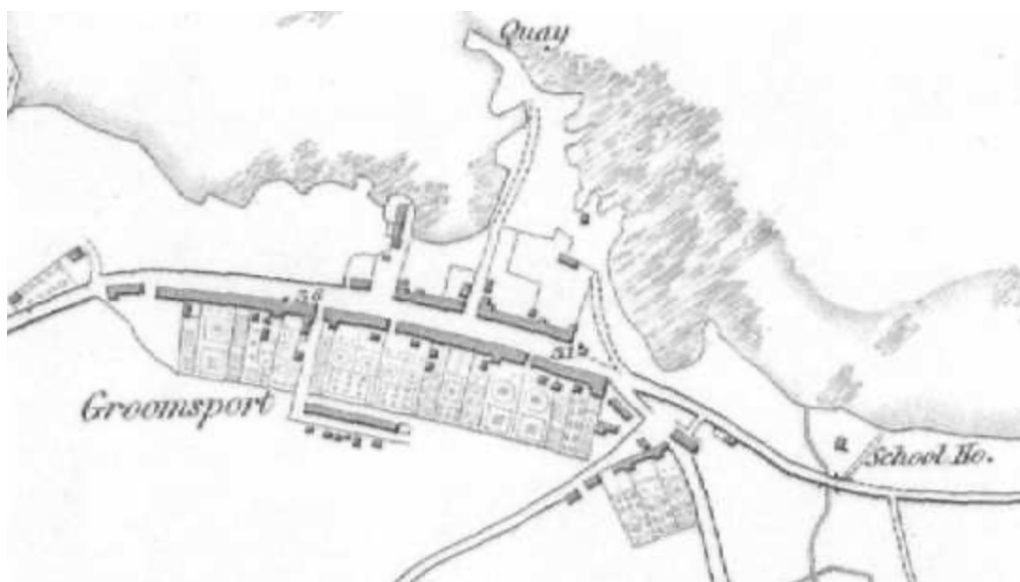


Groomsport's earliest school - before the First National School

Groomsport's First National School opened in 1845. It had been built, by the Rev Isaac Mack, immediately behind the new Presbyterian Church in the centre of the village.

The first edition of the Ordnance Survey map (6 inches to 1 mile), published in the 1830s, shows an earlier School House on the edge of Cove Bay beach, just to the east of the stream that flows to the sea.



Ordnance Survey map first edition 1834-1846

When the First National School opened, applications for grant aid were made to the National Board of Education in Dublin.

PRONI (the Public Record Office for Northern Ireland) has the documentation regarding requests for grant aid in 1845 (ED/1/163) and in 1846 (ED/1/174).

The result of the 1845 application, a grant of £4 9s 1d was made for the male school and £1 1s 5d for the female school. These were contributions to the

salaries of Alexander Lindsay, the master of the male school and his wife, Eliza who was the teacher in the female school

Documents associated with the 1845 grant application include a letter from William Patterson to Thomas H Shaw, an Inspector of National Schools, based in Comber. Shaw had asked Patterson if he had any objection to the establishment on a National School in the village. Patterson stated that he had no objection and added:

“Groomsport is a village containing 500 inhabitants. There has not for 15 years at least been a good school here” [Emphasis added]

The 1846 application was for a contribution to the costs of a newly-appointed assistant teacher for the male school – Henry Hamilton. In the application, Rev Isaac Mack stated:

“He [Hamilton] conducted a school during more than 15 years and in this village more than 8 years.”

and

“As Teacher of the Fisherman School in this village he gave satisfaction and if he was not competent to act as assistant and under teacher he would not have been engaged.” [Emphasis added]

In his report, drawn up in response to the grant aid request, T H Shaw, Superintendent of National Schools, assessed that Hamilton’s competence was *“Passable – Competent to teach the junior classes”*. He continued:

“I am of the opinion that the assistant teacher is indisputably necessary to the success of the school. It is too numerously attended to be efficiently conducted by the individual. The assistant is very competent to the task to which he is employed. He taught at the Church School in the village up to the present [illegible].” [Emphasis added]

Shaw recommended that a grant be paid in respect of Hamilton’ salary, but the amount is not recorded in the papers available.

Conclusion

The above records are consistent with the inclusion of a school in the First Series of the Ordnance Survey maps. However the nature of the school is unclear, as it is referred to as “the Fisherman School” and “the Church School” in these documents.

Peter Gibson
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