

# Three local Schools

By Griffith Wylie

The origin of many of our local schools is shrouded in mystery. Before the establishment of the National School System in the 1830's schools were of a very informal nature. Often they were dependent on how long the teacher remained in the area and generally the "school house" was a barn or shed or even under a hedge or tree. These informal schools are sometimes referred to as 'hedge-schools'. The qualifications of the teachers varied greatly. Some were classical scholars well able to give instruction on a wide variety of subjects, while others were at best barely semi-literate.

At the beginning of the 1820's there appears to have been at least a dozen schools within a radius of 3 or 4 miles of the village of Poyntzpass. These schools were financed in a variety of ways. There was no compulsory education, of course, and no uniformity either in curriculum or teachers' qualifications. Many children, probably a large majority, never attended school at all, and those who did only attended very irregularly — when there was a lull in work or on the farm and there was 'nothing better to do'.

Today the same area is served by two primary schools in Poyntzpass village with a combined enrol-

ment of about 170 children. This reduction in the number of schools is due to many factors but most of all due to the drop in population of the area since the middle of the last century. The following table gives an example of several townlands and their populations in 1841, 1881 and 1926.

Townland	1841	1881	1926
Demoan	201	83	48
Lisraw	170	64	31
Tannyoky	137	64	31
Glassdrumman	29	13	9
Ballyreagh	230	97	60
Ballynaleck	190	82	59

The three schools with which I intend to deal in this article are the two surviving village schools and my own primary school — Fourtowns. The title of these schools has changed over the years — they were known as 'National Schools' during the period up until the 1920's. 'Public Elementary Schools' thereafter and now are designated as 'Primary Schools'.

## POYNTZPASS No. 1 NATIONAL SCHOOL

Situated in the townland of Brannock this appears to have been one of the earliest regular schools in the area and was the first to become a National School in 1832.

In an application for aid submitted to the Commissioners of Irish Education in April 1832, the then Parish Priest, Rev. John Coyne states that the school was built in the year 1813 and was financed by "the contributions of the charitable people of the town and vicinity." The first teacher, was Thomas McCreash and while it is impossible at this stage to comment on his abilities as a teacher, that he was talented is well illustrated by the excellent sun dials he made for the Catholic Church (1817), the Church of Ireland (1819) and other churches locally.

In 1826 Master McCreash had an income £16 per annum made up of school fees paid by his pupils. The fees were between two shillings and sixpence and five shillings per quarter and as Fr. Coyne pointed out in

1832, a great many poor people were denied an education because they could not afford the fees. In 1826 there were only 24 pupils on the roll of whom 4 were of the Established Church 6 were Presbyterians and 14 were Catholics.

In 1832 a new teacher Patrick Conroy was appointed and the school manager applied for aid with both his salary and "a proper supply of school requisites which would greatly facilitate the labours of the master."

The application gives many interesting details as well as those already quoted. The school was a substantial building "built of stone and slates" requiring only "a little glazing, painting and whitewashing to make it decent". The books used had been bought by the parents of the pupils and were 'Monson Universals', McCrea's spelling books, Gahern's History of the Old and New Testament and the "English Speaker". The school was open six days a week from ten till four o'clock.



Poyntzpass No. 1 National School—Group, 1905 - 06.



Poyntzpass No. 1 Public Elementary School Group, 1934.



Poyntzpass No. 1 Public Elementary School Group, 1952.

Master Conroy's qualifications seemed rather vague, simply having "received some instruction in the Belfast Institution." The school possessed only two desks and two forms but Fr. Coyne reckoned that "with proper furnishing and arrangement the building could accommodate an hundred scholars".

The application which was signed (as was necessary) by both protestants and catholics was successful, £7 being granted as a salary for the teacher and the necessary 'requisites' being provided. The Protestant signatories were John Dickson, M.P., George Bennett, James Hamilton, John Little, George Crothers and John Crothers while the Catholics who signed the application were John Coyne P.P., William Quinn C.C., John Madden, James Macgill M.D., Felix Rice and Patrick Conroy (the teacher).

The school, having achieved National Board status appears to have expanded rapidly. From 24 pupils in 1826 it had reached 50 in 1832. In his notes for the 1838. Ordnance Survey memoirs J. Hill Williams gives the following information: "the school is visited by the inspectors of the National Board. The books of the Board are used. Number of pupils Males (3 above 15), total 118, Females (10 above 15) total 180."

Patrick Conroy continued as Master until 1855. In that year however the school was struck off the roll of National Schools, for Mr. Conroy having by then reached an advanced age had failed to pass the annual inspection. The inspector reported that "owing to old age and infirmity he was no longer competent to conduct the school with efficiency."

The Parish Priest of the period, the Rev. Edward Campbell, in seeking the restoration of the school to its former status, stated that prior to receiving the inspector's report he was "constrained to remove him" (Patrick Conroy) and had appointed a new teacher Peter Murphy in his place. Some other complaints regarding furniture had also been dealt with and the school was restored to its National School standing by the Autumn of 1855.

The new teacher was said to be 28 years of age and while he had not taught previously he was in the opinion of Fr. Campbell "well qualified to conduct the school." At that time the books used in the school were those published by the National Board.

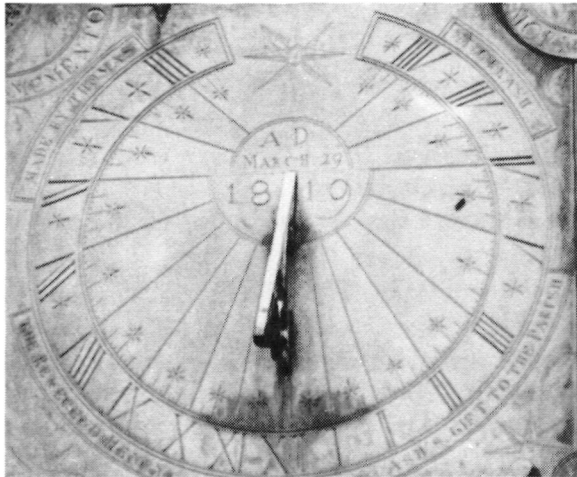
In 1858 Fr. Campbell applied to the Commissioners for aid towards the salary of a work Mistress, Mary



The old Schoolhouse shortly before demolition.

Ann Campbell. She was 21 years old and was to give "instruction in dressmaking white work, plain and fancy work and knitting" two hours, five days per week. She was testimonials from a number of respectable local people and was duly appointed, receiving a salary of £8 per annum. This appointment appears to have been made to encourage girls to attend the school for the number who attended regularly appears to have been very low. Attendance for the half year ending 30th September, 1855 averaging only 43 pupils out of a total enrolment of over 100.

Like his predecessors Peter Murphy appears to have enjoyed a lengthy period as principal, being succeeded in the 1870's by Archibald McVeigh (whose descendants, the Hudson family, still reside in the village).



The sundial Acton Parish Church, the work of Thomas McCreash.

In 1885 the workmistress was Matila Brady and the number on role was 98. On the death of Master McVeigh the next appointment was that of Miss MacDermott.

A native of Bunnanadden, Co. Mayo she was to find herself the centre of the most bizarre controversy in the school's history. Because of an "affair" with a signal-man at the local railway station, parents withdrew their children from the school and sent them elsewhere. Many attended the village's other school and some went to school in Tanioky, Acton, Ballyrgan, Lissummon and one even travelled by train to Lisnegade.

For two years an almost total boycott of the school was maintained during which time only 2 pupils attended the school. Miss MacDermott enjoyed the sup-

port of the school's manager, the Parish Priest, Fr. Bernard Lavery, but despite his support she was eventually forced to leave the village. The controversy was such that Cardinal Logue came to the village to hold an enquiry into the matter. Through his efforts Miss MacDermott was found a position in Lanark, Scotland. Some years later she returned to her native Co. Mayo. She married a local man John Kearins and taught in Bunnadden National School for many years, she died in 1954.

She was succeeded as Principal by a Mr. Hynes, but his term in office was relatively brief for he left in 1905 to be replaced by Mr. J. J. Ryder and his wife Bridget who were to hold the position for 25 years.

The coming of the Ryders, coincided with the building of an extension to the original school house. This did not meet with universal approval as the old building was a long, low 'barn type' and the extension was higher and at an angle. One lady recalled her father describing the job "building a bay onto a barn."

The Ryders achieved a legendary status locally during their tenure of office, being remembered for their severity, especially towards their own children. However despite this they are still very fondly remembered around Poyntzpass. In 1930 the Ryders retired and went to live in Dublin. They were succeeded by Mr. J. J. McGee (a native of Newtownhamilton) and Miss M. A. Cassidy (later Mrs. Hendron) of Newry. The school had by this time become officially known as Poyntzpass No.1 Public Elementary School. They both remained in the school for many years. In 1958 numbers had received sufficiently to justify the appointment of a second assistant, Mr. J. G. Davis. Mrs. Hendron retired in 1962 being replaced by Mrs. A. Canavan and in October 1963 after a reign of 33 years, Mr. McGee retired. He was succeeded as Principal by Mr. J. G. Davis, with Mr. F. Watters being appointed assistant. In the spring of 1964 the teachers and pupils vacated the 170 year old building to move just a few yards to the new school — St. Joseph's Primary School. In March 1982 the Old School House was demolished to make way for the new hall. Mr. Davis continued as Principal until his retirement in 1989 being succeeded by Mr. F. Watters. Mrs. Canavan retired in June 1991. There are at present 4 teachers — Mr. F. Watters (Principal), Mrs. G. Turley (V. Principal), Mrs. A. Kennedy and Miss F. Kennedy. There are 90 pupils on roll.



St. Joseph's P.S. to-day.

### POYNTZPASS No. 2 NATIONAL SCHOOL

Originally situated in Railway Street, Poyntzpass, this school grew out of the amalgamation of several schools in the village in the 1820's and 1830's.

According to J. Hill Williams (Ordnance Survey Memoirs) 1838, Poyntzpass Male and Female School was financed by the Kildare Street Society. Pupils received moral instruction as well as reading, writing and arithmetic. The number of pupils then was, males 14 under 10 years of age; 3 from 10 to 15, a total of 17. Females, 4 under 10 years of age; 2 from 10 to 15, a total of 6. Total number of pupils 23. James Sexton was the Master.

Poyntzpass Male and Female, Infant School was also under the Kildare Street Society. Expenditure was from W. J. Close, Drumbanagher, £10 per annum and small sums from the children, Mrs. Close and the Rev. Darby (Protestant Curate), visited the school. Number of pupils, males, 20 under 10 years of age, a total of 20. Females, 19 under 10 years of age and 7 over 15 years of age, a total number of pupils 46.

The Mistress was Jane McCann and the total number of children "on the books" was 90. Both of these schools were housed in the same building which had been built by Colonel Close of Drumbanagher in 1828. It seems peculiar that there were older pupils at the infant school (7 girls over 15 years of age) than at the Senior School.

Records for this school are very patchy and the names of the early teachers have been largely lost. Exactly when these schools amalgamated is not clear but by 1850 it had become single National School, Poyntzpass No.2. An inspector's report of April 18th, 1856, gives the following information.

"....4 pupils in 1st class — able to read easy words  
2 pupils in 2nd class — reading and spelling — fair  
6 pupils in Sequel No.2 — 4 form a good class, the other are backward  
8 pupils in 3rd class — reading and spelling mostly good  
2 pupils in 4th class — reading good, explanation and spelling, fair.

The school and premises are in excellent order."

In August 1857 the inspector recorded that 33 pupils were present, while in 1865 the total was 59. The inspection of 1870 was obviously very thorough, the inspector recording that "the school was inspected from 11 a.m. until 5.30 p.m."

In 1879 the following are some of the names of pupils on roll, E. Allen, P. J. Little, William McClimond, L. Davis, R. Copeland, A. Stratton, S. Taylor.

In 1882 it was noted by the inspector that "Susan Dinsmore was absent for 22 days without being struck off."

In 1870 the teachers were Mrs. Watson and Miss Bell. In 1887 Mrs. Watson was succeeded by her son James Watson. In 1890 Mr. James Gilliland took over. He was followed by 1906 by Mr. Robert Judge. A confidential report on the school in May 1901 is as follows:

"This school is in a highly efficient state, my examination of the standards of the work of the school generally affording every evidence of thorough teaching. The only important defect noticeable is the monotonous character of the reading. Needlework is unusually good.



Poyntzpass No. 2 National School Group—date not known.

Satisfactory progress has been made with drawing and drill and instruction in singing has been resumed.

Discipline and training are good. J. Murphy (Inspector)."

Another inspector noted that "Pupils should not be allowed to disfigure the out office walls with inscriptions. The walls should be white washed at once."

In 1902 the inspectors report was equally satisfactory as follows:

Reading — Good

Writing — V. Good

Grammar / Spelling — Good

Composition — V. Good

Arithmetic — V. Good

Drawing — Good

Elem. Science — V. Good

Singing — Good

Discipline and Drill — Excellent

Mr. James Gilliland who was the teacher at that period had taken over from James Watson on August 1st, 1889. He, unlike some of those mentioned earlier was a trained teacher having attended Marlborough St. College and had obtained a teachers Certificate from the National Board.

From 1905 until 1932 the principal was Mr. Robert Judge. His wife, Mrs. Kezia Judge was assistant and Miss Mary E. Judge was monitor. Mr. Judge was an

outstanding pioneer in the field of teacher unions being for some time President of the Irish National Teachers Organisation, a body which at that time represented virtually every teacher in Ireland. He was responsible for negotiating teachers salaries and conditions of service. Following his retirement in 1932, he was largely responsible for the setting up of a union for retired teachers and for achieving for retired teachers pension rights. Mr. Judge's contribution to Teacher's organisations has been dealt with in greater detail in No.4 of 'Before I forget...'

Following Mr. Judge's retirement in 1932 his place was taken by Mr. Robert Harvey. Mr. Harvey was a native of Enniskillen. He was a keen gardener, an outstanding musician and a gifted mathematician but in an age when education was little valued his gifts were often not appreciated. His assistant teachers during his term of office were Miss Thompson (1942), Miss Hill (1943), Miss Ethel Martin (1945), Miss Elizabeth McClelland (1945) and Mrs. Jean Minnis (1946). When Mr. Harvey retired around 1960, Mrs. Minnis took over as principal continuing in the post until the amalgamation of the school with several other local schools, Fourtowns, Tanioky, Jerretzpass and Drumbanagher — to form Poyntzpass County Primary School in 1972.

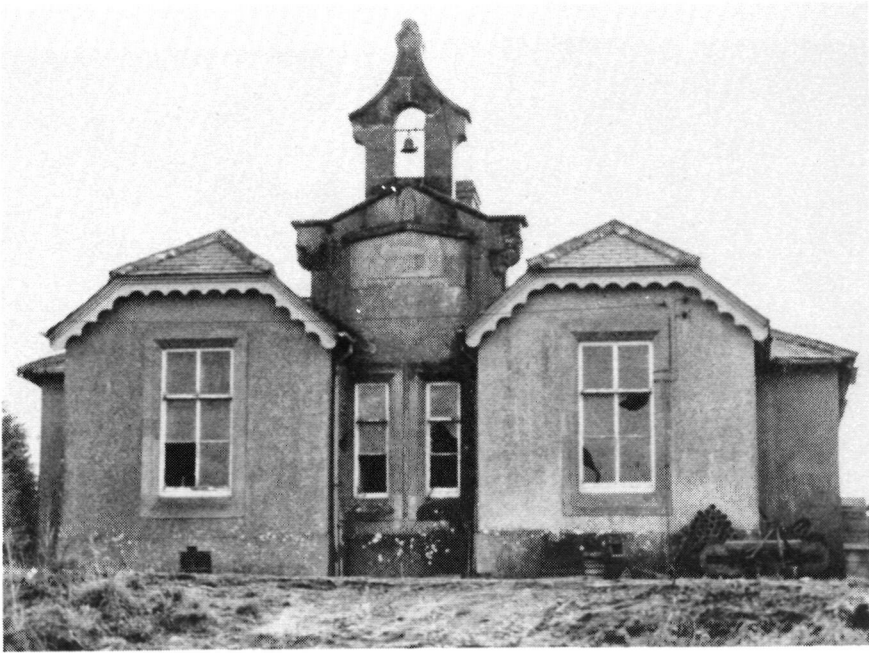


Poyntzpass No. 2 P.E.S. Group, 1930.





Poyntzpass No. 2 P.E.S. Group, 1958.



**The old Schoolhouse to-day.**



**Mr. Robert Harvey, Principal 1932—1954.**

## FOURTOWNS PRIMARY SCHOOL



Fourtowns Primary School Pupils, 1927 - 28.

An attempt was made to establish a school in Killysaran in 1819. The vestry of the parish church resolved in that year as follows.... "We present the sum of twenty pounds for the purpose of Killysavan, provided the proprietor of the estate or his accredited agent gives from under his hand, that he will give over his right to the said parish of the site of the said school-house together with the occupier of the farm at present — which documents are to be produced at the next vestry, and entered on said vestry book — otherwise this grant will be void."

Unfortunately the rather complicated conditions outlined in this resolution were not met with and the proposed school did not materialise. A note in the vestry book for May 1st, 1820 states that "The condition of the above act not complied with."

About the same time (c.1820) and possibly as an alternative, a school was established in the townland of Tullymore.

There is no record in the vestry minutes of any

money having been provided out of parish funds towards either the establishment of this school or its maintenance, apart from a resolution for April 1821 when the sum of 2 guineas was granted "for the repairs of the school hoiiuse at Mr. John Young's. The committee was Hugh Copeland, Robert Small, James Shannon, Joseph McKnight, William Waddell, Samuel B. Marshall, Joseph Clegg and Samuel Gibson.

The first teacher of this school was John McMullen, a Catholic and the pupils in 1829 consisted of 14 Roman Catholics, 5 Presbyterians and 1 Irish Church child. Subsequent teachers were Mrs. Nesbit, Wm. Gordon, Hamilton, McElroy, George Hare, George Gillespie, William Donaldson, Miss Agnes Sloan, Miss Minnie Sloan and Miss Hudson.

In 1820 there was a school in the townland of Ballymacarattybeg. The teacher was Robert Bell (a seceder) his salary was £20 and the pupils consisted of 18 Irish Church Children, 12 Presbyterians and 8 Catholics.

The Fourtowns National School was situated in the townland of Killysaran and was managed by the Ministers of Fourtowns Presbyterian Church, the congregation of which was responsible for its erection and maintenance.

The school-house was built in 1836 and the school became a National School the following year. The following is a list of the teachers from 1837 onwards.

1837 — Miss Bell  
 1846 — Alexander Cummins  
 1872 — Miss Annie Henderson (Mrs. James Jenkins)  
 1890 — Miss Hellena Cuyler  
 1894 — Miss Mary Malcolmson (Mrs. Joseph Wylie)  
 1898 — Miss Susan Cunningham (Mrs. James Wylie)  
 1908 — Mrs. Joseph Wylie (re-appointed)  
 1908 — Miss Minnie Young  
 1911 — Miss Julcia Dunseath  
 1917 — Miss English  
 1919 — Miss E. Darragh  
 1923 — Miss A. L. Major  
 1925 — Miss Jean Hanna  
 1928 — Miss Blackwood  
 1930 — Miss Gladys Dodds  
 1933 — Miss Hanna Barbour

1935 — Miss Annie Howison  
 1941 — Miss E. C. Smyth  
 1941 — Miss Getty  
 1946-1972 — Miss M. E. Grills (Mrs. Kirkland)

The original school-house was thatched and it was not until 1889 that an inspectors' report records that the thatched roof had been replaced by a slated one but also records that there were no "out offices" for the pupils.

These inspectors reports make interesting reading highlighting strenghts and weaknesses in each school and drawing attention to defects in buildings etc. In the case of Fourtowns School, the level altered with charge of teacher which was exceptionally rapid. Up until Miss Grills' (Mrs. Kirkland) appointment in 1946 the average length of service was barely 4 years.

Geography seems to have been particularly neglected irrespective of which teacher was in charge as a long succession of inspectors report that there was "no map of Europe" in the school. This was first mentioned in 1892 and recorded annually until 1938 when it appears a map was procured. Another annual comment is the lack of a playground. However available in this small



Fourtowns Primary School Pupils, 1936.

country school inspectors reports are almost always complimentary. The number of roll in the 1890's was around 30 and appears to have remained around that number until the 1930's when 22 pupils were on roll.

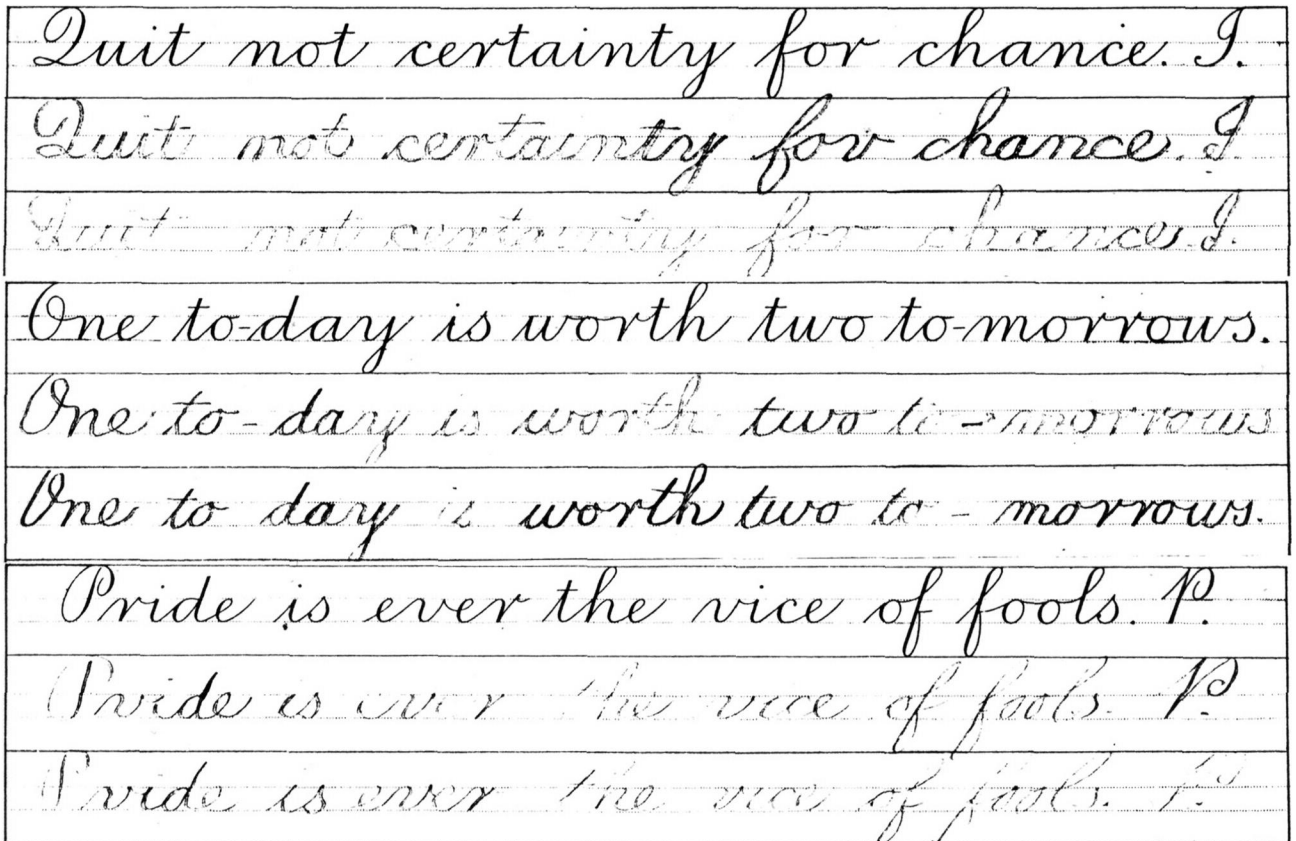
In 1972 the schools 135 year history came to an end, when it closed, the pupils being 'bussed' to the newly built Poyntzpass County Primary School.



**Fourtowns Primary School Pupils,**



Fourtowns Primary School Pupils, 1962.



Extract from Copy-book of Albert F. Purdy, 1902.



Fourtowns School—now a dwelling house—and a road name.