

Cootehill, Co Cavan

Sr. Stanislaus Molloy led the founding group to Cootehill in 1880. Their new home, a single storey thatched house at 24 and 25 Bridge Street was ready and Fr. O'Reilly accompanied them there. At the rear of the house, there were some buildings, which were immediately converted into school accommodation, and the Sisters started their work of education, visitation and care of the poor.

A private school was also opened where, as well as the basic subjects, French, music, embroidery and art were taught. Ironically, the establishment of the private school helped the poor children greatly. It provided an income for the Sisters and this income was used to provide food, clothing and education for the needy. In many cases, it was also used to pay the rent of tenants in danger of eviction. Another advantage was that some of the wealthy landowners, seeing at first hand the efforts made by the nuns to alleviate poverty, made donations towards their work. From the outset, Fr. O'Reilly's intention was to provide a convent for the Sisters. Acting immediately, he approached Mr Edward Smith, owner of Bellamont Castle and demesne, with a request that he would lease the necessary land. Mr Smith agreed and gave a grant of three acres and one rood to the parish priest of the day to build a convent and schools. The annual rent was two acorns if required. The deed was signed on 17 October 1880 – mere days after the arrival of the Sisters in Cootehill.

Built by voluntary labour and costing £6,000, the four-storey edifice was completed by 1883. Unfortunately, Fr. Francis did not live to see its completion. He died in 1882 when it was almost finished.



Old Convent of Mercy, Cootehill

New Convent, Cootehill



Cootehill Chapel Window

The 1960s and 1970s brought significant changes in the Church and in Religious Life. Vocations to religious life were not as numerous as heretofore. Large buildings were difficult to maintain and in

some cases incongruous. It was decided to replace the original Cootehill Convent with a smaller, more modern structure. Work on the new convent started Old Convent of Mercy, Cootehill in 1978 and was completed in 1979 at a cost of £150,000. The first Mass was celebrated there on November 28th 1979.



A Commemorative Script hanging in the Convent in Cootehill remembers the Sisters buried in the three Mercy Cemeteries in the Kilmore Diocese

Primary Education

Traditionally boys and girls were taught separately –the Sisters engaging with the education of girls. In 1983, a new school – which housed St. Michael’s Junior School and St. Michael’s Senior School under one roof - was built on the site of the old Convent. At the request of the Bishop, the Sisters remained in the junior school. Mercy engagement in Primary education in Cootehill ended in 2004 when the last teaching Sister withdrew.