

# Mary Ann McCracken

**Mary Ann McCracken** (8 July 1770 – 26 July 1866) was a social reformer. She was born in [Belfast](#), the sister of the Irish rebel [Henry Joy McCracken](#), who was executed in Belfast following his role in the [Battle of Antrim](#) in June 1798.

Like her brother, Mary Ann held radical beliefs and these extended not just to the politics of the time, but to many [social issues](#), such as poverty and slavery. Mary Ann led the Women's Abolitionary committee in Belfast during the height of the anti slavery movement, wearing the famous Wedgewood brooches adorned with slave and slogan "Am I not a man and brother", and continued to promote the cause long after the spirit of [radicalism](#) had died in Belfast. At the age of 88 she was to be seen in [Belfast docks](#), handing out [anti-slavery](#) leaflets to those boarding ships bound for the United States, where slavery was still practised.

In many ways Mary Ann McCracken had outlived her generation, and she commented to a friend how "Belfast, once so celebrated for its love of liberty, is now so sunk in the love of filthy lucre that there are but 16 or 17 female anti-slavery advocates and not one man though several Quakers...and none to distribute papers to American emigrants but an old woman within 17 days of 89". By the 1850s the liberality of the 1790s had largely evaporated in the aftermath of the failure of the 1798 United Irish rebellion and the subsequent executions or exile of the leading protagonists. In 1859 Mary Ann McCracken wrote to Dr Madden saying "I am both ashamed and sorry to think that Belfast has so far degenerated in regard to the Anti-Slavery Cause". The continued campaign of Mary Ann McCracken long after the deaths of her counterparts serves to demonstrate the strength of radicalism that existed in certain circles of Belfast society at the close of the eighteenth century.

Mary Ann was also dedicated to the poor of Belfast and as a member of the Ladies Committee took on a leading role in looking out for the interests of the poor house. Due to her efforts a school, and later a nursery was set up to educate the orphans of Belfast. She took particular pains to find a suitable teacher, displaying a high level of dedication and compassion for her cause.

After the death of her brother, whom she tried to resuscitate for five hours after he was hanged, at Mary Ann took over the care of his illegitimate daughter, Maria.

Mary Ann never married, but in her youth paid a good deal of attention to a leading United Irishman, Thomas Russell, whom she described favourably and at great length in her diaries. She died on 26 July 1866 at the age of 96 years. She is buried in Belfast with her brother, Henry Joy, in [Clifton Street Cemetery](#).