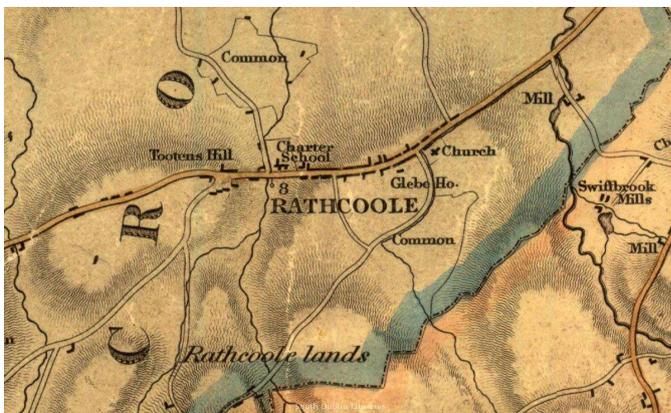


# Mary Mercer Trust Charter School 1744 -1826

## Rathcoole



## Mercer's School Rathcoole

In the main street in Rathcoole stands **Glebe House** now in poor condition awaiting planning decisions re its future, many remember it as the Winter Home of Duffy's Circus and Mc Cormac Amusements in the 60's and 70's .and before that, as the name suggests it was the Church of Ireland Rectory for the vicar of Rathcoole Church for many years. However the building has much longer and more interesting history, it was in fact the location of Rathcoole's Mary Mercer Trust Charter school for Girls from 1744 till 1826 prior to their move to Castleknock.

Mary Mercer was a wealthy spinster whose father was a fellow of Trinity college and who during her lifetime set up a school for poor children in Stephens Street which later became the famous Mercer hospital ,on her death her will specified that all her assets be used for assisting Dublin poor. In 1734 the trustees of her will which included the Dean of Christs Church decided to establish a school for poor girls. Rathcoole was chosen as the Church had significant lands in the area,and it was possible to rent 20 acres from local landlord (Mr Barry)at low rent for farm to support the school.

Construction began on the Mercer Charter School in 1744 ,building was designed by Mr Cummins a noted builder in Dublin at the time ,the brief was to “ design a proper Hospital (school) for the accommodation of a Master and Mistress and twenty-five girls who are to be taught to milk, make butter,cheese,bake,wash etc to be thorough servants”. John Tracy a noted bricklayer of the time built the building. (Both are listed in Dictionary of Irish Architects ).

School was opened on 11 April 1745 and a Mr and Mrs Kenny appointed to run the school the In 1747 Trust records indicate that a Inscription table be affixed to the school with the following inscription

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

School seems to have operated successfully till early 1800's and expanded to take 45 girls however with repeal of poor laws and emancipation several schools were established in Rathcoole. A Commission of inquiry set up by George IV in 1824 records that The mercer school run by Joseph and Elizabeth Senior operated a free boarding school for 50 poor protestant girls, this was said to be the only school under Protestant Management a Daniel Boyle operated a pay school for 39 Catholics and 9 protestants and a John Brady a catholic a locally funded school with 48 catholic children and 3 protestants and there were two other smaller schools.

Although the Mercer school continued to operate the farm associated with the school the donations for girls accommodation & upkeep fell away, Charter schools in general in Ireland by that time had gotten a bad name for child abuse and poor standards of education so in 1825 The trustees of Mercer's charity decided to relocate the school to a vacant building adjacent to Morgans charity school in Castleknock. Where it continued to operate till 1970 when it was merged with Kings Hospital and became part of a new Co-Ed school in Palmerston.

The building in Rathcoole was closed on 24 Jan 1826 with the transfer of the girls to Castleknock and Mr and Mrs Senior were given pensions and the building let to a Frederick Bourne at 25 pounds/year, it subsequently became the residence of the vicar of Rathcoole till mid 1950's

Thanks to detailed meeting minutes of trustees meeting a full detailed history of the school and names of some of the attendees is available. Appendix 1 contains photocopy of key references to Rathcoole school in Royal Society of Antiquarians of Ireland JRSAI (1993) Article.

#### References.

- (1) M. Quane, 'Mercer's School Rathcoole & Castleknock, Co. Dublin', *JRSAI* 93 (1963), 18 (IAA, Edward McParland files, Acc. 2008/44).
- (2) TCD MS 5419 f.59v (IAA, Edward McParland files, Acc. 2008/44).
- (3) Nodlaig P. Hardiman and Máire Kennedy, eds., *A Directory of Dublin for the year 1738* (Dublin Corporation Public Libraries, 2000),.
- (4) Verbal history record by Alan Redmond Actioneer Rathcoole during period 1950 to 2010

Alan Fairman, Rathcoole Community Council, Rathcoole.

# Appendix 1

## 1. Drawing of Typical Charter School

Charter schools in Ireland followed a similar layout and simple design. Note the narrow and barred windows.

## 2. Extract from 1963 article by JRSAl re Mercer schools.