

St Mary's National School, Sandyford

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The Roman Catholic parish of Sandyford was formed in 1829. Reverend Patrick Smyth became the parish priest of the union of the Sandyford and Glencullen churches. He was a strong supporter of education for the poor, and he was the driving force behind the establishment of the school.

Location

Originally traffic from Dublin to Enniskerry travelled through Sandyford village and followed the Kilgobbin road. Between 1830 and 1840 the new Sandyford bypass was constructed, which took traffic from the north of the village and joined the road to Enniskerry in what is now Stepside. The latter village did not exist yet. Stepside village developed as a result of the new road, to the detriment of the village of Kilgobbin, which completely disappeared as a recognisable village. Sandyford village was strong enough to survive. The new road gave rise to a new development at the crossroads of Sandyford/Enniskerry roads (the bypass) and Hillcrest/Blackglen roads (constructed around the same time). This crossroads is locally known as Lamb's Cross, which is at the centre of the map below:

'Lamb' was the nickname of a local farmer and granite contractor - James Doyle - who lived in a house at 'his' crossroads. As the combination of James and Doyle was very common in the area, nicknames were essential to distinguish one James Doyle from another. So, this James Doyle became Lamb Doyle (of pub fame). His house can be seen on the map, just south-east of the crossroads. It still exists, although it is boarded up and will be demolished when the crossroads are upgraded in the future.

The land on which this house and the school now stand belonged to the Moreen estate. This estate was centred on its big house, now the site of the Central Bank. To the south it bordered on the Woodside farm. The border between the two was the Glaslower stream. This stream runs alongside Slate Cabin Lane but is culverted where the school now stands. It appears again on the other side of Enniskerry Road, beside the old Lamb's house, and curves towards Sandyford. It is also the border between the townlands of Balally and Woodside, shown as the dotted line on the map. As a result of road developments, the Moreen lands to the south of the Blackglen and Hillcrest roads were cut off from the main part of the estate. James Doyle build his house on the plot of land to the east of Enniskerry Road. What about the land to the West?

A new school at Sandyford

This is where we return to Reverend Patrick Smyth. He appealed to the owner of Moreen, Daniel McKay, to donate land for a new school at Sandyford. Daniel agreed and gave him a plot of land, just beside the Glaslower stream, opposite Lamb Doyle's house.

Several fundraising drives followed to get the money to build the school. I have no pictures of the original school buildings, but from the description (see below) it probably looked something like the National School in Rathgormack in Co. Waterford.

The school opened on 25 January 1841. Getting money to run the school was a constant struggle however, and not just in these early days, as we will see later. One source of funding was the government, and on 4 February 1842 Reverend Patrick Smyth wrote a report applying for aid for his new school. In it he gave a good description of the school and how it was run.

From the report we learn that the school had its own purpose-built building, which had been funded by private donation. It was constructed from limestone and had a slate roof. It was 60 feet long and 35 feet wide with two separate rooms, one for male pupils (35 feet by 20 feet) and one for female pupils (30 feet by 20 feet). There were also four small apartments for the teachers. In the male room, there were 11 desks and in the female room 7 desks plus a large table. Each room was said to be able to accommodate from 100 to 120 pupils!

The principal was Cornelius O'Driscoll, who also taught in the Glencullen school. He was only 20 years old but was described as 'trained'. He was assisted by Jane Reilly, also 20, and trained at the Kildare Place Society. Reverend Patrick Smyth considered Jane 'infinitely well qualified for her duty, both from the beautiful specimens of needlework she showed me as well as from the clear and efficient manner she displayed in the examination of her pupils'. The teachers were paid £8 per year funded from a legacy which earned £17 10s. interest per year. Pupils had to pay 9d. per week. All pupils were 'from the poorer classes'.

Initially there were 84 male pupils and 93 female pupils on the books but average attendance was 55 and 70 respectively. School hours were from 10a.m. to 2p.m. in winter and until 3p.m. in summer, 5 days per week. The main books used were for teaching arithmetic, grammar and geography. There was also daily religious instruction from 2.30-3p.m. and all day on Fridays!

Soon after the school was established it led to the development of another new road: Slate Cabin Lane. It is highly likely that this road was formed by people walking down Three Rock mountain to the school, following the Glaslower stream. According to a former resident the road's original name was School Road.

A new century

A half century later it does not appear that a lot has changed. We still find the two separate buildings, one for girls and one for boys, appearing as Nos.43 and 44 on the Building Return (Form B1) of the 1901 census.

There were still only two teachers, although there was also an assistant teacher. The original building had four apartments for the teachers within the school building. There was also a separate house beside the school, so it is probable that one of the teachers lived in the school, and the other beside the school. This form shows that 43-year-old Mary Hayden, who was a national school teacher, lived with her two brothers, 36-year-old John and 49-year-old Stephen in house No. 42. Both brothers were employed in construction as bricklayer and builder respectively.

Moving to house No. 45 we find the male teacher: 53-year-old James Greenan who originally hailed from Meath. He lived here with his wife Mary A. (42, from Westmeath) and children Evaleen Rose (2), Angela M. (4), Mary Agnes (10) - all born in Co. Dublin - and eldest son John C. (20), who was born in Dublin city. Teaching was kept in the family, as John was an assistant schoolteacher. James Greenan and family possibly lived in the four apartments which is probably the block in between the two school rooms on the map. Mary would possibly have lived in the separate building nearer to the road on the map, which was only recently demolished to make space for car parking. I mentioned that teaching was a family business for the Greenans. This became even more obvious in the 1911 census. James and Mary, and their children John, Mary Agnes and Evaleen are still there. There is no sign of Angela but there is another son, Austin F. (27) a photographer. Both John and Mary Agnes are now

national teachers. It appears there were now four teachers as in the next house we find Mary Hayden. She is still living with her two brothers who remain active as bricklayers.

There is an interesting difference between the two censuses when it comes to the owner of the houses in which the teachers live. In 1901 Mary Hayden's house was owned by Daniel Fitzsimon who owned the Moreen estate. James Greenan's house was not owned by anyone (presumably because it belonged to the school rather than a person). In 1911 the school buildings were not mentioned, but the houses of both teachers and the Carnegie Library were recorded as owned by James Doyle. As written, it is unlikely that James Doyle would own Greenan's house or the Carnegie library. It is more likely these were owned by the community.

Carnegie library

Worth mentioning is the next building on the 1911 form: the Carnegie library. It is named after Andrew Carnegie who was born in Dunfermline in Scotland in 1835. He emigrated with his parents to the USA in 1848. Starting as a telegrapher, he became an entrepreneur with interests in various industries. His most famous company was the Carnegie Steel Company in Pittsburgh. In 1901, he sold this company to J.P. Morgan Bank, for \$480 million, making him the richest man in the country. He decided however to give his money away. Amongst other things, he donated money for the building of libraries (but would not finance books or staff), under the condition that they would bear his name.

The Carnegie library was built beside the school and opened in 1907. In general, Carnegie libraries were built with a grant from Carnegie. Ownership would rest with the local community who also had to provide funds for the books, upkeep and maintenance. As many of the buildings were bigger than required for library needs they were also used for community activities. The library was badly damaged in a fire by vandals in 1982. Dublin County Council wanted to demolish it, but a local group raised funds to rebuild it as a community centre. The building was finished in 1987, officially opened in 1991 and expanded in 2011.

New building

There were big changes for the school in 1936. A new school building was constructed, which is the building we know today. It is a two-storey building, has a granite facade and a green steeple on the roof. The boys were taught downstairs and the girls upstairs. Hence, the name of the school on the facade: Scoileanna (plural) Náisiúnta Naoimh Mhuire, Taobh na Coille, rather than Scoil (singular). Originally each floor was just one big open space, with wooden floors. There were foldable partitions which, when closed, would create three classrooms on each floor.

1970s and 1980s

In the early 1970s, the school was struggling with falling pupil numbers. There were fewer than seventy boys and girls at this time and only the three rooms on the ground floor were being used. In 1973 the schools were amalgamated into one co-educational school. Not much had changed with respect to the number of teachers and their living conditions. There were still three teachers: the principal, Mr Shannon, lived with his wife Maeve (also a teacher) and their six children (three boys and three girls) in the small house to the side of the school. The third teacher did not live at the school anymore, and there was a number of different teachers during this period.

In 1980 Frank Harty took over as principal, and Maeve Shannon continued to teach for a number of years after her husband's retirement. These were much better times, as there was an influx of pupils

from the newly built estate of Moreen. At that stage, Queen of Angels National School did not exist and apart from St Olaf's National School in Balally there was no other school for the children to go to. Soon all class rooms were in use, although at first there were still only three teachers.

After the Shannons left, the small house they had lived in became a scout hall. It would later become a Montessori school but was later demolished.

During this time, partitions were replaced by proper walls and the wooden floors were carpeted. This cost a lot of money so the walls were painted by volunteers from among the parents. They worked every weekend from November to Christmas, managed and co-ordinated by Nessa Fleming who was also cleaner, school warden, member of the board and mother of three pupils in the school. Nessa was also a member of the fundraising committee. As in the school's early days, money was always needed and a stream of activities such as jumble sales and auctions were organised. One year one of the donations consisted of beehives! Like everything else, they were accepted and sold for the benefit of the school.

Modern days

Once again, the school was threatened with closure in the early years of this century, because as before, the number of pupils was decreasing. New housing developments such as Aiken's Village, once more came to the rescue. Pupil numbers trebled and as a result, instead of closing the school, a two-storey extension with a new entrance and hallway was added in 2011, the year after the principal Mr Harty had handed the baton over to the current principal, Fergus Lyons.

Mr Lyons remembers the official opening of the new extension very well. It coincided with the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the current building and it turned out to be quite eventful. The ceremonies were to take place on 25 October 2011. On the evening of 24 October, a month's rainfall fell in torrents on Dublin in the space of three hours. The stream which runs along Slate Cabin Lane was unable to contain the deluge coming down from Three Rock mountain and a river of water flowed through the back gate of the school, in through the back doors, under and above the wooden floors and out through the vents at the front of the school. The boiler house which is under the school was filled to the roof and the boiler damaged beyond repair. The bottom half of the school was uninhabitable for almost three months as the floorboards, carpets and boiler had to be replaced and the underfloor dried out thoroughly. However, temporary accommodation was arranged, and classes continued as normal with electric heaters hired to temporarily replace the central heating. A striking feature of this whole episode was the community spirit which prevailed as everyone pulled together to overcome adversity. Everything was back to normal by the end of January 2012. Some flood protection measures were taken to ensure that there would be no recurrence of this event, but heavy rain still makes the principal a little nervous! The last work on the building took place only recently: in 2017 the old building got a completely new roof.

As I hope this article shows, St Mary's National School in Sandyford has not only had a long and lively history, but also looks set to have a thriving future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to thank Nessa Fleming and Fergus Lyons for sharing their memories.

SOURCES:

Information on James (Lamb) Doyle on Mccarthytree at (www.genealogy.com)(18 February 2018)

Kildare Place Society at (www.worldhistory.biz)(26 February 2016)

National Archives:

Census 1901,1911

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MICHAEL VAN TURNHOUT was born in The Netherlands and has a Masters degree from Tilburg University. He has been living in Ireland for over 20 years and has totally immersed himself in Irish life. He has been and is involved in several voluntary organisations on a national, regional and local basis. He is the current Chair of his local residents' association and has already written several articles for Obelisk, as well as for the North American publication Your Genealogy Today and Internet Genealogy. He is a co-founder of Genealogy.ie, which offers family history research service.