

## History of Portsoy

### THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR SCHOOLMASTERS.

*Researched by Findlay Pirie*



“Sunnybank” Portsoy’s Grammar School which closed in 1877 on the opening of Portsoy Public School. Photo – Leslie McBain

The Grammar School was situated originally in South High Street on the site presently occupied by the Antique Shop. The Rector of the Episcopalian Church the Rev. Charles Grant (1812-1828) was a classical scholar and in addition to his rectorial duties he taught a class of more advanced students which led to the foundation of the Grammar School. The building became inadequate for its purpose and Sunnybank was erected to house the school.

## THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR SCHOOLMASTERS

*1751 From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay:-*

**ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHOOL IN PORTSOY** - Having thus got the nucleus of a church satisfactorily under way, an effort was made to have a school established on an appropriate foundation, and accordingly in 1751 there was presented to the Presbytery a petition from Lord Deskford and the inhabitants of Portsoy craving a collection through the bounds of the Presbytery to enable them to build a schoolhouse, and that the prayer of the petition was granted is to be judged from the fact that Mr. Thomas Mitchell, preacher at Portsoy, was appointed to receive the collection. That, in its turn, the collection was successful is to be gathered from an entry in the Presbytery records of August of the same year in which Mr. Patrick Constable is described as having been "lately settled schoolmaster at Portsoy".

*1752 - From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay: -*

**APPOINTMENT OF PETER CONSTABLE, SCHOOLMASTER**- A report was sent to the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge that 61 scholars were then attending the charity school at Portsoy, and the same year the Society appointed Mr. Peter Constable, schoolmaster at Portsoy, to be head of their school at a salary of £10.

**1753** - Mr. Constable evidently gave satisfaction for in 1753 his salary was increased to £12.

*1779 From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay:-*

**DEATH OF PETER CONSTABLE, SCHOOLMASTER.** - Mr. Constable died in November 1779, so that he laboured in Portsoy for 28 years. The same year the Countess Dowager of Findlater gave £10 a year to the charity schoolmaster at Portsoy, while in 1780 Mr. John McFarlane was appointed to the vacant post at a salary of £15, of which £5 was from the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge

*Aberdeen Journal, Monday, April 5th 1779: -*

**PUBLIC NOTICE - Wanted** - A Grammar Schoolmaster for Portsoy, properly qualified for teaching Latin and Greek, who writes well and is a master of arithmetic. Any person fit for the office will meet with good encouragement, the particulars of which they will be informed of by applying to Mr. George Riddoch, vintner, Portsoy.

*From the book "Annals of Banff Vol. II" by William Cramond: -*

**BANFF SCHOOLS 1782** - James Morrice who was then leaving the Grammar School at Portsoy, owing to its being given up, was appointed as Headmaster at Banff Grammar School

*From the "Statistical Account of Scotland, Parish of Fordyce, 1791 -1799: -*

**PORTSOY SCHOOLS IN 1800** - There is a school by subscription at Portsoy, the fixed salary of the schoolmaster is L.15; and, as he is allowed to take some more scholars than those subscribed for, about L.5 more is made of it. The amount of scholars amounts to 30.

There is likewise a charity schoolmaster at Portsoy, for teaching the poor. His fixed salary from The Society for Propogating Christian Knowledge is L.8; from the Countess Dowager of Findlater L.5; and the value of L.2 in land from Lord Findlater as a cow's grass; L.2 as clerk and treasurer for the poor's funds at Portsoy; in all L.17. And about seven pound more may be made by teaching those who are able to pay for reading, writing, arithmetic, book-keeping and navigation.

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

There is another school for boys at Portsoy (*the Grammar School*) where from 20 to 30 are taught; and through the rest of the Parish of Fordyce there are four schools for girls, where reading, sowing, and knitting of stockings are taught.

*From the book "The Church and Churchyard of Fordyce" by William Cramond 1866: -*

### **FROM THE OLD PARISH RECORDS**

**1801** - In Portsoy there are two schools, one a Society School, attended by 72 scholars who are taught according to the rules of the Society; the other a subscription Grammar School, attended by about 30 boys. In the same parish there are also some women of unexceptionable character, who teach children the elements of reading.

**1814** - There is in Portsoy a School supported by subscription, (*the Grammar School*) in which the same branches of education are taught as in the Parochial Schools, and which is also regularly visited and examined by the Presbytery.

*Aberdeen Journal, Wednesday, April 22nd. 1812: -*

**EXAMINATION AT THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL** - On Wednesday 15th. current, the Grammar School of Portsoy was examined by a Committee of the children's parents ; when the whole of the scholars acquitted themselves in a style which reflects credit on Mr. McKenzie, their Master, under whose charge they have only been for one twelvemonth. In that short time the Presbytery were convinced the scholars had made very great progress in the different branches taught in the school, and it is pleasing to find that Mr. McKenzie meets with that encouragement from every individual which his great attention in the education and morals of his pupils deserve.

*Banffshire Journal Annual -1979. "The Story of a Building" by J.D.G.M*

**The Episcopal Church : - Rev. J. Cardno 1799-1812** - Another member of the Church at this time was Miss Elizabeth Bond who headed the Ladies' School (*The school is now the Boyne Hotel*).

*From the booklet "Bits and Pieces about Portsoy" by Mary A. MacDondald, 1962: -*

**SCHOOLS IN PORTSOY** - There were no fewer than five schools in Portsoy. Eliza Bond's was in Old Cullen Road. I wonder if this was the Miss Bond, a native of Fortrose, who wrote 'Letters of a Village Governess', and who died in Portsoy in 1839. Perhaps she carried on this school for young ladies, and extra fees were charged if they wished to learn music, French, drawing, etc. There was the Grammar School in High Street, which was without endowment. But the Society School, whose master was Thomas Philip by name, "enjoyed the liberality of the Earl of Seafield. His salary was £15, augmented by £5 from the Earl, along with a house and cow's grass." The Dame's Schools, May Marshall's in Church Street and Miss Wiseman's in Aird Street - must have catered for the juniors and infants for the sum of one penny each per week.

History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.



The site occupied by Portsoy's Grammar School in South High Street before the Independent Chapel was erected.

*Photo – Leslie McBain*



The Institute Hall which was the site of the Society School.

*Photo – Leslie McBain*

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.



*Miss Elizabeth Bond headed the Ladies School which was situated on the Old Cullen Road the site now occupied by the Boyne Hotel. (Culbert Street was regarded as part of the Old Cullen Road at that time). Miss Bond died in 1839.*

**1840** *From the book "Banffshire Schools by William Barclay, written in 1925: -*

**GRAMMAR SCHOOL SCHOOL AT PORTSOY.** Probably there is no one who can now recall of their own memory a time when the old Grammar School of Portsoy was situated on South High Street, in the building that has been in succession occupied in later years by Mr. Wiseman, Mr. Angus and Mr. Barron. Those were pre-Disruption days, and one of its later teachers was the Rev. Wm. Ingram, who was then Assistant to the minister of Fordyce and at the same time taught at this Grammar School at Portsoy; later he went to Gartly as schoolmaster there, and for many years he was the Free Church minister in Rothiemay.

After it had served its days as a Grammar School, the building served the purposes, for a time, of an Independent Chapel.

*Banffshire Reporter, Wednesday, May 31st 1879: -*

**DEATH OF MR. THOMAS PHILIP** - Mr. Thomas Philip who for many years taught the Assembly's School in Portsoy died at the house of his daughter, Mrs. Deane in Leith, on Sunday at the ripe old age of eighty-seven years. The deceased gentleman, who was a native of Fife-shire, came first to this part of the country as teacher of the school of Edingight, from which he was transferred to the school which he taught here, on the retirement of the late Mr. John MacFarlane more than forty years ago; but a good many years have elapsed since he resigned his office.

For a few years he held the office of Inspector of the Poor for the Portsoy section of the parish of Fordyce.

Though he was a brother of Dr. Philip who was known to fame as the superintendent of the Presbyterian churches in South Africa, it does not appear that he had enjoyed great

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

educational advantages in his youth, but rather that he, like many of his countrymen, had made his way in the face of many difficulties by his own innate ability and perseverance. But he had never gone through the curricula of a college. He was of a highly intellectual bent of mind, had read much, had a well-stored memory and was possessed of such conversational powers as made him an esteemed and agreeable companion, while he was at the same time of such an amiable and strictly upright disposition as won for him the respect of all who knew him, so much so that many natives of Portsoy, both at home and abroad, who had been under his tuition, must feel a pang of sorrow when they had read of his death.

His partner in life, Mrs. Philip, pre-deceased him by a good many years. Though in his day the emoluments were small compared with what they are now, they brought up a large family, two or more of which are in the Cape Colony, while two of the younger sons are respected ministers of the Established Church.

His funeral took place at Leith on Thursday afternoon. He was not a man to make enemies and in closing this brief tribute to his memory we feel sure that many of his former townsmen will join with us in saying, "May he rest in peace."

*From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay: -*

**SOCIETY SCHOOL** - A writer of 1842 tells us: -

The salary of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge's teacher in Portsoy is £15, with £5 additional from the Earl of Seafield, and the usual accommodation of a house and cow's grass. His school fees average about £20. The same nobleman gives liberally to the support of an infant school teacher, and female teacher, in Portsoy. The annual expense of education at the Society's school is from 6s to 14s; and at the grammar school of Portsoy, which is unendowed, from 12s. to £1.10. The children at the infant school pay one penny per week. The fees for the common branches of female education are much the same as those paid at the other schools, but a considerably higher charge is made for music, French, drawing and the like. There are very few between the ages of six and fifteen who cannot either read or are not learning to read; and few also who are not, at the same time taught to write.

*1847 From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay published in 1925: -*

**MR. MOYES, SCHOOLMASTER** - In 1847 Mr. W.B. Moyes was elected schoolmaster of Portsoy, leaving a few years later to be a master in Circus Place School, Edinburgh.

*1854 From the book, "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay published in 1925: -*

**APPOINTMENT OF JAMES DAVIDSON, HEADMASTER** - James Davidson was appointed headmaster. Later became minister of the Kirk of the Ord.

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, June 1st., 1858: -*

**PORTSOY - FEMALE SCHOOL** - This new building situated in the Durn Road was formally opened on Thursday last (*27th. May*), in the presence of several of the trustees and others. It is a very handsome and substantial slated building, measuring about 34 feet by 17 feet within walls, is 13 feet high, and supplied with neat folding desks, mounted on fixed metal supports. Ventilation appears to have been particularly attended to, there being three perforated wooden ventilators, with hinged covers, in the ceiling, besides opening pieces in each window, hung on pivots. It is seated to accommodate about seventy pupils, and is built on a site kindly granted by the Earl of Seafield, and surrounded by a strong wooden paling, the gift of the same nobleman. A grant of £107 towards its erection having been obtained from the Government, it becomes subject to Government regulations, as well as inspection. This, it is hoped, will be a sufficient guarantee to secure the efficiency of the seminary, which is

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

open to pupils of every religious denomination. We trust the promoters of this institution, who have so perseveringly exerted themselves, will not be allowed to sit down under the burden of debt for which they are still liable, but that they will be aided in wiping it off by the community who will be benefitted by the result of their efforts.



*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, June 21st. 1859: -*

**PORTSOY FEMALE SCHOOL** - Mr. Scott, professor of dancing, who lately acquired such a good name in Cullen, promises making himself an equal favourite here, and gives an entertainment for tomorrow (Wednesday) evening, in aid of the proposal for extinguishing the debt of the Portsoy Female School, when a great turn-out is expected. The Professor's classes here are respectably attended, and it is said that his pupils are making rapid progress ; and the present disinterested move on his part will tend much to enhance his reputation.

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, December 23rd 1862: -*

**PORTSOY FEMALE SCHOOL** :- The following report of the Portsoy Female School taught by Miss Watson, has just been received from the Privy Council :- "The school is conducted with great energy and success. Remarkable good reading and English composition. Good part singing. Pupils very orderly and intelligent. Plain needlework, though improved, is scarcely yet up to mediocrity. All the infants should have slates and practice slate-writing."

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, December 13th. 1864: -*

**PORTSOY - VACANT SCHOOLS** - A town with a population of 2000, without a schoolmaster, in the middle of the 19th. century is surely a phenomenon which is rarely witnessed, yet, such is the present condition of Portsoy. The Society's School has been vacant for some two to three months, and the Parish School is now also without a teacher since the

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

appointment of the Rev. Mr. Davidson to the Ord Chapel. It is to be hoped that such a state of matters will not long continue, for most assuredly we have not yet reached that blessed state of perfection when the services of the Pedagogue can be altogether dispensed with; nay, rather, one would be much more likely to infer, from the apathy generally displayed by our young men towards anything pertaining to intellect improvement, that the schoolmaster had never been abroad amongst us.

It will be seen that an advertisement appears for candidates for the Parochial School to lodge testimonials on the 19th. current, on which day an appointment will probably be made.

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday January 10th 1865: -*

**PAROCHIAL SCHOOL** - At a meeting of the heritors at the Parish of Fordyce, held on Wednesday, Mr. James Kissach, M.A., was unanimously appointed to the Portsoy or second Parochial School of Fordyce. Mr. Kissach is presently teacher in the second Parochial School in the Cabrach - which appointment he gained after competition. He is a Redhythe bursar, was successful at college in carrying prizes and honours; and at the examination for the Dick Bequest, passed at the first appearance, and with honour.

At this meeting of heritors, a statement being submitted by the Trustees for the school showing that there was a debt upon it of £25, chiefly caused by the erection of an additional classroom, Mr. Souter, for Glassaugh, offered, if the trustees raised £5, to subscribe £5; and Mr. Bryson, for Lord Seafield, who had on former occasions given liberally, subscribed £10; and Mr. Coutts, for Sir George Abercromby, subscribed £5; so that, with the £5 from the trustees, the debt will be extinguished.

**1865** *From the book, "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay published in 1925: -*

**APPOINTMENT OF JAMES KISSACK, HEADMASTER** - Mr. James Kissack, appointed headmaster, after having been for some little time schoolmaster at Invercharroch now known as Lower Cabrach. He was the son of James Kissack schoolmaster at Brodiesord. He graduated in Arts at Aberdeen in 1863, at the age of 20; he was schoolmaster at Lower Cabrach 1863-65; schoolmaster at Portsoy, 1865-68; and going abroad died in Jersey City, New York, in April 1892

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, April 23rd. 1867: -*

**INSPECTOR'S REPORT** - The following is a summary of the Inspector's report on the Portsoy Grammar and Parochial School :-

"This school is conducted with most praiseworthy vigour and ability. With such a large attendance, such a variety of branches, and no assistance, the quality of the instruction is very surprising and must be the result of great labour. Upwards of thirty pupils are in Latin; the highest class reads Virgil and Horace and in Greek, Xenophon. Very accurate Euclid. Singing is well taught."

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday January 14th 1941: -*

**PORTSOY GRAMMAR SCHOOL - IN AND AROUND PORTSOY (EXTRACT) -**

"Now for one last look. What better place than the old school playground designated a new "Sunnybank". To us scholars it had always been Sunnybank, except perhaps when the tawse appeared. Here we played cricket, bools and kind of shinty" (Note :- This would indicate this school was at one time on the site of the house presently known as Sunnybank)

History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.



Portsoy Public School from the top of Langie's Brae

Photo – Leslie McBain

*Banffshire Reporter, Friday, April 22nd. 1870 : -*

**EXAMINATION OF MISS GREGOR'S SCHOOL** - Yesterday the school which was recently established in Church Street by Miss Gregor was examined by the Rev. Mr. Grant and the Rev. Mr. McKay Fordyce, and the Rev. Mr. Simmers, and Mr. Bell, inspector. There was also present several of the parents of the pupils.

This school was commenced under rather disadvantageous circumstances, except that it was known that Miss Gregor was a certificated teacher, and that she had acquired experience by teaching in Edinburgh.

About November last she opened her school with a very small number of pupils, but the latter have steadily increased until they now number 55, most of whom are tidy, clean, and orderly girls - we say orderly because that is a branch to which the greatest attention seems to be paid.....

We may remark that the schoolroom is comfortable, well ventilated, and fitted with much taste and neatness ; but, as in the case of several others of our scholastic institutions, the want of more ample accommodation is felt to be no small drawback. In short, it would almost seem that no matter how many educational institutions are opened here, they will all be filled - a fact which is at least creditable to the inhabitants, as it proves that they fully appreciate the advantages of having their children well educated.

*(Note :- Extracts from a much larger report)*

*Banffshire Reporter, Friday, February 2nd. 1872: -*

**PORTSOY SOCIETY'S SCHOOL** - We have much pleasure in inserting the following report by Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools on the above school, taught by Mr. Brown: -

"This school under the new teacher is conducted with good teaching power, very good

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

feeling, and good results. The upper standards did well; the lower require more thorough exercises in standard work, especially in arithmetic. The writing should be larger and clearer. Extra standard subjects very well and intelligently taught. Geography good and interesting. Grammar well understood as far as gone. History well begun. Religious knowledge very good. The order might be more thorough."

Considering the comparatively short time that Mr. Brown has been teacher, and the disadvantage he labours under, through many of his pupils who attend the Society School being only able to do so for short periods at one time, the above report does him much credit.

*Banffshire Reporter, Wednesday, July 8th 1914 :-*

**DEATH OF MR. WILLIAM WATSON, TEACHER, PORTSOY.** It is with sincere regret that we announce the death of Mr. William Watson, retired teacher. The sad event took place early on Friday morning, at his residence, 27 Chapel Street, Portsoy. Deceased had been in a weakly state of health for some considerable time, but was also confined to bed for a few days before the end came.

Mr. Watson, who was 67 years of age, was a son of the late Mr. William Watson, blacksmith, who in his day carried on a business at Roseacre Street. He was not only born in Portsoy, but spent all his life in it. His education was received at the Parish School, the remodelled building now known as the Christian Institute, under the late Mr. Thomas Phillip, who took great pains in fitting him for after life.

At an early age he opened a school at the Seatown and commenced teaching on his own account. The building still remains, and there are not a few who can point to it as the place where they were well grounded in the initial stages of their education. Earnest and diligent, he did excellent work all alone for upwards of twenty years.

When, after the Education Act had got into thorough working order, and the Seatown school was closed, Mr. Watson was in 1886 taken into the service of Fordyce School Board and given employment in Portsoy School, where his ability was thus fittingly recognised, and he received what was his due reward.

In the larger sphere of labour his activity and resourcefulness continued, until advancing years made it imperative that he should retire. But this step was only taken so lately as December last, when he was granted a retiring allowance by the School Board.

He led an upright and wonderfully useful life. As a teacher it may be said that he had a thorough grasp of elementary arithmetic and English, perhaps to a much greater extent than many, favoured with greater advantages, who may have posed higher as instructors of youth. Mr. Watson will not soon be forgotten, and perhaps the difficulties he succeeded in overcoming will act as a stimulus to not a few in the course of life's battle to overcome and achieve where they might otherwise fail.

While retiring, Mr. Watson was of a bright and genial disposition, and took a keen and intelligent interest in public questions and all matters connected with the town and district, the concerns of which, now and bygone he knew well. He was admired and held in the highest respect throughout the entire community and now that his task is done and he has crossed the bourne, his departure will be mourned and his memory cherished by his many pupils and a wide circle of friends. Mr. Watson is survived by a brother and sister.



*The site in the Lower Seatown where William Watson conducted his school from 1867 to 1886 until the new Portsoy School was opened. Mr. Watson, a local man, continued his teaching career at the new school until he retired in 1913. This building is now a joinery workshop. Photo – Leslie McBain.*

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, April 23rd 1940: -*

**SITE FOR NEW SCHOOL AT PORTSOY** - There was a period in the history of Portsoy when feelings ran high and controversy was the order of the day. The occasion was the selection of a site for the new school. New masters, new methods. School Boards had been established in Scotland. In England and Wales, such bodies had been functioning since 1870. In the year of our Lord 1872 the powers that be, centralised in London, decreed that Scotland also should have the benefit bestowed upon her.

The old school sites were not sufficient, a new building had to be erected and a site settled upon. The majority of the Board favoured a position which the minority termed "a sand hole." The fight went on for weeks, it is no exaggeration to say that pandemonium frequently prevailed, and Press reports were eagerly looked forward to. It is not recorded that various sites at any time were seriously considered in a moderate fashion. No, the Board definitely divided itself into two camps. Ultimately the majority, mostly if not all landward members, forced their decision upon the minority, the town members, and the school was built upon the sand-hole against the wishes of the town in which it was erected. There was no great harm done. Sandy soil is not the worst on which to place a building, the appearance of this part of the town was much improved, and the school, as reckoned at the time was considered a good one.

The advent of the School Board acted as a bombshell to some of the old dominies. He, usually the monarch of all he surveyed, his word the alpha and the omega, brooking no interference within his domain, was suddenly subjected to the orders of a body of men, his neighbours in the same parish, elected by popular vote, often as an honour, without consideration of qualification, whose first interest in the administrative side of education, saw light only on his selection to membership of the Board. Usually such members were wisely

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

content to feel their way, realising that they had embarked on an unknown ocean. If so, then all was well.

There were exceptions, some being imbued with a sense of importance of their position. The good old dominie soon felt the weight of such self-imposed critics. He suffered pin-pricks, not always administered from duty-urge, but from some personal pique. He was not defenceless, however; his authority had not altogether vanished, he was a parochial schoolmaster first, a School Board employee later, and the authority vested in from the former had not all fallen from his shoulders in assuming the latter, so long as he did his duty and retained his character. The zealous one often retired a sadder a wiser man.

Portsoy was never a Secondary School, and yet as classification goes today, it was not entirely Primary. Languages and mathematics were taught although primary subjects predominated. Judging from results in the 'seventies, 'eighties and 'nineties the teaching was excellent. There was seldom, if ever a complete failure in the whole school during the tenure of office of the late James Kissack, M.A. a man of wonderful agility and energy, adding to his many duties the captaincy of the local Battery, qualifying as such by Army certificates gained after examination at the Artillery School. His methods were orderly to a degree, although as boys we did not like it - four days' preparation, with a fifth set aside for revisal under his immediate supervision. J.C.

*Banffshire Reporter, Friday, May 12th 1876: -*

**SCHOOL CLOSURE** - Miss Donald, who has successfully taught a school in South High Street for a considerable time, has now broke it up; she having passed an examination and obtained a certificate under the Education Act. Thus the last of our purely adventure schools may be said to have given place to the new order of things, with what real advantage to the community, time must tell.

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, February 27th 1877: -*

**OPENING OF NEW PUBLIC SCHOOLS AT PORTSOY** - Yesterday the School Board of Fordyce took formal possession and inaugurated the occupancy of the New School Buildings at Portsoy. The erections are of an extensive and costly character, but provide accommodation very much needed for the instruction of the youth of the town.

The new schools occupy an elevated situation facing the turnpike road, at the east end of the town. About two acres of ground are enclosed, bounded in front by the road, at one end by the enclosing wall of the Catholic Church property, and at the back by the railway line. The site being of unequal surface, heavy outlay was necessitated for enclosing walls. The wall facing the turnpike road is seven feet high finished on the top with freestone coping, and an iron railing three and a half feet high; the ground level within the enclosure being scarcely a foot below the top of the mason work. The enclosing wall fronting Chapel Street is also of a considerable height, but is relieved by two gateways giving entrance to the playgrounds, and by a section of iron railways on each sides of the gates. The girls' playground is separated from the railway by a wall six feet high, surmounted by an iron railing. The school and classrooms being all on ground level, the buildings occupy a considerable surface space. Externally they have a pleasing aspect. The main elevation to the turnpike road is finished with an ornamental belfry, and the gables are relieved by ornamental finials. The building in the elevation facing the turnpike road is to the extent of 10½ feet, facing Chapel St. 9½ feet, and fronting the railway 72 feet. The masonry is of coursed rubble work, with freestone corners and ribs.

The female school affords accommodation for 160 pupils. The school is 50 feet by 20 feet and class-room is 18 feet 6 inches by 14 feet. A small private room is provided for the

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

teacher. The male department has accommodation for 270 scholars. It embraces two schoolrooms, one measuring 58 feet by 20 feet, and the other 36 feet by 20 feet ; the class room is 18 feet by 18 feet ; and there is also a teacher's room. The entrance porches at both male and female schools are fitted up with lavatories, etc. All the apartments in the building are of a uniform height of 16 feet from floor to ceiling. The walls are lined with wood to a height of four feet. The schoolroom desks are fixed upon wooden standards, with pitch pine tops, and all varnished.

In each play-ground there are airing-sheds to give the scholars shelter in wet weather. The cost of the schools is £2615, or rather more than £6 for accommodation for each of the 430 scholars. The building was designed by Mr. Robson, architect, Banff, by whom the fulfilment of the contracts were superintended. The contractors were Messrs. Alex. Barclay & Co., masons, Keith ; Mr. Alex. Gray, carpenter, Portsoy ; Mr. James Watson, Slater, Portsoy ; Mr. Robert Hume, plasterer, Buckie ; and Mr. Wm. Duthie, Banff, for plumber and iron work.

The inauguration of the new school buildings yesterday was the occasion of some demonstration. The scholars met in the morning within the West Public School (Mr. Kissack's) and within the Portsoy Female School (Miss Liddell's) to take farewell of the old establishments. At the West Public School 187 were present out of 212 on the roll. The attendance would have been larger but for the prevalence of measles in the town which detained a number at home. The children having appropriately sung ' Goodbye, Old Schoolroom' a distribution of oranges was made. These were kindly provided by Colonel Moir. The Rev. Mr. Gibson., Established Church, Portsoy, then proposed cheers for Mr. Kissack, the schoolmaster, and wished him long life and great prosperity in the new school. The proposition was heartily responded to, and the children were afterwards marshalled outside the building.

At the Female School, 127 out of 141 on the roll attended. They were also put in processional order. At a little before eleven o'clock the pupils from both schools marched to the new buildings. Those from the West Public School were preceded by a flute band, and both companies carried numerous flags with suitable mottoes. The streets through which the youthful processionists wended their way were lined with spectators, and the scholars woke up the echoes by cheering lustily. Arrived at the new school, the children took their seats. There was a large attendance of parents and others who displayed warm interest in the ceremony.

The members of the School Board of Fordyce present were the Rev. James Grant, Fordyce, Chairman of the Board ; Dr. Anderson, Mr. McRobie, Mr. Ewing, and Mr. Stephen.

The Chairman, then said he had great pleasure in seeing so many assembled on the interesting occasion on which they were met. He looked upon the large attendance as an indication of the interest they took in the education of the young in the place. It was now his pleasant duty, as Chairman of the School Board, formally to declare this school open for the purposes of public instruction..... *(Taken from a lengthy report)*

*Banffshire Reporter, Saturday, December 8th 1883: -*

**REPORT ON PORTSOY PUBLIC SCHOOL** - The following is the Inspector's Report on the above school, for year to 30th. April: -

The overcrowding in this School is to be remedied immediately by amalgamation with the Female School under the same roof, a step of which I highly approve.

Results show administrative capacity, untiring energy, and corresponding success. Order, tone, and drill are excellent. Battalion drill is wonderfully good, while manual

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

exercises were performed with precision. The weak points are the reading and composition of the fifth standard and the writing and dictation of the fourth standard. Elsewhere the work is satisfactory and thorough. Intelligence has been greatly raised, and is very good throughout, except in the fifth standard, where more concentration and better methods of teaching are required. Grammar successful. Writing must be improved all over the school. Slate-writing of the first and third standards good. The third standard made an admirable appearance, and passed without an approach to a failure. Intelligence excellent ; grammar would have done credit to a fourth standard. Almost all the children in this standard had four sums right. History of the fourth very good ; of the fifth and sixth, excellent. Geography very good ; very fair in the sixth. The infants are well advanced in the various branches. A class of sixteen performed all the work of the first standard with distinct credit. Arithmetic and intelligence well taught. Singing of the infants flat, and out of tune ; fair in Junior Department ; good in Senior. Sewing good. Special subjects fair. Latin accurate. One boy read passages from Homer, Xenophon, and Virgil with credit. Mathematics good.

**8th. February 1885** - *From the book "Aberdeen Journal. 1908 Notes and Queries" Page 15*  
:-

**DEATH OF MARY PIRIE, SCHOOLMISTRESS AND AUTHORESS** - Through the courtesy of Rev. A.M. Gibson and Rev. Alexander Perry, Portsoy, we are enabled to furnish the following particulars :- Mary Pirie, daughter of Mr. William Pirie, carpet manufacturer, Aberdeen was born at Cotton Lodge there, in 1821. While resident at Portsoy she received pupils, and formed a small private school. Her success led to the erection of the Durn Road school (it was closed about two months ago) but ill-health prevented her ever teaching in it. Although "Familiar Teaching on Natural History," and "Flowers, Grasses and Shrubs" are the only works which Miss Pirie published in book form, she wrote a series of weekly notes on natural history, botany, etc for the columns of the "Banffshire Reporter" a paper published in Portsoy. She died in the house in North High Street, Portsoy which is now occupied as a Temperance Hotel on 8th. February 1885, aged 64 years.

*Banffshire Reporter, February 14th 1885 :-*

**DEATH OF MISS MARY PIRIE** - Our obituary today contains the name of a lady who was much respected, and while her strength remained, was very active in all good works in Portsoy. Miss Mary Pirie was the last member of a large family that came here about 45 years ago and have died out gradually without leaving any representatives. The deceased was highly educated, and at one time conducted a ladies' school in Old Cullen Street, which had however to be given up by her on account of ill health.

In earlier years she took much interest in natural history, the outcome of which may be seen in her two books, entitled "Flowers, Grasses and Shrubs" and "Pensioners of Air, Earth and Sea, or Familiar Teachings on Natural History." These with many other valuable contributions from her graceful pen, appeared first in our columns.

*Banffshire Reporter, Saturday, September 5th 1885: -*

**RE-OPENING OF DURN ROAD SCHOOL** - It will be seen from the advert that the Durn Road school will be re-opened by Miss Reid, Aird Street, Portsoy.

*Banffshire Reporter, Saturday, September 5th 1885: -*

**NEW SCHOOLROOM** - Advertisement - Miss Cheyne is opening a new schoolroom in Seafield Street Portsoy.

*Banffshire Reporter, Wednesday, January 11th, 1888 : -*

**APPOINTMENT OF J. MCINTOSH WILSON, HEADMASTER** - Mr. J. McIntosh Wilson, a product of St. Andrew University, who came north from Harris Academy, Dundee, was appointed headmaster on 1st. February 1888.

*Note:- He left Portsoy to become an Assistant Inspector of Schools*

*Banffshire Reporter, Wednesday, February 22nd 1888: -*

**LETTER TO THE EDITOR.**

**PORTSOY PUBLIC SCHOOL AND ITS NEW HEADMASTER.**

Sir - Judging from what I hear, if the newly appointed Headmaster is a proficient in anything, it is in the use of the "tag." His application of this instrument of torture, frequently injudicious and unjust, is already causing not only discontent but most righteous indignation on the part of many parents.

Several boys, I understand, have already had to leave the school on the account of usage they received, and I hear that a good few other parents are saying that they also will have to withdraw their children if the Headmaster continues his present cruel practices. It is not only that physical pain is inflicted, but mental incapacity is actually induced. Boys going to school with their lessons thoroughly prepared are, through fear, rendered quite unfit to repeat what, if treated with kindness and consideration, they would find no difficulty in going through satisfactorily. Fancy a class called up to be examined, each one trembling with abject fear. How is it possible, under such conditions, that pupils can avoid making mistakes or forgetting what they may have previously committed to memory.

Such nevertheless is the actual state of matters in the class Mr. Wilson specially teaches, and where, instead of a kindly and considerate manner, giving a slight hint to a diffident pupil when a momentary slip of memory occurs, he will give him no assistance, but down upon them with the leather, thereby driving everything out of their heads for the time being. Such treatment not only tends to retard education but is most hurtful, and in the case of a nervous child is positively dangerous.

Is this the way to increase the efficiency and popularity of our school, and to attract pupils to it, which latter, by the way was one of the beneficial results we were led to expect would be gained by a change of master. If formerly it was a standing complaint that advanced pupils had to go to other schools for lack of attention on the part of the late Headmaster, it will surely be a most humiliating thing for the Board to know that they have appointed a man who will drive away more and more.

If Mr. Wilson wishes to be retained in his present position he had better at once adopt a different course of action. I think he might at least endeavour to make himself acquainted with the temperaments, dispositions, and habits of the boys that he has to deal with before putting in force indiscriminately into his beloved practice.

The School Board meantime will do well to see to it that the present state of matters be altered before more damage is done. If not, the date of election is not far off, thank goodness, when the aggrieved will have the remedy in their own hands.

JUSTITIA

*Note :- Mr. Wilson left Portsoy to become an Assistant Inspector of Schools*

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

**1893** *From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay published 1925: -*

**APPOINTMENT OF W. MCLEAN, HEADMASTER** - Mr. W. McLean, appointed on 23rd. January 1893, held the appointment of Headmaster of Portsoy, until his retirement from active work at Easter 1924. During that long tenure of office he performed a great deal of admirable work and he had the satisfaction of leaving every department of the school in probably as high a state of efficiency as it had been all its history. Born at Fochabers where he had the fine advantage of Milne's Institution at hand, Mr. Mclean graduated at Aberdeen in 1882 with Honours in Classics. He assisted Mr. Smith at Fochabers for over a year and in October 1883 went to the school of Crathie as headmaster. He became head of the school of New Byth in May 1889, at a time when scholastic affairs were in a turmoil and in January 1893 he began his long spell of highly capable and well directed work at Portsoy.

**1907** *From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay published in 1925: -*

### **DURN ROAD AND OTHER SCHOOLS CLOSED.**

Until a comparatively recent date there was also in existence in Portsoy the Durn School, conducted under a board of Managers, of which the late Provost Clark, was for long Chairman. The building is still in existence beside the bowling green, and was converted into a bungalow by one of the wood-cutting companies. It was, for long, under the charge of Miss Watson, and it was also for many years conducted by Miss Mary Liddell, and when she gave up work in 1909 the school was closed and the pupils joined the public school.

Other schools are recalled that have shared the same fate, some of them dames' schools of the type familiar to the pre-Education Act era, and which the operation of that Act, in its universal sweep, tended to destroy.

In Seafield Street Mrs. Cheyne conducted a most successful girls' school in which a speciality was made of such subjects as drawing and music and finer arts. Mrs. Cheyne herself was an accomplished woman, and over a number of years many pupils attended her establishment. A subscription school was carried on by Mr. Brown where the Institute now is. At this school another teacher was Mr. John Young, son of Mr. Robert Young, who for a number of years walked the post between Portsoy and Banff; he ultimately went to India as a missionary. Miss Bremner had a school in Cullen Road and Miss Gregor had a school in Church St.

Another of these adventure schools was conducted for long by Mr. William Watson, who died in 1914 aged 67. He was a native of Portsoy, son of Mr. William Watson, blacksmith, Roseacre Street. He had his education at the school which was carried on in Church Street, on the site where the Institute Street now stands., then under Mr. Philip. At the age of 20 (1867!) he began teaching on his own account in a school in the Seatown, where he did excellent work in the elementary education of the young, mostly fisher children, of whom he gathered a very considerable company. He continued until 1886 when his school was closed and he was taken into the service of the Fordyce School Board, teaching in Portsoy school from that time until his retirement at the end of 1913.

*Banffshire Reporter, January 15th. 1908 Page 2 Col 6 :-*

**DEATH OF MISS LIDDELL** - Obituary and report on funeral.

**1918** Fordyce School Board replaced by Banffshire Education Authority.

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, December 25th. 1923:-*

**PORTSOY SCHOOL - A FRESH EXTENSION** - A notable advancement in the educational interests of Portsoy was marked on Friday, when there was opened with a pleasant

## History of Portsoy - The Schools and Their Schoolmasters.

little public ceremony the new wing which has been added to the school, consisting of rooms for instruction in practical subjects. The opening ceremony was performed by the Rev. Matthew Stewart, Chairman of the Educational Authority. The extension is a substantial modern structure, airy, well lighted and heated, and beautifully finished interiorly. It consists of two large rooms and a store-room. One of the rooms is for teaching woodwork and elementary science, and is fitted up with modern appliances for both subjects. The other large room is provided for the instruction of girls in cookery and laundry work and is fitted with a hot and cold water system, boiler, range and up-to-date conveniences. The cost of the building was over £1000.

From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay published in 1925: -

**APPOINTMENT OF JOHN GEMMELL, HEADMASTER** - Mr. John J. Gemmell succeeded Mr. McLean as Headmaster. A graduate of Glasgow University with Honours in Classics, he was for a time, assistant mathematical and science teacher in Dunfermline High School and afterwards principal teacher of these subjects at Linlithgow Academy. At Keith he occupied the position of mathematical and science master and did excellent organising work as headmaster of the continuation classes there. From there he came to Portsoy.

*From the book "Banffshire Schools" by William Barclay published in 1925: -*

**APPOINTMENT OF JAMES JOHNSTON, HEADMASTER** - Mr. James C. Johnston, Headmaster, Clochan, succeeded Mr. Gemmill as headmaster at Portsoy. Mr. Johnstone was educated at Turriff school, of which he was dux in in 1905, and in which he was a pupil teacher 1905-07. He graduated at Aberdeen in 1911, and after a short time as assistant at Comrie, he was from November 1911 to February 1914 supplementary class teacher at Buckie. From March 1914 to December 1915 he was first assistant at Glengarnock, Ayrshire ; from January 1916 he was first assistant at the Central School at Kilbirnie, in the same county, until August 1917 when he was appointed Headmaster at Clochan.

*Banffshire Journal, September 9th. 1935: -*

**PORTSOY SCHOOL ALTERATIONS** - The school holidays are over and Tuesday saw a resumption of work. Owing to the alterations being carried out on the school buildings the greater number of class-rooms are unfit for use and recourse has been had to different halls in the town to accommodate the displaced classes. Those in use are the Town Hall, the Christian Institute Hall and the Salvation Army Hall.

*Banffshire Journal, Tuesday, September 21st 1943: -*

**LATE CANON SLORACH** - Canon James Slorach, who passed away at Elgin, aged 73, was a native of Huntly, and was educated at Blairs College, Aberdeen., and at the Scots College, Valladolid, where he became a lover of Spain and of its sonorous language. He was ordained at Aberdeen in 1894. He ministered in Orkney and Shetland and for 14 years he was in Portsoy where he took a warm interest in local affairs and as a member of the School Board became associated with some of the recurring disputes that arose over Fordyce Academy; one of his closest friends there was the late Mr. John E. Sutherland, M.P. Since 1916 he had been at Elgin, interesting himself in schemes for the public welfare and becoming a popular townsman.