

With the dawn, in the 19th century, of the recognition and the rights of the common man, education came to the forefront as the great social need-- education of all classes, education for women. Nowhere was the need felt more than in England. Here also the exigencies of the Catholic revival made the need more intense in that segment of the population.

Mother Connelly not only recognized this great social need and stepped forward to help to answer it, but with great vision she saw that teacher training lay at its root, and so she planned for it from the beginning of her apostolate.

Though she came as a foreigner to England in 1846 with meager resources, she was among the first twelve managers of Catholic schools to apply for apprenticeship of pupil teachers in England -- this within a year and a half after her first foundation at Derby. She continued throughout her lifetime the work of training pupil teachers in Preston and in London. It was the sisters who had been trained as pupil teachers who were able to take the Society's mission to the poor from St. Leonard's to London in 1850.

But Mother Connelly's sense of the real educational needs caused her to plan courageously, from the beginning of her work, for a teacher training college; she was the first in England to respond to the call for a college for Catholic women teachers. As early as 1848 while she was still at Derby, she tried to establish one, as a letter of one of the Catholic Poor Schools Commissioners to Bp. Ullathorne attests:

It will be the recollection of your Lordship that the Bishops in Synod assembled have approved of Derby Convent as a training school for Mistresses It would accomodate sixty young women readily It appears to me that by seizing this opportunity we might secure great advantages to Religion & Education in England. The Nuns at Derby have represented to the C.P.S. Committee that the training of Mistresses is their chief desire, and the first object of their Institute. (D 36:4-5)

The plan for Derby did not materialize since the Society left Derby for St. Leonard's. Eventually the first Training College was established by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at Liverpool, but by 1856 Mother Connelly had established the second one in England at St. Leonard's.

The work of the St. Leonard's Training College was highly commended during its eight years of existence (1856-64) in which it contributed "upwards of a hundred teachers to the Catholic body". In 1864 Mother Connelly and the St. Leonard's community closed it because of insuperable prejudices of and conflicts with government inspectors, and because the out-of-the-way situation of St. Leonard's made teaching practice too difficult.

Even before she closed the St. Leonard's Training College, Mother Connelly & Mr. Allies (member of the Catholic Poor Schools Committee) were looking for a place in London to open a Training College.

In 1870 when the Poor Schools Committee reopened the question of the great need for another Training College in the south of England to supplement the work of the Liverpool Training College, Mother Connelly again offered St. Leonard's. When the site was, for the second time, considered too far from the city schools, Mother Connelly began a long, three-year series of negotiations to obtain the government grant for a Training College in London, but her efforts did not succeed in her lifetime.

Nothing daunted, Mother Connelly took in pupil teachers from 1875 on, in the SHCJ convent and school at 12 Nottingham Place. 13 Nottingham Place was acquired in 1880, but even with the added house accommodations were inadequate.

In 1889 the Society received a gift of a house at No. 11 Cavendish Square. This not only led to the improvement of the work of training pupil teachers but to an eventual realization of Mother Connelly's desire for a "Large College in London." (Intention for prayer written by M. Connelly in 1856: CC 22:28)