

60 years ago: new Limerick hospital 'a wonder'

GRAINNE KEAYS, ARCHIVIST

ON April 25, 1955 – almost exactly 60 years ago – the Limerick Regional Hospital in Dooradoyle was officially opened and the Leader was there to capture the occasion for posterity. It represented the culmination of 20 years of planning and hard work – and Limerick had the distinction of being the provincial first centre in which one of the new regional hospitals was opened.

Limerick architect, Chevalier P. J. Sheahan, FRIAI, designed the building and it was built by Cork contractors, Murphy Brothers. (Sheahan had been made a Chevalier of the Order of St Sylvester by Pope Pius XII for his services to ecclesiastical architecture).

Described as a "wonder of architecture" at the time, the building was blessed by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev. Dr. O'Neill and officially opened by Minister for Health, T. F. O'Higgins, T.D. Among the many dignitaries who attended were Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick, the Rt. Rev. E. C. Hodges; Mayor of Limerick, G. E. Russell; Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, M. J. Keyes and County Manager, P.J. Meghan, B.E.

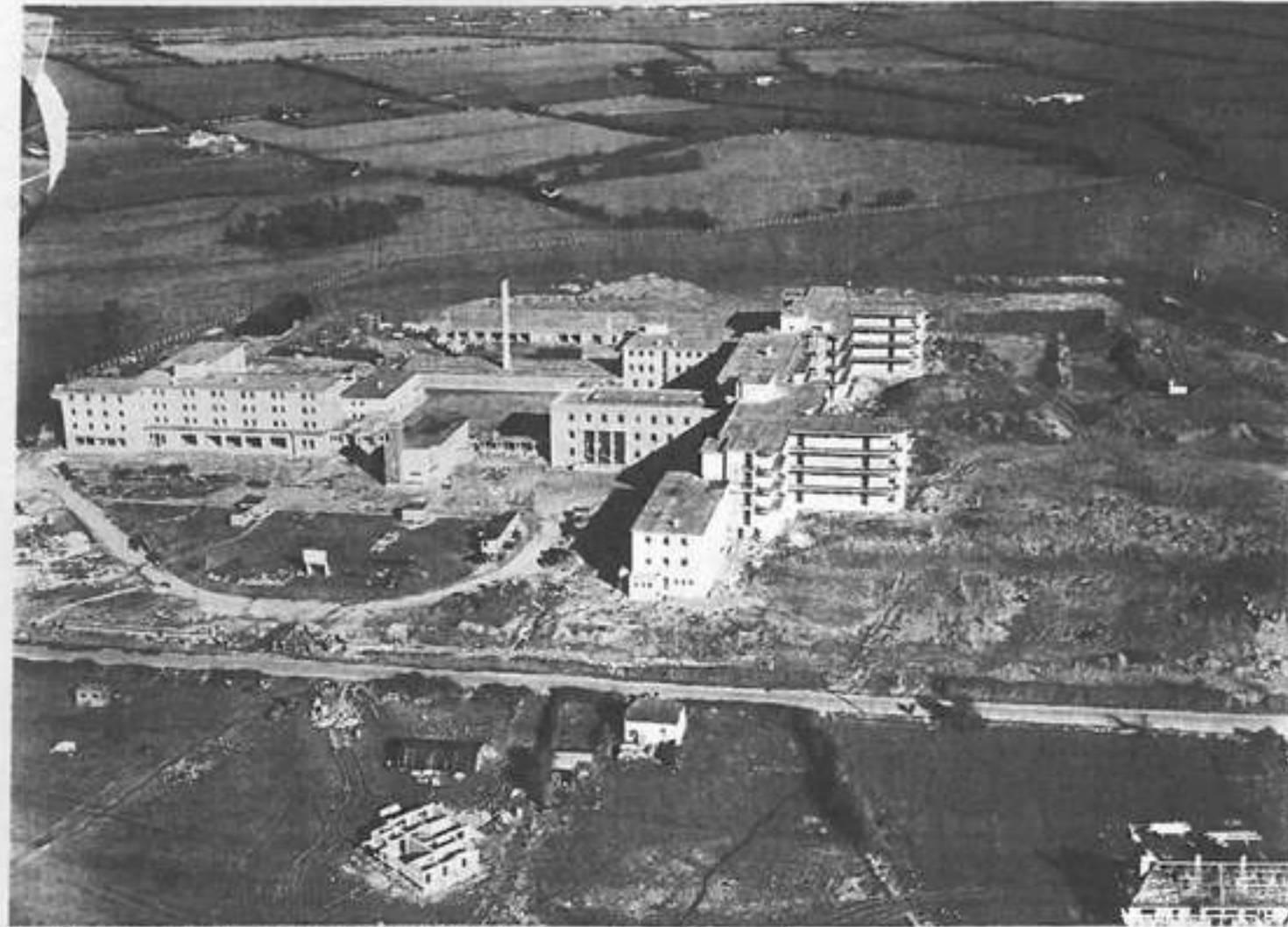
It was anticipated that the hospital would cost £120,000 annually to administer and maintain; £60,000 of this money was to come from the State's Health Grant, £50,000 from Limerick County Council and £10,000 from patient fees. Among the anticipated expenses were: salaries, £59,000; medicines £7,500; heating and lighting, £18,000 and, indicative of just how much times have changed, £19,000 for "food, drink and tobacco".

The hospital was to be run by nursing sisters from the Mercy Order.

Limerick Regional Hospital famously cost £1 million to build and this sum was funded in total by the Hospitals Trust Sweepstake Fund. Some lesser known facts about the hospital were published in the Limerick Leader of April 18, 1955, a week before the official opening.

■ The hospital provided its patients with 300 "personal radio outlets", an individual radio service to each patient using headphones, the latest in personal entertainment gadgetry at the time.

■ 78,000 tonnes of sand were used



An aerial view of Regional Hospital taken in May 1954

in the construction of the hospital and 3,000 tonnes of cement. 12 tonnes of paint used on the exterior alone.

■ The hospital had 2.5 miles of corridor and it took 4 acres of linoleum to cover the floors. 500 tonnes of asphalt were used in the roof. 50 miles of heating pipes and 250,000 feet of electric cabling were used. 180 electric clocks were fitted throughout the building. The hospital had 4000 lights, 1000 radiators, 1700 windows, 16 staircases and 5 lifts. The hospital's 100 phones were controlled by two exchanges.

■ The hospital site was planted with approximately 2000 trees.

■ 20,000 gallons of water per day were required to run the facility and were supplied by the city's water supply and, as the Leader's correspondent remarked at the time, "needless to say, the Corporation is not just giving it away".

The official opening was followed by a luncheon, hosted by Limerick

County Council, in the Desmond Hall at Cruise's Hotel. The speakers on the day had great aspirations for the new hospital. The Minister for Health felt sure that the opening was "the beginning of a very fine medical centre in Limerick [that would provide] the finest medical care and treatment".

Possibly the most interesting aspect of the speeches made at the luncheon was the idea expressed that the hospital represented more than simply the opening of a health facility. According to some speakers, it marked a milestone in the country's coming of age and in its development of an independent, post-colonial identity. For example, M. J. Collins, TD, Chairman of Limerick County Council, stated that the building of the Regional Hospital represented "the first real effort to abolish the hospital facilities and systems which alien rule had imposed on us" while D. J. Madden, T.D., MCC, referred to the old workhouses saying they were "a symbol of tyrannv and oppression

of an alien administration which inflicted on every section of the community a lasting and enduring wrong. Presumably, Cllr Madden was referencing the fact that existing Limerick hospitals of the day were housed in old workhouse buildings, including the hospital at Croom and the City Home (St Camillus') which acted as the city's fever hospital and sanatorium from the 1940s to the 1960s.

In addition to the superior treatments and care promised by the new hospital, other anticipated benefits included the provision of jobs for nurses, many of whom returned home from England to work there and also the hospital at Croom was freed up to become a designated orthopaedic hospital.

As it turned out the official opening was somewhat premature as the hospital was not ready to take patients. The first patients were not admitted until five months later, on September 21, 1955.



Dr D Costello; Mr MF Noonan, solicitor; Chevalier PJ Sheahan, FRIAI; Mr TF O'Higgins, Minister for Health; Mr PJ Meghan, county manager; Mr MJ Keyes, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs; Dr C McDonnell; His Lordship the Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev Dr O'Neill and Rev Fr PJ O'Callaghan, diocesan secretary, at the official opening of Limerick Regional Hospital, April 25 1955



The touring party examine the latest medical devices



A ministerial welcome at the Regional hospital



The official opening took place five months before any patients arrived