

A Wexford couple on many stages

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Fred Cogley and Daisy Bannard Cogley shared Wexford backgrounds and deep involvement, jointly and individually, in numerous creative and radical political endeavours over their thirty years together. Following their first meeting in Wexford in 1908 they lived for two years in Santiago, Chile, briefly in Paris and Wexford, and for longer periods in Dublin and London.

Johanna Mary Désirée (Daisy) Bannard Cogley, 1884-1965, was primarily active in theatre, notably becoming a founding director of the Gate Theatre Dublin in 1928. Frederick Joseph (Fred) Cogley, 1885-1937, was a journalist and a writer of plays and songs. Both were active republicans from the 1910s to 1930s. Neither of them left memoirs or other significant amounts of papers and, until recently, their stories have not been published. In 2022, Daisy Cogley was the subject of a profile in *History Ireland*¹ and an entry in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*².

Fred Cogley was born in February 1885 in Wexford, the only child of Aidan Cogley and Maggie, née Boyle, who were living in High Street at the time of Fred's birth. Aidan and Maggie Cogley had married on 6 February 1884 in Tagoat, when both had Fort of Rosslare as their address. This indicates that they came from families of pilots, coastguards, customs officers or lifeboat crew, who were the only residents of this promontory, later an island.

Aidan Cogley's father, brother and cousins were all sailors. His father, Patrick, and his brother, also Patrick, ended their seafaring careers as Pilot Masters in Wexford harbour. Aidan (also sometimes Aiden) began his maritime career as a 'boy' on sailing ships, starting on the *Saltee* in 1874, later sailing on the *Rosslare* to continental Europe, and on the *Alert* as far as Constantinople (today, Istanbul).

He received a master's licence the year before Fred was born and during Fred's early childhood captained the new steel steamer SS *Eden Vale* which ran weekly between Liverpool and Wexford, carrying mainly livestock from

Wexford, and small numbers of passengers in both directions. He later received a master's licence to captain foreign-owned ships and sailed routes in the Indian Ocean.

Aidan and Maggie were not at home in Wexford when the 1901 census was held and Fred, aged 16, was recorded as living at 11 Waterloo Road, with his maternal grandparents Marcus and Mary Boyle. Marcus Boyle (as recorded in the census; Maurice in the transcribed parish record of his marriage) was a customs officer.

Fred completed his secondary school education at CBS, Wexford, and got a good grounding in music, later performing in public as a pianist accompanist to singers, and writing songs and arrangements.

Johanna Mary Bannard was born in Paris on 5 May 1884, one of two daughters of Thomas Bannard, a coachman and Mary Josephine Furlong, from Co. Wexford. Later taking the name Désirée (hence Daisy), she studied at the Paris Conservatoire, Sorbonne University and Comédie Française, training as an actor and singer and appearing in theatrical productions and concerts on stages around France.

After school, Fred studied in Dublin for the civil service, living for a time with fellow-students in a flat in Lennox Street, Portobello, where his Wexford friend Robert Brennan visited him³. At that time, Brennan was working as assistant county surveyor in Wexford. He had grown up with his parents and three siblings in Abbey Street, Wexford, and took part in '98 centenary events, singing a song in Irish that led to him being asked to join a new Gaelic League branch as language teacher on 5 shillings a week.

Cogley followed Brennan into public service serving briefly in the Indian colonial administration. By 1907 he was back in Wexford and joined Sinn Féin, where Brennan was now county secretary. The pair were to become a kind of double act in Wexford nationalist circles. In April 1907 Cogley read a paper on the potential of an independent Irish economy to the Wexford branch of the Dungannon Clubs⁴, set up by Bulmer Hobson as a political platform for the Irish Volunteers. Brennan commended Cogley's paper in seconding the vote of thanks. In June 1907 Brennan addressed the Dungannon Club, this time on the Irish Council Bill before the House of

Commons, and Cogley, who was in the chair, responded “at length”⁵. In August 1907 Brennan spoke to the Wexford branch of Sinn Fein and Cogley proposed the vote of thanks. The following month, Cogley addressed the branch on the ‘Aims and Duties of Patriotism’ and Brennan again responded.

Cogley found employment with the Enniscorthy Echo where Sinn Feiner William Sears had taken over as editor in 1907. Sears became president of the Sinn Fein county committee in January 1908, and later an MP and TD, representing Mayo-South Roscommon. The large majority of articles in the Echo, as in other newspapers of the period, were published without by-lines. We cannot be sure who wrote what but it seems likely that Fred Cogley contributed the paper’s Wexford Notes at this time. Like other columns in the Echo, the Wexford Notes were a platform for Sinn Fein views. Thus, the Wexford correspondent wrote: “We trust the time is not too far distant when all good Irishmen in South Wexford will unite on the one platform and at the one convention to review the old fight against British misrule and robbery”⁶.

In January 1908 Cogley was a candidate for the Wexford Borough Council in the St Iberius Ward, along with fellow Sinn Feiner, Patrick Clancy. There was only one other candidate, Nicholas Gaul, and when he withdrew shortly before election day, Cogley and Clancy were returned without a contest. At their first meeting in January 1908 Cogley and Clancy were the only councillors to oppose a motion of congratulations to the four leaders of Irish Party factions (Redmond, O’Brien, Healy, Dillon) who had recently re-united the party. Cogley insisted they could not support the motion without knowing what the party’s policies were to be⁷.

He also opposed council motions to welcome troops being stationed in Wexford. In March 1908 he spoke against such a proposal in relation to the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment. In February 1909, when he could not attend a council meeting, he ensured his view was heard through correspondence, strongly opposing the proposed location in Wexford of a “military body”⁸.

Cogley and Brennan canvassed in 1908 for Seán Sinnott, SF candidate in the Selskar Ward of Wexford, who recalled sixty years later in an interview with Fr. Séamas de Vál that he was helped by “Bob Brennan and a boy by the name of Fred Cogley”⁹. Cogley, the “boy”, was then 23 and a sitting councillor¹⁰.

Robert Brennan was sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and when he married Una Bolger from Oylegate in July 1909, she too was sworn in as only the second woman (after Maud Gonne) to be admitted. By then, Brennan had lost his county council post and, with Cogley departing Wexford, he became Wexford correspondent of the *Echo*, a position he held until 1916. He was at the same time contributing stories to *Ireland's Own*. Jim Bolger, brother of Una, was also on the *Echo* staff and Una contributed a women's column.

Cogley had met Désirée Bannard in summer 1908 when she was visiting her mother's relatives in County Wexford. They later arranged to travel separately to Santiago, Chile, where Daisy escaped the attempts of her mother to have her marry into French bourgeois society¹¹. Cogley ceased attending Borough Council meetings from July 1909 and the couple married in Santiago on 16 December 1909.



A card size print of one of the many portraits and sketches of Daisy Cogley by artist Harry Kernoff, from Cogley family collection.

A photographer's studio portrait of the couple taken the following year is one of the few known surviving photographs of them together¹². Their son, Mitchel, was born there in 1910. In Chile, Fred did some journalism work and Daisy performed in concerts and theatre productions. In 1911 the couple returned to Europe, staying briefly in Paris before returning to Wexford and then Dublin.

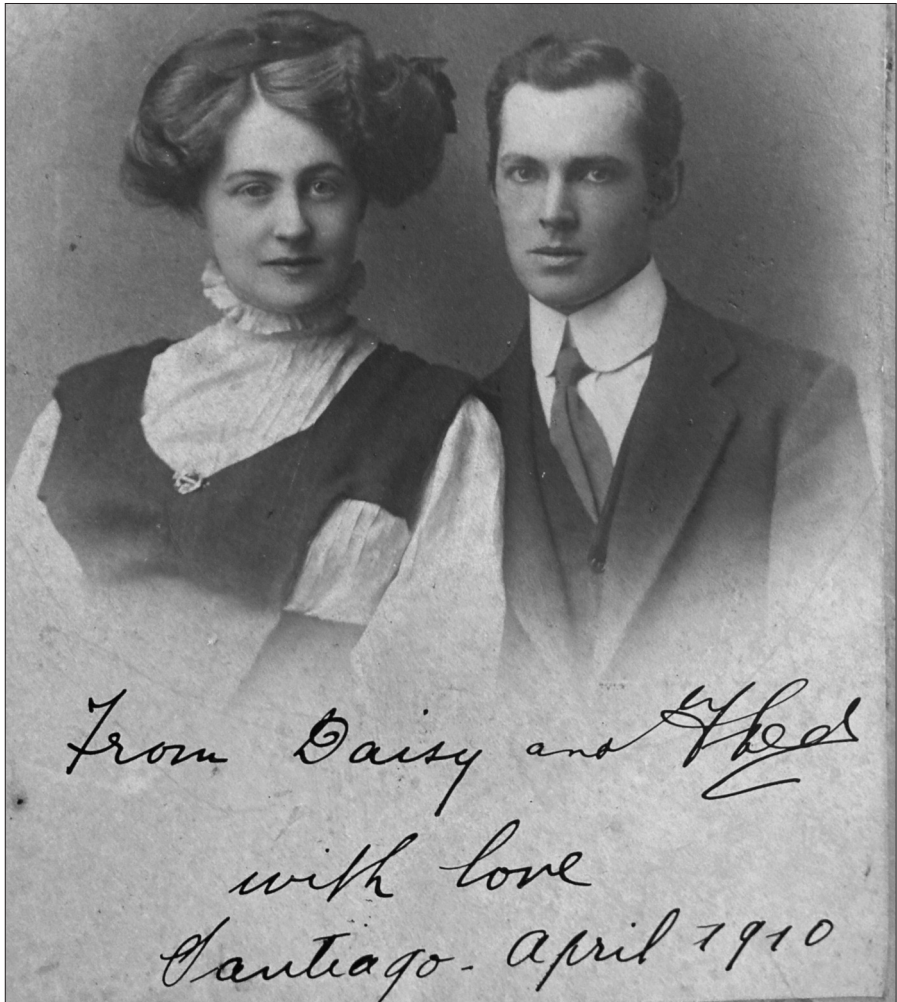
In October 1911, Daisy and Fred attended the founding meeting of the Wexford Operatic Society, at which it was decided to stage a production of *Pirates of Penzance*. In early December, the cast was chosen, with "Mrs. Cogley" in the role of Mabel. Pat Horan, secretary of the Wexford Harbour

Board, and the first Hon. Sec. of the Society, appeared as Major Stanley in the *Pirates*, which was presented on 12 and 13 February 1912. In its review, the *Wexford People* noted Boran's "exceedingly interesting performance" and also singled out "Mrs F. Cogley, who achieved a veritable triumph in her presentation of Mabel. Her acting was excellent, and she entered into the spirit of the piece with delightful chic, which entitled her to all the encomiums she received. The possessor of a delightful voice, her singing was one of the most charming items of the performance, and as a consequence she was obliged to respond to an encore"¹³. There is no further mention of Mrs Cogley contributing to Wexford Operatic Society in the detailed cast listings and press excerpts collected by Thomas Irish, historian of Wexford's musical societies¹⁴.

Moving to Dublin, Fred took up employment with *Independent Newspapers* and was one of the contributors to *Irish Freedom*, set up by the IRB in November 1910 and edited by Bulmer Hobson (others included Terence MacSwiney, P. S. O'Hegarty, Padraic Pearse, Ernest Blythe and Piaras Beasláí). The paper was funded by subscriptions from members of the IRB and ran until 1914.

Daisy took to the stage as Helen Carter, appearing in April 1913 in *For The Crown* by French playwright Francois Coppée, a romantic drama set among the conflicts of Turks versus Bulgars. This was the first production by the Dublin Repertory Theatre at the Gaiety; Constance Markiewicz was also in the cast. She and Bannard Cogley performed together again several times, including in April 1914 in a *Daffodil Fete* organised by the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL). Bannard Cogley appeared as Sappho and Markiewicz as Joan of Arc; Mary MacSwiney also took part. As a further part of the entertainment Bannard Cogley sang the Women's Marseillaise, a suffragist anthem to the tune of the French national anthem¹⁵. She included "some of her charming Spanish and French songs" in a social gathering ("conversazione") she organised in May 1914 for the IWFL¹⁶.

Fred was also involved in IWFL activities and in the Irish Journalists' Association, attending a special meeting of that association to honour the recently deceased Richard Sears, younger brother of William, Fred's former editor in Enniscorthy. Richard Sears had worked with the *Irish Independent* and with the *Daily Express* in London.



Daisy and Fred Santiago 1910

In August 1915 Captain Aidan Cogley, Fred's father, died at 'Camalan', in East Africa, as it was reported in the *Irish Independent*¹⁷. This appears to refer to present-day Quelimane, on the coast of Mozambique. Cogley was captain of a German-owned ship SS *Wissmann* which sailed on Indian Ocean routes, then on Lake Nyasa, where British and German colonial interests were adjacent to each other. He was described at the time of his death as "late of School Street, Wexford"¹⁸.

In April 1916, Daisy was giving birth to their second son, Fergus, in the Rotunda when the Rising broke out, and Fred was on duty at the Sunday Independent when Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order to the Volunteers was delivered there about 1 a.m. on Easter Sunday. Writing in 1966 about the Rising, historian Father F. X. Martin referred to the "humble" influence of journalists on public opinion towards the rebels. He cited as people with "very definite separatist convictions" Piaras Beaslaí and Sean Lester, then with the Freeman's Journal, J. J. O'Kelly (Sceilg), editor of the Catholic Bulletin, and Fred Cogley of the Irish Independent¹⁹. While Lester and Beaslaí were directly involved with the Volunteers, and O'Kelly became treasurer of the Irish National Aid and Volunteers' Dependents Fund after the Rising and was interned in 1917, Cogley does not appear to have had such roles or visibility, other than that thrust upon him by the chance that he took delivery of MacNeill's order to the Volunteers.

Michael Knightly, an Irish Independent reporter and president of the Irish Journalists Association, in his witness statement to the Bureau of Military History, recalled Easter Monday 1916²⁰:

I was engaged in the 'Irish Independent' offices summarising an advance copy of the speech of the President of the Teachers' Organisation when the news came that the G.P.O. had been taken by the Citizen Army. I was to travel to Cork later. I surveyed the position and, seeing that the Rising was not confined to the Citizen Army, determined to join up. I scouted about during the day and in the evening informed a sympathetic colleague, the late Mr. Fred Cogley, of my determination. He offered to accompany me to the G.P.O., saying that he would like to see Sean McDermott. As I was afraid he might remain if he once came in, I advised him to go home, remarking that this was no married man's job. I asked him to take what money I had. "Keep it", he said, "you may want it". "I shall have no use for it," I said. He refused to take it. Remarking that probably some Tommy would take it from my dead body, I bade him goodbye.

Cogley's reference to Sean McDermott, as recounted by Knightly, indicates that he (Cogley) remained connected with the IRB, for whom McDermott had been manager of Irish Freedom when Cogley was a contributor to that paper. Knightly's advice to Cogley, as a married man, to go home presumably

related to his knowledge that Cogley had just become a father for the second time. Knightly himself was imprisoned after the Rising but went on to serve in *Press Intelligence* with the IRA in the War of Independence, while maintaining his job at the *Independent*.

In September 1916, Daisy performed at an *Aeridheacht* in aid of the Irish National Aid and Volunteers' Dependents Fund, which supported post-Rising prisoners. But there were also other issues on the Cogley couple's agenda. Fred wrote the script for one of the earliest Irish-produced films, *A Miser's Gift*. This was a comedy produced by the Film Company of Ireland, with Abbey actor Fred O'Donovan and singer Brian McGowan, among others, in the cast. O'Donovan (1884-1952) was to appear in many films and in early BBC television productions. McGowan also performed with Daisy and Fred at events in support of the Irish Women's Franchise League.

The *Evening Mail* reported that *A Miser's Gift* was "not only characteristically Irish, it is characteristically good"²¹. When the film was included in a picture house presentation at the Theatre Royal in Wexford, the People noted the contribution of "Mr Fred Cogley, a well-known Wexfordman", adding that "it is one of the best comedies ever produced by any company in every detail, brimful of good old Irish humour and native customs"²².

Fred delivered a "most thoughtful ... stimulating and challenging" paper²³, *The Vote and the Vision*, to the Irish Women's Franchise League in November 1916 and, the following month, he addressed a public meeting of the League at the Trades Hall, Capel Street, along with Nancy Wyse Power and Walter Carpenter, of the Socialist Party of Ireland. Meanwhile, Daisy was taking on more commitments with the IWFL, being one of the principal organisers of its Fancy Dress dance in February 1917 and named as point of contact for those wishing to join the League's social committee. In June 1917 she ran an IWFL outing to Howth on a chartered tram, with games, tea and dancing. The *Irish Citizen* reported "the best thanks of the League to Mrs Cogley whose genius for organising amusements is a proverb"²⁴.

Fred was also active in drama and music. He wrote a short play, *Gassed*, for a cast of four that was performed in July 1917 at the Tivoli Theatre, and a one-act comedy, *A Close Shave*, that was included in a Theatre Royal programme of magic, music and drama in February 1918. The *Irish Independent*, despite

the fact that the author was one of its editorial staff, noted that the play is set in a flat and “fell that way too”²⁵.

On the direct political front, Daisy acted as an interpreter for two French priests who came to meet Eamon De Valera in 1918 and discuss a proposal that Irish migratory workers might be encouraged to go to France rather than to Britain. In December of that year Daisy chaired an election meeting in support of Constance Markiewicz that was addressed by Maud Gonne, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Nora Connolly, daughter of James. Daisy also spoke at a meeting of women voters in Dun Laoghaire in support of Sinn Féin candidate, lawyer Gavan Duffy.

In May 1919 Daisy and Fred appeared together in a musical programme that was presented at the Abbey Theatre alongside a production of Ibsen’s *Enemy of the People*. Daisy was accompanied by Fred in the performance of songs by French composers Massenet and Weckerlin, which the *Irish Independent* described as “exquisite numbers”²⁶. They also performed together in July 1920, along with ballad singer Gerard Crofts, at a *café chantant* (singing café) that was presented four times during a Sunday afternoon and evening. Crofts, a republican who was imprisoned after the Easter Rising, was a long-time associate of the Cogleys.

In June 1919 Mr Cogley and Mrs Cogley, listed separately, attended a James Connolly Birthday Celebration, along with members of the Connolly family, Markiewicz, Maud Gonne, Kathleen Lynn, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, and other prominent socialist and republican figures. The event was a fundraiser for the Connolly Memorial Workers’ College which opened later that year at premises in North Great Georges Street, Dublin.

The connection with the labour movement was also represented in Daisy’s and Fred’s appearance in February 1920 in a benefit concert for Dublin hotel and restaurant workers, then in dispute over wages and hours, and in her involvement with the Liberty Hall Players at various times between 1920 and 1923. The Players were organised by the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (ITGWU) and performed mainly at union halls and events. Daisy appeared with them in the play, *Victims*, in Maryborough (now Portlaoise) in January 1920, winning “enthusiastic applause”, according to the union’s paper²⁷. The paper also recorded that “Mrs Cogley in her own inimitable way

delighted the audience by her rendering of operatic and national songs, having to respond repeatedly to encores". The Liberty Hall Players revived *Victims* at the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, in July 1920 with Daisy again, this time appearing as 'Helen Carter', in the cast.

Fred Cogley wrote for republican publications during the War of Independence, including the Dáil's daily publication, *The Bulletin*, of which Robert Brennan, Desmond Fitzgerald and Erskine Childers were successive editors. The flat at 113 St Stephen's Green, above the shop and factory of pipe-makers Kapp and Peterson, where the Cogleys and their two children were living, became a safe house during the War of Independence for Beaslaí, Brennan and other republican leaders, but also for documents, munitions and arms. Maeve Phelan, who procured arms for the IRA, was a frequent caller, either directly or through couriers that she sent.

Countess Markiewicz "almost lived in the place", according to Daisy's later testimony in her application for a military service pension²⁸. During this period she also carried dispatches to republican representatives in London and Paris. In August 1921, the RIC Auxiliaries raided the Cogleys' flat, when Fred, Daisy and one of their children were present, but nothing incriminating was found. There were several other raids there during the war.

Fred continued his musical activities, appearing as accompanist to Gerard Crofts and other singers at concerts for children organised in connection with the Catholic Truth Conference in October 1921. In the same year, Cogley had a piano arrangement of Charles Kickham's *Sliabh na mBan* (also *Slievenamon*) and a version of Kevin Barry with new words and arrangement published by J.J. Walsh, from his business premises at Blessington Street, Dublin, known colloquially as Walsh's Corner. Walsh had been in the GPO during the Easter Rising, served terms of imprisonment in several gaols in England and Ireland and was later a Sinn Féin TD, a supporter of the Treaty, and a minister in early Free State governments.

Daisy and Fred actively supported the anti-Treaty side after the 1921 Anglo-Irish negotiations. In November 1922 Daisy was arrested at Sinn Féin's offices in 23 Suffolk Street, Dublin, by government troops, along with Margaret Barry, sister of Kevin Barry, Cecilia Gallagher, who earlier that year had married republican journalist Frank Gallagher, himself arrested on 10

October, and writers Lily O'Brennan and Dorothy Macardle. They were held in Mountjoy Gaol, where the cell they shared was known as 'Suffolk Street'. Daisy – now also Noinín (the Irish for daisy) – was recalled in the memoirs, prison journals and diaries of several inmates as singing from her cell in support of hunger striker Mary MacSwiney and the other prisoners. MacSwiney acknowledged Daisy's efforts in her foreword to *The Jangle of Keys*²⁹, the prison memoir of Margaret Buckley, later president of Sinn Féin, who was arrested on Christmas Eve 1922. MacSwiney recalled:

Mrs Cogley's beautiful voice was often raised on the stairs for my special benefit. I being on hunger strike, we never tired of hearing her sing the Ave Maria, and though we were often greedy for more and yet more, her generosity never tired either³⁰.

Referring to communications between women and men prisoners, some of them married couples, in their respective wings of Mountjoy, Buckley wrote:

Fred Cogley, too, whose wife, Noinin, greeted him with a burst of song – usually French – when he appeared on the steps each morning, was a neighbour of ours. Mrs Cogley had a beautiful singing voice, and was very clever at theatricals. She cheered us up immensely while she was with us; she played the harmonium in the prison chapel. She fretted about her two children outside, and her health broke down completely. She was released after about six months in Mountjoy³¹.

In fact, Daisy was there closer to three months. Fred had campaigned for her release, as he recorded in his unpublished prison journal:

Having written to Daisy on the first day I got a welcome reply in five days. She was well, but troubled about my arrest and naturally worried about the children. She said she had written to the AG (Colonial) to point out that the officer who arrested her said they would keep her until they got me, and demanding her release. She had not had a reply. I then went to Mulcahy, addressing him as OC of the Free State forces, pointing out that, as she had been apparently held as a hostage for me there was no point in keeping her longer. No reply to that then or since³².

At the time Fred was a contributor to *An Phoblacht*, which was started in that year as a platform for anti-Treaty voices. He was arrested in Harcourt Street in December 1922 as he went from delivering material to *An Phoblacht* to doing the same at the Bulletin office. Like Daisy, he contributed his talents to entertainments for prisoners. Fred also spent time in Portobello barracks, Kilmainham Gaol, Newbridge and Gormanstown Camp in a total 11 months of imprisonment. He took part, along with hundreds of others in a hunger strike in November-December 1923, in which the longest-lasting fasted for 41 days.

After the hunger strike ended, Frank Gallagher, later editor of *The Irish Press*, wrote from Kilmainham Gaol to artist and Cumann na mBan activist, Estella Solomons, thanking her belatedly for the gift she sent to him the previous March of a chocolate cake, cigarettes and a book. Estella's gifts, he wrote "provided a right noble banquet at which Fred Cogley and others right nobly assisted. By morning the only things that remained of the chocolate cake was its box"³³.

Having reluctantly signed the Form of Undertaking to cease disruptive activities, Daisy had been released in February 1923 and soon returned to the stage and to political activity. She appeared in April with the Liberty Hall Players in *Poached and Victims*, in Dundalk, where a packed house "listened with rapture to [her] beautiful rendering of songs from the opera"³⁴. In August of that year, Bannard Cogley and Máire Ní Bhriain (Maire Louise O'Brien) were charged by the anti-Treaty 'government' to attend the World Congress of the Red Cross in Geneva to highlight the conditions under which republicans were being held by the Free State forces.

According to Ní Bhriain in a witness statement for the Bureau of Military History, "Our object was to put the case of Ireland before the world ... We had brought the material for propaganda with us and we had copies multiplied by commercial firms in Geneva and distributed among the delegates of the various nations. We were invited to the meetings and on one occasion certainly we were allowed to speak and put our case before the members in French. We were listened to with attention and considerable interest was shown".³⁵

Daisy and Gerard Crofts were among the performers at a Grand Concert in the Theatre Royal in early November in aid of the Republican Prisoners'

Dependents. On his release Fred Cogley returned to anti-Treaty activities, speaking in early 1924 at election meetings for fellow-Civil War internee Sean MacEntee, saying there were still 1,000 men in jail, some sentenced at trials without being present, and no reference to this in the newspapers³⁶. Anti-Treaty candidates had successes in several by-elections, including in November 1924 when Sean Lemass was elected. Three months earlier, Lemass had married, with James (later famous as Jimmy) O'Dea, his Capel Street neighbour and the Cogleys' stage colleague, as his Best Man.

Fred also appeared regularly on stage in republican-run events, for example, in March 1924 with the Mountjoy Glee Singers in a Liam Lynch Commemoration Concert at the Theatre Royal, and in October 1924 in a Harry Boland Commemoration Concert, when the group sang *Comrades in Arms* and *Daisy* also performed. But they had time too for lighter entertainment. In May 1924 Fred presented a production at the Queen's Theatre of his three-act comedy *Liz* about the sudden rise from poverty to affluence of the title character, "a little household drudge"³⁷.

Fred and Daisy were trying various means to make ends meet. In 1924-26 Daisy ran a dress-making, clothes and fancy goods shop in Molesworth Street, Dublin, advertising in the anti-government papers, *Sinn Féin* and *Honesty*. In June 1924, she initiated a claim under the Damage to Property (Compensation) Act 1923 concerning damage to mattress, clothes, piano, chairs, carpets, etc at her home on 1 July 1922, when several armed men took over and sand-bagged her flat, staying overnight³⁸. She gave the value of the property, less value of salvage, as 75 pounds, 17 shillings. As Bannard Cogley later told minister Ernest Blythe in a letter, she left the flat with her two children, and stayed in Oakley Road for a month. Payment had been approved in October 1925 but the case was not closed until October 1926 with payment of £75 + 10% + costs, totalling 93 pounds, 2 shillings, 3 pence.

The evidence gathered in connection with this case demonstrated both the weakness of government intelligence and the inconsistency of Daisy's memory and judgement. An Intelligence report stated: "No record of any Irregular activities on her part. Mrs Daisy Cogley (probably her mother) arrested in Suffolk Street on 9/11/22 by reason of her Irregular sympathies etc. Subsequently signed form and was released on 10/2/23". This report accepted that Irregulars were not at her property with her "connivance" and

stated that the evidence of a Detective Garda on her political sympathies was “not sufficiently strong”. It was also recorded that Daisy had written to Fred Cogley from prison to say she would not sign the release form, but then did so on 6 February 1923. As Daisy continued to press for payment, she wrote to Blythe implausibly that she was “in no way connected in any political movement nor was I in sympathy with the outbreak”³⁹.

In May 1925 Fred published in *The Dublin Magazine* a translation from Spanish of a story, *Big Game*, by Baldomero Lillo (1867-1923), a Chilean author who wrote from and about the experiences of miners in the south of the country. In October of that year Cogley sued J. J. Walsh, now Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, for infringement of copyright on Cogley’s version of the song, *To Kevin Barry*, by allowing gramophone records of the song to be released. Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiator and later president of the High Court Gavan Duffy appeared for Cogley and the case was settled in November in Cogley’s favour, with his copyright acknowledged and royalties to be paid. *The Evening Herald*, in reporting the case, referred to Cogley, their former colleague in the Independent group, as “described as a journalist”⁴⁰. Also in November 1925 Cogley gave the first lecture in a series on *Some Great Revolutionaries*. Cogley’s subject was Jean-Paul Marat; other lectures in the series included *The First Irish Republican* by Rosamond Jacob, *Bolivar* by Seamus McCall, and *An Italian Patriot* by Frank Gallagher.

The launch of the radio service, 2RN, in early 1926 provided a new platform for Daisy. Although the station’s musical menu was decidedly “national”, she was booked to give recitals of French songs. In May 1926 she broadcast a talk on the *Evolution of French Popular Song*. She developed a repertoire of songs of the trades (*chansons de métiers*) which she presented in December 1926 at Egan’s Salon, an art gallery in St Stephen’s Green with a modernist mission. Accompanied by Violet McKinnon on piano she presented 40-50 songs “all impressively expressive of the sentiments and feelings of the people engaged in the various occupations on land and water”⁴¹.

Egan’s Salon was to be an important venue for Daisy’s activities as an innovative organiser of cabarets. Initially run under the auspices of the Radical Club, founded in late 1925⁴², these programmes of sketches, readings, songs and late-night dancing ran at Egan’s until Dublin Corporation stopped it, because the venue did not have the appropriate licence, and later at

locations in South William Street and Harcourt Street⁴³. Writers, painters, musicians and other creative people and intellectuals were prominent among the clientele, but also art students, who were admitted free to these cabarets if they painted decorations.

Cabaret packages were also presented in other settings, as, for example, at charity events like the Herald Boot Fund Dance in February 1927, when the performers included a teenage Mitchel Cogley, Gerard Crofts, actor and civil servant Gearoid O Lochlainn and Alex Newman, later editor of the *Irish Times*. The regular Saturday night cabarets were inaugurated at the Little Theatre, 7 South William Street in May 1927. By that year, the magazine *Honesty* could describe “Madame Cogley [as] ... a Parisienne ... associated with many successful theatrical ventures in her native city, and ... well known in Dublin where her Cabaret shows scored such a success last season”⁴⁴.

Fred Cogley was no longer in Dublin to enjoy his wife’s success in cabaret. He had moved to London in search of paid work, working with the (notably pro-imperialist) *Daily Express* and later with Odhams Press, publisher of *The People*, a Sunday paper, magazines and books, and half-owner with the Trades Union Congress of the *Daily Herald*.

In Dublin, Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLíammóir, who had first met each other in 1927 with Anew MacMaster’s travelling troupe in Enniscorthy, were looking to set up a new theatre. Bulmer Hobson took them to meet Daisy, in whom Edwards recognised a like-minded individual. He and MacLíammóir performed a scene from *Macbeth* for one of Daisy’s cabarets as their first appearance on stage in Dublin.

The cabaret moved to 41 Harcourt Street, building up a club membership of over 400 that helped raise funds for an October 1928 Edwards-MacLíammóir production of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, which was the first done in the name of the Gate Theatre. Daisy’s club members were a ready-made audience for the Gate, which also set up a club, with Daisy becoming Member No.1. When the Gate Theatre was formally established, she was one of the four directors, along with Edwards, MacLíammóir and Gearóid O Lochlainn. Her role with the early Gate has been variously described, including as ‘patron’⁴⁵. She was briefly business director but her main responsibility in the Gate’s first years was for costumes in plays by authors such as Eugene O’Neill, Oscar Wilde and MacLíammóir.

In 1929 the Gate presented the premiere of *The Old Lady Says No* by Denis Johnston that had been rejected by W B Yeats at the Abbey; the cast included Mitchell Cogley, aged 18. In response to a critical letter on this production to the *Irish Statesman*, republican journalist Geoffrey Coulter defended the Gate against the charge of ‘foreigner’, referring to “Madame Cogley, who has suffered for Ireland since patriotism went out of fashion”⁴⁶. Mitchell Cogley also appeared later in the Gate’s presentation of *Juggernaut* by David Sears, Irish Independent journalist, former IRA leader in Wexford and son of William Sears, of the *Enniscorthy Echo*.

During Civic Week in September 1929 a pageant commissioned by the government from MacLiammóir was presented in Dublin’s Mansion House. This was *The Ford of the Hurdles* – a thousand-year history of Dublin, with music by John Larchet and costumes by Daisy. It was written, according to MacLiammóir, “mainly ... in Toto’s cabaret to the distant crashing of a jazz band”⁴⁷. Toto was yet another of the names by which Daisy Cogley went, apparently used most in connection with her cabaret activities.

In 1931, Mitchel found work as a sports journalist with the newly established *Irish Press*, and Daisy and second son Fergus joined Fred in London. They lived at Haverstock Hill, Chalk Farm, later a short distance away in Belsize Park Gardens. In 1934, Fergus, then aged 18, got a job on *The Islington and Holloway Press*, which described him as coming from a journalism background.

Daisy was active in the International Language Club, Hampstead Branch, organising and performing at their entertainments. Her contributions in January 1934 included a one-act play, *Bad Publicity*, co-authored with ‘Yota Lane’, and a set of French character songs. Daisy also set up the Green Curtain Theatre Club in Hampstead and took part in entertainments organised through the London branch of the Republican Congress. Daisy appeared with son Fergus in Leslie Daiken’s dramatised version of *The Rebel* by Padraig Pearse, presented by a new stage group associated with the Republican Congress. On that occasion, Daisy also sang songs of the Black and Tan period “written for her in Ireland in 1920”⁴⁸. In July 1937 Fred Cogley of 54 Belsize Gardens died. An obituary in the *Irish Press* mentioned prominently his Wexford background⁴⁹.

Fergus joined the British Army during World War II and Daisy moved back to Dublin in 1941. She presented two plays, *Awake and Sing* by Clifford Odets with the New Theatre Group, strongly connected with socialist and communist movements. Soon, however, Daisy established her own theatre group, opening the Studio Arts Club at 13 Harcourt Street in January 1943 with a presentation of short plays. By 1946 she had formed the Dublin Theatre Group presenting plays at the Gate Theatre.

In that year too, Daisy submitted her application for a military service pension. She was invited to testify before the tribunal assessing these applications and in response to their questions stated that Fred Cogley was in the Volunteers, then later saying she was not sure⁵⁰. Peadar O'Donnell, Robert Brennan and Piaras Beaslaí were among those who gave testimonials in Daisy's support, Beaslaí stating that the Cogleys accommodated men on the run, including himself, and that a wounded IRA man was nursed at their flat. Johanna Mary Cogley, as she was for official purposes, was awarded a military service pension of £18.3.10, backdated to 1934; this was based on a calculation of service for pension purposes of 3²³/₃₆ years. The pension amounted to £27.5.9 in 1954 and £42.15.8 at the time of her death in 1965.

In July 1949, when Daisy was 65, the journalist and critic R. M. Fox wrote an extensive and sympathetic profile of her in a series on theatre personalities. In this, the most substantial feature published about Daisy in her lifetime, Fox paid tribute to her "quiet work, gathering companies together, producing plans and seeking to give Irish theatre a vital connection with the finest drama of the Continent ... Through all the difficulties, she has remained indomitable"⁵¹.

In 1951 Daisy produced a play with the Dublin Jewish Dramatic Society at the Gaiety Theatre and she established the Dublin Theatre Group at 52 Upper Mount Street. When she moved her theatre just up the street to 43 Upper Mount Street in early 1952 Hilton Edwards performed the official opening and conducted a fundraising auction with imaginary lots, raising £100. The eclectic theatre fare included plays by new continental European authors but also plays by young Dublin writers Christy Brown and Joy Rudd. Numerous actors got their first semi-professional experiences under Daisy's guidance, among them Louis Lentin, later a director with RTE, Kathleen Barrington, Joan Styles and Daphne Carroll.

Financing the theatre and herself was a constant struggle. In April 1952 she wrote to Robert and Una Brennan inviting them to her current show and saying she needed “the support of my friends”. She added: “The Club is getting on its feet at last, but I nearly lost it and some interested party nearly took it from me. People with plenty of money & no scruples. However, that’s another story”⁵².

In 1953 Daisy directed *A Stranger Came* at the Theatre Royal, Waterford, by the young local author James Cheasty. In 1956, she directed *Wife* to James Whelan at her Studio Theatre Club by Cheasty’s mentor Teresa Deevy, also from Waterford. This play had been written in 1937 and rejected by the Abbey Theatre, where Deevy had a series of plays put on during the 1930s. Bannard Cogley’s staging of the play was its first theatre production. The script then went missing but turned up much later at the Deevy family home in Waterford, was published in the *Irish University Review* in 1995 and revived on stage in New York in 2010.

Increasingly, from the mid-1950s, Fergus Cogley was taking on the duties his mother had filled in bringing Studio Theatre productions to the stage. He directed the first production of Cheasty’s *The Lost Years* in 1957 and wrote production notes for the play as published in 1958. He also continued to appear in other Dublin theatre productions and in films produced at Ardmore Studios. But in the 1960s he moved to England, basing himself in Birmingham, where he was associated with the Hall Green Little Theatre and wrote, acted in, produced and directed shows.

Meanwhile, Daisy’s and Fred’s older son, Mitchel, had a high-profile career as a sports journalist, Mitchell’s son, also Fred, followed him into sports journalism from the 1950s, later becoming “the voice of rugby” as a commentator on radio and television.

From 1954, and at several other times over the following years, Daisy applied unsuccessfully to the Department of Social Welfare for an allowance on top of her pension. With failing health and vision, she lived her last years frugally, giving language and drama lessons, and staying in the Donnybrook home of painter Sean Keating and his wife, Mai, a socialist activist and kindred spirit of Daisy. On 8 September 1965 Daisy died in Dublin. The *Irish Times* in reporting her death recalled her Wexford connections with mild overstatement: “She also founded the Wexford Operatic Society, from which the Wexford Opera Festival has sprung”⁵³.

NOTES

- 1 Elaine Sisson and Brian Trench: *The Many Parts of Daisy Bannard Cogley*, History Ireland, March-April 2022
- 2 Brian Trench and Elaine Sisson: *Daisy Bannard Cogley*, Dictionary of Irish Biography, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/bannard-cogley-daisy-a10249>
- 3 Robert Brennan: *Allegiance*, Browne and Nolan, 1950
- 4 *Wexford People*, 24 April 1907
- 5 *Enniscorthy Echo* 14 June 1907
- 6 *Enniscorthy Echo*, 2 August 1907
- 7 *Wexford Borough Council Minutes, Vol.-6-Part-1-5-March-1906-26-March-1908*, County Wexford Archives
- 8 *Wexford Borough Council Minutes, Vol.-6-Part-1-5-March-1906-26-March-1908*, County Wexford Archives
- 9 Séamas S. de Vál: *Seán Sinnott's reminiscences - an interview with Rev. Séamas S. de Vál*, c. 1968, *The Past: The Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, No. 32, 2016, pp93-103
- 10 Despite this and many other connections between Cogley and Brennan, the relationship is not mentioned in Nicholas Furlong's article on Brennan and his associates; Nicholas Furlong: *Robert Brennan (1881-1964) Fact and Memoir*, *Journal of the Wexford Historical Society*, no. 24, 2014-15, pp7-27
- 11 *Fred Cogley: Voices From My Past – a memoir*, Irish Sports Publishing, 2012
- 12 Copies of this photograph are in the Robert Brennan papers at the National Library of Ireland, signed in Irish by the couple, dated April 1910, and another in the Cogley family collection
- 13 Quoted in *Thomas Irish: Musical Societies in Wexford Town, 1911-1944*, Le Ireis Publishing, 2020
- 14 *Irish*, *ibid.*
- 15 *Irish Citizen*, 2 May 1914
- 16 *Irish Citizen*, 23 May 1914
- 17 *Irish Independent*, 18 September 1915
- 18 *Irish Independent*, *ibid.*
- 19 F. X. Martin: 1916 – *Myth, Fact and Mystery*, *Studia Hibernica*, no. 7, 1967, pp 7-126
- 20 Michael Knightly, witness statement to Bureau of Military History
- 21 *Evening Mail*, 17 August 1916
- 22 *Wexford People*, 17 January 1917
- 23 *Irish Citizen*, 1 November 1916
- 24 *Irish Citizen*, 1 July 1917
- 25 *Irish Independent*, 19 February 1918

- 26 Irish Independent, 29 May 1919
- 27 The Watchword of Labour, 24 January 1920
- 28 Johanna Mary Cogley files, Military Service Pensions Collection
- 29 Margaret Buckley: The Jangle of the Keys, James Duffy and Co., 1938; republished, Sinn Féin, 2022
- 30 Buckley, *ibid*, page v
- 31 Buckley, *ibid*, pp24-25
- 32 Journal in manuscript in Cogley family collection
- 33 From papers of Seamas O'Sullivan and Estella Solomons, Trinity College Dublin; displayed in Estella Solomons – Still Moments exhibition, National Gallery of Ireland, September 2022 – January 2023
- 34 The Voice of Labour, 5 May 1923
- 35 Maire O'Brien, witness statement to Bureau of Military History
- 36 Irish Independent, 25 February 1924
- 37 Sunday Independent, 4 May 1924
- 38 Department of Finance file, National Archives of Ireland, FIN/COMP/2/28/1995
- 39 Department of Finance file, *ibid*
- 40 Evening Herald, November 1925
- 41 Irish Independent, 17 December 1926
- 42 Brian Trench: The Radical Club – a 1920s forum for 'progressive cultural activity', History Ireland, September-October 2019
- 43 Elaine Sisson: Experiment and the Free State - Mrs Cogley's Cabaret and the Founding of the Gate Theatre, 1924-1930, in D. Clare, D. Lally and P. Lonergan (eds.) *The Gate Theatre, Dublin, Inspiration and Craft*, Carysfort Press, 2018, pp11-27
- 44 Honesty, 17 September 1927
- 45 Christopher Fitzsimon: *The Boys – a biography of Micheál MacLíammóir and Hilton Edwards*, New Island, 2002; originally published as *The Boys – a double biography*, Nick Hern Books, 1994
- 46 Irish Statesman, 27 July 1929
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- 48 Irish Times, 10 December 1935
- 49 Irish Press, 3 July 1937
- 50 Johanna Mary Cogley files, Military Service Pensions Collection
- 51 R. M. Fox, *Theatre Personalities 25 – Madame D. Bannard Cogley, Women's Personality Parade*, July 1949
- 52 Robert Brennan papers at National Library of Ireland
- 53 Irish Times, 13 September 1965