

## Maureen Gallagher Creamer's school Ballinamore 1940-1954

### *Roma Creamer*

IN 1940s IRELAND free primary school education was available to all children, up to the age of twelve. Most children were within walking or cycling distance of a national school. However, this wasn't the case with second level education which was not funded by the state until the 1960s. Students who lived in the cities or within comfortable travelling distance of large country towns had access to secondary education, if their parents could pay the fees. This was not true for many small rural towns and villages where second level education did not evolve until the 1950s at the earliest.

In Ballinamore there were thriving national schools. The girls' school run by the Sisters of Mercy, and the boys' school which had a headmaster and assistant teacher. Post primary education was not offered in the town until the vocational school started in the late 1940s. Mean Scoil Fatima girls secondary opened in 1954 followed by St Felim's boys' secondary in 1962. Therefore between 1940 and 1954 Maureen Gallagher Creamer's school played an important role in the town.

Maureen Gallagher opened her school in 1940. She advertised in the *Leitrim Observer* twice in that year. She



FEMALE PUPILS MAY 1950

*Back:* 1 **Carmel Gaffney** 2 **Lily Cosgrove** 3 **Carrie (or Annie) Maloney**  
4 **Teresa Quinn** (*Drumcoura*)

*Middle:* 1 \_\_ 2 \_\_ 3 **Lizzie MacAweeny** (*Derrinkeher/Roycroft*)  
4 **Gertie D'arcy** (*Drumracken*) 5 **Maeve Beirne** (*Fenagh*)  
6 **Rose Murtagh** 7 **Teresa Farrell** 8 **Teresa Kelleher**  
9 **May McKeon** (*Fenagh*) 10 **Anna May Devlin**  
11 **Eileen Wrynn** (*Ballinamore*).

*Front:* 1 **Joan Gallagher** (*Ballinamore, not a student but Maureen's sister?*)  
2 **Bernadette Gough** 3 **T D Sweeney** 4 **Teresa Kilkenny** (*Aghavas*)  
5 **Rose Kiernan**, 6 **Kathleen Moran** (*Aghavas*)  
7 **Eileen Teehan** (*guard's daughter*) 8 **Anna Tiernan**  
9 **Teresa Dolan** (*Aghacashel*)

worked from her family home in Main Street. The house was quite large, so she was able to do this without too much disruption to the household.

The school opened in the ground floor front room of what later became her sister Joan's house. The information available about this is sketchy, as she may later have moved to use the upstairs front two rooms.

It was a fee paying school, as were all secondary schools at the time, but



as the only other option available to local families was sending their children to boarding schools, this provided an affordable alternative for many people. There were private schools of this type in other towns in Leitrim. Manorhamilton had 'The Private School' and Carrick on Shannon had 'Miss Fox's Private School', as well as Mrs Lynch's secondary school. These schools advertised regularly in the *Leitrim Observer* throughout the 1940s.

Mrs Eileen Maguire remembers going up the front stairs:

'We were in the first door on the right upstairs. It was a big room. There was a fireplace in it and the typewriter room was just off it.'

The house was split into two premises after Maureen married, so she moved to use another room at the back of the Creamer family home.

Maureen ran two distinct departments in her school, and managed this by having discrete morning and afternoon sessions. She taught typing, shorthand and bookkeeping, supplemented by English lessons, in the morning. The afternoon was reserved for academic studies including English, Irish, Mathematics, Geography and preparation for Co. Council Scholarship and matriculation exams. According to an interviewee she also delivered German and French lessons. This particular student sat scholarship exams for St Louis, Monaghan and Loreto College, Cavan and was successful in both.



Father Gus Layden of Drumlunnon, Ballinamore won a county council scholarship to St. Patrick's College in Cavan. This was recorded in *The Leitrim Observer* in 1942.

He attended Maureen's school from 1941-1942. The family know he was one of her students as she told them about him. He occasionally visited Maureen's daughter, Ruth, when she was a pupil in Loreto College Cavan, and often told her that had it not been for her mother he would not have had the opportunities he enjoyed.

It was discovered during the interview process that she employed Rita McTeague from Aughnasheelin to teach Irish around 1942-1944.

The school was attended by pupils from as far away as Newtowngore, Kiltubrid, Templeport and even Bawnboy. Some cycled more than ten miles a day, others walked from nearer town lands like Aughnasheelin and Mayo.

One student from Kiltubrid occasionally got the train from Annadale. In fact

the train guard 'Hughie McKeon' from Ballinamore would sometimes stop the train along the road to pick her and others up, along with their bikes, as they travelled to school or work!

The school fees, from what evidence is available, seem to have varied according to courses undertaken. Fees seem to have varied from about £1/10s/0d to 5s/0d a month. What is clear is that many parents struggled to find this money but were determined to give their children the best opportunities they could.

One interviewee said

"I was wondering how did Mammy get the money to pay for it...because money was awful scarce...and daddy was after dying."

Another remembered

"...oftentimes maybe we wouldn't have the money, ... we had a farm and we would bring a chicken and maybe bring in your mother fresh cabbage and potatoes and things like that so we'd make up the money that way..."

Little evidence remains as to resources used in the school. Gregg shorthand was taught, some ex students who have retained their certificates supplied examples.

The typewriter was kept in a smaller room off the main teaching room. Pupils had to queue up to use the machine during class sessions. Maureen made sure that those from the rural areas had first choice of practice time during school hours, as the town students were encouraged to come back and practise in the evenings.

Students could borrow the typewriter for job interviews. One girl carried the typewriter to Dublin for the Civil Service and CIE exams.

An interesting result of this research was discovering what some of Maureen's students did after leaving her school. A few people stayed in the Ballinamore area where they spent their working lives and became involved with the social and economic life of the town.

One of the Henderson brothers became a rector.

Augustine Layden became a priest and taught at St Patrick's College Cavan.

May Sharkey of Ballinamore, later Sr De Lourdes, head teacher of Mean Scoil Fatima, attended the school and



was prepared for the university Matriculation exam. Interestingly, Maureen taught at Mean Scoil Fatima, with Sr.De Lourdes, from 1962 until her illness and death in 1966.

Sean Sharkey became a chemist.

Jack McGovern (Ballinamore) went from the school to attend the College of Commerce Rathmines, where he was able to skip the first year.

Kathleen Sutherland (McGovern) went to New York where she worked at the Jewish Lennox Hill hospital. She went to night school to improve on her secretarial skills and eventually worked as a secretary for Mrs. David Rockefeller.

Mary Alice Leddy, one of the last pupils at the school, studied shorthand

and typing. She worked in Sonny Prior's and Batty Cryan's, in Ballinamore until she emigrated to England.

John Martin worked in Creamer's shop for a few years then emigrated to the U.S where he was employed in the postal service until his tragic murder.

Martin Kiernan, of Aughavas and Carigallen, actually joined the school having completed his secondary education at St.Mels in Longford in 1947.

"...at that time there wasn't much for me ...so I decided to do the commercial course... I was nineteen years of age, then and I remember at the time I did the shorthand, the typing and the book-keeping... It was a two or three year course."

Interviews were carried out with twelve ex pupils of the school. These people proved to be a great source of information and full of interesting stories about life in the 1940s and early 1950s. Hopefully this short history of the school will be of interest to them as well as other ex pupils and families, who may have a family member who benefitted from the school.

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