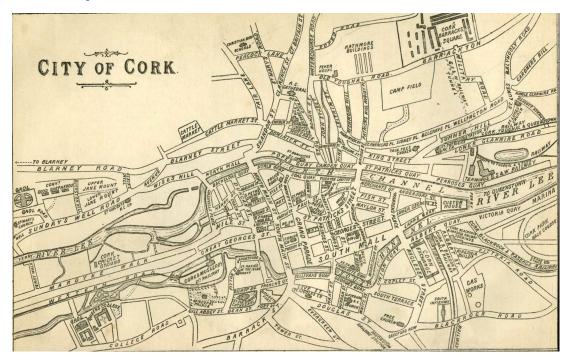
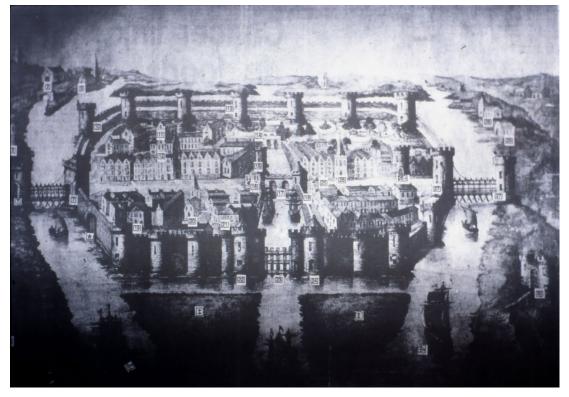


# <u>1888 Map</u>



# Medieval Cork





Laneways - home to Cork's Poor, especially during the 19th Century. Mary Aikenhead, would have seen the suffering of Cork's poor.





# A Brief History of Cork

By Tim Lambert

### Cork in the Middle Ages

According to tradition Cork was founded by St Finnbarre in the 7th century. He built an abbey there. Its name comes from the Gaelic Corcaigh, which means marshy place. For centuries the abbey at Cork flourished and it was famous for learning. However, in 820 the Vikings raided the abbey and the settlement nearby. The Vikings then created their own town on an island in the River Lee. In 1172, after the Norman invasion of Ireland, Cork was surrendered to the English king. Following the English conquest stonewalls were built around Cork. In 1185 Cork was given its first charter (a document granting the townspeople certain rights). During the Middle Ages Cork was a busy port and an important town (although it would seem no more than a village to us with a population of probably not more than 2,000). Animal hides and woollen cloth were exported from Cork and wine (the drink of the upper class) was imported. I n Cork there were also the same craftsmen you would find in any Medieval town such as blacksmiths, potters and shoemakers.



In the 14th century an Augustinian Abbey was built in Cork. Today all that remains of it is Red Abbey Tower. In the 13th century the friars came to Cork. Friars were like monks but instead of withdrawing from the world they went out to preach and help the poor. In Cork there were Dominican friars (known as black friars because of their black costumes) and Franciscan or grey friars. In 1349 the Black Death came to Cork and it may have killed half the population of the town. However, Cork recovered from the disaster. In 1491 a man named Perkin Warbeck arrived in Cork. He claimed to be the rightful king of England and in 1492 tried to overthrow Henry VII. The mayor of Cork and several important citizens went with Warbeck to England but when the rebellion collapsed they were all captured and executed. After the attempted rebellion Cork became known as "*rebel Cork*".

# Cork in the 16th and 17th Centuries

At the end of the 16th century the English built a fort to overawe the population of Cork. It was destroyed in 1603 but it was rebuilt. The Elizabethan fort was burned by the anti-treaty forces in 1922 during the civil war. In 1649 Cork was captured by Cromwell. By the mid-17th century Cork was a flourishing town with a population of about 5,000 (most of them living outside the Medieval walls). By the standards of the time Cork was a large and important town. However, in the 1660s Cattle Acts forbade the Irish to export cattle to England. After that Cork began to export vast amounts of butter and beef instead. In 1690, Cork underwent a five-day siege by the army of William of Orange. Cork was captured by John Churchill, William's general, and afterwards the walls were destroyed.

## Cork in the 18th Century

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, French Protestants (Huguenots) arrived in Cork fleeing from religious persecution in France. The Huguenot Quarter and French Church Street gets its name from them. Many new buildings were erected in Cork in the 18th century. Christ Church was built in 1720-26. St Anne's Shandon was built in 1722-26. The famous Shandon bells were installed in 1752. South Chapel was built in 1766. South Presentation Convent was founded in 1776 by Nano Nagle. During the 18th century Cork was a busy port. A Custom House was built in 1724. In the 18th century Cork exported large amounts of butter to Britain, the rest of Europe and North



America. Large quantities of beef were also exported. A Corn Market was built in 1740. The Butter Market was built in 1750.

### Cork in the 19th Century

During the early 19th century the population of Cork exploded. By the middle of the 19th century Cork had a population of about 80,000. Some of the increase was due to immigration from the countryside as people fled from poverty. There was a great deal of poverty and overcrowding in Cork during this century. However, in the later 19th century, the population of Cork declined slightly. (At that time the population of the whole of Ireland fell substantially.) From the time of the potato famine (1845-1849) onward Cork was the main port for emigrants from Ireland to the USA and other countries. It remained the main port for emigrants well into the 20th century as vast numbers of people fled extreme poverty. During the 19th century important industries in Cork included, brewing, distilling, wool and shipbuilding. Cork was also, of course, an important port. During the 19th century large numbers of Irish people emigrated from Cork. In 1852, an Irish Industrial Exhibition was held in Cork. Parliament Bridge was built in 1806. A new Custom House was built in Cork in 1818. Cork County Goal was built in 1825. The Court House was built in 1835. Cork Workhouse was built in 1840. Cork City Goal was designed in 1867. There were a number of improvements in Cork during the 19th century. In 1825 Cork gained gas light. The Cork Examiner was first published in 1841. The railway reached Cork in 1849. Also in 1849 University College Cork opened. The first fire brigade in Cork was formed in 1877. The first public library in Cork opened in 1892. Mercy Hospital was founded in 1857. A Statue of Father Matthew was erected in 1864.

St Mary's and St Anne's Cathedral was built in 1808 but it burned down in 1820 and had to rebuilt. St Patrick's Church was built in 1836. St Finbarr's Cathedral was consecrated in 1870.

In the late 19th century some of the worst slums in Cork were demolished by the Corporation. However, the inhabitants were <u>not</u> rehoused by the corporation. They were forced to find new housing where they could in the city. The sites of slums were sold to the Improved Dwellings Company. The built "*model*" dwellings with street names such as Prosperity Square and



Industry Place. The new houses were too expensive for the poor and most went to skilled workers.

# St Vincent's College, Cork

#### **History**

Mary Aikenhead, who was a Cork woman, founded the Religious Sisters of Charity in 1815. Her aim, in response to God's call, was to make available to the poor what the rich were able to buy in the areas of health, education, social services. In 1857 the Sisters of Charity started teaching girls at St Vincent's. The school changed and developed through the years to meet the needs of the community it served. The first record of students sitting state examinations dates back to 1931 when eight girls sat the Intermediate Certificate Examination. For many years there was a "Secondary Top" attached to the Primary School. In August 1974 St Vincent's Secondary School came into being with full recognition as such by the Department of Education. A new building for the Secondary School was opened in December 1979 under the Principalship of Sr Bríd Forde. She was succeeded as Principal in 1989 by Sr Eileen Doyle. The following year Sr Patricia Dockery became Principal. In 1998 Ms. Josephine Coffey, a past pupil and member of staff was appointed as first lay principal of the school. Mr Donnchadh O Briain is the current principal. The spirit of enthusiasm and dedication of the Sisters of Charity and the lay staff has ensured the continuation of charism of Mary Aikenhead.

#### <u>Motto</u>

Caritas Christi Urget Nos - The Love of Christ Urges Us On.

#### **Mission**

St Vincent's is a Catholic girls' secondary school. We recognise the uniqueness and needs of all our students, staff, parents and partners. Through a broad-based curriculum, we aim to educate each student so that she may achieve her full personal, social, spiritual and academic potential. We welcome the participation of all our partners in the life of our school community.



### **Trustees**

In 1857, the sisters of Charity started teaching girls in St Vincent's. A Board of Management was set up in 1991 to take charge of the running of St Vincent's Secondary School. This Board consists of eight members who are appointed by the Trustees. Four of these members are nominated by the Trustees, along with two parent nominees and two teacher nominees. The spirit of enthusiasm and dedication of the Sisters of Charity is shared by these nominees. The Trustees continue to own the school and all major projects and refurbishment are sanctioned by them. The Provincial Team keeps contact with and visits St Vincent's regularly. The model of trusteeship for the future is currently under review.

### **Ethos**

St Vincent's is a Catholic school owned and managed by the Religious Sisters of Charity. The school concentrates on the development of the whole person by providing for the religious, moral, social, physical and intellectual growth of the students. The school strives for academic excellence while recognizing the need constantly to develop a curriculum where compassion and cooperation are given a higher value than competition. The religious education of students is, and is seen to be, of fundamental importance. The school is committed to enabling the student to develop a healthy self-image and to form positive relationships with others. The school seeks means of working effectively towards curriculum development in the light of the changing needs of the students. Good relationships between home and school are encouraged, as these are essential to the educational process.



# Key Places around Mary Aikenhead

- Mary's Birthplace
- Dr David Aikenhead's Shop
- St Anne's (Shandon's Bells)
- Nanny Rourke (Eason's Hill)
- South Chapel (St Finbarr's)
- North Chapel (The Cathedral of Saint Mary and Saint Anne)

# Key Cork Foundations / Influences around the time of Mary Aikenhead

**Honora "Nano" Nagle** (1718–1784) founded the "Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary" (PBVM)

- Began in Cork
- South Chapel
- Ministries
  - Education
  - Home Visitation
  - Prison Ministry

**Edmund Ignatius Rice** (1762–1844) founded of the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers.

- Presentation Brothers begun in Cork
- Christian Brothers begun in Waterford (with direct assistance from PBVM)
- Ministries for both Education

**Catherine Elizabeth McAuley** (1778–1841) founded the Sisters of Mercy in 1831

- Begun in Dublin
- Ministries
  - Education
  - Health care



Notes	

# A SHORT SYNOPSIS OF THE LIFE OF MOTHER MARY AIKENHEAD IN CORK





# Mary's grandfather comes to live in Cork

Sarah Atkinson tells us in her book, "Mary Aikenhead: Her Life, Her Work and Her Friends" which was published in 1882 that Mary's grandfather David, a Scottish gentleman, relinquished his military profession, married a Limerick lady, Miss Anne Wight and settled in Cork. David died early leaving two children, a daughter Anne, who afterwards married Dr Galway of Cork and settled in Mallow and a son David who having studied medicine, established himself as a practising physician and chemist in Cork.

## David Aikenhead's marriage: Holy Trinity / Christchurch

The young David like his father, was a member of the Established Church of the time. We would call it the Protestant Church, the Church of Ireland or the Anglican Church. In due course David married Mary Stacpole, the eldest



daughter of a Cork merchant whose family were staunch Catholics with strong national leanings. They were married on 22 October 1785 in a Cork church with a double-barrel name, Holy Trinity/ Christchurch, situated in South Main Street. In modern times that church became the keeper of the archives of Cork and in April 2011 it was opened as a concert hall under the title, Triskel/Christchurch, Triskel being the name of a small theatre next door.



# **Birth of Mary Aikenhead**

The Penal Laws introduced in 1695 forbade a Protestant marry a Catholic under penalty of losing his inheritance and his business and to borrow a phrase from a prominent politician of today, those laws had "*not gone away you know*" by 1785 but they had become partially relaxed and David Aikenhead suffered no penalty. However, before his marriage, he made one stipulation that whatever children heaven blessed them with, they should be brought up as members of the Established Church. So, on the 19th January 1787 when the first child, a little girl was born to Mary Stacpole and David Aikenhead she was whisked off to her father's parish church, St Anne's Shandon, Cork's Anglican Church where she was baptised on 4 April 1787 and given the name, "*Mary*". The baptismal font used at her baptism with the date it was made, 1629 clearly etched on the side, is still in use in the church today.



### Mary is "fostered"



Soon after her birth, Mary Aikenhead was taken from Daunt's Square where the Akenhead's lived, to be fostered by a Catholic nurse, Mary Rorke who with her husband John lived in a cottage on Eason's hill, a semi-rural site quite near the top of Shandon Hill.

We might ask ourselves why a child so young was taken so soon from her home? Some reasons have been proposed: Firstly, Cork city was built

on marshy islands around which the River Lee wound its way on its journey to the sea. From about 1700 some of these marshes had been reclaimed to form streets. When Mary Aikenhead was born there were still many channels or canals in the city, some of them guite near low-lying Daunt's Square. This position of the Square made it prone to damp and fog and this may have been a cause of concern to the parents of their new-born child. Secondly, and according to Donal S Blake in his book, "Mary Aikenhead, Servant of the Poor", Mary was, "quite frail, probably asthmatic, and according to the medical wisdom of the time it was decided to have her fostered in the more salubrious ground to the north of Shandon". Thirdly, and here again I quote from Donal Blake: "It would appear that the young Mrs Aikenhead was already having qualms about agreeing that all her children would be raised as Protestants and for that reason she handed her young daughter over to Mrs Mary Rorke, a devout Catholic. Dr Aikenhead, possibly wishing to humour his young wife, did not object. Perhaps he already had leanings towards the faith which he was to embrace on his deathbed". Fourthly, a system of fosterage was practised in Ireland even from the time of the chieftains whereby a child was handed over to another family to be reared for a while and then brought back to the original family. Mary Aikenhead always referred to Mrs Rorke as "Nurse".

#### Life on Eason's Hill

Mary was cared for lovingly by the Rorkes and loved them as her second parents. A story is told that Mrs Rorke had little Mary baptised secretly according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

Mary joined in the family Rosary every night before bedtime and accompanied the Rorke family to Mass every Sunday in the Bishop's Chapel,



as the church of the north parish was usually called. The present Cathedral of St Mary and St Anne is on that site. She played with the children of the hill and got to know some of the adults too. On one occasion when her parents arrived on their weekly visit Mary ran to her father saying, "Oh! Father, I got such a fine supper of sprats from Joanie Keating; and now I want you to give me some medicine for her". The doctor was well known on the hill for his many kind visits to the poor. The little girl was so happy, so well cared for and looked so healthy that it was decided to extend her stay on Eason's Hill indefinitely.

On Sundays often met her father going in his carriage to Shandon Cathedral and coming up Shandon St. He would stop to greet them and ask Mary if she would like to join him going to Shandon Cathedral. Her reply was always no as she wanted to go with Mammy Rourke to Mass.

# A glimpse of life in the City

Mary made trips now and again to her home in Daunt's Square in the city. These were followed by a walk on the Grand Parade where she met new friends. She was beginning to learn that there were two worlds in Cork – one up on the hill where most of the people were poor and went to chapel; the other down in the city where most were well-to-do and better dressed and went to church.





### Mary returns to Daunt's Square

In 1793 when Mary was six years of age, it was decided it was time for her to leave Eason's Hill and re-join the family in Daunt's Square. By this time there were two other little girls in the family, Anne born in 1790 and Margaret about 1792. A brother, St John was born later, about 1796. To the delight of all, Dr Aikenhead invited "*Mammy Rorke*" to come and work full time in the nursery and "*Daddy John*" to act as coach driver and general help. It was arranged that Mary would attend a nearby school established for the education of the children of Protestant gentlemen and soon she began accompanying her father on Sundays, to service in Shandon Church.

## 1798 affects the Aikenhead family



1798 was a memorable year in the Aikenhead household as well as in the whole of Ireland. From the early 1790s, Dr Aikenhead had become imbibed by the principles of the United Irishmen. He subscribed to fair play in worship and employment for "Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter". On one occasion Lord Edward Fitzgerald disguised as a Quaker sought refuge in the Aikenhead home. He

was enjoying dinner with the family when the house was surrounded by troops with the sheriff at their head.

After a few hurried but instructive words from the doctor, the visitor disappeared reaching safety across the river. The house was searched but because of the loyalty of his apprentices who knew and kept the doctor's secret, no incriminating documents were found among the drawers apparently filled with just medical prescriptions.

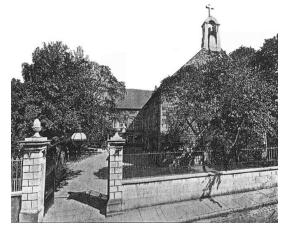


#### Dr Aikenhead retires

The strain was beginning to tell on Dr Aikenhead. Already worried about matters of religion and the delicate health of his only son, St John, the political fall-out from the 1798 rebellion began to affect him. David Aikenhead was very sympathetic to the United Irishmen. One day, while entertaining one of them, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, in his house on Daunt's Square, the house was

surrounded by sheriffs. Lord Edward escaped, dressed as a Quaker, went to the river where a ferry man had been tipped off and was waiting for him. He crossed the river to a safe house in Sunday's Well. All the leaders of the United Irishmen were executed. All this had a great effect on Dr Aikenhead. He sold his practice and with his family retired to Rutland St the home area of his wife's people, the Stacpoles. He was fifty years of age. Coincidental to this change of residence was the return to Ireland of Mrs Rebecca Gorman, the widowed sister of Mary's mother. Mrs Gorman was to have a profound influence on the young Mary Aikenhead.

## Mary's spiritual struggle



A struggle was going on in Mary's soul. On the one hand there was her father, whom she loved dearly and his well-to-do, good Protestant friends and on the other hand were the Stacpoles, in whose company, permeated as it was with the Catholic faith, she felt so much at home. She was living in a state of divided loyalty and, young though she was, she realised

that she must go one way or the other and that nobody but herself could make the decision.

She began to slip out to early morning Mass in the nearby South Chapel and people in her household noticed that before retiring at night, "she burned down a whole mould candle while saying her prayers."

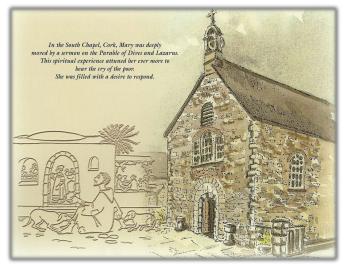
# The death of Dr Aikenhead

Dr Aikenhead did not live long to enjoy his retirement. Towards the end of 1801 he became seriously ill. The minister from his church came and prayed with him. Later and of his own accord he asked to see a Catholic priest. His



doubts vanished, and he asked to be received into the Catholic Church. He died on 28 December 1801 while his family, Bishop Moylan a close family friend and faithful "*Mammy Rorke*" knelt around his bed.

# Dr Florence McCarthy's influence on Mary's life



Her father's conversion and death cleared the way for Mary's entry into the Catholic Church. Mary's aunt, Mrs O'Gorman, her mother's sister lived next door and had previously entered a Religious order on the continent and eventually left there and returned to Ireland. She was a deeply religious person who was involved in the Church. Mary was

greatly influenced by her aunt and often accompanied her (secretly) to early morning Mass in the nearby South Chapel.

About this time too, when Mary accompanied her aunt Mrs Gorman to Mass in the South Chapel she heard a sermon by Dr Florence McCarthy, Coadjutor Bishop of Cork, that was to influence her for the rest of her life. The topic was the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31), the story of the uncaring rich man who ends up in hell and the crumb-begging poor man who inherits paradise. Mary applied the story to the Cork scene. She felt that she herself and her kind, the well-to-do had a gospel obligation to reach out to the thousands of poor, starving wretches who cohabited the city with them. The focus of the rest of her life was, to quote her own words, "God's nobility, the suffering poor."



# Mary's reception into the Catholic Church

Her father's conversion and death cleared the way for Mary's entry into the Catholic Church. Mary began to receive systematic instruction in the faith and on 6 June 1802, she was solemnly received into the Catholic Church at the age of 15. Her first Holy Communion followed on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, 29 June and she received the sacrament of confirmation on 2 July. She took Frances as her confirmation name, probably in honour of Bishop Francis Moylan, and she was to use "Mary Frances Aikenhead" on her copy of the vows many years later. Shortly after her confirmation, her younger sisters, Anne and Margaret and her little brother, St John were also received into the Catholic Church. (There is a plaque on the wall opposite the Aikenhead house in Rutland Street marking the place where the Sisters of Mercy came first from Dublin to Cork in 1838. They moved after a short time to St. Mary's of the Isles in 1871.)

## Mary is obliged to learn business skills

After the death of her father and because her mother was semi-invalided and unable to cope with business and financial affairs, Mary found herself learning how to keep accounts and transact business, skills that stood her in good stead in the years ahead. Her sisters, Anne and Margaret attended the school, run by the Ursuline Sisters while her frail brother, St John, was educated at home. Until she was twenty-one years of age, Mary took her place in society, entering into the round of social activities, balls and soirees that were part of Cork middle class life of the time. But she did not forget the destitute poor that tried to survive in the lanes of the city.



#### A bird's eye view of 18th to 19th century Cork



What was Cork like in Mary Aikenhead's time? It was a busy international port. Through this port beef, butter and grain from the hinterland were transported to feed the British armies in their European wars while in the miry lanes of the city, hordes of starving, ill-clad men, women and children

tried to eke out an existence by hoarding and selling human waste. As the water supply for the poor came solely from the contaminated river, diseases such as typhus fever were quite common. Into these lanes and into the grossly overcrowded, airless hovels (*"airless"* because windows were taxed and thereby generally boarded up) went Mary Aikenhead with her middleclass friends including Cecilia Lynch, bringing whatever help they could to ease the suffering of these unfortunate people.

## Mary begins to focus on religious life

Mary began to think seriously of devoting her life full-time and as a religious to helping the poor in their homes but for the present she felt obliged to help her ailing mother in the management of the household. The Ursuline and Presentation Sisters, whose convents were nearby, were bound to enclosure. Even in the whole of Ireland at this period there was no convent that allowed its members to move outside the enclosure. When Mary discussed this with Cecilia Lynch, Cecilia informed her that she herself was joining the Poor Clares in Harold's Cross, Dublin.



## An unexpected, life-changing meeting



Then on 30 November 1807, when Mary was 20 years of age, a providential meeting took place at the Ursuline convent in Cork. Mary met Anna Maria Ball of Dublin, a wealthy woman in her own right who was married to a rich Dublin merchant, John O'Brien. She had come to Cork for the religious profession of her sister, Cecilia. Accompanying her was another sister, Frances or Fanny, the future founder of the Loretto sisters. Mary Aikenhead found that she had met a kindred spirit in Anna Maria. Mary already knew from

her friend, Cecilia Lynch that Anna Maria devoted a great deal of her time in Dublin to the care of the poor and afflicted. Before leaving Cork, Mrs O'Brien invited Mary to spend some time with her in Dublin. The invitation was gladly accepted.



# Notes