

The image shows the exterior of a large, white, multi-story building with a dark roof and several dormer windows. In the foreground, there is a stone monument with a shield-shaped emblem. To the right of the monument, a sign reads "ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY RECREATION". A blue sign in the foreground says "SCHOOL CARS ONLY".

# History of St Louis Community School Kiltimagh

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By Caoimhe Walsh

# Father Denis O' Hara

Denis O'Hara was born in 1850 in Cloonacool, near Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo. His father was a farmer and his mother looked after the house. He received an early education at Cloonancool National School. Later, he attended a Latin school attached to St Nathy's cathedral in Ballaghaderreen. He started attending Maynooth College in 1867 and was ordained in 1872. He then went to the parish of Kiltimagh Co. Mayo, where he worked for 2 years. He left for Curry, Co. Sligo, and spent another 2 years there working as a curate. He was to become the new Bishop of Achonry, however this did not happen, and he returned to Kiltimagh as a parish priest, where he remained for the rest of his life, helping the people in the community.



# The Arrival of the St Louis Sisters

Father Denis O' Hara invited 6 St Louis Sisters to Kiltimagh from their convent in Monaghan. Their names were Sister Mary Philomena Lynch( Superior), Sister Augustine Roche, Sister M. Liquorice Cloran, Sister M. Roch Joseph Hickey, Sister Kathleen O' Callaghan and Sister Francis McGrath. They travelled by train via Enniskillen, Ballisodare and Collooney to Kiltimagh. Father Denis O' Hara boarded the train at Collooney to formally lead the sisters into Kiltimagh. They were greeted at the station by a cheering crowd. They were then driven to the church in Kiltimagh to be introduced to the local people.



# The Technical School

The Sisters set up a technical school to educate the women and girls in the area on how to make clothes, how to do laundry, poultry-keeping, cookery and bee-keeping. A lace class was later introduced in the school. The technical school flourished. The Sisters began to learn more skills to be able to pass them on to the students in the school.



# St. Aidans

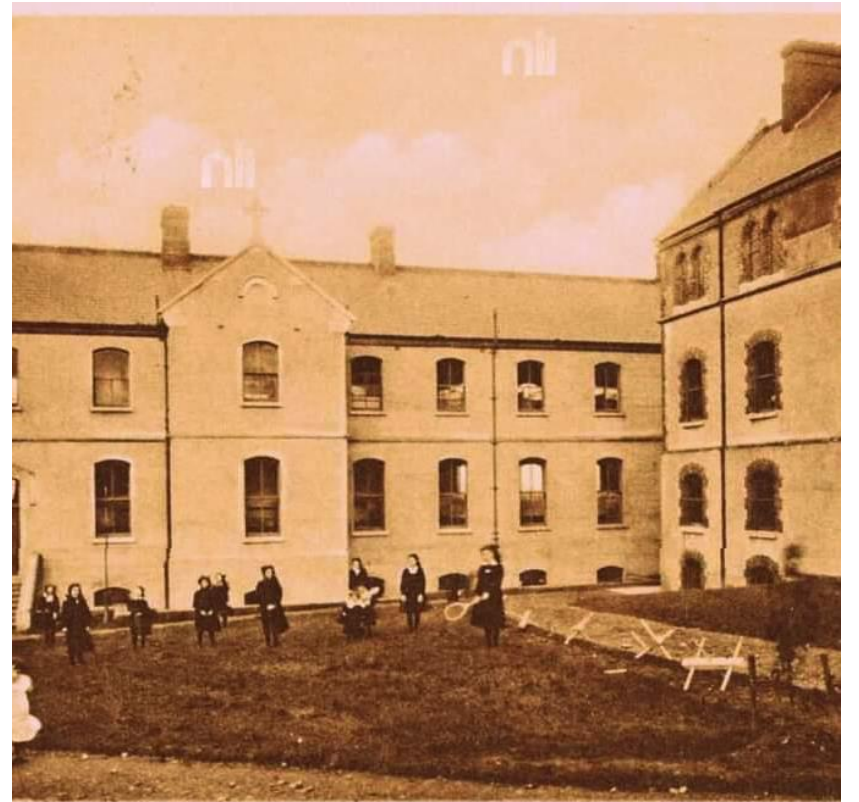
After the teacher in Mount Browne school retired. Father Denis had the school join the young children's school at St Aidan's. Then in 1898, the Boarding school opened with 13 students attending. The annals described it as "the new building with our lovely new chapel on the top floor with its beautiful panelling and stained glass" this became the library.



# The Boarding School

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In 1898 a boarding school was opened with 13 children attending. The school was called St. Philomena's boarding school. By 1901 it had 50 pupils and three teachers. The school taught religion, English, French, Latin, German, Italian, Painting, dancing, Music, Singing, Domestic Economy, plain and fancy Needlework. Presumably, Maths is included. Science was taught later on. However, only 15 students wanted to study for exams as "their parents consider it injurious to their health". Six years later in 1909, two girls won scholarships to Galway university.



*Convent of St. Louis, Kiltimagh. Junior Wing of Boarding School*

# The Sister's Work


By 1907 they ran the Technical school with over 200 girls , the National school and the Boarding school which now had about 90 girls. A lot of students were doing music and London college exams from the start. The Sisters also visited the sick and the poor all over the area. The Sisters spent much of the summer taking courses to improve their skills and qualifications. They travelled long distances to attend these courses.





# The Epidemic

Unfortunately, in 1908 there was an outbreak of typhoid in the Boarding school leaving some of the students very ill. The disease was very contagious and very often fatal. It must have been difficult to get the children that were not sick out of the school. Two of the Sisters stayed to look after the sick children. Many of the children that had been sent home developed the illness a few days after they arrived home. The Sisters invited all of the students back to the school to be looked after. 35 students were nursed altogether along with the two Sisters that stayed as they had also contracted the disease. Father Denis said an extra Mass in the convent because the local people in the area didn't want the students to go to the church while there was a fever in the school.





# Libel

The school was later accused of feeding the students contaminated meat in a national journal. The school had been carefully built up over 10 years and was now facing a setback , first the illness and now libel. The bishop eventually decided to take the publishers to court. Before the court hearing took place the publisher withdrew and published an apology. The Sisters actions spoke a clear message to the community. The Boarding school saw a huge increase in numbers by 50% as it went from the fallen 70 students to 124 students. Mother Philomena Lynch was so stressed by the whole incident that she became ill and went back to Monaghan where she later passed away in 1914.





# Independence

Before and after the Easter Rising, there was a new political awareness. James Connolly's widow went to see her two children in the Boarding school. By 1917 there were hints that the political affairs nationally had begun to cause concern in the community with split political loyalties.

# Amalgamation

In 1918, the Kiltimagh Community acquired the Balla property and moved the "Preps" out there with a different community and staff. They planned to make it a junior department for Kiltimagh. However, this did not happen because of serious difficulties occurred in the communities. By 1920 both houses had been amalgamated with Monaghan. A new phase of Kiltimagh life began, and Balla became a separate foundation. This did not change the quality of education available in Kiltimagh. Then, in 1922, they suffered another setback, the death of Father Denis O' Hara.



# The 1930's and 40's

In 1930, the electric light is turned on in the convent for the first time. 115 Boarders attended St Louis. Three more Sisters came to Kiltimagh in 1933. St Louis came first place in the All-Ireland Shield for Irish. The Boarding school students won first place in the Drama Festival in Dublin's mansion house. The 1940's recorded the first of huge pilgrimages for peace to Knock. About 20,000 children went to pray for peace in the world, as war had broken out the year before. Mother Roch Joseph, the last foundress of St Louis Kiltimagh died in 1942.





## The 1950's

In 1952, a new building was built costing between £45,000 and £50,000. It took 2 years to complete. The sanctuary windows, made from stained glass, were admired greatly by the visitors. The Commercial school was moved to Coláiste Íosa. A fire broke out in Concert Hall furnace, in 1956. One of the students discovered it in time. The Sisters and men from the community brought it under control before Castlebar Fire Brigade arrived. A cold storage chamber was constructed in the convent square to replace the old meat safe. In 1958 Eamonn de Valera attended a funeral in Kiltimagh and following the funeral he had lunch in the convent and was entertained by a group of students.

# The 1960's and 70's

100 pupils from the Convent National School went to Dublin on their first educational tour, and got to visit the Zoo, Museums and Galleries. In 1973, boys enrolled in the school for the first time and the boarding school was phased out.





# The 1980's and 90's

New Science labs were built in 1983. 1 year later, the girls left the Convent Primary school for the last time. Plans were made for the new co-educational Primary school on the site the St Louis Sisters generously donated .In 1988 a new primary school was opened. In 1992, the Sisters moved out of the school and into a private residence in the town. St. Louis Community School was founded in 1993 when St. Louis Secondary School and Coláiste Raifteirí Vocational school amalgamated.

# 2004

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The school underwent a complete transformation. Over 40 classrooms, a gym, labs and a kitchen and the most modern school facilities were added, making the school a warmer, modern and more up to date school. This transformation took two years and heralded the beginning of a new era in the St. Louis history and the opening of a new chapter in the story of St. Louis Community School.





# Recent times

In September 2020, a new building was added to the school which contains 7 classrooms and a multi-purpose room. The school has seen changes since Covid-19 started. There is a one-way system in operation, masks must be worn, social distancing where possible, sanitising your hands and workspace and keeping the windows and doors open.





# Sources

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