

MARY LEADBEATER

Best known for: Chronicler of 18th to 19th century village life in a Quaker community, which includes eye-witness accounts of the horrors of the Rising of 1798.

Born: Ballitore, Co. Kildare 1-12-1758, daughter of Richard and Elisabeth Shackleton

Family life: Mary's father was the headmaster of the school founded by his father Abraham Shackleton at Ballitore in 1726. Brought up in the school with her brothers and sisters, she lived there until her marriage in 1791 to William Leadbeater, a progressive farmer. They reared their family in the large house in the village which to-day contains a museum to her work and accommodates the local branch library. She died there on 27th June 1826.

Education: Her father's school catered for boys and girls of all religions, from all parts of Ireland and from Britain and continental countries. The most distinguished of the pupils was the statesman Edmund Burke. Mary was a pupil there, receiving a broad education in the arts and in science and making lifelong friendships amongst her fellow students. Her abilities as a writer were noticed from early childhood and in 1766 she began to keep a diary which she would continue until the end of her life.

The Annals of Ballitore: When she was about 65 years old Mary Leadbeater began to go through her diaries and turn them into an account of her own life

BALLITORE MUSEUM



Now the Ballitore Library and Quaker Museum, the Mary Leadbeater House contains many Quaker-related books and artefacts, including a wedding dress from 1853. Nearby is the Meeting House built in 1708. The site of the famous school, founded in 1726 by Mary's grandfather

Abraham Shackleton, with traces of its foundations, is marked by a memorial plaque.



Statue of Mary Leadbeater ministering (Ballitore Museum)

in Ballitore and of the lives and doings of all the people she had met with. She was not only a very well-educated and wise woman, she loved people of all kinds and was skilled in herbal medicine. And for much of her life she was Postmistress at Ballitore so that she knew details of all the comings and goings of people in the village, as well as their day to day gossip, She finished the book not long before she died in 1826 and it was eventually published, in 1862, with the title *The Annals of Ballitore*.

The Annals is a highly readable book, one that can be picked up and dipped into with pleasure or studied as an account of national, social or local history. Having been known mainly to specialist historians for more than a century, the Kildare County Library first published a collection of extracts from it and then in 2009 brought out a completely new and thoroughly revised edition so that it is freely available once more.

Other work: Mary Leadbeater, long before she embarked on the *Annals* had published numerous small books, directed towards various levels of readership and generally filled with practical advice. They included *Cottage Dialogues*, *The Landlord's Friend*, *Biographical Notices of Irish Friends* and *Memoirs of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton*. Many of her poems and essays were published in journals.