

# Kyle Park Agricultural School (1843-1875)

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By Cáit Logue

Kyle Park Agricultural School was one of several agricultural schools established by the Commissioners of Education in the middle of the last century. These schools were set up under the general regulations for National Schools. At that stage the system was interdenominational, and the pupils were to receive combined literary and separate religious instruction.

Certain conditions were laid down regarding the granting of aid. One-third of the building costs had to be provided locally, and the Board had to be satisfied that local funds would be available to keep the schoolhouse in repair. The person who applied for aid for a school was called the patron or correspondent.

The patron of Kyle Park Agricultural School was Thomas George Stoney J.P., of Kyle Park, Borrisokane, who applied for aid for the building of the school on March 20, 1843. He was willing to supply the site with a lease of three lives or 31 years at a nominal rent of 1 shilling per annum. (The lease was actually for the lives of the Queen, Prince Albert and The Prince of Wales!)

He would also contribute £100 in cash to the project as well as supplying building materials for the schoolhouse, and would later keep the buildings in repair. The expected attendance was 80 males and 70 females. The applicant had consulted with the Parish Priest with regard to the proposal, but not with the Rector as the "Protestant Clergy will not participate in the establishment of a national school".<sup>1</sup>

The inspector, Hugh Cline, favoured the application and stated: "The portion of Lower Ormond in which Kyle Park is situated being almost destitute of well regulated schools and in a sadly backward state with regard to literary and moral education; I recommend that this application be favourably entertained". However, the inspector made no reference to agriculture in his report. Mr. Stoney obviously intended that the school would give both literary (i.e., the usual subjects on the National School curriculum of the time) and agricultural instruction. In 1844 he applied for salaries for two teachers, John Nevin aged 26, trained at Marlborough Street Model School and Frances Nevin, aged 24. They had taught at Eglish National School in King's County.

The school was already in operation. Two schoolrooms had been built, each about 30 feet by 18 feet in area. There was also a female workroom 22 feet by 14.5 feet. There were no local funds available "as yet". The scholars paid one penny a week each on average. There were about 139 males and 210 females attending at the time of Stoney's application. Salaries granted were £15 for the master and £12 for the mistress.

Teachers' residences formed part of the premises and these, as well as the farm buildings, but not the farm itself, were to be vested in the Board. Mr. Stoney was to attach a farm of six acres to the school. Later this acreage was increased to about 16 acres and the Commissioners paid an annual rent of £35-10-0 to Mr. Stoney.<sup>2</sup>

One year later Mr. Stoney informed the Board that he intended dismissing the master for having "made a false statement and for general inattention to his duty as a teacher", and that he also intended dismissing the mistress. The Board informed him that he had a right to dismiss any teacher of whom he disapproved.



Mr. Stoney then proposed appointing an agriculturist at a salary of £30 a year and also an assistant at £8 a year, in which case he would retain Nevin as the assistant. He was informed that the Board would grant the salary for the agriculturist "if he be considered suitable after due trial completed and upon the understanding that the general responsibility of managing the literary department would also fall on him". However, an assistant's salary could only be granted where the daily average exceeded 100, in which case the correspondent would be at liberty to re-appoint John Nevin.<sup>3</sup>

On July 12, 1845 Mr. Robert Smyth, a highly qualified agriculturalist, formerly employed on the estate of the Earl of Aberdeen at Strabane, Co. Tyrone, was appointed at a salary of £30 per annum. But Stoney's problems continued. His next letter to the Board requested that the Superintendent be directed to investigate charges preferred against John Nevin's wife for "having employed one Bess Peters, a reputed dealer in witchcraft, to restore to them their butter which had been spirited away by some person". The Board did not comment on the allegation beyond informing Mr. Stoney that he was "privileged as manager to remove the Nevins if they were unsatisfactory, but if he was unwilling to do so without an investigation, the Board would grant it".

In January 1846 £10 were granted for the purchase of books and requisites, and permission was given for some of the money to be spent on books other than those published and sanctioned by the Board. The school affairs ran into more difficulties. A letter dated July 22 of that year stated that "in consequence of the obvious failure of the potato crops of this season, he [Stoney] is compelled to abandon his intention of continuing the establishment as an Agricultural School. He was informed that the Commissioners "had no power to release the Trustees from the Covenant in the lease by which they are bound to keep open the school at Kyle Park as a [District] Model Agricultural School".<sup>4</sup>

### Another Dismissal

Stoney was in constant touch with the Commissioner of the Board by letter regarding difficulties encountered in the running of the school and also making suggestions with regard to its expansion. In September he wrote to say that he had notified Robert Smyth that his services would no longer be required after September 8; no reason was given. He also requested the Board to purchase the school completely; this the Board declined to do.

In August 1847 the school was reported closed since the previous May and was still closed in October. In February 1848 Mr. P. Darragh was appointed as teacher and authorised to get repairs done. He too proved unsatisfactory. A report from the inspector led the Commissioners to conclude that "Mr. Darragh is not likely to conduct the establishment with the efficiency and success they had anticipated". Darragh's services were dispensed with.

The inspector, Mr. Donaghy, recommended James Neville, "whose term of training as a pupil of the Glasnevin Model Farm is nearly expired" as a fit person to conduct the agricultural department of the school. Thomas Madden, whose term of training as an agriculture teacher had expired, should be appointed as literary teacher *pro tem*. (It is not clear why or how an agricultural teacher should be appointed a literary teacher).

Madden was directed to "lodge in the house and receive the payments of the children in addition to his classed salary". It seems that the school was a co-educational one at this stage, as there was a query to whether there would be a daily average of 30 girls should the Board appoint a female teacher, and what would be the average of boys when the girls would be removed to a separate room. There appears to have been no female teacher since the dismissal of Frances Nevin in 1845.<sup>5</sup>



In March 1850 the Agricultural Inspector recommended that an "industrial class" be formed. This should consist of 6 pupils who would receive 6 shillings a week for their labour. He also suggested that the sum of £30 be granted for the support of 4 pupils as boarders as a stimulus to agricultural improvement. Both suggestions were accepted by the Board, and John McCabe and Anthony Baynes became the first two boarders admitted on the recommendation of the inspector. They were granted £5 each, "the parties who applied for their admission to pay £5 each to the agriculturist quarterly in advance". Stoney was also granted £25 to build an enclosing wall.

Two new literary teachers were appointed from 1 January, 1851. They were John and Elizabeth Dowling. Included with their application was a letter from Head Inspector Butler regarding their literary qualifications. The master was to receive £10 per annum in addition to his classed salary and school fees, and the mistress £7-10 in addition to her classed salary and fees of the girls' school. The residence provided for the Dowlings consisted of a "parlour, a bedroom and a kitchen with a bedroom overhead for a servant". The agriculturist was provided with similar accommodation. In February 1851 the sum of £3-7-0 was paid to Mr. Edward Deane, contractor, for repairs to the "vested house", and he was later paid an additional £1-7-4 "to finish the school".<sup>6</sup>

A report by James Neville to the Agricultural Inspector in March 1851 stated that the farm consisted of 16 statute acres divided into 4 nearly equal parts. Potatoes, turnips and mangels were sown, as well as oats, wheat and barley. The turnip crop had been a failure, but "a crop of flax had done remarkably well". The stock consisted of four cows, two calves, one pig and a pony. An inventory of stock showed that, in addition to the livestock, the farm possessed a cart and harness, barn implements, working tools, dairy utensils, turnip cutter and steaming apparatus.

The work on the farm had been carried out by employed labourers until July 1, 1850, when boarders were admitted. The report added: "There is also an agricultural class formed, the members of which receive instruction daily in agriculture, but they do not work on the farm. I may mention that the average attendance at this class is eight".<sup>7</sup> It appears from this report that the literary and agricultural departments of the school were totally separate at that stage. In May the Commissioners were requested to pay the rent for Kyle Park Model Farm to Robert J. Stoney in future, instead of to Thomas George Stoney.

### Dispute among staff

It was not long before a dispute broke out between the Dowlings and James Neville. The latter accused the former of "preventing the boarding pupils from having access to the schoolroom in the evening for the purpose of study". The inspector reported that the misunderstanding was of a "frivolous nature", but to prevent a recurrence he made regulations regarding the use of the schoolroom. He also directed that James Dowling should have free and uncontrolled use of the outoffice (hitherto used as a tool house) for a stove and a portion of the garden when Neville's crops had been removed. Mr. Stoney was directed to have some turf cut for the use of the schoolroom, the amount expected not to exceed £3.

James Dowling soon found cause to lodge a complaint against James Neville. The Board received a letter from the manager that Neville had held "a party in his house, causing much noise and keeping the doors open till one o'clock at night". He had also given encouragement to an itinerant piper contrary to the manager's wishes, and he had refused to comply with the manager's directions to give back a work table belonging to the female school which he had taken when the school was closed.<sup>8</sup>



The inspector was sent to investigate the complaint, and James Neville was dismissed "for his contempt of the manager's directions and general inefficiency". Matthew Ryan was appointed at a salary of £36 per year, with an extra £11 for board. Life now seems to have taken a more peaceful turn at Kyle Park. The agriculturist (Matthew Ryan) applied for permission to visit a cattle show at Galway on August 12, 1852, saying that Mr. Dowling would take charge of the premises in his absence. The permission was granted, but he was directed to "defray his own expenses".

In December 1852 there was an application from one John Ryan "Esquire" to have Francis Ryan admitted as an agricultural boarder. This application was granted from January 1853. In May of that year Mr. Stoney's request to have James Nolan accepted as a free agricultural boarder was granted. But when James Dowling applied for "a Terrestrial Globe [and] a set of mathematical instruments" for use in the school with a letter from the Head Inspector Mr. McCreedy recommending them, the application was declined.<sup>9</sup>

Trouble loomed again in Kyle Park at the end of 1853 when Matthew Ryan was fined £2 and "severely admonished for great neglect of accounts". Finally in November he was dismissed "for repeated irregularities in his account, he having been frequently admonished". In December Patrick Stephens was appointed agriculturist on the same terms as his predecessor. It appears that Patrick Stephens did not take up duty until 28 February, 1854 when the inspector accompanied him to Kyle Park.

The latter testified to Mr. Ryan's extreme kindness and respect in handing over to his successor all matters connected with the establishment. He also suggested that should Ryan conduct himself satisfactorily in some similar situation for some years he could again be received into the service of the Board. Stephen Kavanagh was admitted as an agricultural boarder from April 1, 1854, but was dismissed in February 1855 for "having left the establishment several nights without leave" and otherwise "acting in a subordinate manner". In May of that year James Loughlin was admitted as a paying agricultural boarder, and in September Martin Costelloe became a free boarder.<sup>10</sup>

The literary school was closed in August 1855 when the Dowlings resigned. In February 1856 John and Kate Gallagher were appointed. There was also a change of correspondent in 1855, Rev. J. Whelan (later replaced by Rev. J. Meagher) replacing Mr. Stoney. It appears that the Stoney family had withdrawn from the school and handed it over to the parish priest. The Stoney family, however, remained as landlords. In May 1857 the agriculturist P. Stephens complained of "annoyance caused by pupils during the mid-day recreation and proposed curtailing it". The inspector did not agree with his suggestion, and stated that "the Commissioners were not disposed to alter the arrangements".

Mr. Stephens complained again in 1858, this time of "too many interruptions of school business by vacations, etc.". But the inspector considered that "a vacation of a week at Easter and two weeks respectively at Christmas and Summer are not in excess of those allowed in schools under the management and supervision of the Board". In April a rather cryptic report stated that "as the Agriculturist P. Stephens has a farm at a distance from the Model farm he be informed that the Commissioners will no longer require his services from 31st of May 1860 and his salary is to cease from that date". However, it was later decided that Mr. Stephens's salary should be paid until the end of June "as he had not sufficient notice".<sup>11</sup>

### Arrival of last instructor

In December 1860 it was decided that Kyle Park "be let to Michael Costelloe at present Agriculturist at Temple Douglas [Co. Donegal] at a rent of £16 per annum from 1st January,



1861. He is to receive a salary of £30 per annum for giving agricultural instructions and £16 for maintaining one free pupil and £10 for each of two paying pupils in case there shall be such pupils in the establishment. He is to take the live and dead stock at a valuation and have the use of the house and of such furniture as may be present in the house but such shall not be renewed". The arrangements under which Stephens and his predecessors had held office were to cease from 1 January, 1861.<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to get an accurate idea of the actual workings of the Agricultural School or to know how exactly it was run, as correspondence relating to the years prior to 1870 has not survived. A report dated May 5, 1871 gives the following information.

#### Agricultural Class

Under nine years	1
Under twelve years	3
Under sixteen years	9

The character of the agricultural instruction given was described as "middling". The report also states that the farm had 4 cattle, 3 horses, 1 sheep, 1 goat, 2 pigs and 50 poultry. The farm offices, though not adequate, were in "fair condition", the mature "well managed" and the farm accounts "accurate". The response to the question "Have former suggestions been attended to?" was "not sufficiently".<sup>13</sup>

The foregoing may be compared with a report of 1870 in Derry Castle Agriculture School, Killaloe. This showed that in 1870 the attendance was:

No. of pupils under 12	7
No. of pupils under 16	2
No. of pupils under 9	0

Michael Costelloe continued as agriculturist at Kyle Park until its closure in 1875. In 1860 Michael Slattery was admitted as a paying agricultural boarder. There were no boarders in 1870 and no paid industrial class. At that time the whole situation was under review. However, the school did not live up to official expectations.

Michael Costelloe was not informed until 1875 that his services would no longer be required after June 1, 1875 "after which date no salary would be paid as the Commissioners had resolved to dispose of the farm and that an appeal would in due course be made to the Treasury to grant him a retiring allowance". In the event the farm was put up for public auction and Costelloe was the only bidder. He purchased the farm for the nominal sum of £30. In April 1876 the Superintendent proposed that the dwelling on the farm should be left to Costelloe, but the Commissioners declined to do so. The dwelling was retained by the Board for the National School.

Costelloe then became involved in a long legal wrangle with the Commissioners regarding his entitlement to a pension. In February 1878 he appointed Matthew Slattery, Ballinderry, as valuator, who with the Board's officer might value the crops, etc. It was stated in the course of a report of 9 March, 1878 that "Michael Costelloe was 39 years of age and had 20 years service with the Board". He was granted a "compensation allowance" of £13-2-6 per annum from 1 February, 1876 and was accepted as a subtenant of the Board.

Thus ended the initiative of trying to stimulate the development of agriculture in Lower Ormond by the provision of an agricultural school under the Board of National Education. The



tenancy of the farm was retained by the Costelloe family. In 1909 Martin Costelloe was accepted as tenant in place of his late brother, and in 1917 the fee simple of the farm was purchased from the landlord by John Costelloe.<sup>14</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

1. National School Application Book (National Archives, hereafter NA), Ed. 182
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. Co. Register Book, Tipperary, NA, Ed. 243. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. 18th Report of the Commissioners of National Education, Ireland.
8. County Register Book, Tipperary (NA), Ed. 284.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. County Register Book, NA, District 36.
12. National School Application Book, NA, Ed. 183.
13. Report on District Model Agricultural Schools, NA, Ed. 3/5.
14. Case Files of Individual Schools, Ed. 9.