

## **School & Education – School Days**

When I went to school it was the norm that you started school in the September following your fifth birthday, but normally the child went to school in April and spent the summer term in the school to get the feel. Then the summer holidays, then started school proper. It was a custom to go along to the Christmas party which was held on the days immediately before Christmas. The party would seem very simple nowadays.

Every pupil was given either an apple an orange or a bag of sweets by the teacher and what was considered a great treat. The tea was made in the school. I think it funny nowadays to hear about the children having a choice of meals in the school canteen that one day in school was made and we had tea with our sandwiches it was our sandwich of loaf bread and jam. I went to the Christmas party the year before I started school, that would have been Christmas nineteen forty four and Master Trodden who was the Principal of Kerrib school was off ill at the time and was replaced by his brother in law Master Riordan, who had been principal of Kerrib school for a long number of years and had built it into one of the, one of the best schools in the county, if not the whole country at that time however as the poem says ‘ a man feared, he was and feared by all’ I remember this particular day, very severe day, it was very cold with sleet and my brother Patsy had taken me along to school, had been warned by my mother if there was any rain or cold to make sure I had my coat on and my cap, which came down over my ears. So when we were out at play time, play time was very long because the girls would be getting the room ready for making the tea, the sleet started and Patsy brought me into the hallway of the school to put on my coat and my cap and it was at that particular time that Master Riordan decided to take his daily walk, came out up the school door go down the steps as far as the road, look up and down the road and walk back in again and as he opened the door to come out of the classroom into the hallway he saw us and apparently there must have been a rule that no pupils were supposed to be on the school premises during lunch time. So when he saw us he said “Get out before I kick you out!”

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that was my welcome to Kerrib School. When the pupils arrived at school for the days class, there were certain chores that had to be done, first water had to be got in, the fire had to be lit and usually there were boys, and we were considering the bigger boys and were envying them for being, as we thought favorites for getting these jobs.

Two boys were sent with a bucket to get water from, in the gate of Kerrib school, it was down Paddy Quinn's field which was two to three hundreds yards from the school. Later on when I became one of the bigger boys myself and was sent, it wasn't as pleasant as one would have thought. In those days the school uniform was overalls and Wellingtons and you were sent with somebody else for the bucket of water. On the way up, if you were with a prankster, he was liable to tip the bucket up on his side so that it would, went into your Wellington. So you were left with a wet Wellington all day. However the water had to be got in, the fire had to be lit. Now that was a slow process. There were no fire lighters at that time, coal was used. Usually Master Trodden would send out an SOS for some dry turf, one turf or two might be used or whin woods among the coals to get the fire lit, that and when the match would be put to those a newspaper would then be held very tightly to narrow down the draft on the open fire, when the fire was got going.

On those winter days when it was cold pupils would have probably have arrived in wet and of course when they did there was no chance socks getting dried by the end of the day Each put up in turn to stand around the fire. There were certain things that would be done standing around the fire. The reading could be examined or the pupils could stand back to back and the mental arithmetic would be done standing back to back, you would pass your jotter over your shoulder to the person behind, who marked yours as you marked theirs, then after half an hour or so that class went back to the seats and the next class would, was put out to the fire. So in the run of the day sometime before morning and lunch time you had half an hour close to the fire warmed the cockles of your heart and dried

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your clothes which were probably soaked on the way to school. Lunch was, which I mentioned earlier usually a round or two rounds of a loaf, jam wrapped in, my mother insisted on using brown paper bags, which were common in those days because all items bought in the shops were sold in paper bags however a lot of pupils just used newspaper. My mother disapproved of newspaper, which again I didn't like because once your different you don't worry about the hygiene or anything else. What the others are doing must be right. Others had their lunch wrapped in newspaper then mine should be wrapped in newspaper as well, but my mother would still insist on the sandwiches going into, which was probably the brown paper bag which a pound of sugar would have come from the shop or the tea bags were generally a bit smaller, by tea bag I don't mean the bag it went into the tea pot, the bag in which the loose tea was bought and then brewed.

Nineteen and forty four the Butlers Education Act which took effect in Britain in nineteen forty eight. It became law here, which meant the eleven plus provided the scholarship for all pupils of ability to go to grammar school, apart from that pupils would have stayed at school 'til the school leaving age of fourteen, some would have gone to the Tech. At that time you did an exam before leaving primary school to go to the Tech. I think it might have been thirteen years of age. Then there was in later years, not long after the eleven plus there came the Review an examination at thirteen plus. It was probably aimed at late developers and anyone who passed that got a scholarship to grammar school as well, which meant they were two years behind their classmates but it still provided them with the opportunity of grammar school education, for the rest, for the vast majority they stayed on at school until they were fourteen and left, got work, some of them might go as apprentices to trades.

The eldest boy on a farm would stay at home to farm and I suppose the rest would stay around and work for some of the local farmers and in a few years would emigrate. A lot of people speaking now about the education then, think that it was a poor standard of education, but I don't agree those local all age

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schools did a very good job, to my mind, teaching myself I've seen children at school in this day, in age at the age of sixteen, illiterate and innumerate. They have been pushed aside in the primary school with the idea, when you go to secondary school there are teachers who are able to deal with your slow learning and so on and unfortunately when they come to the secondary school when they get caught up in the main stream of the school they pass by unnoticed. They leave the school illiterate and innumerate.

In Kerrib school there wasn't a pupil who would have left that school who couldn't have written his name and address. As I mention addresses with his townland as well, not a road number as today. There wasn't a pupil that didn't know that twelve pence made one shilling twenty shillings one pound or twelve inches one foot, three feet one yard they knew those basics. They could read at least the head lines of the Dungannon Observer and I remember the sixth, seventh class had David Copperfield, The Old Curiosity Shop, Pickwick Papers, Kidnapped those books were being read, books which now I find pupils can pass and I've taken them myself to GCSE O Level English without having taken on one of those books. In my time it wasn't the case, but before my time at the Kerrib school with Master Riordian Shakespeare would have been done, calculus and trigonometry those subjects would have been done and even for those who might be going on to grammar school a little bit of Latin. So I think considering their times, they didn't do such a bad job at all.

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