

# The Written Memory of St. Mary's University College, Dublin (1893–1912)

The Pioneer College for the Higher Education  
of Catholic Women in Ireland

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**ABSTRACT** St. Mary's University College, 28 Merrion Square, Dublin, was the first establishment in Ireland to provide for the university education of Catholic women, and its records testify to a revolution in female education. Originally generated to support its foundation and function, these records now provide information on the administration, actions, and achievements of this institution established in the 19th century by the Dominican Sisters of Eccles Street, Dublin. Both the *University Education (Ireland) Act, 1879* and the *Irish Universities Act, 1908* provide the fundamental context of their creation and original function. Although not all items are afforded consideration, this survey provides a sense of the variety and extent of the records preserved, discusses the motivations that favoured their preservation, and asserts that the records demonstrate an archival sensibility ahead of written norms and obligations. The records that now survive provide authoritative evidence of the manner and means of the foundation of St. Mary's and of its purpose, character, context, and demise.

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**RÉSUMÉ** St. Mary's University College, 28 Merrion Square, Dublin, a été le premier établissement en Irlande à fournir une éducation universitaire aux femmes catholiques et ses documents témoignent d'une révolution en matière d'éducation des femmes. Générés d'abord afin d'appuyer son établissement et ses fonctions, ces documents fournissent maintenant de l'information sur l'administration, les actions et les accomplissements de cette institution mise sur pied au XIXe siècle par les sœurs dominicaines d'Eccles Street à Dublin. La *University Education (Ireland) Act, 1879* et la *Irish Universities Act, 1908* offrent toutes deux le contexte fondamental de leur création et de leur fonction initiale. Bien que chaque item ne soit pas abordé, ce recensement offre une idée de la variété et de l'étendue des dossiers conservés, élabore sur les motivations derrière leur conservation et avance que les dossiers témoignent d'une sensibilité archivistique qui dépasse les obligations et les normes écrites. Les documents qui sont survécus fournissent un témoignage fiable de la façon dont St. Mary's a été fondée, de sa mission, ses caractéristiques, son contexte et sa disparition.

## Introduction

*Archives are those records, created or received by a person, a family, an organization, a business or a government in the course of their life and work, which merit preservation because they provide enduring value: because they provide evidence of or information about either the functions, responsibilities, actions or transactions of the creator or about the life and time in which the creator conducted his or her affairs and the society in which he or she lived and worked.*<sup>1</sup>

When the integrity of their content, structure, and context are maintained, records provide “a unique sequence of evidence.”<sup>2</sup> The records created by St. Mary’s University College, 28 Merrion Square, Dublin, Ireland, in the course of its life and work are also unique for another reason: as the records of “the first establishment in Ireland to make university education possible for Catholic women,”<sup>3</sup> they testify to “a revolution in female education.”<sup>4</sup> They are “a form of written ‘memory,’”<sup>5</sup> providing information on the administration, actions, and achievements of an institution established in the 19th century by the Dominican Sisters of Eccles Street, Dublin.

The records of St. Mary’s University College were created in response to two acts of parliament regarding university education in Ireland, the *University Education (Ireland) Act, 1879* and the *Irish Universities Act, 1908*. The former resulted in the creation of records to support the foundation and function of St. Mary’s University College. The latter occasioned the creation of a collection of records associated with an unsuccessful application from St. Mary’s to the National University of Ireland (NUI) for recognition as a women’s college. The present records survey intends to examine the records preserved and the combination of motivations that favoured their preservation, adhering to the chronological order of the acts of parliament that prompted their creation. Not every item from St. Mary’s will be given consideration but only such as is necessary

1 Laura A. Millar, *Archives: Principles and Practices*, Principles and Practice in Records Management and Archives, ed. Geoffrey Yeo (London: Facet Publishing, 2010), 3.

2 *Ibid.*, 9.

3 Máire M. Kealy, *Dominican Education in Ireland 1820–1930* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 130.

4 Eileen Breathnach, “Women and Higher Education in Ireland (1879–1914),” *The Crane Bag* 4, no. 1 (1980): 48.

5 Millar, *Archives*, 5.

to provide a sense of the extent and variety of the records preserved and the rationale that contributed to their preservation.

The records are the property of the General Archives of the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Catherine of Siena, Cabra, Dublin. They consist of Box 128 (containing folders E7/1, E7/3–4, and E7/6–36) and oversized boxes accommodating the minutes of the governing council of St. Mary's (E7/2) and the general register (E7/5). An unpublished catalogue of the congregation's archives is available to users at the General Archives.<sup>6</sup>

The records have been afforded relatively little attention since their arrangement and description in the 1980s, although they were of evident value to Máire M. Kealy, as demonstrated in the pages of her book *Dominican Education in Ireland 1820–1930*. In addition to their obvious value for the history of women religious and their contribution to education, the extant records of St. Mary's University College also merit further examination regarding the status of women and their response to structural inequality. Further, champions of inclusion will find in such records the evidence of a triumph by Catholic women over prejudice and exclusion. Users' attention might also be attracted by the consideration of the personal and social benefits of access to education as documented in these records.

The present study serves primarily to introduce a collection of records the full measure of whose importance will only be disclosed by further perusal and scrutiny. At the same time, it might serve to highlight the enduring value of archival records to an extensive and varied range of users, often well beyond the expectations of those responsible for their creation and preservation.

## The University Education (Ireland) Act, 1879

The first university in Ireland to admit women to degrees, the Royal University of Ireland, was established in 1879 as an examining board, and "women were . . . expected to source their own teaching without any support from university

6 Dominique Horgan and Marianne Cosgrave, "Catalogue of the *Archivium Generale*: Congregation of the Irish Dominican Sisters."

authorities.”<sup>7</sup> Thus it was that in 1885, Mother Patrick Shiel introduced university classes to the Dominican College, Eccles Street, a secondary school. In 1893, a new institution, St. Mary’s University College, was established at 28 Merrion Square, Dublin; it remained there until it moved to Muckross Park, Dublin, in 1900, before its transfer to Eccles Street a few years later.

### Episcopal Correspondence

The record of the establishment of St. Mary’s University College is not provided by charter but by a collection of 30 letters from William J. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin (1885–1921), to Mother Clare Elliott, the Prioress of Sion Hill, Dublin, and to Mother Patrick Sheil.<sup>8</sup> In one of these, he declared, “the important work . . . in the cause of Catholic Education . . . has my blessing.”<sup>9</sup>

In naming the institution, the archbishop was anxious to avoid reference to “young ladies,” which description he felt was “an abomination.”<sup>10</sup> Nor was the institution to be styled “a Dominican College.” Such a title would, he feared, impede its standing as “the common centre” and fail to attract potential candidates educated by other religious congregations.

The same collection of correspondence also records his appointment of a governing council for St. Mary’s and records the satisfaction of “the gentlemen” at the invitation extended to them to join the council.

Initial retention of the correspondence would have been determined by quite practical considerations rather than by any sense of obsequiousness or deference. Religious sisters were well aware of the importance of official episcopal correspondence, particularly in relation to new initiatives. In this instance, such awareness received formal expression in 1930, two years after Eccles Street and various other foundations of Dominican sisters amalgamated to form the Congregation of Irish Dominican Sisters. The first edition of the *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Irish Dominican Sisters*, published in 1930, required

7 Judith Harford, “Women and the Irish University Question,” in *Have Women Made a Difference? Women in Irish Universities 1850–2010*, ed. Judith Harford and Claire Rush (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2010), 13.

8 General Archives of the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Catherine of Siena, Cabra, St. Mary’s University College (hereafter cited as General Archives, Cabra), E7/1, William J. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin (1885–1921) to [Mother Clare Elliott], Prioress of Sion Hill, and Mother Patrick Sheil, 24 March 1893 – 30 November 1896.

9 See General Archives, Cabra, E7/1, William J. Walsh to Mother Clare Elliott, 5 August 1893.

10 Ibid.

the preservation of “documents from the local ordinaries”<sup>11</sup> and “documents of interest to the congregation.”<sup>12</sup>

A subsequent edition further required preservation of “copies of documents coming from . . . bishops, and the local ordinary relative to the house or the work of the sisters”<sup>13</sup> and “documents connected with the . . . history of the house or of general importance to the community.”<sup>14</sup>

The motive for preservation is articulated exclusively in relation to the interests of the community or the congregation and may well be described as internal. However, the preservation of such correspondence must also have had an external motive: it ensured an ability both to prove that “the important work . . . in the cause of Catholic Education,” from its very inception, had episcopal approval<sup>15</sup> and to document the filial obedience so often required of religious by ecclesiastical authorities and their successors.

### General Register

Among the institutional records preserved is the general register of St. Mary's University College.<sup>16</sup> As one would expect in relation to an academic institution, it recorded for quite practical purposes the names and addresses of those who attended St. Mary's as well as the dates of their admission to and departure from the college. It also listed the classes attended and the examination results achieved at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Annotations indicate an effort to compile annual totals of academic achievements, possibly to support the application for recognition of St. Mary's University College by the National University of Ireland in 1911 – an application that was accompanied by a table of the results achieved by students of St. Mary's from 1886 to 1909.<sup>17</sup> Again, the practical purpose of such a register is demonstrated

11 *The Rule of St. Augustine & the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Irish Dominican Sisters under the Protection of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary & of Saint Catherine of Siena* (Dublin: n.p., 1930), art. 544, (b).

12 *Ibid.*, (j).

13 *The Rule of St. Augustine & the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Irish Dominican Sisters under the Protection of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary & of St Catherine of Siena* (Dublin: n.p., 1947), art. 402, (a).

14 *Ibid.*, (f).

15 See General Archives, Cabra, E7/1, William J. Walsh to Mother Clare Elliott, 5 August 1893.

16 See General Archives, Cabra, E7/5, General register, September 1893 – October 1912.

17 See General Archives, Cabra, E7/29, Application for recognition of St. Mary's University College as a recognized college of the NUI, 1911.

by a letter of 10 December 1909 from the president of University College Dublin requesting testimonials for a number of former students of St. Mary's who subsequently wished to attend UCD.<sup>18</sup>

### Minutes of the College Council

At the time of their creation, the minutes of the college council<sup>19</sup> of St. Mary's served as the official record of discussions held and decisions taken during the first years of the college's existence and would have allowed useful review of the implementation of decisions at subsequent meetings. At the first meeting of the council, on 10 October 1893, it was noted that "the number of pupils already on the rolls was forty-two and that applications for admission were being daily received." Subsequent meetings of the council afforded regular attention to the working of the college, the success of its students, and the best means of allocating the sum of £100 donated each year by William J. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, for the founding of scholarships and prizes.

Not all matters discussed by the council were so pleasant. An address delivered at the opening of St. Mary's Literary Society in 1894 earned the most jaundiced disapproval of the council. On a separate note, a letter of protest from a disgruntled father regarding payment of a special fee for his daughter to be instructed in Greek obliged the council to determine the minimum number of pupils required for a course to proceed on ordinary terms and without additional expense to pupils.

### Prospectus

A prospectus of St. Mary's University College,<sup>20</sup> designed and printed to encourage prospective students to apply for admission, contains information regarding its foundation in 1893 "for the Higher Education of Ladies,"<sup>21</sup> its management by the Dominican sisters, and its enjoyment of the patronage of the archbishop of Dublin. St. Mary's pedigree is further promoted by informa-

18 See General Archives, Cabra, E7/25, President of UCD to the rectress of St. Mary's University College requesting testimonials, 10 December 1909.

19 See General Archives, Cabra, E7/2, Minutes of meetings of the council of St. Mary's University College, 10 October 1893 – November 1897.

20 General Archives, Cabra, E7/8, Prospectus, n.d.

21 Ibid.

tion regarding the college council and the association of its members with the senate of the Royal University of Ireland, commissioners of education in Ireland, and the heads of colleges and schools. Details are provided regarding fees and an extensive list of subjects, including “Greek language and literature . . . philosophy, mental and moral . . . physical, political and historical geography.”<sup>22</sup> Other subjects listed include German, Italian, and Spanish; Celtic language, literature, and history; mathematical and experimental physics; painting in oil and water colours; instrumental and vocal music; and the theory and practice of education.

### St. Mary's Literary Academy

The minutes of St. Mary's Literary Academy reveal that its members had occasion to hear “a most interesting account of the spirit and practice of chivalry” and a discourse regarding “the domestic life” of a Norman castle. On another occasion, “the youthful lecturer,” a Miss O'Brien, gave “a most able and charming essay on Shakespeare's theories.” On 23 January 1900, arising from a discourse on painting and music, a Miss Hazlett noted that “low” minds were not able to enjoy “the higher forms of music” and also observed that “music draws together a larger crowd of ignorant people than other arts can do.”<sup>23</sup> Together with programs for concerts by St. Mary's Choral Society from 1894 to 1897,<sup>24</sup> the prospectus and the minutes of the meetings of St. Mary's Literary Academy<sup>25</sup> provide evidence of the intellectual and cultural world of St. Mary's and Ireland a century ago.

Of course, appeal can again be made to the *Constitutions*, the requirements to preserve documents of interest to the congregation or community, and the existence of such an archival sensibility even prior to written norms and obligations. However, the Dominican sisters were also aware of the significance of their efforts in founding “the pioneer college for the higher education of Catholic women.”<sup>26</sup> That the *Book of Annals* of Sion Hill Convent, published in 1904, noted that a student of St. Mary's won “the highest and the most honourable, and . . . the most coveted . . . among the prizes and distinctions that the

22 Ibid.

23 General Archives, Cabra, E7/3, Minutes of the meeting of St. Mary's Literary Academy, 23 January 1900.

24 See General Archives, Cabra, E7/12, Programs for concerts by St. Mary's Choral Society, 1894–1897.

25 General Archives, Cabra, E7/3, Minutes of meetings of St. Mary's Literary Academy, April 1893 – November 1911.

26 General Archives, Cabra, E7/27, Circular letter of appeal for support for St. Mary's application for recognition, 27 May 1911.



Royal University has reserved as rewards for the most brilliantly distinguished graduates”<sup>27</sup> suggests that the Dominican sisters also felt a just pride in their achievements, and this sentiment must be accommodated by any explanation put forward regarding the preservation of St. Mary’s records.

Preparation and publication of the *Book of Annals* of Sion Hill Convent in 1904 commemorated the golden jubilee of the foundation of the convent, from which Eccles Street itself was founded in 1882. The publication drew extensively on primary sources and may well have fostered an awareness of the importance of the records for eventual historical research long before amalgamation in 1928 and the subsequent publication of the *Constitutions*.

## The Irish Universities Act, 1908

In 1908, the *Irish Universities Act* established two new universities in Ireland: Queen’s University, at Belfast, and the National University of Ireland, with constituent colleges at Cork, Dublin, and Galway. While the *University Education (Ireland) Act, 1879* resulted in the foundation of St. Mary’s University College by the Dominican Sisters of Eccles Street, the Act of 1908 prompted an unsuccessful application from St. Mary’s to the NUI for recognition as a women’s college.

The records relevant to St. Mary’s subsequent to the *Irish Universities Act, 1908* suggest quite a purposeful preservation of material. Indeed, the records preserved convey the drama and disappointment as “the pioneer college for the higher education of Catholic women”<sup>28</sup> failed to obtain the desired recognition.

### A Statute for the NUI

For instance, among the records preserved is a copy of the *Irish Universities Act, 1908: A Statute for the NUI*,<sup>29</sup> a printed and revised draft of the act of charter for the university to have its seat in Belfast,<sup>30</sup> and a printed and revised draft

27 William J. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, Speech at distribution of prizes, St. Mary’s University College, 1 November 1895, in *Book of Annals: Sion Hill Convent* (Dublin: Browne & Nowlan, 1904), 242.

28 General Archives, Cabra, E7/27, Circular letter of appeal for support for St. Mary’s application for recognition, 27 May 1911.

29 General Archives, Cabra, E7/14, *Irish Universities Act 1908: A Statute for the NUI*, 1909.

30 General Archives, Cabra, E7/16, Revised draft of the act of charter for the university to have its seat in Belfast, 1908.

of a charter for a college to have its seat in Dublin.<sup>31</sup> The preservation of such statutory or official documents, the beginning of the end for St. Mary's, is unique in its archive.

### **Petition to Gerald Balfour, MP and Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant for Ireland**

Of a different character is a printed general petition<sup>32</sup> “to most urgently solicit . . . support and interest”<sup>33</sup> from Gerald Balfour, MP and Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant for Ireland, in favour of “the claims of women to share in the benefits of Higher Education provided for Ireland.”<sup>34</sup> Not only does the petition reflect the situation in Ireland at the beginning of the 20th century, it also contributes to an understanding of the ambitions that had prompted the foundation of St. Mary's in the last decades of the previous century.

### **Correspondence, Petition, and a Circular Letter**

From 22 October 1909 to 25 July 1911, the efforts of the Dominican sisters to obtain recognition of St. Mary's elicited a significant amount of correspondence offering or declining to support the application.<sup>35</sup> Patrick O'Connell, Bishop of Raphoe (1888–1922) and Archbishop of Armagh (1922–1925), offered the assurance of his support, while the principal of a Methodist grammar school in Dublin, Wesley College, pledged “to give the application his best attention and support.”<sup>36</sup> Douglas Hyde, an Irish academic, founder of the Gaelic League, and the first President of Ireland, declared himself in favour of the “the good work”<sup>37</sup> of St. Mary's University College, while the Lord Mayor of Dublin readily undertook “to support” St. Mary's application for recognition.<sup>38</sup> In addition, a petition was

31 General Archives, Cabra, E7/17, Revised draft of a charter for a college to have its seat in Dublin, 1908.

32 General Archives, Cabra, E7/18, Printed petition to Gerald Balfour, MP and Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant for Ireland, n.d.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 General Archives, Cabra, E7/22, Letters offering and declining to support the application for recognition, 22 October 1909 – 22 July 1911.

36 General Archives, Cabra, E7/22, Letter from Mr. Crawford, Wesley College, 10 January 1909.

37 General Archives, Cabra, E7/22, Letter from Mr. Douglas Hyde, 13 November 1909.

38 General Archives, Cabra, E7/22, Letter from the Lord Mayor of Dublin, 22 March 1910.

signed by some 3,000 individuals.<sup>39</sup> A manuscript list of the members of the senate of the National University of Ireland and of the governing body of University College Dublin,<sup>40</sup> as well as a circular letter intended to obtain support for St. Mary's application,<sup>41</sup> further document the intensive lobbying undertaken.

### Episcopal Correspondence

Letters from William J. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, from 19 October 1909 to 22 October 1911, to the prioress of Sion Hill Convent regarding the application for recognition of St. Mary's by the NUI<sup>42</sup> develop the narrative and consider the recognition of a women's college to be "a matter of . . . importance."<sup>43</sup>

### Application to NUI for Recognition of St. Mary's

A number of drafts of the application for recognition have been preserved<sup>44</sup> as has the final printed application of 1911.<sup>45</sup> In its plea for recognition of St. Mary's as a college of the NUI, it provided information on the principal subjects of study (Irish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, English language and literature, mathematics, experimental physics, and chemistry) as well as other areas of instruction (psychology, phonetics, voice production, blackboard drawing, and physical culture). In addition to noting that "the fees of the professors vary from five schillings a lecture to ten schillings,"<sup>46</sup> the application also noted the credentials of its academic staff and, where staff were lacking in formal credentials, urged that the qualification of such members of staff to impart instruction be judged by "the distinctions gained by their pupils . . . from the very beginning of the existence of the college."<sup>47</sup> The students' results from 1886 to 1909, based on the

39 General Archives, Cabra, E7/24, Lists of supporters of the application for recognition, n.d.

40 General Archives, Cabra, E7/26, Manuscript list of members of the NUI Senate and the UCD governing body, n.d.

41 General Archives, Cabra, E7/27, Circular letter of appeal for support for St. Mary's application for recognition, 27 May 1911.

42 General Archives, Cabra, E7/21, William J. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin (1885–1921), to the prioress of Sion Hill, 19 October 1909 – 22 October 1911.

43 General Archives, Cabra, E7/21, William J. Walsh to the prioress of Sion Hill, 21 May 1911.

44 General Archives, Cabra, E7/28, Drafts of application for recognition, n.d.

45 General Archives, Cabra, E7/29, Printed application for recognition of St. Mary's University College as a recognized college of the NUI, 1911.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

general register of St. Mary's University College, were provided in a tabulated form to add appropriate emphasis. The application also noted that the college was financed by fees from the students and "the private resources"<sup>48</sup> of the Dominican sisters.

### Rejection of Application

Somewhat poignant is the preservation of the letter of 11 November 1912, from the registrar of the NUI, informing the superior of St. Mary's in a single sentence that the senate could not comply with St. Mary's application for recognition, and so effectively putting an end to St. Mary's University College.<sup>49</sup>

The circumstances that led to the creation of these records are clear, and the requirements of the *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Irish Dominican Sisters* regarding "documents from the local ordinaries,"<sup>50</sup> "documents of interest to the congregation,"<sup>51</sup> and "documents connected with the . . . history of the house or of general importance to the community"<sup>52</sup> have already been noted.

However, the preservation of the records also suggests an archival sensibility. "One of the first steps in deciding whether or not to keep archives . . . is to consider their potential value as evidence, as proof of key actions, decisions or communications."<sup>53</sup> In this regard, it would be hard to criticize the individual responsible for preserving the records of St. Mary's University College arising from the *Irish Universities Act, 1908*, so well do the preserved records chronicle the decisions and actions involved while also depicting their context. Indeed, "a record does not . . . sit alone as an isolated item,"<sup>54</sup> and the integrity of content and context maintained in the archives of St. Mary's provides "a unique sequence of evidence"<sup>55</sup> and endows the preserved records with authority and reliability.

48 Ibid.

49 General Archives, Cabra, E7/34, Letter from the registrar, NUI, informing the superior, St. Mary's University College, that the senate could not comply with St. Mary's application for recognition, 11 November 1912.

50 *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Irish Dominican Sisters* (1930), art. 544, (b).

51 Ibid., (j).

52 *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Irish Dominican Sisters* (1947), art. 402, (f).

53 Millar, *Archives*, 20.

54 Ibid., 6.

55 Ibid., 9.

## Conclusion

The directives framed in the *Constitutions* of the newly founded congregation may well reflect a previous practice of safeguarding records, particularly in relation to correspondence from ecclesiastical superiors. In this regard, however, it is interesting to note that only episcopal correspondence survives from the early years of St. Mary's: there is no correspondence from proud or anxious parents or even from grateful alumnae. Nor does any correspondence from the academics who made up the staff of St. Mary's survive, to say nothing of any correspondence from the gentlemen of the college council. One is left to conclude that it was actually decided to preserve only the episcopal correspondence.

Although the paucity of visual material regarding the staff, students, and premises of the college is to be regretted, there may never have been any abundance of such material in the first place. It is also regrettable that there are no financial records of St. Mary's University College in the General Archives in Cabra, and a similar note of regret must be sounded regarding the absence of any catalogue of the contents of the library of St. Mary's. Perhaps their mundane character led them to be regarded as the less valuable records associated with the successes of the Dominican sisters and their students, or perhaps they simply found their way into the archives of Eccles Street and are held in the new convent at 204 Griffith Avenue, Dublin.

The pride of the sisters in their achievement and in the achievements of their students, coupled with an awareness of the significance of their efforts in founding "the pioneer college for the higher education of Catholic women,"<sup>56</sup> most certainly contributed to the preservation of a significant collection of the records created to support the foundation and function of St. Mary's University College in light of the *University Education (Ireland) Act, 1879*. Moreover, an archival sensibility is very evident in the records preserved "as proof of key actions, decisions or communications"<sup>57</sup> subsequent to the *Irish Universities Act, 1908* and the unsuccessful application from St. Mary's to the National University of Ireland for recognition as a women's college.

In my opinion, these records, which now survive as authoritative evidence

56 General Archives, Cabra, E7/27, Circular letter of appeal for support for St. Mary's application for recognition, 27 May 1911.

57 Millar, *Archives*, 20.

of the manner and means of the foundation of St. Mary's as well as its purpose, character, context, and demise, were preserved primarily and exclusively for the needs of the community.

The amalgamation in 1928 of various foundations of Dominican sisters, including Eccles Street, witnessed the formation of the Congregation of Irish Dominican Sisters. Among the administrative structures of the new congregation was the General Archives, and each convent was asked to contribute to its creation through the transfer of items of significance. It is quite possible that the records of St. Mary's University College were transferred to the General Archives at this point.

Quite probably, the celebration in 1978 of the golden jubilee of its foundation led the congregation to turn to the General Archives to document its history and achievements. This event may well also have thrust upon the congregation some recognition of an impending decline and a need to put affairs in order. Less than a decade later, work was undertaken to sort, arrange, and list the contents of the General Archives in Cabra, and it was then that the archives of St. Mary's University College acquired their present arrangement or simply that that arrangement was described. The records also acquired a new value for the Dominican sisters, who had come to recognize their potential interest to historians, social scientists, and educationalists and "the ever-increasing number of researchers analysing the contribution and influence of the religious in Irish life."<sup>58</sup>

In that regard, it is interesting to note a similar academic establishment, founded by the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Loreto sisters. In 1890, subsequent to the *University Education (Ireland) Act, 1879*, various schools of the institute in Ireland arranged classes to prepare alumnae for the examinations of the Royal University in Ireland. These regional university classes were merged, and Loreto College was established at 53 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, in 1894, a kilometre from St. Mary's University College, which was established at 28 Merrion Square, Dublin, the previous year. Moreover, the *Irish Universities Act, 1908* also prompted an application from Loreto College to the National University of Ireland for recognition as a women's college, an application that proved to be no more successful than that of St. Mary's.

A comparison of the extant records of both institutions promises to be an interesting field of inquiry and has the potential both to contribute to the history

58 Horgan and Cosgrave, "Catalogue of the *Archivium Generale*," Introduction.

of Catholic women's education in Ireland and to determine the existence of collaboration between the two institutions and their founders. It might also lift the veil on any rivalry between the Dominican sisters and the Loreto sisters, and their protégées.

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**BIOGRAPHY** A former rector of the Basilica of San Clemente, Rome, John M. Cunningham holds a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome. He is author of *The Basilica of St. Clement* (Rome: Basilica San Clemente, 2015); editor of *Sacrosanctum Concilium: Sacred Liturgy and the Second Vatican Council* (Wells, UK: Smenos Publications, 2015), the proceedings of the sixth Fota International Liturgical Conference, 2013; and contributor of a series of articles on the evolution of ecclesiastical legislation and the role of the archivist in the diocesan inquiry of the canonization process to the *Newsletter of the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 193 (2018): 64–103. He is a graduate of the Scuola Vaticana di Paleografia, Diplomatica e Archivistica, and holds an MA in historical archives from the National University of Ireland. He is the Provincial Archivist of the Order of Preachers in Ireland and Chairman of the Association for Church Archives of Ireland.