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Gentle Readers

Greetings! If you are voting in the Donegal election, on Aranmore, to be precise, you would have enjoyed a 'gorgeous' day as described by the RTE journalist this morning. From where I stand it is miserable. You may, by this know that our 'brilliant' Hon. Secretary, Sr. Marie O'Leary has had to resign her position. We shall miss her, not only for her professionalism but for her ever-ready fun and humour and sense of the ridiculous, her kindness and concern for everyone in the Association. We owe you an immense gratitude Marie.

Another member of the Committee, Sr. Marie Coyle, has also had to resign due to responsibilities in her Congregation. We shall miss her eagerness, energy and ideas. More about these two good women anon.

I had a wonderful day in Maynooth on Thursday 18th attending the Lord Morpeth Testimonial Conference. Over the past eighteen months NUIM has been involved in a joint project between National University of Ireland, Maynooth, and Castle Howard, North Yorkshire, in investigating, preserving and eventual digitalisation of a Testimonial Roll given to him on his departure from Ireland in 1841, having served five years as Chief Secretary in Lord Melbourne's administration. This Testimonial Roll is wrapped around a gigantic bobbin, measures 412 metres in length and contains 300,000 signatures from across the whole of Ireland. It is amazingly legible and gripping to browse through. Lord Morpeth, George Howard, was one of the Howards of Castle Howard remembered by many of you as the Castle where 'Brideshead Revisited' was filmed. There are plans for an exhibition on Morpeth in Ireland in 2014. Watch out for it.

Once again 'thank you' to our intrepid editor who pursues relentlessly for copy, so if you have any item of interest please tell us about it and send your script to Sr. Teresa at wparchives@yahoo.co.uk.

I wish you all the graces and blessings of a peaceful and joyful Christmas season.

Sincerely,

Dominique Horgan op; Chair ACAI

St. Angela Merici and the Ursulines

This year we are celebrating the 475th anniversary of the founding of the Ursulines. Who is this woman who founded the Ursulines and whose spirit motivates us to this day?

Angela was born in Desenzano in Northern Italy. Her father belonged to a family of impoverished minor nobility with urban commercial roots. Angela pursued a devout life from her childhood and she developed this in harmony with her family. Her family did not try to oppose her devotion by forcing her into marriage or the convent. When she was eighteen years old her mother, father and sister all died of unknown causes. This sad event gave her a further urge towards the spiritual life she had undertaken. It was during this time that Angela had her first vision. She was praying for her sister when she saw her sister in the sky among a group of angels happy and joyful. She became a member of the third order of St. Francis so that she could more easily attend mass, confession and the Eucharist, since at that time frequent communion was not conceded to lay people.

We know that Angela was a mystic and a contemplative. Another aspect of her life was her theological and preaching activity. She had ability to read both Latin and the vernacular. Her interpretation of the scripture attracted many people. One of the strongest characteristics of Angela's personality was her human approach.

Angela was sixty years old when she founded the company of St. Ursula. It was founded on the 25 November 1535 with the admission of 28 virgins. She accepted St. Ursula as her patron, as Ursula had been a fourth century martyr who was popularly venerated as protector of women. Angela did not found a convent as we know such today. She pioneered a new way of living the gospel. The idea of apostolic religious involvement in schools and parishes was unheard of in her time.

Although Angela devised a rule for her sisters she did not think of them as a religious order. They did not wear a religious habit as other women of the time did. They continued to live with their families and not behind an enclosure or convent walls. But the work Angela and her followers did in educating the poor girls of the region was greatly admired. The company of St. Ursula was not specially directed towards girls who were poor or unable to marry or enter a convent. It was open to women of all strata of society. What was unique about Angela's company was that it was composed and managed by women. After her death this eventually changed when it was taken over by the male members of the church. The Archbishop of Milan – St. Charles Borromeo was responsible for the reform that eventually cloistered the Ursulines and set up convents as most of us know today.

However many of us are returning to our roots and the charism of our founders and living to the best of our ability as Angela asked. The theme for our forthcoming Chapter next July is 'Lead A New Life.' It may be appropriate to finalise this short article by putting some of Angela's words in modern terms:

"Do something, get moving, be confident, get on your knees; then be ready for Big Surprises."

Sr. Margaret Mary, Árdchiaráin, Shannonbridge, Athlone, Co. Roscommon.

The Parochial Records of the Church of Ireland Diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry

Graphically the Church of Ireland Diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry encompasses all of Co. Mayo and parts of Cos. Sligo, Roscommon and Galway. The diocese of Achonry in the north east was united to Killala in 1622 and the United Dioceses of Killala and Achonry were joined to Tuam in 1834. In 1839 following the death of the Honourable Power Le Poer Trench, Archbishop of Tuam (1819 – 1839), the province of Tuam was united to Armagh and the see ceased to be an Archbishopric. At present there are nine parish unions within the United Diocese – Achonry, Aughaval, Ballisodare, Galway and Kilcummin, Killala, Kilmoremy, Omey, Skreen and Tuam. The clergy of these nine unions provide services in 30 churches throughout the Diocese, see <http://tuam Anglican.org>.

In 1810 the Irish Record Commission was set up to look into the state of Irish records. This commission published a number of reports between 1810 and 1815 from which some evidence of the state of the parochial records of the established church can be gleaned, for example Charles Davis, deputy Registrar of the Consistorial Court of Tuam, wrote the following to the Commissioners in 1811:

“I do not know of registers being kept in any of the parishes or unions of baptisms, marriages and burials, prior to the year 1795; but I know that soon after the present Archbishop’s (the Honourable William Beresford 1794 – 1819) translation to this Diocese in 1794, His Grace, understanding that such registers were not kept, ordered that every church should be furnished with a book for that purpose and that such registers should be regularly kept in each parish according to the Canons of 1634.”

Davis told the Commissioners that there was

“no Librarian, nor Diocesan Library of the Cathedral Church of St. Mary’s, Tuam, nor any Archive or Office thereunto belonging...”

In the second report of the Irish Record Commissioners published in 1812 recognition was given to the public importance of parish registers and of “their regular return and transmission to some secure repository and of their careful arrangement and preservation therein.” However it was not until 1844 that any legislation was passed. It was entitled “An Act for Marriages in Ireland and for registering such Marriages.” The Act provided for the civil registration of Protestant marriages by the keeping of a marriage register in duplicate and the quarterly return of certified copies of each marriage to the local registrar. The provisions of this Act explain why the General Registry contains records of Church of Ireland marriages from 1845 while all other records of births, marriages and deaths date from 1864.

The compulsory civil registration of births, marriages and deaths begun in 1864, coupled with the disestablishment of The Church of Ireland in 1869, led to the breakdown in certain areas of the custody of parochial records. In 1875 the Public Record Act of 1867 was amended to provide for the safe keeping of parochial records in Ireland. The Act declared that any Church of Ireland register containing baptisms or burials earlier than 1 January 1871 or marriages earlier than 1 April 1845 was a public record and was to be transferred to the Public Record Office for safe keeping. Luckily for posterity another Act was passed in 1867 which provided for the local retention of records under special conditions and specifically excluded vestry minute books and marriage register duplicates from the operation of the 1867 Act. In General parishes complied with the legislation and sent their registers to the Public Record Office where they were destroyed in the fire of 1922. Many extant baptisms and burial registers date from the 1870s as a result of these Acts.

The main constituents of parochial records are of course the registers of baptisms and burials. Only nine parishes in the Diocese had registers that contained entries dating from

the 18th century, Aglish (Castlebar), Burrishoole Newport), Cong, Crossmolina, Dunmore, Emlagfad, Killala, Kilmaine and Kilmoremoy. The registers of Aglish, Burrishoole and Dunmore were lost in 1922. Other parishes began to keep records at the end of the 18th century and in the first decade of the 19th century, probably due to the influence of Archbishop Beresford as already mentioned. These parishes include Athenry, Aughaval (Westport), Ballinrobe, Ballysakerry, Ballisodare, Castleconnor, Galway, Headford, Kilcommon (Hollymount) Rathbarron and Tuam. Of these the original registers of Athenry (a copy survives) Ballisodare, Headford, Kilcommon and Rathbarron do not survive.

In the 20th century a number of surveys of the parochial records of the Diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry were carried out. An inventory of church plate and parochial records was made in 1934- 1935, a survey of parochial records was undertaken in 1975 – 1976 and in 1985 a list was compiled of the parochial records transferred from the Tuam Synod Hall to the Representative Church Body (RCB) Library, Braemor Park, Churchtown, Dublin 14. Most of the surviving parochial records of the Diocese, not in current use, are now held in the RCB Library. Besides Registers these include other parish records such as vestry minute books, cess applotment books and preachers' books. These records also help to document the history of a particular parish and its parishioners. An example of this is found in the preachers' book for the parish of Kilmaine, Co. Mayo 1857 – 1896. On 9 November 1879 the rector records a tenant right meeting at Kilmaine, attended by large numbers of people "on foot and mounted – carrying banners bearing seditious and socialistic mottoes, some of them armed with mock swords or pikes." This meeting was "brought to an early conclusion by torrents of rain." Other comments in this book reveal the prevalence of illnesses such as influenza, scarlatina, whooping cough and measles in the late 19th century. The parish of Shrule was also in the care of the rector of Kilmaine, who records that the afternoon service in the parish of Shrule came to an end in February 1884 due to the lack of Protestant police in the barracks there but services recommenced in May 1892 as a result of "an influx of Protestants (English and Scotch.)" who were employed to cut down the timber in the nearby Dalgan woods. [Dalgan was later a seminary for the Columban Missionary Fathers.]

The survey conducted in 1975-1976 found parochial records for 83 parishes in the United Diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry. Registers from 55 of these parishes were destroyed in 1922 so only the records of one third of the parishes were unaffected by the Four Courts' fire. Over the years some records had accumulated in the Diocesan Registry in the Synod Hall in Tuam and in 1985 the Diocesan Registry was moved to the RCB Library for safe keeping as the Synod Hall was to be refurbished and used for more practical purposes such as meetings, concerts etc.

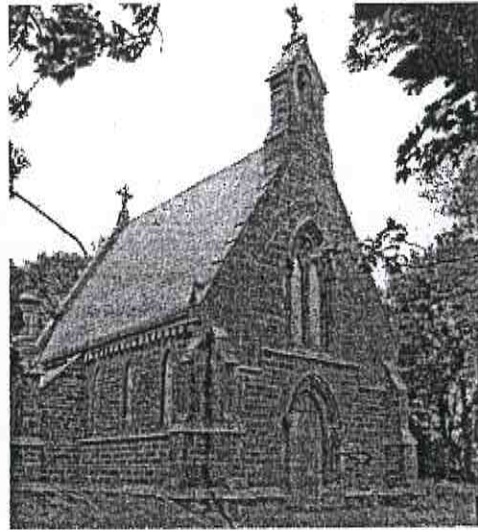
Only a third of the churches of the Anglican Communion in the Diocese of Tuam. Killala and Achonry, remain open today. Some of the church buildings have survived and now have alternative functions, for example as libraries as in Claremorris and Ballinrobe, but most of the buildings are now in ruins. This year the annual church outing of the Tuam Union of parishes visited three of these unused churches – Kilcommon (Hollymount), Ross (Clonbur) and Ballyovie (Tourmakeady).

Kilcommon Church, Hollymount, Co. Mayo

The first church at Hollymount was built in 1688 as a chapel of ease by Archbishop John Vesey of Tuam close to his mansion Hollymount House. It became a parish church in 1714, was rebuilt in 1816 and the last service was held in 1959. Four volumes of registers covering baptisms 1800-1913, marriages 1800-1845 and burials 1800-1918 were destroyed in the fire at the Four Courts. The marriage register 1845-1937 was lodged in the RCB Library in 1976.



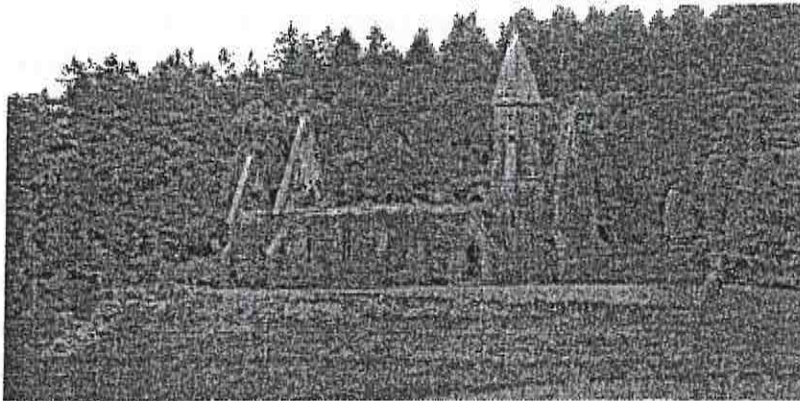
Kilcommon Church



Ross Church

Ross Church, Clonbur, Co. Galway

The church at Ross was built in the late 1840s by Lady Elizabeth Clements, sister of the 2nd Earl of Leitrim and was originally planned as a chapel of ease for the Clements family. However, by the early 1850s it had become a parish church. Canon Robert Young Lynn who was appointed rector of the Union of Cong in 1886 is buried in the grounds. He was the father of Dr. Kathleen Lynn, Irish nationalist, member of the first Dáil Éireann and founder of St. Ultan's Hospital. A local community group has now reroofed this tiny church which is considered an architectural 'gem'. Registers of baptisms and burials 1845-1878 were burnt in 1922, one register of marriages 1856-1950 is extant. It contains eight entries.



Ballyovie Church, Tourmakeady, Co. Mayo.

Ballyovie Church was built in the early 1850's under the auspices of Thomas Plunkett, Second Baron Plunkett and Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry (1839- 1866), as a base for the work of the Irish Church Missions in the area. Surviving registers of baptisms and burials cover the years 1879 – 1966 and marriages 1854- 1954. There are also two vestry minute books 1871- 1961. The church closed in 1959.

In conclusion – the destruction of many Church of Ireland registers in the fire of 1922 caused the loss of valuable sources for the study of Irish economic and social history in general and for the history of the Church of Ireland and its members in particular. More recently recognition has grown as to the value of parish records that are not registers and efforts have been made to maintain the safety of all remaining parochial records by centralizing their preservation in the RCB Library.

Brigid Clesham, Archivist & Researcher, Landed Estates Project, Moore Institute, NUI, Galway. www.landedestates.ie

(Photographs courtesy of Paul Johnston)

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## St. Mary's Diocesan College, Galway.

*As this College is celebrating its Centenary this year, Tom Kilgarriff, Archivist in the Cathedral, and member of our Association, kindly supplied the following information which is taken from the Jubilee issue of 'The Mantle 1962' a diocesan magazine, which gives a good description of its founding.*

### **Greaven Request:**

The Very Rev. John Greaven, P.P., of Saint Nicholas W., Galway, who died on 28 March, 1908, left by will certain property and funds for the establishment of a diocesan seminary for the Dioceses of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. The whole of the capital was for the endowment of the College.

### **Site:**

About nineteen acres of land –“Townparks” – were purchased by the Most Rev. Dr. O’Dea, Bishop of Galway, in April 1910. The “Virgin Plot”, containing about three-eighths of an acre, at the S.E. corner of the lands mentioned above was acquired soon after (in the same year); and the lands with the buildings on them known as “Fort Eyre” were acquired in March 1917. Those lands contain about fifteen acres.

### **Buildings:**

- (i) The College: The blessing of the first stone of the College by the Bishop took place on the feast of Corpus Christi, 26 May 1910, after a public procession from the Cathedral to the site of the College. The Bishop of Elphin, the Bishop of Clonfert, very many of the clergy of the dioceses and a great number of the laity, were present. Mr. W.A. Scott of Dublin was architect: Mr James Wynne of Dundalk was contractor. The work of the building was begun in September 1910 and was completed in September 1912. (The clerk of works was a Galway architect, Mr Allen McDonald.)
- (ii) The Gymnasium: The design of the gymnasium was also Mr. Scott’s and this was begun in 1914 and completed in 1915>
- (iii) The Shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes (promised by the Bishop on the occasion of the National Pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1913) was designed by Mr. Scott and erected in the year 1915.

### **Staff:**

The Very Rev. Peter Davis was appointed first president of the College in February 1912. At the time of his appointment he was curate in the parish of Saint Nicholas N. & E., Galway. The Rev. James Mitchell, M.A., B.D., Dip.Ed., was appointed Prefect of Studies and Professor of Greek. After his ordination in 1910, he had been first to University College, Dublin, and then to the University of Cambridge. The Rev. Patrick Considine, B.A., was appointed Professor of Irish and French; he had spent a year in Paris studying French. The Rev. Martin McCarrick, M.A. was appointed Professor of English in August 1912. He was a priest of the Achonry diocese. Mr Francis Davis, D.Ph., who had previously taught in Australia, was appointed Professor of Latin. Mr. Patrick Cusack, B.A., was appointed Professor of Mathematics in August 1912. Mr Arthur O’Dowd, A.R.C.Sc.I., was appointed Professor of Experimental Science and Mathematics in 1912. Mr Stephen McDonagh, M.A. was appointed assistant professor of Irish and French in August

1912. Rev. Michael Grogan was appointed assistant professor of Latin and modern languages in February 1913.

**Students:**

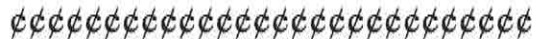
In the first year, the number of boarders at the College had reached sixty by the end of the Autumn term; and the number rose to sixty-four during the Spring of 1913. The number of day-pupils during the year was seventeen. The College pension was £30 per annum for boarders and £6 per annum for day-pupils.

**Blessing:**

On Sunday, 25 August 1912, the solemn blessing of the College took place. The procession started from the Parish Church (Saint Joseph's) at 10.45 a.m., and after it had reached the College grounds, High Mass was celebrated in front of the College. The day was very fine and an immense throng of people had gathered on the terrace and in the field to assist at the Mass. Special trains were run for the occasion and people came from every parish in the dioceses. The sermon was preached by Right Rev. Monsignor Fahey, P.P., V.G.

**The School Year:**

On Monday 26 August, the first students entered St. Mary's. The next day the first scholarship examinations were held. On the Wednesday 28 August – the professors held the first classes. The feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December, was appointed the feast-day of the new college.



*As editor and having access to the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy I found the following description, which is probably worth quoting:*

**1912:** St. Mary's Diocesan College was built by the Most Rev. Dr. O'Dea. R.I.P. A year later an application was made by him to the Superior Mother M. Bernard Ryan, for two sisters to take charge of its domestic affairs. The sisters were accordingly sent and in due time replaced by others.

**1918:** This year during the influenza epidemic, priests, lay professors, boys, maids and one of the two sisters were laid low, so that a reinforcement had to be sent from the convent for the time being. It was impossible to get lay nurses as they were all engaged in the hospitals which were full to overflowing. One nurse was unearthed after some time and with her help alone, the sisters had to tackle the problem. The Rev Mother with a companion occasionally paid a visit to see how things were going on, and her companion was immediately set to work to help wash the delph!

Before any help was provided one night Sr. M. Evangelist Cahir did great work acting as night nurse to all the patients. She made several journeys from the lowest to the topmost storey carrying an immense jug filled with some refreshing or strengthening drink, of which she prevailed on the poor patients to partake. Thank God all recovered although other colleges in Ireland were not so fortunate. The sisters are still at their posts (*written in 1939*) which from the beginning has been remarkably successful.

*In order to pay tribute to the Sisters who worked in the College over the years, Fr. Barry Hogge, President, invited all sisters who ministered there to a celebratory function during which a plaque bearing the names of all the sisters was unveiled and it now holds pride of place in the entrance lobby. He also invited all Sisters of Mercy from Galway city to celebrate Evening Prayer followed by a lovely meal on 24 September last in honour of Mercy Day.*

## Methodists and Presbyterians in Galway

By Dudley Levistone Cooney.

On Sunday 16 May 2010 the book of the title above was launched in Galway at a truly ecumenical service which was held in the joint Methodist/Presbyterian church. The occasion also provided an opportunity for the united congregations to offer a well deserved 'Thank You' to many people who had worked diligently at renovating and updating the church and hall. New comfortable seating accommodation as well as a modern musical instrument and IT electronics including power point etc had all been recently installed and many donors and workers were present to accept the gratitude of the congregations, and many leading ministers of both denominations graced the occasion by their presence.

After the service and before the meal was served, the book was launched. Its compact size belies the amount of information contained therein. Once again Rev. Dudley's expertise is so very worthy of commendation, as it covers an immense area of time and space as well as incorporating ten pages of photographs of fairly recent origin. All the towns and an amazing number of smaller places are finely described. In the introduction Rev. Dudley explains that he had already written a history of Methodism in Galway in 1978. When requested to update this work he felt it would be rather discourteous to have stitched in a history of the united congregations onto the earlier one.

It is good too that he explains why the account of the Methodist work occupies much more space than that of the Presbyterian. There are two reasons. The first is the manner in which the two denominations came to the area. Methodists originally came as a religious society within the Church of Ireland, and largely recruited among the members of that denomination. Presbyterianism depended heavily on people of Scottish family who moved here to work. The second is the quantity of material available, which is in inverse ratio to the size of the denomination in Ireland as a whole. There have been so many Presbyterians in the country that the magazines which they have published through the years have been unable to give much attention to individual congregations. Given much smaller numbers, Methodist magazines have afforded quite extensive coverage to circuits, buildings and special events. Methodist schedule books, first introduced in the 1860's, provide good records of a variety of church activities. Early Methodist preachers were encouraged to keep journals of their activities, and these have been extensively quoted in biographies and histories. It is indeed an interesting history.

An anecdote used by the preacher on the day deserves recording:

"Clíodhna, who was partially sighted and whose hobby was rock-climbing, was quite adept at using ropes and steel hook-grips, but one day as she climbed, a rope became loose, hit her face and knocked out her contact lens. She sat on the ledge to which she had attained and groped round in search of her lens, but in vain. She prayed earnestly to God to find her lens, but alas! she found no lens so she continued on to the top and made her way back down by an easier route. Just as she reached terra firma, another climbing group was ready to start and a man from the group was shouting: '*Has anyone lost a contact lens?*' Imagine Clíodhna's delight, but she was more intrigued on hearing how the lens was found. The man had noticed an ant grappling with the lens and trying to make its way forward, so he relieved the insect of its burden.

Clíodhna's father was a cartoonist and when he heard the story he drew a cartoon of the incident. In the bubble attached to the ant he wrote: "*Dear God, why do you wish me to carry this load of a lens? I do not like it. I cannot see with it; I cannot eat it, so why am I burdened with it?*"

The preacher ended by saying that often, we too are burdened by tasks or chores that we do not like or even understand, but we should talk to God as the ant did, for God never makes us sensible of our weakness except to give us of His strength.



## Mercy Oral Archive Project

*Marianne Cosgrave*

*Marianne wrote this article for 'Mercy @live' newsletter in January 2010. She and the Sisters had given a presentation on the topic at a conference in Burlingame, California, during the preceding November and we were requesting that they give a presentation to ACAI and a large number of you attended that. Thank you all.*

“There are two histories of every land and people  
The Written History that tells what is considered politic to tell  
And the Unwritten History that tells everything.”  
(Callum Campbell)

Our understanding of history is based on an analysis of material evidence that survives from the past – documents, usually or artefacts. Most researchers into religious history rely on written documents in our archives, be they books, letters, diaries, deeds, registers and administrative papers. But another way to learn more about the past is to talk to people who were there. Oral history is the technique for gathering such recollections, the systematic collecting of an individual's spoken memories of her life, of people she has known, and events she has witnessed and in which she has participated.

So if we want a definition of oral history we can say that it is the term we use for the technique or first-hand knowledge as participants or observers of the historical process. These interviews are recorded, transcribed and then preserved for researchers, biographers, and historians of today and of the future.

In 1997 we decided to establish a Mercy oral archive project so that we could add a new kind of evidence to the already existing data of the history of the congregation by preserving the voices of the sisters and other individuals who participated in the making of that history; or who, as reliable witnesses, can recall and describe the historical events; or who are themselves recognised for their unique contributions to the life and growth of the congregations and its ministries.

The project gives us the opportunity to record primary witness to what has happened within Mercy over the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These have been times of momentous change within religious life, from Vatican II to diocesan union, small community living and congregational union. The oral history project can let the Sisters speak for themselves – to tell who they are, why they came into religious life, why they remained, and what they experienced in the years of radical change.

Oral history is sometimes seen as history from the bottom up. It captures the stories and experiences of all sectors, but specifically includes those who would otherwise not be recorded in history and in that sense it adds an egalitarian element to history that is all too often recorded and interpreted from the top down. Because of the active and pastoral nature of the Mercy congregation, the history of the Sisters of Mercy parallels in many ways the history of the cities, regions and people among whom the Sisters live and work. Hence, these interviews have an importance wider than the congregation; they can have a value for future historians of Irish life in general and not just for researchers into the religious experience.

Oral history also allows us to compensate for the digital age. Historians of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries can rely on extensive correspondence and documentation for information about life in the past. But in today's world, telephone, email, text messaging and web-based communication have largely replaced those written communications. Without oral history,

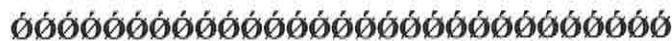
much of the personal history of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries will be lost to future historians.

We have collected some 270 interviews to date. The interviews tend to include both an autobiographical and more topical or subject based elements. The autobiographical element explores a Sister's family of origin, home life and experiences from childhood to the present. In the topical or subject based section of the interview, we focus on the person's life as a Sister of Mercy, paying particular attention to ministries she has developed or aspects of Mercy life in which she has participated as we try to capture what it has been like to live as Mercy in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

There have been challenges. These include the need for on-going training for those conducting the interviews, both in the skill of interviewing and in the management and use of what has become a rapidly evolving technology. In the twelve years that this project has been in place we have moved from using analogue cassette players to mini-discs and are now coming to terms with solid state digital recorders.

Sisters who interview also have to be conscious of the oral archive concept of stranger intimacy – that their familiarity with the norms of language of religious life means that they fail to ask the obvious questions that a stranger unfamiliar with such norms would automatically ask. Other challenges include the reluctance of Sisters to talk about themselves, the legal and ethical issues surrounding the oral archive process and the difficulties attendant upon the transcription of interviews. Perhaps the greatest challenge is time. There are so many stories to gather, but how short the time available to gather them.

Nevertheless, the oral archive project has been a tremendously rewarding experience. It has allowed us to capture the lived experiences of Sisters of Mercy across the seven provinces, from the Sister who recalled the 1916 Rising, to the Sister who ministered in the Workhouse/County Home, the Sister who taught refugees from the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, the Sister who experienced Belfast in the worst of the Troubles, the Sisters who struggled against apartheid in South Africa, the Sister who experienced life in the American school system in the 1950s and 1960s, the Sisters who ministered in the bush in Kenya and in prisons in Nigeria and all the Sisters who through their experiences have given witness to what it is to be a Sister of Mercy.



#### **Book Review**

**“In Search of Truth, Journeys of Nineteenth Century Irish Dominican Women”**

**Author: Maura Duggan O.P.**

As the title indicates, this is the story of nineteenth century Irish women who, because they were imbued with the Dominican ideal of Truth, set out on many difficult, even hazardous journeys in order to inspire others with the same spirit. AS the search for Truth is the central theme stemming from the original purpose of its founder, Dominic de Gusman, it was necessary to give a succinct account of the origins of the Dominican Order and the important role women played at its inception. Thus, the Introduction to this work covers the thirteenth century foundation of the Dominican Order in the Toulouse region of France and the much later establishment of Dominican convents in seventeenth century Ireland.

Chapters I–III recount the story of the foundation of Cabra and Sion Hill convents in Dublin and Cabra's expansion with Ireland. Chapter I, while recalling the memory of those sisters who had lived their religious life in Channel Row, their first house in Dublin, describes the pitiable state the only three surviving sisters were in when the lease of that convent was not renewed and they had to search for accommodation elsewhere. The story of the years spent in Clontarf is supported by a number of appendices with extracts from the Account Books of the convent revealing the great financial difficulties these women had but also their determination to follow their ideal.

Chapter III which concerns the expansion of the Cabra community within Ireland illustrates St. Dominic's principle that the seed which is stored will rot, while the seed scattered and sown will produce a rich harvest. This chapter reveals the courage of these women who, in spite of daunting financial problems, scattered the seed along the eastern seaboard from Wicklow to Belfast. Chapters IV and V narrate the extraordinary story of the missionary expansion of the Cabra community to four continents in a relatively short time – to mainland Europe in Lisbon, North America in New Orleans, to Africa in CapeTown and to Australia in Adelaide and Maitland. Chapter VI and VII cover similar expansionist movements stemming from Sion Hill, at first within Ireland and later abroad – South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. These chapters contain fascinating accounts of the extraordinary missionary movement undertaken by a relatively small number of Dominican women.

The author, while not ignoring the weaknesses and even idiosyncrasies of the various participants in this historical drama, succeeds in painting word pictures of the global scenes in which these missionaries worked. Enduring nostalgia for their families and mother country they, nevertheless enthusiastically undertook to address the educational needs within the culture they had embraced. One can only wonder that young women from the narrow world of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland embarked on so many difficult projects and succeeded as is evidenced today in schools that are still flourishing. To attempt to write the history of such undertakings is also a daunting task and this account is eminently successful in bringing the story to light for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The writer details that, while some members of the Sion Hill community were bravely going to faway and difficult missions during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pioneering spirit was also active among those who remained in Ireland. In 1882, these Dominicans creatively undertook third level education for young women at a time when little provision for such education was available in Ireland. It was not necessary to give a comprehensive account of this enterprise as it has been already studied in "Dominican Education in Ireland, 1820-1930" by M. Kealy, O.P.

Every chapter of this book reveals the depth of research undertaken and justifies the title "In Search of Truth". However, the chapter that illustrates this purpose more than any other is Chapter VIII entitled "The Status Question". This concerns the historical situation in each of the regions especially abroad, where the very identity of these missionary women as Dominicans was challenged. Here, Duggan not only details the facts but she also highlights the distress and very human suffering it caused together with the heroic effort made especially by hardworking missionaries to ensure their Dominican identity. Another but positive aspect of this painful saga, emphasised by the writer, is the international networking that developed between many different Dominican congregations of women, which has been further advanced in recent years.

The title of Part III – "A Time to Heal" is appropriate as it shows how the networking of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bore fruit and led to the process by which sisters in houses founded from Cabra began to consider amalgamation of the various foundations with their houses of origin in

