

Willbrook National School, Corofin, Co. Clare (1884-1988) by Michael Mac Mahon

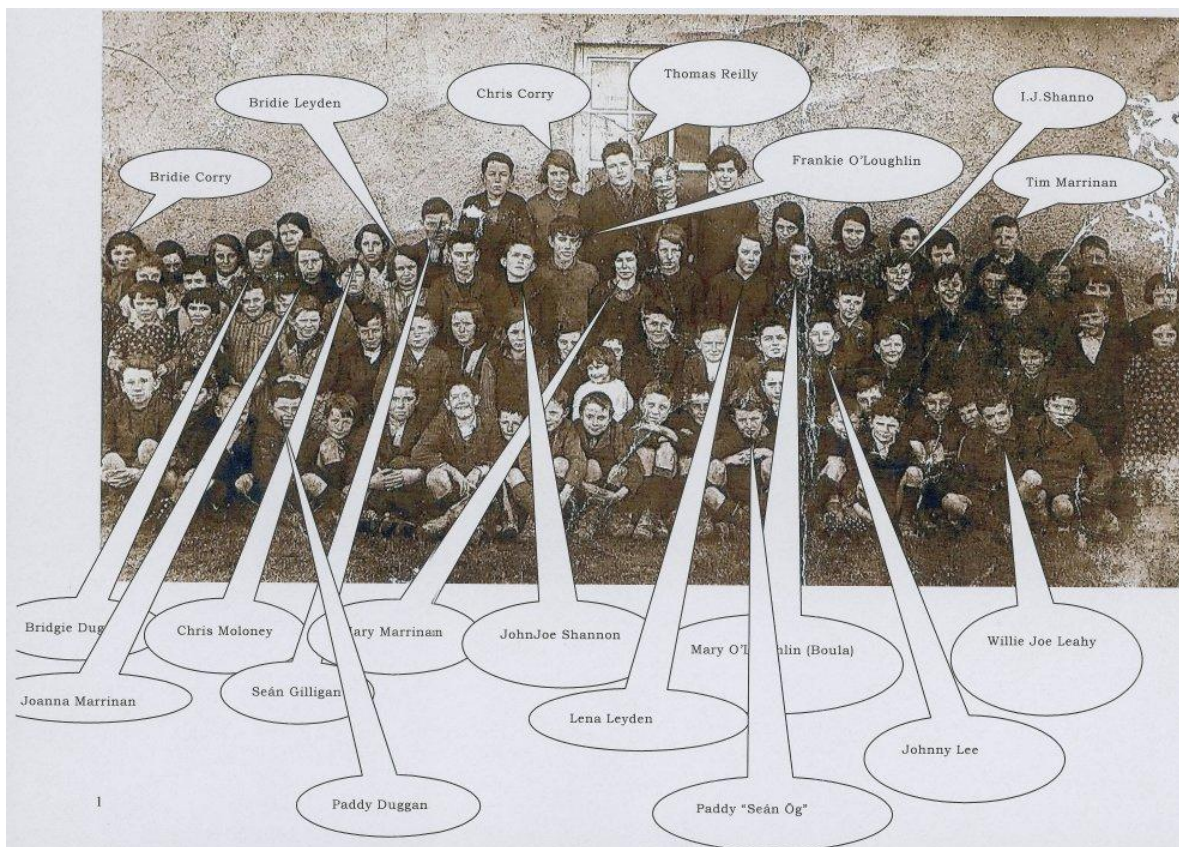
State Education

Ever since the Reformation education in Ireland was closely linked with religious reform, specifically with the promotion of the Protestant Church. From time to time various 'penal laws' were enacted to further the Protestant interest and to 'prevent the further growth of popery'. At the beginning of the eighteenth century these laws became particularly severe. Catholics were denied any education whatsoever unless they were prepared to attend Protestant schools, and no Catholic could teach school under penalty of twenty pounds and three months imprisonment. In order to avoid arrest, Catholic schoolmasters were obliged to conduct their classes surreptitiously in so-called 'hedge-schools' located in quite places removed from the public gaze. For the following one hundred and thirty years the hedge schools were the principal centres of education for the Catholic poor of Ireland until the National School System was established in 1831.

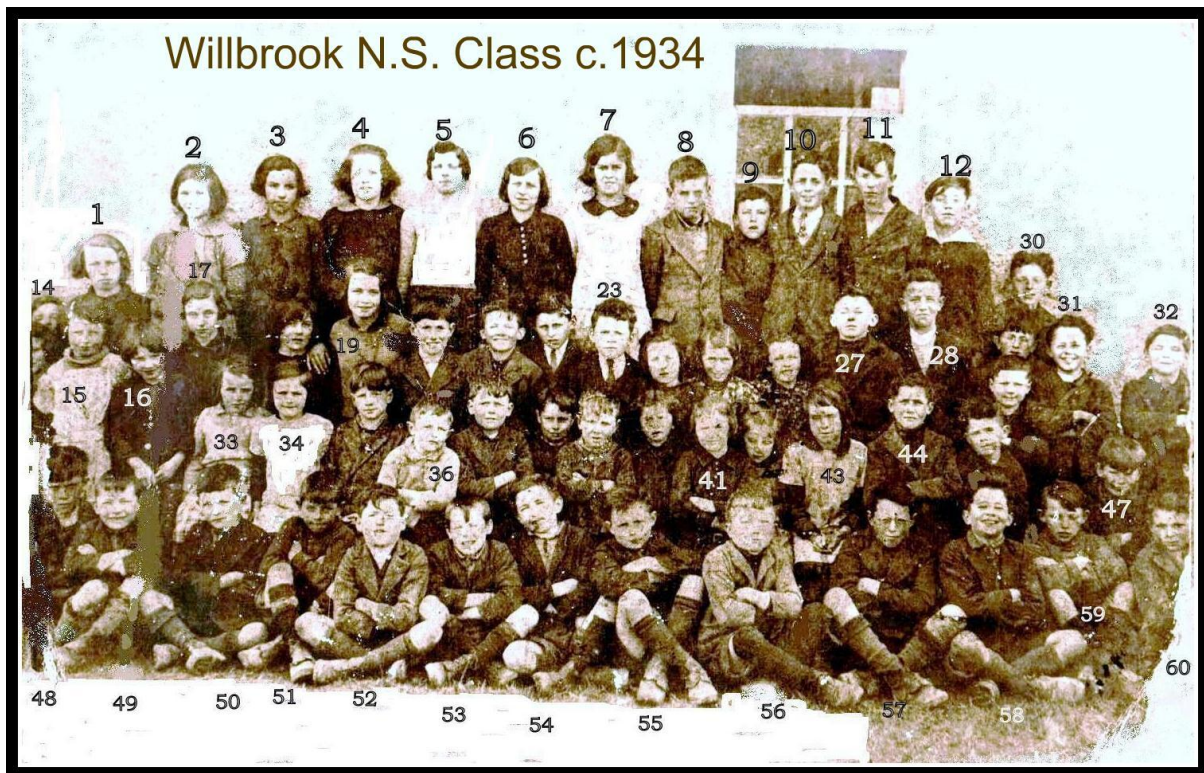
We get the first glimpse of the hedge-schools in the parish in a return of unendowed schools in 1806. There were two schools in Rath, one containing 50 pupils taught by Michael Moroney at Craggaunboy (Willbrook) and another – one of the largest in the diocese – containing 200 pupils taught by John Moriarty. When we get the next return in 1826, Willbrook still had a school described as a thatched cow-shed. It was taught by one John Moloney, who received amounts varying from one shilling and three pence to around eleven shillings a quarter from each pupil. He had an attendance of 80 boys and 12 girls, all of them Catholics. A report in 1837 shows that a school taught by John Casey was being held in the old chapel at Liscullaun, a wretched structure strung together in the previous century at the height of the Penal Laws. Integration with the new National Education System introduced in 1831 was slow, but progress must be seen against the backdrop of the devastation and social disintegration caused by the Great Famine in the 1840s.

In 1835 a school at Richmond House, Corofin, founded a decade earlier by Fr. John Murphy, became the first school in the parish to integrate with the state system. A school in the new workhouse at Corofin was taken under the Board of National Education in 1852, and four years later a school held in the chapel at Killinaboy was recognised as a non-vested national school. Almost another thirty years would lapse before the Rath portion of the parish would have a school connected to the state network, but the delay can probably be explained by the priority given to the provision of a new church in Rath, which was consecrated in 1869. When Canon Michael O'Donovan was appointed to Corofin in 1882 a school at Rath integrated with the National School System became an early target. By the

following year he had procured a site for a school from Thomas Moran of Willbrook House, and enlisted trustees in whom the new school could be vested as required by law.



Pupils of Willbrook School, early 1930s



Back Row: 1 Joanna Marrinan 2 Bridie Corry 3 Lena Leyden 4 Chris Corry 5 Chris Gilligan 6 Bridget Duggan 7 Vera Leahy 8 Willie Joe Leahy 9 Jimmy McGrath 10 John O'Loughlin 11 Frankie O'Loughlin 12 Tom Russell.

3rd Row: 13 (hidden) Suzanne Leyden 14 Kathleen O'Loughlin 15 Anna Lee 16 Chrissie Moloney 17 Mai Moloney 18 Nora Leyden 19 Gertie Russell 20 Mickey Shannon 21 John Joe Shannon 22 Paddy Duggan 23 Jimmy Duggan 24 Martha Sexton 25 Kathleen Shannon 26 Mary McGrath 27 Johnny Lee 28 Mickey O'Loughlin 29 Joe McMahon 30 Paddy Marrinan 31 Martin Kenny 32 Michael McMahon (Knocknaslinne).

2nd Row: 33 Peg Kelly 34 Eileen Duggan 35 I.J. Shannon 36 John Joe McGrath 37 Paddy Shannon 38 T.J.O'Loughlin 39 Gerry Foran 40 Tess Sexton 41 Maisie Foran 42 Catherine Whelan 43 Nora Leahy 44 T. Kenny 45 Willie Neylon 46 P.J. Morgan 47 Jimmy O'Loughlin.

Front Row: 48 Pat McMahon 49 Pat Gorman 50 David Neylon 51 Joe Leyden 52 Seán O'Reilly 53 Michael O'Gorman 54 Ned Mullins 55 Paddy O'Reilly 56 Jimmy Corry 57 Tom Kelly 58 Pat Kenny 59 Tim Marrinan 60 Peter Flanagan.

The School

Canon O'Donovan's application to the Education commissioners is dated 30 July, 1883. The school was vested in the trustees on 31 October following and taken under the Board as from that date. The trustees were Canon O'Donovan himself, the donor of the site Thomas Moran, and Moran's brother-in-law James Frost, J.P., George's St., Limerick. James Frost would afterwards become notoriously well-known as the author of the much-acclaimed *History & Topography of the County of Clare*, first published in 1893. The school

was built at a cost of £249, two thirds of which came from the National Schools Board grant. The building was stipulated to accommodate 75 pupils. The school opened on 7 July, 1884 though the certificate of completion is dated 22 September. It consisted of just one room (28 ft. x 16ft) and a porch until 1928 when a second room was added.



Confirmation Class c. 1945 -Willbrook N.S.

Front Row: Peg O'Loughlin, Mona Morgan, Kitty Lee, Mary O' Loughlin, Gortnagloch Mary Organ,
 2nd James Lee, Michael Keneally, John O'Loughlin (Applevale), Jackie Wheian, Michael Morgan,
 Patrick Flanagan, Murt O'Donoghue, Kieran Casey
 3rd Row: Tom Kearney, Joe Keneally, John McMahon Gerard Quinn (?), Jack Hanrahan, Christy O'Reilly

A total of 94 children attended on the first day and the average attendance for the first month was 110 pupils (49 boys and 61 girls). The furniture comprised 4 desks (with forms 9ft. long.) 2 forms for work tasks, each 5½ft. and 1 form attached to the wall. In 1912 a further sum of £4.4.0 was provided for the purchase of six deal adjustable desks.



Front Row Left to right: Maura Organ, Lily Kenny, Peggy Quinn, Mary O'Loughlin, Maura Mullins, Mary Leyden
Back Row: Mary Hanrahan, Nora O'Gorman, Susan Hallinan, Tessie Lee, Ann Whelan, Maureen Quinn, Esther Flanagan, Mary Cahill

Girls' Confirmation Class, 1949



(Seated: Michael Organ, Martin Quinn. 1st Row (Standing) Michael Mac Mahon, Joe Leyden, Joe O'Reilly, Francis Kearney, Michael Marrinan, Jimmy Sexton, Christy Lee, John Mc Donnell, John Keneally
2nd Row: Mary Hanrahan, Nora O'Gorman, Peggy Quinn, Teresa (?) Lee, Maura Organ, Susan Hallinan, Lily Kenny, Maureen Quinn, Mary Cahill, Ann Whelan, Maura Mullins, Mary Leyden, Mary O' Loughlin.

Boys' Confirmation Class, 1949



Willbrook School, 1950s

(L-R) Back row: Patrick Cahill (teacher), James Caulfield, Michael O'Loughlin, Sean Caulfield, Patrick Burke, Frank Ward, Martin Conway, Patrick Kenneally, Tommy Neylon, Patrick Whelan, Tom Organ, PJ Marrinan, Stephen Lee, Johnny Neylon, Tom Mullins, John Organ, Joe Ward, John Mullins.

Middle row: Anne McDonnell, Maura McNamara, Josie Quinn, Bridget Quinn, Anne Liddy, Mary O'Keeffe, Maura Mullins, Teresa Leyden, Anne Mullins, Evelyn O'Loughlin, Josephine O'Loughlin, Mary Liddy, Mary Ita Shannahan, Pauline Brasil.

Front row: PJ Commene, Thomas Burke, Pat Conway, Johnny Leyden, John Whelan, Paddy McNamara.



Back Row : Pappy Cahill (RIP) (Teacher), Tom Burke, James Caulfield, Johnny Neylon, Paddy Kenneally, Patrick Burke, PJ Marrinan, Billy King, Tom Mullins (RIP), John Mullins, Dan Neylon, Michael Murphy. **Second Row :** Eileen Cahill, Mary Burke, Teresa Leyden (RIP), Josephine Quinn (RIP), Mary Mc Donnell (RIP), Olive Tyne (RIP), Mona McNamara, Mary Commene, Bridie Mullins (RIP), Anne O Loughlin, Biddy Kearney. **3rd Row :** Billy Neylon, Michael Cahill (RIP), Jimmy Commene, Mary O Keeffe, Bridget Howard, Margaret Mullins, Mary Kenneally, Joan Cahill (RIP), Anne Mullins. **Front Row :** Paddy Howard, Martin Fahy, Gerard Mullins, Martin Kenneally (RIP), Johnny Leyden (RIP), Patrick Mullins, Patrick Conway, Paddy Neylon, Davy Neylon, Michael O'Keeffe (RIP), Tony McMahon, Martin Mc Donnell (RIP).

Teacher Pappy Cahill with pupils in the 1950s

Though her appointment never received official approval, Mary Colbourne was the first principal of Willbrook School. She took up her post when the school opened on 7 July, having been appointed by Canon O'Donovan without reference to the Education Commissioners. When the appointment was afterwards notified to the commissioners, however, they refused to sanction it on the grounds that Miss Colbourne had not completed the stipulated training course. The Canon was therefore obliged to remove her from her post after less than one month on the job. Little is known about her apart from the fact that she was aged 19 years and had previously taught in Birr, Co. Offaly. The commissioners offered her the option of applying again in three months on condition that she had completed the required training course in the meantime. However, her name does not appear again in the Willbrook School records.

On the 11 August Margaret Roche, who had previously served for four years as senior monitress in Killinaboy, was appointed as Willbrook's first *de jure* principal on a salary of £27.10.0 with residency fees. She had charge of the school for the following twenty-two years, helped at various periods by assistant monitresses Mary McGrath and Ann Morgan. In July 1898 she was awarded a £5 premium for her excellence out of the Carlisle & Blake fund. Afterwards, however, charges of alleged harsh discipline against the principal resulted in some parents withdrawing their children from the school, and by 1903 the average attendance had fallen below 35. Miss Roche resigned her post abruptly in May, 1906 and was succeeded by Catherine McInerney.

A Teacher's Residence

An application to provide a teacher's residence at Willbrook had been made in 1898 and a sum of £200 was authorised. The application was subsequently withdrawn as the principal was unwilling to reside in the district and, in any case, no contractor could be found willing to carry out the work for the sum allowed. Canon O'Donovan renewed the application in January 1905 stating that he "had great hopes that he would find a contractor to build the residence". Though a sum of £250 was granted on this occasion, the work was never progressed.

Teachers

As well as those already mentioned, the following persons taught for various periods at Willbrook: Michael Considine, Mary Mee, Thomas Lynch, Nora Cuineen, Henry Comber, Patrick Cahill, Micheál Breathnach, Bridget O'Loughlin, Caitlín Ní Laoire, Máire Ní Lochlainn and Donncha Mac Conmara. After an existence of one hundred and four (104) years Willbrook School finally closed its doors on 30 June 1988 due to insufficiency of pupils. On the final day the attendance consisted of just seven pupils.



Back Row : Kathy O' Leary (Teacher), Mary Whelan, Mary Anne Neylon, PJ Quinn, Paddy Neylon, Patrick Mullins: Dan Neylon Paul O'Loughlin, Michael Murphy, Frankie Whelan, Tony McMahon, Joe Mullins, Martin Mc Donnell RIP, Joe Marrinan: Billy King, Martin Kenneally RIP, Anne Ward, Chrissie Mullins. **Middle Row :** Eileen Howard, Anne O'Loughlin, Mary O' Keeffe: Mary Commane, Mary Burke, Biddy Kearney, Mona Mc Namara, Mary McDonnell RIP, Pauline Lee, Brid McNamara: Mary Ward, Margaret Mullins, Nora Leahy RIP, Bridget Howard. **Front Row :** Martin Fahy, John Liddy, Jimmy Commane: Davy Neylon, Willie Whelan, Michael Cahill: RIP, Gerard Mullins, Billy Neylon.

Teacher Kathy O'Leary with pupils in the 1950s



Back Row : Mona McNamara, Mary Anne Neylon, Mary Whelan, Josie Quinn RIP, Teresa Leyden RIP, Evelyn O'Loughlin, Anne Mullins, Maura Mullins, Anne Liddy, Mary Burke, Mary Mc Donnell RIP, Biddy Kearney, Bridie Mullins RIP, Eileen Howard, Anne O'Loughlin.
Middle Row : Maureen McNamara, Margaret Mullins, Anne Mullins (almost hidden), Mary Ward, Pauline Lee, Eileen Cahill, Brid Mc Namara, Bridget Quinn RIP, Anne Ward, Anne McDonnell , Mary Commane, Bridget Howard, Chrissie Mullins, Pauline Brassil.
Front : Joan Cahill RIP & Brid Mullins.

Willbrook National School Girls in the 1950s



Back Row : Tony McMahon, Pat Mullins, Joe Mullins, Patrick Whelan, Martin Conway, Frank Ward, Paddy McNamara, P.J. Marrinan, Paddy Kenneally, James Caulfield, PJ Commene RIP, Joe Ward RIP, John Whelan, Patrick Conway, Martin McDonnell RIP, Dan Neylon. **Middle Row :** Michael Cahill RIP, John Organ, Tommy Neylon, Stephen Lee, Patrick Burke, John Mullins, Tom Organ, Tom Burke, Johnny Neylon, Sean Caulfield RIP, Tom Mullins RIP, Frankie Whelan, Michael O Loughlin RIP, Gerard Mullins. **Front Row :** Willie Whelan, John Liddy, Martin Fahy, Johnny Leyden RIP, Billy Neylon, Billy King, Paddy Neylon, Michael Murphy, Davy Neylon, Martin Kenneally RIP, Joe Marrinan, Jimmy Commene. **Boy in front :** Noel McNamara.

Willbrook National School Boys in the 1950s



At Scariff Drama Festival, April 1957

CARLISLE AND BLAKE PREMIUMS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE, 1956.

(Amount of each Premium—£6 6s. 0d.)

Division	County	Roll No.	School	Name of Principal Teacher
1	Cavan ..	17809	Scoil Phadraig Tnamanna	Tomás C. Mac Uidhir.
1	Leitrim ..	12872	Drumshambo	Matthew F. Giblin.
2	Monaghan ..	13685	St. Tighearnach's Boys'	James Joseph Kirke.
2	Louth ..	12266	Shelagh ..	Seán Ó Gnímh.
3	Mayo ..	13392	Kilkelly Girls	Miss Agnes Cassidy.
3	Galway ..	16548	Ballincurry ..	Alphonsus Ó Maoileanaigh
4	Galway ..	17095	Na Cealltraí ..	Michael F. Hogan.
4	Meath ..	17821	Scoil Mhuire Naofa (Linfield)	Roger J. McDyer.
5	Wicklow ..	2276	An tInbhear Mór Buachaillí	Michael O'Connor.
5	Dublin ..	17279	Scoil Mhuire Haddington Rd.	William A. Donovan.
6	Clare ..	12486	Willbrook ..	Pádraig S. Ó Cathail.
6	Cork ..	3886	Kiskeam Boys'	Seán Ó Ríordáin.
7	Cork ..	17001	Cluain Caoin ..	Patrick H. Casey.
7	Waterford ..	9889	Modeligo ..	Micheál Ó Murchadha.
8	Wexford ..	17005	An Ghleanna, Buachaillí	Michael J. Kehoe.
8	Kilkenny ..	797	Freshford Girls'	Miss Julia Maher.

Note name Pádraig S. O Cathail, who also received other awards.

27. CARLISLE AND BLAKE PREMIUMS.

THE CARLISLE AND BLAKE PREMIUM FUND.

1. The Minister for Education is empowered to allocate, in premiums, to the teachers of ordinary National Schools the interest accruing from certain funds at his disposal, these premiums to be called "The Carlisle and Blake Premiums." Teachers of Model Schools, Convent Schools, or other special schools are not eligible for these premiums.

2. The interest from the accumulated funds available for premiums is distributed every year in premiums to the two most deserving principal teachers in each of the eight Inspectorial Divisions, subject to the following conditions:—

- that the average attendance and the regularity of the attendance of the pupils are satisfactory.
- that, if a boys' or mixed school, taught by a master in a rural district, the education of the boys in the senior standards is given a rural bias; and, if a girls' school (rural or town), needlework is carefully attended to;
- that the state of the schools has been reported during the previous two years as satisfactory in respect of efficiency, moral tone, order, cleanliness, discipline, school records, supply of requisites and observance of the rules and regulations for national schools.

3. No teacher is eligible for a premium more frequently than once in five years.



Communion Class Willbrook National School, 1968

Left to Right: James O' Gorman, Moherbullog; Gerard Hanrahan, Cahermacateer; Brid Ryan, Moyhill; Mary Russell, Ardrush; Imelda Morgan, Applevale; James Crowe, Moyhill, James Shannon, Tonlegee.



Dr Harty with a Willbrook Confirmation Class in the 1970s.

(L-R) Back row: Michael Hynes, Mary Crowe, Margaret O'Loughlin (Carrowduff), Margaret O'Loughlin (Martree), Catherine O'Loughlin, Breda Morgan.

Front row: Peter O'Loughlin, James Hynes, John Shannon, Michael Corry, Patrick Ryan, PJ Shannon, Gerry O'Loughlin.



First Holy Communion Class

Fr Rodgers and teacher Mrs Mary O'Loughlin at Rath Church in the 1980s with a First Holy Communion Class:

(L-R) Andrew White, Sean Flaherty, Mary Shannon, Martin Mullins, Patrick Mullins, Kieran Casey.



Confirmation Class, Willbrook National School, 1973

Back Row (Left to Right): Martin Shannon, Gortbofarna; James O'Gorman, Moherbolg; Patrick O'Gorman, Moherbolg; James Guinnane, Gortnaglogh; John Guinnane, Gortnaglogh; James Shannon, Tonlagee; James Crowe, Moyhill; Gerard Hanrahan, Cahermacateer; Martin Corry, Cahermacateer; Tommy Marrinan, Ballyculliney.
 Front Row (Left to Right): Imelda Morgan, Knocknareeha; Mary Pat Kenny, Rathfynn; Mary White, Derry; Judith Ryan, Moyhill; Dympna Hynes, Willbrook; Brid Ryan, Moyhill; Martina O'Loughlin, Boula; Mary Russell, Ardrush; Bridget Russell, Ardrush.



Last Class at Willbrook National School, 30 June 1988 with teacher Mr McNamara.

(L-R) Martin Neylon, Willbrook; Frances Organ, Willbrook; Olivia Organ, Willbrook (partially hidden); Mary Neylon, Willbrook; Thomas Organ, Willbrook; Helen Quinn, Cahaska; Dermot O' Flaherty, Clouna



Former Pupils who attended the closure of Willbrook National School:
(L-R) Michael Mac Mahon, John Quinn and Michael Leyden



Willbrook National School Re-union Organising Committee, 2013

(L-R) Tom Burke, Mary Ward-Browne, Peter O'Loughlin, Michael Mac Mahon, Sheila Organ, Jack Hanrahan, Ann Ward-Burke, Michael Leyden, Frank Ward.