

The Whitla Hall: The Old and New

Last year a tragic event took the daily routine of our great school by surprise. The heart of our school, the Whitla Hall, caught fire on the 21st of January 2011, a little while after school had finished. Thankfully, the fire brigade were able to put the fire out without any one being hurt. The foyer had been damaged by the fire, the music department and the hall itself by smoke damage.

The Hall was opened in December, 1935. The Whitla Hall was named after Sir William Whitla (1851-1933). He was a successful doctor and politician. He donated large amounts of money to both Methody and Queens University (this is why they also have a Whitla hall.) He had been the governor of our school for twenty-seven years before his death. He bequeathed £10,000 specifically to build the hall.

The 75 year old Hall held daily assemblies, music groups, play rehearsal and play performance. All these things and many more were delayed some were thought to be cancelled. It seemed that things could not continue as normal, the show would really not go on. Yet go on it did.

The rehearsals for the junior school play (The Sound of Music) continued as normal with just as much enthusiasm as for all previous performances and in some ways more. We were able to secure the Stranmillis theatre to perform the play. It was a wonderful series of performances even without the Hall and its stage.



The music department took refuge in where the boys boarding had been and instrument lessons went on as normal. Luckily the music department was not as badly damaged as the rest of the Hall and was able to get up and running before the end of the school year.

The school sport shops had been damaged but happily those looking for deals on their P.E kit were able to buy the slightly damaged goods for less.

The school assembly rota had been seriously stunted by the absence of the Whitla Hall in the schedule. Again our wonderful school fought on and simply changed the routine and had to make do without.

We managed to keep things going and praise to our school for being able to organise everything in such short notice because 'if you're going through hell, just keep going.'

A few weeks after the fire renovations started to get things back on track. Although the music department had already been reopened the rest of the hall only opened in October 2011. The question was would the new hall be the same, or would it be dramatically different?



Well yes it is different, but the feel of the hall and the unity in our school that it stands for is still there.

A main element of the old hall which we are glad to see has been saved and kept on. This is the school crest on the floor of the foyer, it has always been an impressive feature and we are happy to see it is still there.



We have new toilets on either side of the foyer replacing where the sports shop was and where the deli was.

The stage was changed; it is now a flat, more modern stage with shiny, new wooden floors different from the previous white floors.

Carpets have been put in, on the upper level of the hall and also in the music department.

There are new chairs and although that doesn't seem like a noticeable thing as they are all the same colour it looks a lot better as before there had been mixed match different chairs. On the stairs of the hall there are also now new black folding chairs.

On the upper level of the hall, there are new glass and metal banisters at the front again giving a much more modern look to the hall. In the old hall there were cream painted walls with wood and brass banisters.

Finally there is a new lick of white paint on the walls giving the hall an open, bright, clean feel.

Although it is based around the same shape of the hall before it looks a lot brighter, cleaner looking and more modern. Although we will never forget the importance of the old Hall we cannot deny the importance of the new and improved Whitla Hall.

