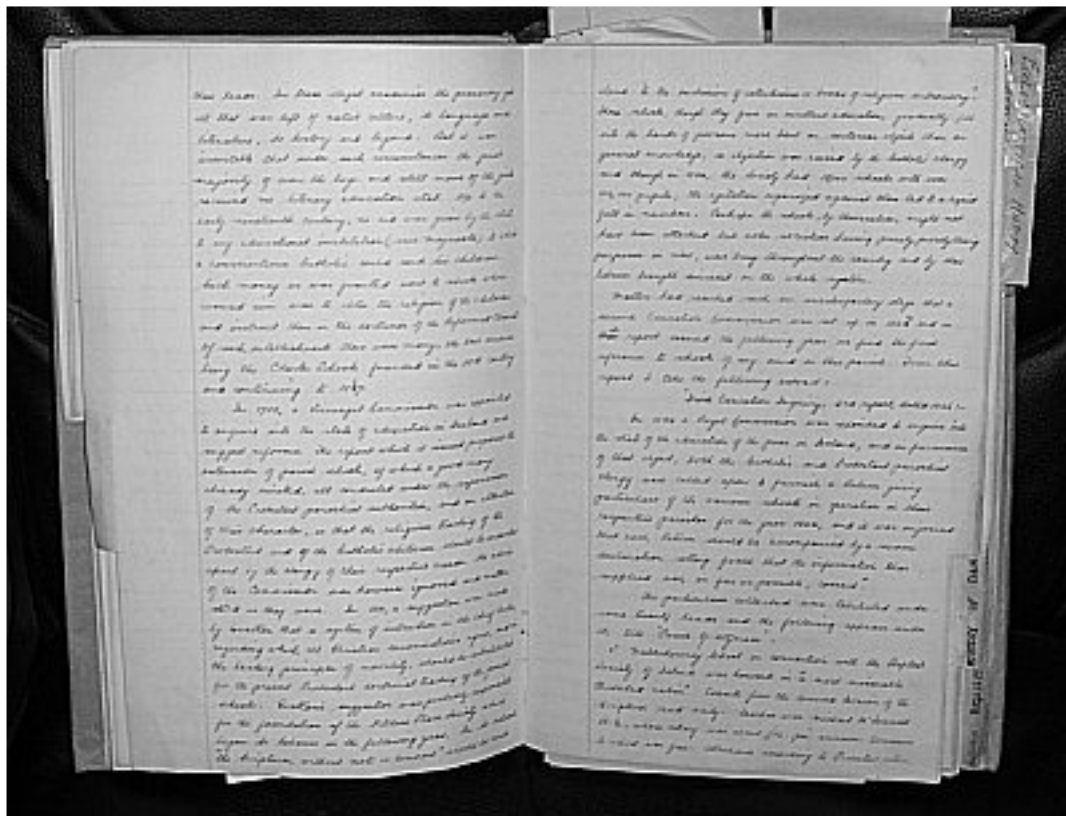


The History of the Schools of Attymass Parish

Transcribed from the hand written
Attymass Parish Inventory

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The Attymass Parish Inventory c1930

History of the Schools of Attymass Parish

With the flight of the wild geese following the Treaty of Limerick Ireland was entering a new phase of her chequered history – the penal times were about to begin. In the early 16th century, learning and culture were honoured in Ireland, but the destructive warfare of the following two hundred years altered the situation completely. From the first the bards and teachers, who were the heart and brains of the national effort, were bitterly attacked. They were denounced proscribed and hunted down and their writings were destroyed, their hereditary lands confiscated and their schools disposed. Education was denied the Irish people in their own land except at the sacrifice of all that they demand sacred – their Catholic faith.

But in spirit of all the efforts made to prevent “Popish Education”, there were, even at the very worst period of the Penal Laws, many small Catholic schools scattered here and there over the county and also many working schoolmasters who remained a while in each district.

Often the teachers did not limit themselves to elementary education for amongst them were some fine classical schools and it was not uncommon to find ploughmen, blacksmiths and fishermen who could recite in the original long passage from Homer and Virgil; and this at a time when amongst the richer classes, the level of education was lower than it had been for generations and when, over in England, 70% of the population could not read their own language.

These small scattered schools were known as “Hedge Schools” and upon them the great mass of the people depended for their education. They were conducted in defiance of the law and by teachers with a price upon their heads. In these illegal academies the peasantry got all that was left of native culture, its language and literature, its history and legend. But it was inevitable that under such circumstances the great majority of even the boys and still more of the girls received no literary education at all.

Up to the early 19th century no aid was given by the state to any educational institution (save Maynooth) to which a conscientious Catholic would send the children. Such money as was granted went to schools whose avowed aim was to alter the religion of the children and instruct them in the doctrines of the Reformed Church. Of such establishments there were many the best known being the Charter Schools founded in the 18th century and continuing to 1827.

In 1788 a Vice Regal Commission was appointed to enquire into the state of education in Ireland and suggest reforms. The report which it issued proposed the extension of parish schools, of which a good many already existed, all conducted under the supervision of the Protestant Parochial Authorities, and an alteration of their character so that the religious teaching of the Protestant and of the Catholic children should be conducted apart of the clergy of their respective creeds.

The advice of the Commission was, however, ignored and matters stood as they were. In 1811 a suggestion was made by Grattan that a system of instructions in the chief faiths regarding which all Christian denominations agree, and in the leading principles of morality should be substituted for the present Protestant doctrinal teaching of the parish schools. Grattan’s suggestion was probably responsible for the foundation of the Kildare Place Society which began its labours in the following year.

In its schools the “Scriptures without note in comment” should be read aloud “to the exclusion of Catechisms in books of religious controversy”. These schools, though they gave an excellent education gradually fell into the hands of persons more bent on sectarian objects than on general knowledge so objection was raised by the Catholic clergy and though in 1824

the Society had 15,000 schools with over 100,000 pupils, the agitation organised against them led to a rapid fall in numbers. Perhaps the schools by themselves might not have been attacked but other societies having purely proselytising purposes in view, were busy throughout the country and by their labours brought discredit on the whole system.

Matters had reached such an unsatisfactory stage that a second Education Commission was set up in 1824 and in its report issued the following year we find the first reference to schools of any kind in this parish (Attymass).

From this report I take the following extract:

“Irish Education Inquiry” 2nd report dated 1826:-

In 1824 a Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into the state of the education of the poor in Ireland and in pursuance of that object both the Catholic and Protestant parochial clergy were called upon to furnish a return giving particulars of the various schools in operation in their respective parishes for the year 1824 and it was enjoined that each return should be accompanied by a sworn declaration setting forth that the information these supplied was as far as possible correct”.

The particulars collected were tabulated under some twenty heads and the following appears under the title “Parish of Attymass”:

1: Mullahowney School in connection with the Baptist Society of Ireland was housed in a most miserable thatched cabin. Extracts from the Avowed Version of the Scriptures read daily. Teacher was Michael McDonnell R.C., whose salary was about £12.00 per annum. Admission to school was free. Attendance according to Protestant return was 4 Protestants and 66 Catholics, but according to the Catholic return, 8 Protestants and 74 Catholics, 52 males and 30 females.

2: Kilgellia School also in connection with the Baptism Society was housed in “a bad thatched cabin.” Avowed Version of Scriptures read daily. Teacher was Eneas McDonnell R.C. whose salary was about £12.00 per annum. Admission to the school was free. Attendance according to Protestant Return was a Protestant and 40 R.C.’s 26 males and 14 females; but the Catholic Returns gave 0 Protestants and 86 R.C.’S, 59 males and 27 females.

3: Currower School: Not connected to any Society was housed in “a wretched thatched cabin”. Not stated whether the Scriptures were read. Teacher was Patrick Diffely R.C. whose rates of charge varied from a penny to four pence per week per pupil. Attendance according to Protestant Return was 0 Protestants and 20 R.C.’s, 8 males and 12 females, but according to Catholic Returns 0 Protestants and 13 R.C.’s 9 males and 4 females.

It will be seen that Attymass was described as a parish at that date but this had reference to the Protestant Parish, then forming a part of the benefice of Ardagh and in the Protestant diocese of Killala. Kilgarvan parish was then taken separately from Attymass as it formed part of the benefice of Kilmoremoy.

According to the Catholic Returns no less than 168 pupils attended the Mullahowney and Kilgellia schools and of these only eight were Protestant. These belonged to the Protestant Colony which had established itself in the townlands of Mullahowney and Ardrass and which consisted of nine families; O’Neills, O’Donnells, Clarkes, Potters, D’Altons, Lynns, Srogens, Hamiltons, and Wills and of whom not a solitary soul remains in the parish today.

The Baptist Society paid the salaries of the teachers in both schools while the Currower School depended solely on local aid and was consequently free from the condition that extracts from the Avowed Version of the Scriptures should be read daily. But the attendance was very small in comparison with that of the other two schools of the parish showing the straits to which the people were reduced, as probably the fee of one penny per pupil per week was even more than they could afford to pay.

The findings of the 1824 Education Inquiry Commission were embodied in the Education Act of 1831 when, as a result, the first National Schools were founded. For twenty years afterwards the Catholic and Protestant Archbishops of Dublin worked side by side to frame a scheme of general instruction that would be acceptable to all parties and to draw up a course of Scriptural extracts partly from the Douay and partly from the Authorized Version for use in schools.

School books were prepared from which any reference to the past history of Ireland, patriotic songs or even some of Moore's melodies were excluded and there was no provision made for the teaching of the national language. Dr. McHale, Archbishop of Tuam, supported by several members of the Hierarchy, opposed the scheme and in 1840, the National Boards administering the Education Act of 1831 was on the point of being condemned at Rome when a Legate was sent over and reported that the teaching in the National Schools was satisfactory and consequently objections were withdrawn.

The first report of the Board was in Dec. 1833 when there were in operation 789 schools. There was continuous increase in the succeeding years: in 1845, due to the decision in Rome, there were 3,426 and in 1860 the number had risen to 5,632 with over three quarters of a million pupils.

Attymass, in common with most parishes in the country, particularly in the Archdiocese of Tuam, did not take advantage of the National Board Scheme for about a decade after it was set in motion. In the "Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland" there is an account of this parish for the year 1834 when three hedge schools were in existence here with 153 boys and 100 girls on rolls, and when the Catholic population amounted to 3,478 or more than twice that of the present year 1940, and the Protestants numbered 34.

We may take it that the three schools viz., Mullahowney, Kilgellia and Currower mentioned in the report of 1824, continued under the same authorities until the passage of the Education Act of 1831; that the Baptism Society then dropped out and that as Attymass had become a separate parish, apart from Kilgarvan, and had a resident priest, education came under the supervision of the Catholic Church here.

It is not stated where the three hedge schools were situated but they were most likely in the same town lands and housed in the same "bad" or "wretched thatched cabins" as in 1824. The attendance, we note, was not only maintained but increased, but then there was an increase also of some two hundred in the population in the intervening decade.

The Rome decision of 1840 evidently satisfied the majority of the Catholic Clergy and we find its influence in Attymass, for in the same year says the Parliamentary Gazetteer "The National Board granted £74/3/4 towards the building and fitting up of a school at Trienclare". This should of course be Trienlaur. I cannot find any other reference to the Trienlaur National School but that such existed is probably certain, as we shall see later.

The small sum allowed for this school would perhaps only cover the cost of construction of a thatched building like the great majority of the schools of the period, for it is recorded that all such schools were badly fitted and equipped.

The old hedge school in Currower was either replaced or rebuilt in 1848 out of private funds and was opened as a National School in 1856. It was 55ft x 12ft 6" but had a wing afterwards added. The foundations and portions of the walls can still be seen on the McGloin farm near "Tobar Naughtha".

The Treenlaur School probably closed about that time as it was conducted as a hedge school about 1860. The teacher was a Mr. Devaney who lived in the school house, the foundations of which, 30ft x 12ft, still exist.

The opening of a National School in Currower in 1856 and one in Bofield a decade earlier to which a Michael Loftus was appointed in probation at a salary of £14.00 per annum, affected the attendance at Devaney's school in Treenlaur, for although having still to contribute to the support of the National School in payments of one penny per pupil per week plus a bundle of straw per family per annum for thatch, education there would still be cheaper than at the hedge schools which depended solely on local aid.

In his last years in Treenlaur, Devaney resorted to the holding of a night school and even gave private tuition in houses in the neighbourhood. But he was forced to abandon the school and afterwards taught, in turn in Byhalla and Curradrish and finished his career in the parish by conducting a hedge school in the church up to 1872, when the first National School was opened in Attymass (or townland of Kilgellia).

There are still old people still living who attended Devaney's school in the Church. He taught in English but, when angry, resorted to the native tongue. Except for some books and slates there was no school equipment and the fees were a penny or two pence per pupil per week. Devaney lived in a shabby house opposite the Church gate and left the parish when his hedge school in the Church ended.

That Devaney did not take up duty in the new school in Attymass would indicate that he had no qualifications as a teacher under the Board and consequently the school conducted by him in Treenlaur had closed to become a National School when he took charge there. Probably the grants were withdrawn from it in 1856 when the Currower School was recognised.

The Treenlaur School under the National Board would be under the management of Fr. Denis O'Kane (1835 – 1845), who built Attymass Church, while the Currower School, built by private funds, was established during the ministry of Fr O'Flynn (1845 – 1855) and recognised by the Board in the first years of Fr. Hurst's ministry (1855 – 1875). The latter also got the first National School in Attymass (village) in November 1872. He either purchased from a man called Paddy Kavanagh, or was presented by the Landlord, Mrs. G. H. Moore, with a plot of ground containing an old residence on the opposite side of the road from the Church gate. It was a poorly constructed thatched building.

The first teachers were Daniel and Mrs. Henry and they laboured there until 1879, when Fr. O'Grady, who succeeded Fr. Hurst in '75, had completed the present Attymass National School. The site of the new school was a rough unclosed patch and part of the plot on which the Church was built and which was given free of charge to Fr. O'Kane by the landlord, Mrs. Moore.

While the old school was mixed, the new had separate boys and girls schools consisting of one room each. The register of boys used in the old school is still in the new but the girls register is lost.

The succession of teachers is as follows:

Male Principals:-

Daniel Henry	15/11/1872 to 19/4/1896
Thomas J. Henry	20/4/1896 to 1905
Thomas Caron	22/5/1905 to 7/8/1908
Michael P. Beirne	8/5/1908 to 19/1/1912
PK. J. Clarke	3/2/1912 to 15/10/18
PK. Flannelly	16/10/18 to -- (Serving)

Male Assistants:-

Patrick Brown	-/10/1880
Robert Henry	-/11/1894
Thomas Hunter	-/ - /1906
Michael J. Hughes	-/ - /1907
John J. Ruddy	1908 - 1916
<i>Brigid Hardy</i>	<i>1916 – 1918</i>
<i>Kate E. Hughes</i>	<i>1918 – 1938</i>
<i>Mary Campbell</i>	<i>1938 (still serving)</i>

Female Principals:-

Maria Henry	15/11/1872 - 19/10/1910
Mary Kilcullen	- /11/1910 - - / 12/1918
Helena O'Flynn	-/12/1918 - - / 12/1930
Brigid O'Dwyer	1/3/1931 - (still serving)

Female Assistants:-

Kate O'Flynn (J.O.M.)	-/10/1906 - 30/6/34
Mary Doyle	17/9/34 - 23/10/36
Catherine O'Dwyer	26/10/36 - 30/9/37
Mary Ellen Gallagher	1/10/37 - (serving)

For many years the schools had no yard or boundary walls but these were erected afterwards by the Co. Council. The schools were amalgamated on 1/1/1939.

In 1895, the then parish priest Fr. Connington began the construction of new schools in Currower, a few hundred yards east of the old buildings and on a plot given free by the landlord Mr. McGloin. These were opened on the 7/9/1896.

There is a tradition that the Board was anxious to have the new schools built in Treenlaur and this would support idea that the grant of 1840 was utilized for the erection of a National School there and that now the grants were to be restored. The Boards argument in favour of Treenlaur would be that the proximately of Bofield and Attymass N.S. to Currower, the existence of a tolerably good school in the latter place and its anxiety to accommodate the numerous families along the mountain side from Ellaghmore to Byhalla.

Fr. Connington however succeeded in having the new school built in Currower. Separate male and female schools were accommodated under the same roof with two principal rooms and two classrooms. These were amalgamated in Jan. 1929.

The first male principal appointed to the new school was Daniel J. Henry transferred from Attymass. His successors were as follows:

John Rafter	1. 2.1901 - 1905
Timothy O'Leary	22. 5.1905 - 1916
Bernard Durkin	24. 7.1916 - 1928
Austin F. Cunney	15.10.1928 - 1940 (still serving)

Male assistants:-

Robert Henry	2.1897
Annie K. Hughes	2. 7.1906
Jannie Igoe	11. 2.1907
Kati Dempsey	3. 2.1908
Maey A. Rafter	3.11.1908
Brigid Gallagher	1. 7.1911
Annie K. Rafter (Assist.)	1.10.1916

Female Principals:-

Helena O'Flynn	9.1896 - 1919
Brifid F. Cunney	14. 1.1919 - (still serving)

Female Assistants:-

Mary Igoe	9.1896 - 31.12.1907
Kathleen Hennigan (j.a.m.)	7.1911 - (still Serving)

The Derreen and Bonnifinglas National School were built out of private funds by Fr. O. Grady in 1876 and the former was opened under the Board on 15.1.1877. There was one room only and the school was mixed.

The teachers serving there are as follows:-

Robert Gallagher	1. 2.1877 - 30. 9.1918
Michael P. Gallagher	1.10.1918 - 31. 3.1929
Robert P. Gallagher	1. 4.1929 - 31.12.1933
Padraic S.O'Maolain	21. 1.1934 - 31. 3.1934
Mairead McNioclais	2. 4.1934 - 31. 8.1936
Maire Cib Ni	7. 9.1936 - 30. 9.1937
Maire Nic A'Maraid	10.12.1937 - 30. 6. 1938
Una NiLannagain	5. 9.1938 - (still serving)

Mrs Gallagher, Ellen Gallagher, Brigid Teresa Gallagher, Lucy Gallagher and Nora Kneafsey served as assistants in turn to 1934 when the school became one teacher.

Since 1936 the school is only being continued from year to year and the teachers appointed provisionally owing to the small attendance.

Bonnifinglas N.S. a one room mixed school was opened on 1/7/1876 with a staff of two, James O'Grady Principal and Anne O'Connor assistant who later became Mrs. Hughes. A Margaret J. O'Grady was appointed on 11/9/1876 (in what capacity I cannot say) James Hughes served as principal from 1.6.1880 to 30.9.1922

Patrick Padden from 16/10/1922 – 31/10/1934 Patrick Mullen 11/11/1934 - still serving.

Mrs Hughes was succeeded into the assistantship by her daughter Lucy who in turn was followed by Miss Irwin, Miss Scully, Mrs. Peyton, and Miss McNicholas who now serves.

Teacher's residences were erected beside both Derreen and Bonnifinglas Schools in 1876 out of Board of Works grants. The annuities have been paid off so that both residences are now Church property and these with all the schools of the parish are vested in diocesan trustees.

Various additions and improvements were made in the schools of the parish from time to time but as these are recorded in the History of the Church in this inventory¹ I do not propose to repeat the facts here.

We have seen that of three schools in existence here 116 years ago, the only one to pass out was that which was conducted in the Protestant settlement of Mullahowney. Although it continued after the erection of the Church here, following Emancipation, it was deserted by the Catholics who not only maintained those at Currower and Kilgellia (Attymass) but succeeded in having for some time an additional one at Treenlaur and had erected two other new schools viz., Dereen and Bonnifinglas.

The Mullahowney School passed out completely with the last of the Protestant families who in most cases sold their lands to Catholics and left the district. The large farm of Curry divided among the local conjestes about 1927, was the last to remain in Protestant hands although there was no residence on the farm for many years before.

In spite of the fact that well over twice the number of families existed here before the Famine and the terrible conditions under which they lived, the parishioners, unaided succeeded in raising funds for the erection of three schools viz., Currower (1848) and Dereen and Bonnifinglass (1876) as well as building a Church (1835) and maintaining all in perfect state of repair.

The only regret is that the population is fast dwindling and that in the four schools in the parish now with a compulsory education act, and all the advantages of fairly modern school buildings and free education, the total number on rolls is less than that on the rolls of the three parish hedge schools of 1834, which were solely maintained by the people.

¹ Document referred to is "The Ecclesiastical History of Attymass" by Patrick Flannelly taken from the same parish inventory as this work. A transcript of the document can be found at http://www.attymass.ie/historical_documents