



Eleanor Knott (1886-1975)

Period and Area of activity at TCD: lecturer of Celtic Languages from 1928; professor of Early Irish from 1939-1955.

Eleanor Knott



Celticist

Professor Eleanor Knott (1886-1975), a scholar and lexicographer, was a prolific contributor to the field of Celtic Studies in the twentieth century. She had a very successful career producing academic work in the field of both Early and Modern Irish. As a scholar, Eleanor was renowned for her exacting and 'scientific' methods employed in her editorial approaches, preferring 'quality over quantity', as well as for her modest translations. Eleanor studied Old Irish at the School of Irish Learning, under the mentorship of Prof. Osborn Bergin, in Dublin and became well-versed in the language and literature of the Early and Modern Irish periods, with her published work touching upon all those areas. Eleanor's speciality lay mainly in the language and poetry of the Early Modern Irish period, of which she became the leading authority during her lifetime.

Eleanor Knott began working for the Dictionary of the Irish Language at the Royal Irish Academy in 1911 and devoted some fifty years to this project. She was a co-editor of the prominent philological and linguistic journal *Ériu*, which is now jointly edited by the current Chair of Early Irish at Trinity College Dublin, Prof. Damian McManus. In 1928, Eleanor became one of the first female lecturers at Trinity College before having the Chair of Early Irish created for her in 1939. Eleanor went on to become one of the first four women elected as a member to the Royal Irish Academy in 1949. In the 1940's, Eleanor also served on the board of the School of Celtic Languages, at the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, although she turned down a professorship here out of loyalty to the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College Dublin. Although Eleanor retired from Trinity College in 1955, she continued with her scholarly work for some years before her death.

Eleanor's publications such as *Introduction to Irish Syllabic Poetry of the Period 1200-1600*, *The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn* and *Togail Bruiden Da Derga* are still highly regarded today. Eleanor also co-edited many of the articles in eight volumes of *Ériu* and co-edited the E- and F- fascicles of the Dictionary, as well as assisted with the *Contributions to the Dictionary*. However, she is less well-known for her work with the Modern Irish scholar and tAthair Peadar Ó Laoghaire, for whom she compiled the vocabulary *Foclóir d'Eisirt*, and edited *Lughaidh mac Con*. Eleanor wrote many other articles and studies, but of no less importance, as well as many reviews and obituaries.

Despite her major contributions to the field of Celtic Studies, and her dedication to Trinity College, Prof. Eleanor Knott has not been memorialised and little has been done by way of honouring her work to date.

A one-day conference is being held in honour of Eleanor in the Long Room Hub on the 28th of April 2016, hosted by the Department of Irish and Celtic Languages.