

Chapter 2

History of industrial schools and reformatories¹

An early nineteenth-century social problem

- 2.01** The earliest provision in Britain and Ireland for destitute children is to be found in the Act for the Relief of the Poor of 1598. It provided for the appointment in every parish of ‘overseers of the poor’ with, among other specific duties, those of ‘setting to work the children of all such whose parents shall not be thought able to keep and maintain their children’. In 1771, legislation was enacted, under which overseers were appointed to arrange for the maintenance and education of orphaned or deserted children out of money raised by the parish. It was envisaged, too, that workhouses were to be built, financed either by voluntary contribution or, if these were not forthcoming, by official grants. In fact, neither was available on anything like the scale necessary to meet the need. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in both Ireland and Britain, the rapid growth of populations meant that the parish ceased to be a viable unit for the administration of relief. Destitute children roamed the countryside or streets, foraging for food and pilfering for a livelihood. In Ireland, the Famine (1845–1849) made a bad situation immeasurably worse, leading to the desertion of children by parents.
- 2.02** On an official level, the response to this significant social problem was the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act, 1838. This established or confirmed a system of workhouses throughout the country, under the central authority of the Irish Poor Law Commissioners (replaced in 1872 by the Local Government Board for Ireland). By 1853, 77,000 children below 15 years of age (one third of them orphans), which was 6.5% of the age cohort, were living in workhouses, while an unknown number of ‘street urchins’ were still living wild in the towns.
- 2.03** One of the workhouse system rules was that families were forced to split, with children seeing their parents only once a week. Moreover, in the workhouses, the children had to mix with all types of adult paupers and vagrants, giving rise to the real possibility of abuse. No effective education was provided. In addition, the stigma attached to workhouses meant that they were perceived as providing charity for ‘the shameless, the idle and the shiftless’.
- 2.04** It might have been thought that an alternative policy to the workhouse could have been tried, namely to make direct contributions of money or necessities to those in need (a policy then generally known as ‘outdoor relief’), since this would allow the poor families involved to be assisted outside the workhouse system. However, this was unpopular in official quarters, because of the danger that it would be taken advantage of by persons who in fact had their own resources on which to draw. It was partly to reduce the chance of this that workhouses had been established: for the orthodox thinking was that charity should be extended only to those who were prepared to accept the harshest and most overcrowded of conditions.
- 2.05** Apart from these official efforts, charitable organisations and individual philanthropists also attempted to alleviate the problem by gathering some of these children into orphanages, charity

¹ This historical overview has drawn extensively on the research provided to the Commission by Professor David Gwynn Morgan, Dr Eoin O’Sullivan; Professor Séamus O’Cinnéide; Dr Moira Maguire (who along with Professor O’Cinnéide compiled reports to the Sisters of Mercy); Professor Dermot Keogh (who wrote a report for the Presentation Brothers on Greenmount) and Ms Sheila Lunney (who wrote an MA thesis entitled Institutional Solution to a Social Problem: Industrial Schools in Ireland and the Sisters of Mercy 1869 to 1950).

schools, 'ragged schools'² – all institutions depending on voluntary contributions and, often, on voluntary labour.

2.06 However, neither workhouses nor voluntary efforts were equal to the scale of the problem, and it came to be accepted that something more was required. In the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain and in Ireland, there were several commissions and committees to investigate both the broad subject of poverty³ and the particular needs of poor children. The industrial school system was proposed as a solution. This idea was based on a Continental model and, by the 1850s, Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia had nearly a hundred institutions for criminal and destitute juveniles, whose achievements were well known in Ireland and Britain. The thrust of the education provided in these schools, some of which were called 'Farm Schools', was in favour of practical training, which would equip the children for employment, rather than academic learning. This approach fitted in well with the Victorian idea of utilitarian progress, and also helped to provide skills to fuel the Industrial Revolution. The motivation for these reforms has also been variously attributed to the desire to help the needy, or the need to control those whom the authorities viewed as a threat to the existing order.

Legislation and establishment

2.07 This Continental model was put into legislative effect and was implemented in Britain, in the 1850s.⁴ In Ireland a little later, the reformatory system was established by the Reformatory Schools (Ireland) Act, 1858. A decade later, the industrial schools came too, this time by way of a Private Member's Bill introduced by The O'Connor Don,⁵ which became law as the Industrial Schools (Ireland) Act, 1868. The reformatories were for those guilty of offences; and industrial schools for those neglected, orphaned or abandoned; in other words, not for criminal children, but those potentially exposed to crime. This dichotomy was in line with a fairly well-established distinction between a penal school for youthful offenders and a 'ragged school' for the poor or vagrant.

2.08 In Ireland, the initial result of the 1858 and 1868 Acts was that a number of existing voluntary schools and homes applied for and were granted certificates as reformatories or industrial schools. These were for the reception of children committed by the courts, and they became eligible for grants from public funds for the maintenance of such children. The next few decades brought extensive new buildings and institutions. Although reformatory schools were established first, industrial schools soon surpassed them, both in numbers of schools and of pupils. In the seven years after 1858, 10 reformatories (five for females) were certified. By the end of the century, only seven of the 10 original reformatories survived, some of the former reformatories having been re-certified as industrial schools; and, by 1922, only five remained (one of which was a reformatory for boys in Northern Ireland). The reformatory school population, which was nearly 800 immediately after the passing of the 1858 Act, fell to 300 in 1882, and to 150 in 1900.

2.09 On the other hand, however, by 1875, there were 50 industrial schools, and the highest number of industrial schools was reached in 1898, when there were a total of 71 schools, of which 61 (56 schools for Catholics and five for Protestants) were in the 26 counties. At its height, in 1898 the

² The idea of 'ragged schools' was developed in 1818 by John Pounds, a shoemaker. He began teaching poor children without charging fees.

³ For example, Royal Commission (Nassau, 1832) to review the working of the Act for the Relief of the Poor, 1601 in England (1832); Royal Commission for Ireland under Archbishop Whately of Dublin (1833–36) to inquire into the conditions of the poor and to ameliorate them; others according to Caul 12, in 1804, 1819, 1823 and 1830. Mary Carpenter's seminal work, *Reformatory Schools for the children of the perishing and dangerous classes and for juvenile offenders* (1851) was among the causes of the Commission of Inquiry into Criminal and Destitute Children [HC 1852–53], before which Mary Carpenter was the principal witness.

⁴ In Britain, the schools were established by way of the Reformatory Schools (Youthful Offenders) Act, 1857 and the Industrial Schools Act, 1854, though the latter applied only to Scotland. The legislation was consolidated in 1866.

⁵ A liberal Catholic described by Cardinal Cullen as 'the only good man' in Parliament; and a member of the House of Commons Select Committee of 1861, which studied the problems of educating the destitute. Neilson Hancock, a statistician and social campaigner, was able to show that, although the juvenile crime rate in Ireland was half that of Britain, this proportion was reversed with regard to vagrants under 16 years of age; for Ireland had almost double the British rate of juvenile vagrants. These statistics provided The O'Connor Don with the intellectual ammunition to argue his case for the extension of industrial schools to Ireland.

population in the industrial schools was 7,998 residents, compared with the 6,000 children in the same year in the considerably less salubrious conditions of the workhouses. Moreover, in the late nineteenth century, social and economic conditions in Ireland were such that many children had to be refused places in the schools. In 1882, over 70% of committal entries to industrial schools were made under the category of begging.⁶

2.10 The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were eras when social reformers began to notice children as individuals susceptible to neglect and ill-treatment. In Edwardian England, reformers like Charles Booth and Sebohm Rowntree were attempting to quantify poverty, analysing its causes and characteristics. One consequence of this thinking was that all the nineteenth-century legislation in this field⁷ was replaced by the Children Act, 1908, popularly known as the Children's Charter. While making relatively slight substantive amendments,⁸ this Act applied a unified system of law to both types of schools in Britain and in Ireland. The Children Act, 1908 dealt with a number of topics, among them the prevention of cruelty to children, protection of infant life, and provision for juvenile offence. However, its most important provisions were in Part IV, which provided the constitutional basis for reformatories and industrial schools. It continued to be the primary legislation for vulnerable children in Ireland until it was amended by the Child Care Act, 1991 which was not fully operational until 1996. The 1991 Act was replaced by the Children Act, 2001 which was signed into law in July 2001.

2.11 The 1908 Act was one of a trio of measures introduced by the Home Secretary, Herbert Gladstone, and justly regarded as a late flowering of Victorian reformism. The other two measures were the Probation of Offenders Act, 1907 and the Prevention of Crime Act, 1908, which established borstals. Another reform in a slightly earlier period was that the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was first established in 1875 in the United States, and then in Britain in 1884, and in Ireland in 1889.

2.12 It may be worth quoting from section 44 of the Children Act, 1908 since this is the closest the legislation comes to what later generations would call a mission statement for the schools. This section states:

The expression "industrial school" means a school for the industrial training of children, in which children are lodged, clothed and fed, as well as taught.

2.13 The definition of a 'reformatory school' is defined in the same terms by section 44 of the 1908 Act, but, with the substitution of 'youthful offenders' for 'children'.

⁶ The Aberdare Commission of Enquiry into Reformatory and Industrial Schools 1884, which dealt with the British and Irish systems separately, warmly endorsed the schools. Partly as a result of this, there was a considerable expansion in industrial schools in the 1880s and 1890s. See Jane Barnes, *Irish Industrial Schools, 1868–1908* (Irish Academic Press, 1989), p 64. The Cussen Report 1934–1936 credits the early spread of the schools to a speech by the Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, Lord O'Hagan, to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland (of which he was president), in which he drew attention to the advantages to the social order which would follow on the establishment of the industrial schools: JSSIS Part XXXIX, 1870, 225.

⁷ By 1908, for Ireland alone, the legislation comprised: the Industrial Schools Act, 1868, the Industrial Schools Acts Amendment Act 1880, the Industrial Schools (Ireland) Act, 1885 and the Industrial School Acts Amendment Act, 1894, and the Reformatory Schools (Ireland) Act, 1858. Other minor amending Acts were passed in 1893, 1899 and 1901. The 1908 Act substituted the Chief Secretary for Ireland in place of the Home Secretary.

⁸ However, there were two significant improvements in the Act which never received a fair trial in Ireland: day industrial schools, and release on licence. Questioning the advantages of institutional life and perceiving the value of keeping a child in a family environment (unless this was wholly evil) in the late nineteenth century, the Philanthropic Reform Association proposed the establishment of day industrial schools: Jane Barnes, *Irish Industrial Schools, 1868–1908* (Irish Academic Press 1989), pp 85–86.

Policies underlying the School system

Intervention in the family

- 2.14** Until the legislation establishing the schools, the law seldom intervened in the affairs of a family. The new legislation, however, gave Magistrates' Courts (the pre-Independence equivalent of the District Court) jurisdiction to intervene in the interest of the child, usually of the poorer class, to protect their physical or moral wellbeing. Doing so meant a major interference with the family and parental rights.
- 2.15** Barnes⁹ states that, as originally conceived, industrial schools had two objectives: the first being to provide appropriate skills and training to enable children 'to be capable of supporting themselves by honest labour'; the other being to reform the child's character. To achieve these ends, it was considered necessary that 'the links between child and home [be] ruthlessly cut', on the basis that the home was a bad influence. For this reason, committal was generally imposed for the maximum period, correspondence between the children and families was vetted, and parental visits were allowed only at the discretion of the Manager.

Religious ownership and management

- 2.16** Each type of school was to be independently managed and run, though subject to State approval and inspection. Thus, a fundamental feature was private, largely religious philanthropy. It seemed natural that churches should take responsibility for providing assistance to the poor. In Ireland, Catholic emancipation in 1829 made the Church a central institution. It was powerful both at the level of the Hierarchy and, even more so, at grassroots where, in the absence of a trusted landowner class, the priests who were educated and nationalistic were regarded as community leaders. Apart from religion, the main focus of the Church's influence lay in education. The burgeoning character of the Catholic Church in the post-Famine period may be illustrated by the simple fact that the number of nuns increased eightfold between 1841 and 1901. There was huge growth in the numbers of priests and Brothers as well as nuns, and the establishment of a comprehensive range of services in the fields of education, health and social services. Moreover, there was even surplus capacity, so that many of the Orders exported personnel and services to America, Canada and Australia.
- 2.17** A related issue was the fear of each of the major religions of proselytisation by the other side. On either side, this was not an unreasonable fear: Catholics were moved by the fact that the last relic of Catholic subservience was not gone until 1829. The 'established Church' was Protestant, in particular Anglican, and Protestant institutions were more richly resourced. Thus, a major concern of the Catholic side, which persisted into the twentieth century, was to keep Catholic orphans from being taken into the 'Birds-nests homes' run by the Protestant orphan societies. On the other side, the immense potential of the Catholic Church as the church of the great majority of the people was evident. From the perspective of both sides, the schools allowed an opportunity to imbue children with religion and to present a caring image of the Church.¹⁰
- 2.18** In response to these considerations, the main modification of the English model, contained in the Irish Industrial Schools Act of 1868, concerned safeguards to prevent any change in the religion of a child committed. Catholic and Protestant children had to be committed to separate schools. The control of the religious was also copperfastened by a provision that State funds could be used only for maintenance and not for capital expenditure to set up State schools; and that funding would be on a capitation basis. This avoided any suspicion of the Government favouring one denomination, which might have existed had payments been based on the institution as an entity. In addition, this met Catholic resistance to State ownership. From the perspective of the State, the cost would be less, and it was believed that schools conducted by voluntary management would retain an adaptable character, and that their pupils would have better opportunities for employment than those afforded by juvenile houses of correction under official management.

⁹ Jane Barnes, *Irish Industrial Schools, 1868–1908* (Irish Academic Press, 1989), pp 85–86.

¹⁰ Bríd Fahey Bates, *The Institute of Charity: Rosminians, Their Irish Story 1860–2003* (Dublin: Ashfield Publishing Press, 2003), pp 68–69.

Finance

- 2.19** A distinction that was observed in the financial regime of the schools was that recurring expenditure on food, staff equipment, etc was the responsibility of the State. This was funded by central and local government on a capitation basis,¹¹ whereas capital expenditure was funded by the owners of the schools. This was an incentive to maximise numbers and not to spend money on capital items such as buildings, sports facilities or other benefits for the children.
- 2.20** A check was imposed by the Treasury on the granting of new certificates between 1875 and 1879, in order to keep down its contribution. As a result of this policy, admissions were restricted. Moreover, several new schools were built, their founders being under the impression that they would be certified on completion, yet they failed to receive certificates immediately. One such school was built for Roman Catholic girls at Mallow. The building was erected in 1873, but certification of this School was refused for six years after its completion.¹²
- 2.21** The Children Act, 1908 dropped the restriction on the use of public funds for capital expenditure but, in contrast to the position in England and subject to one or two exceptions, Irish local or, until the 1940s, central government did not use this power. Indeed, the reality is that Irish local authorities were often overdue in paying the contributions, even to maintenance, which they were legally obliged to make.
- 2.22** The schools were founded either by the philanthropic donation of a premises and land by a concerned land owner, or the capital required to build the schools was raised by public subscription from a group of community-minded citizens, with the major impetus in collection and spending coming from the religious authorities. For instance, almost immediately after the legislation was enacted, the Dublin Catholic Reformatory Committee was established to meet this financial challenge.
- 2.23** Another example was the Cork Reformatory Committee,¹³ set up by the Cork Society of the St Vincent de Paul in 1858. They purchased a 112-acre farm at Upton, 14 miles from Cork City, for use as a reformatory school, and they asked the Rosminian Order to take charge of it, as they had experience of operating reformatories in England. A building was completed on the site in 1860 at a cost of £5,000, and the lease of the lands and buildings was transferred to the Rosminians in 1872.¹⁴ This operated as St Patrick's Reformatory School in Upton, County Cork until 1889 and, thereafter, as an industrial school.¹⁵
- 2.24** In 1869, Lord Granard, the local landowner, invited the Sisters of Mercy to establish a school in Newtownforbes, County Longford. He gave the Sisters a house for use as a convent and gardens, rent free, and an annual cash donation of £90.¹⁶ In the same year, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Industrial School, Newtownforbes, was certified for the reception of 145 girls.
- 2.25** One of the legacies of this piece-meal way of establishing the schools was that there was an uneven geographical distribution of schools throughout Ireland, which had a considerable impact on whether children were likely to end up in an industrial school.

'Industrial' training

- 2.26** The principal virtue claimed for the schools, by the utilitarian thinkers who championed them, was that they would equip the residents with skills, which would enable them in later life to survive by

¹¹ The Children Act, 1908, ss 73–75. In the nineteenth century, most of the recurring expense fell on central government [the Treasury paid 5s/week for each child]. Local authorities' contribution ranged from 1 shilling to 2/6. Voluntary contributions were very small. The result was that, for example, in 1880: the contributions were as follows: treasury (£68,000); local authorities (£23,000); other sources (parental contributions, voluntary subscriptions and industrial profits): £16,000.

¹² Barnes, p 50.

¹³ Bríd Fahey Bates, p 72.

¹⁴ Bríd Fahey Bates, p 71.

¹⁵ Bríd Fahey Bates, p 79.

¹⁶ Taken from: The Parish of Clonguish: Its People and its Culture (December 2005), p 15.

steady, if humble, employment. In the nineteenth century, this was accomplished in the case of girls. According to Ó Cinnéide and Maguire:¹⁷

Girls' schools provided a narrower range of industrial training than boys schools, focusing on domestic service, laundry, and sewing. The majority of girls who left industrial schools went into domestic service. Indeed the schools were a vital source of domestic servants, particularly because the schools were among the few institutions that provided a coherent training program for domestic servants. Some schools, including High Park and St. George's in Limerick, were particularly noted for their training program, and girls from these schools had no trouble securing work as servants. Goldenbridge Industrial School was also an important source of trained domestic servants. Mona Hearne, author of *Below Stairs*, shows that of the 877 girls discharged from Goldenbridge between 1880 and 1920, over 300 were placed in service; the nuns kept in touch with these girls for at least three years after discharge, and only rarely were bad reports received.

2.27 As to the boys' schools, they commented:

the [Samuelson Commission's]¹⁸ remit was to examine industrial and technical training in all schools, including industrial schools, throughout the United Kingdom ... The Commission's report was extremely critical of the general standard of training in Irish schools generally; the one exception was Irish industrial schools, which they found to be models of technical and industrial training.¹⁹

2.28 Barnes acknowledged that some schools did in fact excel in providing children with the skills and training which enabled them to support themselves once they were discharged. She took the view that, in the early years of the system's existence, there was some tension between providing industrial training to ameliorate poverty, and the general feeling that industrial training should not facilitate upward social mobility.²⁰

2.29 Barnes claimed that only a small percentage of boys entered trades for which they had been trained, and that the majority ended up working as unskilled labourers, mainly on farms. However, this could be the result of the general lack of opportunities for poor people in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²¹

2.30 Barnes and most other writers give a largely favourable impression of the nineteenth century industrial schools system. On the other hand, John Fagan, who was appointed Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools in 1897, criticised virtually all aspects of the system at the end of the nineteenth century, especially the physical conditions in the schools and the overall condition of the children. He was particularly critical of the poor hygiene and lack of cleanliness in the majority of the schools.²² Ó Cinnéide and Maguire summarise Fagan's criticisms, and comment:²³

conditions in many of the schools seem to have deteriorated around the turn of the century, in what Barnes termed a spirit of "complacency and a resistance to change".

¹⁷ Séamus Ó Cinnéide and Moira Maguire, *The Industrial Schools Over A Hundred Years: A Monograph*, p 20

¹⁸ This was a Commission established by the British Parliament to examine industrial and technical training in all schools throughout the UK. It reported in 1884.

¹⁹ Séamus Ó Cinnéide and Moira Maguire, p 19.

²⁰ Séamus Ó Cinnéide and Moira Maguire, p 19, p 20.

²¹ Séamus Ó Cinnéide and Moira Maguire, p 20.

²² Séamus Ó Cinnéide and Moira Maguire, p 21.

²³ Séamus Ó Cinnéide and Moira Maguire, p 21.