Dublin, 1917–1918)

political tensions may have spurred some sectors of the society to reaffirm their loyalty to the state and their patriotism through civil mobilisation. The productivity of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot and the success of the fundraising appeal for 1918 are especially noteworthy given the high infection rates of the influenza pandemic in Ireland in 1918, with infection levels highest among the young adults who were also most likely to have been active in the war effort.¹³² The first wave arrived in Ireland in spring 1918 and over the following twelve months there was a flare-up almost every month in Ireland. An estimated 900,000 people were infected by the pandemic.¹³³

Women's Services

In 1917 and 1918 hundreds of Irish women also joined the women's auxiliary military services where they performed work for military units usually undertaken by soldiers to release more men for active service. The military services attracted a wider class profile of Irish women and offered an alternative means for women to gain roles in the public sphere and to participate in the war effort. The most significant of those involving Irish women were the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the Women's Royal Naval Service. The WAAC was established in July 1917 by the War Office to provide support services for the British Army. It arose out of two voluntary organisations, the Women's Voluntary Reserve and the Women's Legion, both founded by a woman with strong Irish connections, Edith Vane-Tempest Stewart, 7th Marchioness of

¹³² Caitriona Foley, *The last Irish plague: the Great Flu epidemic in Ireland 1918–19* (Dublin, 2011), p. 32.

¹³³ Ida Milne, *Stacking the coffins: influenza, war and revolution in Ireland 1918–19* (Manchester, 2018), pp. 59–60. The influenza pandemic's impact on Ireland is discussed further in Chapter 2.

Londonderry and a vice-president of the UWUC.¹³⁴ In a speech in January 1915, Lady Edith Londonderry outlined her views of the role of women in wartime: 'In time of war women ought to be able to perform many of the ordinary civilian duties of men, when, by the absence of the latter with the colours, there is a shortage of labour available, both in the towns, and with regard to agriculture'.¹³⁵ She suggested that the Women's Voluntary Reserve would produce a body of 'responsible and efficient women' who could be depended upon in case of invasion and could replace male labour to free men for active service. She hoped it might also serve to prove women's capabilities and win supporters for women's suffrage.¹³⁶ Aware of the potential criticism, Londonderry emphasised that the objects of the Reserve were 'diametrically opposed' to 'ostentatious displays' of women 'stamping up and down the country, bristling with firearms and making themselves ridiculous'.¹³⁷ In an account of the organisation's establishment, written in 1944, Londonderry recalled how many people were 'deeply prejudiced' at the prospect of women performing war work outside of the traditional female spheres of nursing, sewing or cooking.¹³⁸ The uniforms worn by the Reserve members generated particular criticism: the newspapers reported them as 'parading the streets in breeches' and as 'masquerading as men'.¹³⁹

The controversy over the military roles of Reserve members prompted Londonderry to withdraw from the Reserve in summer 1915 and to establish the Women's Legion.¹⁴⁰ The Legion's motto was *Ora et Labora*, pray and work, and it advocated work 'performed by women in a woman's way'.¹⁴¹ Unlike the Reserve, the Legion consisted of paid workers with the intention being to 'replace working men with working women'.¹⁴² The first female voluntary organisation to be accepted for military service, the Women's Legion gained recognition from the Army Council in February 1916 and its military cooking and motor transport sections worked directly with the army within the United Kingdom.¹⁴³ By the war's end there were about 20,000 Women's Legion members working as cooks for the various army bodies. Despite the strong Ulster

¹³⁴ Urquhart, 'Ora et labora', p. 1.

¹³⁵ PRONI, D3099/3/10/8/4: Edith Londonderry, speech on 'Women and the war', Jan. 1915.

¹³⁶ Urquhart, 'Unionism, orangeism and war', p. 473.

¹³⁷ PRONI, D3099/3/10/8/4: Edith Londonderry, speech on 'Women and the war', Jan. 1915.

¹³⁸ D3099/14/1: Edith Londonderry, 'The Women's Legion, 1914', 1944. ¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. ¹⁴¹ Urquhart, 'Ora et labora', p. 4.

¹⁴² D3099/14/1: 'Sir John Cowans and the Women's Legion'.

¹⁴³ Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: war and the gentle sex 1907-1948* (London, 2006), p. 58.

Unionist sympathies of Lady Londonderry, the Legion was intended to be non-political and non-denominational. Nevertheless, it was greeted with limited enthusiasm in Belfast and indeed throughout Ireland.¹⁴⁴ There were active Legion detachments in Belfast, Cork and Dublin but it was far more extensive in Great Britain. One detachment in Dublin had over forty members who acted as motorcar drivers.¹⁴⁵

The need for more manpower in combatant positions in the army led to the establishment of the WAAC in 1917 with the initial intention of women replacing men in non-combatant positions in France. Many members of the Women's Legion and the Women's Voluntary Reserve joined the new organisation, which came under the remit of the War Office.¹⁴⁶ Between 1917 and 1920 some 57,000 women from Britain and Ireland served with the WAAC. They served as clerks, telephonists, waitresses, cooks and instructors in the use of gas masks. Those in senior positions held the rank of controller or administrator.¹⁴⁷ By November 1918, the Corps included 1,058 controllers and administrators, and 38,684 members. Of these 8,529 members were serving abroad and the remaining 30,155 on home service.¹⁴⁸ The organisation operated on what Lucy Noakes has described as a "consciously conservative" model of social class, but as paid work, it nevertheless had broader class appeal than many other types of war work.¹⁴⁹ The levels of pay however received some criticism. The *Irish Citizen* objected in March 1917 to the low pay offered to WAAC members serving in France.¹⁵⁰ The *Woman Worker* also highlighted the fact that the wages paid to WAAC members compared unfavourably to those earned in munition factories.¹⁵¹

The total number of Irish recruits with the WAAC remains unknown. Of the 57,000 women who served in the WAAC, only 7,000 service records have survived (12.3 per cent) due to bombing damage during the Second World War.¹⁵² There are 463 personnel files among the surviving records that list Ireland or a county in Ireland as the birthplace. By 19 July 1917, 574 Irish women had enrolled with the WAAC, making

¹⁴⁴ Urquhart, 'Ora et labora', pp. 6–7.

¹⁴⁵ Molly Coleclough, *Women's Legion 1916–1920* (London, 1940), p. 23.

¹⁴⁶ The organisation changed its name to the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) in April 1918 but for the purposes of clarity I shall continue to refer to it as the WAAC.

¹⁴⁷ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, p. 148.

¹⁴⁸ War Office, *Statistics of the military effort of the British Empire during the Great War 1914–1920* (London, 1922), p. 206.

¹⁴⁹ Lucy Noakes, 'Demobilising the military woman: constructions of class and gender in Britain after the First World War' *Gender and History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2007), p. 146.

¹⁵⁰ *Irish Citizen*, Mar. 1917. ¹⁵¹ *Woman Worker*, May 1918.

¹⁵² www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/womens-army-auxiliary-corps.htm

up 2.4 per cent of all WAAC enrolments by that date.¹⁵³ By April 1918 there were sixteen units in Ireland staffed with WAAC personnel, but it was anticipated that this would eventually rise to thirty-five units. There were two unit administrators, seven deputy administrators, fifteen assistant administrators and one quarter-mistress, indicating a high number of officer positions.¹⁵⁴ In May 1918 enrolments of the WAAC in Ireland were reported to have exceeded expectations and the recruits were described as of a 'very high standard'.¹⁵⁵

In many ways, the Irish members of the WAAC performed comparable work and represented a similar social profile to those from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The widespread support for the organisation in Ireland, even in the charged atmosphere after the Easter Rising, is significant. Examination of a random sample of seventy-five WAAC members who were born in Ireland indicates that the typical Irish WAAC member was single, in her early twenties and from a working-class background.¹⁵⁶ Just four were married and one was widowed. The mean age on enlistment was 22.4 years. A slight majority of the Irish members were Protestant: the various Protestant denominations accounted for 52.8 per cent of all WAAC members. There was a substantially higher proportion of Catholic involvement than evident in the Red Cross samples, reflecting the broader appeal of paid work. The dominance of Protestants in the local associations of the Red Cross also affected their associational appeal for Catholics, while WAAC workers enlisted as individuals and typically served outside their hometowns, removing the influence of locality on attitudes to war work. However, in common with the Red Cross volunteers, the majority were born in Ulster (twenty-nine) and Leinster (twenty-six) compared to just three from Connaught and seventeen from Munster.

The members had varying levels of education. The mean age at leaving school was 15.1 years, ranging from those who left school at twelve to two members who attended university. Two recruits were recorded as being illiterate. Table 1.3 reveals that a significant number of the WAAC members were former domestic servants. Most of the remainder came from factory or clerical work backgrounds. Eight had

¹⁵³ BLPES, Markham papers, 4/5: Number of application forms received by the national service department in connection with the WAAC up to and including 19 July 1917.

¹⁵⁴ IWM, WWS Army 3.25/5: Statistics re Irish command.

¹⁵⁵ *Lady of the House*, 15 May 1918.

¹⁵⁶ I selected the first seventy-five members who had listed Ireland as their birthplace from the National Archives catalogue: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/womens-army-auxiliary-corps-service-records-1917-1920/. The catalogue arranges the files randomly rather than alphabetically.

Table 1.3 *Previous occupations of sampled WAAC members*

Occupation	Number	Percentage of total (%)
Domestic service	31	41.3
Factory work	14	18.6
Clerical	14	18.6
Shop assistant	4	5.3
Other	4	5.3
Never worked	8	10.6

Source: TNA, WO 398 WAAC service records

never worked before, unsurprising given the young age of many of those who enlisted.

Twelve of the members had previously worked in the textile industry, either as manual workers or as clerks. The depression in this industry during the war may have played a role in encouraging these women to join the WAAC. Mary Martin, from Belfast, had worked as a doffer in a flax mill after leaving school in 1914. She was unemployed when she enlisted in the WAAC in May 1918. Her father was deceased, and it is likely that she needed to earn her own living.¹⁵⁷ Sarah McAtamney also worked as a doffer in a flax mill before joining the WAAC in September 1918. She grew up in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, and left school to enter the workforce aged fifteen. She was accepted for WAAC service despite her referee stating that they did not consider her 'suitable or qualified from any standpoint'.¹⁵⁸ Other members included Florence Marks, the daughter of a RIC district inspector. She joined the WAAC in 1918, aged twenty-two, having not worked since finishing school four years previously.¹⁵⁹ The decision to enlist in the WAAC likely arose from a combination of personal, economic and patriotic factors, with particular individuals motivated more by one factor.

The work of Irish WAAC members fell into four broad categories: domestic, cookery, mechanical and clerical.¹⁶⁰ Just over half of the sampled Irish members served in a domestic capacity, as general domestics, laundresses, orderlies and waitresses, while almost a third were clerical workers. This resembles closely the statistics given for total Irish enrolments to July 1917. Of the 574 Irish women enrolled with the

¹⁵⁷ TNA, WO 398/144/27: Mary Martin WAAC service record.

¹⁵⁸ WO 398/147/18: Sarah McAtamney WAAC service record.

¹⁵⁹ WO 398/143/24: Florence Marks WAAC record.

¹⁶⁰ Noakes, 'Demobilising the military woman', p. 148.

WAAC at that point, 37 per cent served in a clerical capacity and 54 per cent in domestic work.¹⁶¹ The Corps reflected the class structure of both civilian society and the army.¹⁶² Most of the women employed as clerks were from the skilled lower middle class, while those in domestic positions were usually working-class and frequently former domestic servants. The officers were predominantly from the upper middle or upper classes. A significant majority (81 per cent) of the sampled Irish members were mobile recruits, that is, they did not serve in the area from which they enrolled with the service. Nineteen of the WAAC members were based in England, thirteen in France and the remainder in Ireland. The average length of service for the sampled members was fourteen months, ranging from those who served for just two months to one member who served for two years and seven months. They were expected to serve 'for the duration of the war' when they enlisted; however, several were discharged early for various reasons, ranging from leaving to get married to being discharged for misconduct.

Annie Ellen Fraser left her post as assistant administrator after two months' service in 1918 as she was due to get married. The marriage was cancelled 'due to religious differences' and she applied to re-join the WAAC but there were no suitable posts available. Gladys Gilliland was discharged after five months' service for circulating a 'disgusting letter' among the men with whom she worked. She was described as a 'danger to the community'.¹⁶³ Others were unable to cope with the work. One woman was discharged due to fits of neurasthenia. She had previously worked as a domestic servant and was illiterate.¹⁶⁴ Another Irish woman in the sample was discharged after just five months' service with the reason attributed to 'pregnancy'.¹⁶⁵ The woman was single and aged nineteen. It is not clear if she was pregnant on enrolment and forced to resign on its discovery or whether the baby was conceived during her time with the WAAC.

There were widespread reports of sexual immorality in relation to WAAC members, with hundreds of WAACs alleged to have been sent home to give birth to illegitimate children.¹⁶⁶ The rumours of sexual

¹⁶¹ Markham papers, 4/5: Number of application forms received by the national service department in connection with the WAAC up to and including 19 July 1917.

¹⁶² Noakes, 'Demobilising the military woman', pp. 148–149.

¹⁶³ WO 398/80/16: Annie Ellen Fraser WAAC service record; WO 398/86: Gladys Gilliland WAAC service record.

¹⁶⁴ WO 398/86/22: Jemima Gilmore WAAC service record.

¹⁶⁵ WO 398/71/12: Rebecca Evans WAAC service record.

¹⁶⁶ Alison Fell, *Women as veterans in Britain and France after the First World War* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 111.

misconduct originated in letters written home by soldiers, some of whom clearly resented the women's presence with the military. The allegations were also influenced by more general concerns about women's sexual behaviour in wartime and the potential consequences arising from interactions between unmarried women and soldiers. The heightened visibility of women in the public sphere, especially in uniform, created anxiety about women transgressing gendered codes of behaviour.¹⁶⁷ In consequence, the rumours about the WAAC were taken seriously. The Ministry of Labour appointed a commission of inquiry in early 1918 to investigate the issue. It found no basis for the rumours but advocated that female police patrols be introduced at WAAC centres in France and for the powers of dismissal to be exercised more freely.¹⁶⁸ However, despite some individual difficult cases, most of the women recruited in Ireland for the Corps were considered capable and efficient and the April 1918 report enthused that in the case of the inexperienced workers, they were mostly 'keen and very willing'. While it was noted that there had been a few problems with discipline, the report continued that 'the less educated girls soon fall into line'.¹⁶⁹

The War Office was nonetheless concerned about the possible security risk from recruiting in Ireland for the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS). All women recruited from Ireland were subject to scrutiny by the Irish branch of the naval intelligence department, while in Britain only those required for special confidential work underwent the same scrutiny.¹⁷⁰ A report on the Kingstown subdivision in 1918 referred to the difficulties of recruiting Irish women for work in Ireland: 'the religious question must perforce enter largely into the matter and the Commodore was unwilling to trust confidential papers to girls who might feel themselves bound to pass their knowledge on'. The report stated that consequently it was inadvisable to recruit confidential posts through the labour exchanges.¹⁷¹ However, the Senior Naval Officer stated that they 'had no strong views' about recruiting Irish women for work in Ireland 'as long as the scrutiny was thorough, and their loyalty was assured'.¹⁷² This comment suggests a strong sense of confidence on the part of the British military in the Irish women's wartime service and a belief in the

¹⁶⁷ This wartime concern with sexual behaviour is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁸ Noakes, 'Demobilising the military woman', p. 154.

¹⁶⁹ IWM, WWS Army 3.25/5: Statistics re Irish command.

¹⁷⁰ WWS WRNS 7/29: Precis of WRNS series of dockets: statement re general recruiting arrangements.

¹⁷¹ WWS, WRNS 8.2/31: Precis of WRNS dockets: statement re Kingstown, subdivision, 1918.

¹⁷² WWS, WRNS 8.2/32: Precis of WRNS dockets: statement re Belfast subdivision, 1919.

loyalty and patriotism of the Irish recruits that was enduring in the aftermath of the Easter Rising and the growing political unrest in Ireland. The success of the WAAC and the WRNS in recruiting Irish women in those turbulent years is worth noting, reminding us of the plural home fronts evident in Ireland.

The WRNS was established in November 1917 to provide support services for the Admiralty. Women were typically recruited through the local labour exchanges with the selection boards led by WRNS recruiting officers.¹⁷³ The headquarters of the divisional director in Ireland was in Kingstown but the base stretched from Buncrana, Belfast and Larne in Ulster through Dublin and Kingstown to Queenstown in Cork.¹⁷⁴ The divisional office opened in Ireland in April 1918 and recruitment began in May 1918. The roles of the WRNS members included baking, signalling, attaching floats to torpedo nets and driving cars.¹⁷⁵ Almost half of the WRNS in Ireland performed clerical work. Technical work was the next largest category, followed by unskilled and domestic work. By November 1918 there were 175 WRNS members working in Ireland of whom 24 were mobile and 151 were immobile. The numbers employed in Ireland was 4.6 per cent of the total employed by the WRNS at that time. However, there were many women still required by the Naval service after the end of the war. The Irish division was not closed until August 1919, and it is likely that more women joined after the Armistice. The total number of women who worked with the WRNS from 1917 to 1919 is reported to be over 5,000.¹⁷⁶

The Irish members of the WRNS were primarily local women from port areas who had previously worked in the dockyards. The recruits in the Queenstown division were all local women, a necessity owing to a lack of suitable accommodation for mobile recruits. Many lived with relatives in Queenstown and the remainder travelled daily from Cork city. The War Office was concerned that Queenstown would be a difficult subdivision to operate because of the confidential nature of the work, the 'political situation' and the presence of many thousands of British and American naval men in Queenstown.¹⁷⁷ The Queenstown WRNS

¹⁷³ M.H. Fletcher, *The WRNS: a history of the Women's Royal Naval Service* (London, 1989), p. 14.

¹⁷⁴ WWS WRNS 19/1: 'The WRNS: being a story of their beginnings and doings in various parts' *WRNS Journal*, July 1919.

¹⁷⁵ Fletcher, *The WRNS*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁶ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/womens-royal-naval-service-ww1.htm.

¹⁷⁷ WWS 8.2/30: Precis of WRNS series of dockets: statement re Queenstown subdivision, 1919.

were mostly Catholics but despite initial concerns, the 'religious question' did not appear to present any problems.¹⁷⁸

Members of both the WRNS and the Women's Legion faced some hostility in Dublin, however. The Naval office was based close to Liberty Hall, 'near the worst rebel quarter of Dublin', and it was reported that the women 'often had unpleasant times there'.¹⁷⁹ Local hostility may have contributed to the reluctance of both WRNS members and their parents to the girls participating in public drills on the Naval Parade ground in Kingstown.¹⁸⁰ The Women's Legion also faced some trouble. Lady Londonderry witnessed Legion ambulance drivers being 'hooted and jeered at by hostile crowds and mud and stones thrown at them' in Dublin in October 1918. Urquhart suggests this was characteristic of the heightened anti-British sentiment prevalent in the latter half of the war, with the Legion's uniform seen as evidence of British loyalties.¹⁸¹ However, Molly Coleclough, an English member of the Women's Legion, recalled the hospitality and the friendliness of the Irish people during her time in Dublin in 1918.¹⁸²

The Women's Services offered an alternative means for women to contribute to the war effort aside from unpaid voluntary activity. This service enabled them to perform auxiliary military roles bringing them into close interaction with the war front, transcending the binary of home and battle front and blurring the lines between the female civilian and male warrior.¹⁸³ While Lady Londonderry and others were careful to emphasise the feminine nature of the work, the very act of putting women into military uniform offered a challenge to the traditional pattern of gender relations.¹⁸⁴ Hundreds of Irish women enlisted in the various branches of the services, serving in Ireland, Britain and France. This mobilisation took place almost entirely in the latter half of the war after the Easter Rising when support for the war effort had supposedly dwindled in Ireland. It is evident from examination of the case studies that a combination of personal ambition, economic and patriotic factors motivated the women's decision to enlist. The participation in extensive numbers of Irish women in the military services in the final years of the

¹⁷⁸ WRNS 14/33: Report of divisional director for Ireland, July 1919.

¹⁷⁹ WRNS 8.2/31: Precis of WRNS dockets: statement re Kingstown, subdivision, 1918.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. ¹⁸¹ Urquhart, 'Ora et labora', p. 8.

¹⁸² Coleclough, *Women's Legion 1916-1920*, p. 25.

¹⁸³ Kristina Robert, 'Constructions of "home", "front" and women's military employment in First World War Britain: a spatial interpretation' *History and Theory*, vol. 53 (Oct. 2013), p. 342.

¹⁸⁴ Noakes, 'Demobilising the military woman', p. 146.

war is indicative of enduring loyalty among many women towards Britain, and indeed of Britain's confidence in Irish patriotism.

Motivations and Experiences

The only WRNS worker to die due to enemy action in the Great War was an Irish woman named Josephine Carr. She was killed when the mail boat RMS *Leinster* was torpedoed in the Irish Sea on 10 October 1918.¹⁸⁵ Josephine Carr was born in Cork in 1899. She was enlisted with the WRNS at the age of nineteen to serve in a clerical capacity as a shorthand typist. She was a member of the Church of Ireland and the daughter of a tailor. In 1911 her elder sister Eva was working as a shop assistant, indicating that it was expected for the daughters of the family to earn their living before marriage.¹⁸⁶ Carr was en route to England with the WRNS when her boat was torpedoed.¹⁸⁷ She was one of at least forty-four Irish women who lost their lives between 1914 and 1918 while on active service for the war effort. A further thirteen died in 1919. The majority died of disease. Others suffered lingering health problems attributed to wartime infections, discussed further in Chapter 6. Women's war service carried the risk of illness or death and often involved a significant commitment on the woman's behalf. Their war service was encouraged and supported by governments and the wider society. The civic response was vital to the success of the war effort and to maintaining morale and stability on the home front. For the women themselves, the motivations behind their war service ranged from the desire for emancipation, personal fulfilment and independence, together with patriotic, political and economic motives. For many women, their participation was spurred by a combination of these factors.

As noted by Margaret Downes, Irish voluntary aid cannot be categorised simply as Christian piety or Imperial zeal, but instead represents the universal aim of voluntary war workers across the world: to alleviate the suffering caused by the war, from which they could not escape.¹⁸⁸ It is certainly true that for many of those involved, their initial motivation was to assist with the fallout from the crisis engulfing Europe. This urge was evident across political allegiances, including among advanced nationalists opposed to Irish participation in the Great War. For many, their support for the war effort was in aid of specific soldiers or military

¹⁸⁵ Fletcher, *The WRNS*, p. 23.

¹⁸⁶ 1911 census record for Josephine Carr; Commonwealth War Graves Commission record for Carr.

¹⁸⁷ WRNS 19/1: 'The WRNS'. ¹⁸⁸ Downes, 'The civilian voluntary aid effort', p. 37.

families rather than an imperial or even national cause. Margaret Darrow's work on French volunteer nursing describes the differing attitudes towards war service among soldiers and nurses. Men's military service represented a nationalist commitment to aid their country while women's voluntary nursing was more personal and less abstract. Women's commitment to the national cause was expressed through their nursing work and care for the soldiers.¹⁸⁹

War relief work was typically undertaken on a local scale, further distancing it from difficult concepts of nationality. Irish women participated in local, regional, national and international networks. While most of the activity came under the remit of the British Red Cross, for many women, their point of connection was their local division or detachment. Most relief work was performed in work parties or sphagnum moss collecting groups, providing a strong associational element. This was a common feature of wartime charitable work. Local associations were viewed as extensions of the family and neighbourhood and thus as permissible spaces for women.¹⁹⁰ In Ireland, it also allowed women to support relief efforts in their locality even if they had reservations about the British or imperial war effort. Rosamond Jacob, the Waterford playwright and suffragist, was vehemently opposed to Irish participation in the British forces but nonetheless supported fundraising efforts for local people in distress due to the war.¹⁹¹ Importantly, unlike men's military service, women's voluntary work did not have to be a full-time commitment. Women could avail of the social benefits of war service while choosing the extent of their participation.

A significant number of the women who devoted their time had a family member serving in the armed forces and so it may have provided some consolation to be able to contribute in some way themselves. Isabel Meredith, a middle-class Catholic from south Dublin, became involved with the St John Ambulance following the enlistment of her brother Dermot in the army. Dermot was invalided out of the army in 1917, suffering from severe shell shock, and spent a year in the Dublin Castle Red Cross Hospital.¹⁹² Marie Martin, another Dublin Catholic, found solace in her Red Cross nursing work in France and Malta after her brother Charlie was reported missing and later confirmed to have died in

¹⁸⁹ Darrow, 'French volunteer nursing', p. 84.

¹⁹⁰ Nicole van Os, 'Aiding the Poor Soldiers' Families: the Asker Ailelerine Yardımcı Hanımlar Cemiyeti,' *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, vol. 21 (2011), p. 282.

¹⁹¹ Pennell, *A kingdom united*, p. 171.

¹⁹² Meldon and Meredith family papers (private collection in the ownership of the author's family).

Gallipoli in December 1915.¹⁹³ Six of the sampled Irish WAAC members had a father or husband serving in the army. These included Evelyn Hudson whose husband was a prisoner of war in Holland when she enlisted with the WAAC in June 1918.¹⁹⁴

Emma Duffin, a young middle-class Belfast woman, volunteered as a Red Cross nurse along with her four sisters. Their brother Terence was a British Army officer. Duffin outlined her motives for enlisting to serve as a SJAA nurse in a letter to her mother in May 1915:

I am glad for I think it is the right thing to do, you will feel that that you are being of some use, and it makes me independent till the end of the war anyway, and I daresay I will get to like the work, everyone seems to, it will certainly be interesting.¹⁹⁵

Her reasons for enlisting clearly combined both a sense of patriotic duty with a desire for independence and personal fulfilment. The sense of it being ‘the right thing to do’ was common with many women feeling almost compelled to do something related to the war. Isabella Cleland from County Antrim inserted a note with her completed British Red Cross service record, outlining how she had seen a call in a local newspaper for volunteers to help with the sphagnum moss dressings. She was ‘well pleased with the privilege of doing a little bit’. Cleland made an estimated three-dozen bandages each week for eighteen months.¹⁹⁶ Another British Red Cross member, Emilie Gilmore McCaw (Belfast), summed up her war service as follows: ‘I first went when I could and did all I could’.¹⁹⁷

Personal fulfilment, the influence of one’s peers and the social benefits derived from war work were also important factors, particularly in sustaining war relief work beyond the first few months of the war. Patriotic fervour and the excitement generated by the outbreak of the war may have prompted women to begin activities to support the war effort in autumn 1914, but other factors were essential to sustain this enthusiasm and commitment. In her work on British nurses, Henriette Donner has emphasised the fulfilment many women gained. The nurses enjoyed a sense of pride in their handling of their duty, the companionship of working with others and a feeling that their lives had meaning and purpose.¹⁹⁸ This is

¹⁹³ BRCA: Marie Helena Martin service record; NLI, Ms 34,256A: Diary of Mary Martin, 1916.

¹⁹⁴ TNA, WO 398/111/1: Evelyn Hudson WAAC record.

¹⁹⁵ PRONI, D2019/9/3/a: Letter from Emma Duffin to her mother, 22 May 1915.

¹⁹⁶ BRCA: Isabella Cleland service record.

¹⁹⁷ BRCA: Emilie Gilmore McCaw service record.

¹⁹⁸ Henriette Donner, ‘Under the Cross – why VADs performed the filthiest tasks in the dirtiest war: Red Cross volunteers 1914–1918’ *Journal of Social History*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Spring 1997), p. 688.

evident in the case of Marie Martin. Her letters from France and Malta to her mother reveal the sense of self-worth she gained from receiving praise from the matron, and the enjoyment she found in being able to dispense medical advice to her relatives.¹⁹⁹ She found the work difficult but wrote home to her mother after a month in Malta that she could ‘stand anything and everything to feel I am of use and doing a certain amount for all these poor men who are suffering to save us from ruination’.²⁰⁰

Iza Mahony, another Dublin Catholic, also served with the Red Cross in Malta. In her diary she noted the day she left Dublin for overseas service as ‘the beginning of a new career for me’. Despite the paltry pay provided to volunteer nurses, the arrival of Mahony’s first pay packet generated excitement: ‘Great day. Got our first pay. First money I ever earned’. Although Mahony was homesick, greatly missing her mother, her friendship with her fellow nurses sustained her. When given the choice to remain for another period of service in February 1916, she initially decided to stay rather than return home in six weeks. The decision was difficult, but she felt ‘I ought to stay’. Although she ended up coming home early following urgent summons from her mother, she felt conflicted about leaving her nursing work and sorry to be parted from her friends.²⁰¹ She later served in France for seven months. Urquhart has similarly observed a sense of ‘camaraderie and purpose’ among the Women’s Legion members, evident, in Molly Coleclough’s account of her friendship with other Legion members in Ireland.²⁰²

Peer pressure also played a role in certain war relief participation. A worker with the National Egg Collection noted how two women in a rural area who first refused to give eggs later did so ‘because they were ashamed to be the only families on the mountain who had refused’.²⁰³ Donations to the National Egg Collection were published in the local newspapers, placing pressure on women to contribute.²⁰⁴ These appeals were directed at women who controlled household management and the element of peer pressure in this regard primarily affected older married women with responsibility for domestic consumption.

Emma Duffin referred to the independence she hoped to gain from nursing service. For some women voluntary work for the war effort came

¹⁹⁹ MMMA, B/F/1/41 to B/F/1/81: letters from Marie Martin to her mother, 18 June 1916 to 12 Dec. 1916.

²⁰⁰ MMMA, B/F/1/15: Letter from Marie Martin to her mother, 27 Nov. 1915.

²⁰¹ Mahoney family papers, Diary of Iza Mahony, 1 Sept. 1915–3 Mar. 1916. I am grateful to Hubert Mahony for making this diary available to me.

²⁰² Urquhart, ‘Ora et labora’, p. 13; Coleclough, *Women’s Legion 1916–1920*, p. 24.

²⁰³ IWM, WWS B.O.2 44/20: The story of the National Egg Collection (n.d.).

²⁰⁴ See, for example, *Anglo-Celt*, 13 Nov. 1915.

as a welcome distraction from their restricted lives. Sharon Ouditt has suggested that British voluntary nurses, epitomised by Vera Brittain, found themselves ‘suddenly released from the passive, chaperoned Edwardian existence characteristic of provincial female life’.²⁰⁵ Arthur Marwick argues that a conscious awareness of their contribution to an essential war effort brought a new ‘self-consciousness and a new sense of status’ to the middle- and upper-class women involved in war work.²⁰⁶ Marwick’s conclusions have been critiqued by scholars such as Alison Fell who highlight the limited and temporary nature of wartime progress in women’s emancipation and the pre-war roles performed by many women in the public sphere.²⁰⁷ Urquhart’s history of the Women’s Legion nonetheless demonstrates the emancipatory possibilities of war work. She considers the Legion’s work in replacing men with uniformed women as the ‘historic’ actions of a ‘pioneering organisation’. By putting women into uniform, the war had challenged traditional orthodoxies of feminine behaviour. The Legion’s founder, Lady Edith Londonderry, herself felt that the war had not only ‘revolutionised their dress but completely altered their status’.²⁰⁸

The emancipatory potential of war service can be observed in the case of Sophie Peirce-Evans, who served as an ambulance driver and motor dispatch rider with the WAAC. Born in Limerick in 1896, Peirce-Evans studied at the Royal College of Science from 1914 where she was active in writing for the College magazine, *Torch*. In 1916 she married an English soldier, Captain William Elliot-Lynn, who was based temporarily in the Curragh with the Royal Engineers.²⁰⁹ Peirce-Evans continued her studies at the Royal College until April 1917 when she joined the WAAC. This allowed her to earn her own income for the first time, to join her husband in serving her country and to exchange domestic life for a more adventurous one. Peirce-Evans’ biographer, Lindie Naughton, suggests that the main attraction was to be ‘embarking on her first adventure, unchaperoned and free to come and go as she wished, with no aunts or husbands holding her back’.²¹⁰ At first Peirce-Evans was based with the WAAC in England where she carried messages for the army. In a letter to the *Torch* in December 1917 she described her experience in England with the WAAC in glowing terms:

²⁰⁵ Ouditt, *Fighting forces, writing women*, p. 31. ²⁰⁶ Marwick, *The deluge*, p. 99.

²⁰⁷ Alison S. Fell, ‘Afterward: remembering the First World War nurse in Britain and France’ in Alison S. Fell and Christine Hallett, *First World War nursing: new perspectives* (New York, 2013), p. 186.

²⁰⁸ Urquhart, ‘Ora et labora’, pp. 12–13. ²⁰⁹ NLI, *Torch* magazine, Dec. 1916.

²¹⁰ Lindie Naughton, *Lady Icarus: the life of Irish aviator Lady Mary Heath* (Dublin, 2004), p. 43.

I enjoy every second of life here; it is no end of a rag. The officers get up dances for us about once a fortnight and a week never passes by without some joy ride into Salisbury, only 16 miles away, for a theatre [...] The work is pretty stiff here I admit, but there isn't one of us that would go back to 'civvy' life without regret.²¹¹

Peirce-Evans served in France with an ambulance unit in 1918 and 1919 where she had her portrait painted by the Irish war artist Sir John Lavery in July 1919.²¹² She subsequently became one of the first female aviators and an internationally ranked athlete (discussed further in Chapter 6). Sophie Peirce-Evans was evidently an exceptional woman. Her experience nevertheless provides an insight into motivating factors for Irish women participating in the war effort, revealing as it does the fulfilment, excitement and independence gained by some such women through their war experience.

Specific motivations applied to certain types of war service. The paid roles with the women's military auxiliary services were notably different undertakings to participation in a Red Cross work party or an Irish War Hospital Supply Depot. Joining the WAAC or the WRNS or serving with the QAIMNS involved a significant commitment to a specified duration of service. These roles also involved an economic incentive. Many of the Irish members of the WAAC or the other auxiliary services came from working-class backgrounds and were obliged to seek paid employment. Although poorly paid compared to munitions work, the women's services represented an opportunity to enter new types of employment. Personal, economic and patriotic motives frequently coincided and the choice of occupation suggests some level of patriotism was involved for many of the women. The Women's Legion, for instance, employed thousands of trained cooks who had come from 'excellent situations' and in many cases had accepted a 'considerable drop in salary from motives of patriotism'.²¹³ The pay rates for clerks with the WAAC also compared unfavourably to those offered by commercial businesses.²¹⁴

The annual £2 retainer paid to the QAIMNS reserve may have motivated Irish nurses to sign up as reservists before the war, little expecting that their service would be required. Professional nurses could also earn significantly more through army nursing; the wages of a ward sister or matron in the army were almost double that of civilian nurses at home.²¹⁵

²¹¹ *Torch* magazine, Dec. 1917. ²¹² Naughton, *Lady Icarus*, p. 48.

²¹³ D3099/14/1: Londonderry papers, 'Sir John Cowans and the Women's Legion'.

²¹⁴ BLPES, Markham papers, Ms 4/5: Draft of letter from Violet Markham to the War Office, 27 June 1917.

²¹⁵ Horgan-Ryan 'Irish military nursing in the Great War', pp. 90–96.

Humanitarian impulses, personal ambition and patriotism also played an important role in the enlistment of qualified nurses. In her study of Welsh wartime nursing, Sara Brady concludes that the Great War offered nurses ‘unique opportunities to fulfil private ambitions alongside their duties in public service’. The war offered an escape route to nurses who wished to move from their usual working environment, allowing them to move to another institution, into a more specialised field or to serve overseas.²¹⁶

A combination of patriotism and a desire to be part of the excitement of war motivated two Irish nurses who joined the QAIMNS from their civilian hospitals in England.²¹⁷ Catherine Black, from County Donegal, held a nursing position in the London Hospital in 1914. She signed up with the QAIMNS but did not ‘really expect to be called up’, as she believed the war would be over by Christmas.²¹⁸ After spending the first year of the war in a military hospital in Cambridge, Black was sent to France in autumn 1916. She worked in various casualty-clearing stations until the war ended.²¹⁹ Emily MacManus, a nurse in Guy’s hospital in London, explained in her memoir how she felt compelled to enlist as an army nurse after the outbreak of war: ‘I felt I could remain at Guy’s no longer’.²²⁰ MacManus was born in England in 1886 to Irish parents. Two of her brothers served in the war: Desmond with the Royal Army Medical Corps and Dermot with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

MacManus joined the QAIMNS reserve in July 1915 and was immediately sent to France. In her memoir, she recalled some of the harrowing scenes she witnessed as a military nurse. At the time of the March 1918 offensive she was working in a casualty-clearing station at Noyon, at the end of the English line. The nurses were placed under huge pressure to cope with the vast numbers of injured soldiers: ‘We worked from 3pm to 8am or thereabouts – and still the wounded poured in’. She was reluctant to be evacuated from the front line and worried about the wounded soldiers and civilians they were leaving behind in danger: ‘I have never felt more sad or ashamed’.²²¹ The dedication to her work and a desire to, in some way, alleviate the suffering caused by the war is evident in MacManus’s memoir. This was also evident in the case of the amateur nurses serving with the VADs. Nonetheless there were significant tensions between the amateur and professional nurses.

²¹⁶ Sara Brady, ‘Public service and private ambitions: nursing at the King Edward VII Hospital, Cardiff during the First World War’ in Anne Morsay (ed.), *Medicine in Wales c. 1800–2000 public service or private commodity?* (Cardiff, 2003), pp. 108–109.

²¹⁷ See also Graffin, ‘Hope and experience’, pp. 143–145.

²¹⁸ Catherine Black, *Kings nurse, beggar’s nurse* (London, 1939), p. 84.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–95. ²²⁰ Emily MacManus, *Matron of Guy’s* (London, 1956), p. 89.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–108.

For many women, one of the most significant benefits of war relief work was the solidarity and companionship of working with others for a common purpose. However, the wartime rhetoric of sacrifice and nationhood emphasised sectional divisions.²²² The political and sectarian tensions affecting the war effort were referred to earlier and are discussed further in Chapter 6. Social class was also a persistent issue for women war workers. Although war service is frequently imagined as having encouraged greater interaction between the classes, increased interaction did not necessarily lead to improved relations. The morality of working-class women was questioned, and upper-class women faced criticism for their supposed frivolity and accusations of using war service as a new social competition.²²³

One Irish nurse requested to be transferred from her hospital in Lancashire due to ‘the associations of the place’. The wounded soldiers had made unwelcome advances, and it is implied that the other nurses were of a lower class and thus unsuitable companions, as they do not ‘make allowances for those whose natural inclinations and upbringing compel them to resent incidents which the majority accept as usual’.²²⁴ The nurse in question was the daughter of a Catholic barrister and had grown up in a prosperous area of Dublin.²²⁵ Celia Duffin, a Belfast voluntary nurse, maintained her class-consciousness when serving in hospitals in England. In a letter to her sister Emma, Duffin commented on the class of her fellow voluntary nurses and seemed nervous of interaction with them: ‘A lot of the Red X girls are ladies but I don’t think many of the St John are’.²²⁶ A few weeks later she repeated the sentiment to her mother: ‘Some of the girls are quite ladies but the greater number are not’.²²⁷ Ann Matthews has observed similar social barriers among Cumann na mBan members during the Easter Rising, whereby middle-class women were reluctant to interact with the working-class members, feeling somewhat ‘alien among them’.²²⁸

Significant tensions were particularly apparent in the nursing sector between the amateur and professional nurses, due to class differences but also professionalisation, and the different perspectives each group had of

²²² Horne, ‘Mobilising for total war 1914–1918’ in Horne (ed.), *State, society and mobilisation*, p. 12.

²²³ Similar attitudes prevailed in France: Darrow, ‘French volunteer nursing’, p. 82.

²²⁴ IWM BRCS 10/37: Letter from W. Geoghen, County director of the City of Dublin BRCS branch, to Katherine Furse, commandant in chief of the VADs, 15 June 1917.

²²⁵ 1911 census record of Mary Nydia Kennedy.

²²⁶ PRONI D2109/9/3/B: Letter from Celia to Emma Duffin, 9 June 1915.

²²⁷ D2019/9/3/B: Letter from Celia to her mother, 24 June 1915.

²²⁸ Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish republican women 1900–1922* (Cork, 2010), p. 131.

their work. Janet K. Watson has observed how professional nurses viewed wartime nursing as an opportunity to demonstrate their essential and unique skills while the volunteers perceived it as a parallel war service akin to that performed by their soldier relatives and friends.²²⁹ The conflict was evident in the *British Journal of Nursing*, which frequently featured criticism of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses during the Great War. The journal criticised the volunteers for their ‘inflated ideas of their own importance’, their unreliability and snobbery.²³⁰ Emily MacManus recalled in her memoir the initial ‘consternation and annoyance’ among the QAIMNS nurses on the arrival of VADs in their army camp in France and her assumption that the ‘untrained girls’ would be ‘useless – frivolous, frightened’. Despite this foreboding she reported that the VAD girls were the ‘greatest success’ and that army nurses could not have managed without the extra volunteer help. She described the voluntary nurses she encountered as ‘careful and keen – determined to learn all they could and to be helpful’.²³¹

Concern about the voluntary nurses was also evident on the home front in Ireland. In November 1914, Margaret Cunningham, warden of the Trinity College Dublin women’s residence, expressed reservations about the sudden popularity of voluntary nursing. She argued that women were neglecting ‘other obvious duties to have the glamour of looking after the soldiers’ and suggested that they would be better served caring for the sick poor.²³² The *Irish Citizen* adopted the issue, arguing that the involvement of Irish women with the Red Cross was taking away employment from trained nurses who depended upon such work for their livelihood and lowering the ‘standard and prestige’ of the nursing profession by allowing in unskilled workers. The newspaper claimed that the hospitals in Dublin were being ‘flooded’ by voluntary nurses and suggested that the class and influence of the ladies meant that most hospitals had ‘condoned the incursion of hordes of untrained into their ranks’. The discussion of the topic in the *Irish Citizen* included several letters from trained nurses who believed that there was a shortage of work for nurses in Dublin due to the deluge of amateurs into the profession.²³³

²²⁹ Janet K. Watson, ‘War in the wards: the social construction of medical work in First World War Britain’ *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Oct. 2002), p. 486. See also Christine Hallett, ‘Emotional nursing: involvement, engagement and detachment in the writings of First World War Nurses and VADs’ in Fell and Hallett, *First World War nursing*, pp. 93–96.

²³⁰ *British Journal of Nursing*, 13 May 1916, 20 May 1916.

²³¹ MacManus, *Matron of Guy’s*, pp. 93–94.

²³² *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 27 Nov. 1914.

²³³ *Irish Citizen*, 21 Nov. 1914, 5 Dec. 1914, 12 Dec. 1914, 17 July 1915.

Such protests resembled the objections to the use of volunteers in munition factories or the potential displacement of textile workers by Red Cross work parties, except that in this case, it was a skilled profession that was threatened by the influx of volunteers.²³⁴ It is however possible that the conflict between the two types of nurses was exaggerated in the nursing journals as a means of asserting their own worth. There was a lengthy campaign among nurses in the United Kingdom before the war for a register to recognise the training of qualified nurses.²³⁵ This remained a significant concern in wartime. The Irish Matrons' Association passed a resolution in January 1918 stating that VADs needed to take three years training in the wards of a recognised training school to be entitled to call themselves trained nurses.²³⁶ Most former VAD nurses in any cases were glad to leave behind their war work after the Armistice and return to their pre-war occupations.

The Nurses Registration Act became legislation in December 1919, creating a boundary of expertise around the profession.²³⁷ The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation was founded in 1919, the same time as the Professional Union of Trained Nurses in Britain. Initially a branch of the Irish Women Workers Union, the Irish Nurses Union, as it was known, aimed to seek improvements in pay and the setting of professional standards for the performance of nurses' duties.²³⁸ It made significant progress in the first years regarding pay and pension entitlements, and the setting of standards through education and policy documents. Despite the Registration Act and the increased unionisation of nursing, historians however have questioned whether women's war-time activities resulted in long-term changes to the status of nurses in society. From her examination of British military nursing Anne Summers concluded that nurses lacked power and radical leadership during the war. She argues that the war demonstrated 'how easily the state could override the nurses' criteria of professionalism by "diluting" hospital staff with barely trained VADs'.²³⁹ The nursing profession however benefitted from the significant public attention in wartime with nursing becoming valorised and sentimentalised in the popular press. Although their

²³⁴ In autumn 1914 the work parties were criticised for displacing paid labour by the War Emergency Workers' National Committee. Andrews, *Economic effects of the war*, pp. 24–25; see also *Irish Citizen*, 26 Nov. 1914; *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 21 Aug. 1914.

²³⁵ Hallett, *Veiled Warriors*, p. 16. ²³⁶ *British Journal of Nursing*, 12 Jan. 1918.

²³⁷ Hallett, *Veiled Warriors*, pp. 255, 259.

²³⁸ *Irish Citizen*, Aug. 1919, Apr.–May 1920; May–June 1920. UCD Library Irish Nursing Journals Collection: <http://digital.ucd.ie/view/ivrla:35760>

²³⁹ Anne Summers, *Angels and citizens: British women as military nurses 1854–1914* (London, 1988), pp. 253–270.

leadership had to tread a difficult line of advocating for their profession while maintaining their positive public reputation centred on self-sacrifice and virtuous duty, they eventually succeeded in gaining the long-awaited register.

Conclusion

Irish women's participation in the war services was remarkably high despite the complex relationship between Irish society and Great Britain. The huge variety of organisations associated with the war effort in Ireland, ranging from the small local initiatives to the nationwide or international organisations, closely resembled the structure of voluntary civil mobilisation in Britain.²⁴⁰ Communities all over Ireland engaged with the war effort in varied ways. The participation of Irish women in the BRCS and the SJAA was much greater than previously realised and was almost in line with that in Great Britain, while the amount raised per head of population through fundraising in 1917 and 1918 surpassed that of Britain. This is especially noteworthy given the political context in Ireland and the level of opposition to the British government among Irish people in 1914.

Despite the increasing political divisions after the Easter Rising there remained significant levels of support for the war effort after 1916, as indicated by the outputs of the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot and the results of Red Cross fundraising appeals. The Red Cross and WAAC samples indicated the diverse range of women involved in voluntary war work and the war services, revealing a range of socio-economic and denominational backgrounds. Nonetheless, the war effort became a contested space, with Catholics distrusting the motivations of Protestant war workers and vice versa. The war also emphasised the divisions between north and south with the women's work for the war effort being used by unionist bodies to emphasise Ulster Unionist loyalty at the expense of all-island cooperation. Thomas Hennessey argues that while partition was inevitable without the war, it accelerated the process of 'psychological partition'. The war began the process of complete polarisation of Irish national and British national or imperial identities.²⁴¹ Although ignored by Hennessey, the activities of the main voluntary war relief organisations are indicative of this 'two Irelands' mentality.

²⁴⁰ Gregory, *The last Great War*, pp. 98–100.

²⁴¹ Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and partition* (London, 1998), pp. 235–239.

The opportunities for this war service were affected by class, generation and geography. The samples of Red Cross voluntary workers reveal that while a wide range of women participated in war work, the women's age, marital status and domestic responsibilities affected their level of commitment. Red Cross work parties and detachments were also more common in urban areas and in north-east of the country. While it was dominated by single young women, the women's auxiliary military services had a wider class and denominational profile, enabling women to combine economic and patriotic motives. Although their nationality and religion brought Irish members increased scrutiny and suspicion from the British authorities, the strength of these organisations in Ireland in the aftermath of the Rising is noteworthy.

Voluntary support for the war effort through organisations like the Red Cross was motivated by both humanitarian and patriotic impulses. Many women, in Ireland as elsewhere, hoped to gain independence and personal fulfilment from their war work. Maria Luddy argues that philanthropy offered middle- and upper-class women the opportunity to enter the public sphere 'without any great tension'.²⁴² This was certainly true of charitable work during wartime, where women's contribution to the war effort was typically celebrated and praised. Accepted as solely confined to the exceptional wartime circumstances, it did not present a challenge to gender norms, but rather an affirmation of women's compassionate maternalist role in society. Nevertheless, within the space created by the war, women could occupy the public sphere to a greater extent than before. War work offered women new experiences, the solidarity of working with others for a common purpose and, for some women, financial independence. Women's domestic responsibilities nevertheless continued unabated and, as the next chapter illustrates, these expanded and became more challenging in wartime.

²⁴² Luddy, *Women and philanthropy*, p. 2.