

Alms Houses of Kilkenny

BY DORCAS BIRTHESTLE

The citizens of Kilkenny, down through the years, have taken an interest in the welfare of their less fortunate fellow citizens. One of the proofs of this is the number of Alms Houses that they established and maintained throughout the city. The following is a very brief account of eight of them during the last four centuries.

The Shee Alms House — in Rose Inn Street, was built by Sir Richard Shee and his wife in 1581, to house six men and six women. Endowed by his will of 1603, it was looked after by his family until about 150 years later, when it was sold. It continued as an Alms House but without the Shee endowments. The conditions of sale included, that the inmates were not to be disturbed. About this time it was also endowed by a Mr. Jasper Rothe of London, who had been living in Paris. He was decended from the ancient family of Rothe of Kilkenny. This endowment lasted until the money was confiscated during the French Revolution. A few years later, the house was re-purchased by Mr. John O'Shee, a direct decendent of Sir Richards. It continued as an Alms House, depending on the charity of that family and the generosity of the citizens of Kilkenny, until it became uninhabitable in the early 19th century. Later in 1871, it was repaired by Nicholas Power-O'Shea of Gardenmorris. Subsequently Mr. O'Shea gave the building to the Ladies Charitable Association. Since 1916 it has been used as a store by Messrs. Lowrys, but the outside has been preserved and the arms of the Shees and inscriptions may still be seen on both gables.

The Ormond House properly known as the Hospital of Our Most Holy Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ of the city of Kilkenny, was established by Royal Charter and letters patent granted in May, 1631. The Home was originally where Tylers Shoe Shop is now (No. 4, High Street). It was transferred to its present situation in Barrack St., in 1840, nearly 200 years after it was established. The inmates are properly described as Brothers and Sisters of the Hospital and the person in charge

of it as the Master. He is usually the agent for the Marquis of Ormond. The Ormond family continue to take an interest in the home and have visited it within the last few years. There is accommodation for nine women at present. This home has been in continuous use for over 300 years.

The Walkin Street Poor House, formerly known as Fr. Tobin's Poor House. This was built in the last years of the 17th century and endowed under his will in 1699. Fr. Tobin was a member of the Tobin (St. Anbyn) family of Leyrath. Having served its original purpose for almost 200 years, the Home was taken down in 1897, and its endowments transferred to premises on the opposite side of Walkin Street. The Friary now stands on the original site. This Home continues to the present day and accommodates three men and three women.

St. James Asylum, Castle Road, founded and endowed by a philanthropic gentleman James Switzer, in 1803, for the relief of 20 females. He was a builder and made his money principally by taking contracts for the building of the military barracks and other works of this kind. The Home still continues under its original endowments and accommodates eight women.

Evan's Asylum, John Street, was endowed in 1818 by Mr. Joseph Evens, of Belevan, Ballyfrunk. His bequest was of a truly magnificent nature, amounting to £1,570, per annum, divided between different hospitals and charitable institutions etc. In this home there is accommodation for 12 men and 12 women. It is administered by a board of five trustees. This Home continues in use for both men and women.

St. Patrick's Widows Home, Callan Road. Rev. William Lonergan, from Dunbell parish of Clara, died in December, 1830. In his will he made provision for the building and endowment of a Widows Home. The provision was carried out and it is known as St. Patrick's Widows Home, Callan Road.

His successor was the Very Rev. Nicholas Shearman, son of Robert Shearman, of High St., Kilkenny, a merchant and Mary Brennan, his wife. He was a most distinguished priest. He laid and blessed the foundation stone of St. Kieran's College in 1836. He died in 1842 and like Rev. William Lonergan, he bequeathed a sum of money for the establishment of a Widows Asylum, which was afterwards erected beside the former one,

on the Callan Road. They continued to be occupied until recently but have now been closed.

St. Canice's Widows Home. Very Rev. John Gorman became Pastor of St. Canice's in 1826. Where his uncle had been parish priest since 1802. Both Fr. Gorman and his uncle were born in Ballyragget and rest in St. Canices. Fr. John Gorman completed the building of St. Canice's Church which his uncle had started on 17th March, 1824. Later in 1864 he built and endowed the St. Canice's Widows Asylum. This is still in use and gives a home to eight inmates.

Chapel Lane Alms House. In 1868 Mr. John Hudson willed two of his houses in Chapel Lane for Alms Houses and left money to have them repaired and he also endowed them generously. They are governed by a committee, the minutes of whose meetings go back to 1896. They continue in use up to the present time and give home to six inmates.

These Alms Houses of Kilkenny, are a living testimonial to the generosity of their benefactors. Most of them are still in use and are continuing to fulfill the charitable intentions of their founders.

CHRISTMAS PARTY, 1963.

Songs and musical items contributed by — Miss May Walsh, Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Cassidy, Mrs. Reid, Mr. Fitzgerald and Mr. Jordan. The following "shortettes" were contributed —

Textiles in Kilkenny by Mr. Pat Walsh.

Patrick Kavanagh's Visit by Mr. Frank McEvoy.

Ballad of the Freneys by Miss Helen Lanigan.

Sport in Kilkenny by Miss S. de Montmorency (now Mrs. S. Fitzgerald).

Alms Houses of Kilkenny by Miss Dorcas Birthistle.

Irishtown and Englishtown boundaries by Mr. Peter Smithwick.

100 years of Kilkenny Hounds by Miss Deirdre Leahy.

Bishop Minogue of Sacramento by Miss Molly Cassin.

The Walker Caterpillar Track by Miss B. Gibbons.

Duelling in the 18th Century by Miss Rita Harte.

John Hogan, Historian by Mr. James Delaney.