

P. J. Dowling – Educationalist & Author

By Jim Walsh

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P. J. Dowling

PATRICK John Dowling was born in Slieverue in 1888. Both his parents were teachers in the local National Schools. William was Principal of the Boys School and Catherine (nee Hackett) was Principal of the Girls School. Catherine Dowling was daughter of Patrick Hackett who had been appointed Principal of Slieverue Boys National School in 1851. so P. J. came from two generations of teachers in this parish.

He was one of a family of five, three boys and two girls. His brothers were Ned, who became a priest, and Thomas who died when a young man. Thomas was also studying for the priesthood. His sisters were Mary and Julia (Babs). Mary trained to be a teacher, became Mrs. Brennan and was later Principal of the Girls School - the third generation of teachers to work in the parish schools. Julia remained unmarried. She lived and died in Slieverue.

P. J. was the only member of his family who was not sent to boarding school. He went to Waterpark School and often expressed satisfaction that he was able to grow up 'full time' in Slieverue with his neighbours and friends. Some of his own family recall hearing stories of his escapades with his peers in the Slieverue of circa 1900.

He went to University College, Dublin where he obtained a degree in Chemistry. He then returned to Waterpark as a teacher for a period and later got a post in the Vincentian College at Castleknock, Co. Kildare. From here he studied for his M. A. at U. C. D. and later started work on a thesis for his Ph. D. In 1924 he went to England to teach at St. Mary's College of Education, again run by the Vincentians, at Hammersmith. Shortly afterwards the College moved to Strawberry Hill where P. J. lectured in the History of Education and supervised teaching practice.

Meanwhile, he continued his thesis on 'The Hedge Schools of Ireland' for which he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.). This work was published in 1935 and was highly acclaimed by scholars. It was reprinted in 1968.

In 1971 he had published 'A History of Irish Education'. This volume was also highly rated and is still quoted by writers on the subject. He continued to write for various publications and periodicals including 'The Tablet'. With the help of his brother Fr. Ned he researched and wrote an unpublished history of St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny.

He was, for a time, lecturer in Education at the University of London Institute of Education and was a member of many committees dealing with education matters.

Aside from schools and teaching, he was secretary for a period, of the Irish Literary Society in London.

Patrick John Dowling died in 1972, aged 84 years.