



## **Appendix C: Former Monasterevin Charter School (The Hulk) – Statement of Architectural, Historical and Cultural Significance**

***Aguisín C:***

***Iar Scoil Chairte Mainistir Eimhín (The Hulk)  
– Ráiteas Ailtireachta, Stairiúil  
agus Tábhacht Cultúrtha***



**Comhairle Contae Chill Dara**  
Kildare County Council



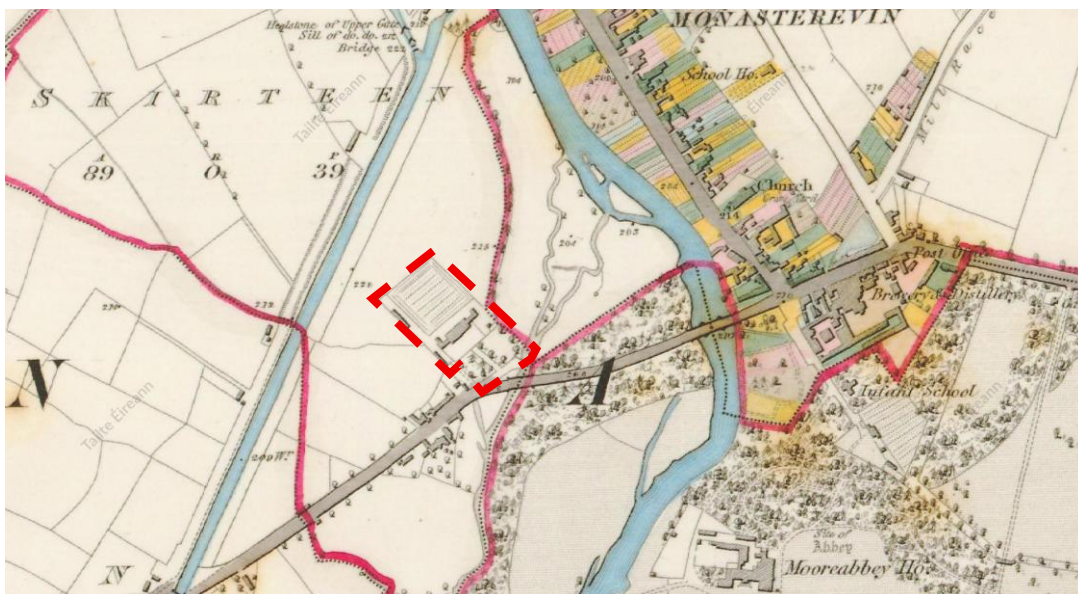
## Introduction

Monasterevin Charter School, locally known as "The Hulk", is a substantial Georgian institutional complex constructed in 1758 and opened in 1762 on the western bank of the River Barrow, south-east of the Barrow Line of the Grand Canal and accessed from the present-day R445 Regional Road. The buildings are included in the Kildare County Development Plan Record of Protected Structures (RPS Ref. B21-29 and RPS No. B26-03) and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH Ref. 11816103 and 11816104). The former school complex is of national significance and is considered one of the most intact surviving Charter School complexes in Ireland, providing tangible evidence of the educational, religious and social policies of eighteenth-century Ireland.

**Figure 1:** View of 'The Hulk', Former Monasterevin Charter School



**Figure 2:** First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, circa 1837 (The Hulk marked in Red)

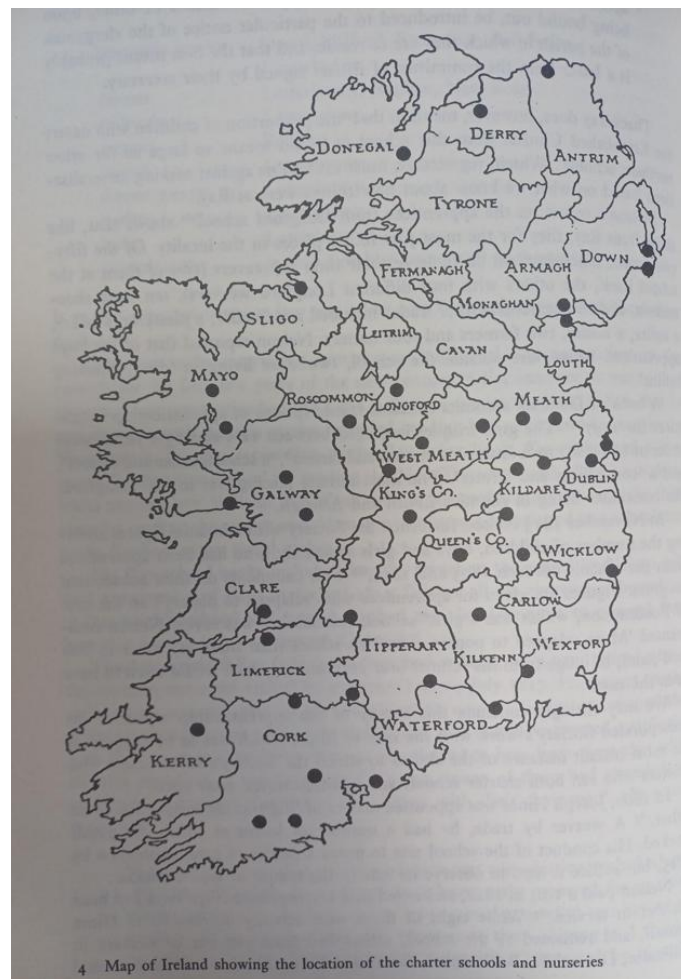


## The Charter School Movement

Charter Schools were established throughout Ireland under the auspices of the *Incorporated Society in Dublin for Promoting English Protestant Schools in Ireland*, a body founded in 1733 with the objective of educating Catholic children in the English language and Protestant religion. The Society formed part of a wider programme of social, cultural and religious reform promoted by the Protestant Ascendancy during the Penal Law period. The first Charter School in Ireland was opened at Castledermot, County Kildare, in 1734.

By 1748, a nationwide network of Charter Schools had been established throughout Ireland, with thirty schools in operation, eleven under construction, and three further schools authorised, giving a total of forty-four schools.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 2:** Distribution of Charter Schools in Ireland (Milne, p. 172)



The underlying objective of the Charter Schools remains deeply controversial. The system reflected a belief among the Protestant Ascendancy that education could be used as an instrument of social and cultural transformation, serving to 'civilise' Ireland and integrate its predominantly Catholic population into a Protestant and English-speaking society. To many Irish Catholics, however, the schools represented an attempt at religious and cultural assimilation. The Society encouraged

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Milne, *The Irish Charter Schools, 1730-1830* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 172.

impoverished Catholic families to entrust children between the ages of six and ten to its care, offering food, clothing, accommodation, education and industrial training. The indispensable condition, however, was that the children be educated as Protestants, separated from their families, and that all contact between children and their parents be prohibited.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these measures, enrolment remained low, prompting the Society to adopt increasingly coercive methods of recruitment. Legislation was subsequently introduced empowering officers to remove healthy children aged five years and over who were found begging or homeless and place them within the Charter School system, a measure that “*excited in Ireland an intensity of bitterness hardly equalled by any portion of the penal code*”.<sup>3</sup>

### **Monasterevin Charter School as a Nursery School**

By 1757, despite more than two decades of operation, the managers of the Charter Schools acknowledged that they still found it difficult “to procure children to fill schools”. In response, the Society introduced a significant new measure. Believing that impoverished mothers might be persuaded to surrender their children in infancy, it established a network of ‘nurseries’ from which children would later be transferred into the Charter School system. The Society proposed the construction of one nursery in each province, each capable of accommodating one hundred children under six years of age, thereby creating a steady supply of children for the wider network. The nursery scheme proved particularly contentious. By targeting children in infancy, it was widely perceived by Irish Catholics as the “*most insidious and demoralising of all forms of bribery*”, severing children from their families at their most vulnerable age.<sup>4</sup>

Monasterevin Charter School opened in 1762 as one of these regional nursery schools. The nursery remained in operation until 1809, when it was converted into a standard Charter School.<sup>5</sup>

### **Operation of the School**

The separation of children from their families and communities was regarded by the Society as essential to the success of the Charter School system. Children were deliberately transferred to schools remote from their homes, thereby removing them from the influence of parents and relatives who might encourage a return to the Catholic faith. This policy of “transplanting” children was regarded by supporters as fundamental to the success of the Charter School system. Supporters of the Charter Schools frequently dismissed concerns about the trauma of family separation. Elias Thackeray, Vicar of Dundalk, equated the removal of poor Catholic children to Charter Schools with the experience of elite families sending their children to English boarding schools, arguing that “*Parents, when they part with their children, must feel,*

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<sup>2</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 233.

<sup>3</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 235.

<sup>4</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 235.

<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Carville, ‘The Hulk: A Charter School, 1734 and a Nursery School, 1762’, in *Monasterevin: A Parish and Its People on the Eve of the Millennium* (Monasterevin: Monasterevin Heritage Society, 2000), p. 92-94.

*as we know they do on sending their children to Eton, or other schools...*". The comparison reflects a striking failure to acknowledge the profound differences between the voluntary educational choices of wealthy families and the enforced separation of impoverished children from their parents and communities.<sup>6</sup>

Charter Schools also functioned as institutions of labour and vocational training. Boys were instructed in agriculture and gardening, while girls were trained for domestic service, with linen manufacture singled out for particular emphasis throughout the system. The labour of the children formed an integral part of the schools' operation, providing schoolmasters with an additional source of income, and children were required to work long hours for the benefit of their masters.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, educational standards in schools were often so poor that children who had spent more than a decade in a Charter School were reportedly unable to read.<sup>8</sup>

By the late eighteenth century, the Charter Schools had become the subject of growing criticism. While investigating the condition of Irish prisons in 1788, the prison reformer John Howard turned his attention to the Charter Schools and reported the "existence of evils almost as frightful as any he had discovered in the prisons of England or of the Continent".<sup>9</sup> In 1788, a parliamentary committee was appointed to investigate Irish Charter Schools. Its findings revealed what was described as "a revelation of abuses perhaps as horrible as any public institution has ever disclosed". Public funds were found to have been systematically misused and "*in most of the schools the children were half-fed, almost naked, covered with vermin, and reduced to the condition of the most miserable of slaves...*".<sup>10</sup>

Subsequent reforms sought to improve supervision, strengthen inspection procedures, and address abuses within the Charter School system rather than dismantle it. However, official support continued to decline and, following the recommendations of the Irish Education Inquiry in its 1825 report, public funding was gradually withdrawn.<sup>11</sup> In 1828, the Charter School system was formally discontinued, and Monasterevin Charter School closed later that year.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Milne, *The Irish Charter Schools, 1730-1830* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 142-3.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Milne, *The Irish Charter Schools, 1730-1830* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 58.

<sup>8</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 237.

<sup>9</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 237.

<sup>10</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 237.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Milne, *The Irish Charter Schools, 1730-1830* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 269.

## **Subsequent History**

Following its closure, the former school was adapted for warehousing purposes, reflecting the evolving commercial role of Monasterevin during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It remained occupied into the early twentieth century before eventually falling vacant. Despite prolonged neglect, the structure remains remarkably intact. It retains its symmetrical Georgian composition, pitched slate roof, red clay ridge tiles and surviving cast-iron rainwater goods. The principal elevation remains centred on a three-bay, three-storey pedimented breakfront flanked by lower two-storey ranges that originally contained the schoolhouse and associated offices.

## **Significance and Future Potential**

Today, 'The Hulk' is of considerable architectural, historical and social significance. As one of the few substantial surviving buildings associated with the Charter School movement, it provides important evidence of eighteenth-century institutional architecture and educational policy. Having remained largely undeveloped for almost a century, the complex may represent one of the most intact surviving Charter School buildings in Ireland.

The building also embodies a complex and often uncomfortable aspect of Irish history. It stands as a physical reminder of the Penal Era, when education was closely intertwined with religious and political objectives, and when attempts were made to reshape Irish society through the separation of children from their families and their education within a Protestant institutional framework.

With careful conservation and sensitive adaptation, the building could be given a sustainable new use while also serving as a focal point for public engagement with this difficult and significant chapter of Ireland's past.

Its exceptional level of survival provides a rare opportunity to interpret and communicate the history of the Charter School system and its lasting social and cultural legacy.