

## St. Thomas' Secondary School.

"Mum, I can't go to Secondary School in short trousers!" I pleaded to no avail. Off I went to be made fun of for two weeks. In that time I never let up and finally mum gave in and got me a pair of long school trousers.

I went to St. Thomas' Secondary School on the Whiterock Road. I had to get the bus over at Mackies, get off at the top of the Whiterock and walk down the Whiterock to school.

The weather played havoc with us on the Whiterock. Sometimes it was so cold that we slid down the road on our backsides. Most often or not we arrived in school or back home again looking like drowned rats as the rain tore into us. The material in the trousers we wore was terrible once wet. It gave us such a rash on our legs that mum must have gone through jars of vaseline - no Sudocreme then!

My first day in St. Thomas's was a nightmare. Not only was I in short trousers feeling awkward but all us First Years were herded into the Assembly hall to be spoken to by the Headmaster, Sammy McKeown. After his stirring and instantly forgettable talk to us came the calling out of classes. We had all completed an entrance exam for the school many months before. It became quickly obvious to us that the results of that exam were being used to allocate us to classes. "1A" was called and some of my brainy friends got called. "1B" and a lot more friends like Damien McHugh were gone. "1C", now there were few from my primary School, St. Gall's left. "1D" now I knew nobody. After 1F was called and my name still was not there I knew I was in trouble. The guys left were to all extents 'not really interested in school' or as we put it in those times; "knuckle draggers". With each class being called my heart was getting lower and lower. When they started to call out "1H" my poor heart was somewhere near the earth's core. However, when they had finished with 1H there were about six of us still standing there. 1H walked off as they began to give us a right rollicking for not listening for our names closely enough. Two more got quickly allocated but there were still four of us left. Papers were consulted. "What was your name again?" More papers were sent for. Finally a decision was made, "You two in 1A and your two in 1B". I followed along to my new class 1A, a very relieved wee boy.

Years later I sorely regretted not being allocated to 1B. In 1A we studied French and Latin and did not have the opportunity to do Irish, Technical Drawing nor woodwork.

For two years I took off to St. Thomas' every morning until I was expelled! Well, I like to tell people that to shock them. A new school had been built in my own parish of St. Paul's, called, appropriately; St. Paul's Secondary School. Those children in the parish were obliged to move there. So I began in St. Paul's in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year the oldest group in the school.