

Limerick County Infirmary

P49

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Introduction

Limerick County Infirmary was established in 1759, as a four bed charitable hospital located on Little Island. It was founded by two surgeons Sylvester O' Halloran, who also established the Royal College of Surgeons and developed a new method for the treatment of cataracts, and Giles Vandeleur. A new County infirmary was built in 1811 on Mulgrave Street developed into a new County Infirmary on Mulgrave Street, Limerick which was built in 1811 and operated until 1958. The surviving collection is not extensive, dating from 1835 and comprising mainly minute books of the Governors and the Managing Committee for the nineteenth century with some financial material and ward books for the twentieth century. The hospital operated under the 1765 County Infirmary Act and similar institutions were established in other counties including Clare, Meath and Dublin. Staff included an apothecary (paid £90 in 1842), a matron and a number of surgeons who operated in a voluntary capacity as the following resolution passed by the Governors illustrates. 'that Robert R. Gelstan Esq. be and is hereby elected Assistant Surgeon to this institution to act without salary' (21 April 1845)

The provision and funding of health services in Ireland in the eighteenth century depended very much on the benevolence of local individuals of wealth and standing and their sustained voluntary interest and support to ensure a reasonable standard of administration and organisation; Pigot's Directory of Ireland 1824 records that County Infirmary was 'a spacious structure, facing the gaol. The internal management of this praiseworthy institution does honour to those to whom it is confided.' The Infirmary was managed by a committee of Governors, elected for life, who met at least once year, and a Managing Committee, which was appointed by the Governors and met monthly. It was financed by a combination of Presentments awarded at Petty Sessions, Parliamentary Grants, Governor's Subscriptions, Petty Sessions Fines, and interest on bequests (including one under the will of Anne Banks in 1824), and a moiety of a perpetual yearly rent charged under the will of George Rose (1877) and Sir Henry Hartstonge.

The Infirmary received its main financial support from the Grand Jury Presentments, - in 1854 to receive an 'increased presentment of £700.' This was subsequently recommended by the Grand Jury at their Summer Assizes in 1861, which was seen as a double edged sword, as when this was subsequently recommended by the Grand Jury at their Summer Assizes in 1861, the Grand Jury also resolved to examine the issue of 15 beds in the County Infirmary, which were reserved for City Patients, and were thereby incurring a charge of £320 on the County- these beds were to have reverted to Barrington's hospital in 1832, but this had not taken effect.

The Governors main source of income was from presentments and they were fearful of refusing to implement the recommendations of the Grand Jury, which they considered to be 'injurious to the operation of the Institution'. (22 October 1873) These recommendations involved amalgamating the County Infirmary with Barrington's Hospital and the Fever Hospital and in 11 April 1874, which the Governors after discussions with the other hospitals concerned. In April 1874 the Governors were forced

to refuse admission to City patients and in order to raise funds decided to permit any resident who donated £1 annually, to recommend 3 patients for care.

The Governors also dealt with the acceptance of large tenders for supplies of food and coal and for the awarding of tenders for major building works including works approved in 1862 to increase accommodation – the works to be carried out by Joseph Fogarty, Architect and on foot of his report it was decided to divide the 107 beds between men and women with 62 beds allocated to men and 45 to women; it was also decided to implement a bye law limiting the stay of each patient to six weeks ‘except it be deemed prudent to prolong it’ (21 August 1862).

The issue of free admissions and the admission of City patients was a constant problem for the Governors and Managing Committee. In 1873 it was decided to accept paying patients admitted by Governors tickets. The hospital thereafter accepted paying patients sometimes at rates set by the Managing Committee or Governors. ‘A letter from the Garrison Doctor was read asking if soldiers wives and children would be admitted for treatment of general and infectious disease and at what rate. It was decided that a reply be sent stating that provided there was room and that the cases were not incurable or infectious that women and children would be admitted as a cost of 21/- of which respectively.’ P49 (9 March 1904). The Medical Annual and Practitioners Index 1885-86 records that the County Infirmary then had 70 beds, that admission was free or by payment of between 7s to 20 s a week.

The establishment of local government in 1898 under the Local Government Ireland Act meant changes to the Infirmary and they were obliged to instruct ‘to write to the Local Government Board for information as to what amount can be applied for to the County Council under the new Act’ (P49/4, 3 June 1899). As a result of the Act a new Joint Committee of Management was appointed with 22 members, 12 appointed by the County Council, 2 by the County Borough and 8 by the Governors. The Governors then appointed 2 life members- A. W Shaw and Thomas A. Ferguson and 6 annual governors: W. L. Hunt, Esq, F. Kennedy, Mrs O Brien, J. E. Goodbody, Lord Clarina and Lord White.

The issue of finance and the need to raise funds from private patients remained constant theme. At a meeting of the management committee on 13 September 1905 the Matron Miss Mayne reported that ‘in several instances patients came with free tickets and were admitted and that it was afterward found that many of them were well able to pay. Some when pressed paid a little but others refused to pay. She asked the assistance of the Governors to remedy this evil’. (P49/5 11 October 1905.) The worsening financial position of the Infirmary during this period was a cause of concern to the committee and it was proposed to limit the number of free tickets issued to the committee members and the subscribing Governors of the County Council. It was then decided to make the Matron and House Doctor liable for admission tickets that were irregularly filled in, an effort to control and reduce the number of free patients. In 1943 a weekly minimum charge of £1 per patient was approved to improve the financial position.

The Hospital was abolished in 1958 by Ministerial Order, and the building, assets and liabilities, transferred to Limerick Corporation. At a meeting on 20 December provisions for superannuation of staff and compensation to staff were outlined by the City Manager, Mr. Macken. The remaining patients were transferred to the City Home and Hospital.

The collection provides a detailed insight into hospital administration from 1835, the people and personalities and tracks developments in the increasing role of the estate in the provision of health services and transfer of responsibility for public health from the private benevolence of landowners to state institutions.

County Infirmary Governors Minute Book (1835-1920)

1. 10 January 1835 -12 June 1920 Minute Book of the meetings of the Governors of the Limerick County Infirmary, held quarterly pursuant to public notice, but more often held annually or bi-annually, attended by Governors- prominent local business people and land owners, generally elected for life on payment of a subscription, with some medical staff; Governors included the Bishop of Limerick, The Mayor of Limerick, the High Sheriff of Limerick, The Dean of Limerick, Thomas P. Vokes, William Monsell junior, Alderman D.F.G. Mahony, Francis P. Russell, Roger Scully, Henry Woodburne, Henry Watson, Reverend J. B. Costello, John Wilkinson, Richard Franklin (a surgeon), William Griffin, James Wilkinson junior [a surgeon] , Thomas Myles, John Griffin, Thomas Devitt, Thomas Wilkinson, Arthur Wilkinson, Richard Wilkinson, and Daniel Barrington; by 1873 membership included Richard Bourke, Thompson Russell, J. Boyd and Robert Gelston; by 1889 membership included Robert Hunt, J. F. Bannatyne, James Spaight, Captain Edward Croker, Joseph Matterson and Reverend Gregg, John Massey; from 1898 Alec William Shaw was in attendance and (generally acted as chairman), by 1900 governors included Lord Clarina, J.E. Goodbody and Malcolm O' Shaw; annual meetings involved the election of members to the Management Committee and those elected regularly included Lord Adare, the 'O' Grady', and Lord Clarina, while the Rector of the Parish of Mount St. Laurence and the Lord Bishop of Limerick acted for a time as ex-officio members of the Managing Committee; the Governors also appointed new 'governors for life', dealt with the appointment of staff, salaries, internal staff disputes and admissions policy; 'In consequence of the late Liberties of the City having been united to the County it is now resolved that the number of City Patients be limited for the future to 20'. (14 January 1843). The Governors also dealt with the acceptance of large tenders for supplies of food and coal, and for the awarding of tenders for building works, including works approved in 1862 to improve accommodation, to be carried out by Joseph Fogarty, Architect; meetings were held with declining regularity from 1900 as one meeting was held in 1915, the next in 1920, in the Council Chamber, 83 O' Connell Street, and was attended by 'Mrs O'Brien, Miss Croker, Mrs White, Courtenay Croker, D. L. William Walker D. L.' at which Lord Emly was elected to the chair; from 1934 there is a noted increase in the use of Irish, as the chairman signed the minutes in Irish and addressed was generally addressed in Irish.

c.200pp

Reports and Correspondence Received (1863-1902)

2. 10 July 1863. Letter from [J. Murray],
Ballysteen, Shanagolden to
James Guearin, Registrar,
County Infirmary, requesting that some tickets for admission to the hospital be
issued to him for on foot of the bequest of Mr. Rose.

3pp
3. 20 February 1902. Report of a sub committee
appointed to examine the
financial position of the
hospital, recommending a reduction in the number of free beds as the only
method of preventing the hospital from sinking into deeper debt.

2pp

Managing Committee Minute Books (1898-1958)

Minutes of the meetings of County Infirmary Managing Committee held monthly with a quorum of three; the committee dealt with the administration and financial management of the hospital, inspected accounts, received reports from medical staff and authorised the payment of salaries and other general expenditure, ' The Medical Staff were authorised to order a new surgical table for the operating room the old one to be used in surgery' (4 June 1898); the committee also dealt with admissions policy, staffing disputes and received reports from the matron and surgeons on the number of patients, received tenders and authorised repairs, maintenance and improvements; ' It having been found necessary to get a supply of town water for the operating room it was agreed that Messrs Shaw and Goodbody arrange for same to be laid on' . (8 March 1899); the committee also dealt with correspondence and sanctioned staff leave, 'It was arranged that the Matron be allowed one month's holidays the other nurses to get 3 weeks' (4 June 1898) The committee also dealt with general management policy. A new committee was formed as a result of the 1898 Local Government Act, called the Joint Managing Committee, and the first meeting took place on 3 June 1899 when some new rules for the holding of meetings were agreed; it was also agreed that a county councillor had the power to recommend free patients and that patients from outside the county should only be admitted on the authorisation of a member of the committee (P49/4, 3 June 1899) Meetings from 1900- 1903 are regularly concerned with the training of nurses in the Infirmary and the recognition of their qualifications by other hospitals and the Local Government Board; in February 1904 new Standing Orders were approved (P49/5), the committee received an increasing number of requests to reduce charges pleading inability to pay.

4. 5 February 1898-8 April 1903. c.130p
During this period A.W Shaw generally acted as chairman while W. L. Hunt acted as treasurer; E. Goodbody, Lord Clarina and F.G.M. Kennedy are regularly in attendance; from 1899 membership and attendance increased and members included; Mrs O' Brien, P. Shaugnessy, J.O. Neill, W. Clancy, W. Nunan, J. Geary, B. Collins and E. Sheehy. Alderman Prendergast and Mr. Duggan attended from 1 July 1899, Mr McGrath; The matron (Miss Mayne) and some doctors were normally in attendance.
5. 13 May 1903-11 March 1908. c.220pp
From 1903 members include J. Hogan, Mr. Naughton, J. B. Barrington, Mr Hurley, J.P. and C. Croker, D. L; A.W. Shaw acted as chairman until his resignation in March 1906; Courtenay Croker acted as chairman until October 1907, when the position of chairman was held by Maurice Connery; the chair alternated then between Revd. W. Casey, William Gubbins, and Patrick Vaughan; includes a note added to the minutes by the chairman A. W. Shaw 'The minutes are signed subject to a protest of 9 members to 8 that Dr. McGrath's Election was irregular'. (4 October 1903); this committee began to receive reports from a Visiting Committee
6. 8 April 1908-10 January 1917 c.250pp
During this period Lord Emly is generally chairman and new members include Mr Mitchell, Mr Hartigan and later P.J. Fitzgibbon, C. Hartigan, Captain White, later Mrs White; includes a report from Cyril E. Browne on book keeping procedures in the Infirmary, recommending that diet sheets be kept recording consumption (1 December 1908, 2pp); also includes reference to reports from the Ladies Committee one of which is critical of the Matron and lead to her dismissal (July 1909); includes letters from the Irish Steamship Company indicating increased difficulty in procuring supplies and the likelihood of rising prices.
7. 14 February 1917-9 January 1935 c.400pp
Lord Emly and later Courtenay Croker and E. Walsh (E.

Breathnach)acted as chairmen at the meetings while membership changed to include by 193; Mrs Farmer, Mrs Bennett, J. McCormick, M. Quinlan, Dr. Moloney, E. O. Brien, M. Shaw, D.J. Madden, Dr. Kennedy, E. O' Brien, P. Fitzgerald, J.W. Canty, John Brouder and A. Colbert. Includes a detailed diet sheet and a description of the duties of Lodgeman, inserted to the front of the volume; includes a report of an inspection by the Hospitals Sweepstake Trust and the Infirmary's application for £30,000 to be invested and to yield a yearly dividend of £1200.

8 13 February 1935-29 December 1958 c.450pp

Includes reports from the Finance Committee with E. Walsh as chairman; from September 1942 members include D. P. Quish, P.H. Donegan, Timothy O' Connell, John McCormick and from 1946-1952; Michael J. Carmody, and P.W. Ryan; includes a typescript minute of the final Special meeting of the Committee held on 20 December 1958, mainly concerning superannuation rights for staff on the closure of the hospital.

Financial Administration (1916-1956)

Finance Committee Minute Books (1916-1956)

Monthly meetings of the Finance Committee, containing the matron's report, examining quarterly and monthly accounts, general expenditure, quotations and sanctioning minor expenditure; 'the scrubbing brush and coal shovel applied for were granted', (11 July 1917); the committee examined patient charges and attempted to ensure payment and manage admissions; ' The Matron having been questioned about O' Brien who was 2 yrs in the Infirmary', (11 April 1917); House Surgeon's reports are included from 1923 'The House Surgeon's report was read and in connection with same it was ordered that the House Surgeon be granted her annual leave'. (13 July 1927)

9. 9 February 1916-12 February 1936 240pp

10. 11 March 1936- 6 October 1956 232pp

Abstracts of Accounts (1931-1957)

11. 31 December 1931-31 December 1957 Abstracts of Accounts of Limerick County Infirmary from 1931- 1947, and 1949- 1957, containing details of the Revenue Account and Capital Account, (and in 1931) a Sweepstakes Account; the Revenue Account included a summary of income and expenditure, including income from paying patients, subscriptions and dividends, and expenditure on provisions, stimulants, salaries, wages, drugs, dressings, surgical appliances, coal, gas, water and laundry; the Capital Account details securities held in shares and a statement of insurances; in 1931 the sweepstakes account indicates the level of income received in that year from the national sweepstakes account, (£27,343); includes a Statement of Accounts for the months ended 30 September 1939; from 1940 the accounts are described as ‘ Income and Expenditure Account’, ‘Extraordinary Income and Expenditure Account’ and a ‘Balance Sheet’; accounts for the year ending December 1940 include a draft with ms notes and a statement on the overdraft increase; accounts for the year ended 31 December 1943, contain comments on financial trends ‘it will be noted that the Direct Expenses of treating and maintaining a patient show a steadily rising tendency’.31 January 1944, p1. ; Accounts were prepared by C.W. Metcalfe, Accountants, 46 O Connell Street, Limerick, from 1931- 1940, by Thomas H. William, 101 O’ Connell Street, in 1940 and 1941 and by W.H. O’ Donnell, 90 O’ Connell Street from 1943- 1957.The returns for 1957 includes a Resident Medical Superintendent, B. Crawford’s report; ‘ A total of 775 patients were admitted into the Hospital during the year ended 31st December, 1957. These consisted of Medical, Surgical, Ear, Nose and Throat, Dental, Orthopaedic and Gynaecological Cases. In the Extern department there were 275 patients treated and the attendances numbered 978. In the X- ray Department the patients treated included Board pf Health, 2154, Hospital 417, giving a total of 2571.

29 items

12. 14 February 1939- 31 December 1955 File of completed copies of H.R.1 forms, submitted to the Hospital Commission for years ending 1939, 1944 and 1955, containing annual information on the number of beds in the hospital, occupancy, admissions, paying patients, average costs per patients, outpatients and an income and expenditure account.

3 items

13. 31 October 1939 Copy of a H.R. 4 form; ‘Estimate for the year ending 31st December 1940’,

- submitted to the Hospitals Commission.
- 1 item
14. 13 December 1943- 1 December 1957
- Copies of Form H.R. 1.
‘Analysis of payments for
Special Services rendered in
respect of In-Patients for the year ended 31st December - -’ ; a list of services
including X-ray with the amount received from various authorities for them is
listed under pre-printed column headings for the years ending 1947,1953, 1954
and 1955.
- 5 items
15. December 1957- December 1958
- Notebook listing monthly, the
[nursing] staff, and the
periods for which wages and
salaries were paid.
- 14ff

Female Floor Admissions Book (1941-1943)

16. 31 January 1941-14 November 1943
- Female Floor Admissions
Book listing under separate
columns admission details for
each patient including date of admission, name, age, address, ‘disease’, doctor,
whether they were admitted on a ticket (free) date of discharge, occupation or
occupation of husband or father .
- 140pp

X-Ray Registers (1934-1958)

X-Ray department registers, listing patient details in an alphabetical register by surname,
under the following columns; Date, Name of Patient, Address, By Whom recommended
(generally a Doctor), Disease ‘left ankle’, and remarks ‘ in hospital’.

17. 1 November 1934-1 December 1943 c.150pp
18. 13 October 1944-31 December 1951 c.130pp

19. 13 June 1957- 30 December 1958 Register of tuberculosis patient X- Ray's, chargeable to Limerick County Council, details include, patients' names, addresses, type and number of x -rays, (generally chest x-rays), the cost per x-ray and a monthly total billed to Limerick County Council.
c.120pp

Register of Deaths (1910-1948)

Register of death listing under separate columns; date of death, former residence of deceased, name and surname, male or female, marital status, age last birthday, rank, profession or occupation, cause of death, duration of illness, initials of officer, date when registered.

20. July 1910-18 November 1940 c. 40pp*
21. 19 December 1940- 16 January 1948 c. 40pp*

Rules for the Government of Limerick County Infirmary (1934)

22. 9 August 1934 'Rules for the Government of the County of Limerick Infirmary'.
24pp