

Clifden

On 16th July, 1855, Mother Teresa White, Srs. Vincent Irwin, Aloysius D'Arcy, Teresa Blake and Joseph McDonagh, a Novice, arrived. Mother Teresa White and the Novice stayed and the other three Sisters returned to Galway. There was not even a stool in the Convent but the kind neighbours loaned them a few planks for stools and a few boxes. The Sisters shared in the poverty of the area and visited the poor in their homes. Mother Teresa remained thirty-three years in Clifden and died there. In the first ten years twenty Postulants entered in Clifden.

The Orphanage

The Sisters quickly rented a house to use as an orphanage. The Industrial Act allowed the orphanage to provide for children under fourteen, who were orphans, children found begging in public and vagrant children with nobody to support them. The Sisters worked at Quay House for three years until in 1862 an orphanage, known as St. Joseph's, was built near the Convent. Some of those children left the Bird's Nest (Protestant) and went to the nuns. In 1872, St. Joseph's was certified and registered under the Industrial School Act. In 1902 an epidemic of typhus raged through the school and at least eighteen children died. Sr. deSales Colleran, the Sister in Charge also died. 2,241 girls and 100 boys passed through the orphanage. The school closed in 1984 when things improved for children in Ireland.

Education

In 1855 the Sisters started a school in a room in the Convent. Only one child attended the first day, two on the second day, but soon the numbers increased, and they had three rooms in the Convent at their disposal, with the basement for a meal. A new school was skillfully erected and the numbers increased. The Sisters had to work extremely hard until the school was placed under the Department of Education. The school gave a liberal and practical education, and music had a special place on the curriculum. It had an orchestra, percussion band, mouth organ band, choirs and an annual variety concert or operetta. Over the years many schools amalgamated with the Convent School – Streamstown, Goulane, the Orphanage and the Boys' School. A new Central School was built and opened in 1991.

In the 1930's the majority of boys and girls in Clifden completed their education with the Primary Cert apart from a few who went to Boarding Schools elsewhere. The Sisters resolved to seek permission from the Department of Education to start a Secondary Top. They had their first Intermediate exam in 1943. The Secondary Top ceased to exist in 1959 when it became a recognised Secondary School. The Boys' School was outside the town, but after many years of writing and pleading, a new Community School was built in Clifden in 1970's and it opened in 1976. It contained all the pupils under one roof.

Archbishop Healy advocated continuation schools for girls in Domestic Economy. In 1905 the Sisters bought a house and four acres of land for £300. A Technical School was built and completed in nine months, all at the Sisters' expense. It opened in November 1908, and boarders and day pupils arrived. They received instruction in Dairying, Poultry, Needlework, Cooking and Religion. It thrived for years but due to grants, free travel; and other opportunities it closed in 1968. The building was leased to the Western Health Board as an Old Folk's Home, which was badly needed in the area at the time. Sr. Margaret O'Connor served there for many years.

Clifden Hospital

Clifden Workhouse was burnt down in 1921. Later on a cottage hospital was built under Galway County Council, known as Our Lady of Fatima Hospital. In the 1960's an extension was built and provided beds for maternity. All this was a welcome service in the Clifden area. The Sisters were associated with the Hospital from the beginning until Sr. Bernard Curran retired as Matron.