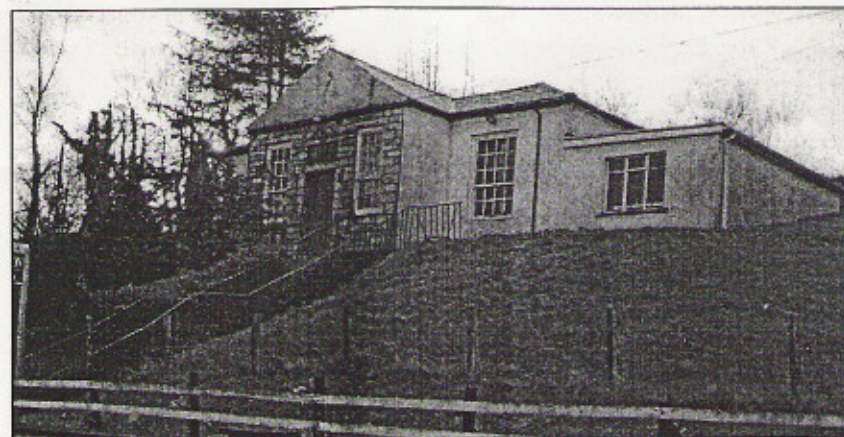


IN 1834!.....



• *The 'Old Robertson Endowed School' or 'Old Wood School' which opened in 1834.*

In 1834, on land given by Major James Nesbitt of Woodhill, a school for boys who were from Church of Ireland families, supported financially by the Robertson Endowment, was opened in Ardara. There was a separate school for girls which no longer exists; it not being considered good practice to educate the sexes together, you wouldn't know what they would get up to. Today we do not think that it is good practice to separate the sexes but even in the 1940's I got my primary education in a single sex school in south London. There are fashions in teaching as well as everything else.

Lochlan McGill in his book, "In Conall's Footsteps" records, "In 1834 we are told that the Wesleyan Sunday School was attended by 29 boys and 38 girls; and 4 daily schools - one of which was aided by £24.00 from the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and another with £11. 1s. 6d. from Robinson's Fund had on their books 229 boys and 99 girls." (Page 219, Note 28)

From four schools we are down to the one school built in 1834 and that closed for the last time at Halloween. On 7th November, 2000 just twenty one boys and girls from both the Methodist and Church of Ireland congregations took up residence in a new building built by Paddy Peter McHugh in what I think will always be known as the New Wood School, although that is not how the Department of Education and Science know it.

The old building does not owe us anything. There may be people still alive who got all the education they ever got in that building. It is still a sound building, although in some ways conditions would be regarded as a bit primitive by today's standards. It has also over recent years been forced to cope with educational equipment and styles of teaching which would not have been in the imagination of the teachers and children in 1834, indeed not in the imagination of those who were there as little as thirty years ago. So on the grounds of age and suitability it had to be retired. The steps up to it, for example, bring Health and Safety Inspectors out in a cold sweat at the thought of what might happen and the size of the resultant insurance claim, and yet, I have heard of only one child who has fallen down them and she tells me she got up and walked away with hardly a bruise.

Not that the building was used only as a school. In the past it was used for

fund raising socials and has been used regularly for meetings. I believe it has been used to cater for people attending the Ardara Show. Organisations such as the Girls' Friendly Society used it for their meetings and classes for the Archbishop's Challenge and Confirmation Classes were also held in it.

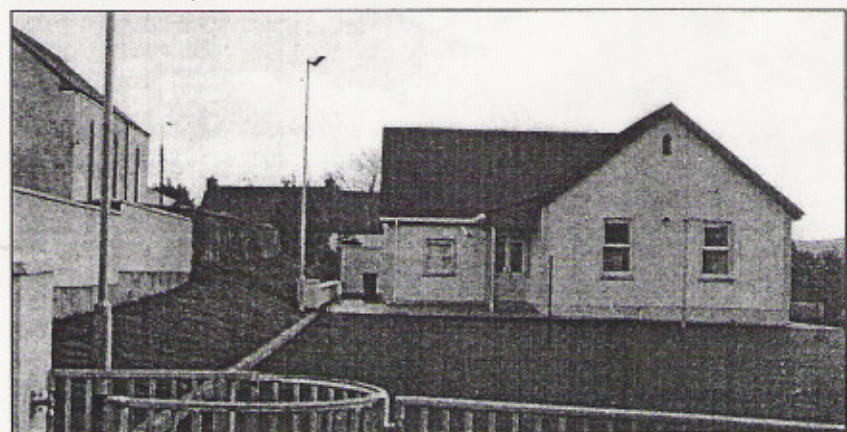
The building will remain as part of the streetscape. It has been sold (It is owned by the Robertson Endowment) and I understand is to be converted to a home.

We thank God for the foresight of those who built the first school and pray that we have shown the same foresight in building the second (with substantial government (for which read tax-payers) assistance. If we get 166 years out of the new building we will have done rightly. Not that we will know anything about it.

We plan to have a formal opening in early 2001 provided we can synchronise the diaries of Bishops, TDs and Ministers. We are also thinking of holding a special service of dedication in St. Conall's Parish Church to which anyone who has ever been a pupil at the old school will be invited, wherever they are in the world. Lists of names and addresses would be helpful.

May God bless all who teach and learn in the new school, both now and in the future.

Rev'd Gordon Freeman,



• *'New Wood School' which opened 7th November, 2000.*