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Mercer's School Rathcoole & Castleknock, Co. Dublin

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**MERCER'S SCHOOL  
RATHCOOLE & CASTLEKNOCK, CO. DUBLIN**

*By Michael Quane, Member*

To all and singular the faithfull in Christ to whom these our present Letters Testimonial shall come or whom the underwritten may in any wise concern, Hugh by divine Providence Archbishop of Armagh Primate and Metropolitan of all Ireland also Judge or President of his Majesty's Court of Prerogative for causes Ecclesiastical and for Faculties in and throughout the whole Kingdom of Ireland by royal authority rightly and lawfully constituted and established Greeting in our Lord God everlasting and Will that undoubted Faith be given to these Presents and do make known and will that it be truly made known to you that on searching the Registry of his Majesty's said Court of Prerogative in Ireland in the Archives thereof there well and faithfully preserved and kept We have discovered and plainly found amongst other things in the same that on the first day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirty five the last will and testament of Mary Mercer late of the City of Dublin Spinster deceased having whilst living and at the time of her Death goods rights credits or chattles in divers Dioceses or peculiar Jurisdictions was proved and approved in common form of Law and that the Burden of the Execution thereof and Administration of all and singular the goods rights credits and chattles of the said deceased were granted by us to the Right Reverend Father in God Robert by divine Permission Lord Bishop of Killalla and Achonry, the Reverend Patrick Delany and William Jackson Clerks Doctors of Divinity the Executors named in the said Will, of which the said last Will and Testament the true Tenor whereof is in the words following that is to say

In the name of God Amen I Mary Mercer of the City of Dublin being in perfect sense and memory but uncertain of the time when it may please God to take me out of this troublesome world do make this my last Will and Testament in manner following First I bequeath my soul to Almighty God hoping through the mercies and merits of my Saviour Jesus Christ to partake of eternal happiness with him and my body to be laid in Saint Mary's Chapple Christ Church Dublin, and as to my worldly substance I give leave and bequeath the same as follows vizt., My will is to devise direct and appoint that my Executors hereinafter named do and shall with all convenient speed after my decease lay out the sum of Three Thousand Pounds Ster. on a purchase of lands tenements or hereditaments to be taken in their names or in the names of the survivors or survivor of them and their heirs upon trust and confidence nevertheless and to the intent and purpose that they my said Executors shall as soon as conveniently may be after such purchase made and taken by good and sufficient conveyance in the law by lycence of alienation in mortmain or otherwise as by law shall be warranted grant release assure and convey all such lands tenemts. and hereditaments so to be purchased unto the then Lord Archbishop of Dublin, the Lord Bishop of Kildare, the Dean of the Cathedral Church of St Patrick's Dublin, the Vicar of St Peter's Parish, Dublin, and the Revd. James King, Minister of St Bridgett's, Dublin, and to their successors in the said respective dignities and parish forever.

To the special intent and purpose and upon trust and confidence that they the said Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Vicar of St Peter's and James King and their successors for ever, or any three of them, shall and will give employ and bestow the rents issues and profits of the said lands so to be purchased for and towards the cloathing dieting maintaining and supporting of twenty five poor girls and for their instruction in reading writing and working and qualifying them to be put out apprentices and until such time as they shall be put out apprentices

And my will is in case there shall be a surplus of the said rents over and above what my said trustees shall judge proper for the maintenance and support of the aforesaid number of poor girls, that they the said trustees shall employ and apply all such surplus rents for augmenting and increasing the number of such poor girls to be supported educated and maintained in the manner and for the purposes aforesaid as far as such surplus rents shall reach or amount unto

And my further will is that untill such purchase shall be made for the purposes aforesaid that the said sum of Three Thousand Pounds Ster. shall be placed and laid out at interest by my said Executors on bonds or other sufficient securities to be approved by my said trustees or any three of them and that the interest money

to be received for the same shall be applyed employed and laid out by the said trustees or any three of them for the maintenance support and education of the said poor girls in the manner aforesaid and for the purposes hereinbefore expressed

And whereas I am possessed of an estate and lands in West Derby near Liverpool in Great Britain, and whereas there has been purchased by me the severall plots of ground in the south side of Abby Street in the suburbs of the City of Dublin called and known by the names of the ninth and tenth lots each containing in front to Abby Street aforesaid twenty eight feet and backwards to the Lord Mount Alexander's stables in Strand Street one hundred and thirty two feet as they are set to Captain Richard Swan, and also two other plots of ground on the east side of Jervis Street in the suburbs of the said City each containing in front to Jervis Street aforesaid thirty feet and backwards one hundred and thirty feet called the first and second lots as the same are set to Mrs Ann Cogheran whereon severall houses are built, and also to all that part or parcel of ground fronting to St Mary Street on the south adjoining to a grand lott of Sr Humphry Jervis on the east thereof containing in front to said street eighty one feet and backwards to the grand lot of Dr William Smyth late Bishop of Raphoe and Sr Humphry Jervis two hundred and ten feet being part of the lot called the eleventh lot as the same was set to James Barry Esqr. his heirs and assigns for ever at the rent of twenty pounds a year whereon are two tenements which are or were inhabited by Coll. Richard St. George and Richard Nutley Esqr.

I therefore devise leave and bequeath the aforesaid estate and lands in Great Britain and the aforesaid severall lots of ground tenements and premises unto my said Executors and their heirs upon trust and confidence nevertheless that my said Executors shall and will likewise with all convenient speed after my decease by lycence of alienation in mortmain or by such other means as by law shall be warranted grant convey and assure unto the aforesaid Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Vicar of St Peter's and James King and their successors for ever in the said respective Dignities and Parish, the said estate and lands and said several plots of ground tenements and premises upon trust and confidence, likewise that they the said Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Vicar of St Peter's and James King and their successors for ever in the said respective dignities and Parish, the said estate and lands and said several plots of ground tenements and premises upon trust and confidence likewise that they the said Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Vicar of St Peter's and James King and their successors for ever as aforesaid or any three of them shall likewise apply and employ the rents issues and profits thereof for and towards the support maintenance and education of the said twenty five poor girls for ever and such further other poor girls as the rents and profits of the said premises together with the said other premises hereinbefore made for them shall reach for that purpose, and untill such time as they shall be fit to be put out apprentices as aforesaid, and my will is that untill such time as my said Executors shall execute sufficient conveyances in law of the said estate and said plots of ground and premises to my aforesaid trustees for the purposes aforesaid that the rents issues and profits of the said estate and the said lots of ground and premises shall be applyed and employed to the support maintenance and instruction of the said poor girls and for putting them out apprentices in manner aforesaid

And whereas I have built and erected a large house and school in St Stephen's Church-yard in the Parish of St Peter's and City of Dublin, the ground whereon the same is built being a fee farm lease to me and my heirs for ever and taken in lease by me from the Vicar and Churchwardens of the Parish of St Peter's Dublin wherefore I devise the aforesaid house with all easements and appurtenances thereunto belonging to my said Executors and their heirs upon trust, also that they may with all convenient speed after my decease convey and assure the same to the aforesaid Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Vicar of St Peter's Dublin and James King and their successors as aforesaid for ever upon trust, nevertheless that to the intent and purpose that they the aforesaid trustees shall from time to time for ever settle and place therein all such poor girls as are hereby intended to be supported and provided for, and shall accomodate them therein with lodging cloathing diet firing and other necessarys suitable to their state and condition untill they shall be put out apprentices as aforesaid

Item I will and devise that my said Executors or the survivors or the survivor of them shall lay out the further sum of Two Thousand Pounds Ster. on a purchase of lands to the use of them and their heirs in the County of Dublin or of ground

rents in the City of Dublin or the suburbs of the said City upon trust and confidence nevertheless to the intent and purpose that they my said Executors shall in like manner with all convenient speed after my decease grant convey and assure such lands or ground rents so purchased to the said Lord Archbishop of Dublin, the said Bishop of Kildare, the said Dean of St Patrick's Church Dublin, the said Vicar of St Peter's Church Dublin and the said James King and their successors as aforesaid in the said respective dignities and parish upon special trust and confidence nevertheless and to the intent and purpose that they the said Archbishop, Bishop, Dean, Vicar of St Peter's and James King and their successors for ever or any three of them shall and will from time to time for ever apply the rents issues and profits of the said last mentioned to be purchased lands or ground rents for and towards the care and relief of such poor indigent sick persons as from time to time shall be found and be resident in the severall following parishes in the City of Dublin that is to say the parishes of St Peter, St Bridget, St Luke and St Nicholas Without the Walls, and my will is that the respective ministers in the said parishes who personally visit the said sick shall have the distribution of the said money to and amongst such poor sick persons in the said parishes as they shall judge to be proper objects for such relief and charity and to that end also my further will is that my said trustees and their successors aforesaid shall from time to time for ever as the rents issues and profits of the said purchased lands or ground rents come into their hands half-yearly, divide and pay over the said sumes in equall shares to the said respective ministers of the said parishes who may in their discretion and according to the exigences of the said poor sick persons distribute the same to such poor sick persons as shall from time to time be found to be proper objects in the said parishes for this my intended charity

And my further will is that untill such purchase shall be made for the purposes aforesaid that the said sume of Two Thousand Pounds Ster. shall be placed and laid out at interest by my said Executors on bonds or other sufficient securities to be approved of by my said trustees or any three of them And that the interest money to be received for the same shall be applied and employed and laid out by my said trustees or any three of them towards the relief of the said poor indigent sick in the manner aforesaid and for the uses hereinbefore expressed.

Item I give and bequeath to my cosen Mary Barry daughter of my unkle Paul Barry late of Finglass in the County of Dublin Esqr. deceased the sume of One Thousand Pounds Ster. to be paid her in the first place out of my effects the produce of which she is to enjoy during her natural life or till the day of her marriage, and then my will is that the said sume shall revert to my Executors to be by them paid over to my said trustees, and that the produce and income thereof be applied by them in like manner for the use of the aforesaid Charity School for Poor Girls

And I also leave and bequeath to my said cosen Mary Barry daughter of my said unkle Paul Barry all my wearing apparrell and household furniture of what nature or kindsoever together with the gold diamond ring my said unkle Paul Barry was pleased by his last will and testament to bequeath me

And as to all the rest of my personal and real estate debts due to me and effects of what nature or kind whatsoever which I am or shall be possessed of or entitled unto I bequeath the same to my Executors to be by them paid over to my said trustees for the use of the said Charity School of the poor girls aforesaid

Item and lastly I constitute and appoint the Right Revd. Robert (present) Lord Bishop of Killalla, the Revd. Doctr. Patrick Delany, Minister of St Werbrough's Parish Church Dublin and the Revd. Doctr. William Jackson, Minister of St John's Parish Church Dublin to be Executors of this my last will and testament

In witness whereof I the said Mary Mercer have to three parts of this my will all of the same tenor and date subscribed my name and affixed my seale this eighth day of August in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirty three.

Mary Mercer (seal) signed  
Sealed and published by the within named Mary Mercer as her last will and testament in the presence of us who hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses at her request and in her presence

Thomas Heany John Pope Saml. Kathrens  
In faith and testimony wherof we have caused these our Letters Testimonial to issue and be corroborated and confirmed under the seal of his Majesty's said Court of Prerogative. Dated as to the search and sealing of these presents the seventh day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred forty one.

Nath. Bland. Commissary.

## I

Mary Mercer was the daughter of George Mercer (or Merse) who was born at Derby in Lancashire in 1645 and who came to Ireland in 1663 when he entered Trinity College, Dublin as a 'pensioner'. He became a 'scholar' in the following year.<sup>1</sup> In 1670 he became a Fellow of the College, and in 1671 he was elected *Medicus*, or medical fellow, although he did not proceed to a medical degree till 1681, a year before he was admitted a Fellow of the College of Physicians. Evidently he was a learned man, for in 1672 he became Senior Greek Lecturer in Trinity College, and later its Vice-Provost. At that time the Fellows were not allowed to marry, but Mercer seems to have been susceptible, for he married a Miss Mary Barry. This might not have caused any trouble, provided public attention were not called to the fact, the wife of a Fellow being generally passed off as his sister. In 1687, however, the *Terrae Filius*, in a speech at Commencements, spitefully mentioned the marriage. Archbishop Marsh, as Visitor of the College, wrote to the Provost on the matter, and in June of that year Mercer was deprived of his Fellowship. He appears to have died in the following December . . .<sup>2</sup> His death at the early age of forty-two may have been hastened because of the termination of his university appointment. The will of his widow, Mary Mercer, was proved in the Prerogative Court in 1703.<sup>3</sup> It was made on 1 February 1692.<sup>4</sup>

On the death of both of her parents, the daughter, Mary Mercer, was considerably wealthy. She lived in Great Ship (or more correctly Sheep) Street in the parish of St. Bride, Dublin, not far from the site of the Hospital which now bears her name. She died unmarried on Tuesday, 4 March 1735,<sup>5</sup> and on Thursday evening, March 6th, she was 'very decently interred at Christchurch'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burtchaell & Sadleir *Alumni Dublinenses* Lond. 1924. p. 573.

<sup>2</sup> Address delivered by Dr. T. Percy Kirkpatrick at the Bi-Centenary Celebrations held at Mercer's Hospital, Dublin, December 4, 1934.—*The Irish Journal of Medical Science* No. 109. Jan. 1935. p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Kirkpatrick *loc. cit.* p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The note respecting this will in the Betham *Abstracts of Prerogative Wills* (Phillip MSS.) P.R.O.I. IA-44-5 describes the husband as Doctor George Mercer and mentions also an *only daughter* Mary.

<sup>5</sup> "Last Tuesday died Mrs Mercer, a Maiden Lady, who hath left 6000l. in Charitable Uses to be disposed in the following manner. The Interest of 3000l. is to endow a Charity-School for the Maintenance and Education of 35 poor Girls. The Interest of 2000l. is to support the Sick and Poor of four Parishes, viz., St Nicholas Without, St Patrick's, St Bridget's and St Luke's; the Interest of the remaining 1000l. is left to a young lady her Neice; and after her death is to go for the Benefit of the above School."—*The Dublin Evening Post* March 4-8, 1734/5. (Vol. III. No. 69.)

The mention of a niece in the foregoing announcement could be adduced in support of Dr. Kirkpatrick's statement *loc. cit.* that Mary Mercer "had one sister Alice, who was married", but the fact remains that the young lady named in Miss Mercer's will *supra* was not a niece but her cousin, Mary Barry, daughter of her mother's brother, Paul Barry of Finglas.

<sup>6</sup> *The Dublin Gazette* March 8, 1734/5.



## II

The site of Mercer's Hospital, at the corner of Lower Mercer Street and Lower Stephen Street, was occupied in 1230<sup>7</sup> by the leper-house of St Stephen which had been founded there at an earlier date by the citizens of Dublin. In 1275 Katharine le Gront made a considerable bequest in favour of 'the lepers of St Stephen'.<sup>8</sup> In 1378, Elena Mocton made a very substantial grant in favour of the guardian and brethren of St Stephen's<sup>9</sup> and from the terms of her deed it is evident that the leper-house was then under the supervision of a religious order. This order was suppressed in 1542 in furtherance of the designs of Henry VIII, but though the prior and brethren of St Stephen's were thereby removed, the patients would seem to have been continued in the buildings, as in 1577 it was recorded

Saint Stephan, this was erected for a hospitall for poore, lame and impotent lazers, where they abide to this daie, although not in such chast and sincere wise as the founders will was upon the erection thereof. The Maior, with his brethren, on Saint Stephan his daie (which is one of their station daies), repaireth thither, and there dooth offer.<sup>10</sup>

In 1591 'the pore lazares of St Stephens complayneth that they are in distress and wante, and prayed . . . that the offrings this last St Stephens daie and the yeare before should be gyven unto them for their better relefe' but the members of the Dublin City Assembly or Corporation to whom this appeal was made, disregarded it, and applied the "offringes" to "the reparacion of the howse" i.e. the lazar-house'.<sup>11</sup>

The Church of the lazar-house of 'St Stevens' is shewn on Speed's Plan of Dublin, drawn in 1610, on the site now occupied by Mercer's Hospital, but by then St Stephen's Hospital (i.e. the lazar-house) had passed into the 'custodship' of a succession of individuals who were authorised by the City Assembly to receive the rentals, tithes and other income annually accruing to the institution subject only to their maintaining the 'said hospitall in good and sufficient repaire'.<sup>12</sup> In 1639 however the Protestant ecclesiastical authorities united the parish of St Stephen's with that of St Bride's, the incumbent of which, Rev Stephen Jerome (Hierome)<sup>13</sup> became thereby a quintuple pluralist as he also had the livings

<sup>7</sup> In Michaelmas Term in the fourteenth year of the reign of Henry III (1230), an agreement was entered into in the King's Court whereby "The master and lepers of the house of Saint Stephen at Dublin, plaintiffs, agree to accept from Geoffrey Tyrel and his wife Sara, defendants, a surrender of the town of Balygyregan and its appurtenances".—Gilbert *Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin*. Vol. I. pp. 168/9. Thereafter these lands became known as Baile-na-lobhar (i.e. Leperstown, nowadays Leopardstown).

<sup>8</sup> Christ Church Deeds in *Appendix to Twentieth Report of Deputy Keeper of Public Records Ireland*. No. 106.

<sup>9</sup> *The Irish Builder*. Vol. XXXVII. 1895. pp. 169-188, & *The Dublin Historical Record*. Vol. IV. 1941-2. p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Stanihurst *Description of Dublin; Cal. Ancient Records*. op. cit. Vol. II. p. 545.

<sup>11</sup> *Cal. Ancient Records*. op. cit. Vol. II. p. 239.

<sup>12</sup> *do.* Vol. III. pp. 289-290.

<sup>13</sup> Concerning whom there is an interesting notice in the *D.N.B.* Vol. XIX. 1892edn.

of the parishes of St Michel-le-Pole, St Peter's de Monte and St Kevin's. During the next few disturbed decades, till the restoration of Charles II, the 'old hospital, chapel and graveyard of St Stephen's' were 'enclosed up and preserved from all common and profane uses'<sup>14</sup> and so became derelict. Between 1682 and 1698, the hospital building and chapel which had become ruinous were taken down, and the site now contained only the walled-in churchyard.

Mary Mercer 'of the city of Dublin, spinster, being piously and charitably inclined to build at her own charge a house for the reception of twenty poor girls or other poor persons, proposed to build the same in the parish of St Peter's in the suburbs of the city of Dublin provided the said parish would set out to the said Mary a piece of ground for that purpose . . . the minister, churchwardens and parishioners of the said parish of St Peter's in order to encourage so pious a work . . . by deed bearing date 25 February 1724 let to said Mary Mercer her executors administrators and assigns for the use aforesaid all that plot or parcel of ground situate and being part of the ground commonly called St Stephen's Churchyard, in the suburbs of the City of Dublin containing in front to Stephen's Street facing William Street forty five and a half feet and in depth forty six feet or thereabouts for the term of nine hundred and ninety-nine years at the yearly rent of a pepper corn only from 25 September 1723'.<sup>15</sup>

By the same deed, Mary Mercer covenanted to build within twelve months on the said plot a house 'containing four rooms, to be employed for the habitation and reception of twenty poor girls or such other poor persons as she should from time to time direct and appoint to live therein'. The building actually erected by her on this site was however much larger than the house of four rooms stipulated in the deed of 1724 as appears from the drawing in Brooking's Map of Dublin, 1728. (Plate IV.) When the building was completed, it is clear from Miss Mercer's will that it was in use from the date thereof viz. 8 Aug. 1733, as a residential school for poor girls; but it would appear from a letter written less than a year previous to that date to Dean Swift by Sir William Fownes, a former Lord Mayor of Dublin, to whom the Dean had evidently mentioned his intentions regarding the foundation of a mental hospital,<sup>16</sup> that Miss Mercer was

<sup>14</sup> *The Irish Builder*. Vol. XXXVIII. 1896. p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> From the preamble to the Act of 1749 (23 Geo. II. c. XVIII)—An Act for regulating the Hospital founded by Mary Mercer, spinster.—Vesey *The Statutes at Large*. Vol. II.

<sup>16</sup> Addressing Swift on September 9, 1732, from his home at Islandbridge, Sir William wrote: Herewith you have my thoughts of the affair you mentioned to me. I wish I could prevail on you to patronize it and lay down your own scheme. . . . My scheme for such an undertaking should be much to this effect. First I would have a spot of ground fixed on, that should be in good open air, free from neighbourhood houses for the cries and exclamations of the outrageous would reach a great way, and ought not to disturb the neighbours which you did not think of when you mentioned a spot in a close place, almost in the heart of the city. There are many places in the outskirts of the city, I can name, very proper. . . . It comes just now into my head that there is a very proper spot, which I think the Chapter of St Patrick lets to one Leigh, a bricklayer or builder. It lies back of Aungier Street East, comes out of York Street, down a place called the Dunghill, runs down to the

having some misgivings as to the possibility of continuing her school for poor girls in the surroundings of the building which had been erected by her in St Stephen's churchyard, and she had very likely come to the conclusion that it would be preferable to locate the school in a rural area at some distance from the city. She must also have been aware of the desire and intention of various charitable persons at that time to improve the very insufficient facilities then available in the city for the care and treatment of the mentally and physically ill. For one reason or another, in 1734 Miss Mercer 'changed her mind'<sup>17</sup> regarding the use of the stone house erected by her in St Stephen's churchyard, and with the consent of the minister, churchwardens and parishioners of St Peter's she granted the building as it stood, and without any money endowment from her

for the remainder of the term of 999 years upon special trust to fit up and order the said house for the reception and accommodation of such poor sick and diseased persons as might happen to labour under diseases of tedious and hazardous care, such as the falling sickness, lunacy, leprosy, and the like, and such other diseased or infirm poor persons as the said trustees should judge proper to place therein, and to be taken care of and disposed of therein, according to such rules and orders as the said trustees should from time to time frame and settle for the purpose of the better habitation, care and accommodation of such poor and infirm persons, and also to lay out all sums of money, gifts, legacies as said trustees shall be entrusted with.<sup>18</sup>

The trustees nominated in the foundation deed of 20 May 1734 of Mercer's Hospital were the Protestant Archbishops of Armagh and Dublin, the Bishop of Kildare, the Lord Mayor and high sheriffs of Dublin, the ministers of the parishes of St Peter's, St John's, and St Michan's, the Dean of Christ Church, Dr Jonathan Swift (Dean of St Patrick's), and medical practitioners William Stephens, Francis Le Hunt, Hannibal Hall, William Dobbs, and John Stone of the city of Dublin.

end of King Street, facing William Street; At the north end of which some almshouses are built by Dowling and others.

Also there stands to the front of the street, a large stone building, called an almshouse, made by Mrs Mercer; though by the by, I hear she is weary of her project and does little in supplying that house or endowing it.

Perhaps this ground may be easily come at through Leigh's heirs; and by your application, I know not but Mrs Mercer may give her house up to promote so good a work. This will go a good way, and being followed by subscriptions, a great and speedy progress may be made, in which I will readily join my labour. If that spot fails, we will pitch upon another.

Whatsoever may be your future intentions, do not deny me the consideration of the good your appearance and help may do. . . .—*The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, ed. by F. Elrington Ball, Lond. 1913. Vol. IV. pp. 343/9.

<sup>17</sup> *Educational Endowments (Ireland) Commission. Annual Report 1885-6*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in *23 Geo. II. c. XVIII* (see n. 15 *supra*).



Samuel Kathrens, who was one of the witnesses to Mary Mercer's will on 8 August in the previous year was, presumably on her recommendation, appointed to the post of house steward in the new hospital, to which 'the very first benefaction came from the Corporation of the City of Dublin, who granted £50, on the application of William Jackson. In 1734 ten beds were provided for the reception of the sick poor, and immediately filled. The physicians and surgeons of the time undertook to give their services without fee or reward, while several apothecaries and druggists subscribed annually towards supplying the hospital with medicines. As more contributions came in, the number of beds was increased to 40, and in 1738, by means of a legacy left by Captain Hayes, an addition to the old house was made, on ground given for the purpose by the Archdeacon of Dublin, the number of beds was further increased, while conveniences were added for bathing and sweating'.

In 1749 the surviving trustees, desirous for 'the better carrying into effect of the said charitable scheme', sought and procured an Act of Parliament for this purpose. Under this Act,<sup>19</sup> the governors of Mercer's Hospital were set up as a body corporate to execute from 25 March 1750 for ever the grant of the foundress. The corporation was enabled by the Act to secure perpetual succession and was composed of fifty-two members including dignitaries of the then Established Church, the Earl of Kildare and other titled persons, and Francis Le Hunt, William Stevens and John Anderson, 'doctors in physic'; and John Stone, George Daunt, Rice Gibbins, Rathborn Mills, Joseph Shewbridge and George Whittingham, surgeons. The title page of the Annual Report of the Hospital for the year 1934 contains this notice:

Please note : That this Hospital has been incorporated for 200 years. It rejects no person on account of religious tenets. It has no government grant.

### III

On the issue of letters of administration to them on the 7th May 1741, the executors of Mary Mercer's will laid out the sum provided by her in the purchase of lands in the town and neighbourhood of Rathcoole, Co. Dublin,<sup>20</sup> the rents of which with the rents of the property in the city and in Liverpool were to be applied to the support of her Charity School. The 'Book of Rules and Orders of the Rt. Revrd. and Revrd. the Trustees appointed by the last Will and Testament of Mrs Mary Mercer decd.' opens with the minutes of their meeting held on 4 July 1743 followed by the minutes of a meeting held on 20 February 1743. At the former meeting, which was attended by the Archbishop, the Bishop of Kildare, the Dean

<sup>19</sup> 23 *Geo. II. c. XVIII* already cited.

<sup>20</sup> Detailed particulars of the landed property attaching to the School are contained in an article at pp. 82 *et seq.* of the 1945 issue of this Journal.



The large house 'built and erected' by Mary Mercer 'in St. Stephen's Churchyard in the Parish of St. Peter's and City of Dublin' for a Charity School for Twenty-five Poor Girls.

from *Brooking's Plan of Dublin 1728*.

of Christ Church and Dr James King, Minister of Saint Bridgett's, they

'took into consideration the Intent of Mrs Mercer's Will and the Charitable Uses bequeathed in her state', and

'Resolved that a Charity School or Hospital be erected with all Convenient Speed for the Reception of Poor Girls to be dieted cloathed and educated pursuant to the Intent of the said Will and the trust reposed in them.

It is the opinion of the Trustees that Rathcoole, out of which the most Considerable Part of the bequeathed Estate ariseth is the properest and most convenient Place for the Scituation of the Intended Hospital.

Ordered that Doctor King be desired to take a view of the Lands at Rathcoole and Report to them at the next meeting what part of the Land he Judges to be most fit and convenient for the Scituation of the said Hospital'.

At the February meeting, the Trustees ordered that Samuel Kathrens<sup>21</sup> 'their agent do still continue to pay Mrs Barry the yearly sum of sixty pounds and to inform said Mrs Barry it is sayed she is married, and to know what she says upon the said affaire'. At a later meeting it was reported to the Trustees that 'the said Mrs Barry would not inform said Kathrens whether she was or not but sayd she apprehended whether she was or not she was intituled to what was left her by the will of Mrs Mercer'. At the same meeting Dr King reported that with others he had viewed that part of the Trustees lands in Rathcoole held on lease by Clement Barry, jr., and that

1st. We are all of opinion that the part of Mr Barry's farm which we view'd is a most proper, convenient and beautifull scituation for the school-house or hospital intended to be built.

2dly. We observe that it is placed at a small distance from the parish church, is adjoining Rathcool-Common, of which Mannor the Archbishop is Lord, and is almost surrounded with a fine Revulet which can occasionally water the fields as well as serve the uses of the hospital.

3dly. We judge from the appearance of the uppermost stratum of

<sup>21</sup> As already noted, Samuel Kathrens, one of the witnesses to Mary Mercer's Will, obtained the post of house steward at the Hospital in Stephen's Street in 1734, but at a meeting of the Governors of the Hospital held on 30 August 1736 it was "Ordered That whereas upon a strict inquiry at two several meetings it has appeared to the Managers of Mercer's Hospital that Mr Kathrens is every way unqualified for the office of House Steward he be and is hereby discharged from the service of this house". He was however retained by the Trustees as agent for the collection of the rents of the houses and lands pertaining to Miss Mercer's Charity, and he was continued in this paid employment till his death in 1772.

some part of the land that, upon searching, a quarry will be found there, which will save carriage of that expensive article of building.

4thly. Mr Barry their tenant proposes to accomodate to the Trustees with what number of acres of meadow and pasture they think necessary and sufficient at one pound ten shillings an acre, which is a lower rent than it has been set for to the inhabitants of the town, and further to shew that this demand is very reasonable, he is willing to refer the merit of his proposal to the determination of any two or three gentlemen in the neighbourhood acquainted with country business.

5thly. We are of opinion that a search should be immediately made for the quarry, which may be done at a very small expence, and that a survey with a mapp should be taken of the plot of ground designed for the scituation of the school-house.

6thly. Mr Cummin a man of well-known probity and great skill in contriving buildings for conveniency, beauty, stability and cheapness is so good as to promise when the Trustees have determined the number of children to be received into the hospital and the particular kinds of labour they are to be employed in, that he will design a plan of the house and offices with a bill of scantling to be laid before them for their further improvement and amendment of it.

7thly. And that when the plan is approved and agreed upon he will assist the Trustees with his advice how to have it honestly executed, and will often call at Rathcoole to see that the materials prepared for the building are well chosen and as much as possible prevent the workmen's mistakes and impositions.

The Trustees agreed to the erection of the school on the site recommended in the foregoing report, and asked Mr Cummin 'to design a plan of a proper hospital with convenient offices for the accommodation at present of a master and mistress and twenty-five girls who are to be taught to milk, make butter, cheese, etc., bake, wash, etc., and to be thorough servants'. Cummin submitted a plan which was passed by the Trustees, and John Tracy, bricklayer, was 'spoke to about said building'.

John Kenny and his wife were appointed master and mistress of the school at 'the same allowance as the schoolmaster and mistress at the Charter Schools in this Kingdom have'. These appointments were made whilst the school was being built, and the Trustees arranged that Kenny 'be overseer of said building and that he takes care the same be well gone on with, and justice done to every particular, and that his sallary commence from the time of his beginning to oversee the same' The build-

ing was completed in 1745,<sup>22</sup> as on 11 April in that year the Trustees 'ordered that Samuel Kathrens do give Mr Kenny, schoolmaster, one pound ten shillings sterling to be by him given to the workmen employed in building the schoolhouse, to drink, as usual in such cases'. Three cows were bought for the use of the school. These were grazed on part of the twenty acres leased from Clement Barry, and a barrel of flax seed was supplied to the master (Kenny) and sown in another part of the lands 'for the use of the schoolhouse'. Mary Mercer's school opened at Rathcoole at Michaelmas 1745 with twenty girls. The master and mistress were told 'that twelve pounds a year is their salary as it is the allowance of the Charter Schools, but that they may expect a gratuity from time to time at the discretion of the trustees if he and his wife are diligent in the management of the house and the care of the children'.

It was reported to the Trustees at their meeting on 19 June 1747 that sufficient funds were then available to permit of the keeping of twenty-five girls in the school, 'the number required by Mrs Mercer's will'. In the previous year the Trustees had ordered that the following inscription be 'set up at the schoolhouse':

FOR THE EDUCATION OF POOR GIRLS  
IN THE PROTESTANT RELIGION  
BY THE BEQUEST  
OF MARY MERCER SPINSTER  
THIS HOSPITAL  
WAS ERECTED AND ENDOWED  
1744.

At the meeting of the Trustees on 19 June 1747 it was again ordered 'that the Inscription Table be immediately affixed to the School'. At this meeting

Mrs Kenny, the Mistress of the School House, having informed Dr King that many parents, particularly of Popish Children, often resort to the School in order she believes to inveigle them away, and are very abusive to her for not permitting them to go with them to ale-houses, which she apprehends may be attended with many Inconveniences.

Ordered that Mr Kathrens do acquaint Mrs Kenny that the Trustees highly commend her conduct in not suffering children to converse with their Parents; and that for the future she is desired to discourage All

<sup>22</sup> The total cost of building was £742-6-4½, and a sum of £100 was made available for the purchase of beds and other equipment. The first group of girls entered the school on 29 September 1745 on which day Mrs Kenny, the mistress, was present to receive them.



mutual visits, and to inform them that it is by Positive Orders of the Trustees.

The Trustees had also under consideration the letting of the 'Inn in Rathcoole known by the sign of the White Horse and Black Lyon and the fourteen acres of ground or thereabouts late in the possession of David Birtchell and Mathew Bermingham'. They 'ordered that Samuel Kathrens do inquire for a Protestant tenant for the White Horse Inn and lands thereunto belonging'.

Dr Pococke, then Archdeacon of Dublin and afterwards Bishop of Ossory, regularly attended the meetings of the Trustees of Mary Mercer's Charity. It is not unlikely that his plan for the Linen Weaving Charity School for Boys endowed by him at Brownstown, Kilkenny, originated from his connection with the Charity School for Girls at Rathcoole. The following is a transcript of the minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 1747, at which he was present with the Archbishop of Dublin (Charles Cobbe), the Dean of St Patrick's, and Doctor James King (Minister of St Bride's):

Doctor King's report of the Present State and Condition of the Charity School made pursuant to an order of 8th February last was this day laid before the Trustees and read, and it is the Opinion and Resolution of the Trustees present that since Mrs Kenny is insane both in Mind and Body and Entirely Incapable to take care of the Children, that the management of the School be committed to the care of some Discreet Sober and Qualifyed Matron and that for the future no Mistresses Husband or any other Man shall be suffered to Reside or Lye in the said Schoolhouse.<sup>23</sup>

Mary Owen being very well recommended by several gentlwomen of character and credit as a Woman in every Respect well Qualifyed to execute the office of School Mistress to teach the Girls to Knit, Spin, Wash, do Plain Work, Bake, make Butter, Read, Write, etc., Ordered that the said Mary Owen is this day approved of for Schoolmistress and that she be placed in the said School the first of May next for six months, and that she have for her service the usual salary of £12 a year to commence from her entrance into said School.

<sup>23</sup> Under an Act of 1711 (9 Ann. c. 6) carnal knowledge of a female under 12 was a felony punishable with death. Rape was one of the many abuses associated with the Charter School system introduced in this island in 1733, and for this under another Act passed in 1749 (23 Geo. II. c. II), the punishment was a mere whipping. Section IX of this Act reads: And be it further enacted . . . that if it shall happen that any school-master of any such Charter or other Charity school shall have carnal knowledge of any female child above the age of 12 years under his care, or if any such schoolmaster or schoolmistress shall consent or be privy to any other person so doing, he or she being convicted thereof at the assizes, shall for such offence be three times publicly whipped upon three several market days at noon in the county town where such person shall be so convicted.

The present writer has not seen any record of any conviction under this Act.

Ordered by Direction of the Trustees that Mrs Kenny present Mistress of the School and her family except her two daughters on the foundation do remove from thence by the first of May next, and that in consideration of her past services and care of the school a gratuity of Ten Pounds be paid by Samuel Kathrens to Doctor King to be applied by him at his discretion to her use.

Ordered that Dr King do enquire for and employ some honest labouring gardner to take care of the Garden Fields and Cows. And that he be desired to agree with an honest shoemaker to make shoes for the girls at as reasonable a Price as they can be made for.

Ordered that the grown up Girls who are qualified to be placed in Service be put out as soon as proper Mistresses apply for them, except two who are to continue in the House as Servants and to be allowed beside their diet and cloathing Twenty Shillings yearly for wages in case they deserve it.

Ordered that each Girl in the School have two shifts more a piece allowed them to keep themselves clean and decent and that they shift twice a week for the future.

*Initialled C. Dublin.*

It was reported to the Trustees in 1750 that 'several children of Popish extraction received into the school and there educated for some years have been inveigled away by their parents for fear they should be bred Protestants'. The Trustees resolved that 'for the future no girls be admitted into the school but such as have well attested certifiycates that their fathers and mothers were both of the Protestant religion'. At the Trustees' meeting of 6 August 1753, Dr King's report on the school for the year 1752 was read :

He visited the school several times this year (without any previous notice sent) in company with his wife and some other grave matrons who are well acquainted with the education of children on a charity foundation and the most proper management and application of their labour.

They were so good as to make many useful and advantagious enquiries in their province, and to give prudent necessary instructions about cutting out their cloathing and linnen which they saw carefully executed.

they always found the rooms and bedding clean and neat and the girls in good health and decent order, all engaged in their respective works.

All the children in proportion to their age (except three or four lately admitted) sing psalms and repeat their catechism very well, as Mr Ford the curate of the parish can attest, who regularly examines them every Sunday and instructs and prepares those arrived at years of discretion for the Holy Sacrament, which all receive regularly before they are placed in services.

Most of them read very well and write a pritty good hand, others are spelling and learning their catechism, and all engaged in work suitable to their years.

They have spun from ffebruary the 1st 1752 to January the 1st 1753 being 11 months

125	yards of flax one yard wide
20	" " tow " " "
170	" " camblett stuff spun the long way 1 yard wide
90	" " druggett for pettycoats
60	" " twilled chequer for aprons

---

465 yards in all. Besides knitting 44 pair of stockings and footing 23 pair. Making shifts and doing the necessary business of the house, which considering the tender years of the children is as much work as could be reasonably expected.

The children are now engaged in spinning flax for sheeting is wanted. The garden is in extraordinary good order, and plenty of roots and greens. The elms thrive very well. They saved this year 62 loads of hay, 40 barrells of potatoes, 13 barrells of oats made into meal, 2½ of wheat.

The windows and painting the house, white-washing which was done by Mr Keating.

The windows below stairs wants shutters both for warmth and security (several attempts have been made to rob the house). Mr Walsh the carpenter has fixed them up.

The children want bodices, some prayer books, and small boxes with keys to keep their cloaths and to teach them to be carefull, orderly and handy in folding up their linnen all which are provided for them.

A second hand clock is greatly wanted to fix the regularity of the childrens' dining working and sleeping.

Mr Kathrens who generally visits the school once a fortnight can give a more particular and exact account of the state of it if required.

James King.

Feb. 1, 1753.

In May, 1757, Mary Owen was succeeded as mistress of the school by 'the widow Susanna Harricks' at the same wages, viz., £12 a year. In

1762 a gallery was erected at the west end of the Protestant Church of Rathcoole for the use of the girls of Mercer's School, and in the following year Samuel Kathrens was authorised by the Trustees to pay Richard Benson, the Parish Clerk, £3/10/- a year 'for teaching the children to sing psalms, read, write and cypher'. On 8 Nov. 1769 Susanna Harricks resigned from the post of mistress, and 'in consideration of her past services and present infirmities' the Trustees decided 'that she shall be paid for the future during life a salary of ten pounds a year'. 'At the same time the proposal of Ann Johnston was read in which she offers to dyet the twenty-five children and the maid servant at three pence per day each. With an allowance of eight pounds a year for her dyet and a salary of £12 a year. The said Ann Johnston is hereby appointed mistress on the above mentioned terms. The dietary to be settled to the satisfaction of the Trustees.' Two years later Ann Johnston asked the Trustees to increase the allowance for dieting the girls from 3d. to 4d. a day because 'of the great rise of provisions'. (Plate V.) Her application was supported by Rev William Blackford, Vicar of Rathcoole, and Rev John Gast, Minister of Newcastle, both frequent visitors to the school. At their meeting on 10 June 1771, the Trustees 'ordered that the sum of eight pounds be paid Mrs Johnston on account of her extraordinary care of the children when ill of meysles last Febry. and also on account of the Rise of Provisions'. The Trustees gave Ann Johnston a gratuity of £12 in December 1776 'for her distinguished care of the children in the said school', but the minutes of their meeting held on 14 November 1783 read as follows :

It is this day resolved that Mrs Mary Maclean be and is hereby appointed Mistress of the School at Rathcoole in the place of Mrs Ann Johnston who we have removed from the care of said school to commence from the 17th of this inst (month), for which the said Mary Maclean shall have the following salary and advantages.  
Her salary to be £12 yearly.

The said Mary Maclean is to diet the whole family by the head. She is to be allowed for herself six pence p. day—for each of the girls three pence p. day—and for two maid servants four pence p. day for each—and their wages which is three pounds each p. year.

She is also to have the use and advantages of the garden, and a gardner to cultivate the same for whose wages she is to be paid £12 p.a. and also all necessary utensils for the Dairy and Kitchen, and the field held by Mrs Johnston in as large and ample manner as the said Ann Johnston had the farm at the yearly rent of five pounds which she is to allow of the salary every year while we shall see proper to continue her as mistress of said school.

The next recorded minutes of the proceedings of the Trustees are dated 15 January 1796; from these it appears that Mrs Elizabeth Senior

was then 'Matron' of the school; her rate of pay is not recorded, but in the following year Joseph Senior was appointed school-master at 'the yearly salary of £12 sterling to commence from 25 March last' i.e. 1797. The Matron represented in 1801 that she was at a loss of £130 because of the high cost of provisions and the inadequacy of the allowance of 6d. a day for her own food, with only 3d. a day for each child, and 4d. a day for each servant—which rates 'had been fixed many years since and not encreased'. The Trustees thought 'it but just to reimburse her the above sum of £130 and the treasurer is desired to pay her that sum'. At the same time the trustees 'granted to Joseph and Elizabeth Senior a lease of  $1\frac{3}{4}$  acres of land at Rathcoole 'with the ruined cabbins thereon lately held by William Mullaly, at the rent of £5 p.a.' In 1807 the allowance of 3d. a day for feeding each child in the school was increased to  $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. because of the high prices of provisions. The Commissioners appointed in 1806 under the Act 46 Geo. III c. 122 reported at length on the school on 18 March 1812. Their report ended as follows:

The children are taught, besides reading, writing and arithmetic, spinning, knitting, needle-work, and particularly every species of household country employment—their religious education is also carefully attended to.

The girls when fit are apprenticed to trades and services as opportunities offer.

This Charity for many years past has been and still is extremely well conducted in every respect. The Trustees visit the school, and hold frequent Boards, and pass the Accounts at stated periods.<sup>24</sup>

It is not possible however to reconcile the last statement with the fact that in the twelve years from June 1801 to June 1812 only six meetings of the Trustees are recorded in the Minute Book.

The Commission of Inquiry set up by George IV on 14 June 1824 obtained much information in that year concerning the schools then in Rathcoole.<sup>25</sup> Joseph and Elizabeth Senior were returned to them as master and mistress of the free boarding school for '50 poor protestant female children' endowed by 'Mrs Mary Mercer'. This was the only school in Rathcoole under Protestant management, but there were five schools in the town under Catholic masters or mistresses.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Thirteenth Report of the Commissioners of the Board of Education in Ireland. 1807-1812.* pp. 298/9.

<sup>25</sup> *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry* dated Dublin 16 September 1826. pp. 604/7.

<sup>26</sup> Nine Protestant children attended a school kept by Daniel Boyle in a thatched house for which he paid a rent of £4 p.a. He had thirty-nine Catholic children. Of the total of forty-eight, forty were boys. This was a "pay school" and out of the payments made to him by his pupils, the master made about £26 a year.

Three Protestant children were among the fifty-one pupils in attendance at John Brady's school. Brady was a Catholic, his schoolhouse was mud-walled and the cost of its erection was met from local subscriptions totalling £40. He made about £15 a year, i.e. the average fee per pupil came to 6/- a year.



Richard Morgan of Newcastle, Co. Dublin, who died in 1784, by his will made in 1773 left certain properties in trust

to erect and furnish two separate buildings at a distance not exceeding two miles from Dublin; one to provide for the accommodation of one hundred boys, the other for the accommodation of one hundred girls, the children of poor reduced Protestant parents, to be clothed, dieted, lodged, educated and instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, and other useful and necessary qualifications for persons of their condition in life, under the inspection of proper masters and mistresses, and when of sufficient age, to be apprenticed to Protestant masters and mistresses, paying with each an apprentice fee of £5.

In 1810 two separate buildings were erected by the Trustees of Morgan's bequest on lands procured by them from Lord Ashtown at Castleknock. These buildings were completed in May 1813, and the Commissioners of the Board of Education, who had been looking into the state and condition of the various educational endowments in Ireland during the previous six years, were hopeful that

In fine, these two establishments, if well attended to, and supplied with capable masters and superintendents, promise to be most useful and noble establishments among the many public ones which at present exist in Ireland for the education of the lower orders of our people.<sup>27</sup>

These expectations did not, however, materialise, as the income from the property held upon the trusts of the will proved insufficient to carry out all the purposes thereof, and a school providing accommodation for thirty-six boys only, 'or thereabouts', was established in one of the buildings at Castleknock under the name 'Morgan's School'. The other building remained unoccupied for several years till in 1823 the Trustees of Mary Mercer's Charity

Resolved that it has been deemed expedient to remove Mrs Mercer's Charitable School for Protestant Females from Rathcoole its present position to a situation more immediately in the vicinity of the metropolis of Dublin.

The owner of a cabin in the town gave the use of it to another Catholic teacher. John Murphy, in return for the free schooling of one child. There were two schools under Catholic teachers on "the hill of Rathcoole"—Catherine Whelan kept one of them in "a poor cabbin"; she taught eight boys and six girls and made about £4 a year.

William Saunders kept a school in an old cow-house on the hill—he made about £15 a year out of twenty-three pupils, of whom two were Protestants.

<sup>27</sup> *Thirteenth Report* already cited (n. 24 *supra*) p. 295.

The meeting at which the foregoing resolution was adopted was held at the palace of His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Dublin on November 29', and a further resolution was taken at that meeting

that His Grace of Dublin be requested to communicate with the Governors of Morgan's Charities as to the practicality of removing the female school to the vacant house now in possession of the Governors of Mr Morgan's Charities.

As the Archbishop was a trustee of both Mercer's and Morgan's Charities the trustees of the latter Charity readily agreed that

as there was not any prospect of their funds improving so as to enable them to carry into effect the intentions of their Testation, by establishing a female school it was considered that their wishes would in some measure be answered and a heavy expense saved by acceding to the proposal.

At their meeting on 26 October 1825, the Trustees of Mercer's Charity approved of the appointment of Mrs Elizabeth Williams to the post of School Mistress of the Rathcoole School now to be transferred to Morgan's school-house in the room of Mr Senior'. Senior was given a pension (amount not recorded) and his wife was given 'an annuity of twenty guineas for her long and faithful services' as matron.

On 24 January 1826 the transfer of the girls from Rathcoole to Castleknock had been effected, and at a meeting in Morgan's Boys' School on that date, the Trustees of Mercer's School decided that

the two mistresses, under whose superintendence and charge Mrs Mercer's school is to be hereafter directed be denominated Matron and Class Mistress. To the Matron is entrusted the entire household department and to the Class Mistress the teaching department.

A salary of fifty-two pounds was fixed for the Matron and forty-two pounds for the Class Mistress. Each was to be supplied with 'coals, candles and soap' but not food. Mrs Williams was Matron and Miss Marianne Palmer was appointed, on 18 February 1826, as Class Mistress of the Castleknock School. Mr Elliott, surgeon, Castleknock, was to be 'paid £5 p.a. so long as it shall appear to the Treasurer that he is paying proper attention to the children of the school'. The following is a list of the 'Names and supposed Ages of Girls in Mrs Mary Mercer's School at Castleknock June 1st 1826.

Names.	Supposed ages.	By whom recommended.	Observations.
1 Anne Groves	17	Mr Lefanu	Father living
2 Frances Dawson	14	"	Parents dead
3 Eliza Horan	14	"	Father living
4 Mary Farmer	14	Abp. of Dublin	Parents dead
5 Eliza Barlow	13	Mr Lefanu	" "
6 Mary Patterson	—	"	" "
7 Eliza Mitten	13	Bp. of Kildare	" "
8 Eliza Piers	13	Mr Lefanu	Mother living
9 Ellen McCready	13	"	Parents "
10 Frances Conroy	13	Abp. Beresford	Mother "
11 Ellen Cunningham	13	Dean of St Patrick's	" "
12 Eliza Hines	13	Mr Lefanu	Father "
13 Ellen Botham	13	"	Parents dead
14 Catherine Miller	13	Bp. of Kildare	" "
15 Ellen Gallagher	13	Abp. of Dublin	" living
16 Eliza Gillen	12	Bp. of Kildare	" "
17 Mary Ward	12	Bp. of Killala	" dead
18 Mary Mangan	12	Abp. Beresford	" "
19 Jane Binks	12	Dean of St Patrick's	Mother living
20 Catherine Turner	12	Archdeacon of Dublin	" "
21 Rosanna Potter	11	Mr Lefanu	" "
22 Anne Pegley	13	Archdeacon of Dublin	" "
23 Margaret Jennings	11	Mr Lefanu	" "
24 Eliza Kinkead	—	Dean of St Patrick's	Parents "
25 Mary Ann Walton	11	Bp. of Kildare	" "
26 Teresa Logue	11	"	" "
27 Eliza Twanley	11	Dean of St Patrick's	" "
28 Mary Ann Ennis	10	Mr Lefanu	Mother living
29 Eliza Miller	10	"	" "
30 Eliza Hart	10	Bp. of Kildare	" "
31 Emily Butler	10	Archdeacon of Dublin	" "
32 Margaret Armstrong	10	Bp. of Kildare	Parents dead
33 Mary Eddington	10	"	living
34 Sophia Keane	11	Archdeacon of Dublin	Mother "
35 Jane Kinkead	9	Dean of St Patrick's	Parents "
36 Susannah Logue	9	Bp. of Kildare	" "
37 Mary Ann Geary	9	Abp. of Dublin	" "
38 Eliza Manning	9	Archdeacon of Dublin	Mother "
39 Maria Farmer	9	Abp. of Dublin	" "
40 Christiana Wilkinson	9	Mr Irvine	" "
41 Mary Miller	8	Mr Lefanu	" "
42 Margt. Cavenagh	8	"	Parents "
43 Maria Kennedy	8	"	Mother "
44 Mary Thornton	8	"	Parents "
45 Anne Torrington	5	Mr Irvine	" "
46 Jane Joice	5	Abp. of Dublin	" "
47 Frances Purcell	6	Dean of St Patrick's	" "
48 Elizabeth Usher	6	Abp. of Dublin	" "
49 Emily Huband	5	Bp. of Kildare	" "

The old schoolhouse at Rathcoole 'and benefices of the school' were let on lease by the Trustees to Frederick Bourne at £25 p.a.; it was subsequently in use for many years as a residence for the vicar of Rathcoole; it still stands at the extreme S.W. end of the town and is now used as a storehouse.

The Trustees decided in December 1840 that the number of children admitted 'under their patronage' i.e. as free pupils to Mercer's School, Castleknock, should not exceed forty, but that children in excess of that

number could be admitted on payment of £10 p.a. for each. This decision in a few years had the effect of bringing about a fundamental change in the character of the school; it ceased to be a school for the maintenance of twenty-five poor girls and for their instruction in reading writing and working in preparation for apprenticeship; it could no longer be described as a Charity School, and in course of time it became one of the more important secondary schools for girls connected with the Board of Intermediate Education<sup>28</sup> for Ireland. The school was inspected by F. W. McBlain, LL.D., on 29 October 1856, on behalf of the Endowed Schools Commissioners. He reported

In the year 1796, a Mr Robert Lightbody bequeathed £200. Irish, to the school; and in the year 1804 a bequest of a like amount was made by Mrs. Mary Lightbody. These two sums were invested in the purchase of £450 Government Stock, no portion of which now remains, as same has been entirely sold out by the Governors of the Charity. The first sale took place in the year 1817, and successive sales were subsequently effected, until the process of extinction was completed in the year 1832 by the present minister of St Bridget's parish (Dean Gregory), who then sold out the only remaining portion of the stock, viz., the sum of £60 9s. 2d. The amount produced by the sales was applied in meeting the current ordinary expenses of the school.

The state of instruction in the school was satisfactory, I examined the girls in reading, geography, English history, and grammar, and was pleased with their proficiency in all these departments except the last. The discipline and internal management of the institution seemed good. . . . All the children in the school are obliged to conform to the Established Church, although no such restriction was imposed by the will of the foundress.<sup>29</sup>

The following newspaper account of a Prize Day distribution at Morgan's and Mercer's Schools by the Lord Lieutenant (the Earl of Carlisle) in the summer of 1857 may be of interest :

His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, with his usual readiness to encourage and reward talent and industry, visited Castlenock Glebe on Friday last, to witness a tea and strawberry party provided by the rector of the parish and Mrs.

<sup>28</sup> Two centuries after Mary Mercer's School was opened at Rathcoole wherein 25 poor girls were to be taught to read and write, and to milk cows, make butter and cheese, bake bread and wash clothes, and to be made thorough servants, the School at Castleknock was described as "For the education of Daughters of Members of the Church of Ireland" to which pupils were admitted on payment of £35 p.a. with provision for a limited number of free and assisted places. "The education imparted embraces the following subjects: Holy Scripture, Church Formularies, English, French, Irish, Arithmetic, Geometry, Algebra, Drawing, Commerce, Class Singing, Theory of Music, Drill, Needlework, Housecraft."—*The Irish Church Directory and Year Book for 1945*, advt. facing p. 185.

<sup>29</sup> *Endowed Schools (Ireland) Commission 1855-58*. Papers. Vol. III. p. 41.

Sadleir for the children of Morgan and Mercer's Schools, and to distribute premiums to as many of them as had distinguished themselves at the annual general examinations lately held in Dublin under the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

About eighty children sat down to table in the nut grove, in a long green arbour formed by nature as if for the express purpose, and after partaking of the good things provided for them, sang with exquisite taste and feeling those charming words of the 92d psalm—

How good and pleasant must it be  
To thank the Lord Most High,  
And with repeated hymns of praise  
His name to magnify.

His Excellency then distributed the premiums, and addressed the children in terms of affection and encouragement, expressing at the same time his approbation of their appearance and deportment, and the gratification he felt in seeing them enjoying themselves so thoroughly.

The Lord Mayor, who is one of the governors of Morgan's School, also addressed them in a short impressive speech, in which he dwelt upon the importance of industry and good conduct to their success in life.

Among the company present were Mr. and Lady Fanny Howard, and children; Sir William and Lady Hamilton, and a large number of the parishioners; also the Lady Mayoress and party; the Dean of Kildare, who is a governor of Mercer's School, and Mrs. Gregory; Mrs. and Miss Brady, Colonel Colomb, Dr. Sadleir, of College, &c.

His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin, who was unable to attend, kindly sent by the Rev. Mr. O'Regan, Rector of Finglas, some of his grace's most popular and instructive works as presents for the children.

The picturesque beauty of the lawn where the distribution of the premiums took place, and which commands a charming view of the Phoenix Park, with the clear outline of the Hill of Howth, and the Bay of Dublin in the distance, was increased by three Crimean tents, tastefully decorated with the national flags of England and France, and the scene was enlivened by the presence of the band of the Royal Hibernian School, who played during the evening several delightful airs to the great admiration of the children, who enjoyed themselves with innocent and amusing sports till evening drew the curtain of darkness around them, and forced them to say "Good night."

<sup>30</sup> *Saunders's News-Letter* 20 July 1857.



The report on Mercer's School by the Endowed Schools (Ireland) Commission of 1878-80 included the following :

. . . The fees of paying pupils amounted in 1878 to £130.10s. After deducting all outgoings, the net income of the institution for the year 1878 was £879 3s. 3d.

The Trustees appointed by the founder were five in number, viz., The Archbishop of Dublin, the Bishop of Kildare, the Dean of St Patrick's, the Archdeacon of Dublin, and the Rector of St Bride's, but on the amalgamation of the Bishopric of Kildare with the Archbishopric of Dublin, the number was reduced to four, and at the date of our inquiry was further reduced for all practical purposes to three, owing to an unfortunate quarrel which induced the Rector of St Bride's to absent himself.

The quorum of Trustees being three, a difficulty was experienced in convening meetings, and no meeting of Trustees was held from 20 June 1877 to the 15 January 1879. The Rev Morgan-Jellett, LL.D., the secretary, was practically the manager of the school. . . The house was erected by the trustees of Morgan's School, which is situated in close proximity. These latter trustees, finding their funds insufficient to maintain both buildings, granted the building in which Mercer's School is held to Mercer's Trustees, on the terms that they should keep it in order, and that the girls in Mercer's School should make shirts for the boys in Morgan's School.

The will of the founder imposed no religious restrictions. . . . All the children at the date of our inquiry were Protestants, and the rules for admission required the following certificate to be signed before any pupil is admitted :—

We, the Minister and Churchwardens of the Parish of ———, having made diligent inquiry concerning ———, sought to be admitted into Mercer's School, do hereby certify that she is the daughter of Protestant parents; is between the age of eight and eleven years, and not subject to any disorder which may incapacitate her from earning her bread or make her a burden on that establishment.

The number of pupils at the date of our inquiry was thirty two—twenty-five free, and seven paying pupils. The latter paid £15 for board and £3 for clothing. The age for admission was from eight to eleven years of age, and the pupils were retained till fifteen. Sometimes, however, they were allowed to remain a year longer if they were about to become teachers, and helped in the school work; in some promising cases the Trustees had paid apprentice fees to the Dublin training school for teachers, they also had helped one of the pupils into the Alexandra School, Dublin.

The course of instruction comprised English and Music, and in some instances French. The girls also made their own clothes, knit their stockings, and assisted in the housework. The teaching staff

consisted of a schoolmistress who received a salary of £50 a year, and a housekeeper who taught French and Music, and received a salary of £35 a year. . . . The lands at Rathcoole in the county of Dublin, part of the estate, were stated to be very much intermixed, and the agent informed us that it would be almost impossible, in a great many cases, to ascertain the boundaries.

This School was inspected by Mr Moore who reports :

'This institution impressed me as being in a highly satisfactory condition, both as regards the education and the household arrangements. The answering of the 38 girls present in all the English subjects, including history, was excellent, while they were well instructed in music and drawing, and a few in Latin. Six girls passed at the last Intermediate Examination, two being on the prize list.'<sup>31</sup>

Miss Kate Curtis was then 'matron and head teacher at the School, and she had the assistance of a housekeeper who taught music. The housekeeper also taught French, and Miss Curtis taught English and 'the rudiments of Latin'.<sup>32</sup>

When Rev William George Carroll, M.A., incumbent of St Bride's, came before the Commission on 23 September 1879, he stated that he wished

to call attention to the fact that the form of application for admission into the institution requires a certificate that the child is the daughter of Protestant parents, but there is no such requirement from the beginning to the end of Madame Mercer's will.

That is to say, it has been made virtually, by this requirement, a denominational institution?—Yes; it was always meant, I have no doubt to be, like the charity schools, a proselytizing school. When the school was opened and for several years afterwards, there were several Catholic children in it. . . .

Was it, at that time, required that all the children were to be brought up as Protestants?—There was an agreement to that effect amongst the Trustees.

There was no such requirement in the trust?—I do not think there was, or that they should be taught the Scriptures . . .

The endowment was left upon trust 'That the trustees and their successors, or any three of them, shall apply and vest the rents of the said lands which shall be purchased, towards the clothing, tuition and maintenance of twenty-five poor girls'?—That is all it says. There is not a word about religion there, but, when the original house was

<sup>31</sup> *Endowed Schools (Ireland) Commission 1878-80. Report. Vol. I. pp. 195/6.*

<sup>32</sup> *op. cit.* p. 234. Q. 7019 & 7043.

built in Rathcoole by the Trustees, they put up a stone slab with the inscription 'For the Education of Poor Girls in the Protestant Religion'.<sup>33</sup>

At an earlier meeting (29 May 1879) of the Commission, the evidence of Mr Arthur Murphy, master of Morgan's School for Boys had a few references to Mercer's School :

It was stated that the girls in Mercer's School were to make some clothes for the boys. Is that carried out?—Yes; they make the shirts.

Do you find any difficulty in managing the boys, on account of having the girls school so near?—Indeed we do; but the same difficulty has existed since the two schools were built. My experience goes back to the period when I was a lad at Morgan's school myself. I knew the boys and girls to be often playing together, and I remember on one occasion, forty years ago, the girls invited the boys to have pancakes in their kitchen; they were caught and flogged for it. Even since I became master I have known of boys throwing letters across the wall to the girls. Miss Curtis detected them and consulted me, and we have put a stop to that.

What is the separation between the two places? A wall eight feet high.<sup>34</sup>

The work of the Endowed Schools (Ireland) Commission of 1878-80 was, in effect, a preliminary survey which led to the passage of the Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act of 1885. Section 7 of this Act provided for the exclusion from its scope of 'any endowment applicable and provided exclusively for the benefit of persons of any particular denomination, and which is under the exclusive control of persons of that denomination'. The Commission appointed under Section 4 of the Act met on 16 December 1885 to hear and determine questions of exemption raised on behalf of certain endowments including Mercer's School. The case for the Trustees was made by Mr. J. J. Twigg, Q.C., who submitted that the School was

a boarding school for the religious education of Protestant girls and under the exclusive management of divines of the Disestablished Church. Except during the interval when Roman Catholic children were received into it, it is and has been a strictly denominational establishment.

<sup>33</sup> *op. cit.* pp. 271/2. Q. 8130-5. Whilst there is evidence that the School at Rathcoole was opened as a proselytising institution, there is no evidence whatsoever that Mary Mercer contemplated at any time that both the Hospital and the School endowed by her should be other than undenominational.

<sup>34</sup> *op. cit.* p. 240. Q. 7217/9.

To the Most Rev<sup>d</sup> the Lord Arch Bishop of Dublin,  
the Lord Bishops of Kildare, and the Other Rev<sup>d</sup> Trustees  
of M<sup>rs</sup> Mercer's Charity School. —

The Humble Petition of Ann Johnston,  
Most Humbly Sheweth.

That your Petitioner had the Honour of  
being appointed to the Care of your said School in Nov<sup>r</sup> 1769  
And Humbly hopes, she hath Discharged her Trust, to the  
Satisfaction of your Lordships and Reverencies —

That your Petitioner can, In fact, with a good Conscience, she  
hath done her Duty, with her utmost Care, Fidelity and Diligence, to  
said Children Sick and Well. —

That your Pet<sup>r</sup> confesses, she did undertake to Maintain the said  
Girls, now 26 in Number, at three Pence a Day for Each, But has for  
some time past, and is now, not able to do them Justice at that Price,  
on Ac<sup>t</sup> of the great rise of Provisions, for which reason she was Obligated  
to apply her own Salary, and Private Income, to the support of the family.  
Wherefore your Pet<sup>r</sup> most humbly Prays for an Augmentation of one  
Penny a Head for the better Enabling your Pet<sup>r</sup> to support the said  
House. —

All which is most humbly Submitted, to your Consideration by your  
Lordships, and Reverencies, Most humble, Most Obligated, and Most  
Dutifully.

Servant,  
Ann Johnston

March 1<sup>st</sup> 1771.

Petition of Ann Johnston, Mistress of Mercer's School, Rathcoole,  
1769-1783—for an increase in the daily food allowance for each of  
the children from 3d. to 4d.

Are Presbyterian children and children of other denominations taken in there?—I would be prepared to hold that it is a Church of Ireland institution, even though they might admit others. It would be their option to do so.

Do you contend that at the time they received Roman Catholic children they acted contrary to the provisions of the will?—I could hardly say that. If Roman Catholic children availed themselves of the instruction afforded in the school, I think the Trustees may receive whom they please. If they came there they were bound to obey the regulations.

You would scarcely say that the Trustees would be guilty of a breach of trust in admitting them?—I would not go so far.

(Rev Dr Jellett interjected—I would go quite that far. They could never have got a site for a school in the churchyard belonging to our parish, namely the churchyard of St Stephen's church, except that they were distinctly to be church schools.)

Lord Justice FitzGibbon, one of the Judicial Commissioners observed—'She no doubt had taken a piece of Church land on which to build a school, but I think it a little strained to say that she could not have got a lease except for an exclusively denominational purpose. She plainly appears to have put the test of the application of the endowment on the poverty of the children, and their deserving it. We must also remember that the ministers and churchwardens at that time were the authorised body for the relief of the poor of all denominations. The upshot of the whole is this—the lady, belonging to a Protestant denomination, gives to Trustees belonging to her own denomination, her property in trust to establish a school for twenty-five poor deserving girls. . . . I cannot possibly see that I am at liberty to declare that it would be a breach of trust to apply this endowment for a child of any other denomination, and therefore I must hold that the endowment is not exempt, and that the Act does apply to it.'

Lord Justice Naish, the other Judicial Commissioner agreed with Lord Justice FitzGibbon, adding—'inasmuch as I agree with my Lord Justice FitzGibbon in considering that we are not justified in putting any exclusive provision of that kind into the will where the lady herself did not do so, I think it follows that these trustees have not maintained their claim to be held exempt from the jurisdiction of the Commission.'<sup>35</sup>

On the consideration of a draft scheme for the future government and administration of the endowments for Morgan's and Mercer's Schools,

<sup>35</sup> Educational Endowments (Ireland) Commission, Annual Report 1885-6. pp.9-10.

the Commissioners held a public inquiry on 24 March 1886. The Trustees of both endowments were represented by Queen's Counsel at this inquiry, and evidence was received from the agents of the school properties and from Mr Arthur Murphy, master of Morgan's School and Miss Kate Curtis, matron of Mercer's School. After this inquiry, the Commission prepared a draft scheme covering the administration of both endowments. This draft was first published on 26 June 1886, and a few months later was submitted for 'the approval of the Lord Lieutenant in Council'. The scheme so submitted was designed to serve a dual purpose, i.e.

To maintain a boarding school for poor or reduced Protestant boys, to be called Morgan's School, and a boarding school for poor or reduced Protestant girls to be called Mercer's School, in the manner and subject to the conditions and provisions herein prescribed.

The draft scheme contained thirty-four sub-divisions, prefaced with an introduction summarising the provisions of the wills of Richard Morgan and Mary Mercer, and a declaration that the Educational Endowments Act of 1885 was applicable to the endowments

And whereas it has appeared to the Commissioners under the said Act after due inquiry that, in order to extend the usefulness of the said endowments, the same should be amalgamated and the government and management thereof should be altered in manner hereinafter provided. . . .

The draft scheme provided for the incorporation of a Governing Body, all the members of which should be 'members of the Church formerly established by law in Ireland', for the joint management and government of the two schools; and there were detailed directions for the application by the Governing Body of the monies accruing to the endowments. Provision was included for the admission of free pupils, not less than nine and not more than twelve years old, and subject to the qualification that 'he or she shall be the lawful child of Protestant parents'.<sup>36</sup>

Fifteen months after the draft scheme had been submitted by the Endowed Schools Commission for the approval of the Lord Lieutenant and Council, it was referred back ('remitted') to the Commission. The reason for this action is not given in the published Reports of the Commission, and must remain open to surmise. The decision to 'remit' the Scheme was evidently taken behind closed doors and must be regarded as arbitrary, particularly when it is borne in mind that both Justice Fitz-Gibbon and Justice Naish, two experienced Judges of the Supreme Court of Judicature in Ireland, had already pronounced unequivocally against

<sup>36</sup> The draft of Scheme No. 3, framed under the Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act, 1885, for the future Government & Management of the Educational Endowments known as Morgan's School & Mercer's School is set out at pp. 528-534 of the Annual Report for 1885-6 already cited.



the exemption of Mercer's School from the application of the Act of 1885. At a meeting of the Commission on 10 January 1888 Justice FitzGibbon announced, with regard to Scheme No 3—Morgan's and Mercer's School

This is a remitted Scheme. Mercer's School has been withdrawn from our jurisdiction.<sup>37</sup>

He confined himself to this bald statement and gave no explanation of the departure thereby involved from the considered judgment in the matter previously given by him and his judicial colleague on the Commission. It is noted in a tabular statement published by the Commission in 1890 that Mercer's School endowment was 'declared exempt'.<sup>38</sup> A fresh draft scheme was thereupon prepared for Morgan's School, and this scheme was finally approved by the Lord Lieutenant and Council on 5 March 1891. It repeated the introductory historical references to the wills of Richard Morgan and Mary Mercer as set out in the remitted scheme, but its provisions have no bearing on Mercer's School and relate solely to Morgan's School. This latter School for Protestant boys accordingly operated under the new scheme as from the date mentioned, but Mary Mercer's School for poor girls continued to operate in accordance with the principle adopted by the Trustees in 1750. The further story of the administration of the endowment is outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>37</sup> Endowed Schools (Ireland) Commission. Annual Report 1887-8. p. 294.

<sup>38</sup> Endowed Schools (Ireland) Commission. Annual Report 1889-90. p. xiii.

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