

From Swanley to Glasnevin

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ABSTRACT: The history of female students who attended the National Botanic Gardens (Ingram and Forrest, 1997) is continued following an examination of Swanley archives. Brief biographical notes are given on four students from the Horticultural College at Swanley, who attended Glasnevin, namely: Rose Barton (1906), Mary Helen Graves (1898), A. Margaret MacIntyre (1906), and Gertrude Webb (1898). Biographical details of Mary Helen Graves shed light on her decision to come to study in Glasnevin.

INTRODUCTION

A previous paper, 'From Lady Pupil to Lady Gardener' (Ingram and Forrest, 1997) outlined the history of twenty female students who attended the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin in the period 1898 to 1942 and provided information on their subsequent employment. In a letter to the Science and Art Museum in 1898, Frederick Moore, the Keeper of the Gardens, named Gertrude Webb and Mary Graves 'who had passed a couple of years at Swanley College' as the first 'lady gardeners' (1). Records of subsequent, though not all, lady gardeners appear in manuscript registers entitled 'Came', 'Left' and 'Lady pupils' at Glasnevin (2,3,4).

Swanley Horticultural College commenced in 1889, providing education for male and female students. In 1891 it became a college for female students only. Courses of two or three years duration were provided and students were awarded certificates and diplomas (Janes, 1907). It continued at Swanley until 1945 when the property was bombed and the College became part of Wye College, Ashford, Kent.

Some information located in 1999 in the archives of Wye College, and the Royal Botanic Gardens (R.B.G.), Kew, highlights connections between the Horticultural College, Swanley, Kent and the Royal (now National) Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin in the years 1898 to 1916. Biographical details of Mary Helen Graves shed light on her decision to come to study in Glasnevin.

The names of Gertrude Webb, Mary Helen Graves, Rose Barton and A. Margaret Mac Intyre appear in Glasnevin manuscript sources and in the Dept of Science and Art of the Committee of Council on Education, General Register of the Horticultural College Swanley Kent (5). The Register records name, address, date of commencement and completion of course, and father's occupation for each student. The register 'Lady Pupils' (4) notes the names of four other Swanley students who applied to study at Glasnevin.

THE SWANLEY STUDENTS

Gertrude Webb was aged 27 when she entered Swanley on 4 May 1896. She left in April 1898. Her address was given as the Horticultural College and her father's occupation was listed as gentleman. She commenced her studies in Glasnevin on 20 June 1898.

Mary Helen Graves's address was Red Branch House, Wimbledon, London and her Father's occupation was given as H.M. Inspector of Schools. She began her studies at

Swanley aged 19 on 25 January 1897 and left on 3 August 1900. A later record states that she started in the college on 11 September 1899 and left on 3 August 1900. She must have spent a year in Swanley, followed by a year in Glasnevin, before returning again to Swanley. Further details about Mary Graves were located in *Robert Graves the assault heroic* (Graves, 1986) and *Robert Graves his life and work* (Seymour-Smith, 1995). Mary Graves (1877 – 1949?) was a half sister of the poet Robert Graves. Her father, Alfred Perceval Graves, was born in Dublin and was also a poet and writer of ballads, the most well known being 'Father O'Flynn'. Her grandfather Charles Graves was Bishop of Limerick. She is described by Graves (1986) as the first woman to pass the Royal Horticultural Society's examination in horticulture. This is not the case; 23 women were successful in that examination in 1898. Mary Graves achieved a first class result with 270 marks gained (Anonymous, 1898-1899). She was later described as working as a gardener at the Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, where she was in charge of the orchid collection (Graves, 1986). However she is not included on staff lists of the period. During the year 1898 – 1899 when she was a 'lady pupil' she may have worked in the orchid house. Perhaps she was attracted to spend the year studying in Dublin because her aunt, Lady Grace Pontifex, lived there and she also had a granduncle, Robert Graves, who was subdean of the Chapel Royal in Dublin Castle and vice warden of Alexandra College Dublin. In 1902 she went to Egypt where she met and married Arthur Preston, a solicitor who later became a judge. They had three children, Janie, Roseen and Martin. Mary went to France to work as a nurse in World War I. She was also a water diviner.

The references in F. W. Moore's letter and the Register were the only ones relating to Gertrude Webb and Mary Helen Graves to be located in Glasnevin or Swanley archives.

Rose Barton was 30 years old when she began to attend Swanley on 14 September 1904. She left the College on 11 April 1906. Her address was 15 Landsdown Place, Cheltenham and her father's occupation was landlord. In 1905 she applied to Glasnevin, with a recommendation from William Edward Gumbleton of Belgrove, Co. Cork and was accepted for July 1905 but deferred taking a place until a year later (Lady pupils (4)). The *Horticultural College Magazine*, a Swanley publication, notes that Miss Barton and Miss Mac Intyre were at Glasnevin (Anonymous, 1907). In 1911 Rose Barton wrote an article for the *Horticultural College Magazine*, describing her time in Glasnevin working in the Pits and in the Locked Garden, perhaps what is now called the Enclosed Garden. She also described evening lectures and 'strolling lectures' given by the Keeper. It is unclear whether she later worked as a gardener. In a 1915 issue of the *Horticultural College Magazine*, Miss Barton is described as an assistant cook in one of the Red Cross hospitals in Cheltenham (Anonymous, 1915a). A register of Guild members given in the *Horticultural College Magazine* in 1924 gives her occupation as housekeeping for an invalid mother.

A. Margaret Mac Intyre attended Swanley from 14 September 1904. She was from Mackenzie Lodge, Fortrose, Scotland and her father was a soldier. She remained in Swanley for two years, then went to Glasnevin in August 1906. The 1907 edition of the *Horticultural College Magazine* refers to her being a student in the R.B.G. Glasnevin (Anonymous, 1907). There is no record of her actual application to the Gardens. In 1915 she was appointed as a gardener at R.B.G. Kew and she was later described as working in the Rock Garden (Anonymous, 1915 b). In 1916 she became sub-foreman in the Herbaceous Department and was in charge of the frames and pit for Alpines (Anonymous, 1916). Records at Kew state that she worked there from 8 June 1915 to 15 July 1916. The printed staff list for the period says that J. Divers, sub-foreman of the Herbaceous Dept was 'absent on Military duty'. There were 22 female gardeners in Kew in 1916 (Kate Manners, pers. comm. 1999).

The Lady pupils notebook (4) records the names of the following Swanley students who applied to Glasnevin but did not accept a place. **Miss J. Barlow** of South Bank, Swanley, Kent, applied to Glasnevin in October 1906 but was not offered a place until 1908 when she refused it. **Miss M. Legg** of South Bank, Swanley, Kent also applied in 1906 and was offered a place in 1908. **Miss E. R. Thornton** of South Bank, Hextable, Kent applied on 15 July 1910 for any vacancy occurring before 1914. She was offered a place in 1915. The *Horticultural Magazine* records her address as Lissory, Portadown, Co. Armagh. **Miss S. Dill**, with an address of the Horticultural College, Swanley, applied to Glasnevin in July 1913 and was offered a place on 5 November 1915. In the *Horticultural Magazine* her address is given as Montpelier, Malone Road, Belfast. In view of the time lapse between application and the offer of places it is not surprising that these women were no longer available to fill them.

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MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

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- (1) Letters book 1898: F.W. Moore to G.E. Plunkett, Director, Science and Art Museum, Dublin, 20 November 1898.
- (2) Came: ms notebook, c.1894-1944 (alphabetical/chronological listing of staff and apprentices, with date of birth and date of commencement).
- (3) Left: ms notebook, c. 1894-1943, (alphabetical/chronological listing of staff and apprentices, giving dates and reasons for departure).
- (4) Lady pupils: ms notebook, 1903-1929 (119 numbered entries) (on back cover is inscription 'Lady Gardeners wanted'). Wye College, Ashford, Kent.
- (5) General Register of the Horticultural College Swanley Kent, Dept of Science and Art of the Committee of Council on Education. 1891 - 1912.

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