

CHAPTER ONE

The Foundation of the School

At the *Old Boys' Association* dinner on 25 November 1956, the centenary year of the School, Randall Clarke, Headmaster and historian, told the assembled company that in 1616 Sir James Hamilton had made provision in his will for schoolmasters to be appointed at:

'Ballyhalbert . . . , at Bangor . . . , at Holliwood . . . , one at the ford at Belfast, one at Dundonnell and one at Killeleagh, and fyve pound a year to be given to every one of them . . . besides such monies as they shall have from the scholars for their teaching'.

He went on to say that in 1659, James, the first Earl of Clanbrassil, continued and increased the grant made in the earlier will to one of twenty pounds a year. What happened to the bequest cannot be said, but in 1834, the Irish Corporation Commissioners reported that, while there was a corporation school, the original bequest was no longer paid.¹ Unfortunately, *Bangor Grammar School* cannot claim to be approaching its four hundredth anniversary.

BANGOR IN EARLY VICTORIAN TIMES

In 1837 Bangor had a population of around 3,000 and was described as a *'narrow and straggling'* settlement consisting of some 563 houses, stretching from Church Quarter (modern Church Street, Croft Street and Abbey Street) to the south, along Main Street, the lower part of Castle Street, Souters' Row (King Street), Sandy Row (Queen's Parade), Kinnegar, Gray's Hill, Quay Street, Ballymagee Street (High Street), and Corporation Street and Fisher's Hill (Victoria Road). While Main Street was said to be *'neatly edificed'* with two or three storied, slate roofed, whitewashed houses, those at the southern end of the town were mostly thatched. Although they were *'indifferently built'* and *'indifferently supplied with water'*, *'a tolerable degree of cleanliness and neatness may be seen to prevail in some instances'*. The old Castle and the spire of Bangor Abbey dominated the skyline from the south, but from the bay, *'the two large cotton factories with their smoking chimneys form the most striking features, and the whole place has a manufacturing, crowded and dirty appearance'*. The harbour was described as *'a very bad one'*, being left completely dry at low tide. There were, nevertheless, imports of coal and timber and exports of corn, flax and cattle. The town also boasted corn and flax mills, a library, two Presbyterian and two Methodist meeting houses and several schools; the percentage of the population in *'total ignorance of elementary instruction'* was only 7.5%, according to the 1841 Census, the lowest figure for the whole of Ireland, which befitted such an ancient seat of learning.²

ROBERT WARD'S BEQUEST

Bangor Endowed School owed its foundation to the generosity of Colonel the Honourable Robert Ward. The Ward family had been the proprietors of Bangor since 1709, when Michael Ward, of Castleward, had married Anne Catharina Hamilton, daughter of James Hamilton and heiress of Bangor.³ By his will, dated 7 November 1828, Robert Ward bequeathed the sum of £1,000,

'for the use of the Provost and Burgesses of the Corporation of Bangor, to be expended by them in building and endowing a school house for the education of boys in mathematics, astronomy

¹ *The Gryphon*, December 1956.

² Angelique Day and Patrick McWilliams (eds), *Ordnance Surveys of Ireland: Parishes of County Down II, 1832-34, 1837: North Down and the Ards* (1991), pp 23-24; *Ordnance Survey Map of Bangor surveyed in 1831 and engraved in 1834 under the direction of Lt.Larcom, R.E.*; S.Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1837), p.181; Marcus Patton, *Bangor: A Historical Gazetteer* (1999) p.ix; Grenfell Morton (ed.), *Victorian Bangor* (1972), *passim*.

³ Sandra A.Millsopp, 'The Provosts of Bangor', in *The Journal of the Bangor Historical Society*, Volume 3, 1984-5, p.44.

and navigation, so as to qualify the students to navigate and take charge of merchant vessels as masters on foreign voyages'.⁴

He recommended that a schoolhouse,

'should be built on the lands of the Corporation where four acres could be got convenient'.

Probate of the Will was granted on 17 May 1831 to Michael Edward Ward, his son, but he died in 1832 without carrying out the trusts of the will. In turn, his Executor, Thomas Laurence Ward, handed over the original sum and the interest to the Commissioners of Charities for Ireland, and this was invested in the purchase of Government Stock.⁵

In 1834, the Provost of Bangor reported to the Irish Corporation Commissioners that he,

'apprehended a deficiency of assets and that little benefit was likely to arise from the bequest'.⁶

In 1840, the Corporation was dissolved by Act of Parliament, although in practice the Ward family and their dependents remained in control of the town. In September 1849, a Petition was presented to the Lord Chancellor of Ireland, by Robert Edward Ward and George Dunbar of Woburn, asking that a Scheme should be settled for the establishment of a school. It was reported by the Endowed Schools Commissioners in 1857-8, that the School had not been established, *'no site having been obtained*'⁷, but Lord Bangor and R.E.Ward had apparently already granted a free site of one rood 14 perches⁸, and on 15 November 1852 a Scheme had been approved by the Lord Chancellor, whereby it was provided that, out of the sum of £2,046-16-10 which had accrued, (and which was yielding interest of £61-7-8 per annum), a sum of £200 should be spent, under the direction of Viscount Bangor and R.E.Ward, on repairing and improving the schoolhouse, known as *'the Old Schoolhouse*'⁹, described as *'a picturesque two-storey building, with label mouldings*'¹⁰, located, it was said, on the site of the notorious *'Black Hole Gaol*'¹¹, the site now occupied by the Bank of Ireland, on what was then called Front Street. (In 1938, the Board of Governors' Minutes made reference to *'the deeds of the Main Street property of 3 February 1804*'). Despite this reference to "The Old Schoolhouse", an advertisement, dated 2 February 1856, reads: *"PROPOSALS WILL BE RECEIVED FOR the BUILDING of a SCHOOL HOUSE, in the town of Bangor"*, and two months later, the same newspaper reported that: *'a very commodious and handsome school house has been contracted for, to be built opposite the market house*'.¹²

The power of appointment and removal of the Master, who was to be paid £60 a year, and the general management of the School, was vested in Lord Bangor and R.E.Ward, and it was laid down that each of the scholars, who required instruction in subjects other than those specified in

⁴ *First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations of Ireland, 1834.* (House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1835, Volume XXXVIII, p.lxxxiii). (Hereafter referred to as *First Report*).

⁵ *Scheme [No.99] framed under the Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act, 1885, for the future government and management of The Bangor Endowed School in the County of Down*, dated 13 July 1893. (In the possession of the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests for Ireland, Dublin). (Hereafter referred to as *Scheme [no.99]*).

⁶ *First Report*, p.lxxxiii.

⁷ *Report from the Commissioners (Ireland) Endowed Schools: Session 3 December 1857-2 August 1858.* (House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1857-58, Volume XXII, part IV, p.554).

⁸ *Endowed Schools (Ireland) Commission: Report of Commissioners . . . into Endowments, Funds and Actual Conditions of all Schools in Ireland, Volume II, 1881*, pp 306-307; evidence taken on 26 September 1879. (Command Papers, c.2831).

⁹ *Scheme [No.99]*.

¹⁰ *Historic Buildings . . . in Bangor*, prepared by Marcus Patton (U.A.H.S., 1984).

¹¹ Keith Haines, *North Down Memories* (2000), p.54.

¹² *Belfast Newsletter*, 2nd February and 8th April, 1856. These references were discovered by Sandra Millsopp.

the Will, was to pay £10 a year in fees, half of which was to go to the Master of the School and the other half was to be invested and was to form a separate fund, to be called '*Ward's Charity Repair Fund*', for the purpose of keeping the School premises repaired and providing '*requisites*' for the School. When that Fund reached £100, it was to be transferred to the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests for Ireland, and if the Fund proved insufficient, Lord Bangor and R.E.Ward were to keep the School repaired and provided with all the necessary '*requisites*', at their own expense.



Robert Edward Ward (1818-1904)
(Photograph courtesy of
North Down Heritage Centre)

An Indenture, dated 3 February 1854, conveyed to Robert Stewart Kennedy and William Crawford, the plot of land and the Old Schoolhouse to be used by them, as Trustees, for the purpose of a school for the education of boys in Mathematics, Astronomy and Navigation, and in addition, in other branches of a general education, such as Latin and Greek, French, German and other modern languages, and in other branches of science.¹³



The Old Schoolhouse, Front Street, Bangor.
The plaque above the door reads '*Bangor Endowed School 1856*'.
(From the author's collection)

¹³ *Scheme [No.99]*.

Robert Stewart Kennedy died on 6 July 1854, which probably explains, in part at least, why a similarly worded indenture, dated 17 April 1856, names Henry Kennedy of Cultra and Robert Steele Nicholson of Ballow [sic], as Trustees. It refers to a plot of land measuring 'on the north seventy feet, on the west eighty feet, on the east one hundred and twelve feet and on the south seventy eight feet'¹⁴, the dimensions given in the 1893 Scheme.



The 1856 Indenture
(In the possession of the Registry of Deeds, Dublin.)

Nevertheless, there seems to be little doubt that by 1856, the school had been established. 1856 was an eventful year: the Victoria Cross was instituted, the Crimean War came to an end, Pasteur began his work on bacteria, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* was published, *Neanderthal Man* was discovered and *Bangor Endowed School* was founded.

There were already several schools in the town: the Church Educational School in Church Quarter, an Infants' School on Front Street, the Parochial School for Boys in the Market House and a National School on Ashloanen (now Brunswick Road). Henry McFall's *Royal Hotel* was already in operation, as were a number of businesses which were to continue into the next century, such as Hugh Furey (grocer), Robert Neill (coal merchant) and Robert Bowman (butcher). However, Bangor witnessed a number of important developments during the 1850s, of which the establishment of *Bangor Endowed School* probably caused the least comment. In 1852, R.E.Ward had a new Castle built, replacing the earlier seventeenth century one, and two

¹⁴ A *Memorial of an Indented Deed of Conveyance*, bearing the date 17 April 1856, in the possession of the Registry of Deeds, Dublin.

years later, possibly inspired by the Great Exhibition of 1851, *Bangor Gas Light Company* was formed, with R.E.Ward as one of the Directors. In 1856, the cotton mills, which had provided employment for several hundred people over the previous half century, closed following a number of fires. Since Bangor's role as a port had never developed due to its vulnerability to the north winds, the loss of such an important source of employment must have been a severe blow in a town with a population of less than 3,000.¹⁵

¹⁵ Grenfell Morton, *op.cit.*, pp 19, 25, 26; Marcus Patton, *Bangor: An Historical Gazetteer* (1999), p.ix; I.Wilson (ed.), *North Down: A Century of Photographs* (1999), pp 24, 40; Bangor Civic Week Souvenir Handbook, 1951, p.47; *Slater's Directory of Ireland* (1856), pp 415-416.