

## **THE EARLY YEARS**

The Ulster Society came into existence in the Spring of the year 1836 although its origins can be traced to 1831 when the first attempts to educate a number of Belfast's deaf children were made. A room in the Congregational Church building in Donegal Street served as a Classroom, the teacher being a 17 year old lad named George Gordon, whose brother was in charge of the School for the Deaf at Claremont, Dublin, established in 1816.

In 1833 the Belfast School moved to a room in a building in King Street, Belfast. Some of the children then attending came from outside the City. These were lodged in a small dwelling house nearby owned by the person from whom the School room was rented. With the venture still in its infancy the Committee was finding increasing difficulty in attracting sufficient financial support from the public to meet the relatively modest sum necessary for its continuation.

At a meeting on 26 February 1835 called to discuss the closing of the School a conversation arose regarding the admission of blind children. No attempts had hitherto been made in Belfast to provide for the education of these children. The decision was taken to appeal to the public through newspaper advertisements for support for the setting up of a School in Belfast for the Blind and the Deaf. Such was the response to this appeal that a public meeting was held where it was resolved that a building be erected as quickly as possible to serve as a School.

The Belfast Charitable Society made available a site in College Street on which a School was erected at a cost of £800. The new building, completed in 1836, was named "The Ulster Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind" with the Committee and supporting members calling themselves "The Ulster Society for Promoting the Education of the Deaf and the Blind".

Rules and regulations were drawn up to govern the Society's affairs, the first being:

*The objects of this Society shall be to afford to deaf and dumb and to blind children whose parents reside in the Province of Ulster a religious and literary education. Likewise to teach them some useful trade by which they may be able to earn their livelihood.*

The first Annual Report of the new Society spoke warmly of the generosity with which their application for the necessary funds to build and furnish the new Institution was received.

*"Friends of humanity connected with many religious denominations have enabled us to erect buildings containing suitable school rooms, a workshop, a dwelling house for the Master and suitable accommodation for 50 Boarders".*

The Society lost no time in attempting to publicise its work and its needs in every part of Ulster. The Annual Report for 1837 states that deputations were sent to Ballynahinch, Newcastle, Newry, Warrenpoint, Rostrevor, Banbridge, Lurgan, Antrim, Ballymena, Coleraine, Portstewart, Armagh, Monaghan, Cootehill, and Ballybay, for the purpose of establishing auxiliaries. These deputations included both blind and deaf pupils of the Institution who were required to exhibit their scholastic accomplishments at the meetings addressed by the leaders of the deputations. Also as a result of deputations which the Society sent to the different Schools in Belfast, a Juvenile Society was successfully established in October 1836. Just over a year later they were paying for the education and board of 6 pupils at the Institution.

At this time also it was becoming increasingly clear to the Committee that the new buildings at College Street were totally inadequate to deal with the problem of educating and boarding the deaf and blind children of Ulster. Claims for admission had been yearly increasing and at the election of pupils held in 1841 only 3 out of 21 candidates could be admitted. At the Annual Meeting of 30 December 1841 it

was proposed as follows:

*"That this meeting deeply impressed with the propriety and absolute necessity of erecting immediately, on a suitable site, an appropriate building for the religious and literary education of the deaf and dumb and blind poor in Ulster, give their most hearty sanction to the erection and pledge themselves in the strength of Divine Grace to give the Committee now to be appointed every assistance in their power".*

## **THE LISBURN ROAD INSTITUTION**

A subscription list was opened and in a short time nearly £2,000 was subscribed and a suitable site, comprising 5 acres, was secured on the Lisburn Road, about a mile and a half from the centre of the Town and at a rent of £12 per acre. The Sixth Annual Report of the Society for the year 1841, in urging the building of the new Institution, gives figures relating to the numbers of deaf and blind children in the Province of Ulster, in order to strengthen its case. It states:

*"yet it would require that there should be 250 deaf and dumb from Ulster always under process of instruction to overtake the wants of the Province, whereas only 25 from Ulster were in Claremont, Dublin, at the date of their last Report, which, added to the same number in your own Schools, leaves 200 more to be brought into a new Institution".*

Of the blind, the Report noted that 500 of school age could always be under instruction. The one objection, suggested the Report, to the building of a new Institution could only be that their plans were too limited. On 31 August 1843 the foundation stone of the Lisburn Road Institution was laid by the Marquis of Donegal. The plans for the new building were drawn up by the eminent Architect Sir Charles Lanyon and the work was carried out by the Firm of Mr Cranston Gregg at a cost of about £11,500, including the expenses of lighting, furnishing, etc.

The building was designed to accommodate 100 Boarding pupils and included on the ground floor a Committee Room, Sale Room and Museum, a library and private apartments for the Principal, also two large School Rooms separated by a folding door, one for the deaf and one for the blind. The whole of the second story was occupied with dormitories for the pupils containing 100 beds, clothes stores, infirmaries and bedrooms for the assistant teachers. At the rear of the building were the boys' and girls' washrooms and the workshop for teaching trades.

An appendix to the 9th Report of the Society for the year 1845 includes a list of household regulations. Some of those which concerned the pupils of the Institution were as follows:

1. All persons connected with the establishment to rise at six o'clock in the morning throughout the year.
2. Pupils to retire to their dormitories at 8.00 pm
3. Family worship shall be conducted by the Principal in his School Room before all the members of the establishment commencing in the morning at 7 am and in the evening at half-past 7.30 pm
4. School business to commence daily immediately after morning worship and to continue until 9.00 am to be resumed at 10.00 am and continue until 2.00 pm.

5. The bell to ring for pupils to proceed to the Dining Hall at 9.00 am for breakfast, 2.00 pm for dinner and at 7.00 pm for supper. Half an hour is to be allowed for each meal.
6. Hours for play and outdoor exercise to be from 9.30 am until 10.00 am in the morning and from 2.00 pm until 4.00 pm in the afternoon.
7. From 4.00 pm to 7.00 pm. the boys are to be engaged in learning trades and the girls in learning needlework.
8. On Sundays care must be taken that the pupils depart from the Institution at such hour as that they may be in their respective places of worship at least 5 minutes before service commences.
9. Vacation. One month, usually August is allowed, when all the pupils will return to their homes.

Also contained in the Appendix to the 9th Annual Report was a section relating to the Principal's duties, which were given as follows:

1. He shall have the entire direction of the business of the School and superintendence of the children out of School and he shall make no engagements which may interfere with the efficient discharge of these duties.
2. He shall keep a diary of occurrences which shall be submitted to the Committee and present one at the same time from the Matron and one from the Master of the Blind School.

The Committee in framing the rules and regulations for the conduct of their new establishment went to a good deal of trouble to ensure that it should benefit by the experience of kindred institutions in Great Britain, Europe and the United States. A Circular, accompanied by a list of 30 queries, was sent to the managers of the principal institutions for the deaf and for the blind in these lands. From most of these:

*"full and frank replies were promptly received accompanied by drawings, reports and other documents which gave much valuable information".*

The Secretary of the Society had, previous to the setting up of the new Institution, visited similar establishments in the United States and in England. The Committee, after considering the nature of the replies received to the Circulars addressed to the Scottish Institutions, considered that the circumstances in which they were placed would supply the most appropriate experience for their guidance. Accordingly, the Secretary visited in person the institutions for the blind and the deaf and dumb in Glasgow and Edinburgh. From the managers and principals of these:

*"he met with the most friendly reception and the information desirable most readily and frankly afforded".*

The general affairs of the Society were managed by the General Committee consisting of 21 members who met monthly and under whom met a number of sub-committees. Members of committee also had to undertake regular visits to the Institution and provide answers to queries posed to them on a printed form which had to be laid before the Committee at its next monthly meeting.

These queries were as follows:

1. Was the general aspect of the Schools orderly when you came in and were the officers all in their places?
2. Did you examine any of the pupils and were you pleased with the results?
3. As you are expected to visit the Workshops, Gymnasium, Dormitories, Playgrounds, Laundry Store Room etc., at least once in the week say were you satisfied with their cleanliness, order and ventilation.
4. As you are expected to see the pupils at meals at least once in the week say were you satisfied with the quality etc., of their food.

Thus by the mid 1840's the efforts begun some 14 years before which seemed destined to failure in their infancy were being well rewarded as is evidenced by the subscriptions to the Society. During the first 2 years of its existence the income averaged only £36 per year. This soon rose dramatically:

1834 to 1837	£120	p.a. average
1838	£400	
1839	£500	
1840	£600	
1841	£850	
1842	£1,000	
1843	£1,150	
1844	£1,330	
1845	£1,600	

By the end of 1846 there were no less than 98 auxiliaries to the Society in active operation throughout the Province of Ulster. At the close of the same year there were 77 pupils in attendance at the School, an increase of 28 since the opening of the new Institution just over a year earlier.

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Pupils</b>
Deaf and dumb Boarders	52
Deaf and dumb Day Scholars	2
Blind Boarders	21
Deaf and dumb Sabbath Scholar	1
Blind Day Scholar	1

The wide coverage reached by the Society by the end of 1846 in its admission of pupils is borne out by the figures relating to the home counties of these 77 pupils.

<b>Home County</b>	<b>Pupils</b>
Belfast	16
County Derry	15
County Armagh	14
County Down	12
County Antrim	9
County Tyrone	5
County Monaghan	3
County Donegal	2
County Cavan	1

In 12 November 1846 the Rev John Martin, who had been Principal in the old Institution in College Street and had left in 1840 for a similar position in the Claremont Institution, was appointed Principal. He was appointed on the following terms - his salary was to be £150 per year with an allowance of £1 for each boarder pupil, exclusive of private Boarders up to 100. His apartments were to be furnished exclusive of linen, delph, glass and cutlery, and bedrooms for private pupils would be provided, if required, with bedstead mattress, table and chair in each with attendance of a servant, fuel and light. As regards private boarders, Mr Martin was to pay to the Committee 25% of the sum which he might agree to receive for each, it being understood that no private boarders were to be received at a lower annual payment than £30.

The practice of Principals taking in private or parlour boarders was common throughout the Institutions in the British Isles. For many years the Annual Reports of the Ulster Society carried a notice to the effect that the Principal of the Institution was prepared to receive as parlour boarders one or two deaf and dumb children from the higher classes of society. Such pupils, the notice stated, would obtain additional instruction separate accommodation and other advantages.

Within 3 years of the opening of the new Institution the whole of Ireland was ravished by one of the greatest natural disasters of all times - the Irish Potato Famine, though as Cecil Woodham-Smith states in "The Great Hunger" 'exceptions were to be found in Ulster particularly the North-East portion which included Belfast'.

During the period of the famine, however, subscriptions to the Society diminished considerably and the Committee found itself with a Bank Overdraft in 1850 of well over £2,000. In that year there were 71 applications for admission and of these only 13 could be admitted. In an effort to economise the following amended diet was adopted:

Breakfast - Meal 6 oz, buttermilk two-thirds of a pint.

Dinner - Household bread 6 oz, beef 5 oz and its broth.

Supper - Rice 5 oz, sweet milk half a naggan and treacle.

The total cost of this fare was 3.15d per child, representing a saving per pupil per week of 19.91 pence, compared to the previous diet and a total saving yearly for 70 pupils of £212.

## **JOHN KINGHAN**

However, from the early 1850's onwards the Society enjoyed a remarkable change in its fortunes. This change largely coincided with the coming of the Rev John Kinghan to the office of Principal, following upon the Rev John Martin's resignation on 27 May 1853. Though by that time, due to increased returns of money from the auxiliaries, and to the efforts of the ladies attached to the Society who succeeded in raising over £1,000 at a Bazaar in Belfast early in 1853, the Society's bank overdraft had been wiped out. John Kinghan was well known to the Committee. The Annual Report for 1853 says of him:

*"Mr John Kinghan has been very favourably known to your Committee throughout a period of 8 years during which he has been in connection with your Society as Assistant Secretary, teacher of the blind and teacher of the deaf and dumb. In the discharge of the duties of these several offices and on the visitation of your numerous auxiliaries throughout the Province, Mr Kinghan has earned for himself the entire confidence of your Committee and has enjoyed the advantage of the very experience which may all be made subservient to the charity with which he is now so fully identified"*

His election as principal was a unanimous one even though a number of very able men were also candidates for the post, including William Stainer who later was to play a leading part in the organising of the London School Board's classes for the deaf. John Kinghan thus brought with him to his new office a very thorough knowledge of the Society's workings both externally as a money raising body and internally as an Institution for educating the deaf and dumb and the blind. Few Principals of the period could have been better equipped to succeed in their task than he and few Committees were as fortunate in having such a man at their disposal.

The Committee, on account of the increased finances now available, became more concerned with the problem of discovering the number of eligible children in the Province and securing their admission to the Institution before they became over age. It had always been their proudest boast even during the famine years when funds were low that no child had been turned away who, had he or she to wait another year, would have been ineligible due to over age.

By the end of 1846, the first full year of operation of the new Institution, there were 75 pupils on roll, made up of 52 deaf and dumb and 23 blind. During the famine years the average number enrolled was about 60. From 1850 onwards numbers began to rise steadily towards the 100 mark which was reached in 1859 when there were 107 on rolls, made up of 94 deaf and dumb and 13 blind. In 1855, for the first time in their history, the Society was able to record that not one applicant had been refused admission.

Early in 1858 it was decided that additional accommodation would be required to cater for the increased number of pupils expected to arrive after the summer vacation. Room for 40 additional beds was provided at the boys' side of the Institution which had been originally planned to allow of easy and economical extension at a total cost of less than £700, including furnishings. The Committee were also at this period beginning to relax their conditions regarding pupils' age of entry to, and departure from, the Institution. In 1860 it was agreed that 11 pupils whose educational term would normally have expired be retained for a further year. Similarly the following year, on the Principal's recommendation, 22 pupils were retained for a further year.

## **THE ASSISTANT TEACHERS' LOT**

During the 1860's, therefore, numbers climbed steadily towards 150 and the business of procuring suitable assistant teachers began to take up more and more of the Principal's and Committee's time. Assistant teachers were engaged by the Committee, either by personal recommendation by one or more of their own members or through advertisements in the Press. The following advertisement, which appeared in the General Advertiser on 16 February 1855, demonstrates the type of person sought after by the Committee for a post as an assistant teacher:

*"Wanted by the Committee of the Ulster Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind a young man from 16 to 19 years of age of unexceptional character who has received a sound English education and is qualified to be trained as an assistant teacher of the deaf and dumb."*

Successful applicants were required to undergo a 7 year apprenticeship. They were paid at the rate of £15 for the first year with an additional £5 for each succeeding year of service, thus obtaining a wage of £45 on completion of their apprenticeship when they were re-engaged at a salary of £50 per year. As the Institution was residential, assistant teachers, who had of course to live in, were literally on call 24 hours a day. They received free board and lodgings and were also required to spend a good deal of the vacation on deputation to the auxiliaries throughout the Province.

In 1861 the Committee agreed on the desirability of providing some form of inducement to their apprentice assistant teachers to complete their apprentice period. It was agreed that in future all assistant teachers engaged by the Society would leave 20% of their salary to be unpaid each year amounting in 7 years to £42, upon the condition that if the term of 7 years was completed they would receive this sum of £42 and if their duties had been performed to the entire satisfaction of the Committee they would receive a further £8, making it up to £50. That this inducement did not meet with the success expected of it is shown by a paragraph in the Principal's monthly report for March 1870, which read:

*"I have been making enquiries over the three Kingdoms for a suitable assistant in the School for the Deaf and Dumb, but have not yet been able to secure one. I hoped I may succeed before your next meeting."*

In 1874 one of the assistant teachers in the deaf and dumb School, Mr James McKee, having finished his period of apprenticeship was re-engaged on new terms of £60 for the first year with a promise of a yearly increase of £10 for 5 years, provided he agreed by letter to the usual terms, i.e. that his entire time be given to the business of the Society, either in teaching in the School, going on deputations or in attending to such other duties as might be pointed out to him by the Committee or the Principal.

In 1877 Mr George Sherlock, a single assistant teacher in the blind School, asked the Committee for permission to marry and sleep out. The reply stated that the Committee could not sanction any teacher sleeping out of the Institution, but that he would be granted an extra £5 a year to his salary. The following year 4 teachers in the deaf and dumb School wrote letters to the Committee complaining about the quality and quantity of the food provided for them. One of the 4 teachers was the aforementioned Mr James McKee and the Committee resolved, that in order to maintain proper discipline in the Institution, to mark their high disapproval of the conduct of these 4 teachers, and feeling especially that a better example should have been set by Mr McKee, the Senior Assistant, he be given 3 months notice. Such was the lot of the assistant teachers in the Ulster Institute for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind in the second half of the 19th Century.

## **THE POOR LAW ACTS**

One reason for the Ulster Society's improved financial position from the 1850's onwards was the increasing implementation by the Poor Law Guardians of the Poor Law Amendment Act for Ireland (6 & 7, Victoria Chapter 92, Section 14) for the education of the deaf and dumb and the blind. By this Act, which had been in operation from 1843;

Boards of Guardians of any Union in Ulster were empowered to send any destitute poor deaf and dumb or blind child under the age of 18 to any Institution for the maintenance of the deaf and dumb or the blind which might be approved of by the Poor Law Commissioners and the expense of doing so could be paid for out of the rates raised in each particular Union.

Needless to say the Committee of the Ulster Society made efforts to induce Boards of Guardians in Ulster to take advantage of the enactment, but to little avail due mainly to the impoverished state of the country during and after the famine years.

Up until the end of 1866 the Ulster Society were receiving only £12 per annum for one pupil sent by the Guardians of the Newtownards Union. In February 1867, however, the Committee in response to a resolution passed at the Annual General Meeting some 2 months earlier renewed their efforts to procure aid from the Poor Law Guardians. A circular was sent to each of these bodies pointing out the provisions of the Clause in the Poor Law Act relating to the deaf and dumb and the blind, particularly the fact that for any Poor Law Guardian to send a child at their expense to the Institution, it was not necessary for the parents to be inmates of that Union Workhouse. The only qualification necessary was for the parents to show that they could not meet the expense of sending a child to the Institution.

The Committee's efforts met with much success. Their Annual Report for the following year stated that, so far as applications had been made, these had, in general, been favourably entertained. In these cases, once properly understood, the Guardians had been willing to do what they could in response to reasonable claims. A letter written by John Kinghan on 23 November 1870 asking the Committee for a new salary arrangement discloses that £460 per annum was being received by the Ulster Society from the Poor Law Guardians, or in other words, approximately 40 pupils were being sent to the Institution with fees paid for by their respective Boards of Guardians.

In 1872 the Boards of Guardians were asked to pay £15 per year instead of the £12 formerly and this request was agreed to by the majority of the Boards who were already paying the expenses of children sent to the Institution.

In 1876 the Poor Law Rating (Ireland) Act was passed. This Act made it considerably easier for Poor Law Guardians in the poor areas of Ulster to pay the expenses of children sent to the Institution as it stated that in future such expenses would be borne not by the electoral division in which the child resided, but by the whole Union.

The most important source of the Society's income, the remittances from the auxiliaries of whom there were 137 by 1880, had from 1850 averaged approximately £1,200 per annum. Much work had been done by the Committee, the assistant teachers and the Principal to keep the Society's need for donations from this source in the minds of subscribers throughout the Province. This entailed an annual visit to each of the localities served by an auxiliary. The visiting party normally consisted of a Clergyman, an assistant teacher and pupils from the deaf and dumb and the blind schools, who were publicly examined at the meeting organised for the express purpose of allowing the visiting deputation to promote the Society's cause.

From 1850 onwards the Society frequently received legacies, both large and small, from deceased contributors to their funds. These monies, which were largely invested in United States Government Bonds and United States Railway Companies, amounted in 1878 to the grand sum of £11,000. Thus when the Endowed School's Commission came to Belfast in 1886 to enquire into the funds and management of the Ulster Society's Schools for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind they found the Society settled firmly on a secure financial foundation.

The Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act of 1885 was brought into operation because the Government wished to impose some reasonable control over the use of educational endowments and the 1885 Act empowered it to do so. It was a wise and reasonable piece of legislation in which an anxiety was shown to give as wide a freedom as possible to those who were already in control of Schools. It was also designed to avoid undue interference with established rights and vested interests and to ensure that any organisation necessary should not violate the spirit of the founders' intentions. Any existing Governing Body was at liberty to submit to the Commissioners appointed under the Act a scheme of organisation of its own which would be considered before any scheme the Commissioners had in mind.

Early in 1886 a Special Committee meeting was called to consider a draft Scheme for the management of the affairs of the Society as required by the Commissioners and a copy of the Scheme agreed upon was forwarded to the Commissioners. The Commissioners held a sitting in the County Court House Belfast on the 12 and 13 October 1886 at which John Kinghan, the Principal, was examined on several details connected with the Society.

On 14 October the Institution was visited by the Commissioners. The Commissioners' draft Scheme, which merely embodied the rules by which the Society had hitherto been controlled, was not accepted in its entirety by the Commissioners who drafted one of their own and sent it to the Committee for their comments. By and large, however, the Endowed Schools (Ireland) Act of 1885 entailed no major changes in the manner of the Society's operations.

The Scheme under which these operations were conducted in 1888 had all the authority of an Act of Parliament though no pecuniary assistance was given by the Government. The yearly inspection was a mere formality, the Governors themselves being requested by the Lord Lieutenant to submit the names of people whom they believed to be capable of carrying out such an inspection. By the Act it was no longer necessary for the Society to appoint Trustees a chore which they previously found expensive and irksome.

## **METHOD OF TEACHING**

It is appropriate at this juncture to consider the methods of teaching employed in the Ulster Institution from its earliest days. In the case of the deaf this was, right up until the last decade or so of the 19th Century, a completely manual one in common with the great majority of teaching establishments for the deaf in Great Britain. Signs were used initially as a means of establishing communication between pupils and teachers. The sign system was later superseded by finger spelling, by using the two-handed alphabet, and writing. During the year 1847 the one-handed alphabet replaced the two-handed.

The fact that the early Principals of the Ulster Institution were aware that speech could be taught to the deaf is borne out by Newspaper accounts of Annual Meetings and examinations of the pupils. However, this knowledge was not translated into action. In 1879 Mr James Scott-Hutton, Headmaster of the Halifax Institute of Nova Scotia, was appointed to the post of Vice-Principal of the Ulster Institution on account of the failing health of John Kinghan. Kinghan continued to act as Superintendent of the establishment whilst Scott Hutton took charge of the Day School and was responsible for the education of the pupils. Scott Hutton pressed for more attention to be given to the teaching of speech. However the Committee, guided by John Kinghan, refused his request for additional staff for this purpose. In 1882 Scott Hutton returned to Nova Scotia. There follows a statement made by John Kinghan contained in a letter to the Head of a school for the deaf in Australia written in 1878:

*"My experience of deaf mute education for 33 years has been in what you may call the French System. I have had very little experience of the German method, but from all I have seen or heard I am not prepared to abandon the former in favour of the latter. Articulation and lip reading were taught for years by some of the ablest and most enthusiastic men of their day and in the end abandoned and discouraged. I believe signs of some kind are all but indispensable to the acquirement of the correct knowledge of the meaning of some words by the congenitally deaf. Articulation has been systematically taught in the Great London School for the Deaf and Dumb for at least half a century and I have been informed by a gentleman who laboured as a missionary among the adult deaf and dumb of London that it is an exceptional case for one of these pupils to continue to articulate in after life".*

Sign language was commonly used as the main means of educating deaf children well into the 20th Century. Articulation or speech was taught widely at the Ulster Institute from 1878 onwards though as a separate subject of instruction just like any other, but the bulk of the teaching was carried out through finger spelling, signing and lip reading on the part of the pupils.

As comparatively recently as 1937 an Inspector of the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education in his Report on the Deaf School wrote:

*"in a School of this type it was difficult to assess exactly the progress made by the pupils and their proficiency in various subjects unless one was an expert in the sign language."*

It must be mentioned in this connection that at that time no less than 4 of the staff of 6 had attended the one-year course of training in the oral method at Manchester University.

It has already been recounted how, in 1836, the blind almost literally came to the rescue of the deaf. It is, therefore, somewhat strange to discover that blind children for a long time were treated less favourably than the deaf. In the first place the blind had no teacher of their own for their first 4 years under the Ulster Society's care. Much of this time was spent in the manufacture of articles in the Workshop and in the peddling of these articles lead by the deaf pupils round the doors of the

neighbourhood.

Also for a considerable number of years the blind were permitted only 3 years instruction at the Institution whereas the deaf had 5. The reasons given by the Society for this distinction being that the blind were much easier to teach than the deaf. It was perhaps also for this reason the blind had, during the first 50 years, never more than 1 teacher, who at times had over 30 children to take charge of. Indeed, at one period, the teacher of the blind had also to act as Matron of the Institution.

It is in their failure to employ Braille in the education of the blind at the Ulster Institution until some 20 years after Dr Thomas Armitage had amassed evidence to justify its being used as the method of educating the blind, that the Ulster Society's neglect of the blind is most marked. This is perhaps also the more incredible due to the fact that Dr Armitage was a Irishman, a Dublin Physician, who, having lost his sight, visited in the 1860's all of the Schools for the Blind in Great Britain and in many other countries and was especially impressed by the advantages of the Braille system over all others. On his return to Ireland he did much to publicise the Braille system and in 1868 he founded the British and Foreign Blind Association which was engaged in publishing books in Braille.

A few years before the close of the Century deputation's from the Board of Governors visited Schools for the Blind in Great Britain and following their visits Mr George Dickie, a teacher of the blind in the Edinburgh School, was appointed teacher of the blind in the Ulster Institution. Thus for the first time since they came under the care of the Ulster Society some 50 years earlier the blind children had an experienced teacher of the blind to take charge of their education.

James Tillinghast revised the practice of industrial training in the Institution. Blind children were instructed in map making and in clay modelling. In 1902 senior blind pupils began to attend, twice weekly, the workshops for the Blind in Belfast to receive training in basket making. These visits to the workshops were, however, soon discontinued on the grounds that the influence of the adult blind was detrimental to the morals of the blind children.

What was perhaps the best feature of the education in the Ulster Institution until comparatively recent times was one over which the Governors had little control. This was to do with the fact that staff changes which had bedevilled the blind school in the past were, after 1908, with the coming of a third teacher Miss Gordon, reduced to a minimum. George Dickie from Edinburgh remained on the staff until his death in 1931 having served the Society for 42 years. Miss Gordon, who became a fully qualified teacher of the blind in 1928 after completing the examination of the College of Teachers of the Blind, stayed on until her retirement in 1953. Though from 1918 onwards only she and Mr Dickie were employed as teachers of the blind.

This reduction in staff was occasioned by a falling off in pupil numbers which continued well into the 1940's. Much excellent work was, however, done in the years Miss Gordon and Mr Dickie taught together in the blind school. An improved supply of Braille books was steadily built up and frequent use made of the National library for the Blind in London.

The Board were, however, rather parsimonious in the amount of money they permitted to be spent on the purchase of text books for the blind. As late as 1947 a Geography Book of the British Isles published in 1904 was still in use and also at this time a World Geography Book published in 1878. James Anderson relates that an Arithmetic Book published in 1890 was still in use when he was a pupil in the blind school in the 1920's. At that time it had become so worn that a child had to have a very highly developed sense of touch in order to read it correctly.

Strict censorship of books coming into the blind school was carried out, even Shakespeare's Macbeth and the works of Chekov were forbidden to the pupils. The use of Books of the Bible printed in raised letters appears to have been the chief means by which the blind children in the Ulster Institute learned to read. As a result of this a few, when they left school, obtained part-time employment as Scripture

Readers. One Adam McClelland became the Minister of a fashionable Presbyterian Church in New York and later Professor of Theology at an American Divinity College. Another former pupil James Coburn became a noted Methodist Minister in Glasgow.

## TRADE TRAINING

Some mention should now be made of the efforts of the Ulster Society, not only within but outside of the Institution, to give some form of trade training to the deaf children for whom they had in other spheres provided so much. The first attempts along these lines were made in 1845 when a shoemaker was employed to teach the boys his trade for 3 hours daily on 4 days each week. A tailor was also employed at the same time for a similar purpose. The girls enjoyed the benefits of a teacher of plain needlework and were later required to do much of the work in the cooking and laundry departments of the Institution.

In 1851 the Committee discussed whether the term of 5 years, being the maximum time any pupil could spend in the Institution, was sufficient for their education. Also discussed was the time spent by pupils at trade training and the limited hours thus remaining for recreational activities. The Society was bound by the last Clause of the second general rule to provide industrial or trade training. This Clause stated:

*"and likewise to teach them some useful trade by which they may be able to earn their own livelihood".*

The Committee's difficulties in abiding by this Rule and at the same time giving the pupils sufficient school room instruction during the few years they were enrolled at the Institution was referred to in their Annual Report of 1852. An alternative was at the same time suggested and this was adopted a year later and remained, except for a little training in the printing trade, the sole practice of the Committee as far as trade training for the deaf was concerned for the remainder of the Century almost. The girls of course continued to assist with cooking and laundering.

The Committee's plan involved the promoting of a system of regular apprenticeships to trades when the pupils' ordinary term of education in the Institution had terminated. This system, the Committee thought, had considerable advantages over the previous one. In the first case there would no longer be any need to encroach upon the time spent by the pupils in ordinary education. Secondly, ample time could now be afforded for open air exercises and recreation, and thirdly, a much wider field of employment was opened up for the pupils than had been the case when shoemaking and tailoring alone were taught at the Institution.

The Committee's new scheme appears to have worked very well. A considerable number of applications was received from parents and friends of deaf children, both boys and girls, asking for monetary assistance in having the former pupils of the Institution apprenticed to trades. £5 was the sum usually granted by the Committee for this purpose and the various trades in which apprenticeships were found included Shoemaking, Cabinet Making, Printing, Weaving and Baking for the boys and Bonnet Making and Millinery for the girls. In 1880 the Committee paid out £10 for 2 boys who were learning trades in the Workshops for the Blind in Belfast.

The Endowed School Commissioners in their draft scheme to the Committee proposed that the Society should give trade training once more within the Institution. This the Committee objected to on the same grounds as they had stated over 30 years earlier when abandoning their original attempts at trade training. It was finally agreed with the Commissioners that it be left an optional matter for the Committee to decide.

Trade training for the deaf was begun again in the Ulster Institution in 1897 during the period when John Tillinghast of Montana USA occupied the Principalship. Its re-introduction stemmed directly from his suggestions to the Committee, and in the first instance a female supervisor was employed who not only supervised the girls out of school hours but also gave them instruction in plain sewing and knitting. Four of the senior girls also commenced training as laundresses. Some months later Sloyd carpentry was begun with some of the senior boys.

In the Annual Report of 1902 under the title "Industrial Training" the following account appears

*"the Governors were glad to be able to report that steady progress has been made by the boys in Sloyd carpentry and clay modelling and by the girls in laundry and household work, plain sewing and the use of sewing machines. The pupils take great interest in these employment's which are arranged with a view to qualifying them to undertake useful occupations when their school days are at an end."*

Towards the end of 1907 alterations were carried out in the Institution to provide a Tailor's Shop on the premises and a Tailor was employed on a full-time basis. In addition to making clothes for the boys he taught a selected class of deaf boys elementary tailoring with a view to their following this trade when they left school. In 1928 an enlargement to the building was made to provide cookery and laundry classes. The following year saw the introduction of shoe making and repairing instruction for the boys and a few months later woodwork was introduced into the curriculum. However, in 1958 the Board of Governors in their Annual Report stated:

*"in recent years the element of trade training in the education of the boys in this School has been more and more reduced and has now entirely disappeared. Traditionally the boys were trained in tailoring or shoemaking, but on investigation it was found that hardly any followed any of these occupations in after life. And in any case it was felt that time in school was all too short to allow the pupils to overcome their handicaps and to receive the essential elements of education by spending time on vocational training which would be much better given afterwards".*

## STATE AID

Before taking leave of the 19th Century there is one other matter which merits consideration and which gave the Committee of the Ulster Society much cause for concern around this time. This was to do with their efforts to have legislation enacted making the education of the deaf compulsory and state aided as had earlier been done for Scotland and Wales. The first concrete moves by the Society in this direction were made at the Annual Public meeting held on 15 March 1898 when the Chairman read the following petition which, he said, was to be forwarded to the Chief Secretary for Ireland the Right Honourable Gerald Balfour MP

*"that whereas in August 1890 an Act was passed entitled 'Education of Blind and Deaf Mute Children (Scotland) Act' and in September 1893 another Act was passed the 'Elementary Education Blind and Deaf Children (England and Wales) Act' by which state aid was extended to Institutions providing for the education of blind and deaf and dumb in England, Wales and Scotland, we the Governors of the Ulster Society established in Belfast for the education of these afflicted classes respectfully petition that state aid in like manner with such variations in detail as may be considered necessary or expedient shall be extended to Ireland either by amendment of one of the said Acts or by a new Act so that the disability under which Ireland now labours in providing for the education of the deaf and dumb and blind may be removed. Your petitioners further humbly suggest an alteration of the Poor law Amendment Act of Ireland (1806-43, 6 & 7 Victoria Chapters 92, Section 14) making it obligatory on Poor law Guardians instead of optional to contribute payments of not less than £15 per annum for each deaf mute or blind child between the ages of 7 and 16 shall be provided by Parliament Grant or otherwise as may be determined. All the remaining cost of education, maintenance of premises and of boarding pupils continuing to be chargeable on the ordinary funds, endowments or other resources of each Boarding School or Institution and your petitioners will every pray."*

Efforts were made unsuccessfully to have the Institutions at Cabra and Claremont, Dublin join with the Ulster Society in this petition which was sent to the Chief Secretary for Ireland in May 1898. The petition was, however, made in vain. In 1905 the Chief Secretary for Ireland introduced a Bill to make better provision for the elementary education of afflicted children in Ireland. The Bill proposed to make it compulsory on local Authorities to provide for the education of blind and deaf children and to defray the cost to the rates subject to a state contribution. Unfortunately the Bill after having been read a second time was dropped. Home Rule agitation, the Irish troubles and the First World War successively stood in the way of further attempts at legislation and it was not until 1921 when Northern Ireland by the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 received its own Parliament that the outlook for state aid appeared more hopeful.

In 1920 a small measure of financial relief was afforded the Ulster Society by the passing of the Blind Persons' Act. This Act made it the duty of every local Government Board to contribute towards the welfare of blind persons ordinarily resident within their area and resulted in the Ulster Society receiving the sum of £20 per annum from the Corporation of Belfast County Borough for every blind child resident in the Institution. This sum did not of course entirely cover the cost of educating and boarding these children. In fact in 1920 the cost per annum per pupils was over £64 compared with over £32 for 1913.

However, in May 1921 three members of the Board of Governors, the Rev W A Watson, Major Blackeston-Houston and Mr H L McCready waited upon Sir James Craig (later Lord Craigavon), first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. The deputation presented a prepared statement setting out the work of the Institution, the number of pupils in attendance, then 93, the cost of maintenance of children and staff, the upkeep of the building and the sources and amount of revenue. The latter was shown to be inadequate to carry out the work efficiently. Sir James Craig, in reply, stated that the work

amongst these afflicted children had his whole-hearted sympathy and it was inconceivable that in any scheme dealing with education in Ulster its claim for careful consideration could be overlooked.

On 29 September 1921 the Governors met in the Institution to receive Lord Londonderry Minister for Education. The Rev Dr G A Stevenson gave a brief outline of the history and work of the Institution and dealt with its financial position. He emphasised the necessity of legislation for the compulsory education of the deaf and dumb and the blind and asked for substantial financial assistance. Lord Londonderry gave the Governors his assurance that the facts placed before him would receive his sympathetic consideration.

On 11 October 1921 the Governors decided to draw up an outline of evidence to be submitted to the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the Minister of Education in the Northern Ireland Parliament. The Board placed in the foreground of any scheme of development the recommendation that the compulsory clauses of the Primary Education Act should be applied as regards the deaf and dumb and the blind, and they further urged that the responsibility for the salaries of the teaching staff should be borne by the Education Authorities. Their financial liability would thus be limited to the upkeep and management of the Institution and the residential side of the work. The Governors were unanimously and strongly of the opinion that there should be compulsory examination of all children attending primary schools in Northern Ireland in order that steps could be taken to correct any tendency to ear or eye trouble.

On 10 May 1923 a deputation of the Governors again waited on the Minister of Education to press the claims of the Institution for recognition and financial consideration in the Education Bill then before the Northern Ireland Parliament. As a result of this and further deputation's on 29 April 1924 and 3 October 1924 a letter was received from the Ministry of Education on 4 April 1925 in which the Governors were notified that the Ulster Society's Institution was to be recognised and aided as a public elementary school as from 1 July 1924. Payment was to be made by the State in the form of a Capitation Grant at the rate of £11 per annum on each unit of the average attendance of pupils. The School was now certified by the Ministry under Section 9 of the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1923 for deaf and dumb and blind children as the "Ulster School for the Deaf and Blind".

On 1 October 1925 the question of the status of teachers in the Schools in regard to payment and qualifications was taken up with the Ministry of Education and after negotiations regarding the qualifications to be required in the teachers of the deaf and blind respectively special salary scales were fixed by the Ministry in 1929. The incremental portion of the salary so fixed was to be payable by the Ministry in addition to a Capitation Grant of £4 per annum on each unit of average attendance. These grants were in substitution for the Capitation Grant of £11 per annum awarded by the Ministry in 1924. At this time also teachers in the Ulster Institution were admitted to the Government's Superannuation Scheme.

The year 1927 saw an important change effected in accordance with the terms of the 1923 Education Act. The responsibility for the education of afflicted children then ceased to be a merely optional matter on the part of Boards of Guardians and passed on as a duty to the newly constituted Regional Education Committees. It was agreed that the payments by the latter for each child sent by them to the Ulster Society's School should be varied from time to time as may be required in augmentation of their income from all other sources to keep the Institution in a solvent condition. In 1927, however, the amount per pupil per annum payable by these Regional Education Committees was fixed with the sanction of the Minister of Education at £40 per annum.

## **FROM THE 1920's TO THE PRESENT DAY**

The 1920's also saw many improvements to the school building. The kitchen was enlarged - pantries, scullery, laundry, drying lofts, bathrooms, infirmaries and gymnasium erected. Hot water and steam pipes were installed and a good organ and a knitting machine purchased for the blind school. Also electric light was installed throughout the building and a large portion of the drainage re-laid and new steel casement windows fixed.

In 1925 a troop of Boy Scouts, and a company of Girl Guides, were formed. In 1929 the Principal, in his Annual Report to the Board of Governors, commented on the steady decline in numbers which had been going on for a number of years. In 1916, the year in which deputation work throughout the Province ceased for motives of economy, pupils in the Institution numbered 117. By 1920 this had fallen to 100 and by 1929, the year in question, it was further reduced to 89.

Reasons for this diminution, suggested by the Principal, were two fold. Firstly, as indicative of a fall in the incidence of blindness and deafness in the community and secondly as due perhaps to the fact that whereas pupils were formerly received from the 9 Counties of Ulster the field of operation was now restricted almost entirely to the 6 Counties of Northern Ireland. He went on to state his opinion that a considerable number of children, especially in country districts were not being sent to the Institution as their afflictions warranted, adding that it was imperative that instruction should commence at as early an age as possible. The Governors were of course prepared to admit children at the age of 6 years. In 1929, however, out of 16 new admissions only 5 were of minimum age, whilst the ages of the others ranged up to 13 years.

The Ulster Society held no special celebrations to mark their pseudo Centenary Year in 1931. Their Annual Report for that year does however mention that during the previous 100 years almost 500 blind and 1,300 deaf pupils had received the educational benefits which the Society offered. In that year also a member of staff, Mr C J Grindle, attended the one year course of specialist training at Manchester University. He was the first teacher in the deaf school to take this course and in each of the following 3 years a member of staff successfully completed the course of training so that by July 1934 4 teachers, Miss G Tate, Mr C J Grindle, Mr R Press, and Mr G R Swanwick were fully qualified teachers of the deaf and in addition all 4 had, prior to taking the Manchester course, successfully completed the Diploma Examination of the National College of Teachers of the Deaf. Attendance at the Manchester Course had been made obligatory for these teachers by the Ministry of Education in order that they might qualify for the scale of salaries for trained teachers.

In 1934 work was begun on the erection of a new set of classrooms costing £6,000 at the rear of the Institution building and on 18 October 1935 these were officially opened by Her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn.

During the summer of 1937 Mr James Lilley who had succeeded to the Principalship in 1922 following the resignation of Mr John Beattie, visited several deaf schools in England to obtain information regarding the use of hearing aids in the education of the deaf. As a result of his favourable report the Governors decided to purchase a number of these aids and in the following year the Manchester Hearing apparatus was installed in the deaf school. This apparatus included an amplifier, a microphone and headphones together with an audiometer for testing hearing and for measuring the degree of hearing loss. A member of staff was sent to the Royal Residential School in Manchester to observe the methods of instruction when the speech amplifier was in use.

On the outbreak of war in 1939, the question of evacuation was taken up by the Governors. After several country residences had been visited, the offer of the Belfast Central Mission and the North Belfast Mission to put their holiday homes at Donaghadee, Co. Down, at the disposal of the pupils was accepted. Air raid shelters were at this time erected at the Institution as an alternative to

evacuation and the men teachers attended a special course of ARP lectures. However, after the Christmas vacation of 1941 the schools re-opened in Donaghadee. The remaining years of the war which were spent in the Donaghadee premises saw numbers sink to the lowest levels ever experienced by the Society since their Lisburn Road Institution had opened in 1845. This was mainly due to the limited accommodation available at their new premises. The year 1943 began with only 59 pupils on roll and a waiting list developed. However the provision of a suitably equipped hut later that year enabled the children to be admitted and the year ended with 73 pupils on roll. On 18 October 1945 pupils and staff returned to the school premises in Belfast which were officially reopened by Her Excellency the Countess Granville on 7 November. The occasion also commemorated the centenary of the opening of these buildings.

A number of related problems faced the Board of Governors in the immediate post war years. Numbers began to rise again steadily and by 1950 there were 118 on rolls, the highest for 40 years. The Ulster Society, however, suffered from the general shortage of teachers and at one time there were over 20 children in the deaf infants' class, a rather disheartening feature since the Board's efforts to get parents to send their children at an early age had only then begun to bear fruit. The expenses entailed in running the Institution had also increased greatly over the pre-war figure and the Ministry of Education were approached with a view to having the maintenance grant, fixed in 1927 at £40 per annum, increased to a more realistic figure. The Ministry agreed to its being increased to £65 per annum as from 1 April 1947, though for that year the cost per child worked out at £151.

However, by the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1947, more generous Government Grants were forthcoming in respect of teachers' salaries and the Governors' Report for 1948, taking notice of this, states "*the Governors are deeply thankful for the increased support which the Society is receiving from the Ministry of Education*". The Principal also in his report to the Board of Governors for that year makes mention of the increased financial assistance and interest shown by the Ministry of Education and the various education authorities. Though the 1923 Education Act for Northern Ireland had made education compulsory and state aided as it had been in Scotland since 1890 and in England and Wales in 1893, it was not until the passing of the 1947 Education Act "*that the principle of equality of opportunity was honoured in a manner more commensurate with the great needs of the deaf and the blind*".

In 1951 it became more obvious that increased dormitory accommodation for the girls was necessary and this became available in 1953 an extension having been built to the girls' wing of the Institution building.

The year 1953 must go down as a major milestone in the history of the Ulster Society for Promoting the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind. In that year several events occurred which have all played a very significant part in the Society's educational endeavours and in some respects continue to do so. First and foremost of these was the appointment as Principal of Mr F G W Denmark, former Deputy Principal of the Liverpool School for the Partially Deaf, in succession to Mr James Lilley who resigned after holding office for a little over 30 years. Under Frank Denmark the wind of change swept through the Ulster Institution and very soon it no longer merited the second part of that title. A more humane and enlightened approach was adopted as the old taboos and conventions were soon discarded.

More school outings, increased weekends at home and added opportunities for mixing with hearing children were the rule. Saturday morning swimming instruction became a feature of the school's activities and in every possible way Frank Denmark sought to ensure that the children in his charge would, when they left school, be equipped socially at least for mixing with hearing society.

Nor was this his only outstanding contribution to the schools. A Physicist by training he brought with him a keen awareness of the value of amplifying equipment in enabling the utmost use to be made of the residual hearing which the vast majority of deaf children possess. Soon after his arrival the issue

of individual hearing aids provided under the National Health Service began. Next, ministry of Education approval was sought and granted for the purchase of Philips group hearing aid equipment and an auditory trainer. Ministry permission was also forthcoming for the purchase of audiometric equipment to be used in the making of an audiometric survey of the children on roll, thus providing a guide as to the use individual children might make of a hearing aid and also for periodic tests in order to note variations in auditory acuity in particular children.

Also of great significance in 1953 was the Society's purchase of a house and 22 acres of land at Jordanstown, Co. Antrim, about 10 miles from their Lisburn Road Institution and about 5 miles beyond the boundary of Belfast. On this site it was proposed to have 5 separate units - a nursery school for deaf children, a deaf school, a partially hearing school, a blind school and a partially sighted school. Already in 1953 plans were well advanced for a deaf nursery school and this was brought into operation in 1956. A children's Audiology Clinic, attached to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children had been opened a year previously and had proven extremely valuable for the ascertainment and determination of the degree of deafness in young deaf children and for providing preliminary auditory training and also for parent guidance.

Planning for the new school at Jordanstown began to take up more and more of the time of the Board of Governors. In 1954 a delegation consisting of the Chairman of the Board of Governors, the Principal, the Architects and one of the Ministry of Education's Inspectors visited a number of schools in England, Holland, Germany and Switzerland to study their buildings and methods. Preliminary estimates of the cost of the proposed new venture at Jordanstown were giving the Board much cause for concern and at one time it appeared that a part of the work in which they were engaged would have to be given up. However, by severe pruning of the proposals the original estimate of £550,000 was reduced to £450,000.

Even with the Ministry of Education's 65% grant this figure was barely within the Society's reach. A measure of financial relief was afforded the Society when the Education (Amendments) Act Northern Ireland 1956 local education authorities were obliged, for the first time, to pay 65% of the cost of heating, lighting, cleaning and internal maintenance of the teaching premises of the Institution. In addition, the boarding fee payable by local education authorities was raised by the Ministry of Education in 1956 to £155 per pupil per annum. However generous this sum may appear at first sight it was regarded by the Board of Governors as one of the most unsatisfactory elements of the situation in which they found themselves with regards to their efforts to acquire sufficient money to finance the Jordanstown undertaking. The Board reported that in 1957 the boarding of the children cost £81,000, but they received in boarding fees from local education authorities the sum of £17,000 only.

They further added that they now had an accumulated deficit on running the School of £16,000, a sum representing a very substantial part of their shortfall towards the building of a new school. However on 17 February 1959, the contract for the building of the main school at Jordanstown was signed, the contract price being £246,988 and just over 2 years later in April 1961 the move to the new school at Jordanstown was made. Initially only the teaching end was transferred owing to delays in the completion of the buildings and it was not until the following October that the last boarders could be accommodated.

Within the past quarter of a century several highly important developments have taken place which have had a profound effect on the Ulster Society and its primary function as provider of educational opportunities for the majority of the Province's deaf children and blind children. First and foremost of these is the tremendous improvement in the Ulster Society's financial position. In the early 1960's an annual deficit in running cost of some £3,000 was being experienced raising the question as to whether the Society could continue to exist as a voluntary organisation and, at the same time, fulfil its aims and objectives.

However, in 1968 the Education (Amendment) Act Northern Ireland became law. By this Act Schools under Voluntary Management could obtain substantial assistance from public funds if they introduced to their Management Committees persons nominated by the appropriate Education Authority. The Governors agreed to take advantage of the new legislation and negotiations were begun with the Antrim Education Authority regarding the terms of a new Scheme of Management. A direct result of these negotiations was that a new School Management Committee was set up comprised of 12 members, 4 of whom were nominated by the Education Authority and 8 by the Board of Governors of the Ulster Society.

From 1 April 1969 all running costs of maintaining the day school and of the tuition of the pupils were paid for out of public funds. The cost of Boarding continued to be met, as had been the case since 1966, out of the Boarding Fees charged to the responsible Education Authority. Grant aid for approved building development was increased to 85% and existing endowments remained intact and under the control of the Board of Governors. The School, under the Act, became "maintained". The financial benefits of the new arrangements were soon to become apparent. In the year ending 31 July 1969 the Society's income from investments and donations exceeded expenditure not grant aided by £2,284.

The Annual Report for 1971 referred to the need to update the Scheme of Management of the Society as the original one was framed in 1888, following the Educational Endowment (Ireland) Act of 1885. The need for revision became increasingly evident as a result of the School being given maintained status under the Education (Amendment) Act Northern Ireland of 1966 referred to earlier, and which further resulted in many of the functions of the Board of Governors devolving on the new School Management Committee. A new Scheme was drawn up and submitted to the Charities Branch of the Ministry of Finance for Northern Ireland. The new Scheme of Management of the Society's endowments came into operation on 23 October 1974. This Scheme replaced the Scheme drawn up in 1888 and with only small amendments in 1919, 1927, 1951 and 1956 governed the Society until the year 1974.

In January 1986 the School Management Committee, under legislation embodied in the 1984 Education (Northern Ireland) Order, became a Board of Governors. Six of the ten members of this new Board are nominees of the Board of Governors of the Ulster Society which is now referred to as the Society's Board to distinguish it from this new Board. The function of the Society's Board of Governors is now purely and simply that of Trustees of the Society's Endowments. Apart from the diminution in the role of the Society's Board of Governors the most far reaching development to take place in the affairs of the Ulster Society during the last decade relates to the dramatic fall off in numbers of pupils attending the Schools.

In the late 60's and early 70's the Annual Reports of the then Principal, Frank Denmark, to the Board of Governors contained references to the need for increased pupils' accommodation. Five mobile classrooms were erected and the number of pupils in 1970 totalled 256.

In November 1986 as the Society celebrates its 150th Anniversary the pupil numbers add up to a mere 105, made up of 31 severely or profoundly deaf pupils, 23 educationally blind pupils and 51 partially sighted pupils. This dramatic change has been brought about almost entirely by the now well established practice of educating children with useful residual hearing in classes attached to ordinary schools and referred to as Partially Hearing Units. This practice is in keeping with recent legislation regarding the duty of Area Boards to seek to educate all handicapped children within the ordinary education framework. For a similar reason partially sighted children in increasing numbers are being retained in ordinary schools with the assistance of an advisory service operating out of Jordanstown Schools. In an effort to arrest the decline in the number of hearing impaired children and to keep abreast of developments on the mainland, the Deaf Department, in September 1984, embarked upon a Total Communication methodology. Pupils are now taught through signing and finger spelling in addition to their use of residual hearing, and lip reading.

The Ulster Society remains, however, at the end of 150 years of endeavour a remarkably active body. Though the scope and range of its activities and its sphere of influence has been much reduced in recent years, its improved financial position has enabled the Trustees to do much to improve the facilities available at Jordanstown for the Province's visually impaired and hearing impaired children.

In 1980 a new staffroom was completed together with a very modern workshop for the teaching of craft, design and technology subjects at a total cost of almost £150,000. Grant aid was forthcoming from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and furnishings and equipment provided by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board.

In 1982 the Society financed, entirely from its own resources, replacement windows to the majority of the Boarding Houses at a cost in excess of £30,000.

In October 1986 a major works programme commenced at the Schools. This is designed to implement the recommendations of the Department of Economic Development's Health and Safety Inspectorate. These works will cost almost £250,000 to complete and are grant aided by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Concern with regard to provision in Northern Ireland to meet the needs of visually impaired children with severe additional handicaps, prompted the Board of Governors to fund an investigative project relevant to these children. A comprehensive report on the results of the investigation was published in May 1983. Copies of the report were distributed to many interested parties throughout Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

The Board of Governors has also made it known that when the transfer of children from Health and Social Services to Education is completed in April 1987, they will look favourably upon the use of the Society's endowments and properties at Jordanstown for the benefit of the Province's deaf/blind children.

The Ulster Society is therefore prepared to meet new challenges as and when these arise. Though its achievements over the past 150 years have been remarkable by any standards it may well be that the pinnacle of its endeavours has yet to be reached.