

Belturbet, Co Cavan



Convent of Mercy, Belturbet, Co Cavan

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From the very beginning, the finger of God was clearly at work in the lives of the seven Sisters of Mercy who on 23rd August 1868 received a warm welcome to Belturbet. They had experienced enormous opposition and hostility in Ashton-upon-Lyne, Worcester and Bolton, England, so they must have seen the invitation of the Belturbet Parish Priest, Father Dunne, as truly the activity of God in their lives.

Six months later, their Leader, Sr. Bernard Geraghty, opened a house in Ballyjamesduff. Their stay there was short-lived as Sr. Bernard died in 1869 and the Sisters returned to Belturbet. It was Sr. Joseph Maguire, the youngest of the four Maguire sisters from Newgrange, Meath (all of whom entered Baggot Street shortly after the death of Catherine McAuley), who at 35 became Superior of Belturbet on the death of Sr. Bernard. In fact, the survival of Belturbet is due in no small part to the wisdom and dedication of this woman, who remained in a position of leadership until her death in 1931.

Australia calls



Convent of Mercy, Warrnambool, Australia in 1972

Another group of Mercies with Mother Philomena Maguire as their Leader went to Ballyjamesduff, Co Cavan replacing those who had returned to Belturbet. Soon Australia called and all of these Sisters headed to Warrnambool, Victoria, Australia in 1872. Mother Philomena's older sister, Sr. Xavier, had

already founded a convent in Geelong near Victoria in 1859 and was Superior of that convent. She probably encouraged her sister to head for pastures new!

Honoria Fitzpatrick



Honoria Fitzpatrick

A name that is, and, will forever be engraved in the hearts of all the Belturbet Sisters is Honoria Fitzpatrick of Milltown. She was already in her 60th year when the Sisters first planted a sapling in Deanery Street. She was greatly loved for her charity and was affectionately known as Miss Hone. Her two brothers, Thomas and James, became eminent surgeons in North Hampton, England. They both predeceased Honoria leaving her all their wealth. Honoria died 24th January 1872, aged 87, bequeathing a huge legacy of £8,220.3.8 to the Belturbet Sisters. What a windfall!



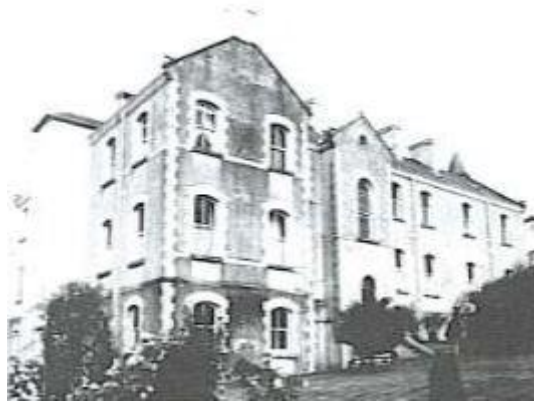
A plaque hung in the Belturbet chapel until 2007

As was customary at the time, the Sisters embarked on education of the local children immediately on their arrival in Belturbet. An advertisement in the local newspaper proclaimed, *"the forthcoming opening of a school for young ladies by the Sisters of Mercy in which they shall be taught all the branches of an English education on very moderate terms paid quarterly in advance. Music and French are extras. All books will be provided as cheaply as possible by the Sisters. A reduction will be made for children under seven years of age."* A school for poor children was established in tandem with the school for 'young ladies' and thus Mercy education was initiated in Belturbet. This tradition of Mercy involvement in primary education in Belturbet was to be long-lasting, ending in 2004 when the last Sister withdrew from the school.

Foundations

As well as the foundations from Belturbet to Cootehill and Cavan town, two 'branch houses' were established in Co. Leitrim:

Ballinamore



Convent of Mercy, Ballinamore, Co Leitrim

As so often happened in the nineteenth century, another Parish Priest made a request in 1871 for a Mercy foundation in his parish. This time the Parish Priest was Fr. Thomas Brady and the destination was Ballinamore, Co Leitrim. Mother Joseph Maguire dispatched three Sisters from Belturbet to start the foundation. To this day Sisters live and minister in [Ballinamore](#).

Manorhamilton



Our Lady's Hospital, Manorhamilton, Co Leitrim

When the Head Nurse of the Fever Hospital in Manorhamilton resigned from her posting 1890, the task of replacing her was not an easy one. She was replaced eventually, and her successor took up duty on May 15th. However, on May 22nd, this person submitted her resignation, citing her parents' reluctance to allow her to work with fever patients as her reason. There were other abortive attempts to appoint a suitable candidate before Sr. Mary Teresa O'Beirne from Belturbet was appointed to the post of Head Nurse in the Infirmary. As Canon law required a minimum of three Sisters to form a religious community, two other Sisters – Sr. Aloysius Murphy and Sr. Magdalen Kelly – accompanied her. Sr. Magdalen had been successful in her application for the position of Fever Nurse. When, in 1916, the Mercy convents of the diocese of Kilmore – Belturbet, Ballinamore, Cootehill, Cavan and Manorhamilton – amalgamated, Belturbet was designated the Mother House.