

# Cemetery records mirror Limerick life over 150 years



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## 42% of all deaths in 1870 were aged under 16

by Marie Hobbins

THE 16-acre site at Mount St Lawrence Cemetery contains the remains of some 70,000 individuals, interred between 1855 and 2009, and a new website is set to become an informative record of the families, well known personalities and men and women from all walks of life who rest there.

The primary burial place in the city for over 150 years, one of the most interesting statistics is that the earliest recorded grave in the cemetery register was a Thomondgate lady, named Mary Keane, who was 110 when she died and was buried on January 24, 1880.

The cemetery records throw up some very informative facts.

For instance, the average life expectancy was 38 years in the nineteenth century, there was a very high rate of infant mortality with 42% of all deaths recorded in 1870 being children under the age of 16.

Even as late as 1930, little had changed - the records show that in

that year, 30% of all deaths were those of children. By the following decade, however, the Limerick infant mortality rate dropped dramatically to 12%, and by 1970 it had dropped to 8%.

The records also show that the more prominent families tended to be buried along the central path, close

ground, as, following the 1830's cholera epidemics and the Great Famine in the 1840's, new burial grounds were needed in the city and Mount St Lawrence Cemetery was officially opened on March 29 1849 in a ceremony presided over by Dr John Ryan, Bishop of Limerick," informs City Hall's Environment

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to the neo-Gothic church, built in 1855, while the 'poor squares' were located at the extreme top of the burial ground, in the left hand corner and in the bottom right hand corner.

"Originally part of the medieval parish of St Lawrence in the South Liberties of Limerick, the cemetery was developed in land which also included a leper hospital (on grounds granted by King John, which later reverted to Limerick Corporation).

"Some of this land was then leased by Limerick Corporation to the Limerick Diocese for use as a burial

Department, which adds:

"The graveyard was the primary place of burial in the city for all strata of society, from the wealthy and influential to those who died in the Lunatic Asylum and the workhouse".

Burial records began in March 1855, but few burials seem to have taken place in the early years, possibly because people were reluctant to bury the deceased so far from the existing city graveyards. However, the burial register now records that over 70,000 individuals were interred in Mount St Lawrence

between 1855 and 2009, but the actual number is believed to be much higher.

The first records show that the burial of Ellen Sharkey, aged 53, took place on March 14, 1855 at location 90Ra: Agnes Moore of North Strand, aged four years, 10 months was buried on March 26, 1855, at location 101 Sa: Ellen Delaney, aged one, of Wellesley Place: Ellen Matthews, aged 22 of North Strand and Mary Enright, aged 60 of the Lunatic Asylum.

City Hall points out that the wall by the nearby railway line is divided numerically from 1 to 280.

"The wall bounding the hospital is divided alphabetically from A to Z and AA to EE - it is the intersection of these lines which provides the grave location."

The cemetery has some very fine examples of funeral monuments of the nineteenth century, which include the Manchester Martyrs Memorial, erected in 1890 in memory of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien, who were executed in 1867.

It was designed in the Celtic Revival style with a romanticised kneeling female figure representing Ireland, a Celtic Harp symbolising Irish freedom and a seated Irish wolfhound.