

## CHAPTER FIVE

### W.G.Conolly M.A., LL.D., 1893-1903

#### DR.CONOLLY'S APPOINTMENT

The Board of Governors<sup>1</sup>, formed under the terms of the Scheme drawn up by the Education Endowment Commissioners, held its first meeting, with Lord Bangor in the Chair, on 4 September 1893. Its first task was the appointment of a Headmaster. There had been a large number of applicants for the post, four of which were short-listed: Dr.Conolly, Mr.Dodds, Mr.Maxwell and Mr.Osborne. Dr.Conolly was chosen by a considerable majority.<sup>2</sup>

William George Conolly was born in County Sligo in 1868, the son of Patrick Conolly a schoolteacher. He was educated at *Coleraine Academical Institution* and entered *Trinity College Dublin* on 11 October 1886, aged 18. He graduated B.A. in the summer of 1891, and LL.B. and LL.D. in the winter of 1893.<sup>3</sup> He was also, '*First High Placeman at Entrance, First Classical Sizar, Double Exhibitioner, Classical Scholar, First Honourman and Placeman, Moderator and Medallist at Degree Examinations*'.<sup>4</sup> In February 1899, Dr.Conolly told the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Commissioners that he had been Headmaster of '*Bangor Grammar School*' for five years, and that he had formerly been Assistant Master in *Coleraine Academical Institution* for five months, and Assistant Master in *Foyle College* Derry for two years and eight months, which means that he began his teaching career before completing his B.A.<sup>5</sup> He remained as Principal in Bangor until August 1903.

#### THE LATE VICTORIAN AGE: BANGOR AND BEYOND

On the world stage, science and technology took important steps forward during Dr.Conolly's time in Bangor. Henry Ford designed his first '*gasoline buggy*', Blackpool Tower was opened, Louis Lumière invented the cinematograph, Röntgen discovered X-rays, Marconi demonstrated wireless telegraphy, the maximum speed for motor vehicles was raised to 14 m.p.h., Pierre and Marie Curie discovered radium and the Wright brothers made their first flight. In the world of literature, Joseph Conrad, H.G.Wells, A.E.Houseman, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Mann were prominent, and in art Pablo Picasso was producing some of his early work. Leading composers of the time included Delius, Sibelius and Elgar, while Enrico Caruso made his first recording. The modern Olympic Games were inaugurated at Athens in 1896 and in 1901 boxing was legalized in England.

Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Four years later, the year in which President McKinley was assassinated, the Victorian age came to an end with the accession of Edward VII. The Boer War, which had broken out in 1899, came to an end in 1902. In 1903 Emmeline Pankhurst set up of the *Woman's Social and Political Union* (the Suffragettes), while Wyndham's Land Act went a long way towards resolving the Irish land question.

The establishment of the Nobel Prizes in 1895 was to be of some significance to *Bangor Grammar School* when, a hundred years later, a former pupil David Trimble shared the prize '*for the furtherance of the cause of peace*'.

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of Governors is given in the Appendices.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Board of Governors, 4 September 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Information supplied by *Trinity College Dublin*. (A 'Sizar' was the son of poor parents, who received an allowance from the College, towards his expenses.)

<sup>4</sup> *The Wave*, 'a literary magazine devoted to the interests of First Bangor Young People's Guild', December 1897.

<sup>5</sup> *Intermediate Education (Ireland) Commission: Appendix to the Final Report of the Commissioners, Part 1: Minutes of Evidence, 1899*. (Evidence taken on 23 February 1899). (Command Papers c.9512).

Bangor continued to grow during the 1890s. By 1901, the population had reached 5,903 and many twentieth century landmarks had been erected: the Guild Hall at the rear of *First Bangor Presbyterian Church*, *Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church*, the *Grand Hotel*, the New (or North) Pier, the spire of Bangor Parish Church, the *Royal Ulster Yacht Club* (from where Sir Thomas Lipton launched his challenges for the *America's Cup*), McKeown's fish shop on Ballymagee Street, and the new gas holder. During these years the esplanade was laid out, a bandstand, later replaced by the McKee Clock, was erected by R.E.Ward at a cost of £200 and band performances during '*the season*' became a feature of Bangor life. Many of the houses on Ballyholme Esplanade, Bryansburn Road, Clifton Road, Hamilton Street (now Road), and Victoria Road date from this period. As Dr.Conolly prepared to leave Bangor in 1903, Souter's Row and Sandy Row were renamed King Street and Queen's Parade, after a visit by Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. By the turn of the century a *Literary Society*, a *Choral Union* and an *Orchestral Society* were thriving, and *Bangor Lawn Tennis Club* and *Ballyholme Sailing Club* had been established. An important development took place in 1899 when, under the terms of the Local Government (Ireland) Act (1898), an Urban District Council was elected, completing the transformation '*from oligarchy to democracy*' and paving the way for a host of new initiatives during the early years of the next century.<sup>6</sup>

### DR.CONOLLY'S TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

The advertisement for a new Master in August 1893 stated that the "emoluments" were to be "£55 per annum, with free house, and two-thirds of the School Fees", but subsequently the Governors agreed that Dr.Conolly should receive the pupils' fees, less '*just so much as the Governors think necessary to keep the premises in good repair*', (although less than a year later, it was agreed that he was to receive the whole endowment and fees, on condition that he paid all future expenses), and they promised to supply maps and a blackboard, while Dr.Conolly was to charge an additional 1/- a quarter to provide '*coals and cleaning*'. Lord Bangor and R.E.Ward said that they would '*put the Endowed School in a state of repair and hand it to the Governors in good condition*'. Estimates were obtained from Mr.James Colville, for various alterations and repairs, including papering and painting, hot water was to be put in, and the flagging in the hall was to be replaced with timber. Gas brackets were to be put in the schoolroom, the drawing room and in '*other apartments*'. The Governors agreed to defray any costs over £42-5-0. In the meantime, the School would operate from the *Good Templar Hall* on Hamilton Road. Further advertisements in September announced that the School had been "*Reorganised and Reopened*" "*for BOYS ONLY*". This is, perhaps, surprising, considering that over two dozen of Mr.Rainey's pupils – some of them very successful – had been girls. It is possibly because Dr.Conolly's experience had been in all-boys schools.<sup>7</sup>

### STAFF

When the School opened under Dr.Conolly's stewardship, the "*First Master and Head of the Mathematical Department*" was S.M.Johnston B.A., who had graduated from the R.U.I with Mathematical Honours and who had been a Senior Science Scholar at *Queen's College Belfast*. Three years later, Dr.Conolly was assaulted by one of his assistants, William St.George Breakey, when he refused to pay Mr.Breakey a couple of days early. The case went to court, but Dr.Conolly withdrew the charge on condition that he received a public apology and £4 compensation! The Board of Governors' Minutes mention the appointment of Arnold Zuberbuhler, certificated Teacher of Zurich University, Foreign Language Master, and Mr.J.Pyper B.A.(Hons.) (R.U.I), '*First Class Honourman etc.*', in January 1897. (Mr.Pyper was

<sup>6</sup> Grenfell Morton (ed.), *Victorian Bangor* (1972), pp 21 and 31-39; Marcus Patton, *Bangor: An Historical Gazetteer* (1999), passim; I.Wilson, *Bangor: Historic Photographs of the County Down Town 1870-1914* (1992), passim.

<sup>7</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 26 August, 9 and 22 September 1893; Minutes of the Board of Governors, 8 September 1893, 26 September 1893 and 4 June 1894.

only on the Staff for six months, but he was to feature again in the life of the School a quarter of a century later, when he narrowly failed to become Headmaster in 1923, and again in the 1940s, when he was a Governor of the School). Mr.Pyper was replaced as teacher of Mathematics and Mathematical Physics in December 1897 by Frank C.Finlay B.A. (R.U.I.), who remained at the School until at least 1903, when he declined Dr.Conolly's suggestion that he '*succeed to his interest in the place, if the Board of Governors would approve*'. He was '*guide, philosopher and friend in both classroom and playing field. What boarder could ever forget his recital of the Third Collect at the end of Evening Prayers*', recalled F.W.Cotter-Craig (Craig Minor, 1900-1902). Also in December 1897, Stanley Moffatt, First Honourman, Exhibitioner and Scholar of the *Royal University* and Classical Sizar of *Trinity College Dublin*, was appointed as English and Classical Assistant.<sup>8</sup> The names of several more of Dr.Conolly's assistants, possibly temporary or part-time, during this time have been recorded elsewhere: in 1897, Herr Pepperil, Mr.Brakey, R.Jones (Organist of Bangor Parish Church) Music Master, and W.J.Colville Instructor in Carpentry; in October 1898, the Foreign Language Master was Archibald Bird, Universities of Paris and Berlin, author of *An English Grammar for German Students*; the Music and Junior English Master was J.Noel Brunton, Certificated Music Teacher, late of *Nelson College*; other names include Miss Danhoff (Pianoforte Music), Professor Metz, Dr.Neuf, and H.A.Cox (1901), the Classics Master, who once broke his leg playing rugby and was replaced, temporarily by the six foot five inch T.W.(later Mr.Justice) Brown; E.Schaarschmidt (1902), a Prussian gentleman who did not appreciate Melville McClure's translation of his name as '*Herr Ploughshare*'; the name W.Mc.Bride B.A. (Cand.) R.U.I. is also recorded for 1902, but this is surely a misprint for Mr.Thomas McBride, who began teaching in the School in 1900; and finally, in 1903, Lewis E.Thomas and August Scheidel.<sup>9</sup> The Visiting clergyman was Rev.Mr.McAuley, the school barber, who visited the School once a week, was William McGrath, and the Janitor and general handy man was an ex-coastguard, Thomas Nicholls, ('*Master of Verbosity and Vernacular*', Jack Aiken called him), who applied for the job as caretaker in the new School, in 1906.<sup>10</sup>

Little is known about Dr.Conolly and his Assistants during these years. Lt.Gen.Sir William McArthur, K.C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., F.R.C.P., the Guest of Honour at the Centenary Prize Day in 1956, recalling his days at the School, said that he had admired and liked Dr.Conolly to such an extent that to have fallen in his estimation was a greater punishment than any of his discipline could have inflicted. Dr.Conolly was, he said, an able scholar with the gift of being able to make his subject interesting. Sir William was still, almost sixty years later, conscious of the influence Dr.Conolly had had on him. That day, Sir William did not recall '*the morning he came to school with a length of black court plaster across his cheek; it covered a wound he had received from Herr Schaarschmidt, the Languages Master, with whom "Cuther" was wont to play sabres after school hours*'.<sup>11</sup> Cecil Sibbett remembered Herr Pepperel [sic] as a former German Sergeant, '*whom we all hated because he was a sneak and would tip-toe up to hear what we were saying*'. '*The good one*', he said, '*was Todd, who taught Maths. He was a "character" and we all liked him. . . . We always enjoyed Todd marching up and down chewing his moustache and asking, "Why do I wear a sleeveless gown?" and our reply in chorus, "Because it's 18/- cheaper". He was an M.A. and wore a B.A. gown*'. In an article entitled '*Memories of 1894-1898 - an Interview with Mr.Robert Clarke*', which appeared in *The Gryphon* in November 1969, Mr.Clarke said that there were about fifty pupils, including ten boarders and a few senior girls. He too remembered Canon Todd and Herr Pepperal [sic],

<sup>8</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 22 September 1893; Minutes of the Board of Governors, 13 January 1897 and 10 August 1903.

<sup>9</sup> *The Wave*, December 1897 and October 1898; *Belfast and Province of Ulster Directory*, Volumes 18-24 (1897-1903); F.W.Cotter-Craig, '*An Old Bangorian Reminisces*', in *The Gryphon*, December 1947.

<sup>10</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 24 December, 1896; Minutes of the Board of Governors, 30 July 1906.

<sup>11</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 3 November 1956; Cotter-Craig, loc.cit.

*'who taught swimming and gymnastics but was hopeless at any ball game. He used to play to us on Saturday nights on his zither. . . . [Canon Todd] was a stickler for punctuality. If a boy was going to be late, he would not turn up at all! Dr.Conolly made it a rule that no assistant master was to punish any pupil and reserved the right to himself alone. Canon Todd circumvented this by his "simultaneous trick", which was not a punishment (he said), but a means of testing a pupil's reactions. He was extremely dextrous at banging a pupil's head and placing his toe on his posterior and then asking the chastened pupil which came first.'*

As well as these two, there was, said Mr.Clarke, a staff of extra visiting helpers, including a musician and a Professor of Elocution.<sup>12</sup>

## PUPILS

Pupils during Dr.Conolly's time included Sam Claney and Stewart Christie, who went on to become Governors of the School, F.W.Cotter-Craig, a boarder who ran away from school and enjoyed *'a week's freedom before being fetched back by an irate parent and handed over to a very kind and understanding Head'*, Fred Cox, brother of H.A.Cox, the Classics Master, W.C.McC.Lewis, who became a professor at Liverpool University and was related to Miss Lewis, who subsequently taught at the School, George Mansfield, who taught at the School from 1921 until 1953, William Rutledge Megaw, who became minister of *Trinity Presbyterian Church*, Ahoghill, later minister of Newtownbreda and a Member of the *Royal Irish Academy*, William (later Sir William) McArthur, nicknamed *'Cuther'*, George McIldowie, who went on to win four rugby caps for Ireland between 1906 and 1910, scoring a try in his final match against Wales, Charlie Pollock, who played scrum-half and who lost a leg during the First World War, S.P.Rea, who worked as a G.P. in Hamilton Road for many years and who became the first Chairman of the *Old Boys' Association* in 1929.<sup>13</sup> Many of the boys served in the forces during the First World War; Howard Gatchell, Arthur Steele-Nicholson, Harry Weir and Willie White were among those who gave their lives.

Dr.Conolly, who was keen on rugby, played for Bangor Town, and the School managed to field a team, although occasionally when they were short of a player they fielded a local called Hanna, who *'had a youthful-looking face'*. Indeed, in one match against Holywood 2<sup>nd</sup> XV, both sides fielded just 12 players, and the School won by one goal and three tries to nil. Among other teams they played were Methody 2<sup>nd</sup> XV and Collegians. The School had a Rugby Club, complete with committee. In 1900, the Captain was Mr.Cox, the Vice-Captain was J.A.Kirkpatrick, the Secretary was J.G.Ritchie and the Committee composed Mr.Finlay, W.P.Macarthur, F.E.Cox and C.M.Kirkpatrick. The photograph below shows that Mr.Finlay also played for the team. The School team played in the Schools' Cup in Robert Clarke's final year, 1897-98, when he was Captain, and were beaten 25-0 in the first round by *'Inst'*. The pitch was at *'the recreation field, just over the bridge on Brunswick Road'*, although Jack Aiken recalled playing in a field on Ward Avenue. The School also fielded a cricket team. In one match *Belfast Royal Academy* was defeated with W.G.Conolly top scorer with 11 runs!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Gryphon*, December 1950 and November 1969.

<sup>13</sup> Recollections of Jack Aiken, F.W.Cotter-Craig, Gordon G.O'Neill and Cecil J.Sibbett; [www.rugbyworld.com](http://www.rugbyworld.com). A list of Dr.Conolly's pupils, whose names have been recorded, can be found in the Appendices.

<sup>14</sup> *The Gryphon*, June 1949 and November 1969; *Belfast Newsletter*, 2 June 1896 and 12 September, 1900..



The School Rugby team, 1901-02.

The names, recorded on the back of the photograph, show that Mr. Finlay, one of the teachers, played for the team!

Mr. T. McBride, S. P. Rea, R. Wilkin, W. Lewis, J. Hutton, W. Simpson, W. Mansfield, H. Gatchell, Herr E. Schaarschmidt  
G. Simpson, C. Gatchell, T. Turner, J. Ritchie, F. Sheppard, F. C. Finlay B.A., (William) McArthur  
C. Smith, C. Pollock

Could the photograph have been taken behind the School, before the development of the north end of Ward Avenue?  
(Photograph in the School Archives)



From this undated and unnamed photograph, it is clear that hockey was also played at around the same time.  
(Photograph in the School Archives)

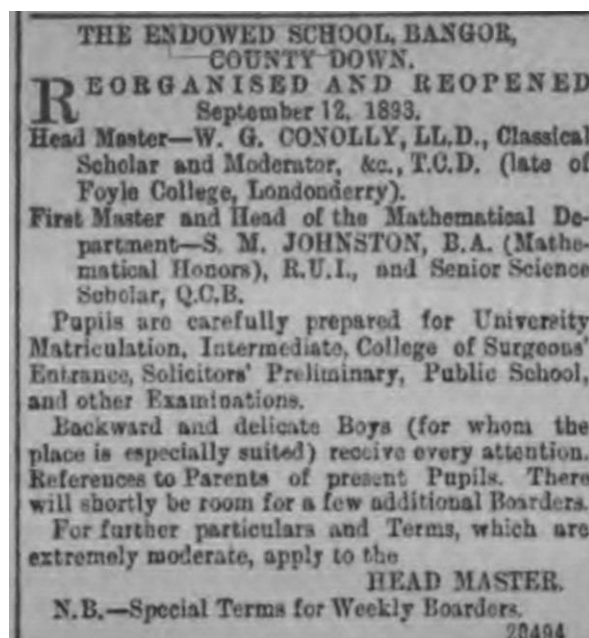
## FEES

At their first meeting, the Governors drew up a revised scale of fees: Boys over 10 years of age were to pay £1 per quarter *‘for all branches of a mercantile education, including Mathematics’*; extras, including Latin, Greek, German and French, were charged at 7/6<sup>d</sup> for one of the subjects, 12/6<sup>d</sup> for two, 17/6<sup>d</sup> for three and 20/- for all four. No arrangement was made for the teaching of Music, Drawing or Shorthand. A 15% *‘abatement’* was to be given for two or more brothers. In 1894, the Governors decided to offer a free place to one under-14 boy from each of the four National schools in the town; for the place to be available for more than one year, each boy had

to pass an Intermediate examination before his sixteenth birthday. Three years later, the fees were increased to £4 a quarter for under-10s, £6 for under-12s, £8 for under-14s and £10 for over 14s.<sup>15</sup>

## THE LOCATION OF SCHOOL

All this, and the fact that the Governors placed advertisements in the press, announcing that the School would reopen on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1893<sup>16</sup>, would seem to demonstrate a clear continuity from Mr.Rainey's Headmastership to Dr.Conolly's.



*Belfast Newsletter*, 22 September, 1893

However, the late Charles F.Milligan O.B.E., writing around 1980, claimed that *Bangor Grammar School* held its centenary celebrations some 43 or 44 years too soon. He said:

*'There is no connection between the Endowed School and Dr.Conolly's school, because from 1893 the Trustees of the Endowed School had applied to the Courts to get permission to use the funds for some other school, because the school was defunct. They got permission on 13 July 1898, to sell the school building, which became the Town Hall, and to use the funds for Dr.Conolly's Intermediate School, which was authorized on 16 November 1900, and the Council paid £1,200 on February 1901, completing the matter.'*<sup>17</sup>

Most of Mr.Milligan's facts are correct. The funds were indeed transferred to aid Dr.Conolly's school, as is shown in an Amendment to the original Scheme, dated 13 July 1898, which says,

*'the said Governors are now applying the Endowment, pending the acquisition of suitable school premises, in aiding the Intermediate School established by Dr.Conolly at Upper Clifton, Bangor, and the old school premises are unoccupied. . . . Application has been made to us by the said Governors upon 27<sup>th</sup> day of June 1898 to amend the said original Scheme so as to enable them, with the sanction of this Board, to let or sell the said school premises, pending the removal of the school to a more suitable site.'*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the Board of Governors, 4 September 1893, 4 June 1894, 17 September 1894 and 5 July 1897.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes of the Board of Governors, 8 September 1893.

<sup>17</sup> C.F.Milligan, 'Bangor Grammar School', in *Bangor and Belfast Lough Yesterday and Today* (undated, but c.1980), p.5.

<sup>18</sup> An Amendment to Scheme No.99, dated 13 July, 1988, in the possession of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel.

COMMISSIONERS OF CHARITABLE DONATIONS & REQUESTS FOR  
IRELAND.

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EDUCATIONAL ENDOWMENTS (IRELAND) ACT 1885.

48 & 49 Vic. Cap. 78.

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Name of Endowment:- The Bangor Endowed School

No. 99.

Date of Scheme:- 13th July, 1893.

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WHEREAS a Scheme, No. 99, hereinafter called the original Scheme was framed under the Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act 1885 for the Government and management of the Bangor Endowed School, and was formally approved by the Lord Lieutenant and Privy Council by an Order in Council dated 13th July, 1893.

AND WHEREAS by Section 15 of the said original Scheme it is provided that the Governors of the Bangor Endowed School may, if and when they shall think fit, remove the School to some other convenient Site or Sites in or near the town of Bangor, and upon any such removal the buildings and premises vacated may be sold, let, or otherwise disposed of to the best advantage.

AND WHEREAS by clause 11 of the said original Scheme it is provided that the Bangor School Endowment shall be held by the Governors thereof upon trust to maintain or to aid in maintaining in or near the town of Bangor in the County of Down, a School subject to the provisions in the said original Scheme set forth.

AND WHEREAS the said Governors are now applying the Endowment, pending the acquisition of suitable school premises, in aiding the Intermediate School established by Dr Connolly at Upper Clifton, Bangor; and the old school premises are now unoccupied.

AND WHEREAS application has been made to us by the said Governors

The first page of the 1898 Amendment to the Scheme.  
(In the possession of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel.)



However, this does not justify Mr.Milligan's statement that, '*there is no connection between the Endowed School and Dr.Conolly's School*'. The 1893 Scheme for *Bangor Endowed School* laid down that,

*"The School" shall mean the Educational Institution founded under the will of the Right Hon.Robert Ward and . . . known as The Bangor Endowed School, and shall include any other school or schools for the time being managed, maintained or aided by the Governors under the provisions of this Scheme. . . . The Governors may, if and when they shall so think fit, remove the School to some other convenient site or sites in or near the town of Bangor.*<sup>19</sup>

The Governors were not obliged to maintain the *Old Schoolhouse* on Main Street, and if, after the departure of Mr.Rainey, they chose to apply the Endowment to Dr.Conolly's school, that school then became *The Bangor Endowed School*. The '*connection*' is undeniable. Furthermore, despite Mr.Milligan's assertion that he attended '*Dr.Conolly's Intermediate School*' from 1897-1900, Dr.Conolly is named as '*Principal of the Endowed School, Bangor*' from 1894<sup>20</sup>, and of '*Bangor Grammar School*' from 1897. The case for continuity is further strengthened by Robert Clarke's recollection that,

*I came to Bangor Endowed School, as it then was, in January 1894, because a neighbouring farmer at Castlederg, where I lived, was an uncle of the Headmaster's wife, Mrs.Connolly [sic]. . . The School was where the Bank of Ireland now stands in Main Street.*<sup>21</sup>

The Board of Governors' Minutes make little reference to the changes in the School's location during these years, apart from the fact that the *Good Templar Hall* was '*secured for a month*', while the repairs and alterations were carried out to the *Old Schoolhouse*. When Dr.Conolly proposed moving the School to the *Ward Villas* in December 1893, less than four months after his appointment, the Governors told him that the suggestion was '*premature*' and that they would consider it one year after his appointment.<sup>22</sup>

The next suggestion of a possible change of location came from a deputation from the Town Commissioners in January 1896. John McMeekan, James Bowman, Greer Cleland and J.T.Brice asked the Governors to consider the '*enlargement and transfer of the School, in accordance with the growing needs of modern Bangor*'. The Hon.Somerset Ward, in the Chair, told them that it was not for the Board of Governors to initiate such a move, but a sub-committee was set up to consider the matter. It was not until July 1897, that the Board decided to apply to the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests for permission to '*remove the School to a more convenient site and to let or otherwise dispose of the existing building, in accordance with Clause 15, p.10 of the Scheme*', and three months later, the Governors, clearly frustrated at having received no reply from the Commissioners, approved the proposal to change the location of the School, and in December informed them that,

*'the Endowed School has not been moved, but . . . [the] school operations were being carried out in another building, as the Headmaster reported that he could no longer efficiently conduct the School in the old premises. In this, the Governors entirely agreed with him, and consented to the removal of the pupils to another and more commodious building, until the sanction of the Commissioners had been received for the changing of the site. This sanction the Governors have been seeking since July. . . . They beg to inform the Commissioners that the premises in which the school operations are being carried on are in the township and about half a mile from the centre of the town'.*

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<sup>19</sup> Scheme [No.99].

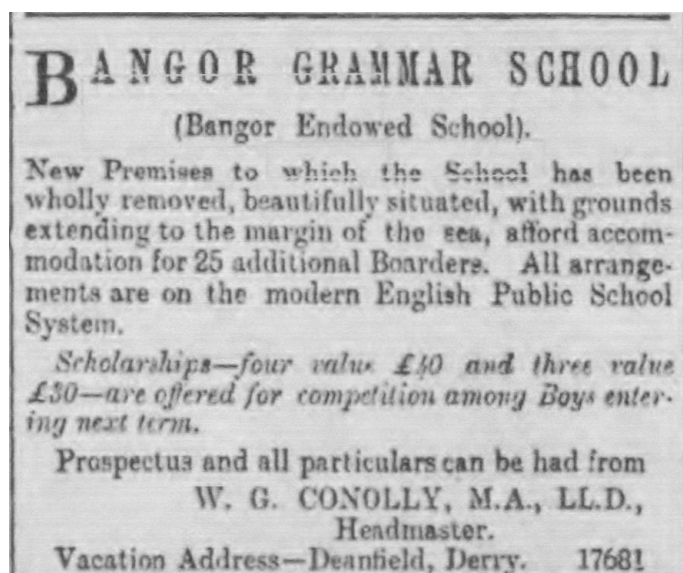
<sup>20</sup> *Belfast and Province of Ulster Directory*, Volume 15 (1894).

<sup>21</sup> *The Wave*, December 1897; *Belfast Newsletter*, 19 July, 1897.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes of the Board of Governors, 19 December 1893 and 17 January 1894.



The renovation of the old school building was clearly not a permanent solution and in 1897, Dr.Conolly was instructed to 'nail up the back door'.<sup>23</sup> Dr.Conolly moved the School to Ardmore, two houses at the top of Seaforth Road.



*Belfast Newsletter*, 19 July, 1897

(This is the first recorded use of the name *Bangor GRAMMAR School*)

The move to *Ardmore* proved to be controversial and the Secretary of the Charity Commissioners was called on to adjudicate. Dr.Conolly explained that in the old premises, there were just two classrooms, one 20 feet square and the other 25 feet by 12 feet, and there were no dormitories; the “closets” “were of a primitive type and were prone to go out of order”. In the new building, there were four classrooms and six dormitories and a playing field of two and a half acres.<sup>24</sup>

*The Wave* reported that, ‘the recreation grounds extend to the margin of the sea and afford ample room for Football, Cricket etc.’ and that ‘the situation of the School makes it exceedingly suitable for backward and delicate boys’.<sup>25</sup> Mr.Milligan also remembered ‘six masters and about one hundred pupils, including twelve to fourteen boarders, who lived in Ward Villa East, [where, according to Robert Clarke, Dr.Conolly lived], opposite the Royal Ulster Yacht Club’. The School did not occupy *Ardmore* for long, for Mr.Milligan recalled that, in the early 1900s, it moved to the two houses in *College Gardens*, which later became the *Ballyholme Hotel*, on *Seacliffe Road*; this is where the School was located when Thomas McBride joined the Staff in 1900. Certainly, by July 1898, the original building was unoccupied and Dr.Conolly’s school was situated at what was referred to as *Upper Clifton*.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes of the Board of Governors, 2 January 1896, 5 July 1897, 30 August 1897, 21 October 1897 and 11 December 1897.

<sup>24</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 3 November 1956 and 8 July 1939, *Belfast Newsletter*, 2 March 1898.

<sup>25</sup> *The Wave*, December 1897; *Belfast Newsletter*, 19 July, 1897.



Part of a photograph, c.1900, showing *College Gardens* (centre) and *Ardmore*, further to the right, and set back from the sea.<sup>26</sup>  
(Reprinted from the *Lawrence Collection*, by permission of the *National Library of Ireland*)



*Ardmore* and *College Gardens* in more recent times.  
(Photographs taken by the author)

<sup>26</sup> *Lawrence Collection*, *Royal Series*, number 11224.



The left of the two *Ward Villas* is *Eastward* or *Eastroyd*, where Dr.Conolly lived. (*Ward Villas* were demolished in 2004; this photograph by Peter O.Marlow, is taken from Marcus Patton's *Bangor: An Historical Gazetteer* and is printed with permission).

In July 1898, the Commissioners were asked to amend the Scheme, under Section 35, to allow the Governors to let or sell the school buildings, '*pending the removal of the School to suitable premises*', implying that its location at that time was regarded as purely temporary.

In May 1898 a joint meeting of the Governors and the Town Commissioners was held in the *Guild Hall* at which a scheme was submitted for the sale of the old school building and to put the money received, together with £500 to be guaranteed by the Commissioners '*and other public subscriptions*', towards the building of a new school. After considerable discussion, it was agreed that the Governors should estimate the cost of the proposed new school, find a suitable site and only then invite the co-operation of the Town Commissioners in the task of raising the necessary money. The *Old Schoolhouse* was finally put up for sale in January 1899. Advertisements were placed in the Belfast press and James T.Brice, a local auctioneer and estate agent, offered £1,100, but the Charity Commissioners in Dublin refused to accept it, saying that the building had been valued at £1,345. However, when the Urban District Council, (as it had now become), offered £1,200 in April, that offer was accepted. In July Rev.J.J.Macauley, Secretary to the Board of Governors, was able to notify the Urban Council that the Charity Commissioners had '*given their sanction to the purchase by the Urban Council of the old school premises on Main Street*', but it was not until February 1901, over a year and a half later that the Governors received the money, and the *Old Schoolhouse* became the Town Hall. By this time, the building had fallen into disrepair and the Governors had had to request estimates for putting it in a safe condition, the '*wall at the rere*' having shown signs of falling. Meanwhile they had inspected a possible new site for the School on Maxwell Road, and '*the Brickfields*' (Bryce's Brickworks on the future site of *Ward Park*, perhaps) as a possible recreation ground, but Somerset Ward told them that the state of the finances '*would not warrant taking steps to build a new school at present*' and so, say the minutes, rather confusingly, the income from the investment was to go '*to aid Dr.Conolly's School*'. After paying advertising and legal expenses, the sum of £1,098-15-9<sup>d</sup> was invested in Consols (consolidated annuities); a balance of £77-17-7<sup>d</sup> was kept in hand, although six months later, it too was invested.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the Board of Governors, 20 June 1898, 23 September 1898, 17 February 1899, 23 March 1899, 26 April 1899, 21 June 1899, 3 September 1900, 13 February 1901, 4 June 1901, 26 August 1901 and 19 February 1902; *Newtownards Chronicle*, 7 May 1898 and 22 July 1899.



The Old School House, as the Town Hall,  
described as having '*mullioned windows with Tudor labels,  
paying tribute to the Oxbridge colleges*'.<sup>28</sup>  
(Photograph in the possession of the author).

### **DR.CONOLLY AND THE INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION COMMISSIONERS**

Mr.Milligan's figure of one hundred boys may be somewhat inflated, for when Dr.Conolly was interviewed by the Intermediate Education Commissioners in February 1899, the School had sixty pupils and four Assistant Masters and Thomas McBride, speaking to the *Old Boys' Association* on the occasion of his retirement in 1939, recalled:

*'When I came to the School almost forty years ago, Dr.Conolly was Headmaster, with three resident masters and somewhat over sixty boys, including twenty six boarders from all parts of Ireland.'*<sup>29</sup>

Dr.Conolly had begun, he said, with eleven pupils and had '*spent every last penny, practically, of the income of the School in developing it*'. In November 1897, there had been forty-two pupils, of whom thirty were studying for the various grades of the Intermediate Examinations. In 1898, five pupils passed in the Preparatory Grade, three in the Junior Grade, one in the Middle Grade and one in the Senior Grade.

Dr.Conolly claimed to have had experience of the working of the Intermediate Education Act since 1882 - presumably when he sat the examination as a pupil, for he would have been just fourteen years old - and this experience, combined with visits to leading English and Scottish public schools, whose systems he said he had studied in detail, had left him with strong feelings about the working of the Intermediate education system in Ireland. In the five pages devoted to his evidence to the Commissioners, Dr.Conolly laid out his criticisms of the system in some detail. He said that the examination system:

<sup>28</sup> M.Patton, *Bangor: An Historical Gazetteer* (1999), p.87.

<sup>29</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 8 July 1939.

*'induced teachers to aim at a higher standard of accumulation of facts in the minds of their pupils, but to neglect the development of the reasoning faculties. . . . Indeed the system has given great encouragement to "grinding" and "cramming", pure and simple'.*

He also said that, in larger schools, only a percentage of the pupils – the clever ones – were entered for the examinations, and that less able ones were often neglected. Some teachers were, he believed, so keen to obtain clever pupils, who would do them credit at the examinations, that a system of *'pupil-grabbing'* was in operation. In an effort to gain good examination results, physical training was often neglected in favour of extra studies. He complained that under the existing system, the need for *'all the grammatical anomalies and syntactical technicalities'* to be committed to memory, often led pupils to take a dislike to modern languages. Science too was neglected, he said, and science subjects had not been taught as an examination subject in his school, although he intended to start examination classes in both science and art. He said that his visits to English schools had been primarily to see their science laboratories. (Indeed, in May 1901, Dr.Conolly asked the Governors to consider applying to the Agricultural and Technical Education Department for a grant towards the purchase of scientific equipment and less than a year before his resignation, the Governors invited the Agricultural and Technical Inspection Committee to visit the School, in accordance with Clause 23 of the Scheme). Sums paid to teachers should, Dr.Conolly felt, be as the result of the inspection of schools, not of examination results. He also believed that pupils should enter the various grade of the examination according to their ability, not according to strict age limits. That, he felt, would benefit small schools, in which pupils of equal ability could not be taught together, because of age limits. And finally, he favoured the abolition of the Preparatory Grade (which did in fact occur in 1913, because it imposed *'a severe strain on children of a tender age'*, as the Act put it). Many teachers today would find much in Dr.Conolly's comments with which they would heartily agree.<sup>30</sup>

Dr.Conolly was also able to tell the Commissioners that he, *'was about to procure new premises'*, although until 1903, the School was still referred to as *'Bangor Grammar School, Clifton'*<sup>31</sup>, and in 1904 a notice in the *County Down Spectator* announced that *'Bangor Grammar School, College Gardens, Ballyholme'* would resume work for the new school year on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> September.

### **DR.CONOLLY'S RESIGNATION**

Dr.Conolly resigned on 8th August 1903, following his appointment as the first Headmaster of the *Boys' High School*, Waterford, following the incorporation of *Bishop Foy School* with several other local institutions. It is said that he took many of his pupils with him. The Governors were clearly surprised by his resignation so near the start of a new school year; in future, they decided, two months notice would be required.<sup>32</sup>

In Waterford, Dr.Conolly *'devoted himself with untiring energy'* to his duties and his premature death in January 1912, aged 45, was attributed to *'an overworked brain'*. The press reported that he was *'highly esteemed by the inhabitants of Waterford of all classes and was recognized as a teacher of exceptional ability'*. *'The cause of higher education throughout Ireland has suffered a serious loss by the untimely death of Dr.Conolly'*, said the *Spectator*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Intermediate Education (Ireland) Commission: Appendix to the Final Report of the Commissioners, Part 1: Minutes of Evidence, 1899.* (Command Papers c.9512); Minutes of the Board of Governors, 18 May 1901 and 14 October 1902.

<sup>31</sup> *Belfast and Province of Ulster Directories, Volumes 21-24 (1899-1903).*

<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the Board of Governors, 10 August 1903 and 1 October 1903; Rev.Fred Smith in *The Gryphon*, 1963.

<sup>33</sup> *County Down Spectator*, 26 January 1912.