**1852 - 1900**

Just months later, on the 12th May, the exhibition was opened in an astonishing series of pavillions for which the architect, John Benson, received a knighthood. The enthusiastic response of the visiting crowds demonstrated an active interst for art as well the desire for the establishment of a permanent public collection that would also be a fitting tribute to the generosity of Dargan.

In June 1852 William Dargan, the father of the Irish rail network, approached the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) with an offer to underwrite a spectacular exhibition on Leinster Lawn in Dublin, the home of the RDS since 1815.  He wished to imitate the great exhibitions that had taken place at Crystal Palace in london the previous year.

Following the success of the exhibition a special Dargan committee was established as well as a committee called the irish Institution to promote the establishment of a National Gallery in Dublin.  In November 1853 the Irish Institution reported that it had considered four possible sites for the location of a Gallery including one adjacent to Leinster Lawns.  The next ten years saw active campagning for the funding of the new Gallery bulding which was designed by Francis Fowke and which had as a condition that its exterior design would replicate that of the Natural History Museum.

Meanwhile the Irish Institution, many of whose active members would be on the first Board of the new National Gallery, continued under the direction of George Mulvany to hold loan exhibitions until 1860 when it was disbanded.

**1900 - Present**   
In 1866 an anual purchase grant of £1000 was allocated for the acquisition of pictures and the institution would thrive over the years through purchase, bequests and donations.  In 1901 the Countess of Milltown gifted over 200 pitures to the gallery from her house at Russborough as well as a collection of silver, furniture and books from her library.  The gift was so substantial that a new extension was constructed to accommodate it. This would be only one of a number of bequests and gifts that the Gallery of ireland would receive and which have contributed to the quality of the collections housed there today.In 1968 the gallery was extended again with design by Frank DuBerry, senior architect with the Office of Public Works.  This new extension are today named the Beit Wing in acknowledgement of the exceptional generosity of Sir Alfred and Lady Beit who gifted seventeen outstanding old master pictures to the institution in 1987.

Some six years later in 1993 the Gallery became the focus of international attention when Caravaggio's, ‘The Taking of Christ’, a painting recorded in contemporary biographies on the artist and known through copies but long believed to be lost or destroyed, was discovered in a Jesuit house of studies in dublin.  The picture remain in the gallery on indefinite loan from the Jesuit father.

The most recent adition to the Gallery complex was the Millennium Wing opened in January 2002.  Designed by London based architects Benson & Forsyth and located on sites purchased by the Gallery in 1990 and 1996, the new wing introduced a new, second public entrance to the gallery from the busy thoroughfare of Clare Street in Dublin.