



**History of  
Groomspport  
Primary School  
1844 – 2007**



# Foreword

Schools play an important role in the life of a community as can be seen in this short history of Groomspoint Primary School.

This booklet tracks the changes over the years from the school's origins at Main Street and the Walter Nelson Hall to the present building on Springwell Drive.

We hope that you will treasure the memories that it evokes.

We express our thanks to Linda and Maurice Mehaffey for their research and Mark Patton for his advice and expertise in putting the final booklet together.

**R Watson  
Principal**

***Cover picture: some former pupils  
visit the Ulster Folk Museum and  
experience a taste of what education  
might have been like in bygone times***

# First School in Groomsport

The following extract from the Presbyterian Church Kirk Session Minute Book details the thoughts of the village residents regarding education.

“At a public meeting held in Groomsport Presbyterian Church on 28th August 1844, the state of education and the facilities through which it may be obtained in this neighbourhood being taken into consideration, it was unanimously resolved that efforts be made to provide better accommodation for the members of the congregation and others who wish to avail themselves of the advantages of a better education than can at present be obtained in this place.”

*(Minute Records of Groomsport Presbyterian Church Session 1844-1887) pp 33 Tides and Times in the 'Port - David Irwin*

As a result, a sub-committee was formed with the Rev. Isaac Mack as Convenor, to oversee the building of a school. Within three to four months a school was built at the rear of the church and parallel to The Hill.

The school committee met to consider the appointment of a teacher on 1st January 1845. Alexander Lindsay was chosen. He proved to be very popular with pupils and parents. On 12th September 1845 it was agreed that a second teacher be appointed as the school enrolment was too numerous for one master. On 18th November, Mr Hamilton was appointed at a Salary of £10 per year, which had to come out of the pocket of Mr Lindsay. By the end of that first year it was decided that an extension to the school was needed. The church minutes record, “Mr Mack applied

for aid towards the payment of teachers' salary and for the supply of books from the Board." He received a grant of £4 9s 1d for the male school and £1 1s 5d for the female school.

*(Public Record Office, Northern Ireland ED 1/15, 163,174)*

The extension, known as the female school, was completed on 16th March 1846. It was added to the Donaghadee side of the original building and ran at right angles to The Hill. This extension was completed at a cost of £46 12s 7d. At that time the entire financial turnover of the church in 1849 was £45 16s 6d so that puts the actual cost in perspective, a significant investment in education.

That school served the community for exactly 50 years until 1895, although it would have been considered as small, poorly lit and ill-equipped by modern standards. This old building was finally demolished in 1962, and the old keystone was lost in the rubble at the rear of the church. However, it was rediscovered in 1970 during excavations for the first extension to the church. It is still in existence and at present located in the church grounds, a little battered, and inscribed as follows: "Erected by the Minister and Congnifcation, 1844"

(The words Isaac Mack, Pastor were also included but are now missing.)



# Second Groomspport Primary School

A report in the Newtownards Chronicle for 27th July 1895 (p3) headlined:

“Groomspport New Schools” Bangor, Wednesday.

“Today at noon the new schools erected in connection with Groomspport Presybyterian Church were opened in the presence of a large gathering by Major R.P. Percival Maxwell, the proceedings being most enthusiastic throughout. Mr Kingan, J.P. presided, and spirited congratulatory addresses were delivered by Revs. James Latimer, pastor loci, S.S. Holmes, rector of Groomspport, R.J. Morell, Bangor and Major Maxwell. A select programme was gone through by the children, terminating with the singing of the National Anthem.”

By 1895 the Schoolhouse behind the church had become old-fashioned and unsuitable, so attention was drawn towards building a new school on Main Street. A Mr McWhinney of Newtownards undertook the work for £485 plus a further £85 13s 11d was added for inside furnishings. The amount was raised very quickly in order that it did not become a burdensome debt. The building was used both as a school and a hall for the Presbyterian Church. This building served for 67 years, until 1962 when a new and larger school was built on Springwell Drive. It was then handed back to the congregation and in a short time was transformed into a fine hall.

*pp 45 Time and Tides of the 'Port - David Irwin.*



*This photo dates from between 1919 and 1921*



*Parents and pupils at the opening of the third Groomspout Primary School on its current site on 19th March 1962*



# Third Groomsport Primary School

The new school was opened by the Down Education Committee on 19th March 1962 at a cost of £17,000.

The Co. Down Spectator of 23rd March 1962 provided a fairly lengthy report of that event. The following is a short synopsis of the proceedings.

"Sixty pupils marched from the old school house, to the modern three-classroom building.

After the key had been turned by Mrs W S Kingan J.P., parents and other well-wishers joined members of the Education Committee and the boys and girls in a dedicatory service and in the presentations which followed.

Two of the classrooms could be combined to make one large room, partitioned by a sliding door, and this is where the proceedings took place. The Principal was Mr James Halliday. Gifts were presented, among which was a teapot and tea-set on behalf of the parents. Mrs Walter Nelson presented a gift of cacti with which to decorate the classrooms.

Mr Halliday read out a telegram from a school in South Down, "May you surpass by the by-pass".

Mrs Kingan closed her remarks with the words, "I wish God's blessing on all who teach and learn here."

# School General Registers

Statistical Information from School Records held in Public Record Office Northern Ireland

It is difficult to compile the total enrolment of the school from 1863 to 2007 as the registers repeat numbering, but it is estimated that approximately 3870 children have attended Groomsport Primary School.

## **SCH 704/1/1 Females Register 1861**

No.	Name	Age	Occupation of Parent/Guardian
1	Margaret J Bell	15	Mason
2	Agnes Hamilton	13	Widow
3	Eliza Heyburn	11	Car Driver
4	Mary Boden	14	Orphan
5	Jane Stewart	12	Car Driver

Register closed on 20th June 1918 at Pupil No. 644

## **SCH 704/1/2 Males Register 1861**

No.	Name	Age	Occupation of Parent/Guardian
1	Hugh Bell	13	Mason
2	Alexander McLean	12	Labourer
3	John Andrews	11	Farmer
4	Richard Mynheer	12	Coastguard
5	William Reid	13	Farmer

Register closed on 1st July 1919 at Pupil No. 563





*Photo taken in the 1920s outside what is now the Walter Nelson Hall, the teachers are Mr Brownlee and Mrs Bradley*

#### **SCH 704/1/3 Females Register**

No.	Date	Name	Age	Occupation of Parent/ Guardian
645	27 Feb.1919	Isobel Murdoch	6	Joiner

Register numbered to 1016, then on 4th August 1941 began at 1 - 208

Register closed on 28th May 1951

#### **SCH 704/1/4 Males Register**

The first registered number was 564 in the name of George Fry, an orphan, who left 4th December 1920 and went to Belfast.

# Origins, names and occupations

In 1941/1942 the names of children registered were entered in the back of the book, in red. This was a very transient time during World War 2. Parents occupations are listed as R.A.F., Army, Navy, Soldier, Sailor etc.

It was recorded that children came to Groomsport from Liverpool, Glasgow, Cork, London, Cornwall, and other places in the UK as well as from Belfast, Lisburn, Antrim etc.

In 1937 four children arrived from Windsor, Ontario, Canada. It would seem that people travelled around, possibly for work, as much, if not more than at present. Of course, the accessibility of private and public transport now means that families can live a distance from work and school.

It may be noted that there were quite a few orphans registered over the years, some being looked after by families and some, apparently, from an orphanage which eventually closed. It was noted in an inspector's report that this resulted in a fall in enrolment.

It would appear that the big houses in the area, Portavo and Glenganagh, provided much employment, and thus contributed to the school enrolment.

Popular names for girls in the mid-late 1800's were Lizzie, Ellen, Nellie, Maggie, Bella, Lucy, Sarah, Jane and Agnes among others. There are the occasional more exotic names, Oliviette being one example.

Popular boys names were, as might be expected, William, George, John, Edward, James and Albert.

In the mid 1900's, a few children did go on to further education: a Victor Bradley left to go to Grammar School in 1942, and others went to Bangor Technical School.

The occupations of the parent/guardian are listed, making interesting reading: plumber, bricklayer, chauffeur, coalman, groom, fisherman, soldier, gardener, riveter, labourer, carpenter, crane driver, farmer, tobacconist/confectioner (Wilkinson), car driver (trap or jaunting car) etc.

Some familiar surnames are Nelson, Watterson, Patton.

Fred and Shaun Magee emigrated to Canada after leaving on 28th June 1924. Charles Halliday emigrated to New Zealand, leaving school on 22nd August 1925.

It is recorded that some boys went into business after leaving school, a few to secondary schools, and some to work. It was not common to record if the girls went to work.

There were a few deaths recorded, John Patton 30th June 1930, and a James McIlroy who came to school on 14th May 1917, died around 3rd June 1922.

Enrolment has fluctuated considerably over the years due to several external circumstances, including:

- the closing of an orphanage,
- the Belfast Blitz (when pupils came to the school temporarily),
- changes in Education Law (e.g. 11+),
- the opening of Ballyholme Primary School,
- the building of a housing estate,
- the fall in number of children living in the area,
- open enrolment, and
- increased use of personal transport.



*Two views of the second school: on the extreme left of Main Street (top) and on the right behind the tip of the mast (bottom), now the Walter Nelson Hall*



# School Management

The following are extracts from the School Management Board book of Minutes dated 1938 to 1974. It may be noted that generally there was only 1 meeting a year, although the Autumn Term of 1938 seems to be an exception.

## **26th August 1938**

It was resolved that the window guards be removed in order to facilitate cleaning and admit more light into the classroom. The caretaker reported that 3-4 tons of coal and 200 bundles of sticks would be required.

## **26th September 1938**

The Secretary reported that he had failed to secure a school cleaner as the wages were too small to attract any applicants. (The employment of a school caretaker appears to be a recurring difficulty and is brought up at many School Management Committee Meetings).

## **23rd November 1938**

A discussion took place regarding a shop which, it was proposed, was to be built on the eastward side of the school. A letter would be written indicating that "This committee considers that such a shop (or wooden hut) would not be in the best interests of the school."

## **22nd November 1939**

The Secretary pointed out that drinking water had to be obtained from the village pump which, unfortunately, was locked during school hours in the summertime. Water had to be pumped into a bucket in the early morning. The question was asked, "How many pupils from Groomsport attended the Central Schools in Bangor? The answer given

was 25-30. Apparently, there were only 29 children in attendance who lived in Groomspport - and it was noted that there appeared to be a need for a school to accommodate Groomspport and Ballyholme. "The proper thing to do is build a new school." Repairs, alterations and improvements were needed for Groomspport Primary School.

#### **20th October 1940**

A circular letter was read referring to the days on which the Union Jack should be flown in Transferred Schools. The Secretary pointed out that we had neither Union Jack or flag-pole. A well was to be sunk in the school yard as there was a plentiful supply of water at 25 feet.

#### **7th May 1941**

Rev. Nelson proposed and Mr Kingan seconded, that a fortnight be given at harvest time (holidays held over from the summer) for the corn harvest. A further attempt should be made to hurry up the provision of an air raid shelter (this was erected by 22nd May 1942). There were a considerable number of extra children attending the school due to the air raids in Belfast. The wages for the Caretaker were 9s 6d per week.

#### **8th December 1943**

The Secretary reported that nuisances were being committed about the school premises.

#### **24th October 1945**

It was agreed that the air raid shelters be used as play shelters and a bicycle shed.

**23rd January 1953**

The planting of acorns from the oaks in Windsor Great Park on Coronation Day was discussed.

**5th March 1953**

The minutes recorded the formation of a Coronation Committee for the purpose of organising Coronation Celebrations for the children of Groomsport. The Secretary reported that the envelope containing 6 acorns was found open at Bangor Post Office - 2 acorns reached the school. The missing acorns could not be replaced, and the 2 remaining ones have been planted in pots in preparation for planting in the school grounds on Coronation Day.

**20th November 1953**

It was reported that a successful day of celebration was held on Coronation Day. It was decided that the Minutes and Balance Sheet of the Coronation Celebrations Committee be preserved. *(This is available to be viewed)*

**11th November 1954**

It was noted that work was needed on the school. However, it was recorded that no action would be taken as it is the intention of the Committee to replace this school at an early date.

**29th September 1955**

The Plantation site is the proposed area for the new school. Mr Maxwell, the Landlord of the ground, agreed to the entrance to the school being affected through his ground to join up with the road system of the housing estate, more land could be available if necessary. An alternative site on the South side of Groomsport, Springwell Road West Side was considered.





*Pupils and teachers, 2007*

**10th December 1959**

Mr James Norman Halliday, formerly of Bangor Central Primary, was recommended to be appointed as Principal of Groomsport Primary School.

There was no reference to Mr D R Brownlee who had served as Principal for many years. It must be thought that he has retired sometime during the school year of 1959/1960.

**29th November 1961**

There was a delay in surfacing the approaching road to the new school building. Plans were made for the general procedure for the formal opening of the new school. (*see notes above*)

*Strangely, there are no recorded minutes from 19th January 1961 to 17th May 1963, and no reference made to the opening of the new school.*

**25th March 1968**

Mrs CEM Kingan OBE referred to the deaths in the past month of Rev. Walter Nelson and Canon Charles Walsh, both long-serving friends of the school.

A short discussion followed regarding the completion of the school extension.

The last minutes in this book were dated 4th April 1974.



*Looking out over what is now  
Cockle Row with the harbour beyond*



*The pupils and teachers of Groomsport  
Primary School in June 1963*

# Inspectors' Reports

Extracts from inspector's reports currently held in School - which will be made available to the Public Record Office NI.

## **1st October 1926**

Order and discipline are very good throughout and the moral training of the pupils is effectively attended to. The pits of the out-offices require to be emptied and disinfectants should be used in these offices - which have 'dry' closets.

## **30th June 1941**

There is a pleasant tone in this school. The children are nicely mannered and attentive to their lessons. There is much evidence of careful school-keeping and of patient and sympathetic teaching. The Organiser of Domestic Economy reports that equipment for teaching Cookery is inadequate.

## **31st July 1953**

The Principal continues to conduct this school with his customary zeal and efficiency. A happy atmosphere permeates both divisions and the children are receiving a valuable training in habits of courtesy, diligence and self-reliance.

## **31st July 1957**

The transference of pupils to Ballyholme Primary School has been the cause of a steady decline in the enrolment which at the time of the inspection stood at only twenty four.

## **20th February 1962**

Since the last inspection of this school a new principal teacher has taken up duty. He is enthusiastic and keen. Enrolment has risen steadily over the past two years. In the fairly new future it is likely that a third teacher will be required. It is fortunate that the new school is almost ready for occupation.

**20th March 1964**

The enrolment of this school has risen steadily and now stands at over seventy. The Junior Division with 39 on rolls is rather large for one teacher responsible for P1, P2 and P3.

**29th April 1966**

With an enrolment which now reaches 102, the three classrooms are now taxed to the limit.

**10th April 1968**

A wide variety of ingeniously planned project work in Mathematics has been underway. These pupils show a marked resourcefulness in inventing situations to explore.... An element of disturbance is unavoidably caused by the building extension now nearing completion.

**9th May 1969**

This fine modern school has now been occupied for eighteen months. Enrolment has now increased to 132 pupils. Work proceeds effectively and the teachers who lay much store by modern methods ... are most zealous in their endeavours. The work accomplished in Art and Handwork deserves special commendation.

**October 1997**

The children are generally settled and well behaved in class: they undertake tasks conscientiously and to the best of their ability. They are friendly and confident when talking to visitors. When given the opportunity they show initiative and a good ability to work independently.

**April 2006**

The strengths of the school include: the attractive learning environment that is conducive to learning, the exemplary behaviour of the children who are friendly and courteous to visitors and the quality of the teaching observed.

# The School Today

In 1983 Mr Halliday retired, and Mr Robert Watson was appointed as Principal. The school enrolment at the time was between 65 and 70. As enrolment fell, the number of assistant teachers was reduced from two to one, but this was alleviated by the appointment of classroom assistants.

In the summer of 1996 a disastrous event occurred. During the night of 20th/21st July 1996 a fire was reported at the school, and the main assembly hall and a classroom had been destroyed, with a second classroom being badly damaged. After investigation it was confirmed that all was secure in the building, and that the fire probably started in the roof, but the cause of the fire could not be determined.



*The aftermath of  
the 1996 fire,  
possibly the  
beginning of the end  
for the School*



However, after boarding up the damaged area, it was declared safe enough for school to re-open as planned in September due to the hard work of Mr Watson and staff. As a result of the extensive damage, the remainder of the top end of the school had to be demolished which left three classrooms in what was originally the extension, cloakroom, toilets and the kitchen. A temporary office was located in the grounds adjacent to the P7 classroom and eventually a mobile classroom was put into the playground area behind the kitchen which serves as a staff room, audio visual room, classroom, library, computer room and subsequently used for most of the administrative work.

Records, however, show that after the fire enrolment began to gradually decrease. The school took on Integrated status in 2004, but this was not as successful as hoped.

In 1986 enrolment was around 65 but in 20 years had decreased to the 25 enrolled in 2006, when the school was declared unviable and the Department of Education announced that the school may close in the near future. A series of meetings, petitions and other support was implemented but to no avail. On Wednesday 20th December 2006, the day of our Christmas Carol Service, the Department of Education confirmed that the school would close on 31st August 2007.

Consequently, plans were put in place to celebrate the 162 years of the existence of the school with a Fun Day for the pupils, a display of memorabilia and service of thanksgiving to be held in the Walter Nelson Hall and Groomsport



Presbyterian Church over the weekend 9th and 10th June 2007 and a dinner for staff, board of governors, former staff and members of the local community on 23rd June in the Marine Court Hotel, Bangor.

Groomsport Primary School has been known by several different names, but it has always been the village school. The closing of the school ends an era of education within Groomsport, begun with a public meeting on 28th August 1844 and the building of a school by the end of that year.

Looking towards the future, with the possibility of increasing house building and more young families moving into the area, could there be another Groomsport Primary School?

*Then youngest  
pupil, Laura  
Patton, opens  
the School's  
library and  
resource centre  
in 1999*



# Letter from Public Record Office 3rd September 1984

Recently you transferred school records to the Public Record Office.

SCH 704 Groomsport National School

1	Register - Male and female 1863-1956
5	Inspector's Observation Book 1912 -1952
1928-1928	Register (Female) dates of entrance 13 May 1861 - 01 July 1919
1863-1927	Register (Male) dates of entrance 04 May 1863 - 01 July 1919
1956-1956	Register (Female) dates of entrance 27 February 1919 - 02 April 1951
1956-1956	Register (Male) dates of entrance 01 April 1919 - 08 May 1951

*These are available for viewing by interested parties and, it may be noted, current school records are being made available to the Public Record Office, which will be available in the future.*

## Groomspoint Primary School Linenhall Library - Belfast Directory

### 1901

National School    Manager Rev. Joseph Moorhead B.C.  
Principal Mr McKee with two assistants

### 1904

National School    Principal Mr Burns and two assistants

### 1911

National School    Principal Mr Burns and one monitor

### 1912

National School    Principal JE Tate, one assistant,  
one monitor

### 1917

National School    Principal JE Tate, one assistant,  
one monitor

*(from the Roll Book 1st April 1919 Esther Patton and pupil Alice J Nixon. Sarah Clarke was employed from 1st July 1919 to replace Esther. Mr DR Brownlee became Principal 1st April 1920. Doris McIlroy became pupil monitor 1st October 1920 to replace Alice. Mrs Bradley became assistant teacher on 20th August 1921 to replace Sarah.)*

### 1924

National School    Principal Edward Brownlee, one assistant

### 1925

Public Elementary School    Principal Edward Brownlee, one assistant

### 1937

Public Elementary School    Principal Robert Brownlee, one assistant

**1955**

Groomsport Primary School    Principal DR Brownlee

**1960**

Groomsport Primary School    Principal Capt. DR Brownlee JP

**1961**

Groomsport Primary School    Principal JN Halliday

**1986**

Groomsport Primary School    Principal RH Watson

**2004**

Groomsport Integrated            Principal RH Watson  
Primary School



***Notice the "Groomsport Public Elementary School" sign above the door in this photograph***



***Pupils and staff from Groomsport Primary School were regularly involved in many community activities such as the switching-on of the village's Christmas tree lights, Nativity play, Carol singing, beach-cleaning and other charity work, entertaining local groups like the Evergreens and taking part in the annual Eagle Wing Festival***

## **Current Staff - at 30th June 2007**

Mr Robert Watson	Principal and P5-P7 Teacher
Mrs Lynda McMullin	P1-P4 Teacher
Mrs Helen Johnston	Principal Release/ Special Needs Teacher
Mrs Noelle Wilson	R.E.. Curriculum Teacher
Mrs Lily Gamble	Classroom Assistant
Mrs Linda Mehaffey	Secretary
Ms Mandy Beattie	Building Supervisor
Mr Billy Patton	Road Patrol/ Kitchen Supervisor/ Supervisory Assistant

## **Current Pupils on Roll (2007)**

Claire Adams	Katie Hunt	Ashley McWhinney
Kate Adams	Thomas Hunt	Curtis Miskelly
Jack Andrews	Joe McCafferty	Campbell Nixon
Charlotte Brown	Zach McCaig	Travis Oliver
Emily Brown	Jordan McCurdie	Nicola Patton
Victoria Brown	Shannon McCurdie	Nicole Purdie
Reece Close	Megan McDonald	Carl Rainey
Louis Gault-Reid		Megan Steele



***National  
School  
above  
(pre-1925)  
and Public  
Elementary  
School  
right  
(1925-1954)***





# Acknowledgements

Rev. Dr Roger Purce, Mr and Mrs Billy McCreedy and congregation of Groomsport Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr David Irwin (Time and Tides in the 'Port)

Mr Ian Wilson, North Down Heritage Centre

Staff of Bangor Public Library

Linenhall Library Town Directories

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

Staff and former staff of the School

Pupils and former pupils of the School and their families

Friends of the school and the community of Groomsport



***The last School in Groomsport, ending an era of education in the village whose recorded history dates back to 1844 but which may date back as far as 1620***



*2007 is a far cry from the 1920s,  
when this photograph was taken -  
notice the boy (front left) who is  
not wearing shoes*

*information and pictures compiled  
by Linda Mehaffey  
booklet edited by Mark Patton  
June 2007*