

Baltimore Fishery Industrial School

by Nuala Mahon

Acknowledgements

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Artist Statement

When Industrial Schools are discussed in Ireland one hears only about the abuse which took place in these establishments. I wanted to tell the full story, in images, of the Baltimore Fishery Industrial School, West Cork, Ireland. I tried to discover what happened there from its conception to its demise. Most of the site of the school has been demolished and the boat building sheds are in ruins. I used symbolism to tell the story. I was assisted in telling my story by a former pupil of the school. He helped me to maintain a balanced view of the life at this establishment

Workhouses and charitable institutions were set up in Ireland in 1838 to deal with people who were unable to take care of themselves. Poverty increased after the famine (1845 – 1849). These institutions proved inadequate and unsuitable.

The Industrial school system was proposed as a solution to this poverty. Children would be taught practical skills. This would enable them to support themselves in adulthood.

From 1858 many voluntary schools applied for and obtained certificates to become Industrial Schools.

The schools were managed and run privately. Religious institutions had personnel and property available so they became the main operators. Funding for these schools was provided by the government on a capitation basis. Buildings had to be funded or donated privately. Some philanthropists provided funds to build schools. These were then leased to religious orders to operate.

Baltimore, situated on the south west coast of Ireland, was a small fishing village with a

boat building tradition. During and after the famine the fishing, which was already relatively primitive, declined completely.

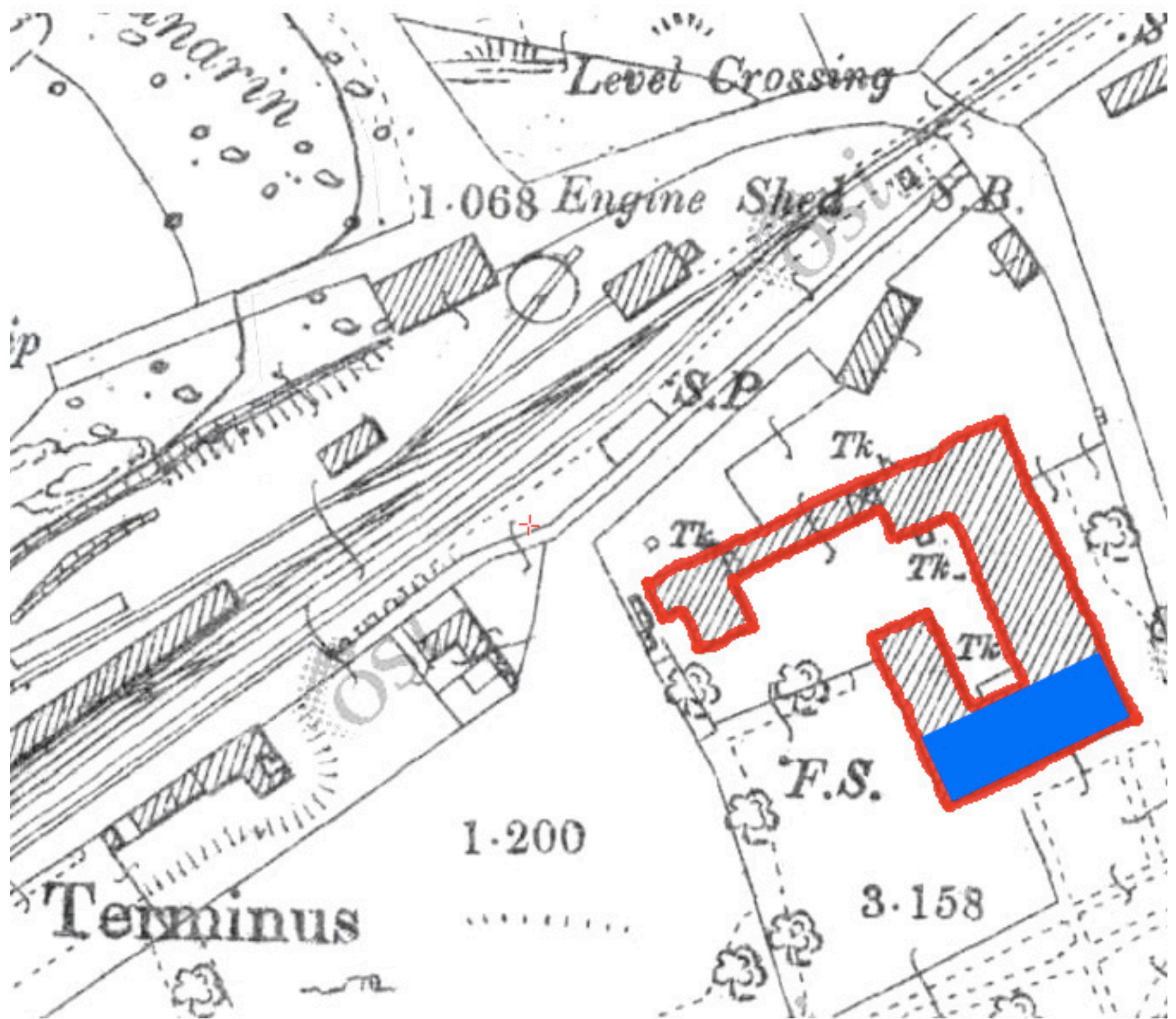
In 18?? the local priest, Fr. Charles Davis, went to London, taking with him a group of fishermen to plead with Queen Victoria to help his starving parishioners. He was given a letter of introduction to Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts, the granddaughter of Thomas Coutts, the banker. She was rich and a philanthropist. She made an interest free loan of £10,000 to the fishing industry in the West Cork region. The loan was to be repaid within twenty years. The government added £5,000 to the fund. Some of this money was used to build the Baltimore Fishery Industrial School. (*Barnes, J., 1989. Irish Industrial Schools, 1868-1908: Origins and Development. Irish Academic Press Ltd.*)

The running of the school was entrusted to the clergy from the parish of Rath and The Islands. In the early days children from the locality and the islands attended the school to learn fishing skills. In 1906 the government sent 60 orphan and destitute children to the school. The local parents withdrew their children at this point.

The School premises and the fishing sheds were constructed at a cost of £3,000 from the fund . The fishing sheds were situated close to the shore and the school building was a short distance away.



The 25" Historic Ordinance Survey Map (1897 - 1913) shows the complete building traced in red. The portion highlighted in blue is the only part of the original school building still remaining. (map reproduced with permission from OSI)



Robert French made many images of the Baltimore area (1865 - 1914). These are now kept in The National Library of Ireland. The adjoining image is included by kind permission of the NLI



The portion of the original building still remaining, which was the old school dormitory, was purchased by the local community and converted into a Leisure Centre.



In 1893 a carpenter's shop was constructed and instruction in boat-building and carpentry were undertaken.

(Barnes, J., 1989 Irish Industrial Schools, 1868-1908: Origins and Development. Irish Academic Press Ltd.)



Light entered the boat building shed from sky lights in the roof. The centre portion was higher to allow for large sections of the boats to be constructed.



A large number of boats were built in the school boat-building shed and launched from the slipway on the north side of the building.



In addition to boat-building the boys were taught net making. They cured and barrelled fish, and this was a considerable source of income for the school.

(Barnes, J., 1989. Irish Industrial Schools, 1868-1908: Origins and Development. Irish Academic Press Ltd.)



In the early days of the school, when the local children attended and learned fishing and boat building skills, the business thrived. Once the local children had been withdrawn, after the arrival of the orphaned and destitute children, the boat yard began to employ local labour and to neglect the children of Baltimore Fishery School.

Boats were commissioned by wealthy business men. Conor O'Brien commissioned two yachts the *Saoirse* and the *Ilen*. The latter was sent to the Falklands where it served the outlying islands for seventy years. The *Ilen* was eventually returned to Baltimore where it was rebuilt.



Most of the children, that were transferred from other institutions or that were sent to Baltimore by the legal courts, arrived at the Baltimore train station. Their arrival was preceded by a long train journey.



BALTIMORE

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in operation

From the 1920s the conditions deteriorated rapidly. The Inspector of schools, sent my the Department of Education, Dr. McCabe, reported continually on the appalling conditions at the Baltimore Fishery Industrial School. She highlighted the fact that the children were dressed in rags and went barefooted instead of wearing their boots.

(Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Third Interim Report. 2018. Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Third Interim Report. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.childabusecommission.ie/publications/documents/abuse.htm#LinkTarget_53218. [Accessed 31 August 2018].)



A number of pupils, from Baltimore Fishery Industrial School, gave evidence to the Laffroy Commission, which was set up by the government to investigate what happened in these industrial schools.

(Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Third Interim Report. 2018. Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Third Interim Report. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.childabusecommission.ie/publications/documents/abuse.htm#LinkTarget_53218. [Accessed 31 August 2018].)

One pupil said in evidence, under oath, to the Commission

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They didn't care if we wet the bed. You just lay in it for months. The sheets were made of a heavy calico material like sail cloth. They were filthy and sodden all the time. They'd only be washed about once every three months, when the bishop came to visit.

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(Mary, R., 1999. Suffer the Little Children. 1st ed. Ireland: New Island Books)



Despite adequate funding, from the Government, the children of the Industrial Schools were starved.

Alfie O'Mahony, a former pupil of the Baltimore Fishery Industrial School, wrote in his mémoire.

“

For our dinner two small potatoes sat beside each plate and not until we peeled them did we know if they were edible or rotten. A bad potato was never replaced.

”

(O'Mahony, A., 2011. The Way We Were: A Story of Courage, Hope and Survival. Inspire Books).



The evidence suggests that neglect and lack of care extended to essential, basic needs. One witness testified that he had extreme myopia, but did not get glasses until he was fifteen and a half years of age, a few months before he left the school. He arrived at Baltimore at the age of 10, already experiencing difficulties with his sight, and spent a further five and a half years in class, learning nothing because he could not see what was going on.

(Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Third Interim Report. 2018. Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Third Interim Report. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.childabusecommission.ie/publications/documents/abuse.htm#LinkTarget_53218. [Accessed 31 August 2018]).



The school buildings were sold in the 1970s and a hotel was built on the site. The money from the sale was put in a Trust Fund. Recently the hotel was pulled down to make way for a new development. The community retained the old Baltimore Fishery Industrial School Dormitory Building for their Leisure Centre.



