

*Coolick N.S.  
Kilcummin,  
Killarney  
Co. Kerry  
V93 DW65  
Tel: 0669764549*



*Email: coolickns@gmail.com*

*Scoil Chuil Líce  
Cill Chuimín  
Cill Áinne  
Co. Chiarraí  
V93 DW65  
Fón: 0669764549*

## **Coolick National School**

**By Irene Bn. Uí Chaoimh**

The townland of Coolick is situated at the extreme western end of the parish of Kilcummin, a parish where the schools church etc. don't seem to be strategically placed. The neighbouring townland of Leamnaguilla is affiliated to the parish of Firies. The local primary school is a focal point in the community. We are a small community within a larger community. The existence of the school over the decades has given the area a focal point - a certain sense of standing out on its own. Coolick school is the oldest of the three schools in the parish, it is the only one from a structural point of view that has withstood the test of time. The original building still stands in its entirety together with the extra class room that was built in the late 1950's. indoor toilets were added in the 1980's. In the most recent storm the one slate that was dislodged rested in the gutter and was promptly rescued by local man and secured in its niche one again. The school to date has remained unchanged - it holds a certain old-world charm. It is insular by its location and by its very nature. The old stone wall is still intact and is home to a nesting family of birds for years. The landscape is unspoilt and the immediate areas sparsely populated. Apart for the sounds of children at play peace is pervasive. During the course of the school day the amount of traffic is light.

The old road as we knew it, going to school long ago has been reopened - thanks to the dedication and the foresight of a local who was adamant that it should not fall into disrepair. The children now refer to it as "the short cut". This road formed part of the original Killarney to Castleisland road, which predated the present N22 which was built in the early 1800's.

At this point it seems fitting to include the details of who attended the school and who worked in it during the las 128 years of its' existence. It is a further dedication to the local people to present a story of the school as it pertains to them.

Coolick N.S. is situated five miles north of Killarney nestled into a hill overlooking the Lakes of Killarney. It faces the MacGillycuddy Reeks and the spire of Killarney Cathedral is clearly visible on a fine day. To the Back lie the townlands of Knocklebede, Buddihans and Cockhill. The Western side borders Coolick and Leamnaguilla. It is only a five- minute drive off the Killarney/Tralee road. Yet it is rural and insular in its' setting.

Seventy to eighty- one per cent of the present roll are fourth generation attenders. They sit on the same benches as their parents did before them if not their grandparents which lends a sense of "Leanunachas" or continuity to the place. In a world where there is a great deal of change and mobility this is unique. I sincerely hope that this sense of continuity or sense of belonging will remain with the children long after they have passed through its' gates.

It was built in 1870. Pupil intake was recorded for the first time on 12<sup>th</sup> June from the townlands of Dooneen, Droumadeesirt, Clounteens, Lisroe, Knocklebede, Buddihans, Cockhill, Leamnaguilla, Rossanean, Ardagh, Knockeenalicka, Currow and Coolbane. The first name on roll was that of William Kelleher of Leamnaguilla. Over 500 boys are on roll from 1871 to 1900. Alas, the girls roll is not available for observation but one can assume that the same number of girls passed through its doors.

At that time school fees were requested and were paid by some and not by others depending on family income. In the early stages, children attend at any age from 4 to 16. Whether they received any earlier education is uncertain. Yet, a local man has informed me that he remembers hearing of a hedge school at Dooneen bridge. We do know that a hedge school did exist at Clydagh up near the old graveyard. Coolick school was up and running from 1871. It opened its door for pupil intake on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1871, having got initial approval in 1868. There was a new lease executed to the trustees for 99 years on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1888. The guarantor was the Earl of Kenmare. The trustees were Rev. Higgins Bishop of Kerry, Rev. Ed Walsh P.P. Rathmore, Rev. Stephen Fuller P.P. Kilcummin.

The school was vested in the commissioners for 99 years from 21<sup>st</sup> April 1894. Con Fleming was the first teacher. At the time Fr. Counihan was the Manager of the school. Thomas Gallwey was manger of the books. The next official record is in 1874 on 9<sup>th</sup> May when a teacher was fined £2 for incorrectly recording attendance. On 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1881 a letter from the manager of the school stated that windows of the school were maliciously broken and requested the commissioners to remit him the amount for the cost of repairs. The letter also

stated that the school was set on fire. Maps and tablets were destroyed. On 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1880 Con Moynihan was appointed principal. On 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1891 the treasurer granted a loan of 200 pounds for the erection of a teacher's residence. In 1894 a loan of 35 pounds was sanctioned for the cementing and slating of this residence.

In relation to the girl's school, which was in fact the adjoining Classroom, Ellen Dowd and Mary O'Mahony served. In 1872 there was an application for Debbie O'Leary as an assistant. This was rejected as she declined to take up the position at the time (she moved to the eastern end of the parish to care for her sister's children. At some point she later returned and married Paddy O'Leary of Dooneen. (They had no issue). A salary was requested for Bridget McKee. She commenced service in June 1878 having come as a monitor from Clashnagarrane. There were 99 on roll. In 1887 there was a request for a salary for Debbie O'Leary. She was appointed to the school on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1877 as monitor. There were 110 on roll. There was an application sanction of Margaret McKee. This was rejected as the number didn't suffice. Mary Fleming was appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1888. Mary Moynihan took retirement in 1905. Events seemed to continue in this vein.

It can be noted that schools in the late 1900's were run under Commissioners and later under the trustees and the P.P. In 1915 the manager was Rev. J. Brick. J McCarthy was the principal. He received the princely sum of £15 per quarter together with a war bonus of £1 a month. In 1922 P. Brosnan was the P.P. in the same year the school was closed in June due to a measles epidemic. In 1924 Michael O'Leary was principal assistant. Mary J. O'Connor was principal of the girl's school assisted by Nora Fleming as a junior assistant mistress. From the early 1930's both the boys and girls roll were recorded in the same book. In 1932 M. O'Leary was assisted by Margerat Kissane (nee O' Leary) and Bridget Roach. A Mrs O'Connor was assisted by Nora Sheahan (Mrs O'Connor's great grandchildren attend the school at present) In 1940 John Teahan became principal, Mary McCarthy was assistant. She ceased employment in 1943. Debra O'Connor left in 1950. She was replaced by Mary Healy. Nora retired circa 1957. Mrs O'Shea (Nee McCarthy) was appointed in 1961. Mrs O'Shea, Miss Foley and Master Teahan continued to work on without incident until 1967.

In the late sixties the Dept. of Education ran a policy of amalgamating all small schools. For practical and financial reasons, it seemed a worth while exercise. This cost- effective measure was admirable from a civil servant'-s point of view.

Having established that the school was admirable from a civil servant's point of view. Having established that the school was a central part of this locality it was tantamount to saying, abolish the area altogether. The local people at the time opposed the matter strongly. They saw this attempt by the department, as being nothing short of draconian. Matters weren't helped by the timing of the incident. The announcement was made from the church alter that the school would not re-open after the summer holidays. The survey conducted by the department stated that there would be a drop off in pupil attendance. A parent's association was formed, probably the first of its kind at the time. One man felt he had no voice unless he had a child in school. He told me he sent his wife to town for a school bag. He sent the lad to school on the first day of September. The following day he was on his bicycle canvassing all the local families. This parent's association was organised by P.J. Teahan, Christy O'Leary, Michael O'Shea and others. Chairpersons of this organisation were the late Kathleen Foley, Leamnaguilla and Con Kerrisk.

This incident made the early morning news on Radio Eireann. It was also in the Kerryman and the photograph of the children appeared in the Cork Examiner. A spokesman for the school at the time Pointed out that the school afforded a panoramic view of the lakes. It had a reasonably new room added and he also made the point that playground space in Kilcummin was limited. The addition of 60 more pupils would further exacerbate the situation. The parents took issue with the idea that this was the first three teacher school to be affected. If the school was closed it would mean a further 6 mile journey for the furthest away pupil who at that point in time had only a mile to travel.

This was the first real threat to the existence of the school. It would be safe to say it hit stormy waters, but thanks to the loyal crew that were at the helm it survived to tell the tale. The matter was resolved temporarily and did not come up for review again by the department until 1975 (at this stage John Teahan had retired and Mr Michael Burke had taken up the post of principal teacher). It did not gather the same momentum. In its letter the department said that the matter had been deferred because of opposition from the Coolick parents. In 1975 a teacher in Kilcummin was due to retire and the department felt that this was a suitable time to amalgamate the schools. The combined averages of the schools would warrant a staff of 5 teachers in the school and accordingly an additional classroom would be requested in order to effect the amalgamation. A transport service would be operated for the school district. The department wanted to know if there had been any change in the attitude of the Coolick school

parents to the proposal. A meeting was held in the school the 19<sup>th</sup> May of that year and 40 parents attended the meeting.

The following points were made:

1. The Parents felt that they themselves would end up paying for the transport (free bus service)
2. A good deal of expense had been incurred when water and heating had been installed in the school.
3. The building itself was perfectly sound at the time.
4. 15 new houses were going up in the area, the parents felt that there would be enough children to merit a third teacher (They were proven correct because a third teacher was appointed in 1982)
5. The point was also made that the department had given free transport to Currow thus reducing the No. going to Coolick.
6. Parents felt they themselves would have to meet the extra costs of accommodating the pupils in Kilcummin.
7. The Children's school day would be much longer.
8. The majority of parents argued strongly for the local school to remain for the local children.
9. Some felt that the identity of the children would be lost in a big school.

The outcome to this meeting was so, that the manager wrote to the department expressing the wishes of the parents. Here the matter rested. It has not become an issue to date.

The life of the school spans two opposite ends of the spectrum from a social and economic point of view, in the days of our grandparent's poverty was the order of the day and putting food on the table was an all-time occupation. To compare the economic climate of life of early 19<sup>th</sup> Century to that of now is nearly impossible. The occupation of the people of the time was that of farming, a lot of casual labourers lived in the locality. A miller lived and worked at Dooneen Bridge. It is unfortunate that these labourers were transients and either died leaving no family or left the area.

A story is told of a man back in the late 1800's who got sick and could not work. His wife advised him to stay at home and his reply was "who would bring home the B" (referring to the four stone bag of flour which at the time had a large B printed on its side). This particular man had a large family and worked on a

neighbouring farm. This story serves of a poignant reminder of the poverty of the times.

Mentions must be made of a Hayes Family who lived at the end of Dooneen Road. They lived in a little house at the corner of Lawlor's Field. The extended family was large and yet there are no direct descendants that we know of. Thade Hayes married May Fogarty. Thade had three sons from his first marriage (Master Dan, Master William and Master James) Mary had two sons (John and Jer Kenny). They both had four sons: Stephen, Paddy, Joe and Mick all these children can be located in the school roll. They were great characters and very amusing tales about concerning them. Master Dan as we know was the local poet. He is reputed to have had a rhyme for all occasions.

At one time when the bailiffs paid a visit to a local man who on the same day was having stations. Master Dan saw it fit to verbalise the situation as follows:

*There now my boy its' plain to be seen,  
We had bailiffs and stations the same day in Dooneen  
The man in question came out and he was in a reel  
But he was soon liberated by Larry and Friel*

Mick Hayes was the last surviving member of this family. He built a little house in Coolick and lived out his remaining years. There isn't a ruin or stone in their memory. Yet I am glad to be able to say that one man can still regale us with vivid tales of their exploits.

After 128 years the school still sits facing south, it operates as three teacher school serving the local children, due to falling numbers the catchment area is not as large as it used to be.

On a summer day it is lovely to see the you children playing rolling games on the front lawn. The middle classes usually commandeer the western side of the school and the big boys play football on the back green. This demands a certain agility on the part of the children as the lawn runs in an east west direction on a fairly steep slope, this makes a football match very interesting. If the ball veers south it rolls so fast the children have to sprint to catch up with it.

The Only modern addition is a basket ball court, of which much use has been made. The Children appear secure and happy and I sincerely hope they leave the school with a certain security and sense of belonging together with a degree of common sense. The curricular aspect of their education is far easier to impart. It certainly is far more tangible.

With the advent of the millennium and the urbanisation of a lot of rural areas it is nice to know that an area can span the divide from old to new. We can boast of a few colourful past pupils in our locality who come together from time to time and entertain each other with tales of the past. Yet they are very comfortable facing the year 2000 and look forward to the future with hope and vigour - "le fíinne Ní bheidh a leithéidí ann arís". A word of thanks to all these gentlemen who too the time to look back and contribute to this article. They were only too glad to impart any information they had regarding the school and its' surrounds. Mention must also be made of those people, who down through the years, have given freely of their time (and still do) towards the upkeep of the school.