



Getting Technical in Portrush

By Frances Wilson

The former Coleraine Technical School on Union Street has recently been demolished along with many years of history but perhaps one of the most important things the 'Tech' did was to act as the catalyst for opening a similar school in Portrush. The Portrush Urban Council looked at the success of the school in Coleraine and how it provided classes in a variety of subjects, for very modest fees, to help young people gain employment. Inspired by this they convened a meeting in December 1909 to discuss opening a similar technical school in Portrush. The cost of providing such a school was to be in two parts - the ratepayers would pay an extra 1d in the £ whilst all other expenses would be met by the County Antrim Joint Technical Instruction Committee. The matter was put to the vote but, unfortunately, there was not a majority to carry it.

A second meeting was held several months later during which time the subject of technical education had been a much debated theme. The matter of fees was discussed and 5s was quoted as the norm for a course of two or three subjects. Scholarships would be available for those students unable to meet the cost of the fees. The people of Portrush were reminded that the increase in their rates would provide assistance to local young people in gaining employment. This time the vote was carried and in June 1910 the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction approved a technical school for the Portrush Urban District under the control of Ballymoney Technical School.

By October of that year the Technical School was up and running in premises on Kerr Street and advertising a wide variety of classes.

**County Antrim Joint Technical
Instruction Committee**

PORTRUSH TECHNICAL SCHOOL

**(Principal - R. Gordon Blaine, M.E.,
Assoc. M. Inst. C.C., etc.)**

CLASSES Commence October 17th, and are intended to be held for Carpentry and Joinery, Building and Allied Trades, Cookery and Dressmaking, Freehand and Model Drawing, Shorthand and Typewriting, etc., also Elementary Classes in Mathematics and English Composition.

The Principal will attend and Enrol Students, at the Minor Town Hall, Portrush on October 14th and 15th, from 4 to 6 and 7 to 9 p.m.

Prospectus may be obtained from Mr. M'Callum, Main Street, Portrush.

Coleraine Chronicle 8 October 1910

The School had a successful start and at the prize-giving ceremony in the Town Hall in November 1912 the Principal, Mr Gordon Blaine, said he was pleased with the standard of work and commitment shown by the students. Those sitting external examinations had done very well and the



results were a credit for such a small school. He also commented that while many technical schools were poorly housed he felt Portrush was the worst in this respect and hoped the matter would soon be rectified.

By 1927 the premises on Kerr Street could no longer cope with the numbers wanting to enrol. Ninety-two students were on the register studying a variety of subjects over three years although there were fewer students in the second and third years.



Former Technical School, Dunluce Avenue. Currently the building is derelict.

The Committee of Technical Education discussed the need for a new building and it was agreed to instruct an architect to submit plans for a building costing no more than £3,000.

The Earl of Antrim was approached to provide a suitable plot for lease. Problems with the design of the two-storey building as well as the lease delayed the procedure but by 1930 a tender was accepted and the new Technical School was constructed in Dunluce Avenue.

A wide variety of classes continued to be offered in the new building and displays of students' work were frequently held there and reported on as in this example from June 1933 in the Ballymoney Free Press -

"An interesting and clever display of woodwork was on view at the Technical School, Portrush, on Monday afternoon, when an exhibition of work done during the session by students of the woodwork classes was held. The exhibits included china cabinets, wardrobes, writing desks, and hall-stands, which were the work of second and third year students, as well as various articles by first year students. All the work reflected very creditably not only on the students, but also on Mr. J. H. McCann, the capable instructor."

During the 1930s the Ulster Tourist Development Association decided that instruction in small hotel management should take place in technical schools and Portrush Technical School started running classes entitled 'Small Hotel and Boarding House Management'. These proved so popular that there was insufficient space for all those who wished to attend. After the Second World War there was a major change in thinking and the hotel and tourist trade wanted a training establishment specifically designed to provide it with skilled staff.

At a meeting in March 1950 the North Antrim Technical Education Committee agreed that Portrush would provide the best location for this establishment. An advisory committee was swiftly set up comprising representatives from the local tourism industry as well as the local education authorities and by July of that year a new full-time two-year course in Hotel and Catering was advertised in the Newsletter. It was open to both boys and girls over the age of 15 and scholarships would be



available to help with the payment of fees. When the course was re-advertised the following year greater details of subjects to be studied were given.

Training for the

HOTEL AND CATERING INDUSTRY

----- PORTRUSH TECHNICAL SCHOOL

PORTRUSH.

A full-time two-year HOTEL and CATERING TRADES COURSE will commence at the Portrush Technical School on 17th September 1951.

Students will receive a thorough training in the fundamental subjects.

Instruction will be given in:-

Cookery.	Calculations for Caterers.
Kitchen Practice & Hygiene.	Counter Service & Waiting.
Catering Commodities.	Housecraft or Services (Gas, Electricity, Water, Sanitation).
French.	
English.	
Hotel Book-keeping and Reception, Shorthand and Typewriting.	

The Portrush Area Committee of the Northern Ireland Hotels' and Restaurants' Association have guaranteed remuneration above the normal for the district to students who qualify for the Course Certificate.

ENROL NOW

SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS at the above Course will gain recognised qualifications which will assist them in attaining PROFESSIONAL STATUS as members of THE HOTEL AND CATERING INSTITUTE.

Full particulars from the Principal of the School or the Secretary of

THE HOTEL AND CATERING INSTITUTE, 24, Portman Sq., London W.1.

Belfast Newsletter 7 September 1951

The popularity of this course led to problems accommodating all the enrolled students and other establishments in the town were used to deliver classes including the Royal British Legion Clubrooms and the Station Cafe. This piecemeal approach was eventually resolved when the Technical School was extended during the mid 1950s so that hotel and catering subjects could be entirely taught within the same building instead of being spread across the town. The Hotel and



Catering students in Portrush Technical School, June 1952



Waiting-at-table instruction in the Station Cafe, 1953.



Catering College, as it was to be known, was officially opened in May 1957 by Lady Brookeborough, the wife of the Prime Minister.

Over the next 10 years the Hotel and Catering College ran alongside the Technical College which was offering classes such as commercial, joinery and decorating. During the 1960s the demand for the catering courses was such that the joinery and decorating classes were phased out as there was no longer space for their students but even with that the numbers could not be accommodated wholly in the Technical College and Portrush Orange Hall was used for the overflow. The continuing problem of lack of space eventually led to the building of the Hotel and Catering College on Ballywillan Road. This opened in September 1972 and all hotel and catering classes along with the teaching staff were transferred there.



College staff assemble for the last time before moving to the new Hotel and Catering College, 1972.

The Technical College ceased to offer day classes, and remaining commercial students and staff were transferred to Coleraine Technical College. The building continued to be used for evening recreational classes such as woodwork under the auspices of Ballymoney Technical College. It was for many years the town library and subsequently a youth club but now stands derelict - a reminder of what an extra 1d in the £ could provide.



SOURCES

Ballymena Observer 24 November 1912.

Ballymoney Free Press 24 June 1933.

Belfast Newsletter 19 July 1950 and 7 September 1951.

Coleraine Chronicle 8 October 1910.

McKay, Joanne. 2002. *Setting the Standard - a History of the Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College 1950-2002*. University of Ulster.

Northern Constitution 5 October 1912.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mrs Marie McAuley for providing information about her days at the Technical College and for the photograph of the College staff.

Portrush Heritage Group would like to thank Frances for this most interesting contribution to our series of Heritage Newsletters. 3rd April 2021