

## Chapter 27: St Gerard's, originally 39 Mountjoy Square

### Introduction

- 27.1 A mother and baby home was opened in 39 Mountjoy Square in Dublin's north inner city in 1920 by Miss Cruice.<sup>1</sup> It seems to have been called St Patrick's - this is the name used on the 1937 report of an inspection under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934* but the Commission has not found this name used on any other documents. Miss Cruice had already established St Patrick's Guild in the early 1910s. 39 Mountjoy Square was sold in 1938 and the institution transferred to St Gerard's which was a house formerly known as 'Lowville' in Herbert Avenue, Merrion in what is now Dublin 4. St Gerard's closed in 1939. It was taken over by the Irish Sisters of Charity<sup>2</sup> in 1943 (as was all of St Patrick's Guild) but it did not function again as a mother and baby home.

### Sources

- 27.2 The records of St Gerard's are part of the very large records of St Patrick's Guild (SPG). These were handed over to the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) in 2017 but are not yet fully processed. To date, it has not been possible to extract the St Gerard's files from the overall SPG files; as a result, the Commission has not had access to the St Gerard's files.
- 27.3 The Commission has very little information about St Gerard's. Some information has been found in Department of Health files and in published material.
- 27.4 A Department of Local Government and Public Health (DLGPH) note from September 1943 described the background to St Gerard's.<sup>3</sup> This note was drawn up in the context of the examination of the finances of St Patrick's Guild, including St Gerard's, which was being conducted by the DLGPH and the Hospitals Trust. Archbishop McQuaid had insisted on a thorough examination of its finances before allowing the Sisters of Charity to take over.

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<sup>1</sup> The surname is frequently misspelled as Cruise.

<sup>2</sup> The Irish Sisters of Charity are sometimes known as the Religious Sisters of Charity. They are completely separate from the Daughters of Charity who ran Pelletstown – see Chapter 13. They were founded by Mary Aikenhead and are now involved in various activities in Ireland including healthcare (for example, St Vincent's Hospital).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health file: RM/ARC/0/521022.

27.5 When the takeover was complete, an article about St Patrick's Guild was published in *The Irish Monthly*.<sup>4</sup> The following information comes mainly from these two sources. There are minor factual differences between the two but they are not significant. The Commission is not investigating St Patrick's Guild itself or St Patrick's Infant Hospital, Temple Hill (sometimes called Temple Hill Dietetic Hospital) but they are inextricably linked with 39 Mountjoy Square/St Gerard's.

### **St Patrick's Guild**

27.6 St Patrick's Guild was founded in the early 1910s as an organisation for the care of destitute Catholic pregnant women and nursing mothers and their children. It first acquired a premises in 1914. According to the DLGPH, its aims were:

- to provide spiritually and temporally for destitute children by securing their admission into existing institutions, or by boarding them out in the homes of respectable families or by providing and maintaining a home or homes for these purposes or by other methods;
- to provide attendance and necessaries for women who were expectant mothers and whose circumstances called for such assistance and to provide during convalescence for the mother and child;
- to provide training of probationers in infant welfare work and in nursing.

27.7 Initially, its premises were in Middle Abbey Street.

### **39 Mountjoy Square**

27.8 The mother and baby home at 39 Mountjoy Square was established in 1919 by St Patrick's Guild for the care of unmarried expectant women and nursing mothers and their babies. It also acted as a training school for nursery nurses.

27.9 Before this Commission was established, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs examined birth records and established that 45 babies are recorded as having been born in 39 Mountjoy Square in the years 1933-1938. There were no births recorded from 1920 to 1932. On the basis of its capacity and the recorded births in the 1930s, it seems likely that it catered for no more than 200 women and their children.

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<sup>4</sup> Rev J J MacSheahan, *St. Patrick's Guild*, *The Irish Monthly*, September 1943.

- 27.10 39 Mountjoy Square was registered under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934* in November 1936. An inspection was carried out by a DLGPH inspector in January 1937. The registration was cancelled in July 1938. (The cancellation stated that the address was 37 Mountjoy Square and it misspelled Miss Cruice's name.)
- 27.11 According to the 1937 inspection report, there was accommodation for 19 patients in five wards. There were two baths and four WCs. There had been four confinements since May 1936.<sup>5</sup> The person in charge was a qualified nurse and midwife. There were two qualified nurses and two qualified midwives but it is not clear if this meant there were two, three or four staff. There was also a maid and a nursery maid employed. The inspector considered that it was adequately staffed. The report noted that the infants were 'kept till adoption'. This is a reference to informal 'adoption' as legal adoption did not become available until 1953.

### **Temple Hill**

- 27.12 Temple Hill was opened in 1930. Children boarded out by St Patrick's Guild 'who become delicate' were transferred there, as were babies from 39 Mountjoy Square.

### **State involvement**

- 27.13 St Patrick's Guild (SPG) and Temple Hill were recouped from the National Maternity and Child Welfare grant on the basis of 50% of approved expenditure in respect of children under the age of five. According to the 1943 departmental note, 'such payments have in some years amounted to £1,700'. SPG's income from parents and guardians was considerably more than its income from this grant.
- 27.14 39 Mountjoy Square applied to the Department of Local Government and Public Health (DLGPH) for payment from the Maternity and Child Welfare Grant in July 1933 and this payment was made from 1 January 1934.
- 27.15 The Hospitals Commission made payments of £5,054 in respect of deficits in the three institutions for the years 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936. Grants of £3,284 were paid in respect of deficits arising from 39 Mountjoy Square/St Gerard's and Temple Hill in the years 1927, 1938, 1939 and 1940. The Hospitals Commission had decided that no further grants could be made to St Patrick's Guild itself as the work

<sup>5</sup> Department of Health file: 34/58 Vol 1

could not be described as a hospital activity. (It would appear that the Hospitals Trust was previously under the impression that the SPG premises in Abbey Street was the out-patient department of Temple Hill.)

### **Transfer to Merrion**

27.16 In January 1937, the DLGPH was told by the Hospitals Commission that St Patrick's Guild had applied for a grant to enable it to buy a house on Merrion Road (in what is now Dublin 4) for use as a 'Children's Dietetic and Convalescent Home and Nurses Training College'. The Hospitals Trust recommended that this house be acquired by SPG for use as a maternity home for unmarried mothers on the understanding that the premises in Mountjoy Square be sold. The Hospitals Commission did not favour giving a grant for its use as a dietetic hospital as it considered that this work should be undertaken by the local authorities.

27.17 In 1938, the institution in Mountjoy Square was transferred to the Merrion Road and became known as St Gerard's. Towards the end of 1939, there was a dispute between members of the committee of St Patrick's Guild about the operation of St Gerard's. Miss Cruice decided to close it down as she considered that 'the type of cases for which this Home was intended were not coming there'.

### **Sisters of Charity**

27.18 St Patrick's Guild (including all its three parts: St Patrick's Infant Hospital, Temple Hill; St Patrick's Guild, Abbey Street; and St Gerard's Home, Herbert Avenue, Merrion Road) was placed under the charge of the Irish Sisters of Charity in 1941 by Archbishop McQuaid. Efforts to legally transfer SPG to the Irish Sisters of Charity were hampered by the tangled state of its finances. Some of the SPG investments were held in the names of individual members and it seems that St Gerard's itself was vested in Miss Cruice. Archbishop McQuaid supported the DLGPH's attempts to have the finances examined and rectified; it is clear that the Archbishop did not have great faith in Miss Cruice: 'I have obtained nothing from Miss Cruice except flamboyant declarations of good-will' (24 July 1942).

27.19 The Hospitals Commission carried out a detailed examination of the finances of St Patrick's Guild before Archbishop McQuaid consented to its being taken over by the Irish Sisters of Charity. This showed that St Patrick's Guild had received £31,274 from the Hospitals Trust Funds; at the end of 1940, £10,302 had been spent and the rest was invested.

- 27.20 In 1942, options for the continued use of St Gerard's were being considered. One option was the resumption of its role as a mother and baby home. The Minister for Local Government and Public Health wrote to Archbishop McQuaid in January 1942 proposing its use as a convalescent home for children from all the city's children's hospitals. This was in the context of a shortage of beds in the children's hospitals and a very severe outbreak of gastroenteritis in Dublin. In the letter he said that St Gerard's was a 'substantial stone built house with 5½ statute acres, has accommodation for about 33 children, and is in good condition and ready for immediate occupation'. The minister and the secretary of the department called on Archbishop McQuaid in February 1942 to discuss this proposal. The archbishop supported this proposal but wanted to sort out the ownership and finances of the property. (The meeting also involved discussions about the Dublin voluntary hospitals, the training of almoners and the provision of school meals.)
- 27.21 St Gerard's was transferred temporarily to Dublin Corporation under an emergency powers order made by the minister in October 1942 as an 'urgent measure to provide additional bed accommodation required as a result of the serious outbreaks of Diphtheria and Gastro-enteritis in Dublin'. Archbishop McQuaid consented to this. It was used as an adjunct to Vergemount Fever Hospital.
- 27.22 St Patrick's Guild was transferred to the Irish Sisters of Charity on 1 May 1943. In September 1943, when the DLGPH note was compiled, St Gerard's was still being used as an adjunct to Vergemount Fever Hospital. It never reopened as a mother and baby home.