

The First Girls To Enter Wesley College As Pupils In 1911. Ernest Armitage

The Wesleyan Connexional School was founded in 1845 by the Methodist Church in Ireland in St Stephen's Green South, Dublin, for the education of boys either as day or boarding pupils. In 1879 the College moved into new buildings close by and the institution was renamed Wesley college. In 1868 Dr Crook, then headmaster of the Wesleyan Connexional School, was appointed the first headmaster of her sister school, Methodist College Belfast and in the next year girls were admitted to that College. Very few second level schools in Ireland had attempted co-education and this experiment was carefully watched by Thomas. J. Irwin, vice principal and, from 1910, principal of Wesley college. In June 1911 the Wesley College Trustees received the permission of the Conference of the Methodist church to admit girls. Florence Boles nee Forsythe claimed to be the first girl enrolled but she did not enter the College until 1912.

There were 175 boys on the roll in 1911. Twenty one girls arrived in September, six of them were boarders and were joined by others as the long term progressed. The boarders were accommodated in Epworth House, a former hostel for young Methodist business men, which had ceased to serve its purposes, located on the west side of St Stephen's Green, a few minutes walk from the College entrance. A second house was later purchased and the first and second floors of a third house were rented as the number of girls increased. Miss Molyneaux, B.A. was in charge in 1911.

What was Wesley College like for those first girls? Miss N. Alexander who taught English and was in charge of Epworth House from 1915 recalled: "That old house had on the lower floors large rooms which served as dining room, studies and sitting rooms, but on the upper floors, what a difference! There one found a labyrinth of long passages, steep flights of stairs, and small bedrooms... That part of the house always made me think of rabbit warren." She recalled the line of girls going to the College every day, 'in those long, wide skirts, in blouses of every colour under the sun, and with wide-brimmed hats that were so often carried off by the wind."

The College was very much a male world. For some years the majority of pupils in any class was boys. Not surprisingly as the number of girls in the college increased so did the number of boys—co-education was successful from a business point of view as well as from an educational point of view. In 1911/12 there were 22 male teachers and 6 female teachers including part-timers. The curriculum was organized into four 'schools': Preparatory, Intermediate (Junior Grade, Middle Grade and Senior Grade), Commercial, Civil Service. The subjects included Holy Scripture, Greek, Latin, English, French, German, Mathematics, Experimental Science, Drawing, Shorthand, Piano, Organ, Choir, Elocution, Carpentry, Gymnastics. For about 50 years the choice of subjects offered a pupil favoured the boys rather than the girls. Games included rugby, cricket and handball for the boys. By 1912 the girls had a hockey team. Boys were addressed by their surname while the girls had their surname prefixed by 'Miss'. Co-education involved boys and girls in the same classroom, but outside class times they were carefully segregated. Nevertheless the girls soon made their mark: winning subjects prizes, prizes for Lady-like Deportment, Intermediate certificates and cash awards, achieving high places in the results for the whole of Ireland, matriculating in the universities and graduating with honours and prizes.

For this period the College archives preserve very limited information: ledgers with pupil accounts, rolls, class and team photographs –often without names—and the College Quarterly, a mainly literary magazine which was normally published three times a year but new items unfortunately were comparatively rare. The records show surnames with initials so it is often

difficult to distinguish boys from girls and when girls changed their names on marriage the researcher's task becomes even more difficult. For these and other reasons this researcher has failed to track down more than the barest details for almost half of the girls who entered Wesley College in September 1911. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of many people including Mr Peter Lydon, Wesley college's archivist, and Revd Robin Roddie, archivist for the Methodist Historical Society of Ireland. If any reader can add to the following stories or offer corrections please contact the Wesley college Archivist at Wesley college, Dublin 16, Telephone: 01-2987066 or E-mail peterlydon@wesleycollege.ie

Amongst the first girls in Wesley College were the three daughters of **Mr William Arthur Storey**, himself a former resident pupil and the son of a Methodist minister, Revd John Charles Storey. William taught in Methodist College Belfast (1884-88), was Principal of Mardyke Intermediate School, Skibbereen, Co. Cork, and was for a time a resident master in Wesley College teaching Mathematics and Experimental Science (1905-29).

Irene Frances Storey (day pupil 1911-15) of 28 Lower Beechwood Avenue Dublin, was born in Skibbereen in 1897 and died in 1982. Irene entered the Junior Certificate, Grade A class and was awarded a prize for 3s. 6d for English. She obtained a distinction in the Intermediate Certificate examination, a £3 prize in Mathematics and £2 in Modern Languages. She trained as a pharmacist and had her own pharmacy in Morehampton Road, Dublin.

Myra Winnifred Storey (day pupil 1911-15) of 28 Lower Beechwood Avenue, Dublin, was born in Skibbereen in 1898 and died in 1986. Myra entered Preparatory Grade A class. She later trained as a nurse in Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, Grand Canal Street, Dublin. She offered her services to the Methodist Missionary Society and after training in the Wesley Deaconess College in England she served in The Gambia (West Africa), transferring to government service in Nigeria in 1937. She retired in 1953.

Edith Lilian Storey (day pupil 1911-21) was born in Skibbereen in 1902 and died in 1991. The Intermediate Education Board awarded her certificates – Junior Grade in 1918, Middle Grade in 1920 and Senior Grade in 1921. She played on hockey teams, was awarded a prize in Holy Scripture) and obtained the Trinity College of Music, London, Certificate in piano in 1921. Edith entered Trinity College Dublin, studied for a year in France (1922 – 1923), was awarded the H.H. Stewart Literary Scholarship and graduated Moderatorship B.A. in French and English Literature. She was awarded her H.Dip. Ed. from TCD in 1927 and her Teaching Certificate from Alexandra College 1928. She obtained a TCD Diploma in Social Studies in 1935 and qualified as a Hospital Almoner from the Institute of Hospital Almoners (London) in 1937, working while training in St Thomas' Hospital, London, and the Adelaide Hospital Dublin. She was employed as an Assistant Almoner in Rotunda Hospital, Dublin (1937) and Almoner in the Royal City of Dublin Hospital, Baggot Street (1939). She retired in 1975.

Mr David Ludlow of 138 St Catherine's Terrace, South Circular Road, Dublin, was the father of a distinguished Methodist family of nine children, of whom seven were pupils in Wesley College: Ernest (1904-07), Jack (1904-07), David Hall (1911-16) later ordained Methodist minister, Elsie Maud (1911-14), Hilda J. (1911-14), Nelson R. (1915-21) later an ordained Methodist minister, Edith I. S. (1925-26) (Mrs Siviter) who organised a junior school in Brighton Road, Dublin.

Hilda J. Ludlow was born in 1886 and died in _____. She was a day pupil in Wesley College (1911-14). She was awarded a prize of 2s.6d for music and a medal in the Hibernian Band of Hope competition. She married Jack Forster and they had a daughter Doris who married Garry

Coote. Her grand-children were Jennifer and David. Hilda published a book of verses (1940) and four inspirational Christian books (1972-80).

Elsie Maud Ludlow was born in 1898 and died in 1997. She was a day pupil (1911-14). She was awarded a prize of 2s.6d. for English. She trained in the Adelaide and Rotunda hospitals and secured her SRN and SCM qualifications. Elsie offered her services to the Methodist Missionary Society and served as Sister and Matron in the Wesley Guild Hospital, Ilesha, Nigeria. 1929-60. She was awarded the MBE for her outstanding service to others. During her long retirement in Dublin she was a very active member of Rathgar Methodist Church.

Mr J.R. Bamford, a Presbyterian of 66 Grosvenor Square, Rathmines, Dublin, sent his daughter, **Isobel Eithne Bamford** to Wesley as a day girl (1911-20). She was awarded a general proficiency prize of 4s 0d. Eithne served as superintendent physiotherapist in the City Hospital, Belfast. She was an enthusiastic member of the Northern Ireland branch of the Wesley College Old Girls Union and active in the Girl Guides as district commissioner and Ulster advisor for handicapped Guides. She was vice president of Belfast Trefoil Guild and a foundation member of Belfast Professional Women's Club. She died in the early 1960s.

Norah Gwendoline Donovan (born 1895) was a day girl (1911-13), the daughter of Revd Patrick Ernest Donovan, a Methodist minister of MYross, Elton Park, Sandycove, Co. Dublin. Gwen was an invalid and died in 1960. Her brother Charles, a day boy (1912-21) was awarded a C.B.E. for his services of Director of Education in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

Olive Irene Harpur entered Methodist College, Belfast in 1910 and subsequently transferred as a boarder to Wesley (1911-14). She was the daughter of Revd William Harpur, a Methodist minister of Dalkey House, Dalkey, Dublin. She married William Norman Bladen (Captain North Staffordshire's Regiment) in Kingstown Methodist Church, Co. Dublin, 1918. She died in 1966.

Lilian Adelaide Harris (1895 - ____) was the daughter of a Methodist minister, Revd Alexander and Annie Jane Harris. She was a day girl (1911-12) and lived at 1, Epworth Terrace, North Circular Road, Dublin. She was a music teacher in Enniscorthy where she died.

Jeannette Mary Moore was the daughter of Mr J. Moore of Iona, Sydney Parade, Dublin. She was born in ____ and was a day pupil in Wesley (1911-18) with her brother (1911-14). She was awarded prizes in French, German, Mathematics (2s.6d. each) She emigrated from Southampton to Quebec, Canada in 1923 on board the ship Andania with her mother and sisters. Her married name was Williamson and she was resident in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Province, Canada.

Ethel Patricia Rea was a day girl (1911-17). Her father was Mr John Rea, a member of a distinguished Methodist extended family of 19 Kenilworth Square, Dublin. She married Jack Shaw and had two sons, and after her husband's death, she married Mr Kent.

Olive Muriel Rudd was a boarder in Wesley (1911-12) as were her brothers William John (1909-14) and Samuel Lowe (1912-17). Their father, William, was a corn miller in Roscrea and a member of the Methodist Church. She was awarded a class prize of 10s. 0d and Herman and French prizes of 3s. 6d each. She married Bob Smyth and lived at Stone Hall, near Askeaton, Co. Limerick.

Maud R. Vickery went to Wesley as a boarder girl (1911-13) accompanied by her brother, William (1911-13). She was born in 1896 and died in 1995 in her 99th year. Her parents, George

and Ellen Vickery ran Vickery's Hotel and a posting establishment (coach service) in Bantry, Co. Cork. The family lived in the hotel. Maud trained as a nurse at the Prince of Wales General Hospital, London, and later qualified in midwifery at the Central Midwives' College, West Minster. She served as a general nurse and midwife in Chelsea and Pimlico. Many years later she commented on the culture shock it was for a girl, from a sheltered background, to experience the conditions in the slums of London in the 1920s. Maud retired from nursing in 1933 and returned to Bantry to look after her mother who lived to be 100.

Warner, Esther Mary (1896-1958). She was a boarder girl (1911-14) along with her brothers Thomas (1911-13) and Samuel (1913-17). They were the children of Mr Samuel H. Warner, Barrack Street, Bantry, Co Cork. Esther was a lifetime close friend of Maud Vickery. She married William Warner of Whiddy Island and had a daughter Hester, who lives in Rathnapish, Carlow. Both of Esther's brothers died in the First World War.

Other 1911 girl entrants for whom I have only the minimum of information:

Bastow, Harriet Mary Born in 1895. Day girl 1911-13. Her father: Mr W Bastow, 3 Altona Terrace, N.C.R., Dublin

Colton, Pauline Jane Boarder girl, 1911-13, her father: Mr A. Colton, Charleville, Tullamore, King's Co.

Cuthbert, Eileen Victoria Born in 1897. Day girl 1911-13. Her father: Mr J. Cuthbert, Tempe, Tenenure Park, Dublin. Also in Wesley were her sister Freda (1914-18) and her brother W. Cuthbert (1911-14).

Ffolliott, Arabella Ruby Boarder girl 1911-12. Her father: Mr M. Ffolliott, Headfort Place, Kells, Co. Meath.

Grinson, Janey Born 1896. Day girl 1911-13. Her father: M. Grinson, 42 Synge Street, Dublin.

Meehan, Sarah Day girl 1911-13. Born 1895. Her father: Mr J. Neehan, 2 Upper Gardiner St., Dublin.

Rathborne, Mary Eveline. Day girl (1911-13). Born 1896. Her mother: Mrs Rathborne, Portmellick, St Margarets, Co. Dublin.

Robinson, Dorothy Crawford Born 1897. Day girl (1911-14). Her father: Mr P. Robinson, Dorcas, Cowper Road, Dublin.