

PREFACE

In 1932, Maurice Wilkins, the Headmaster, told members of the *Old Boys' Association* that, although there were fairly full records of the School's progress since 1905, (when Rev. James McFeeters, his predecessor, had been appointed), there were,

“rumours only of the era in which the school was under Mr. Ashmore and Dr. Connolly, but of the forty odd years before that, there is not a trace”.

He went on to say that he had often wondered whether it might not be possible to find out something about the early years of the school¹ but, apart from a brief Summary of the History of the School, compiled by A.L. Hawtin in 1956 at the time of the centenary², little if anything appears to have been done.

That gave me the impetus to start researching the History of the School in the mid-1980s, but by the time I reached 1906, the pressures of school teaching forced me to abandon the project, returning to it only intermittently until early retirement in June 2001 provided the opportunity (and the new Headmaster, Stephen Connolly, provided the encouragement) to begin the task of carrying the History on beyond the opening of the College Avenue building.

Mr. Wilkins was not quite correct when he said there was *'not a trace'* of evidence for the years prior to 1893. Speaking in 1912, Rev. Dr. Henry Montgomery remembered Mr. Gowdy as *'a very distinguished teacher'*, and he recalled that Mr. Justice Dodd had once been Principal of the School. Twenty years later, Sir Thomas McMullan spoke of his Headmaster, Dr. Molony, as *'a dear old gentleman'*. Those three were thought to have been the only Headmasters during the first twenty years or so of the School's existence, until December 2004 when George Matthews produced a book which had been given as a prize to his great-grandfather, William Hannay. In it is a bookplate bearing the words *Bangor Endowed School*, the date 1870, and the signature of the *'Principal'*, W. Craig.

If the first fifty years had been difficult because of the shortage of evidence, the last one hundred years have been even more difficult because of the proliferation of sources. The *County Down Spectator* commenced publication in 1905, the Board of Governors' Minutes exist from 1893, and there are thousands of Old Boys from Tommy Ross, who started the School in 1916, to those who left it just last year, all of whom have their memories.

An added problem with the more recent history is that, whereas no one can contradict what I write about the 1860s or the 1880s, there are those thousands who will not hesitate to tell me if I have got the 1960s or the 1980s wrong. I beg their indulgence.

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In 2014, local historian Ms. Sandra Millsopp drew my attention to yet another 'unknown' Master, W. Hanly Ball, who was described as Master in 1859. Whether he was the first Master or whether there was a Master or Masters before him, remains a mystery.

TJIG 2015

¹ *County Down Spectator*, 30th January 1932.

² *County Down Spectator*, 3rd November 1956.