



DUBLIN

1. Mountjoy Square



In this house, No. 4 Mountjoy Square, (now No. 22), Mary Aikenhead stayed as the guest of Mrs Anna Maria O'Brien, whom she had met in the Ursuline Convent, Cork, at the religious profession of Anna Maria's sister, Cecilia. Here she met Fr. Daniel Murray, the future Archbishop of Dublin, who later chose her to be the first superior of the new congregation of Religious Sisters of Charity.



2. North William Street

Mary Aikenhead and her first companion Sr. M. Catherine Walsh, having completed their novitiate, arrived in Dublin from York on 22nd August 1815. They went to live in a house in North William Street, where they were to take over the care of a number of orphans.

It was here that the two sisters made their first Profession of vows on 1st September 1815. On that day Mary Aikenhead was appointed Superior General of the new congregation and Sr. M. Catherine, novice mistress. Two days later they received the first postulant -Catherine Lynch from Drogheda.





Two months after their arrival the sisters opened a day school, to which the poor children of the neighbourhood flocked in great numbers. Gradually the number of sisters increased, and they were able to engage in the work originally envisaged by Mary Aikenhead -visitation of the sick poor in their homes. The words of Dr. Murray to Mary Aikenhead while she was still a novice in York had now become a reality: 'Your family in future are to be the poor of Jesus Christ.

3. Portobello



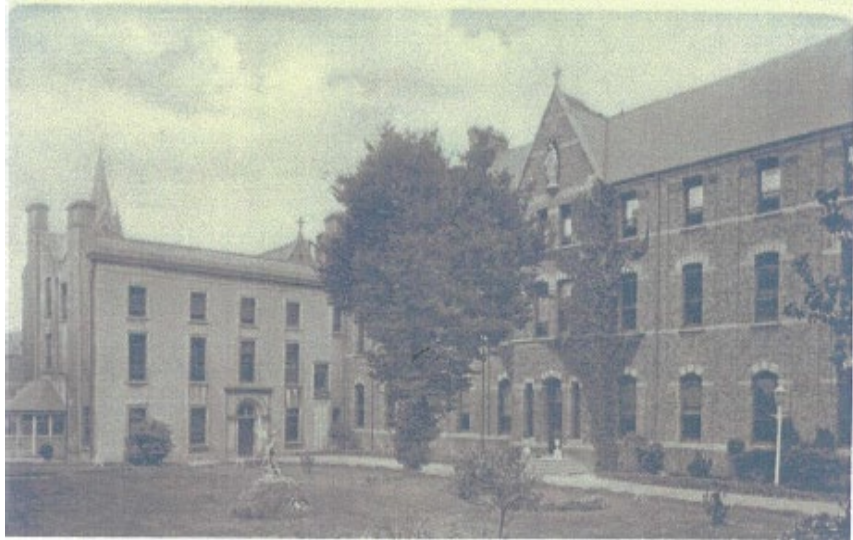
In 1818 Mary Aikenhead's health gave cause for concern. The doctor recommended complete rest and a change of air. It was arranged that she should spend some time in the country home of her friends Anna Maria and John O'Brien, in Rahan, Co. Offaly.

At about 7:00am on a fine morning in July she boarded the covered barge at Portobello Harbour, having waited in the building now known as Portobello College. It was a journey of about thirty-five miles and lasted the whole day. She returned to Dublin two months later, having benefitted greatly from the fresh country air.



4. Stanhope Street

On 2nd February 1819 Dr. Murray celebrated the first Mass in the new convent chapel in Stanhope Street and blessed the house. Mother Mary Aikenhead and Sr. Mary Joseph O'Reilly had moved in a few days previously and were later joined by the three novices from North William Street. It had been the desire for some time to find a more suitable place for the training of the novices. So it was that in Stanhope Street the first formal novitiate of the Sisters of Charity was established.



Mother Mary Aikenhead took on the office of mistress of novices and devoted herself to the task of training the young sisters, though she was still involved in the visitation of the poor in their homes, the visitation of the jail and other works of the congregation. Before the end of 1819 six young women entered the novitiate, of whom only two remained - Sr. Mary John Cahill, who was to be one of the pioneering sisters who went to Australia in 1838, and Sr. Mary Ignatius Sweetman.

5. Gardiner Street

In the mid-1820s it became increasingly clear to Mary Aikenhead that the convent in North William Street was unsuitable: the little school was becoming overcrowded and moreover the care of the orphanage interfered with the all-important duty of the sick mission. As Providence would have it, in 1827 a community of Carmelites offered to take over the convent and the running of the orphanage.

About the same time a friend of Dr. Murray's died and bequeathed to him a sum of £4,000 to be used for the establishment of poor schools in Dr. Murray's parish. Dr. Murray resolved to use this money to build a convent and



schools for the Sisters of Charity at Gardiner Street. The school here was to become famous for its methods of teaching and discipline.

But Gardiner Street was also looked upon as the great mission house of the congregation. Visitation of the sick poor was carried out with great devotion. Many called to the convent door looking for some kind of relief, and in addition, men, women and children came for a morning or mid-day meal in a 'dispensary' adjoining the school. Gardiner Street convent was blessed by the Archbishop of Dublin on 1st February 1830 under the title of Our Lady of the Assumption, with Mother Catherine Walsh as Rectress.



6. [Sandymount / Ringsend](#)

On 16th August 1831 Mother Mary Aikenhead and four other sisters moved to a house on Sandymount Lane, (now Sandymount Avenue), where they ran a small school for poor children, gave religious instruction to children and adults, and visited the poor in their homes. In 1833 Mary Aikenhead wrote a heart-rending description of the conditions of the poor in the Sandymount/Irishtown/ Ringsend area, in reply to an enquiry by the Commission set up for the purpose of obtaining such information.



At the same time the Sisters of Charity were ministering daily to the victims of the cholera epidemic, both in their homes and in a small emergency



hospital which Mary Aikenhead set up in a store in Ringsend and referred to as 'this poor thing of twelve beds'.

Mother Mary Aikenhead left Sandymount in 1834 to establish St. Vincent's Hospital, but the community continued to live in Sandymount Lane until 1876, when they moved to Lakelands, about a quarter of a mile away.

7. St. Vincent's Hospital

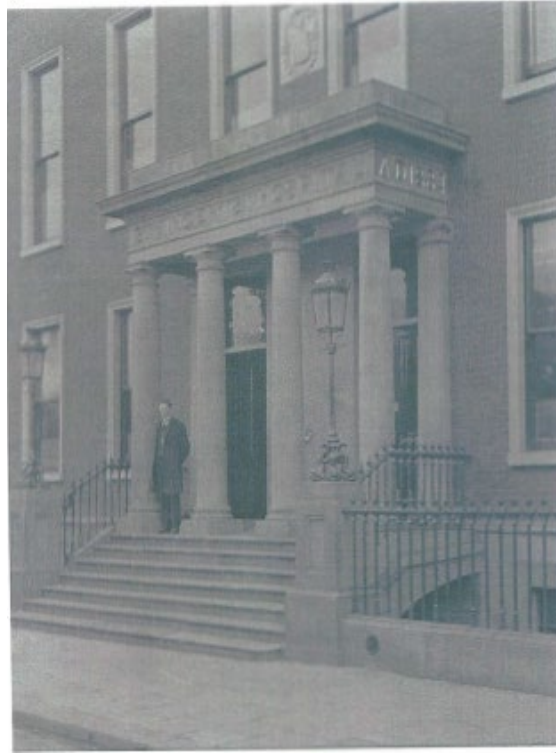
St. Vincent's Hospital on Stephen's Green was the first Catholic hospital to be founded in Dublin. On 23rd January 1834 the congregation took formal possession of what had formerly been the town house of the Earl of Meath. In April 1835, all the building work having been completed, the hospital opened with twelve beds for female patients.



The dream that Mary Aikenhead had long cherished was becoming a reality - that 'the poor be given for love what the rich obtain for money'. She had the support of Archbishop Murray, her personal physician and friend

Dr. J. O'Ferrall and others. However, she also had to cope with disappointments, difficulties and criticism both inside and outside the congregation.

St. Vincent's Hospital gradually developed into being one of the leading teaching hospitals in Ireland, thanks to Mary Aikenhead's trust in Divine Providence.



Thanks be to his Divine Goodness for whose honour and Glory I hope we shall ever labour and assist each other

(MMA 1 • September 1845)

May our Lord. teach our Hearts to Keep alive the fire of grateful love and service.

(MMA 11 August 1949)

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