



HAROLD'S CROSS

Our Lady's Hospice and Care Services

Our Heritage

Our Lady's Hospice in Harold's Cross was established in 1879 by the Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity. The Congregation was founded in Dublin by Mary Aikenhead in 1815, in response to the grinding poverty pervading the city.



Mary Aikenhead was a Cork woman, a feminist, pioneer and a member of the Anglican Community until, at the age of 15, she converted to Roman Catholicism. During her life she founded 13 houses around Ireland, all working for the poor, the imprisoned, the sick, the dying and the deprived.

She established St. Vincent's Hospital, in St. Stephen's Green in 1834 – the first hospital in Ireland to be staffed and run by women – and the precursor of St. Vincent's University Hospital in Elm Park.

In 1845, Mary Aikenhead, who, owing to illness had been advised to move from the city to the country, bought "Greenmount", a late 18th century house on raised ground at Harold's Cross, purchased from a family called Webb who were members of the Society of Friends (Quakers). They agreed a price with the Sisters and kept their word despite a higher offer being received from the Mount Jerome Cemetery Company.

The Sisters renamed it "Our Lady's Mount" and Mary Aikenhead moved there in September 1845. Within days, 20 novices and 30 Sisters followed their Superior General to what had now become the Mother House and Novitiate of the congregation.

New buildings were added on. A night school for women and girls, along with a Sunday School were opened, and finally, in 1851 a large day school was started.



The role of Our Lady's Mount was changed as a result of an epidemic of smallpox in Dublin in January 1879. A number of patients with smallpox were admitted to St. Vincent's Hospital and a young novice from Our Lady's Mount contracted the infection while attending the hospital for nursing instruction. She passed it on to 16 other Sisters in Our Lady's Mount and, while none died, it was considered advisable to move further from the city, especially as the number of Sisters was growing.

A property, again on high ground, was bought at Milltown, Co. Dublin and re-named Mount St. Anne's.

For some years the Congregation had been thinking of opening a Hospice. Two Sisters at St. Vincent's Hospital, Mother Charles Hynes and Mother Philip Neri Russell were particularly anxious to pursue this mission. They discussed this with the Mother General.

Their views were recorded at the time – "Seeing and feeling how very hard it was to send away the poor, dismissed by the doctors as beyond hope of recovery, some having very poor homes and others no friends willing to receive them, they bethought themselves of having a hospice or home where these poor sufferers might be received."

Such a policy of refusal of admission was common in those days and was the main reason for the foundation of the Hospice. Apart from a shortage of beds there were other reasons – fear of infection of existing patients by a new patient, the absence of any effective treatment for many diseases and the medical staff's preference to admit those they could help, which in those days were the minority.

Therefore, a refuge for the sick poor of the city, an institution that took in the infectious, the destitute and the dying was a great need and now there was room at Our Lady's Mount. However, there were other competing needs and it was not until three years following Mary Aikenhead's death that the Hospice was finally opened with nine beds.



By 1880 the number of beds in the Hospice had been increased to 40. From the beginning, fundraising was the lifeline of the Hospice. By 1886, Dublin Corporation was giving the Hospice an annual grant of £250, while money from donors, fundraising and bequests came to £1,535.

The need for expansion was urgent and in 1886, the Hospice received a donation of £8,000 from Charles Hamill. On July 18, 1886 the foundation stone for a new Hospice was blessed by the Archbishop of Dublin. Then, as now, the affluent were frequently glad to come together to support worthy causes. There was a great gathering at the blessing of the



foundation stone – the Lord Mayor of Dublin, John Redmond MP gave an address. Also, there were William O'Brien, MP and the poet Katherine Tynan. A subscription list was opened and by the evening it had reached £1,000. The new Hospice was designed by William R. Byrne and built by Richard Toole. Fronted with granite from Ballyknockan in Co. Wicklow, with limestone for the windows and front porch it looks the same today as when it was built.

The “pennies of the poor” often kept the Hospice going and they were substantial as the people of Dublin rallied to its support. For example, at one stage the staff at Clery’s Department store collected £2,000 in copper coins over a number of years.

Sr. Mary Eustace Eaton who ran the Sodality of the Children of Mary which met in the grounds of the Hospice organised them as collectors and subsequently extended this to a band of men who tramped the streets, roads and lanes of Dublin on Sunday’s gathering money. In one year alone in the 1890 “the Sunday collections” reached £505.

The Hospice was open to all creeds and classes and admissions were for disease, poverty, starvation and helplessness. It is recorded that it took in “Protestants, professors of Irish and French, doctors, solicitors, soldiers and sailors”.



The first medical doctor to work in the Hospice was Dr. Dudley White who was appointed there in 1879 and he was followed by a distinguished body of physicians and visiting physicians. From the beginning there was an interest in being at the forefront of care. In 1961, the country's first geriatrician, Dr. John Fleetwood was appointed to the Hospice.

