

# Bantracht na Tuaithe

## The Irish Countrywomen's Association



## ICA 100 Exhibition

### ICA History

The ICA was founded in Bree Co. Wexford in May 1910. A small group of women came together to set up the Society of the United Irishwomen (UI). Their aim was 'to improve the standard of life in rural Ireland through Education and Co-operative effort'. These progressive women, who were largely Protestant, revolutionised healthcare and other aspects of the lives of women. From the start the UI was non-denominational and non-party political, principles which continue to underpin the work of the ICA to the present day. Members still represent cross sections of the community and come from both country and towns. The name of the United Irishwomen was changed to the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA) in 1935.

The inspiration for the UI came from the Co-operative Movement whose motto was 'Better Farming Better Business and Better Living'. Speaking in 1910 the founder of the Co-operative Movement, Horace Plunkett, remarked that the better living would come from 'the women of Ireland'. Back in 1910 life for women in rural Ireland was one of hardship and drudgery and the society of UI set out to offer support, friendship, hope and leadership.

One of the first projects undertaken by the UI was healthcare. In 'Demonstration Cottages' they held

classes on healthcare, hygiene and domestic economics specialising in nutrition and caring for the sick. They had the foresight to set up a goat farm in an effort to combat the spread of tuberculosis, a scourge on Ireland at the time. Goat's milk was free of tuberculosis.

Education was another key aim of the UI and its adult education classes preceded the Vocational Education Committee which was not set up until the 1930's. UI/ICA always led the way in this field of education and this remains a core part of ICA work to the present day. Classes and learning opportunities are offered at Guild and Federation level and since 1954 the ICA Adult Education College at An Grianán (now known as the Irish Countrywomen's Centre for Lifelong Learning) continues to provide thousands of courses. These courses are available to members and non-members.

For more information see the fact sheet provided or visit the ICA website [www.ica.ie](http://www.ica.ie)

