

# Bumblebees, Bicycles and Tilley Lamps

## Killesher Schooldays Remembered



By

Barbara Graham and Lynne McKerr



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## Introduction

Cuilcagh to Cleenish: A Great Place (C2C) is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. The partnership involves Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (lead partner), Cleenish Community Association, Killesher Community Development Association and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (through the resources of the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark).

The C2C project area is in west County Fermanagh. It extends from the top of Cuilcagh Mountain on the Fermanagh/Cavan border to the shores of Upper Lough Erne, and includes Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark, the National Trust at Florence Court, the Arney River, and the small rural communities of Killesher, Arney and Bellanaleck.

The C2C project provides a unique opportunity to interpret and understand the areas built, natural, cultural, and archaeological history and heritage. Through place-making activities it has developed new heritage trails, cultural and heritage events, and created access to key sites of interest.

## Killesher Historical Society

Cuilcagh to Cleenish is delighted to support the work of Killesher Historical Society in producing this important historical document of local schools in the Killesher parish. Formed in 1988 the society produced highly popular publications including *A view from Hanging Rock volumes 1&2* which offered readers a rich mixture of history, folklore, rhyme, poetry, and reminiscences by, and about the people of Killesher.

This latest publication has beautifully captured the fading yet still vibrant memories of a time gone by. With the masterly insight of researchers Barbara Graham and Lynne Mc Kerr, who interviewed local people and provided the historical context of the education systems of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it vividly brings to life our forgotten schools and presents us with the lived experiences of being a school child in this rural part of west Fermanagh. In all, 31 schools were recorded, of which 13 were documented as being in existence before or by 1831, and the sites of 26 schools have been located on historic maps.

A special word of thanks to Packie Drumm and Jim Wilson whose passion ensured that this important part of our local history would not be lost and whose determination made this publication possible.



The Cuilcagh to Cleenish: A Great Place Project is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

The project is delivered in partnership by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (lead partner), Cleenish Community Association, Killesher Community Development Association and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council through the resources of the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark.

## Acknowledgements

The journey to find and document the old schools of Killesher Parish would not have been possible without the help of the many local people who generously gave of their time to talk to us, helped us find our way in the landscape, told us their stories, and provided us with photographs and publications.

To Packie Drumm, Jim Wilson and Barney Devine for making this project possible, and reading drafts of the report; your advice and help is greatly appreciated. To Jim and Packie for their invaluable help in driving us around the area, introducing us to people and always being available to answer our endless queries. Many thanks to Alicia Wiggins for sharing her abundant knowledge and archives of the schools and the area and providing us with archive material; to John McNulty for allowing us access to 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century roll books (courtesy of Mr. Eugene Dolan) for some of the schools; and to Gaby Burns for access to his copious research and for helping us to find two long forgotten schools.

To everyone who agreed to be interviewed about their former schools, regaled us with such a rich body of information, and made sure our information was correct (any remaining errors are the authors' alone), we are extremely grateful: Alicia Wiggins, Gladys Turner, Billy and Gladys Brown, Irene Brady, Basil Chambers, Ann and Brian McTeggart, Carol and Raymond Robinson, John McNulty, Pascal McGovern, Lilian Reid, Gladys Turner, Jim Wilson, and Packie Drumm. These are your stories, and we hope we have given a faithful account of your history and memories.

Barbara Graham and Lynne McKerr

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## About the Authors

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## A brief history of Primary Schools

We all have memories of our school days - the friends we made, the games we played in the school yard, the teachers we loved (or perhaps, didn't love so much), the journeys to and from school- and the schools themselves, the classrooms, and the cloakrooms. Schools are a familiar landmark in towns and villages, and still, occasionally, in the countryside. For some of us, our former schools have been closed and replaced by bigger, more modern buildings, but before 'our' schools existed, there were other schools, long closed. Some are now halls or more rarely, houses, often with a characteristic shape which reminds us of their former lives, such as Drumbrughas and Claddagh Schools. Others, like Wheathill and Marble Arches are derelict and neglected, while some have vanished completely, the only clue to their locations shown on old maps or recalled by local memories handed down by parents and grandparents, from a time nearly two centuries away. Yet all these schools were once lively places, full of laughter and learning and almost certainly some tears, significant milestones in the journey from infant to adult. They are also reminders of the struggle it once was for ordinary people to educate their children, and how they worked together, from all faiths, to make this possible.

This is a very brief history of primary schools in Ireland - for a more detailed background, there is a list of suggested reading at the end of this report. For an in-depth coverage of schools in Killesher, the work by Gaby Burns is highly recommended [\[1\]](#).

### Hedge Schools and Pay Schools

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most children in Fermanagh (and indeed in the rest of Ireland) had limited access to education. Until the repeal of the Penal Laws, it was technically illegal to run schools which provided free education for Catholics and Dissenters without conforming to the Established religion (the Church of Ireland). However, this did not stop people seeking education of their choice for their children; people worked round the legislation by setting up small schools within their own communities. They were referred to as 'hedge schools' due to the informal, often secretive settings in various 'safe' locations during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, although many were actually held indoors. Fermanagh historian John Cunningham has written of the 'barn schools' of the village of Belleek [\[2\]](#), and it seems that from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards the great majority were held in small houses or barns [\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#). As there was no system of training or inspection, the teaching varied greatly depending on the individual teachers, most of whom were men; where a married couple held a school, it was usually the wife who taught the girls while the husband taught the boys [\[4\]](#). Some hedge schools had countrywide reputations for teaching mathematics and classics; Dr Henry Cooke, the celebrated Presbyterian scholar and preacher, attended a hedge school run by Frank Glass, where he learnt to recite the Odes of Horace [\[3\]](#). This suggests that the term 'hedge school' covered a range of provision, from the makeshift premises for Roman Catholics and Dissenters during periods of strict enforcement of the Penal Laws to fee-paying schools in informal settings, such as a barn or rented house, serving both Protestant and Catholic children in outlying areas.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, small fee-paying schools were well-established. The Report of the Irish Education Enquiry (which was carried out in 1824 and published in 1826) shows that there were 9,352 'pay schools' in Ireland, attended by almost 400,000 children; in Fermanagh, it was recorded that some 9,800 children were attending school. These 'pay schools' are usually still referred to as 'hedge schools' [2] and were probably the direct descendants of them; parents paid small sums (often a matter of pence each week), sometimes irregularly depending on their circumstances, and the accommodation was usually fairly basic. For example, in Killesher ('Killassher') the Report of 1826 states that the schoolhouse listed at Macon was held in a barn lent by a farmer, the mistress being Bridget Maguire, (noted as being 'R. catholic'), who received £3 per year. There were either 40 or 50 pupils (returns vary), all of whom were described as Roman Catholic. At Blunnick school ('Bleenick'), it noted that the school was held in the kitchen of the master's house. The master was Archibald Bridges ('protestant'), with 23 pupils of whom 20 were 'EC' (Established Church/Church of Ireland) and 3 'Roman Catholic'. Druminiskill ('Druminiskeel') school was built of sods; the master was John Lunny ('R. catholic') and he taught 30 pupils, of whom 24 were Church of Ireland and 6 Roman Catholic. He was paid £8 per year. The school at Greentown was in a barn, and the master was Edward McGrath (again 'R. Catholic'); he was paid £12 per year. There were 25 pupils, 13 listed as Church of Ireland and 12 as Roman Catholic.

The first school at Drumbrughas ('Drumbrocas') was also built of sods; however, it was a 'free school' supported by the London Hibernian Society and by an annual subscription of £4.11.0 (£4.55; equivalent to about £512 in today's money) given by Dr O'Beirne, the Master of Portora Royal School. The schoolmaster was Owen O'Rourke ('Protestant') and he earned £12 per year; the returns by Catholic and Protestant clergy vary but either 64 or 40 children were enrolled, of both religions. Florencecourt was recorded as the 'Parish school', associated with St John's Church of Ireland; it was a 'pay school', although the Earl of Enniskillen and the Rev. C. Beresford each contributed '5/ 13s 9d' each year (£5.69; equivalent to approximately £640 in today's money). There were 827 Parish schools in Ireland registered in the Commissioners' report, and some of these were also supported by religious educational charities.

### Religious educational charities: the 'Bible Schools'

These organisations were defined by their evangelical mission to make the 'saving truths of the bible' available to all, and the earliest was probably the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, founded in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century [5]. They included the London Hibernian Society (founded in 1806), The Sunday School Society for Ireland (founded 1809), The Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland (founded in 1814) and The Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland, also founded in 1814 (more widely known as the Kildare Place Society). By 1824, there were 2,119 schools associated with these groups, attended by over 130,000 children, as well as Sunday Schools which had over 145,000 individuals registered, the majority of whom were children. They were however deeply unpopular with the Catholic population and resented by some Protestants as at times they were seen to be a divisive force in the community [6].

It was clear from the Commissioners' report that the educational system (if it could be called a system at all) was ill-organised and unequal, and the findings paved the way for the introduction of a national system which set out standards and increased access to education.

### National Schools

In 1831, a system of National Education was introduced which aimed for a policy of non-denominational teaching, where schools would be open to children of all faiths; religious instruction was to be strictly separate, within a specific time outside 'ordinary instruction' [7]. Educational standards and teacher training became regularised and subject to inspection, and the process of administering a complex series of regulations which dealt with almost every imaginable detail- from building standards, teacher's fees, attendances, books to be used and educational attainments by class to allocated times for reading the bible- was set in place [8]. By 1900, there were 8,684 National Schools throughout Ireland, with 478,224 pupils enrolled.

Pupils were organised in classes from Junior Infants to Seventh Standard, in general from four to fourteen years, after which the child could leave school, although Eighth Standard did exist for those pupils who intended to transfer to grammar school or college. More widespread secondary level education in separate schools only began with the passing of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act of 1900 and up until the passing of the 1947 Education Act (and indeed, up until 1955 in Co. Fermanagh) most children did not have access to Intermediate schools [9].

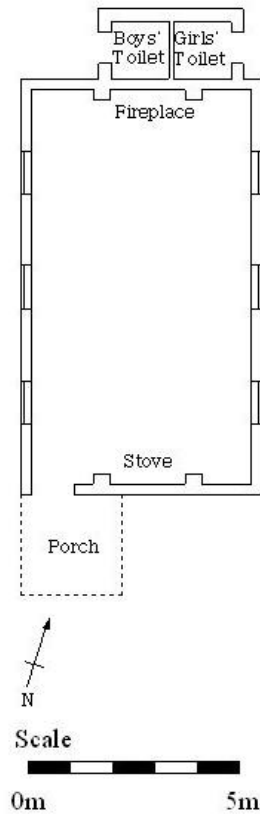
### National School buildings

Schools which applied for National School status had to meet certain standards both in terms of construction and maintenance (which was an area the Inspectors reported on as well as teaching). This is almost certainly why a number of them have survived after they closed. The situation regarding ownership of the building could be complicated; the school might be vested (built by grant-aid) or non-vested (privately owned) which can make future purchases of former schools problematic. Many of the schools in outlying areas of Killesher were one-roomed buildings; generally, those in villages and towns (perhaps supported by wealthy patrons, or a Church of Ireland 'Parish School') were larger and could be more ornate. Some schools-particularly those in towns- had separate entrances for boys and girls, although all were usually taught in the same classrooms.

Most of the one-roomed schools followed a similar floor plan as to that of Carrickbeg School in Boho parish (below). Although dimensions could differ depending on the number of children who could attend, in general they were well ventilated with large windows and an entrance porch. One wall (usually the gable) held a large fireplace, and at the other end was a small stove. As all age groups were taught in the same room, this allowed the classes to be



split into groups for separate teaching; sometimes there were screens which could divide the room if two teachers were employed.



**Floor plan of one-roomed National School (Carrickbeg, Co. Fermanagh)**

Furniture in the classrooms also had to meet a certain standard and included desks, cupboards for books and shelves [1]. Where other subjects such as needlework were taught, grant-aid was available for suitable furnishings; at Mullanavehy, application was made in 1851 for the appointment of a workmistress and provision of a 'convenient worktable', a chest and drawers. Although in Killesher only Drumbrughas school preserved the original features (and some of the furnishings), Castletown National School in Co. Tyrone has been relocated and restored in the Ulster American Folk Park and allows a glimpse of what a working classroom looked like. The pupils' desks, with inkwells and integrated benches, seated four children. Long forms and chairs provided seating for other tasks.



**Teacher's desk at Castletown National School**

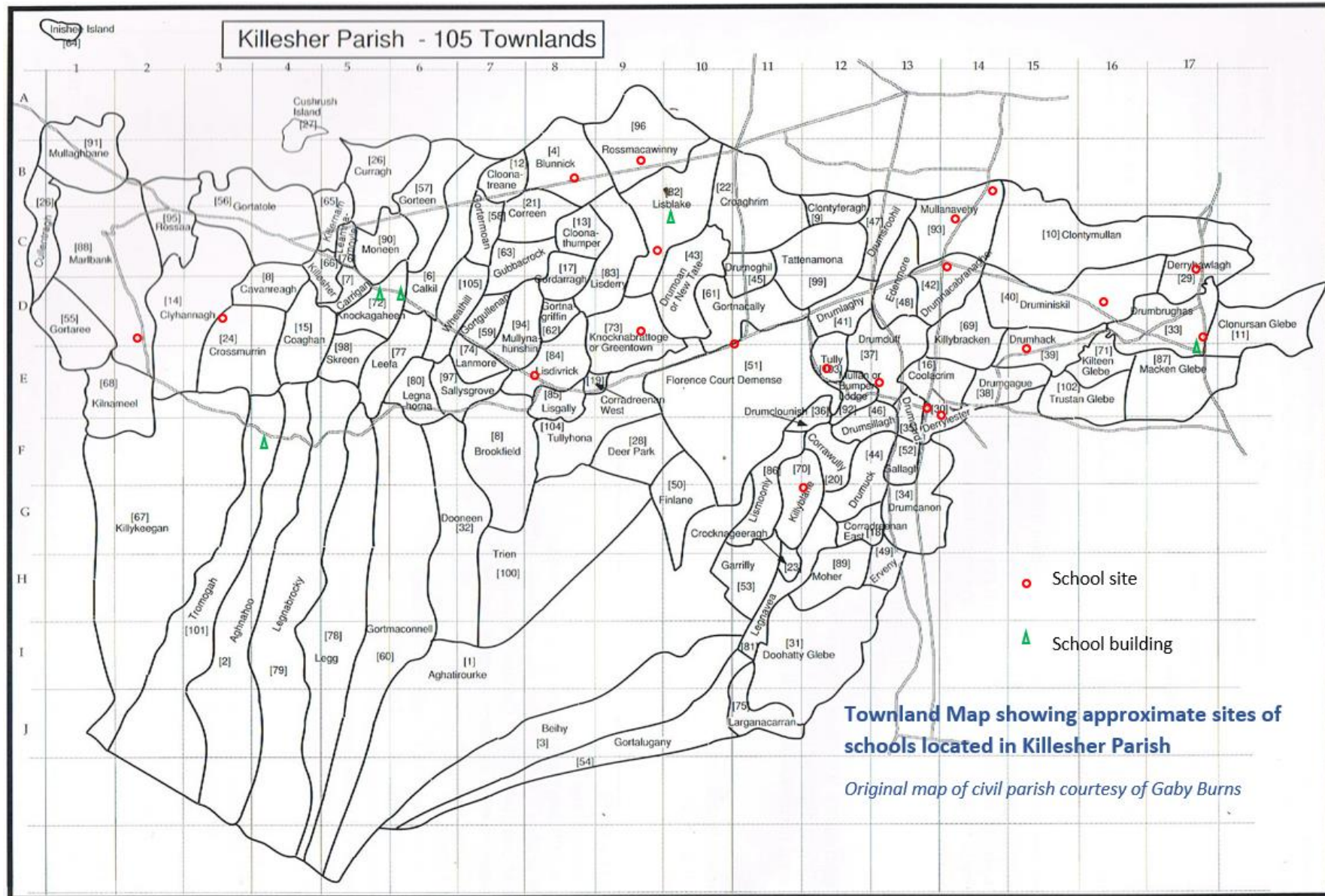


**Visitors changing places in class at Castletown National School!**

Mr Murphy (standing) is a former school Principal; his grandson is seated at the teacher's desk.

### **The end of the National School era in Northern Ireland**

Following Partition in 1921, and the creation of Northern Ireland, control of the schools passed to the new Ministry of Education; National Schools became 'Primary' or 'Public Elementary' Schools. By 1925, despite the original intention to avoid denominational education, in practice publicly funded schools became Protestant in ethos, while Catholic education developed along a separate system. This remains in place today, with Controlled schools seen as providing education for a Protestant population, while Maintained schools generally provide for Catholic children. However, the increased interest in integrated and shared education perhaps reflects the aims of the original National system and, like their predecessor, these schools are attempting to address some of the issues of education in a divided society.



## A way of life

The stories and reminiscences here presented are not just a collection of school day memories but a tapestry of rich insights into a way of life in a particular landscape scanning the decades from the start of World War 2 up to the mid-1960s. What emerges from these conversations and interviews are memories not only of teachers and fellow pupils but also of the journeys to and from school, the farms where these former pupils grew up, the boundless joy and freedom associated with playtime, and, not least, the many pranks played inside and outside of the schoolhouse.

As people told us about their schooldays it became apparent that school-going acted as a peg for a plethora of other experiences. Triggered by the telling, the events of schooldays were inextricably intertwined with a way of life; an anecdote about a school would lead naturally and seamlessly into memories and stories about work on the home farm, and the holidays and customs celebrated throughout the year.

The recounting of the journeys to and from school were peppered with the names of the places and landmarks along the way; they were as much a part of their remembering as were the games they played, the friends they journeyed with, and the treasured free time on the way home.

Names of people, a spot in the landscape, a field or a turn in the road came tumbling out of these stories as people oriented themselves and us to locality. Names that connected people and places, family names for certain townlands, and names remembered when people are long gone. Places in a landscape can carry the name for generations, regardless of what modern road name may be placed on an area in later years. Pascal McGovern, in describing how the road up to and then beyond Marble Arches school was built in stages over decades, vividly illustrates this: *The road didn't go past the school when it was first built. You can see when you go up the road the different turns – one is known as Doherty's turn, about a mile and a half was done at it, just before the school. Maybe not many people know that name now, but the locals would know it as Doherty's turn, as it went past Doherty's house. And that would have been the end of the road for about ten or fifteen years.*

In our quest to find old school sites people often directed us in reference to the names of fields and people's houses. On looking for the old Mullaghbane School site Alicia Wiggins told us to: *go past Johnston's old house with the red roof on the right-hand side, Loughlin's field is past that.* And attempts to find the site of the first school on the Greentown Road were resolved when Jim Wilson knew it was: *opposite Elliot's old house.*

Locating a place in this manner provides an inexhaustible store of knowledge and history of the local and how people relate to their landscape. Perhaps summed up succinctly by Gladys Turner who said: *You didn't need to do local history at school, we all knew it anyway.*

Of his schooldays Basil Chambers remembers: *It was all fun...children were very rarely in the house; they were out in the yard or whatever.* Jim Wilson recalls his time at Claddagh School as *a carefree happy time* and Gladys Turner has fond memories of Druminiskill School as *the best education we ever got.*

Children generally went to school when they were around six years old, sometimes a few months earlier. And they all walked to school, often three miles from their homes, in all kinds of weather. Many would walk with older siblings, meet up with other pupils along the way, or wait for someone at a certain point along the road to school. Alicia Wiggins (Crozier), as the youngest of three, was lucky enough to have a horse to ride part of the three miles to Claddagh School: *I used to ride the horse as far as the top of Gortatole Hill, wrapped a rope around the horse's neck and the postman, Peter Reilly, brought the horse home when he was on his rounds.*

Most schools were one room, single storey buildings. Occasionally there was a second small room, as at Crossroads, or a second storey (Florencecourt/ The Gate school) and often there was an annex at one end which provided living quarters for a teacher. Children normally sat at long desks, or smaller two-seater desks for the infants, with inkwells along the top of the desks. Many schools had a fireplace at one end and perhaps a pot-bellied stove at the opposite end, and these were generally only lit during the colder months.

Once in school the infants would sit up at the front of the room and older pupils behind them. Roll books for Crossroads and Marble Arches show the main subjects taught as: reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, needlework. But singing was also a part of the school week. There were no instruments in the schools, but teachers would have had a tuning fork to give the note from which you would start singing. And some schools had a tonic solfa chart on the wall to teach the scale. Packie Drumm remembers learning to sing 'Down by the Sally Gardens.' But not everyone had the happiest of memories of singing. Billy Brown recalls getting the wrong end of the cane at Lisblake school because he couldn't sing: *There was a teacher there for a very short time and boy was I glad to see him leaving because he bate the divil out of me because I wasn't singing...I knew I couldn't sing.*

And Pascal McGovern recalls the hilarious story of the céilí dancing teacher from Scotland who tried to teach the whole school how to dance with the help of a little tape recorder on which she played the music: *She was mad about dancing. It was Irish dancing but, mind you, she hadn't much hope of teaching us! She would have had some job when you put out 20 or 30 of us trying to get us all in step!*

Children also amused themselves by playing tricks on teachers. As Billy Brown says: *There was no badness. We knew what we could and couldn't do.* That didn't stop some of them from riding bikes around the classroom when the teacher wasn't there or hiding the canes after the master had gone home. At Druminiskill Gladys Turner remembers the forward planning that went into that particular mischief: *Some of the older boys, when there was a new master used to go in during the day when they got a chance, there was a big window at the end of the wall, and they'd take the latch off it. After school they'd watch for the master*



*getting on his bicycle just at the gates of the church driveway, and when he'd gone, they'd go in and take the canes out. And he would have no canes for the next day.*

Pranks weren't confined to the school yard or classroom. There was ample opportunity, as Gladys Turner remembers, to run around and tease neighbours on the way home from school by running up their lanes and fields, or to spy on courting couples up a certain laneway. Halloween was also a time for mischief and games. There were the usual games at home such as dunking for apples. Some of the tricks played on people at Halloween included *putting a string on somebody's door handle and then hiding and pulling the string to rap the door or lifting gates off and putting them up on a barn roof. I remember one time some men moved a ruck of hay, forkful by forkful and built it in another field and the farmer couldn't understand how his ruck of hay got moved! Another fella they got his bike and put it up in a tree. I don't know how he ever got it down!*

But aside from the play and fun there was always work to be done when children got home from school. It could be gathering eggs; fetching water from a stream or well, filling up the turf basket to keep the fire going (there was no electricity or piped water until the early 60s), or doing general chores around the house. Each home was fairly self-sufficient in terms of food, and everyone grew fruit and vegetables.

As John McNulty says: *We had our own vegetables, our own spuds. We had the pig, we had the chickens, we had a good spring well, perfect, far better than what comes through the tap now. We think we were deprived but it was an extremely healthy lifestyle...there was a lot of work done on farms then, you had to have three full days on the bog, you had to set an early half acre of spuds, that had to be done, cos anyone without spuds it was almost poverty. It couldn't happen that you had no spuds. It was all done physically with a spade. You brought the farmyard manure out into the field, and you spread it in rows, and you put your potatoes on, and you turned your sod onto that from one side and turned the sod in onto that from the other side. When the spuds were lifted, they were put in a cone shaped heap in the field. Then you put rushes first then you covered the whole thing with earth very deep so the frost couldn't get to them. The heap of spuds was left out there and when you wanted spuds you went to the field to your heap and took what you needed.*

Gladys Turner said they always had enough vegetables for the family and always had a garden with apples, plums, and blackcurrants: *And there was cabbage and beans and peas, turnip, kale... They used to shoot rabbits for meat during the week. And roasted that, which was good. In the summertime many a time my father would go out and shoot a couple and bring them home. The children would hold them, and he'd split them down and skin them and my mother put them in salted water overnight and we'd have them the next day.*

The stories of schooldays also triggered memories of other ways of life; the evacuees who stayed in the neighbourhood during the war and went to school with the locals and the various cures that were used at the time for ailments. One remedy was known as Crozier's bottle, made up by Alicia Wiggins' father. It was a liquid made from a herb found on Cuilcagh mountain and was used for gall stones, or any kidney trouble: *The herb only grows on one aspect of Cuilcagh mountain, it is a cousin of the bilberry, but has a different stem.*

*Daddy used to get people to pick it for him. It was sorted, leaves and stems, and put at the side of the fire and simmered for about 48 hours in water. A big sandstone was put on top of it, and it would have imparted a mineral on the herb. The juices were like black tea! It was put into small empty whiskey bottles and the bottle would be put between two pan loaves and posted all over the country.*

Several other cures are known from the area and recorded in *A View from Hanging Rock Vol.2* produced by the Killesher Historical Society.

The schools these children attended also played a part in the social life of the neighbourhood. Many of them were used for Sunday school classes, evening church services or harvest festivals. Some of the schools have since been turned into private homes and continue a new chapter in their lives. Others have long since disappeared or lie derelict. Even when the schools closed a great number of the buildings were used for various social functions and gatherings. Dances, at which local people would have played for the dancers, were held in many old schools, including Drumduff, Claddagh, Drumbrughas, Marble Arches and Rossmacawinny and people would cycle to them for a night out. The old buildings were also used for Christmas and wedding celebrations. Claddagh school was also used for playing badminton as it had a big high ceiling.

The fondness with which these old schools and their history are remembered is reflected in the stories of some of them below. It is hoped that this report will serve as a starting point for further conversation within the communities in Killesher and lead to more research by local people.

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## Claddagh School

Townland: Knockageehan

*An Cladach*: the shore. Knockageehan: *Cnoc an Ghaoithin* 'hill of the breeze'

This school first appears on the Ordnance Survey (OS) [3rd Edition](#) map as 'Cladagh School'. The application to become a National School in 1882 stated the teacher was Richard Robb. He received a salary of £44 and 'free residence and garden'. 63 pupils were enrolled, 31 boys and 32 girls. The Hon. John Cole was Patron. By 1883, the number of pupils had risen to 80 and there was a further application for a 'workmistress', Mary Boyd; and Alicia Latimer and Mary Kerr were recorded as Monitresses (pupil teachers) [\[1\]](#). Claddagh school is situated a few miles from Blacklion on the Marble Arch Road and is now a dwelling house. The plaque above the door bears the date of 1880.



Claddagh School in the 1950s

### Schooldays at Claddagh

Both Alicia Wiggins and Jim Wilson have fond memories of their days at Claddagh School. Alicia lived in Marlbank House, about three miles from the school, and started there in 1939 when she was five and a half. She went with her older brother and sister: *I used to ride the horse as far as the top of Gortatole Hill, wrapped a rope around the horse's neck and 'Old Paddy', as we called him, would graze along the verge until the postman, Peter Reilly, brought him home. Peter would put his mail bags on the horse, and the horse would trot along beside him, he knew the route as well as the postman. After I left the horse, I walked on to Claddagh school. We used to meet up with Alex Sheridan at the bottom of Killesher Lane or at the end of Claddagh Glen and he lived up in Legalough in Co. Cavan, so he had come over the mountain. He had a fair walk to school. We also picked hup Norman Kennedy at Gortatole and Garnet Latimer at Killesher.*



Jim, who went to Claddagh in 1955, also walked with his older brother, but was lucky that he only had about half a mile to get to school. He started school at five years old and was one of the last eleven pupils left in the school when it closed in 1958. He was then sent to the new school at Florencecourt: *I can remember three other pupils also started the same year: Desmond Reid, Sylvia Brady, and Ethel (Essie) Sheridan.* His elder brother John was already at the school.

*Our teacher was Agnes Deans, a young lady who was an evacuee who lived with the Coalter family at Brockagh Bridge. I think she came from Belfast. She was a lovely gentle soul. She later married John Brady who had been our next-door neighbour at Wheathill.*

Jim freely admits he wasn't over fond of school: *I know I was a hyperactive child!* but has fond memories of his time at Claddagh as carefree and happy: *Miss Deans was never cross, she came to school in a van and travelled from Brockagh Bridge, along to Willis's Lane, collecting children along the way. She would arrive with the back of the van packed full of children! Most of our time was spent drawing on sheets of paper, playing with plasticine and talking!*

The children were also regularly taken for nature rambles up Claddagh Glen which is a short walk from the school. And encounters with nature didn't stop at the Glen: *There were several large beech trees bordering the school and it was not uncommon to have all the pupils climbing up the trees during fairly flexible lunchtimes.* Catching bumble bees was another favourite pastime: *I remember as youngsters we used to catch bumble bees who were after the honey between our cupped hands and run around with them. How we weren't stung I will never know!*

Some pupils would come to school on bikes and were a great attraction for their schoolmates: *I remember seven of us all on a bicycle at the one time! A different time I remember someone tying a rope to the rear of the bicycle and trying to pull out some bushes. Needless to say, the bush didn't move, but the cyclist did – out over the handlebars when the bicycle came to a sudden stop!*

Like all the schools there was an outside toilet block and at Claddagh there was an adjoining room to store the coal. In the schoolroom there was a post-bellied stove at one end and an open fire at the other end of the room: *The stove was always lit and the open fire when the weather was cold. Milk was delivered in small milk bottles, which in winter would sometimes be frozen and quite often have small holes picked in the lids by birds who seemed to enjoy the cream. It didn't stop us drinking it and I never saw anyone the worse for it. We sometimes got orange drink in small bottles as well.*

For Alicia it was a long day at school as she had to stay until three o'clock until her older sister could bring her home, so afternoons were often spent taking a nap. *I can remember sometime in the afternoon in infants I used to go back down to the back of the class and climb in beside my sister Doreen and her friend Mina Carr and put my head on Doreen's lap and have a snooze. There was a big, long bench and desk and I remember that – fun times.*

The teacher at that time was Mrs Barton from Enniskillen: *Only one teacher and she had control over the whole school. I think we had small two-seater desks for the infants.*

In 1941 Alicia and her brother were moved to Belcoo school, also about three miles from her home. *We were taken from the school because Doreen was going to the model school in Enniskillen so she would be staying with granny in Ballinamallard so we were taken over to Belcoo school as we would have more children to walk with on the way.* Belcoo was a Catholic School, but like so many of the rural schools then both Catholic and Protestant children attended the school: *The Saturday before we started Belcoo we met Master Ferguson (principal) in Blacklion and he called my mother over and said not to send us to school until half past nine because the first half hour was religious instruction; and my mother pulled herself up to her full five foot and said: Master Ferguson, my two children will come to school at nine o'clock, the same time as the other pupils. I have no objection to them sitting in for religious instruction, and if you can make better Catholics out of them what I've made Protestants out of them, you're welcome to them''.* Alicia enjoyed her time at Belcoo, a much bigger school than Claddagh with three teachers. She stayed until she was 12 before moving to the Model School in Enniskillen.



**Pupils at Claddagh, possibly late 1920s/early 1930s. Extreme left is Master William Spiers and extreme right is assistant teacher Georgina Kells.**

Despite spending only a few years at Claddagh the school made a lasting impression on both Jim and Alicia and, even though they moved on to different schools, their days at Claddagh were the happiest of times.

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## Crossroads School

Townland: Drumcard

Ridge of the forge: *droim*, ridge; *ceard*, craftsman, artisan

The school was established in 1862 and sited at a crossroads, hence known locally as Crossroads School. It is shown on the OS [2nd Edition](#) map as 'Crossroads National School'. It was closed in 1957 when the new school opened across the road. The old school is now a modern house incorporating some of the old school walls and is on the corner of Old Coach Road at the crossroads on the Tiravalley Road.



**New home on the site of the former Crossroads School**

### Schooldays at Crossroads

Packie Drumm grew up about a mile from Crossroads and was sent to school in 1951 when he was five or six years old:

*I don't mind much about the first few days of school. All I can remember is the older pupils that went to the school lived up past us and they had they job of walking me to school. You had to walk. I do remember, there was a contract for two lorries doing work near us and when we were going to school, you'd meet the lorries going out. This would have been about half eight a quarter to nine. And all I remember is that these two lads bringing me to school and me saying I was going to jump out in front of the lorries, and they got me down at the side of the road and they sat on me till the lorries went by! The devil must have been in me!*

The contractors who owned the lorries were Liddle and Rooney and the two brothers who brought Packie to school were Hugh and John Lunney. *Hugh went to work for Liddle and Rooney when he was about 18 and he still lives near me today.*

*We didn't have to cross any roads on the way to school, just a mile and a bit up the road, in all weathers. And then when the snow would come, we would get out with a ruler and measure the snow every so often to see how deep it was.*

The school had two rooms, one for infants and a slightly bigger room for the older children: *It was all on the one level. You went in the door into the big room then walked through another door into the small room, it was off the big room just to the right. There were two women teachers, Mrs Melanaphy, a local woman, who taught the infants, and Miss O'Boyle from Leitrim taught in the big room, the seniors.*

Packie remembers that Miss O'Boyle stayed in a house about a mile or two down the Swanlinbar Road and she rode a bike to school. *to school. So, she had about two mile odd to ride her bike up to the school. The other teacher Mrs Melanaphy, her husband was a farmer, and they had a car. Weren't too many cars in those days. She taught the infants; I think that was for the first two or three years you were in infants.*

Packie doesn't remember staying long in the infants' room: *I cannot remember being in the small room. Whether I was only in it for a short time or not I don't know. I cannot remember being there. I was pushed forward for exams a wee bit, I might have been brought forward a bit, cos I was good at maths.*

The youngest children sat up at the front of the classroom close to the teacher at desks for two, then the next row behind would have been for the year above. Although Packie doesn't remember too much about the infants' class he does recall having to assert himself early on: *I remember a fella behind me annoying me and I turned round, and he was laughing, and I hit him a box in the mouth. He was annoying me, tipping me, and I wasn't going to take it. I was just fresh into the room. So, I hit him a box in the mouth!* Luckily for Packie there were no consequences for his striking out!

While most of the school day was spent on the general curriculum subjects there were opportunities for learning about nature and the local environment: *We didn't get out much but come spring/summer they might have taken you for a walk up the byroads and explained to you about the flowers and trees and you were encouraged to grow things, maybe bring in peas and sow them.* Singing was a part of all the schools and Packie remembers songs he learnt and that some of his schoolmates were good singers. When it came to English and arithmetic, they were taught the old cursive writing: *It had to be above the line and below the line and your writing had to be very precise. We didn't do much with algebra, maybe a start on it, a few other schools were starting to talk about it. But didn't really do it until I went to secondary school.*

Lunchtime was a welcome break in the school day and, regardless of the season, the Crossroads pupils played outside: *We would have played out in the yard, winter and all, football, stuff like that. Lunch was two big slices of bread and jam, and you had the milk*

*then. My sister remembers them starting school dinners in the 60s at the secondary school, so they came in quite early.*

*As the nearest school for several families, Crossroads was attended by both Catholic and Protestant children: The Protestant children didn't come to about half nine. We all got on very well and the teachers were incredibly good and very understanding. But then the children went to Florencecourt when it opened in the late fifties. All the teachers and the parents got on very well.*

*When he got a bit older Packie used to get up early and go down and serve Mass before he went to school: I had to be there at 8 o'clock. By the time I served mass I had a wee bicycle when I was about nine or ten. I served mass, went back home, and then I went to school.*

*The average number of pupils in schools generally, would have been around 30, but attendance and numbers on the rolls for all the schools fluctuated over the years, largely dependent on the numbers of families living in an area. Packie recalls how the road he lived on would have been full of children coming and going from Crossroads: If I went out on our road it was full of pupils coming up the road. There was eight in each house down the road, and there were two houses in the parish had 12 kids in each family, and I suppose the oldest was gone from school by the time the youngest started.*

*As the numbers at Crossroads increased to nearly 80 pupils, extra space and more teachers were needed: They got another teacher, and they went to the local hall, the local hall was just 200 yards away, it was a small room in the local hall. And the extra teacher took a class in the hall. She was Miss Lunny, and she married a McCaffery from Enniskillen. And I don't know how long that was going on until the new school opened. Packie attended Crossroads until 1957 when the new school opened on the other side of the road, and he went there for two years: They'd have about 80 in the new school now, but that's the whole parish now, not just one townland. I remember 9 schools, and five of them was Catholic. Of course, there was no secondary school at that time so that would have made a difference in the numbers when the secondary school was built, cos you only stayed at the primary then until 11 or 12.*

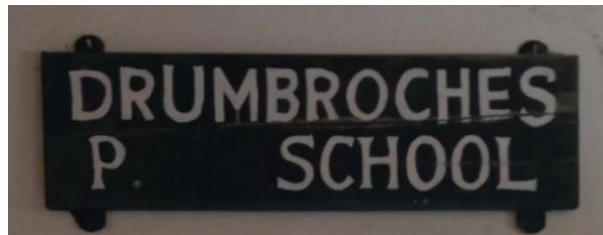
*Packie went on to secondary school in Enniskillen: but unfortunately, there was no one at all went from the school with me.*

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## Drumbrughas School

Townland: Drumbrughas

*Drum Brochlas*: Badger den ridge / ridge of the badger warren



An earlier school (at 'Drumbrocas') on the Derrylin Road was noted in the Irish Education Inquiry (1826); 65 children were enrolled, both Protestant and Catholic, and it was reported as being thatched and built of sods. The present schoolhouse is on the Druminiskill Road, close to the junction with the Derrylin Road. A former National School, it is listed on the OS [3rd Edition](#) map as 'Drumbrughas School' and on the OS 6 ins to 1 mile Irish Grid (1952-1967) as Drumbrughas Primary School. It was built of stone, with a brick porch and originally had a thatched roof, which was subsequently relaced with sheets of galvanised metal (known locally as 'tin' or 'iron'). The builder was a local man, who had two daughters who were schoolteachers; he built another school in the parish, possibly the school at Arney which was in turn replaced by the present Mullymesker Primary School. Although recognised as a Catholic school, it was in fact attended by children of both faiths. The school closed in 1972; records relating to the application for National School grant aid can be accessed from the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland (PRONI) [referenced as ED/1/23].



## Rescued and restored

Like many other old schools, that could have been the end of its story. However, the vision and dedication of one couple, Ann and Brian McTeggart, has ensured that the school remains an integrated part of the community. Brian himself started school at Drumbrughas in 1960 and recalls clearly what it was like then. There was only one room, with a big open fire at one end, and a 'Romesse' stove at the other; it was originally thatched, but by the time he started school, it had a tin ('iron') roof. Brian believes the porch was added at the same time same as the roof was replaced, as it is made of local brick whereas the rest of school was constructed of a combination of cut stone and rubble. The brick is from a brickfield in the townland, derelict now- when Brian was a child, he was always warned not to go near it as the unwary could go down a hole and drown.

Brian estimated that in the past around 60 children were enrolled, maybe 70, but they wouldn't all have been at school at the same time unless for a school photograph or something special, perhaps if the Inspector was coming, as children would have had jobs at home. This was before his time though, as most children attended in his day. The footprint of the school was small- there was only the front garden and the road to play in -definitely something modern children couldn't do! There was no electricity in school when Brian attended, and it was never installed. Ann explained they have a hook in the middle of the ceiling for a Tilley lamp if they ever want a bit of atmosphere! They have both a table and a hanging Tilley in the schoolroom; though Ann doesn't know how to light them, Brian used Tilley lamps both at school and at home. There was also no running water until 1962/63, when the mains water came up the road and there was a sink installed in the porch, just for cold water. Children went to the toilet across the road: *a wee wooden building, and a plank with a hole cut in it, over the drain, with a door that closed-there was only one toilet! Where did the teacher go? Brian said nobody ever knew!*

The school had lain empty for more than twenty years, with a hole in the roof where the original stove had been removed. They began work on the first part of the school in 1994; the school room remains as it was when the school was open, with the remainder of the house added over time to the rear, and almost invisible from the road. The renovation was undertaken with the aim of keeping the authenticity of the school; the main part of the house is accessed through a 'hidden' door in the porch. As Ann says: *...we didn't want to do anything that would have looked out of place or wouldn't have been the sort of style from around then, although Brian would have remembered what it was like when he was at school.*

There were undoubtedly challenges in such a careful restoration- Ann remembers that people kept saying '*just flatten it, it would be cheaper!*'. There were National School regulations to be followed, e.g. regarding the size of the grate on the open fire, and Brian contacted the Folk and Transport Museum on a number of issues. It was a lengthy task sourcing and reclaiming all the materials; they had planned a slated roof but decided to replace the original iron roof instead, and sourced stone sills and solid pine floorboards. It took a lot of time and effort, but as Ann recalls, if something could be preserved, Brian would preserve it.

*Even the holy picture, which had been on floor with the frame broken, and the picture ripped, it was restored and hung up, on a special wee bit of picture rail in exactly the same place, where it was probably since the school was built - that was the focal point for their prayers, where they stood- that's the sort of detail that Brian went into... people come in who were at the school and say, was that the original picture? Yes, that's it, even the frame!*



There are quite a lot of people who went to school still in the area, and now and again people would call in. Ann likes the thought that if you lifted the furniture out of the front room, it would look the way it had been: ... *if somebody wanted to make a film or play about an old school that would be it, they wouldn't have to do anything, it's just there. People do like that- we had some of Brian's elderly aunts down ... and it was really interesting, because not only did they reminisce, but they sat and recited poetry, and they would say do you remember this...and they would wax lyrical into this poem that they'd learnt in P- something-or- other, or that Miss whatever the teacher was taught them and I think for most of the night they sat and sang and recited their poetry...It brought them back...*

It was considered a particularly good school- Ann says she was told three MPs had attended it, and the memories all seem to be very positive. Brian talks about his schooldays with a smile and has happy memories of his teacher Miss McHugh. The school was part of the social life of the whole community- Ann remembers being told when the school was open, they had dances in it, and someone said people had gathered there for a radio broadcast, perhaps for the Eucharistic Conference in 1932. Ann and Brian have had a couple of parties too- a big one for the millennium, with maybe 70 or 80 people, fireworks and food, and a band!

Were they glad they had restored it so carefully? Ann sums it up: *Not many people have kept the wee schools like ours... I suppose if we hadn't taken it, it **would** have gone... If anybody who went to the school drove past, it just looks exactly the same as it did, and that's what we wanted to maintain. Brian's idea is that we could lift our furniture out, the sofas and things, and somebody could go in and put a few desks in and it would look like it did in 1960 when he was at school, or in 1900.*

The restored school is an integral part of Ann and Brian's home and a lasting testament to their vision and hard work to ensure that this wonderful building continues to have a purpose and a new chapter in its place in the landscape and community.

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## Druminiskill School

Townland: Druminiskill

White Hollow Ridge

The Commissioners' Report lists the original schoolhouse as being built with sods. The master was noted as John Lunny (described as Roman Catholic) and there were 30 pupils registered. The school does not appear on the OS [1st Edition](#) map suggesting it was closed by then; there is no reference to it in the OS memoirs, completed in 1834/35. The school was rebuilt at some point thereafter; it is included in Griffith's Valuation for the townland (1862) and is shown on the OS [3rd Edition](#) map as 'Druminiskill School' to the rear of Druminiskill Chapel of Ease. It closed in 1958 with the opening of the new Florencecourt Primary School. The former school was demolished in 2002; there is now a church hall built on the site. Gladys Turner remembers that there was always a parish hall on the site: *There was always a hall there, the school was behind it. The new hall has taken part of the old school site.*



**The new hall at Druminiskill**

### Schooldays at Druminiskill

Basil Chambers' father attended Druminiskill school, cutting across the bog for a shortcut. and Basil had photographs of the old building, both when it was in use and later, when it had closed. It was unusual in that the schoolroom was the central part of a three-bay building, with an Orange Hall at the upper end and a dwelling for the teacher at the other; the classroom was in the middle and each part had its own entrance.



**Druminiskill School, after closure**

Mrs Hill was the teacher in Basil's father's time; Mrs Armstrong taught there after that. There were up to thirty children at school in Mrs Hill's time. Basil's father often told him there was a long form at the end of the school room, which was the equivalent of the naughty corner in days gone by- if you did something wrong, you had to stand on it. However, it didn't always promote better behaviour, as Basil recalls: *Maybe two people had done something wrong, and he said you'd rock the seat, and the other person would fall off it - and there was more a bigger scene then!*

Gladys Turner's father also went to Druminiskill school, and she started there in 1939 when she was six years old. Along with her sisters she walked the three miles to and from school from her home in Kilbracken: *We went down the fields and then got onto the road and walked the rest of the way. You never thought of the time it took, just everybody did it.* Although Gladys has fond memories of her schooldays the best part of the day was playing on the way home; games such as hide and seek and tig: *Then we had to run the last bit because if you weren't home at the same time, it was 'where were you? Because we had jobs to do round the farm and house.* Those jobs included gathering the hen's eggs and cleaning them, going down to the well to get water, and bringing in enough turf and sticks to keep the fire going.

Her teacher was Mrs Armstrong, and she vividly remembers she wore her hair up in a big bun and had her desk up on a platform at a long wall of the school. If it were a nice day in the summertime, she would take the lessons outside. At that time, the teachers no longer lived in the school and Mrs Armstrong would come on her bicycle every day. The old living quarters were used as a cloakroom and to store turf and sticks for the fire or stove. The fire was only lit in the winter, and pupils had to bring ten shillings to buy sticks or turf or bring a

crate of turf every winter. The older children took turns in cleaning out the ashes and setting the fire.



**Children at Druminiskill School, with their teacher Mrs Hill, photographed in the early 1920s.**

Children also brought their own milk to school, and it was warmed up in a saucepan on the fire: *Everybody brought their own milk, and it was all put together into the saucepan to get warmed. That is what put me of milk completely, everybody's milk went in and all mixed together.*

There were about 30 pupils when Gladys first went to school and just one teacher:

*I remember we used to stand around the table, and she asked one day if anybody knew what a bachelor was. And I put my hand up of course because my idea of a bachelor was our neighbour, he was an older man, he might have been I suppose in his 40s and people always said, oh John Robert he's an old bachelor, so I put my hand up and said, 'a man that's too old to get married.' And I can remember her yet, she put her head down in her hands and she laughed, and she laughed.*

Mrs Armstrong retired from teaching and eventually a new teacher came who also used to cycle to the school. As a young teacher he quickly became the object of many pranks: *There was a trap door into the loft from the old dwelling house that stretched over the schoolroom. There was one girl and they put her up in the loft and she was throwing things along the loft over to where he'd be sitting.* On one occasion the girl was coming down from the loft, when

he came into the room: *and she had a skirt on her, and it blew up. He just turned and walked out! The poor man, they played such tricks on him.* Some boys also put thorns round his bicycle tyres one day and punctured them: *He would have tried to do something about it, but he never got to know who it was. Nobody ever grassed!! And my brother, Stanley, was one of them.*

Playtime at school was out in the yard, or over the fields, and nobody supervised so children were free to roam: *We played tig and hide and seek, and the boys played football. We used to make skipping ropes out of lengths of rope and tie knots the end.*

The children also played tig and hide and seek on the way home, along with teasing neighbours along the way:

*I remember one time it was frosty and there was a farmer always chasing us because we were on his land. He had a long lane and one day some of them did something to aggravate him, they got him out to run, and there was ice on the road, and down he went, and everybody run. They teased these old men along the road. There was another one and one day they run across the bog to get him to run, and he fell down the bog, I don't know what happened to him, we all ran away.*

One of the worst things that could happen was if your got slapped in school and your parents found out, as you were likely to get another slap then: *Your biggest worry was if your siblings would tell when you got home. So, you had to bribe them not to tell, maybe with tuppence or something you had. It wouldn't be sweets or anything because we didn't have them then.*

Aside from Christmas and Easter the school holidays revolved around the farm year; children were off school to help with bringing in the hay or when potatoes had to be gathered. Gladys remembers the Mummers visiting houses at certain times of the year and they would come in and dance on the hard stone floors of the cottages. When she was 12, she was moved to the Model School in Enniskillen but always remembers her days at Druminiskill as the best of times.

After the school closed the hall was used for dances and other social events. Basil's father told him there was always a session in the hall on the night of the 12th July. As people didn't really go much to pubs back then, there would be a keg of Guinness or perhaps homebrew in the hall after they came back from 'the Twelfth' to continue the celebration. The new hall is now only associated with Druminiskill church but remains a lively centre for community activities.

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## Florencecourt/ The Gate School/Gortnacally

Townland: Gortnacally

The hag's field: *gort*, field; *na caillí* (Cailleach), hag, witch

The school in Gortnakelly was listed on the OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, sitting directly on the boundary between Florencecourt Demesne and Gortnakelly townlands, as '*School Ho. & Post Office*'. The OS memoirs state that it was established in 1833 and was the Parish school.



**Front view of school and adjoining post office, at some time after electricity was installed in Florencecourt village (c.1954)**

The building was described as being of 'stone and mortar and slated'. It was 2-storied, and 32 feet long. At that time, one room was a temporary residence for the school master. The school was in fact semi-detached, with the post office in the other half of the building to the left in the photograph above. It had two big classrooms, one on each floor and they were heated by open fires. The rear porch gave access to the downstairs room on the left, and to the spiral staircase with 11 steps to the upper room.

After Partition in 1921, the National School system was discontinued, and it became Florencecourt Primary school (also known as the 'Old Gate school'). It was now a 'Controlled' (state) school, and only pupils from the Protestant community attended. Mr Robert Thompson was the last principal; the school was replaced by the new Florencecourt Primary School in 1958. The old school was demolished to make way for the present houses at 50-52 Marble Arch Road.



### School days at Florencecourt Primary School

Basil Chambers was one of the last pupils to attend the old school; he remembers starting it aged 7, in 1950. Although he later enjoyed his time at school, he was very reluctant at first, and came straight back home with his mother on his first day! Thereafter, a local girl, Florence Wilson, met him at the bottom of the land and took him by the hand to school with her every day for his first year. It was around a mile walk to school, and regardless of the weather, he says, you didn't miss school. If it was wet, the fire would have been on in the schoolroom and you stood around for a bit until you got the circulation going again! A warm drink was very welcome in the circumstances, as Basil explained: *That time, you got your wee small bottle of milk, and Bobby Thompson got a big saucepan, and everybody that wanted to heeled the wee bottle of milk into the saucepan , it was heated up , and everybody had a tin of Ovaltine, or Milo, or some of them there, and you put a spoonful of that and you took that along with everybody in a wee mug, it was something warm instead of drinking the cold milk.*

The school day started at 9 o'clock in the morning and finished at 3pm. The youngest children were taught downstairs- in Basil's early school years, Vera Gibson and Freda Purcell were the two teachers who taught there, and Master Thompson taught the older children upstairs- when you got your promotion to the 'high school'! Later on the classes were bigger and Vera Gibson and Bobby Thompson would both have been upstairs. Basil estimates there were up to 40 children in some of the photographs he has seen; he explained that at that time you only had one exam, the 'Tech' exam and children stayed on at primary school until they were fifteen years old. He was fourteen when he sat for that and passed it- but although he really liked the idea of woodwork, he didn't go as he wanted to farm: ... *it ended up that woodwork was the part-time job first, and then it's my full-time job now and the farm is part-time! A change round...*

Basil explained that the desks were the conventional 'old-fashioned' school desks: *two sat on each desk, the lid lifted, and your book work and all was underneath it, apart from that you had to bring your bag... you had a bagful of books you brought home with you each day and back again ... you used the old army type bags...inkwells, and pens with the nibs...*. these are the type of pens which older readers may remember were responsible for many blots and scoldings! Electricity didn't arrive in Florencecourt village until 1954, so for the first few years Basil was at school, there was no electric light. He remembers oil lamps in the classrooms, but doesn't recall them being lit.

Children brought a packed lunch -sandwiches or something similar- every day, and playtime was in the big yard behind the school, close to the area now occupied by the new hall; as Basil explains where part of that is now was big area of grass, and an old store. At the bottom were the toilets, the girls' on one side and the boys' on the other side- and as Basil explains: *the smokers' department was at the back of it! We were smoking at 12 or 13, Woodbine... you got 5 Woodbine in a wee packet... but it was fun, there was less pressure then... there was a wall between the two, but we used to throw something across the wall to the girls, or vice versa!*

Many of the games Basil and his friends played will still be popular today, like rounders, marbles, conkers in season and hopscotch, though they used to do that on the tarmac on the road, which definitely wouldn't be advisable now! Playtime was not highly organised- children were outside and running about, and Basil remembers there was no formal teacher supervision, though as he says: *... the Master would have been about to see that nothing got out of hand... I remember one time, the older classes, the girls and the fellas, they were what, 13 or 14, I mind one day one of the fellas catching one of the girls and kissing her, but Mr Thompson caught him at it and he got slapped for it!!*

As the children got older, the schoolwork got harder upstairs in the 'big room' but studying brought its own rewards, as Basil recalls: *at getting out time in the evenings, [Master Thompson] had spellings on the board, and whoever got it right quickest got out first so the smarter you were the quicker you got out... you still had a lot of learning to do.*



**Florencecourt pupils, mid 1950s, with teachers Mrs Freda Purcell and Mrs Vera Gibson, formerly the Johnston sisters.**

At the end of the school day, they made their way home- some of the children would have to walk three miles or more, but they would shorten the journey a bit playing games like pitch penny. Sometimes they would take a shortcut home, through Lord Enniskillen's Plantation across the road from the school... *down through it, right down to where the present primary school is, and come back onto the road there ...there was no traffic on the road then either, or very little. Barefoot- you were barefoot going to school, it was a thing you wanted to do, often if you had shoes you took them off and you walked barefooted*

*anyway, then when you went home in the evening your mother wanted to know why there was tarmac on the socks! It was tar then, not tarmac, but it was all good fun...*

Sometimes the shortcut included a visit to Lord Enniskillen's orchard, as Basil can testify: ... *many's the run in I had with him, he'd say to you 'Why can you not come up and get them?'... it was better fun when we pinched them! Up a tree on one side up onto the wall and down a tree on the other side into the garden to get the strawberries and apples... you brought no evidence home with you!*



**Florence court pupils with teachers Mr Bobby Thompson and Mrs Freda Purcell, mid-1950s  
Basil Chambers is the first boy from the right in the back row.**

We can leave the last words on past times at Florencecourt school for Basil to sum up: *It was all fun, it's different now, there's kind of a lot of pressure on kids nowadays. And it's a different way of bringing up kids, at that time, you got home- and it was outside, you could be at potatoes, you could be at turf, you could be at hay, you could be at anything, then you got in at night and you'd do your homework ... it was good times, we enjoyed it...*

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## Lisblake School

Townland: Lisblake

Buttermilk Fort / *Lios*- fort and *Bláithich*- of the buttermilk.

Lisblake school is shown on the OS [3rd Edition](#) map; it is not listed in Griffith's Valuation, but shortly thereafter, a National School application was made in September 1862 and again in May 1865; the Manager was George Brackenridge. In 1883, the Rev Jamieson was the manager but there was some conflict recorded, as Rev O'Reilly made an official complaint regarding the preference shown to Protestant teachers. In 1889 Henry Stewart ('EC') was recorded as the Principal, and Eliza Kelly ('RC') was the temporary workmistress. There were 57 pupils, 54 of whom were 'EC' and 3 were described as 'others' [G. Burns (2)]. Initially it was a 'mixed' school, attended by both Protestant and Roman Catholic children, but local knowledge indicates that by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was regarded as a 'Protestant' school. It was closed in 1953 and demolished in 2005, as it was structurally compromised; a new house occupies the former site but there are many references to the school's history, as Lilian Reid explained.

### Lilian's story

Lilian is originally from Lisblake, and in 2003, she was offered a site by friends who had land in the area. She chose the school: *I thought it would be a lovely house*. However, as with many former school sites, over the years it becomes difficult to discover who actually owned the building. Lilian decided to research the history of the school: *with my solicitor, online and among the older community members- my mum and dad would have been very knowledgeable about the area*. She found many interesting details: *The records show Miss Nelson taught there until 1953, when I think it closed. A previous teacher, Mary Jane Teele, lived where the Brownlee's house is now. And Mr Samuel Gourley was the teacher before that, and he lived in what was to be my family's house!*

She herself didn't attend Lisblake- when her older brother was starting school, her mother had heard talk that it would close, so he went to Corryglass. However, Lilian recalls her next brother actually attended the school briefly: *My brother Leslie attended the school (aged 4) for a year... apparently my mum walked him across the bogland and then up a lane near Buchanan's (now Carson's) to get to Lisblake Road. He was brought there as the pupil numbers were very low at that time and locals didn't want it to close ...however he only had the one year there due to it closing in 1953- Miss Teele was his teacher. When it came to my turn, it had closed, and I went to Jones' Memorial in Enniskillen.*

### The schoolhouse

In 2003, when she decided she wanted to live there, it was structurally standing, though the lime plaster had fallen off. It was made of Florencecourt brick- from the Tilery, beside the Arney River. She recalls there was a porch at the front, and an outshot either side- the porch

was tiled with red Florencecourt tiles. She was very struck with some of the details which had survived after more than 50 years: *When you went in, there was a row of 12 coat hangers, a lovely, curved shape, I think made of cast iron, with a round ball at the top, made of solid ivory. To the left of the hallway there was a door which took you into the main room, but before the door was the sink, a stone sink, brown glazed. Most kids would have come across the bog, and they used it to clean their boots! It was built into the wall and cemented into the floor- I don't know if they changed the water every day or every week, for there were no taps.* She recalled that there was no running water at all, and water came from a well; there were actually three wells nearby. Two were spa wells and people came for the health benefits of drinking the mineral-enriched water. There was also no electricity. Sadly, some of the features were to disappear: *Beside the coat hangers was a row of cupboards with lovely brass knobs, those disappeared as well as the coat hangers after I bought it- I suppose they couldn't get the sink out or it might have gone too... the school had the name stone 'Lisblake National School', at the front, that was stolen along with the coat hooks and the brass knobs- I was heartbroken- I wanted to set it into the gatepost.*

Lilian recalled being in the school when she was a little girl: *...after it had closed, I'd walked up a number of times with friends for Harvest Thanksgiving... I remember Canon Anderson giving me an apple! I don't know if they had any means of dividing it when it was being used as a school, but it was one big room. There was a lovely big fireplace, mahogany and carved, it was beautifully decorated for the harvest, and I walked in and couldn't believe it was still there, but there was a pile of twigs and branches halfway across the floor from crows' nests!*

Unfortunately, all the timbers (and the walls) were infested with dry rot: *I walked across to see the fireplace because I'd have wanted to keep that- but my finger went right through it with dry rot!* There was a storage space beside the fireplace for fuel, but no stove at the other end of the room, which was usually the case in one-roomed schools. Lilian didn't get the chance to photograph the school at the time, but she says: *Thinking back, there were two windows on the north side, in the gable, and the south gable facing Cuilcagh mountain had two windows as well. The west side (the back) had one window; the front porch had one window beside the door. The east side faced the road and there were no windows on that side. The chimney was on the front wall, where there were no windows.* She recalls that some of the walls and outbuildings remained: *The toilet was set back on the north side of the school; it was in a state of disrepair but there was an ornate red brick wall with a diamond pattern in the centre. The front had a red brick wall too, and the pillars were still there -there was an iron swing gate, so that only one person at a time could go through. I salvaged the gate, and gave it to the farmer whose ground it stood in. It had a rounded top, and steel bars, with a jack bolt.*

### New life for the old school

After a long search to determine who owned it, Lilian was finally successful in buying it. She really wanted to preserve the building, but after survey, it was clear that nothing in the school could be re-used as it was structurally unsafe. However, there was then a problem with planning, as the authorities wanted it built the same size as the former school. As Lilian

pointed out, this is small for a modern house. She appealed it several times; eventually she was able to increase the footprint and go up a storey.



**The new house which replaced the school, complete with nameplate**

Building began in 2005- the builder turned up early, on St Patrick's Day, which is why she has no photographs of the old school, as he'd unexpectedly begun demolishing it. Lilian moved into the house in December 2005; she has subsequently moved, and the house is now a home for an American family originally from Cleenish.



**The old school sink now repurposed as a flower planter at the back wall of the house.**

She still has some mementoes of the old school in her new home: *I found inkwells and a bottle and an old jam jar or two when the school was demolished- I told the builders to watch out for bits and pieces! Though I wanted to conserve it, it just wasn't possible, but it's a lovely house and I'm glad the way it turned out.*

### **Schooldays at Lisblake**

Billy Brown and his sister Irene both went to Lisblake school as had their parents, and they walked about two and a half miles to get there, no matter what the weather was like. Billy remembers it was a traditional one room schoolhouse: *big high ceilings and an open fire in it. There was one half of the pupils on one side and one half on the other. The wall right around the new house there now is the old wall of the school grounds and it's now been plastered. The toilets used to out at the back of the school. I would say there would have been about 30 or 40 children at the school, and before it closed maybe it was down to*

*20...There were two teachers, Miss Kennedy and Miss Teele. Miss Teele and my father went to school together and the day he left she started to teach the juniors, and it ended up, by the time I was going to school, she was the head teacher. Miss Kennedy came from Ballinamallard, and she had been to the Technical College, and they used to switch when the inspector wasn't there.*

A visit from a school inspector was always a stressful time for teachers and Billy remembers one day when he spotted the inspector coming up the road on his bicycle: *Bob Teele wasn't well at the time and Miss Teele had slipped up to the house to get him a wee bit of dinner. When I saw the inspector coming up the road, I had to hightail it up to tell her to get back down to the school. There was probably only about 15 or 16 of us at the time in the school.*

Along with the general subjects taught at the school, singing was also a part of the day. Billy remembers the teacher having a turning fork that was struck to give you the note but has less than fond memories of one teacher who was at the school for a short time: *I was glad to see him leaving. He stood behind me and apparently because I wasn't singing, wasn't making a noise, I got slapped. I knew I couldn't sing.*

During the school day water had to be fetched from a stream near the school and the children would go down to fill a bucket. If it were cold in the winter the teacher would light the fire and put the kettle over it to boil and make the children tea. Billy says that only happened *when it was very cold. But you needed water also for the ink. The ink powder came in cartons, and you had to go down and get some water to make the ink. And you had the old copy books, inkwell, and wood pens with nibs. And you had to do the joined-up writing perfectly!*

Billy remembers being handy at fixing things and helping Miss Kennedy when she got a puncture: *Miss Kennedy would have come on the bus from Ballinamallard to Letterbreen Cross. She had a bicycle she kept in a wee shed at Letterbreen, and she would cycle from there up to Lisblake. She got a puncture one day, so I fixed the puncture and she brought me a big Wagon Wheel (a large chocolate biscuit) the next day for fixing the puncture. A week or so after that I punctured the bike to get fixing it again, and hoping I'd get another Wagon Wheel! I didn't really puncture it, I just let it down. But she thought it was punctured!*

Despite the odd prank and 'divilment': *there was no badness. We knew what we could and couldn't do.* There were lots of fun times at Lisblake and happy memories. Irene especially remembers the Christmas parties. *There were always nice Christmas parties with a Christmas tree and all and all the families came.*

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## Marble Arches School

Townland: Tromogagh

Place of the little elder trees: *tromógach, trom, elder,*



**Marble Arches school**

The school is first shown on the OS [3rd Edition](#) map as *Marblearch School*. It was built in 1883, and the school manager, Rev. Patrick O'Reilly PP, completed a National School application in that year for the appointment of a school mistress [[1](#)]. It is later recorded as *Marble Arches Pr. Sch.* in maps from 1919-1963. The stone-built school, now derelict and roofless, sits high up a steep laneway leading up from the Marlbanks Road, and has commanding views over the surrounding countryside. It closed in 1967. The land to build the school was given to the parish by Pat Nolan.

### Schooldays at Marble Arches School

Pupils attending Marble Arches school had a long walk ahead of them, and for many it was a trek over fields as the Marlbanks loop road was not finished until the late 1950s. Pascal McGovern, who attended the school from 1957 to 1966 said the road came in sections: *That was the way the road was done, it came in sections, maybe there would have been half a mile done, maybe a quarter of a mile, depending on the time that money was allocated for it. At the time of the war then it would have stalled for a good while. They came as far as Marlbanks maybe in the 30s and there might have been nothing done for 15 or 20 years. And then it came on one side of the school and the last couple of miles was done fairly quickly. When I was going to school the road came to one side of the school, but where the boardwalk is now, we used to walk through the fields there.*

Pascal's house was probably the closest to the school and they still had a good walk down through the fields. When John McNulty went to the school in 1946, he had to travel three miles across country: *Looking back at that sure we really enjoyed it. You were running the fields and there was a pass you see, there was a marked pass, so it was almost the same as a road. You knew exactly where you were going. Many's a time in the morning it would be*



*very heavy rain and you'd be looking down the field from home and you'd be hoping it would get worse and worse. If it got extremely bad you might get away with not going but always coming up to the time of going to school, it seemed to get fair.* John walked to school with his older brother and the Maguires who lived near them.

Marble Arches was the main school for the whole area and both John and Pascal remember children coming across the border from Cavan to the school and children walking up from the low road, as that part of the loop had been completed. As John says: *It was still a fair climb. But when you look back on it you didn't seem to pass any remarks cos that's the way it was. At one time there were children came over from Cavan, from the Burren area of Cavan that borders this area. Children from a couple of families did come from there. There didn't seem to be any bother about them coming but they had an awful journey coming, they were travelling about five miles. When you're young it was actually very good for you to be travelling so much. Great exercise.*

Pascal also remembers that there were a lot of people who moved into the area for a few years, and then moved on again, and their children were at that school for a few years. One particular family were the Fee/Plunketts. Mrs Plunkett was a widow who had married a man called Fee. One of the children, Oliver Plunkett, came to Marble Arches. His family rented a house halfway between Marbles Arches and Wheathill school. *Oliver lived just below Crossmurrin and he'd have walked up through the fields to get to our school. His youngest brother would have gone to Killesher school when Marble Arches closed – six or seven miles away, but they had school buses then. I often wonder what happened to Oliver.*

There were generally about 25 to 30 children at the school when both John and Pascal were at school. But numbers did fluctuate a bit over the years. When Pascal was at school there were a lot of families in the area with children: *At that time the families all were at the one stage, there were big families. There were probably 7 or 8 families there, and they were all large families, so it meant there was a good lock of children. The eldest of us was Noel, and he'd been born probably 1945. Well, he went young to school because the population had dropped, and he went to school when he was four. Then the next few years there was large families coming and when I went there was a big crowd of us there, I was about six or seven when I went.*

The schoolroom was divided in two with long benches. The younger children sat up near the fire and the older ones sat with their backs to them facing the other gable. Pascal remembers there were two teachers when he was there, but before that there had only been one teacher. John McNulty says there were small lower desks for infants: *There were about four desks and the older ones had higher desks, long ones, back-to-back to the infants. I'm sure there were seven or eight rows of high ones and a couple of rows of small ones in the front. They were long bench desks connected. No separate desks. Solid desks, like a table, but they had inkwells along them. When we were young, we thought this was a big place, but looking at it now it seems so small!*

Pascal enjoyed his schooldays in Marble Arches: *It was a nice wee place, up the side of the hill. We had lots of games and we got plenty of time outside. We just organised ourselves at*



*play time, and a couple of days a week you'd spend an hour or two singing. Mrs Dolan took us for singing.*

Older children at the school had the usual jobs of bringing in turf and lighting the fire or go to the well for a bucket of water. Everyone brought a sandwich for lunch and there were little bottles of milk left by the milkman at the bottom of the lane up to the school: *The milkman would leave the milk down at the road and we would bring it up and put it beside the fire, it would be frosted, frozen. We hated it when it was half warm and half cold. It would be better just left the way it was and drink it cold.*

It seems playing with carbide was a favourite way for some of the boys to play pranks in school. Both Pascal and John remember how you could get carbide off the potholers who used it for lighting their way in the caves. (Once wet it gave off a gas which could be lit.) Pascal said his brother, Jimmy, brought some into school: *and he gave one to Frank McGourty who sat beside him and said to put it in his ink well, and the next thing the whole ink started bubbling up and up. He put the book over it try and stop it, and the teacher Mrs Dolan, she could smell it and was wondering what was going on. Didn't she see Frank and his face getting red and she came down and she spotted what was going on. Jimmy had asked to go the toilet just before this and he was outside, and Frank got scuppered. But I think the two of them got slapped anyway, she knew who the culprit was.*

John McNulty remembers one boy who persuaded a whole row of boys to put carbide down their inkwells and the whole place was bubbling and smoking!

Pascal went to school in Enniskillen after he left Marble Arches and he had to cycle down to the bottom road: *The town bus went early, and I would have been too late to wait for the primary school bus to get down the road. Then as time went on the school bus did come round twice. Once to bring us down to the main road to get the bus to Enniskillen and then came back up round to get the children going to Killesher school. It was hard in the wintertime, with snow on the ground, it was hard striking out at half seven in the morning. I spent two years, from 1966-68 at Enniskillen school. I left school of a Friday evening and I started work in Enniskillen of the Monday morning, cycling from home then to Belcoo to get on a lorry to go to work.*

John stayed at Marble Arches until he was 14: *I didn't go to any other school. The reason the teacher wanted to keep us was to keep the numbers up and there wasn't much point in us going to any other school at that age, because I was going to be on the farm. The other brother went to the technical school in Enniskillen but I was going to be the farmer so there was no point in sending me anywhere.*

John and Pascal enjoyed their time at Marble Arches. The walks to school, having lots of other children in the area, and the freedom and safety of their area all made for happy times and good memories.

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## Notes on Lisdivrick and Rossmacawinny

Townland: Lisdivrick

Durack's Fort: *lios*, fort, and the name, *Duibhric*

A schoolhouse is shown in Lisdivrick townland on the OS [1st and 2nd Edition](#) maps behind what is now 85 Marble Arch Road. The OS memoirs report that it was established in 1834 and there were 40 pupils but seems to have gone out of use sometime in the last couple of decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Irene Brady's father-in-law went to the school, and he may have been the last generation to attend it before it closed. The site of the school is close to the junction of what is now the New Line Road and Irene says the modern house at the top of New Line was where the schoolmaster's house would have been, just opposite the school.

Townland: Rossmacawinny

MacSwiney's wood or MacSwiney's point

The school doesn't appear on any of the old maps but was reported in Griffiths' Valuation c.1862 as the 'Church Education Society School.' The building was sited up a laneway behind a later house on Blunnick Road. Billy Brown, who built the new house, says his grandfather went to the school, and he remembers it being demolished in 1986.

*Grandfather Price went to Rossmacawinny school, but our mother didn't go to that school. She was born in 1914 so when the school was closed, I don't know, but she went to Lisblake. The house here opposite us was where a teacher from Lisblake lived for a while. Rossmacawinny was a fair size of a school, about 30 foot wide and up to 60 foot long. It would have been big and then whatever accommodation was in the upper end of it. I think Granda Price said it was McGoldrick's lived in the bottom end of it, but that was possibly after it had been a school. And it's possible that it originally was the accommodation for the schoolmaster and then the house was built further down the lane here. Billy remembers his father always said it was the schoolteachers' house, but it could have been that teachers lodged there or perhaps rented it.*

Billy's sister, Irene, remembers that the old schoolhouse was used for harvest thanksgivings: *We used to decorate it with beech and apples and stuff, and light tilly lamps for the thanksgiving festival. It was also used for local band practice, social events, dances and even an election booth. And there was a bible class in it on a Wednesday and there used to be currant loaf and tea and we thought that was wonderful.* Billy doesn't remember the dances but remembers his father *talking about Jim Carr doing a hornpipe with hobnail boots on him.*

## Notes on Mullanavehy/Mullinavigh

Townland: Mullanavehy

Birch tree summit: '*mullán*'- summit, and '*na bheithe*' - of the birch

The schoolhouse is documented on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS map, which shows it to the immediate south-east of Arney bridge (see photo below). The 1849 application for a National School grant for a teacher indicated it was established in 1847; however, the OS Memoirs record a school at 'Mullinavigh', established in 1831 with 20 children, 7 boys and 13 girls of whom 5 were Protestant and 15 Catholic. The school was no longer present in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition OS map of the area (dated 1905–07), suggesting that by then it had been demolished. According to local residents it was replaced by a more modern building nearby, Arney/Mullanavehy P.S., in the early 1900s, which was itself replaced in 1964 by a new school at Mullymesker in Arney village. There is now a modern house on the site.



During an excavation of the earlier school at Arney Bridge by Queen's University Belfast in 2014, local people remembered their days at the new Mullanavehy school that was built a short distance away. Below are some extracts from a report of 2014, from people who attended this new school.

"Ellen Brogan, who now lives beside Arney Old Bridge travelled to Mullanavehy with her mother, Mrs Theresa Owens, who was the last principal of Arney P.S. and is remembered with fondness by all her charges. Ellen recalls how, as her mother was the Principal, she would be taken to school in the car: *'It was a treat anytime we were allowed to walk home because we always had great fun on the way back. You could take your time and stop and play and talk to people.* Glover Lyttle remembers calling for friends on his way to school and others recall how many pupils would walk through fields to the school, using gaps in the hedges. The journey to and from school was an animated topic of conversation and people remembered what houses they passed, the fields they walked, and the 'dilly-dallying' on the way home to play and explore. One particular treat was on the first day of May when

everyone was allowed to come in their bare feet. *You couldn't wait for it, said Jennifer Cornyn. 'I remember walking on the road, it was great, such freedom.'*

“The school had one large room where half of the benches faced one way, and half the other. Pupils entered at the junior end of the building where there were hooks on a wall to hang coats. The benches were long with desks attached and on each one was copy books, fountain pens and bottles of ink. Jennifer Cornyn, who left the school in 1962, remembers her teacher, Mrs. McKenna, who immediately pre-dated Mrs. Owens: *Mrs. McKenna prepared a couple of us for the Eleven Plus, but other pupils stayed on at school until they were 14 or 16 and then went on to the local technical college or training. There was no secondary school in the area at the time.*’ Jennifer attended the school along with her sister and brother and talks of how Mrs. McKenna would make the exam pupils study throughout the summer. *We only got one week off when she went on holiday. The rest of the summer we used to cycle three miles back and forth to her home every day for class, up hills, and lane ways.*

“The reasons of choosing a particular school were often practical but also tied to family tradition and history. Sean Cox explained: *More often than not you went to a school that was the nearest to your home. But it could also be because your parents or grandparents went there, so there was a sense of family history. But also, it was the reputation of the teacher that was the deciding factor.*”

The full report of the school excavation and the former pupils’ memories can be accessed at: <http://www.battlesbricksandbridges.org/admin/resources/arney-school-stories-and-history22-1.pdf>

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To view detailed descriptions and locations of all the schools in the Killesher Parish area visit the online Gazetteer and Photo Gallery at <https://www.c2c.org.uk/reports/>


## Photographic Credits

Castletown School interior: Professor Eileen Murphy  
 Claddagh School exterior views: Jim Wilson  
 Claddagh pupils: Alicia Wiggins  
 Druminiskill School exterior: Basil Chambers  
 Florencecourt School exterior; Florencecourt School pupils: Basil Chambers

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## Ordnance Survey Historic Map Series

1<sup>st</sup> Edition:1832-1846, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:1846-1862, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition:1900-1907.

For further details, including locations shown on 20<sup>th</sup> century maps, readers can consult the Historical Maps Viewer (<https://apps.spatialni.gov.uk/PRONIAApplication/>). School sites are marked with a small orange mortarboard ; where the term 'school-house' or 'school' also appears beside a building the series date indicates the period the school was in use. Unfortunately dates of use cannot be accurately determined given the time span of the map series, and the fact that the 1846-1862 edition is not fully digitised.

## Further reading

1. Burns, G. 1992. *'If Only'...Historical Sketches of the Belcoo Area*. Available from: <http://www.cavanburren.ie/145-2/history-resources/> Details of local National Schools by the same author can be found at: <https://www.c2c.org.uk/reports/>
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