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"The Perfect Place"

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Abstract:

This article was written by Áine Hyland for inclusion in the *Ogham Magazine* in 1998 to celebrate the centenary of the rebuilding of Ballindangan N.S. Co. Cork in 1896. Áine's husband, Bill Hyland, had attended the school in the 1930s and his mother, Catherine Hyland (née Lanigan) taught in the school from 1910 to the mid-1930s. The article is based on the recollections of Catherine and Bill Hyland as conveyed to the author.

Áine Hyland traces the life and times of her mother-in-law, Catherine Hyland née Lanigan, who lived and taught in Ballindangan for over thirty years.

The Perfect Place

I am very pleased to contribute to this magazine produced to celebrate the centenary of the rebuilding of Ballindangan NS in 1896. I have no direct contact with Ballindangan but my late husband, Bill Hyland, spent his childhood years there and went to Ballindangan NS from 1929 to the mid-1930s. His mother Catherine Hyland (nee Lanigan) taught in the boys school from 1910 to the early 1940s and this article is about her years there as she talked about them to me before she died in 1981.

Catherine Lanigan was born in Cork in 1890. She was the youngest of seven children and her parents originally came from Waterford. Her father was in the building trade. The year after her birth her father died, as a result of an accident at work. Her mother appears to have been in ill health because shortly after her father's death, Catherine was taken to Tramore by her two aunts who had a shop there. Her mother died in Cork a few years later. She spent her childhood years in Tramore and seems to have led a very sheltered existence there. Her aunts were comfortably off and looked after her well but they were very strict with her and didn't allow her to mix very much with the local children. She was sent to the Sacred Heart of Mary Secondary School in Ferrybank, Waterford where she spent at least six years as a boarder. Around 1907, she went to England to spend a year in another convent school also run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary and there she trained as a monitress. When she returned to Ireland, she went briefly to live with her brother Jim in Tramore Villas, South Douglas Road, Cork. (Her brother Jim continued in the building trade after his father's death and built seven houses in Tramore Villas, one for each of the children. He afterwards became CEO of Waterford Technical Instruction Committee.)



Catherine Lanigan and JJ Hyland on their marriage in 1924.

In 1910, Catherine Lanigan saw an advertisement in the newspaper for the post of junior assistant mistress in Ballindangan Boys NS. This grade of teacher had been created some years earlier to provide women teachers for boys schools which were run by a male teacher. Following the introduction of the revised programme of 1900 (a new curriculum) it had been decided that small boys should be taught by women teachers and that the principles of kindergarten should be provided in junior classes of national schools. Catherine Lanigan was eminently suitable for this appointment as she had completed a course in kindergarten when she was in the finishing school in England. However, this qualification does not appear to have been formally recognised in Ireland because junior assistant mistresses were regarded as unqualified teachers and were never eligible for the same level of salary as qualified national teachers.

Her description of her first introduction to Ballindangan is interesting. She arrived with her brother Jim by train from Cork and was met at the station in Ballindangan by the Master, a Mr. Murphy. He brought her up the village to meet someone else (I can't remember now who it was) but that somebody said "she'll do" and the appointment was confirmed. Her brother returned to Cork on the next train and she was left alone in Ballindangan. She didn't meet the Parish Priest who was manager of the school until after she had taken up the appointment in the school. The next question to be resolved was where she would stay. Mr. Murphy brought her up to Mrs. Roche who had a small shop in the village and he asked her to provide accommodation for Miss Lanigan. Initially Mrs. Roche did not seem to be too enthusiastic and suggested a rent which Mr. Murphy felt was exorbitant. "You wouldn't pay that in Dublin", he said. Mrs. Roche said, "Leave her with me and we'll work it out," and to quote my mother-in-law, "She never charged me a penny from that day to this". Catherine Lanigan and Maryanne Roche became firm friends and Catherine Lanigan lived with Maryanne Roche until Mrs. Roche died on 25th April, 1937. In her will, the original of which I still have, Maryanne Roche left virtually all her worldly goods including her house to Catherine Lanigan (who by then was married and had four children).

Life in Ballindangan was very different to the previous twenty years for Catherine Lanigan. She had always been a town person, she had never before lived in a small village. It must have been difficult for her to settle. One episode from her early years in Ballindangan indicate the kinds of problems she faced because of not being used to living in the country. She told me about this episode on more than one occasion and sixty years

on it still upset her. She used to hang her underwear out to dry on the clothesline at the side of Mrs. Roches' house and one day some local person complained her to the Parish Priest for causing scandal by hanging out her underwear in full view of the public road. The Parish Priest denounced her from the pulpit the following Sunday for this action. She was very upset about this but she was a very strong minded woman and was not someone to accept such a reprimand lightly. She called to see him in the priest's house and asked for an apology for what he had said. He refused to apologise whereupon she set off to visit the Bishop of Cloyne to lodge her complaint in person. The Bishop of Cloyne accepted her point and insisted that the Parish Priest apologise publicly from the pulpit for what he had said. I'm sure that this did not make for good relations between herself and the Parish Priest subsequently but this was not the kind of thing that would worry Catherine Lanigan.

She was happy teaching in Ballindangan. She loved the kindergarten programme and she often sang for me the songs which she taught the children as they played with the kindergarten gifts and occupations. Quite early on she became interested in the Irish language and attended classes run by the Gaelic League. She also visited the Gaeltacht in the late years of the second decade of the century so that when Irish became a compulsory subject after independence in 1922 it was no problem to her. She was already a fluent Irish speaker and seems to have embraced the first national programme of 1922 (the new curriculum introduced by the Free State Government) without any difficulty.



Una Hennessy, Catherine Lanigan and Mary Boland (seated) were all on the staff of Ballindangan National Schools when this picture was taken in 1920.

In 1924 she married J. J. Hyland - a teacher of commercial subjects, shorthand and typewriting with Co. Cork VEC. Some priest who was a friend of hers had been encouraging her for some time to look around for a suitable man and she met J.J. at a tennis hop in Mitchelstown. Very unusually for her day, she insisted that he sign a pre-marriage agreement, guaranteeing that he would never ask her to give up her job. She also asked him to promise to live in Ballindangan and not to ask her to move to Mitchelstown. Mrs. Roche seems to have played some part in this arrangement because part of the agreement was that Mrs. Roche would buy a car for J.J. so that he could drive from Ballindangan in and out to Mitchelstown. As a result, Ballindangan saw its first Model T Ford car in 1924 when they got married. A year later their first son, my husband Bill, was born. Unusually, he was not born at home, but was born in a Nursing Home on the South Mall in Cork. There was no such thing as maternity leave for teachers in those days - Mrs. Hyland worked to within a few days of the birth and returned to school as soon as she could after her children were born. The marriage ban for primary teachers did not come into existence until the 1930s so in fact, Mrs. Hyland was able to have her wish and continued to teach until she reached the age of 65. Her four children were born within six years, two sons and two daughters. They all attended Ballindangan NS, at least in their early years. As far as I know, the boys were sent into the Christian Brothers in Mitchelstown for 5th and 6th class.

In her later years, Mrs. Hyland spoke affectionately of the young boys whom she taught. She loved preparing them for their First Communion and made sure they knew their prayers and the answers to their catechism questions. I suspect she was a strict disciplinarian. She often described to me how her discipline was severely disrupted when her first son Bill started school and wouldn't stand in line with the other children. In desperation she would send him down to Mrs. Ryall for a slice of bread and jam to get him out of the way so that she could teach her little boys in the way she wanted. Her great ambition was that some of the boys she taught would become priests. She kept some letters written to her by some of these boys as they finished in second class and were preparing to move up to the Master in third class. These letters invariably said that they would continue to be good boys, pray for Mrs. Hyland and "Please God I will be a priest when I grow up". I have a letter to her dated 1948 from a Jesuit, P.C. Barry, who was ordained that year. In his letter he says: "You will have to cast your thoughts away back to 1925 or earlier in Ballindangan to remember me. However, I could not let this occasion slip by (his ordination) without dropping my first teacher a line. I was ordained on 28 July here in Milltown Park and I ask you to join with me in thanking God for this his great goodness to me". He goes on to say: "I remember pretty distinctly my school days in Ballindangan. One thing I can recall is being badly scolded for my dreadful handwriting and for my crowbar style of holding a pen! However, most of my recollections are more pleasant".

Mrs. Hyland's happy years in Ballindangan Boys NS came to an end around 1941. It seems that the enrolment figures at the school were falling and that the boys' and girls' schools had to be amalgamated. As a result there was no longer a post for Mrs. Hyland. She was placed on the redeployment panel and had to accept a job in Ballyvoneir, near Doneraile, a long distance away.

It must have been a difficult decision for the family, although she never talked about it in that way. This was the Emergency - petrol was scarce, rubber for car tyres was non-existent and most cars had to be taken off the road. By this stage, her husband was teaching in Fermoy Vocational School and most of the children were at secondary school in Fermoy. It was decided that Mr. Hyland and the children should move to Fermoy where they rented a wing of Fermoy House. Mrs. Hyland "commuted" to Ballyvoneir i.e. she lived in digs in Ballyvoneir Monday to Friday and returned home to Fermoy at the weekends. Her sister Alice moved into the home in Fermoy to look after the children. Mrs. Hyland was over 50 years of age at the time and such a move was not easy. However, as some of her neighbours in Ballindangan said: "She has to do it for the pension" - indeed it was a good thing she did, she drew the pension for over 25 years after her retirement until her death at the age of 91.

Shortly after my marriage in the mid-60s Bill brought me to visit Ballindangan. He loved the village where he grew up. He brought me to see the little stream where they fished for minnows and created dams during the endless summer days. I think he was surprised at how short the distances were compared to what he remembered. He thought it was a long walk from Mrs. Roche's up to the school, but of course it was only about a hundred yards. The cross roads in his memory was miles away but again, it was only a short distance in reality. In the months before he died, when he knew his days were numbered, he visited Ballindangan on a few occasions. His sister and brother came from America to visit him; he brought them to Ballindangan and they remembered old days. His nephew came from New York - he also had to be brought to see Ballindangan where his ancestors came from. Bill was very proud of Ballindangan and saw it as the perfect place to grow up.

Professor Áine Hyland holds the chair of Education in University College, Cork. Her late husband, Bill, a statistician, was a career public servant of international standing.

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