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Paul is a caretaker in Limerick School of Art and Design. Here he describes his memories and impressions of the building when the art college first moved here in the 1990s and the changes that have taken place since the art college has taken over.

Limerick School of Art and Design is housed in the former campus of the institutions of the Good Shepherd Sisters.

[Interview begins]

My name is Paul O'Shaughnessy. I am a caretaker in the art college. I was one of the first people to move in to the Good Shepherd convent after the nuns moved out. When we arrived at the time, it was surrounded by high walls. You couldn't see the gardens. There was one door and that was the main entrance. The buildings were joined by conservatory so you couldn't drive in and out the back. There were glasshouses out the back where they used to grow their own vegetables and stuff and the place was over run with wild cats.

There was one particular lady who used to come in every day. 12 and 6 o'clock she'd come in and the wild cats, they'd run away from everyone else but they used to surround her and she'd feed them. Her name was Elizabeth and she was one of the women in the convent. She had moved out with the nuns but she would come back every day. Obviously one of her jobs was to feed the cats and she continued that. So the cat situation got so out of hand that they were inter-breeding so eventually the vet gave her something to put into the food and all the cats, well they were drugged and then the vet came and put them all down because it was getting out of control. They were inter-breeding and taking the place over. She'd come in every day, 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock exactly. She'd come in the back gate and the cats were wild now. They wouldn't come near anybody but the minute she came in they would just go over and surround her and she'd be able to feed them. It's like she was somebody special you know.

But then in the print department there was a stage and every year Tom and Pascal at Christmas time would come and put on a performance. So then that stage was taken out and the place was renovated and new offices were put in and it's now the new print workshop. Out the front in the gardens there was two cemeteries [sic]. They were surrounded by hedging but they were divided by a footpath. All the nuns were buried there. Shortly after we arrived the local undertaker was here and they dug up the remains and they brought them to the local cemetery, Mount Saint Oliver's. So that job took a couple of weeks. It was snowing at the time. And it was just the nuns but seemingly it was the nuns' wishes. They

had the option of leaving the graveyards but seemingly it was their wishes, out of respect for the dead that they take them up. With parties and all the things that would be going on here they reckoned it wouldn't be very respectful. So they took them up and they were all re-interred.

There are cemeteries in Limerick here in St. Oliver's and St. Lawrence's where the women are buried. So if any of the women died today that are with the nuns now they are buried in Mount St. Oliver's. They have a big plot up there you know and they have a newer plot now in another section of it. But there weren't any of the women buried here and each grave only contained one nun. So when they were digging they knew when they were coming on one. Sometimes they came on a full coffin and they would lift it out and put it into a different coffin and other times then they would rake up bones and put them into a bucket and then they had these coffins and they'd fill the coffin with bones and then they'd bring five or six of them to the cemetery at one time. If they could they'd lift the coffin up and they had a bigger than normal coffin that they'd fit it into and just close it. But others then they were there so long they were raking with a hand rake to rake up the bones and put them into the other coffins and they'd bring about six at a time to the cemetery in the back of a van rather than having six hearses coming and going here all the time.

So the church then: The church isn't as old as the main building. I think it was built on much later but when we arrived there was pews [sic] on either side. The nuns had individual pews. They had a kneeler and underneath the kneeler, you lifted it up there was a place for their prayer book and there was an organ loft behind them then and they took out the organ and they sold it. It went to some church in County Cork. The organ loft is where the life drawing room is now. The room was only about ten feet wide at the most but then they extended it out. There were four archangels. They are still there. Seemingly it would have cost a thousand pounds to get rid of them. And the Stations of the Cross, they were taken down and they are gone up the country somewhere.

The builder that moved in then had the salvage rights of everything else in the church. The church had a circular altar with steps up, marble and a marble main altar. They were all taken out and as far as I know the altar is in some church. I'm not sure if it's Raheen church. It's one of the local churches anyway. There is a wood block floor in all of the three sides of the altar. That floor is still there. It's just covered with carpet. Now when you went in the door to the right of the altar you were leading in to a tunnel that led out and then turned left and went down to what is now the Health Centre. That was the orphanage where children were held. When they were coming to mass or coming to this building they came through the tunnel and up in to the church. This is the door now where the caretaker's office is

now. You could also come down into the tunnel from another side of the church. If you remember when you came here first there was a curved area where the first year storeroom was. You could go down the steps there and lead into the tunnel and you could come back into the church in two different places. The children could continue that way and come up into the building by coming that way as well rather than going to the church. It didn't look like a tunnel at the front, there were windows on it. But that was demolished and it's changed now. The new front is there now. But looking in to the side of the church from the front of the building there was a couple of buildings there. It's now the new reception area but that was the accommodation area for the visiting priests. There was a sitting room, bedroom and toilet so that if some priest came for a couple of days – he could be saying Mass here or something, he would stay a night or a couple of nights or whatever. That was demolished then to make way for the reception.

All the rooms in fashion, sculpture, in painting and in the first floor over print were all bedrooms. There was a corridor down the middle. This is in the first floor and the second floor. There was a corridor in the middle and there were individual bedrooms. Each bedroom had its own window. And then they were all knocked away and the spaces were opened up for big studios. There were dormitories in the attic. The attic was divided up into what I would call carrels. I didn't know if anyone lived there but there were toilets up there as well. And the attic overhead incorporated into the painting area so that when you go into the painting department you can actually see up to the roof, they took away the ceiling and left the rafters and you can see right up.

The public phone box was on the ground floor just outside the library, and where the computers are in the library at the moment was actually a corridor. It was an extension of the corridor outside the multimedia labs. It extended down that way but in the renovations they cut out the arches. Originally that was just a solid wall with just one door and there are two arches down at the end of the library now and they were both solid walls. The library was actually the dining room for the nuns and at the back of the library there was a kitchen. Any cooking that was done was done there. There was a separate kitchen, so they knocked away the wall and opened up two arches. They took the stairs away as well and opened up the library completely. The derelict area then was where the Magdalene Laundry was. When we came here it was in disrepair. It hadn't been used for a few years but the pigeons had taken over and it was being used as a store. So it's now renovated and it's the sculpture department. Now the chimney is still here. There was a working chimney for the laundry and there is a preservation order on that.

My initial impressions of the building when we moved in was that it was a very enclosed building. You couldn't see the gardens. When you came in the front gate you could just go to one door. You could only get into the building through that door. It was dreary. In the long corridor outside the canteen, there would have been a bulb here, a bulb half-ways down and a bulb right down at the end. They might have been 60 or 80-watt bulbs but there wouldn't have been an awful lot of light. And at the time the electricity was cut off on the first and second floor and the attic area, so when you went up there it was dreary. It wasn't very nice. In the winter time when we were here we used to have to lock up at half five and you'd go down and lock the main gate and when you turn around you wouldn't see anyone, there wouldn't be any lights upstairs. You wouldn't be too enticed to go back into the building on your own because everybody else would have been gone home.

So the first years arrived here. They were the first people here. They had been up in the Red Tech. The school was all over the city. Sculpture was in George's Quay. Print and graphics was in the first floor of the Granary and painting was in Bruce House. So first year was in the Red Tech in O'Connell Avenue and teacher training was in the School of Professional Studies in O'Connell Avenue. So everybody was all over the place. So one good thing about here is that everybody is on one campus and it's a real college and there are great facilities now. The building has completely changed since the first day I came here. It's more modern and it's a brilliant building compared to what it was.

The spiral staircase started on the ground floor and went the whole way up to the attic and along side it was a service lift. The spiral staircase was narrow and windy, as you'd imagine. Only one person could go up at a time. But you could go to the first floor and then get off it and then go to the second floor and get off and then go to the attic. It wasn't going to the attics only. I don't know what purpose it served at the time. Maybe it was a fire escape, I don't know in those times.

There was shrubbery and a pond out the front and there was a pond in one of the enclosed areas in the back and one year one group of first year ceramic students tiled the pond and made individual tiles. But when we came to the building we opened up the door here so when you came in that door the timber stairs faced you. We were situated underneath that timber stairs and there were all little cupboards and seemingly the nuns would leave the shoes in and the following morning they would come back and the shoes would be polished. They all had their own little cubby-holes where their shoes would be kept. I'm not sure who polished them. But the timber stairs was moved from where they were and the toilets were put in, on the ground floor, first floor and second floor and the timber stairs was moved over here. It still services the same floors but it's in a different area of the building.

In the first floor there were big rooms and they were probably sitting rooms. I can't see for what other purpose they would have been used because they were so big. They are first year studios now. Those rooms were big open rooms.

The laundry was a very big building. There is a working laundry here at the moment. It incorporated that and all the sculpture area and then it came round to where the chimney is. So that would have been all the laundry. It's huge. Massive.

There is the wall I was telling you about and there's the wall here. That one came up and met the side of that and they both went down to meet the front gate. This was called Mary Crest this building and seemingly every floor of that had bedrooms. It was just a long corridor in the middle and bedrooms either side but all those were knocked away and opened up to big areas. Ceramics have two floors and teaching training has the other. The three floors of Mary Crest were bedrooms but they said in later years these were actually rented out to students from Mary I [Mary Immaculate College]. You know if someone was staying in Limerick they could rent a room there.

I would have known about the Good Shepherds growing up because anytime anyone was bold or misbehaved you'd be threatened with the Good Shepherds. If you don't behave you'll end up in the Good Shepherds. Sure everyone knew at the time it was a walled in area. We wouldn't have known what went on in it. We were kids you know but our parents would have known I suppose. It was different times. Someone said to me one time that you have to realise that at the time there weren't any prisons for girls who offended and a lot of them were sent here and the nuns had to deal with them. That was their job. You have good stories and bad stories. I've met people who have come back here and they've come in and they've smiled about the times they had here and others wouldn't want to come in at all. You know they just wanted to see that the building was still here. So like in all walks of life you have good and bad. At the start a lot of people from England and from up the country would come back and they would have a look around and some would have happy memories and others wouldn't. Everyone has their own story.

At the time we bought it stories were coming out, *States of Fear* [documentary made in 1999 by Mary Raftery about the Industrial School system] and all that kind of thing. We were watching those programmes and knowing that this was a Magdalene laundry. We were wondering was the same thing going on here. I wouldn't have known what went on here as a young fellow. It's a completely different

place today. It's happy-go-lucky students and it's a fantastic facility, a far cry from what it was. It must have been scary for young children to be brought in to places like this. You know long corridors and few lights. It must have been horrific for them. But it has changed now. There is plenty of light. It's bright and plenty of space.

I was here about two months before Noel [his colleague] but the two of us have been here since the college took it over. Whatever renovations went on in the meantime we have known about. We've known the old and the new. The church is completely different to what it used to be. On the consecrated ground now you have spotlights, you've dancing and shows. You have every kind of thing going on in it so it's not a church any more but its ideal for the uses they need it for now. It's the church gallery and the degree show will be going on here in a couple of weeks.

I've heard stories from people who have come back but I wouldn't say because I couldn't verify any of those. Like you've spoken to some of the people that I have spoken to, like that lecturer in Waterford. Seemingly Waterford IT bought the Magdalen Laundry, the Good Shepherd Convent the same time as this one was bought in Limerick. So I heard stories from her that you probably heard yourself and different people come and they have different views. That's about it.

[Interview ends]