

'A SCHOOL STORY'

- some reflections on
Whitechurch N.S.,

by

Canon Horace McKinley.



Old Schools Whitechurch (1823).

September, 2016.

A SCHOOL STORY.

- WHITECHURCH NATIONAL SCHOOL was built in the present church grounds and opened its doors to pupils in 1823. Indeed, it pre-dated the building of the 'New *Whitechurch*' (the current) Parish Church in 1827. The 'New' church replaced 'Old' Whitechurch, the 12th century ruins of which can still be seen up the lane at Whitechurch Lodge. This old church also contains two very rare Viking Saltire Crosses, by the way. It was a huge cost to build this new National School (at first called "*Whitechurch Free School*") and its adjoining Teacher's Residence, which is today the Sexton's Residence, in 1823. When the Old Schools Restoration Project was being carried out in 1998/1999, Dr. Harold Hislop, a former teacher and Principal of Whitechurch N.S., wrote an absorbing article in the fund-raising brochure. This article detailed the whole background story of the planning, building and development of the School in 1823 and its early formative years. I can even claim some connection myself with those far-off times in that, when I came to Whitechurch in September, 1976, I and the parish Sexton at the time, Mr. Ernest Williams, accidentally located and rescued five Whitechurch school record books and ledgers, destined, no less for the tip, and dating from 1827-1839. Today, those books are on permanent loan to the Museum of Education, in the Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines (currently moving to its new location in Dublin City University), and they are a most valuable historical and educational resource. I always refer to the Old School in the plural. This simply reflects the name that is carved over the former teacher's (1823) residence front door - '*Whitechurch Schools*'. The plural is used to incorporate both boys and girls.



- WHITECHURCH N.S. had to close its doors in 1968, as there were only four pupils left on rolls. There are still a number of parishioners here who attended the School up till 1968. The last teacher was Miss Gwen Argue and she travelled by bus from her home in Clontarf every single teaching day for nearly forty years. She also combined her teaching post with being the church's Sunday organist. Indeed, when I came in 1976 to Whitechurch, she was still the organist, despite well advancing years. She is fondly remembered by those she taught and I found her to be a remarkable resource and a mine of valuable information about the parish, its people and the locality. She had lovely handwriting and those were more formal days. When I received letters from her, I was always addressed as '*Rev. Sir!*' Well, it all makes a welcome change from receiving constant texts messages and emails today that start: '*Hi*' or '*Hi there*'.

- IT IS HARD for us now to imagine nowadays a time back then when there were effectively no housing developments, for example, on roads such as Grange Road, Whitechurch Road, Ballinteer Avenue, Edmondstown Road, Scholarstown Road, Stocking Lane, Ballycullen Road and so on. All of that terrain was largely '*green fields*' and still very rural in character when I first came here. Indeed, with several local landowners selling out, the parish area then could actually be said to have been in people and population decline, despite its proximity to Dublin. In addition, there were then even questions raised about the parish's very own future viability and status. I came here, therefore, initially installed as a Vicar, not as a Rector and only for an initial period of five years, after which the parish's future status was to be reviewed by the Diocese. Happily, due to subsequent developments, the Parish was able to revert to its full independent parochial status in 1980, when I was then instituted as Rector.



- WHEN I ARRIVED HERE, two comments made to me at the time still stick in my mind. The first was from my Archbishop at the time, the very kindly Archbishop Alan Buchanan. He strongly encouraged me to consider doing a B.D. (a higher theological degree) because, unlike most other parish clergy of the time, he said I wouldn't have the extra demands of a School. In other words, I would have some spare time. The second comment was from the then Sexton, the most genial Mr. Ernest Williams, the first time I met him here on site. In showing me round, he brought me in to the then closed down old School and I know the comment made was in all good faith, but he said: "*Well of course, that'll never be a school again*". And, I want to assure you, I myself fully agreed with him at the time.
- BUT IN THIS LIFE, however, you never quite know what's round the corner! Two significant factors quickly came in to play. First, I paid a visit to the City Planning Authorities and learned for the first time that much of this then whole '*Green Fields*' parochial area was going to be re-zoned for very major urban development. Quite quickly, too, new housing developments started to spring up. The parish's previously quiet baptismal register and parochial numbers suddenly started to go on a very rapid and upward curve. The

second factor of significance was the proposal to consider developing a local multi-denominational National School, known as the Marlay Grange multi-denominational School Project. Prior to my arriving here, Whitechurch Parish had already given its support to this Project. But soon, I found myself facing a whole complex series of dilemmas and pressures, none of which were of my making. And I must stress that there were very good and worthy people at that time on both sides of that particular school debate. But two factors in particular affected the parish's eventual withdrawal from the Marlay Grange Project. First, Divine Word Parish, Marlay Grange, at the time a relatively newly constituted Roman Catholic parish, simultaneously built a new national School on a '*green field*' site. And secondly, our own parish, its numbers now quite suddenly and fast increasing, was simultaneously being put under increasing pressure by young parents to do something in relation to local national School provision. In the end, an independent parish survey was undertaken, which resulted in a large majority wanting the parish to re-open the School. When the parish first gave its support to the Marlay Grange Project, it had hardly any children of its own. But in a matter of a few years, all of that had dramatically changed, with a whole new first-time and young parish constituency pouring in here as new housing schemes started to spring up all over the parish.

- SO, IN SEPTEMBER 1978, Whitechurch National School re-opened in the Old Schools, though a day for enrolment had to be held in it on the last School day of June. I had received no training whatever myself in any of this! I recall having to go in to the Dept. of Education in Marlborough St., and being given a new School Roll book by the then Principal Officer, Mr. Liam McAndrew. He said that the School's original Roll Number, No. 11638, was being re-lived for use in this new Roll Book. A blackboard and chalk even had to be secured. Initially, we used the desks, still there with inkwells in the Old Schools from 1968. A Principal teacher needed to be appointed. Interviews were held and the quite admirable young Ms. Muriel Hatton was appointed. She had been on the teaching staff of Kildare Place N.S., Rathmines. A Board of Management had to be established, of course, and similarly a bit later, a Parent/Teacher Association. Archbishop Buchanan's worthy encouragement of me to study for a B.D. was even, by this early stage, a now long distant and well forgotten memory!

- THE PERIOD 1978, when the School re-opened, up to 1990, when the new School opened, is one I personally shall not easily forget. The pressures were simply constant and unrelenting. First, there was the question in 1978 of whether the re-opened School would actually develop and thrive. There were initially eight but eventually fourteen pupils by the end of its first year. However, thanks to Muriel Hatton's great leadership, the School quickly developed and numbers grew. New assistant teachers were in time appointed, the first of whom was Dr. Harold Hislop (now Chief Inspector of the Dept. of Education and Skills) and a further two of whom, Ms. Yvonne Stanley (later Shirley) and Ms. Alex Wilson, happily remain on the staff to this day. The parental support was really outstanding, quickly raising vital funds for equipping the School properly, for example. A second pressure also soon began to emerge, however. It became very clear that the School's upward growth in numbers would necessitate addressing the urgent question of provision of a new School. Whilst quaint, the Old Schools building was itself quite inadequate and also in noticeable material decline. There was no playground, either. Indeed, space became such a problem in time that land for a pre-fab was very kindly leased on adjoining land from the Grange Golf Club (today, the Old Schools car-park) and the Stables, though then quite dilapidated, were eventually forced in to emergency use to house two classes (back to back, with no partition, in the one room!).
- AT THIS POINT, it's important to record the much later very major building projects here of the Old Schools Restoration and Extension Project (blessed and officially opened on 14 February, 1999) and the Stables Restoration Project (blessed and officially opened on 27 September, 2014). Both buildings now happily serve a wide variety of parish and wider community needs and are a great testament to the various parishioners who gave so much time and talent in overseeing each of these Projects to a very successful conclusion. Parishioners Mr. Alex McLaren and Mrs. Jackie were key leaders of these respective Projects at those two different times.
- FOR SOME YEARS following its re-opening, the School Sports Day was held in the Vicarage grounds. In time, as School numbers started to grow further, Sports Day first migrated to Marlay Park and then to St. Columba's College, for several years.

- IT WAS IN 1979 that the School Development Committee (S.D.C.), an agent of the Parish's Select Vestry, was formed. Its brief was to drive the plans for a new School and to carry out the whole massive fund-raising programme. The S.D.C. was represented on it by members of the Select Vestry and the School parental body. Elections to the S.D.C. took place every two years, to prevent fatigue! It faced a really daunting task. The 1980's was a lengthy time of very deep, national recession, with high emigration and unemployment, so public funds were very bare indeed. Then, since the parish owned no other land, where and how could a new school site be found? And paid for? Initially, there were four potential sites considered. In the end, the present site of the new School was the one identified and purchase of this by the parish was completed in 1985. I have often felt that this site purchase was a very real act of faith, in that it took another three years, 1988, before the Dept. of Education granted permission to release the building project to tender. I also must record the vital work of parishioner Mr. Stewart Paul, until recently a Board of Management member, whose really exceptional professional skills were quite critical in negotiating the highly complex provision of what is now the School's very lovely site.



- THERE WERE SOME REMARKABLE HEROES AND HEROINES on the S.D.C. over the years. It should also be remembered that the School parental body was much smaller in number, certainly in its earlier years, than today. It could be invidious to name some names and not all names. But there were quite outstanding contributions then from Select Vestry members like Mr. Robert Syme and Mr. Charles Guinness, from parish and school grandparents Mrs. Pat and Mr. Harry Richardson and from School parents such as Mrs. Sylvia Simpson (chairperson, S.D.C.), Mrs. Marie Dillon, Mr. Donald Beck, Mrs. Sheila Commiskey, Mrs. Mary Pillow and Mr. Michael Duff, amongst many others. To sustain, for over a decade, a constant fund-raising programme, on the one hand, while not knowing till quite close to the end that that programme would be rewarded (in the form of a new School), was remarkable. At times, of course, there was inevitably '*murmuring*' in the ranks that nothing was happening, but even that never prevented focus being very firmly kept on the end target. In total, £285,000 (punts) was raised as the local contribution to the new School building and the purchase of the site. The Departmental contribution was a bit under £300,000 (punts). In the midst of that, I came across one interesting figure. For nine months of the year, monthly coffee mornings, ran by School mothers, were held over that decade in School parent homes. Often, neighbours were invited. In total, those monthly events raised a remarkable £37,000 for S.D.C. funds. I must also note that a few of those wonderfully consistent, supportive and generous S.D.C. parental members had children all the way through the Old School, yet their children had moved on to Secondary School, just before the new School opened. Yet I never once heard one word of complaint, even though they surely had grounds for even some measure of grievance.

Even after the new School opened, there were still significant monies to be raised. One day, I received out of the blue a bank-draft for a very substantial five-figure sum of money. This more or less removed the remaining School debt. Being anonymous, I had no idea whatever where this monetary munificence came from. It was only later that I accidentally discovered that it had been given by an elderly couple (parishioners) who for many years came to church here quietly and reverently to 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion every Sunday. They had no family and no direct School connection. It would be remiss indeed if I did not record this

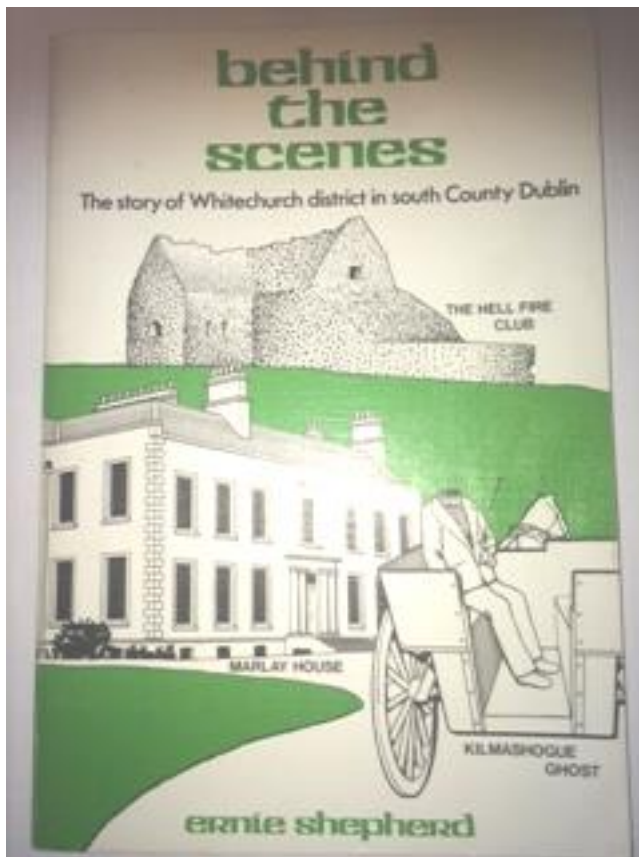
extraordinary act of very timely generosity on their part, at the end of such a long and punishing fund-raising campaign.

- I HAVE MADE REFERENCE to the endless fund-raising events. Three really big highlights were the three successive and very successful fund-raising Concerts we held in the National Concert Hall (1986-88). It was a really big achievement to fill the N.C.H. three years in a row but that target was splendidly achieved. Each Concert was memorable. There were core performers, such as the Garda Band and the Rathfarnham Concert Band, interspersed with a variety of soloists and instrumentalists. At the middle Concert, some of the School children performed a short musical entitled "*Ozzie and the Thwartz*". It goes without saying that they brought the house down. The splendid compere at all three Concerts was Liam Devally, who was well-known at the time as a music broadcaster on R.T.E., and who later became a judge.
- THE '*MAY FETES*' started in 1980. The first two were held, by kind permission, on one of the rugby pitches of St. Columba's College. The Friday night before that second Fete, there was a really violent storm of near hurricane strength. I was awoken early the next morning by a telephone call from the St. Columba's College Bursar to say that our Marquee tent, which had been erected on the Friday afternoon, was now scattered and littered around the adjoining rugby pitch! It was eventually re-erected after much toil and sweat and that particular Fete was officially opened by the then Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mr. Alexis Fitzgerald, complete with his impressive chain of office. Later Fetes in the 1980's took place, and again by kind permission, in Wesley College. One of those Fetes was declared open by Mr. Des Fitzgerald, an Irish and Lions rugby player of the time. Des is, of course, the father of another well-known former rugby player, Mr. Luke Fitzgerald.
- WHEN THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE was set up, I felt I had to try to show some leadership myself. So almost the very first fund-raising function was held in the church, where I played a sponsored organ marathon of the 738 hymns in the then '*Irish Church Hymnal*'. I started on a Saturday at 8.00 a.m., and finished about 10.00 p.m. Each 100 hymns was introduced and announced by a well-known local person, and I was then given a ten minute break, before re-starting. Plenty of people came along and sang, creating a very spirited atmosphere, and I believe this

event raised over £2,000 (punts). I was well stiff and sore, believe me, for some days afterwards!

- IN 1983, a then parishioner, Ernest Shepherd published a book "*Behind the Scenes - the story of Whitechurch district in south County Dublin*". Thanks indeed to Ernest's very high level of detailed research, the book contained very significant and fascinating information indeed as to the history of Whitechurch School and of the parish, as well as other notable local institutions, amenities and features. In relation to the School, Ernest's research reveals extraordinary details as to the social conditions of the time. Each year, it is recorded that the School had to be fully whitewashed, "*as a consequence of the cholera*". In 1827, this cost £1.1.8. The book notes that 100 quills cost 1 shilling and 100 slate pencils cost 6½d. £3.5.5. was spent on articles of clothing for ten poor Protestant children attending the School, while the tailor's bill for making suits for four other children came to 11/7d. Though now long out of print, "*Behind the Scenes*" remains a very rich resource indeed, regarding the foundation, development and social and religious life of Whitechurch N.S., in the 1820's and 1830's. Ernest Shepherd had previously written two best-selling books, relating to Irish Locomotives and the Dublin and South Eastern Railway. Railways and trains were Ernest's big hobby and leisure interest in life. The foreword to "*Behind the Scenes*" was kindly written by Archbishop G.O. Simms, a former Archbishop of Armagh and Dublin. From time to time, even after all these years, I still receive periodic calls, looking for or enquiring about the book.

A member of the Book's parish sub-committee at the time was then parishioner, Mr. Don Tidey, who was the Chairman and Chief Executive of Quinnsworth Ltd. Thanks to Don's organization and Quinnsworth's support, "*Behind the Scenes*" was officially launched, with much publicity, at Marlay House (by kind permission), immediately followed by a parish and community reception in the Grange Golf Club (by kind permission). There, thanks to Mr. Maurice Pratt and the Quinnsworth team, the book was superbly and attractively displayed, and was, of course, available for sale. It wasn't that very long before the book was entirely sold out. "*Behind the Scenes*" was a great success story, not least for its author, but it also put a wider spotlight on Whitechurch N.S., just when that was needed at the time. Not long after that time, the nightmare of Don Tidey's kidnapping, of course, was to unfold across the nation.



- DURING THAT PERIOD OF THE 1980'S, I've referred to the fact that there was a very severe and protracted economic recession. There were several general Elections held, too. In addition, there was the additional backdrop of the tragic Troubles in N. Ireland being at their height. I wish to refer to two public servants, amongst various others, whom I myself greatly grew to respect. First, there was the School's Inspector at the time, Mr. Padraig Lynch. He would not have been more helpful and approachable and went well beyond the normal line of duty with his prudent advice, wise insights and ready availability. Secondly, the Principal Officer in the Building Section of the Department of Education was at that same time, Mr. Paddy Henehan. I was but all too aware of those extremely severe fiscal restraints under which the Department of Education was then operating and the consequently very heavy pressures on his particular office. I quickly came to appreciate Paddy's very considerable skills and abilities. I feel sure though, at times, that he considered me little less than an awkward nuisance, if not "*a turbulent priest*"! But he always treated me with great courtesy, patience and fairness. Indeed, I can now in retrospect say that I learned a lot from him. At a personal level, then, I look back with very genuine indebtedness for their time and professional standards to both Padraig and Paddy.

- IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE, of course, to avoid exerting consistent political pressure at the time, to try to expedite the provision of a new School building. In all, I was on delegations to the Dail on four occasions in relation to Whitechurch School education matters. The Ministers involved were:- Mr. John Wilson (Minister for Education), Mr. Donal Creed (Minister of State, Dept. of Education), Mr. Enda Kenny (Minister of State, Dept. of Education) and Mrs. Mary O'Rourke (Minister for Education). I thank the various Patron Archbishops who kindly accompanied me on those delegations, and the politicians involved for consenting to receive and to listen to these particular representations.
- I HAVE HIGHLIGHTED, then, the huge 1980's fund-raising drive led by the S.D.C. The School's parental body was clearly quite critical in support of that aim and it is so important to acknowledge and record, with much grateful appreciation, that most generous level of parental support.
- BUT THE OTHER BODY that I must not fail to thank in similar terms is the Parish's Select Vestry and the parishioners generally. The Select Vestry provided the essential leadership and guiding hand throughout this whole period and many (non-School parents) parishioners were extremely generous in their financial giving and indeed other forms of valued, practical support. In addition, the Diocesan Councils of Dublin and Glendalough reduced the Diocesan Parochial Assessment of Whitechurch Parish by £5,000 (punts) for five successive years, in the 1980's, in order to support the fund-raising drive for the proposed new School. I have mentioned that there were some '*murmurings*' in the School parental body "*that nothing was happening*" (by way of getting a new School). There were also some converse '*murmurings*', though, from the parish constituency. That was because, once the School re-opened in the Old School in 1978, the parish effectively forfeited its then parish hall. It was only possible to use the School for Sunday School. So, for a decade, the parish existed without a hall premises of any sort. I do look back and thank the parishioners for their great forbearance and understanding during those stressful times. It was a remarkable sacrifice on their part. Many of our parish activities that were developing at the time had to be held in borrowed and dispersed facilities. I recall our parish's Mothers' Union branch was re-opened after a lapse of several years at a meeting held in the new classroom pre-fab adjoining the old

Schools. I also remember parish sales of work being held in Reckitt's Hall, Edmondstown Road and in St. Joseph's Boys (Boxing) Club in Ballyboden. I could mention several other outside locations. For that decade, we were, like Israel of old, a people "*in exile*" from our own land. However, it must not be forgotten that biblical "*Exile*" was in time also happily and mercifully followed by biblical "*Restoration*".

- THE NEW SCHOOL was blessed and officially opened on 21 September, 1990, that date also being the Feast Day of St. Matthew, apostle. A very joyful service was held first in the church. This was then followed across the road by the blessing, performed by the then Patron, Archbishop Donal Caird and the official opening by the then Minister for Education, Mrs. Mary O'Rourke. There were fitting speeches for the occasion and these were then followed by a reception in the Assembly Hall. One very interesting guest on that special day, whom I had managed to track down, was a charming and elderly lady, Miss H.J. Malley, who had actually taught in Whitechurch N.S. before Miss Argue, and who was the very last teacher, up to the late 1930's, to have resided in the School teacher's residence (now, the Sexton's residence). Another feature of interest that day was the tricolour which was erected on a flag pole. This task was undertaken by a School parent father at the time, Mr. Charles Lawn, who was also an Irish Navy officer, and who was for some years A.D.C. to the Taoiseach. A photograph of the Archbishop and the Minister also appeared in the daily paper the next day. The old and now recently demolished pre-fab at the rear of the School originated at that time, for when the School was officially opened, it was a classroom short. Hence, a new pre-fab had to be secured, to serve as that classroom.



- ANOTHER NOTABLE EVENT took place on 15th October, 1998. This was the blessing and official opening of the double semi-permanent classrooms, today at the rear of the Assembly Hall. But this occasion was also used to mark the 175th anniversary of the School, a significant date indeed. This event was held in the early evening but a major crisis, in the form of a very widespread local electric power-cut, took place only a few hours before it was due to start! This meant, of course, that there was no power at either the Church or the School, and therefore no light and no heat. Yet adversity can also bring out the best in people. There were a reasonable number of candles left over from the Candlemass service in the church and our Augustinian neighbours in Our Lady of Good Counsel parish also kindly came up trumps with plenty more. So, the church service was held by candlelight, as also was the blessing and then official opening ceremony over at the School. The patron of the time, Archbishop Walton Empey, performed the blessing and then Government Minister, Mr. Seamus Brennan, undertook the official opening. Hot water somehow or other arrived in a myriad of parental flasks, so that even the prospect of tea or coffee for the hordes was not lost at the subsequent reception! And curiously, over at the church, the old unused chancel 1882 Browne organ, which had by then been replaced in 1990 by the fine restored Connacher (1888) organ in the gallery, came back out of redundancy in to action. It was still possible, you see, to hand pump it! I can still picture the father parental volunteers as they undertook this very energetic activity of

hand-pumping and who did so as if they were old hands at it. I can also picture in my mind the candlelight procession of children, parents, parishioners and guests weaving its way in the dark across to the School, a very lengthy crocodile indeed. As we walked across, a group of the very excited children who were walking beside me kept telling me: *"This is really-cool!"* I want to assure you that, when that particular power cut took place but a few hours earlier, I myself felt the very polar opposite of *"cool!"*

- A MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENT, of course, was the School's extension, comprising two classrooms, toilets and a Staff Room, which was built in 2007. At the time that particular development was being planned and initiated by the Board of Management, we were living in what is now retrospectively called *"the Celtic Tiger"* era. In the end, the local contribution sought for this extension was another mighty sum, this time of €305, 859. The Department's grant was €239, 652, making for a net spend on this extension project of €520,288. In order to address this most daunting task, the PTA2 Fund raising Committee was established, whose first chairperson was former parent Dr. Maria Browne and whose second chairperson was another former parent Mr. Andrew Miller. The PTA1 Committee kindly agreed to hold back on its own usual fund-raising activities, in order to free up PTA2 to drive this fresh and challenging campaign. School parents were again extremely generous and committed in their support of the whole heavy fund-raising programme, not least with contributing vital standing orders, as well as active involvement in other fund-raising events. One special memory is of a very successful *'Dream Auction'*, held in Three Rock Rovers Pavilion, under the skilful direction of parishioner, Mr. Ken Gregory. Not that long after that event, the whole infamous Banking collapse suddenly happened and the economic recession started to take very rapid and biting effect.
- A REALLY BIG DEBT OF GRATITUDE, then, was owed to all the various parents who served on the PTA2 Committees, as well as to the two Chairpersons, and to the staff and parents at the School. Another big debt of gratitude was also due to the Parish's Select Vestry. School Boards of Management are not allowed to take out Bank Loans, so it was the parish's Select Vestry which kindly agreed to take out the Bank Loan of €250,000. In addition, several parishioners kindly made very generous and substantial fixed-term interest free loans, which were really critical to the whole management of this loan.

- AN INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCE of a combination of fund-raising fatigue and the impacts of the economic recession led to the decision in 2013 by the Select Vestry that the whole proceeds of the May Fete 2014 would be solely and once-off used for the benefit of the School and its debt. Prior to and since this, the split on the May Fete proceeds had always been equally divided between parish and school funds. It was encouraging indeed that the whole debt on the School Extension was effectively all cleared by the end of 2014. So again, I thank very warmly everyone and the various bodies who were involved in helping to reach that very satisfactory conclusion to another onerous campaign of very serious fund-raising demands.
- THE BLESSING AND OFFICIAL OPENING of the School's new Extension took place on 4 October, 2007. Again, a very lively service took place in the church, with lots of children involved. This was followed at the School by the blessing ceremony, performed by the then Patron, Archbishop John Neill, and followed by the official opening by the then Minister for Education, Mrs. Mary Hanafin. And, needless to say, there was another very pleasant and hospitable reception held in the Assembly Hall, all most efficiently organized again by the P.T.A.
- THE 'LAST LAP' on the School's Development was reached in June this year, 2016. The Board of Management had taken the decision in 2014 to initiate discussions and seek funding from the Dept. of Education and Skills, due to the School's developmental needs, for additional classroom accommodation. Last year, the Minister and the Department confirmed they had made a very generous grant available and permission for building was then sought and given. The end result is the lovely two story new extension, comprising two new classrooms, three special Education teaching rooms, a Principal's and School Office, and a new Reception area. I must record on the Board of Management's behalf, and with very sincere gratitude, the Minister and Department's high level of grant aid towards this most recent extension.

The new Extension was blessed on 9 June, the Feast Day of St. Columba, by the School's current Patron, the Most Rev. Dr. Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin, following a service of thanksgiving in the church, once again with considerable pupil

participation. It was particularly appropriate that former Board of Management member and parishioner, Mr. Stewart Paul, cut the tape and thereby kindly performed the official opening ceremony. This was the School's way of saying a special and big 'Thank You' to Stewart, whose personal and skill contribution to the School's development over four decades has been immense. Quite simply, you could not put a price on it. I also pay a warm tribute to Ms. Sarah Richards, the Principal, for the time given and skills exercised in relation to the provision of this new Extension.



A very special feature of this extension's official opening was the presentation by him to the School of Mr. Gerry Pullman's quite magnificent carving from wood of the Church of Ireland's Logo cross. Gerry is both a current Board of Management and parish Select Vestry member. The wood Gerry used was beech, cut from a very old tree in Woodtown Park House that had blown down in a storm. It's an extraordinary co-incidence that the dating of the rings on that big circle of beech has been estimated to be - 1823! That's the very same year when the then "*Whitechurch Free School*" first opened its doors. Gerry's great masterpiece in wood is now a very prominent and most attractive feature of the School's new reception area.



- I DO HOPE this article is of some interest. I can assure you that I could have written a very great deal more! What I have outlined has been for me personally a huge life - learning curve, over all those years. What sort of things have I learned? Well, the need in the first place to cultivate patience, which we popularly call a virtue, and which the New Testament actually lists no less as a quite specific gift of God the Holy Spirit. Secondly, in all things, each person should strive to contribute to the “*common good*”. Call it the need for “*good united teamwork*”, if you like. A purely personal or sectional agenda does not ever fit in to the broader and wider agenda that seeks to serve the common good of all. Thirdly, good communication channels are obviously always critical. That is how community confidence and trust are built up and sustained, and how relationships are strengthened. Flawed communication or lack of communication are how mis-information starts to germinate and grow - at times, at an alarming speed! Fourthly, my own continuous dealings in particular with a whole range of ‘*officialdom*’ over the years, both political and statutory, has taught me much about what we call “*life skills*”. I have learned that you have to earn your right to be heard, but once you’ve earned that right, you will then be heard - even in a deep

recession! It all boils down to building a right working relationship, where the respect you display will in time be reciprocated by respect in return. *'Playing smart'* simply does not work. In life, people whom we respect and affirm will in the end nearly always respond positively to us. But if someone is unreasonable to us, or aggressive and even rude and ill-tempered, you know how that becomes an immediately negative way of erecting a barrier that impairs and blocks healthy communication and positive interaction.

Finally, shortly after the School re-opened here in 1978, I recall the then Patron, Archbishop Henry McAdoo, speaking here on what he considered to be a key Triad in a denominational School education system. And that key Triad, for him, was School, Home and Church. Yet, what was said back all those years ago still, for me, strangely but relevantly resonates and rings out as no less true, for this very age we are passing through now. In my recent book, *"As I said.....An ordinary priest reflects"* (Ashfield Press, 2014), I included a chapter entitled *"Education matters"*. In that chapter, I drew on our Lord's words in St. Luke 12, v. 48, relating to His parable of the wise and faithful servant: *"Much will be required from one who is given much; if someone is entrusted with much, even more will be expected in return"*. The living out and filling out of those words is something that all who are stakeholders in Schools with an ethos statement such as ours should not fail to keep working at or to neglect. The stakeholders, it should be remembered, are the Patron, the Board of Management, the Principal, Teaching and all other staff and the whole parental and pupil body - and all working in tandem with the local parish. Much has been given to each one of these stakeholders, then, and in return, much will and should always be required of each of them.

I shall most definitely be very well gone from here by 2023. So please, take note now of that date, the year in which the School will (Deo volente) - celebrate being two hundred years old!

Horace McKinley (Canon),
Chairperson, Board of
Management and Rector,

Whitechurch Parish.

Date: September, 2016.