



**TIPPERARY HISTORICAL JOURNAL
1992**

© County Tipperary Historical Society

**www.tipperarylibraries.ie/thc
society@tipperarylibraries.ie**

ISSN 0791-0655

Sources for the history of education in Co. Tipperary: a case-study from Fethard

By Susan M. Parkes*

The establishment of the National School system in 1831 was a major step in the provision of state support for mass elementary education in Ireland. Prior to the setting up of this system the Government undertook a country-wide inquiry into the state of education in Ireland, and its findings were published in the reports of the *Irish Education Inquiry* of 1825-26.¹ Query sheets were sent out to the protestant and the catholic clergy of every parish, and the data collected provides us with a detailed picture of the number of schools operating in each parish, along with the names and salaries of the teachers, the condition of the schoolhouses and the average daily attendance.

When the National School system itself was set up in 1831, the initiative to apply for aid rested with the local community and these applications forms are preserved in the National Archives, Public Record Office, Dublin.² Each application for aid was required to give details of the existing school provision in the district, the nature of the school buildings, the qualifications, if any, of the teachers, and the average attendance.

Each 'query sheet' had to be signed by representatives of the protestant and catholic community living in the district, because the National Board looked with 'peculiar favour' on 'mixed' applications rather than those from one denomination only.³ Thus, using these two major primary historical sources it is possible to outline and evaluate educational provision in early 19th century Ireland.

Fethard, Co. Tipperary and the surrounding district was chosen as the example for the purposes of this paper; similar study can be undertaken for any parish district in Ireland. Fethard was a medieval incorporated town, sending two members to parliament prior to the Act of Union, 1800. It had a 'mixed' population of protestants and catholics of around 3,500 in 1831, with a resident gentry and prosperous flour mills.⁴

In 1825 there were no less than 13 schools listed as operating in the town, and these show many of the problems besetting education in the early 19th century.⁵ The 'best' school in the town in 1825 was Fethard Church of Ireland Parish School, which was housed in "a very good slated house" built at a cost of about £325.

The money for building had come from three sources. Firstly, £100 came from the Lord Lieutenant's fund which had been established in 1819, originally to assist catholic schooling though only 12 out of 481 grants had been given to such.⁶ Secondly, £50 came from the Association for Discountenancing Vice, a protestant missionary education society founded in 1792, which published religious tracts and supported schools.⁷ Thirdly, £161.10.9 had been raised in local subscriptions from the parish.

The parochial school was run by Thomas and Ellen Perdue, both protestants, who earned £35 and £12 per annum, respectively. The average daily attendance (for the three months previous to the survey) was 45 (45), of whom 41 (38) were of the Established Church and 4 (7) were Roman Catholics.⁸ The school was mixed, with 22 boys and 23 girls. The running expenses were covered

* This article is based on a lecture given at Kickham County Weekend, Mullinahone, in August 1990.



by an annual grant from the Association for Discountenancing Vice, ten pounds per annum from the local landlord, William Barton of Grove House, and ten pounds per annum from the rector, Rev. Mr. Henry Woodward, who was an ardent and active protestant cleric in the town.

In 1821 he had been responsible for the return on the health of the poor of Fethard to the General Board of Health as related in Maria Luddy's article 'The Lives of the Poor in Fethard in 1821' in *The Tipperary Historical Journal*, 1990.⁹ In 1827 Woodward initiated a 'new reformation' crusade displaying 14 converts in his parish church, an episode which roused the anger of the local catholic clergy.¹⁰

The catholic parochial school in Fethard was much less well funded. It was housed in a 'slated house rented at 6/- per annum'. There were 155 (160) children attending, all catholic, of whom 90 were boys, 65 (70) girls. The master, Patrick Devane, and mistress, Margaret Wall, depended on subscriptions from the parishioners for their salaries (not stated), and no fees were charged.

All the other remaining schools in Fethard were listed as 'pay schools' — that is, they charged fees. Seven schools were run by catholic teachers earning salaries which varied from £40 per annum to £3.9.4. Margaret Wall taught 8 (7) scholars in a room in her own house, while William Jordan and Michael Commons each had 40 pupils in 'thatched cabins'.

Robert Blunden, John Blunden and Honora Walsh each taught in 'slated houses' — Robert Blunden's school being the largest with 80 (86) pupils. The protestant 'pay schools' were small; Mary Reeves and Catherine Thompson, a Quaker, had six and five pupils respectively, while Catherine Connell and James Collier only five and four.

Thus educational provision in Fethard in 1825 was very varied. The substantial wealth of the protestant parish school was in marked contrast to the poverty of the catholic parochial school, which was serving over three times as many children. There was little evidence of 'mixed' education in Fethard. The Perdues had only 4 (7) catholic children in the protestant parish school, while Catherine Connell had 15 catholics and 5 protestants in her pay school.

In the area around Fethard there were a number of pay schools also serving the catholic population. At Cloneen John Crowe taught in 'a very good slated house' built by the parish and other subscribers; he earned between £35 - £60 per year teaching 60 (70) scholars. At Cloran John Magrath had 28 (38) pupils in a 'thatched cabin', and earned only £10 a year. Philip Sexton had a large school at Killusty which had 107 pupils in a 'good slated house' built 'by subscription', whereas at Welshbog Morgan Murphy taught in a 'wretched hovel', and at Thorney bridge Richard Heffernan had 'a thatched house with mud walls'.¹¹

Therefore, when the National system of education was introduced in 1831 based on the principle of 'mixed' education and encouraging 'mixed' applications for aid, the response from Fethard was not strong. The Church of Ireland as a whole rejected the National School system because of the rule separating religious from secular instruction. Although Archbishop Whately of Dublin agreed to serve on the National Board, the Church of Ireland established its own education society, the Church Education Society, in 1839 to support parish schools.¹²



The original National School in Cloneen.

PHOTO BY KITTY O'DONNELL

In Fethard, Rev. Woodward therefore did not apply to the National Board for aid; neither was he prepared to support applications from others. The catholic clergy on the other hand were much more in need of aid and, encouraged by Archbishop Murray of Dublin who served on the National Board, many applied as soon as they could. The exception was the diocese of Tuam, where Archbishop McHale opposed the system.

Dr. Michael Laffan, parish priest of Fethard and Killusty, submitted an application in 1832.¹³ He stressed that the parochial school in Fethard had no support other than parish funds, and that it was attempting to educate free up to 160 children. The master, Robert Blunden, was paid only £20 a year taken from the priest's salary. Blunden, who (it will be recalled) was listed in the 1825 report, was described as 'being educated by his father who superintended an excellent mathematical school in Fethard'. The schoolhouse was 'a thatched private house, 26ft x 16ft, with two windows'.

The curriculum taught was quite wide. The books being used included "Davis' English Grammar", "Voster's Arithmetic", "Shannon's Geography Lessons", "Scott's Lessons" and "Dr. Butler's Catechism". The school was poorly equipped, having only three desks, three benches and some 'borrowed seats'. Dr. Laffan asked the National Board to grant him aid for a salary for the master plus three desks and forms which he estimated would cost around 100/-.

The initiative to apply for aid for the Fethard school seems to have come from the teacher, Robert Blunden, and attached to the application form, written in a fine 'copperplate' hand, was the additional petition:

"We the undersigned request to call your attention to the Catholic parochial school established in this town, that the Teacher thereof may get a salary from the Government. There are 100 poor scholars educated in it (none for payment) for the tuition of whom the master is paid by Rev. Doctor Laffan, P.P."

The petition was signed by 17 men of the locality, both protestant and catholic. Initially they had signed together, although the official form required them to sign separately as either catholics or protestant! The protestant signatures included William Barton, Robert Harvey, Robert Cooke, Richard Chadwick and Matthew Jacob. Notable by his absence was Rev. Henry Woodward. The catholic signatures were headed by Rev. Michael Laffan and included John Maher, J.P., Patrick Flannery and James Kelly, M.D.

Dr. Laffan was unlucky; he did not get a grant-in-aid for the Fethard school. He applied again in 1840; this time he was successful.¹⁴ Fethard school entered the National System as Roll No. 2459, and Robert Blunden was awarded a salary grant of £8 per annum, plus a free stock of the National Board's lessons books for 125 children.¹⁵ The official reply stated that 'local parties must provide at their own expense adequate furniture.'

On the other hand, Dr. Laffan was successful with his application in 1832 for aid for the Killusty school.¹⁶ This school obviously was considered a more deserving case than Fethard. The teacher, Philip Sexton, who had the 'best English and Mathematics', taught in a slated schoolhouse '30ft x 14 with 3 windows' which had been listed in the 1825 report. There were 107 catholic children on the roll, and Sexton's salary was £42 per annum which he earned from fees at 7/- per quarter.

The books used included 'Murray's English Grammar', 'Dowling's Book-keeping', 'Voster's and Gough's Arithmetic', 'Pinnock's Catechism', 'Scott's Geography Lessons', and 'Dr. Butler's Catechism', which were all bought by the children. The school was poorly equipped, having no desks but two 'old tables', and no seats except those borrowed from the chapel.

Dr. Laffan therefore applied for aid for furniture for the school, for textbooks and a grant for the teacher 'to enable him to instruct a certain number of poor children 40 or 50, who were destitute of



the benefit of education'. The application form was signed by 16 local men, both protestant and catholic. The four protestant names were Robert and John Cooke, Kiltinan, the local landlords, with William Barton of Grove House and Thomas Wade. Among the catholic signatures were Michael Laffan, James Cantwell, Richard Flaherty and Andrew Shea.

The National Board was sufficiently interested in the Killusty application to write back and demand to know, firstly, the nature of the 'furniture' required and, secondly, why the signatures were all written in the same hand. On 2nd September 1832 Dr. Laffan replied somewhat impatiently, to the 'Chief Secretary, Education, Dublin Castle' listing the furniture required which was 'one desk and form 20ft. in length', 'six desks with forms attached 9ft. each', and 'four forms each 12ft. in length.'

Also he requested an additional window for the school, 4ft. x 3ft. The total estimated cost was £8.2s. On the matter of the signatures he declared: 'With regard to the signatures attached to the official queries I beg to state they were written not by the individual themselves but with their approbation' — which was not what the National Board had intended!

Killusty was fortunate to obtain a grant probably due to its lack of facilities, and because there was no other free school in the immediate locality. The school came into connection with the National Board with the Roll No. 598, which meant that it was among one of the early national schools established in Ireland.

The other local school which entered the National School system early was Cloneen. The school there, as listed in the 1825 report, has been established in 1820 and was built 'upon the Chapel Grounds'. In 1825 it had 60 (70) children on roll. The parish priest, Cornelius O'Brien, encouraged by the teacher, James Roach (Roche), to whom the application form was addressed, applied for aid in the spring of 1834.¹⁷

It would appear that Roach checked and corrected the query form himself and returned it on behalf of the parish priest. This situation was indicative of one of the weaknesses of the National School system where, unless there was a local person of sufficient initiative to write to Dublin for the application form and return it completed, no aid was forthcoming to the schools most in need.

James Roach presented a strong case for Cloneen, emphasizing his own and his wife's teaching qualifications. He had received instruction from 'Mrs. Davin, the proprietor of Cahir National School', and he had testimonials from Rev. Mr. O'Brien and 'a licence from the clerk of the peace'. The nearest school was 'in Cloran within a mile of Cloneen and there is one in Killusty, a National School under the patronage of Rev. Laffan within 12 miles'.

The Cloneen application was unusual, in that it requested aid not only for 'six desks and forms' and 'a desk for the master', but also the cost of installing an upper floor for the schoolhouse and building an external stone staircase for the female pupils. Mr. Roach had difficulty in obtaining the necessary protestant and catholic signatures. He wrote: 'I have obtained the signatures of the Rev. Mr. O'Brien and I also applied to Rev. Mr. Woodward but he said he discountenanced a system formed on such a basis.' In the end Roach obtained only one protestant signature, 'Mr. Thomas Lindsay'. Among the twelve catholic signatures was 'Charles Kickham.'

Although the National Board did not usually approve of a national school being located upon church or chapel grounds because this identified it with one religious denomination,¹⁸ in the case of Cloneen this seems to have been disregarded in view of the strong attributes of the school. The National Board asked for 'a plan of the chapel, chapel-yard, schoolhouse', and they questioned the necessity of building the stone stairs. Eventually the application was successful and Cloneen school, which still exists in the chapel yard, entered the National System (Roll No. 584) and was still functioning in the same schoolhouse in the 1870s.



This micro-study of the history of education in Fethard, Co. Tipperary illustrates some of the key issues in Irish education in the 1820s. The 1825 *Irish Education Inquiry* shows the extensive network of small schools which existed prior to state participation. The differing standards and facilities were apparent, particularly between the well endowed protestant schools and the poor catholic schools. The National School system was an attempt to build on this network of voluntary schools and to achieve a more equitable distribution of funds for education.

However, the development of the National System was dependent to a large extent on local initiative, and, as has been shown at Fethard, required enterprising individuals who could apply to Dublin for the application form, and complete its detailed queries, with no guarantee of obtaining aid. Moreover, the idea of 'mixed' applications from protestants and catholic together proved difficult to implement particularly as the Church of Ireland clergy, as has been shown at Fethard, did not support the system. Applicants therefore were forced to seek the signatures of the liberal protestant landlords. By the 1840s the National Board had abandoned the 'query sheet'. Instead, an inspector was sent from Dublin to report on each application.¹⁹

The denominational structure of the National system was evident from the outset as each parish applied for aid to support its own school. There was no overall planning of educational provision, and a large number of small denominational schools were established. In Fethard the protestant parochial school began to decline in the 1850s, and received a critical report from the visiting commissioners of the Endowed Schools' Commission in 1857 - 58.²⁰ After disestablishment in 1870 due to lack of funds, Church of Ireland parochial schools entered the National System but as separate denominational schools.

Thus, using these various historical sources, it is possible to examine the educational provision of a local area in the first part of the 19th century and to evaluate the locality's response to the introduction of the National system of education. The key role of the churches and the importance of local control are clearly shown. On the whole, the response from Co. Tipperary to the National system was strong, and by 1860 there were 252 national schools in the county.

It is perhaps significant that Clonmel was chosen as the site for one of the first four District Model Schools of the National Board in 1849. (The others were Newry, Ballymena and Dunmanway). These district model schools were designed to provide initial teacher training for young pupil teachers from the area who wished to become national school teachers and to serve as a model for local national schools. The buildings consisted of three spacious 'model' schoolrooms for boys, girls and infants, along with a headmaster's residence and accommodation for eight resident male pupil teachers.

At Clonmel the building of the school was due largely to the initiative of John Bagwell of Marlfield, who in 1846, as soon as the scheme was announced, offered a suitable site. Despite known opposition from some of the local clergy the project went ahead. The District Inspector, James Kavanagh (later in 1859 the author of *Mixed Education, The Catholic Case Stated*, a sharp critique of the National school system) wrote a glowing report of the opening of the school.

It was a 'success of united education', and there was "no social grade in the town not represented in the school; and perhaps few schools in the British Empire exhibit in the appearance, cleanliness and bearing of the pupils greater absence of those differences which might be expected to arise from social and pecuniary inequalities of the parents." The curriculum in the Model School was more extended than the average national school and the teachers were paid more in view of their responsibility for teacher training.²¹

The National Board eventually built 26 such model schools throughout the country, but the venture was an expensive failure as church opposition to these state-managed institutions grew and in 1863 an effective ban on attendance at the model schools was placed by the Catholic Church.

In Clonmel, for instance, while the initial attendance in 1849 at the model school had been 367 (of whom 270 were Catholics), by 1863 this latter figure had dropped to 111, and by 1868 to 88.²²

The presence of a model school in the area undoubtedly helped to strengthen opposition to a state-managed system of education and encouraged the provision of voluntary locally managed denominational schools. The importance of parochial control and of the church's responsibility for maintaining an adequate voluntary system were clearly shown.

A local study such as this one of an area of Co. Tipperary, using official sources which are readily available, illustrates some of the major issues in the development of Irish education in the 19th century such as church-state relations, the role of the landlords and the importance of local initiative. Other such micro-studies would give further insight into educational provision in the last century and indicate its importance in social history.

FOOTNOTES

1. *First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, H.C. 1825 - [400] xii Second Report, H.C. 1826-27 [12] xii; Third - Ninth Reports, 1826-27, xiii.*
2. National Archives, Public Record Office of Ireland, Mss. ED 1, Applications for aid (1832-1890).
3. *Copy of a letter from the chief secretary for Ireland to the Duke of Leinster, on the formation of a board of commissioners for education in Ireland, H.C. 1831-2 [196] xxix.*
4. Samuel Lewis: *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1837), Vol 1, pp. 626-7.
5. *Appendix to the Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, pp. 1136-39, H.C. 1826-27 (12), xii.*
6. *First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825. pp 59-60.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *The Second Report of the 1825 Irish Education Enquiry* contains two sets of figures, one set returned by the protestant clergy, the other by the catholic clergy. The two sets are given here, the catholic figures in brackets.
9. *Tipperary Historical Journal, 1990, pp 121-127.*
10. T. McGrath: 'Interdenominational Relations in Pre-Famine Ireland', in William Nolan and T. McGrath (ed.) *Tipperary - History and Society - interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1985).
11. *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry, 1825, pp. 1136-37.*
12. Susan M. Parkes, *Kildare Place, the history of the Church of Ireland Training College, 1811-1969*, (Dublin, 1984), pp 37-38.
13. Public Record Office of Ireland, Mss. ED 1-81-No.24.
14. PROI, Mss. ED1 -81-No.91.
15. National Schools were issued with Roll Nos. from the 1830s which, after the initial numbering alphabetically by province and county, were sequential and so indicate the approximate date of entry of the school into connexion with the National Board.
16. PROI. Mss. ED1-81-No.18.
17. PROI. Mss. ED1-81-No.4.
18. *2nd Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for 1835. Appendix B, rule 4, 'Although the Commissioners do not absolutely refuse aid in all cases towards the erection of schoolhouses on ground connected with a place of worship, yet they much prefer their being erected on ground which is not so connected, where it can be obtained: they therefore expect that before church, chapel or meeting house ground be adopted as site of a schoolhouse, inquiry be made whether another convenient site may be obtained, and the result of the inquiry stated to them'.*
19. *Sixth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the year 1839; p.3, H.C. 1840 (246), xxviii.*
20. *Report of Her majesty's Commissioners appointed to inquire into the endowments, funds and actual condition of all schools endowed for the purposes of education in Ireland; p. 384 H.C. 1857-58 (2336-1V), xxii, part iv.1.*
21. *Appendix to the 16th Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the year 1849; pp. 256-282, H.C. 1850 (1231, 1231-ii), xxv. The Registers of the District Model Schools are in the PROI (Mss. ED3).*
22. *Powis Commission Report 1870, Vol.i, Report of the Commissioners; p. 448, H.C. 1870 (C6), xxviii, part i.*

