

## History of Tyrone



*Scenic Views of Strabane, Co Tyrone*



*The sculpture, 'Let the Dance Begin' by [Maurice Harron](#), on the outskirts of Strabane*



*The Immaculate Conception Church, Strabane*



*The former Convent of Mercy, Strabane, Co Tyrone*

A fine building erected for them by leading Catholics of the town awaited the Sisters. 'St. Joseph' was chosen as Patron of the new Convent which they named Mount St. Joseph's.

An Elementary school for the children of the parish was opened on June 10th 1868, the day after the Sisters' arrival.



*The High Altar in Carrara marble, presented by a Mrs. Brown, was supplied by the father of the famous writer, poet and patriot-leader, Pádraig Pearse*

On 17th October, 1881, a new semi-public Chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart was opened to cater for the parishioners who joined the Sisters for Sunday Mass. The High Altar in Carrara marble, presented by a Mrs. Brown, was supplied by the father of the famous writer, poet and patriot-leader Pádraig Pearse. The front-piece of the altar was one of five masterpieces executed by the great Irish sculptor John Hogan (1800-1858). The Romanesque Chapel in cut stone, with its graceful spire, gave a monastic appearance to the Convent.

In January 1997 the Sisters moved from Mount St. Joseph's to a smaller residence nearby.



*The Sisters of Mercy Convent in Strabane, opened in 1997*

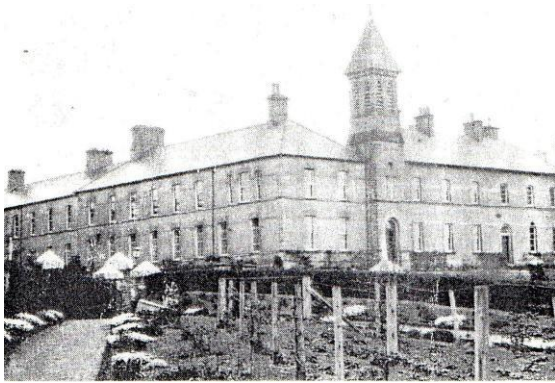


*Photo of the Sisters of Mercy, a week before they left their former Convent*

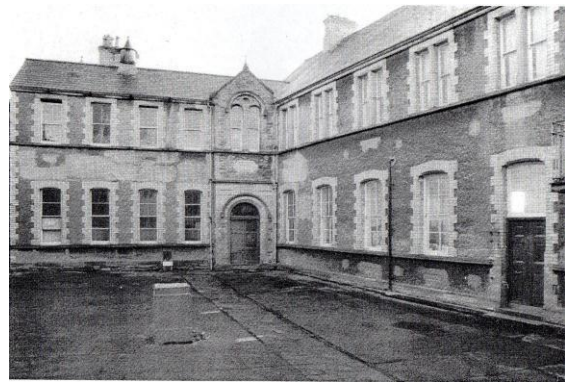
## **SCHOOLS**

As the Elementary School at Mt. St. Joseph's progressed rapidly, a Boarding School was soon established, attended largely by pupils preparing for the teaching profession. Girls came to Strabane from all parts of the country and teachers were sent by the school far afield as well. A new house close to the convent was purchased in 1924 and it was dedicated to St. Anne.

Mother Catherine opened a large orphanage which was certified as a Registered Industrial School in 1869. A new Elementary School was built in 1895; this closed in 1990 and was replaced with the opening of St. Anne's Primary School.



*The Sisters opened an Industrial School in 1869.*



*The Convent Primary school, built in 1895*



*A pupil from St. Anne's Primary School presents Sr. Carmel with a bouquet of flowers on the occasion of her retirement in 1997*



*Sr. Carmel Fanning, first Principal of St. Anne's School, with the Curriculum Award received in London in 1997*

In 1907 Sisters expanded elementary education to Melmount, Strabane with the building of the Primary School in Bridge Street.

## SECONDARY EDUCATION

In 1928, secondary education was extended with the building of Mount Carmel Secondary School later to be known as the Grammar School. In 1968 the school was relocated to Curley Hill. Our Lady of Mercy Intermediate School was opened in 1959 to further extend provision of secondary education to all girls in the Strabane area.

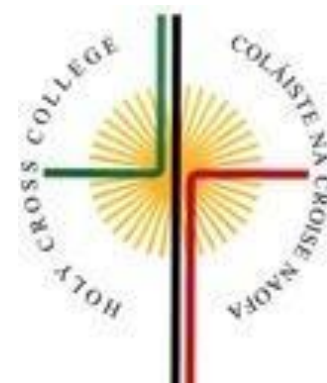


*First pupils of Our Lady of Mercy Intermediate School, Strabane*

In 2003 [Holy Cross College](#) was established with the amalgamation of Strabane's three Catholic post primary schools: the Convent Grammar School, St. Colman's High School and Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School.



*Holy Cross College opened in Strabane in 2003*



*Holy Cross School Crest*

## A MISSION TO AFRICA

In 1897 Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Gaughran O.M.I. from South Africa came seeking Sisters for his mission in Mafeking, where the seeds of Catholicism were just beginning to take root but where there were no schools. Many Sisters volunteered and five were chosen. These were later joined by two Sisters and three postulants recruited from Mt. Carmel Boarding School.



**BRAVE STRABANE  
SISTERS OF  
MERCY.**

**CORDIAL RECEPTION BY  
THE QUEEN.**

The "Daily Independent" of Wednesday last says –

Yesterday, at Windsor Castle, the Queen, who was accompanied by the Princess Beatrice received Mother Superior Theresa and Sister Evangelist, who have recently returned from Mafeking. The Mother Superior and Sister Evangelist went out to Mafeking from Strabane to found a convent of the Sisters of Mercy at Mafeking. When the siege appeared imminent Bishop Gaughran informed the Sisters that they could return to Ireland; but they preferred to remain, and during the siege rendered invaluable service to the sick and wounded soldiers. The Queen was much interested in the work of the Sisters at Mafeking and appeared pleased when informed that they were members of the Mercy Order.

At the outbreak of the Boer War with Mafeking under siege, school activities were suspended and Sisters took on the new role of Nursing Sisters. They nursed wounded soldiers and, after the siege, one of the Sisters was called to Windsor Castle to be invested with the Victoria Cross. Queen Victoria spoke of the splendid services of the Sisters of Mercy on the battlefield.



*The Victoria Cross*

*An Extract printed in the Strabane Chronicle, 1901. The Queen "thanks the Sisters of Mercy for their invaluable service to the sick and wounded soldiers in Mafeking South Africa"*



*Sr. Susan Lynch, Bishop Abba, Sr. Sheila McDermott and Sr. Margaret Burke in Minna, Nigeria in the 1970s*

Another mission outreach to Africa took place in 1971 when one of the Strabane community set out for Nigeria to teach in the Minna Diocese with the Sisters of St. Louis. With the closure of the St. Louis Mission House, two other Sisters were missioned to go there to carry on the work. Two of the Sisters took up teaching posts in the local government Secondary School while the third Sister took up a post in the Women's Teachers' College.



*Sisters Rose Ann, Carmel and Benedict from the Mercy Convent, Strabane, Co. Tyrone, at the opening of the Centre for Homeless Women in Johannesburg in 1997. The Centre is aptly called "Strabane Mercy Centre".*



*Sisters Carmel and Rose Ann with some Zulu girls in 1997*

**BUNCRANA, CO DONEGAL**



*Near the beach in Bunrana in Winter!*



*Linsfort, overlooking Lough Foyle, Co. Donegal*

Nearer home a mission from Strabane to Bunrana took place on May 7 1922, thanks to the kindness of a benefactor who left a house in his will, so that a convent would be founded there. It was his wish 'that the children in Bunrana might attend a Convent school'.

A house and approximately ten acres of land was bought on a more suitable site with the proceeds from the sale of the house which had been donated. Four Sisters moved there in May 1922.

On February 2nd 1952, the foundation stone was laid for a new convent as the original house was no longer suitable to accommodate the number of Sisters who lived there. On September 23rd, 1953 the Sisters moved to their new home.



*Convent of Mercy, Buncrana*



*Crana Bridge*



*View of Buncrana, on a Winter's day*

## SCHOOLS



*Cockhill Church, Buncrana, Co Donegal*

Shortly after arriving in Buncrana in 1922, three of the Sisters travelled a 3 mile journey each day by jaunting car to teach in Cockhill, which was the only school in the area.



*Sisters Emmanuel Cullen and Berchmans Maloney, the last two Sisters to teach in Scoil Iosagáin*

Soon afterwards the Sisters acquired a building adjacent to the present swimming pool and opened their first primary school in Buncrana. In 1924, Sacred Heart Primary School for Girls was built. In 1990 the Sacred Heart School amalgamated with the Boys' school, St. Columba's, to form Scoil Iosagáin. [www.scoiliosagain.ie](http://www.scoiliosagain.ie)

In 1933, a Secondary Top was established within the Primary school to allow pupils to progress to Second level education. In time, some rooms in the Convent were also used as classrooms, to accommodate the increase in pupil numbers. A Boarding School was established in 1934. The Secondary Top became an approved Secondary School in 1950.

Planning for a new secondary school began in 1970. Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana, was completed in 1973 and the pupils moved into their new school. No grant was available for a Gymnasium or Assembly Hall, but relying on providence and the generosity of the people of Buncrana, work began on the Assembly Hall and was completed within two years. There have been various additions since to the building to accommodate a burgeoning school population. [www.ceist.ie](http://www.ceist.ie)



*Scoil Mhuire, Buncrana*