

ULSTER HISTORY CIRCLE



SISTER NINIAN

Margaret Fitzsimmons was born in Crossmore, Dunsford, Co. Down on 4 September 1865; the youngest of six children to farmer John Fitzsimons and wife Eleanor Clarke. She was educated in Dunsford National School and at the age of 25, pursued a vocation joining the Sisters of Nazareth, Hammersmith, London in March 1891. She then adopted the name of Sister St Ninian and spent a few years in Aberdeen. After only four years from entering her order she was included in a group of seven being sent to the still colonised South African State to set up a care house in Durban where she was there appointed Bursar of the House. Sr. Ninian then moved to the Kimberley home for abandoned children and elderly in 1898 for what would be 15 years. After her arrival there, the effect of the Boer War was soon to be felt when this diamond-mining town came under siege by Boer forces. During the war period the home in Kimberley was transformed into a hospital where Sr. Ninian and her treated casualties from both sides of the conflict.

Sr. Ninian's first appointment as Mother Superior was in 1913 at the Johannesburg home for children and the handicapped, where she remained for six years. After WW I she returned to Nazareth House, Belfast and took up a similar position. In 1924 she led a founding party to San Diego, California and was Mother Superior of its new orphanage for five years, returning to Durban in 1929. She spent five years there as Mother Superior, before moving to the orphanage in Port Elizabeth, holding the same position for twelve years.

At the age of 81 her high profile, lengthy overseas work came to an end and Sr Ninian returned to Nazareth House, Belfast in 1946. The following year she was appointed Mother Superior of Nazareth Lodge Children's Home on the Ravenhill Road, Belfast. She retired from active work in 1950, holding the role of First Local Councillor for some years. She died on 26 July 1954. Her funeral was presided by the then Bishop Rev Dr Mageean and many other top clergy paid tribute, bearing testament to Sr. Ninian's distinguished years of achievement. She is buried alongside other members of her order at Nazareth House, Belfast.