



ACAI NEWSLETTER

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ASSOCIATION OF CHURCH ARCHIVISTS IRELAND

Gentle Readers,

Greetings to each one of you.

I would like to share with you a few items that I found archivally interesting recently. Although the Irish College in Rome seems to have fallen on hard times and is unable to fund an archivist, certain parts of their collections are now accessible on line. The Irish College was founded in 1628 and with the exception of a short period in the 19th century has remained open continuously. Fortunately the archive spans the entire time, with the most prolific years being from the mid 19th to mid 20th centuries. Click www.irishcollege.org/archive.htm Archivum Hibernicum is to publish an archival list for the 17th and 18th centuries during 2010. In Limerick, the Religious Society of Friends recently launched the transfer of a digital copy of the Quakers in Limerick to the Limerick City Archive. The original records remain in Dublin. The Quakers played a significant part in the life of the city of Limerick, especially its business and mercantile life. The archives of the Relief committees formed during the Famine to feed the people irrespective of class or creed, provide a rich resource for famine history.

The 85 kilometres of the Vatican Archives, one of the world's most extensive historical/archival resources, can now be visited on the Internet also at www.vatican.va. It always strikes me as an anachronism when reference is made to the 'Vatican Secret Archives' today. In fact the origin of the name goes back to the time of Sixtus IV (1471-1484) the founder of the Vatican Library. A room called the 'Secret Library' was reserved for the archives in the Vatican Library. There the oldest registers of papal letters were deposited. Other valuable records were deposited in Castel Sant'Angelo. The right to create and hold archives was reserved to persons or institutions that had the '*ius archivi*'. Whether in public or private hands, archives were recognised as private property. So the use of the word 'secret' was understood as in the sense of 'private'. It was usually used to describe the archives of Sovereigns, and the Papal archives came under that designation. However, that is part of a more extended story. Of course, today we understand the title to mean the modern archives of the Holy See. I have had the privilege of being taken on a tour of these archives in 1995 - one would need a scooter for daily visiting of same!!!

Lastly there is a new edition of the Directory of Irish Archives due to be published in the Autumn of 2010. If you need to update your entry please do so as soon as possible and email to raymondrefaussé@rcbdub.org

Enjoy the remainder of the Newsletter. If you have anything of historical/archival interest and would like to share your enthusiasm for it with your companion archivists please do not hesitate to contact the editor.

With every good wish for now.

Dominique Horgan op, Chair ACAI.

Blackrock College – celebrating our Sesquicentenary

Blackrock College was founded in 1860 and so we are celebrating our Sesquicentenary. At first the word was rolled around with some uncertainty but now trips off the tongue with no hesitation. It seems right that a 150th birthday should be honoured with a special title. As in all boys' schools, a nickname soon followed so the 'Sesqui' has become the term used familiarly.

What a Sesqui it has been so far! The whole 2009-2010 academic year is filled with events which have given great pleasure to the Blackrock 'family' and many in the wider sphere.

Blackrock College was founded by a French missionary order, the *Congregation du Saint Esprit*, for many years known in Ireland as the Holy Ghost Order and now called the Spiritans. Having been established in French colonies in Africa for many years, by the 1850s the order had been entrusted with missions in areas where English was the official language. However they had no English-speaking priests available so in 1859, a small group was sent to Ireland to recruit vocations, largely on the basis that English was spoken in Ireland, a country with a large Catholic population. Their leader was Père Jules Leman. He hoped to contact young Irishmen who had finished their classical studies and had an interest in becoming missionaries.

Père Leman and his companions settled in Blanchardstown on their arrival in Ireland, leasing a vacated Carmelite convent. Disappointingly, they found the country was still trying to recover from the catastrophic famine years of 1845-47 and was now on the brink of another famine. There was virtually no interest in anything happening outside Ireland and motivating new school and college graduates to volunteer for missionary work in Africa seemed unlikely. Worse still, they found the standard of education of the school leavers they interviewed left much to be desired. This was mainly due to the heritage of the Penal Laws and their on-going effects on Catholic life and education.

Père Leman reached the conclusion that if they were to recruit young Irishmen to the African missions, they would first have to educate them. However, his superiors in the Congregation didn't share his enthusiasm because of the financial outlay involved and their decision to grant him permission to establish the type of school that he suggested was given very reluctantly. Leman's idea was to open a junior seminary for boys interested in becoming missionaries later (known as Scholastics) and a secondary school for boys, day and boarding, whose parents wished them to have a Catholic education with the benefits of French high academic standards. The boys from both sections would all attend class together. Fr. Leman was concerned that Ireland, which had provided an answer to his search, would benefit reciprocally from this project on which his hopes were pinned.

Having visited Kerry and Galway, Père Leman was advised to look for premises in Dublin although the Archbishop, Dr. Paul Cullen, was not keen on foreign congregations opening houses in Dublin, fearing a financial burden on the already overpressed diocese if things didn't work out.

Leman was told that the north city already had sufficient Catholic schools and that those on the south side with sufficient income to pay for education were Protestants who had schools of their own. However, he and his companions learned of a vacant building in poor condition at Williamstown, near Blackrock. It had been used as a school before – a Protestant boys' school and earlier a girls' finishing school – and it was decided that it would be suitable.

The French College, as it was known then and for many years, opened on September 5th 1860. Two boarders and six day students arrived that day but gradually numbers grew and records of that time show that soon boys were coming from both far and near, the first student just

crossing the road to enter the College gates, the second (our first boarder) coming from Buenos Aires.

None of the four priests who founded the college could speak English. They employed an Irish layman, mainly to teach mathematics, and concentrated on learning English from their students. In P ere Leman's case, he quickly gained a remarkable fluency and vocabulary. Reminiscences of French College students of the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, tell of teachers with the accents of different parts of France, especially Brittany and Alsace. The boys wore French military style uniforms in blue and white, chosen for their traditional association with the Blessed Virgin, and still the school colours.

The system of having scholastics, day students and boarders all together on the same campus was most successful. The College flourished. The French method of education put strong emphasis on artistic expression in speech and writing in Greek, Latin and modern languages. Drawing and music were important subjects. *The French College Literary Journal* was published and a Literary and Debating Society flourished. The French way of life also meant that up to the year 1900 wine was served to the boys on special occasions.

Early on, the French atmosphere and methods were soon influenced by the students and their Irish ways. One of these was in the area of sport. The French method of education included intensive physical exercise and long walks but had no place for team games. Irish students felt this to be a great lack so almost immediately handball was introduced, then in 1865, cricket. Ten years after this a tantalising mention of "Dropping Football" in the press report of Sports Day 1875 could be the first reference to some form of rugby, the playing of which took off very soon after this, much helped by the enlargement of the College grounds when Blackrock Castle, a neighbouring house, was acquired in 1875 and it was possible to have proper pitches.

It was here in Blackrock Castle that the College authorities opened a third lever Civil Service College. For the first time, entry to the Civil Service could be acquired by passing a competitive examination instead of by patronage. Another door was opening for young Irish people and the French priests saw another opportunity for their pupils. Having studied in the Civil Service College, many Blackrock students were successful in the examinations and soon they were taking up posts all over the British Empire. For the first time their Catholicism wasn't a bar to their professional advancement. Some years earlier the Castle also became a University College where students could study for the exams of the Royal University. This was a University with no campus, not unlike the present day Open University, but it could award degrees which were highly respected. This system continued until the launch of the National University in 1908.

From the foundation of the College, new buildings were planned and within the first year a new house had been built on campus to allow for the rising number of students. Over the following 150 years there has been a steady enlargement of accommodation, especially in the 1870s and 1970s and most recently in 2007 when the new St. Paul's wing was opened.

The College now has 976 students, 90 boarding. The original idea of recruiting vocations among Irish students has meant that 887 of our past pupils spent their lives in the religious life as priests and brothers, the vast majority as missionaries. There is a strong sense within the College of the importance of the missions. Past students founded several aid organisations including Concern and Refugee Trust, and Bob Geldoff's Live Aid brought the needs of Africa with a bang to a worldwide audience. Nowadays two groups of our students visit developing countries annually and become involved in helping missionaries in their work with the marginalized and poor. College publications – newsletters, annuals etc – constantly bring the needs of the marginalized to our attention and report on how we have responded.

We have much to celebrate and be grateful for and so the events of our Sesquicentenary Year reflect the varied aspects of the College's long life. In September 2009 there was an outdoor Mass in the quadrangle for the whole school community plus guests, the chief celebrant being the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Diarmuid Martin. A book about the College, *Fearless and Bold* – the words taken from our College anthem – was published; also a calendar with a timeline and photographs from the College archives. There have been various social events for parents, past students and rugby teams of yesteryear. For our annual Leman Concert in the National Concert Hall, the College orchestra was this year augmented by over thirty past students who have become professional musicians. Other events have included a series of lectures for 5th and 6th Year pupils by past students of different eras, a collection of framed collages of archival photographs, a time capsule, a permanent Heritage and Nature Trail in the grounds and a Schools' Rugby Festival. A Celebration of Teaching and Learning Exhibition featuring the different developments within the school – English, Irish, Modern Languages, Latin, Civics etc – covering previous teachers and teaching methods, textbooks and students, is ongoing and changing throughout the year. An Art Exhibition of the work of past students who have made their careers in the visual arts – painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, architecture, graphics, ceramics, fashion design – was wonderfully inspiring, the beautifully produced catalogue to be a long-lasting reminder. Some of the exhibits will form the nucleus of a permanent College collection. A more permanent tribute to the Sesquicentenary will be a new work in glass by Róisín de Buitléar, to be installed in St. Paul's wing and honouring that saint.

Our Sesqui has been inspiring, moving and stimulating. For the archivist it has been exhausting! But I wouldn't have changed the year for one less busy. Every event and project required photographs, documents, information, meetings, ideas, explanations and locating, moving and carrying material. Despite a disastrous fire in the College archives in 1984, we still have a wonderful collection and it's a pleasure to see it used and appreciated. Foundation Day next September will commemorate the actual day the first students arrived in 1860 and will be the last event of our Sesquicentenary Year. We are hoping some relatives of those very first students will attend, coming, like their ancestors, from far and near and rounding out the celebrations in a very special way.

Caroline Mullan, Archivist, Blackrock College, Blackrock, Co Dublin.

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Biblical Catchphrases

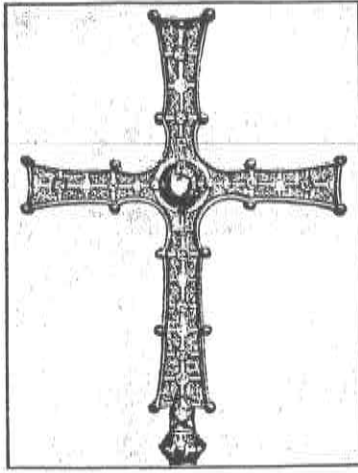
The teacher asked her class – “What was the sin of the Pharisees?” only to be told “Eating camels, Miss”. The child had read that the Pharisees “strained at gnats and swallowed camels!”

When asked why did the Israelites make a golden calf?, one smart child replied “Because they hadn't enough silver”.

In what condition was the patriarch Job at the end of his life? “Dead” was the quiet response.

“I don't believe that Solomon was so rich after all” observed a smart child. “Why so”? questioned teacher. Because the bible says “Solomon slept with his ancestors; if he had been rich, he'd have had a bed of his own”.

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is mystery. Today is gift. That's why they call it the present



THE CROSS OF CONG.

The Cross of Cong

The Cross of Cong is one of Ireland's greatest treasures. On Tuesday 30 March 2010 it was taken to the Museum of Country Life near Castlebar, Co. Mayo, and it will be on display there for some time. Because of its fragility it had not been moved from Kildare Street for years past, even when there was a world tour called Treasures of Ireland. The utmost care was taken during its transferral and Dr. Patrick Wallace, Director of the National Museum, came to unveil it and announce some new discoveries which had come to light during its conservation preparation for removal to Turlough Park.

It was made in 1123 to contain a small portion of the true Cross brought by an Irish Bishop who had attended the Lateran Council, to Turlough O'Connor, King of Connacht. The Annals of Innisfallen state that it was made at Roscommon, while others attribute its manufacture to one who had learned the art of metalwork in Clonmacnoise. 'It is undoubtedly one of the finest specimens of metalwork, enamel, niello, and jewellery of its age in the western world.' It stands thirty inches high, and the breadth of the arms is nineteen inches. It consists of an oaken cross covered with plates of bronze and silver, washed in many places with a thick layer of gold, and having interspersed golden filigree work of most minute character around its front centre. All the front and back plates are elaborately carved with that intertwined pattern which is specially characteristic of Irish ornamentation. The outer corners of each compartment were originally studded with precious stones, glass, or figured enamel paste, in white or dark blue colours. Supported upon a raised boss, decorated with niello in the centre, there is a large polished crystal, under which was placed originally the relic sent from Rome to Turlough O'Connor.

From its appearance it was called the *Bachall Buidh*, or the Yellow Staff. Around its sides there are a series of Latin and Irish inscriptions, all in Irish characters. The letters were punched into the silver plate so deeply that the inscription can still be read, even where the external plate was injured. The foot of the cross springs from a highly decorated dog's head, which rises out of a globe, the detail of its workmanship is simply marvellous. Beneath that ball is a decorated socket, into which was inserted the staff or pole with which the cross was carried. The inscriptions record the history of the relic, the time and purpose for which it was made. The Latin inscription is "*Hac Cruce Crux tegitur qua passus conditor Orbis*". – "In this cross is preserved the Cross on which the Creator of the world suffered".

The Cross, originally intended for Roscommon was probably brought to Cong by Roderick O'Connor. During the penal times it disappeared from Cong, and was recovered in the nineteenth century. It was in the early years of the century in the hands of Abbot Prendergast, who was the last Abbot of Cong, who died in 1829. Sir William Wilde who had a house in the neighbourhood, remembered having seen it in his boyish days in an old cupboard in the Abbot's room, and recalled that it had been placed on the altar of the parochial church in Cong during the Christmas and Easter festivals. After the Abbot's death, his successor Fr. Michael Waldron sold the cross to mathematician Professor James McCullagh for 100 guineas and he presented it to the Royal Irish Academy, from whence it was transferred to what is now the National Museum of Ireland in the 1880's

The Cross is located on Level A of the Museum in Turlough Park and the keepers hope that many people will visit and view this wonderful masterpiece of Irish art.

(This article is adapted mostly from D'Alton's History of the Archdiocese of Tuam.)

Melleray

From time to time little interesting facts are discovered in unlikely places. Below is a poem found by a sister who was researching the history of the primary school at Lecanvey, Westport, Co. Mayo, recently. She was intrigued by it as it was found in the Folklore Collection pertaining to that school. Thanks to Fr. Uinseann Ó Maidin O.C.S.O. we are somewhat more enlightened.

On the Departure of the Monks for Roscrea

By one at Melleray

Away they go a valiant band in number thirty three
To build another abbey fair, like their own Melleray,
Afar, near where the Brosna flows in beauty mid the flowers,
That deck the plains that lie around Roscrea's great ancient towers.

They go to raise another Shrine, another holy pile,
Like those that were the glory and the pride of our sweet Isle,
Before a strange banner waves within our Irish seas,
And nought but sweet toned Gaelic rose in freedom to the breeze.

They go to found another home beneath our Irish sky,
From which sweet songs of praise will rise to God enthroned on high.
Its name will be St. Joseph's Mount, Oh! may St. Joseph be
Their intercessor with the Child he taught in Gallilee.

There's courage on their noble brows, their cheeks are wet with tears,
They leave their brothers whom they loved for many happy years.
They kneel before their Abbot dear, to them and all so kind,
Their manly breasts are heaving now; for him they leave behind.

Name: Rev. Abbot Charles Ephrem MacDonnell.

Fr. Uinseann's notes: Abbot Ephrem McDonnell was a native of Westport – no precise details as to location. He was born 1822 and died 1898. He was sent on the foundation to New Melleray, Iowa, as superior, when Fr. Clement Smyth – his predecessor, was elected Bishop of Dubuque. In time Fr. Ephrem was elected abbot and blessed by Bishop Smyth. A very saintly man, very ascetical, Fr. Ephrem was not a good administrator and left too much to his bursar with calamitous results. He was asked to resign, something he was happy to do and later returned to Mount Melleray. The early arrivals in Cobh, in December 1831 moved to Rathmore, where they established a temporary residence 1831 – 1837. During this period five monks died. In 1861 the remains were exhumed and buried in Mount Melleray near the tomb of our Founder – Abbot Vincent. When he died Abbot Ephrem, at his own request was buried with these five monks.

Another addendum: Ismena McDonnell was the third and youngest daughter of Mathias and Anne McDonnell of Westport, where she was born on 31 July 1820. Galway was the first Mercy Convent to be founded in the west of Ireland on 8 May 1840. On the advice of Dean Burke, Parish Priest of Westport, Ismena entered in Galway. Catherine McAuley was present at her reception on 2 September 1841. Having served her novitiate there she was ready to accompany Mother Paul Cullen to Westport on the 8 September 1842. She served as mistress of schools in Westport, as it was said of her that 'her talents were cultivated by a refined and superior education'. She was a sister of the Abbot of Mount Melleray. After four years in Westport she was sent as Leader of the foundation to Sligo, on the 30 June 1846. There she laboured earnestly and untiringly until her premature death on the 13 July 1854. It was said of her: "*She had the grace of tenderness; her hand was at the latch of every heart.*"

The Poor Clares, Galway

Nuns' Island, Galway: On Saturday/Sunday 16 & 17 January 2010 the Poor Clare sisters unveiled their new extern convent in the Poor Clare monastery to say a big 'Thank You' to all their benefactors. Their fundraising programme had been launched in June 2009 and incorporated events such as Cabaret by the Bay, Family Days, Table Quizzes, Buy a Brick, Coffee Mornings and last but not least on a brilliantly fine Sunday in December there was music, a duck race, Santa in a speedboat and great excitement for everyone as the required € 750,000 for the renovations was almost realised. People came from far and near to visit and view the newly renovated convent which was blessed by Bishop Martin Drennan on the afternoon of Sunday 17 January.

The origins of the Nuns' Island monastery go back to early 17th century Flanders in northern France. At this time there were no convents of nuns in Ireland or Britain, since the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. Any young woman desiring to become a nun, had to go to the continent of Europe, and most went to Flanders – then the Low countries. In 1608 Mary Ward who founded the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is now declared Venerable, was instrumental in establishing a Poor Clare monastery for English girls in Gravelines. Here the first Irish sister was professed on Christmas Day 1620. The first known Irish Poor Clare is Sr. Martha Marianna Cheevers, and she inspired a group of five professed sisters, whose intent was to establish a monastery 'for their own nation'. Their first move was to Dunkirk, then Nieuport (northern France) 1627 and finally to Dublin 1629.

This first group was led by Mother Cecily of St. Francis Dillon. After the tolerant Lord Deputy, Falkland, had been recalled a period of persecution ensued, during which the sisters in Dublin, who had attracted twelve postulants, were arrested on 22 October 1630. Released on parole they left Dublin and set up a convent at 'Bethlehem', Co. Westmeath. The ruins of their building can still be seen by the shores of Lough Ree, five miles north of Athlone. After ten years the community numbered sixty sisters. With the outbreak of war in 1641, the sisters being in great danger were invited to come to Galway. This they did in 1642. Later that year Bethlehem monastery was burned, but luckily the remaining sisters there were alerted and fled to some secluded area. A wooden statue of Our Lady which did not survive intact is still revered in the Galway convent, particularly every year during the month of May.

A significant date for the Galway Poor Clares is 10 July 1649 – that year Galway Corporation gave the sisters Oileán Altanach as "free grant for ever". But in the Ireland of those days there was no permanence – you did not put down roots. Cromwell had reached the west, Galway was obliged to surrender in 1652. The sisters' monastery burned, they had to disband, some to exile in Spain, but others remained on in hiding. In 1691 Oilean Altanagh was again under attack and the monastery burned. Towards the end of the 17th century the sisters rented an old house in Market Street which was "home" to the Poor Clares for over 130 years. These were the years of the Penal Laws, so even here their presence was not unnoticed and they were raided several times. Despite all this numbers increased, and a foundation was made in Dublin in 1712.

In 1825 Ireland was emancipated and four years later would follow the Catholic Emancipation Act. A community of fifteen returned with Mother M. Clare French as Abbess, and gradually they resumed full religious life. The seclusion of their monastery gives them space for prayer and thus they support and live in solidarity with people in all walks of life. Nun's Island and Galway have always felt an instinctive need of one another. The relationship has always been strong and that was certainly evident during the viewing celebration last January – a happy time to reflect on that mutual bond.

Mary McKillop – The Black Dress

Mary McKillop was born near Melbourne on 15 January 1842. She was the first daughter of Flora (nee McDonald) and Alexander McKillop who had emigrated there from Cille Chorill, Murlaggan, Invernesshire in Scotland. Her life was never to be an easy one, her path was continually beset with obstacles, but she was courageous and trusted in God to see her through the difficult times. Before she was twenty she knew God was calling her, but not until she was 24 was she to take up what she called 'God's work'. Her vocation could be summarised as to open and run Catholic schools for the poor in South Australia, and so she became the foundress of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, better known as the Josephites. Doubtless her task brought her much joy but also great hardship and pain, but throughout it all she remained a devoted servant of God. Pope John Paul II declared Mary "Blessed" on 19 January 1995, an important step towards formal acknowledgement of Mary as saint, and we look forward to her canonisation next September.

"**The Black Dress**" a book by Pamela Freeman is an eminently interesting and easily readable book which the blurb describes as credible and compelling, a book seeped in Australian history, a tender and moving narrative. The ante-room of death could hardly be imagined as a pleasant place, but that is the setting for the book. Mary is lying in a little white room, looking at the crucifix, listening to the sound of trams and tugboats and the children's voices in the school next door and the bell ringing the angelus. She prays but she cannot speak as the sisters come in, a few at a time to pray with her, hold her hand and say goodbye. She would dearly love to offer words of encouragement but her worn body cannot quite manage it, so she just lies there and remembers. Even as death approaches she feels she must try to be just and not let old anger or grief or despair colour her thoughts, and if she succeeds it will be due to the grace of God. She died on the 8th August 1909 at North Sydney. She was sixty-seven years old.

This book details much more of Mary's early life and family circumstances than it does of her life as a Josephite sister, but there are other books which wonderfully describe the early lives of the sisters. Her mother's maiden name was Flora McDonald, a wonderful lady who had a deep appreciation of the providence of God in her own life and in that of her family. The extended McDonald and McKillop families emigrated to Australia, but Mary admitted that her life was shaped in the Highlands of Scotland and the oppression of Catholics. Her mother recounted all the old stories and sang Scottish lullabies to the very young children. Her father, Alexander McKillop was a most interesting character. As a boy of twelve he was enrolled as a seminarian in the Scots College in Rome. There he excelled in theology and disputation, a quality he never relinquished right through life. He was 19 when he returned to Scotland with an inflammation of the lungs. He attended Blair's College in Aberdeen for a while but was expelled, and later Mary would say that he had the wrong kind of strength for this world, as he could no more turn away from a fight when he thought he had right on his side than she herself could turn from a child in need. Mary was often angry with him when he behaved rashly, and deprived his family of decent living standards, but when she announced her intention of becoming a nun, he wrote generously to her – "How my soul delights in your success; our only happiness is in fulfilling the will of God and you have the comfort of knowing that you have a true vocation."

Mary is very often referred to as the co-founder with Fr. Julian Tenison Woods of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Fr. Julian was born 15 November 1832 and ordained priest in Adelaide on 4 January 1857. Mary was working as a governess to a relative's family at Penola in 1861 when she first met Fr. Woods. As he spoke of the number of children who were growing up ignorant of their catechism in his parish of 26,000 square miles and implored the people to 'Do what you can' Mary knew clearly that such was God's message to her. And it was confirmed for her when Fr. Woods told her that he believed God sent her to Penola to begin

the great work of educating the ignorant youth of Australia. He had the vision of an order of nuns who were not enclosed within stone walls but rather such as he had seen in France, educating the poor, tending the needy, nursing the indigent and doing it all from small communities of six or seven. He knew that Mary would respond; he could see it in her face. She did indeed and he it was who drew up the first Rule of the Order (11 May 1867).

Reminiscing on her death bed she could think – “I still don’t know why Our Blessed Lord picked me. I made so many mistakes! In the early years it seemed we lurched from crisis to crisis. There never was enough money, not even enough to feed or clothe our sisters properly, and there were conflicts of personality that nearly tore us apart. In those years we took on everyone who came to us claiming they had a vocation. Later on I realised that those priests who had gravely interrogated me as to why I thought I had been called had been acting wisely. Not everyone is suited to a religious life and sometimes those who feel most strongly called are the worst suited. One of our early recruits ended her years in a lunatic asylum, poor, sad soul, and the trouble she caused almost ended the Institute before it was properly established. If I’d been older, wiser, more experienced, perhaps I would have sieved out those girls who were not suited to be nuns, or managed the inevitable conflicts of personality better than I did. I have to smile. If I’d been older, wiser, more experienced, I wouldn’t have had the ... *gall* to do what I did. Sometimes you need inexperience to begin a new venture, for the experienced baulk at the problems they see clearly lying ahead, while the inexperienced go blithely onwards, unaware of the pitfalls in their path. They may fall, but at least they start the journey.”

From another source we find the following: “The scattered band of hastily trained teachers, working in the burning heat of that land under appalling conditions, had to face not only poverty and illness but solitude as well, lacking often the support of spiritual guides. Fr. Woods, who was not good at taking advice, was not always prudent, and encouraged some of the sisters when they strayed into the region of false mysticism.” Another cause of contention for Mary in the early days was the stand she took as regards Aboriginal children. If they wished to attend school, they must be allowed on the same basis as other children. This stance was not acceptable to other well-meaning people. In 1865 Mary and two younger sisters began teaching in an abandoned stable at Penola, before moving to Adelaide. There another contentious issue was the fact that neither Mary nor Fr. Woods ever wished to be connected to any secular board of education. She herself had passed her teacher training examinations although she had little or no time for study. Fr. Woods, although a clever organiser and publicist forged ahead with plans for a catholic funded educational system and the bishop, an Irishman – Laurence Bonaventure Shiel, OFM was inclined to side with his priests who complained to him about Fr. Woods.

Complaints were also made against some of the sisters who were under the jurisdiction of the bishop, so an investigation was ordered. Changes were recommended, one of which was the introduction of the canonical distinction between choir and lay sisters. Mary did not want any distinctions and respectfully remonstrated with the bishop and his vicar general, an Irish Franciscan – Fr. Horan, native of Galway. On the evening of 21 September 1871 the vicar called to inform Mary that the bishop (who had called earlier while she was out) wanted her to go to another convent. She could not go that night and she wanted to discuss matters with her sisters and with the bishop, so the V.G. led her to believe that she was excommunicated. Next morning the sisters did not dare go to church and this was taken by the bishop as an act of defiance, so he arrived later at the convent with four priests. Amid scenes of hysteria with Mary kneeling in the chapel he excommunicated her and sent her back to the world.

Quoting once again from the book, as she lay dying Mary remembered: “I know I have a reputation these days for being defiant of the bishops of the time, but truly this was not so. I have always had such great respect for their office, for the authority God has given them, that

I could never be truly defiant. I was not even being defiant to Bishop Shiel that day – not really. I would have submitted to his authority if he had expelled me from the convent; but he was trying to change the Rule of the institute, the Rule under which I and all my nuns had taken our vows, and I could not believe that this was God's will. I would have obeyed his orders regarding the Institute but that they ran counter to the solemn vows I had given. And the actual 'defiance' for which I was excommunicated did not even exist!"

In her spiritual exile Mother Mary was housed by a Jewish family – the Solomons and supported by the Jesuits, who realised that the bishop had not followed any of the procedures of canon law, and therefore they did not consider themselves bound in any way. Her brother Donald, himself a Jesuit, would one day say to her: "The rules don't always work for the will of God; we Jesuits learn to use the rules to further the good, to look for the spirit of the law, not the nitpicking detail." Shortly after pronouncing Mary excommunicated, the bishop's health declined and he went away for a rest. After some time and thought, he realised that he had been badly advised, admitted his error and rescinded the excommunication. Mary herself could recognise the hand of God even in all the most untoward circumstances of her life. She could say: "If I had not been excommunicated, I would never have travelled to Rome, never met the Pope, and perhaps the Rule of our Institute would never have been ratified. It was remarkable that even Fr. Woods turned against Mary and her institute when she went to Rome in 1873 and returned with a Rule of Life differing from the one he had drawn up. Causes of contention were never far from her, as some bishops insisted on their canonical rights over the religious in their dioceses. Some sisters deserted Mother Mary and started separate diocesan groups.

She could say: "God has given me so many crosses to bear in my life. I am so grateful for them. I know that each one brought me closer to Him, closer to sharing the burden and joy of Christ." As well as the many other vicissitudes visited on her she suffered throughout her life from bad health, terrible headaches and stomach cramps. Her only relief, or the only known remedy then was a spoonful of brandy. Those who wished to revile her said she was a drunkard. She was the chief breadwinner of the family for quite some time, and her work for a time was in a printery – Sands, Kenny & Co, where the noise of the printing presses aggravated her headaches and contributed much to her backaches. But in all she acknowledged the hand of God in her life and she could say: "God pushed me out of Sands, Kenny & Co. and out to the bush, to Penola, where I would find my life's work. It was there that the great adventure of supplying free catholic education for isolated bush children started and since then the lives of many throughout Australia and overseas have been transformed.

Finally the congregation thrived, particularly in Sydney where she was aided and abetted by the English Archbishop Vaughan and the Irish Cardinal Moran, and it is in Sydney that the reminiscences which form the book – *The Black Dress* – take place. Thinking back she ponders on her father and asks: "without his absolute commitment to doing what God required of him, would I have heard God's call to me? Would I have stood up to the Bishops when they tried to take over the Institute? Would I have fought so hard for the establishment of the Rule? Without Mamma's belief in God providing would I have even conceived of an order of nuns who lived on charity? Without her kindness and compassion and love of others, would I have noticed the children going in want? Without her need of me, would I have learnt to take responsibility? I've travelled far in memory these last days, all around the world; have I done my work? On the morning of St. Joseph's feastday, 19 March 1866, I did my hair in tight plaits and wound them round my head. Then I put on the black dress, black stockings and shoes, and went to early mass. Annie and Lexie went too, but they walked behind me to church. The other mass goers knew what I had planned and nodded solemnly to me. I felt solemn too, but also exhilarated, free. That was the beginning of the Institute. That was the moment when, publicly I declared who I really was. Not Mary McKillop any longer, but Sister Mary of the Institute of St. Joseph."

Handcraft in Irish Convent National Schools, c1900

The Board of Education in Ireland had women school teachers teach Needlework in all national schools attended by senior girls from 1832. Sisters in convent schools promoted benefits to families with mother as proficient homemaker. Appointment of a directress of needlework for national schools from the 1880s led to a handcraft-based curriculum for senior girls as a move towards worthwhile wage-earning skills. Patronage from Queen Victoria's representatives was highly appreciated. Lord Lieutenant Thomas Francis de Grey Cowper and his wife took a keen interest in advancing convent pupils' life skills. She influenced formation of the Royal Irish School of Art Needlework in 1882.

The 1883 Cork Exhibition was a turning point. South Kensington Museum's Alan Cole accepted an invitation to Cork from James Brennan (first headmaster of Crawford Municipal School of Art). Sisters, competent needlewomen and teachers absorbed Cole's remarks on advancement of needlework expertise. Sisters of Mercy in Kinsale and Poor Clare's in Kenmare accepted his offer of classes in their convents. Organisers of the Cork exhibition matched South Kensington Museum's £200 towards buying worthwhile specimens of antique lace. The framed specimens were studied for weeks at many local convents. The Prince and Princess of Wales visited Crawford Municipal School of Art in 1885. Viceroy John Hamilton Campbell Gordon, 7th Earl of Aberdeen and his wife Ishbel, mother of four children under seven, positively influenced manual training in convent national schools.

Lady Aberdeen's initial tenure in Ireland was very short – just six months. Nevertheless she exerted great influence. She organised an Irish handcraft stand at the International Exhibition at Edinburgh in 1886. She purchased the Dublin Lace depot in Grafton Street as a focal point for both handcrafters and buyers. They were part of the co-operative movement introduced into Ireland from America.

Appointment of Miss Mary Prendergast as Directress of Needlework in National Schools was significant after more than half a century of day-to-day organisation and inspection of national schools by men only. Men inspectors inspected needlework – teachers were paid according to the results system. Then, with Prendergast's vision and supervision, a combined literary and skill based industrial programme was devised for senior girls. Special industry departments, with teachers paid by the state, were sanctioned where conditions for appointment were met. Some convent national schools had, from establishment, maintained such departments. Many convent national schools participated in the state funded enterprise from 1888. In 1889 over 5,000 national schools – those schools with a woman teacher and senior girl pupils – received a new curriculum with Needlework as the principal subject.

Girls could look towards future employment in handcraft industries. According to Prendergast, use of their hands gave young women habits of neatness, perseverance and discipline which stood them in good stead in the world of work, whether in Ireland or America. Not all parents were enthusiastic that their daughters should be so trained. Employers, in cities such as Belfast, worried that their high dependency on a pool of female labour might be curtailed. The Board of Education accepted counter arguments from many quarters and about 40 % of schools were granted exemptions from this manual oriented curriculum.

Religious conducted industrial departments where adult women and senior pupils trained in lace making, embroidery, and machine made garments. They processed sheep's wool for knitting and flax for weaving, etc. Generally pupils' work was sold, with payment in proportion to value of the work. Pupils took some work home; convents distributed some to less well-off families; women in Houses of Mercy benefited. Efforts were rewarded when Lady Londonderry, Lady Cadogan, Lady Dudley and Lady Aberdeen held sales of work

among friends and acquaintances in Ireland and London. Orders flowed in. Publicity ensued when local prize-winning items proceeded to exhibitions in England and America. The input of religious sisters led to revival of worthwhile handcraft occupations, and income earned gave each woman a belief in her own abilities.

Directress of Needlework annual input into reports of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland published in British Parliamentary Papers detail diverse undertakings. Point lace was made at New Ross national school, Co. Wexford since the Great Famine. The Sisters of Mercy in St. Vincent's national school, Loughrea, Co. Galway had a broad ranging dressmaking, shirt-making, underclothing, knitting and crocheting programme from 1852. The nuns at Adare, county Limerick supplemented pupils' thread for crochet, embroidery and macramé for over thirty years. The work was varied – most convent national schools had instruction in garment making for babies, children, men and women. Some, such as Longford and Carrick-on-Shannon bought knitting machines and catered for sizeable orders from local drapery shops. In 1895. Longford Convent of Mercy turned out 1,000 pairs of men's socks for Longford Militia. As time went on, work got better and more varied. In Navan, county Meath many highly embroidered ecclesiastical garments were produced. Standards in convent national schools were good, but some excelled. Pupils countrywide exhibited at the Royal Dublin Industries Show in Ballsbridge. From Kenmare in county Kerry to Crossmaglen, county Armagh, convent national school pupils exhibited highly commended work. The latter came away with two silver medals for lacework and design. In 1894, the Chicago Exhibition for the Quatercentenary of Columbus's discovery of America brought Irish national school handwork to a new audience. The Paris Exhibition exhibited two beautiful handkerchiefs and a skilfully designed collar from Youghal.

Skilled artistry was promoted and practised. Can duvets ever compete with soft woollen blankets? Woven in Foxford county Mayo at the factory that Cork woman Mother Morrough-Bernard started with the Congested Districts Board over a hundred years ago. Sisters fostered community spirit, built new houses for mill workers, organised local musical events. They fostered pride and senses of place in many towns and villages worldwide.

**Revival of Irish Handcrafts
Irish Convent National Schools c. 1900**

Connacht 7	Leinster	14	Munster	32		Ulster 10
Ballaghaderreen	Ardee	Goresbridge	Abbeyfeale	Doneraile	Passage W	Ballyshannon
Benada	Arklow	Kildare	Adare	Dungarvan	Queenstown	Belfast
Foxford	Athy	Kilkenny	Bandon	Fethard	Rathkeale	Ballyjamesduff
Galway	Carlow	Mountmellick	CarrickSuir	Kanturk	Rosscarbery	Belturbet
Gort	Castlecomer	Navan	Cashel	Youghal	Skibereen	Carrickmacross
Loughrea	Dublin	New Ross	Castleisland	Kilkee	Stradbally	Crossmaglen
Oughterard	Faythe	Stradbally	Charleville	Kilrush	Tipperary	Enniskillen
			Clonakilty	Kinsale	Tralee	Monaghan
			Clonmel	Limerick	Thurles	Newry
			Cork	Lismore	Waterford	Rostrevor
			Doon	Midleton		

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