

Chapter 3: Pre 1922

Introduction

- 3.1 Mother and baby homes were not unique to Ireland, and they were founded and run by a range of religious charities, not all Catholic. The template for mother and baby homes that emerged in Ireland in the 1920s was very similar to that followed in other countries.
- 3.2 This chapter examines the position of unmarried mothers and their children in Ireland before 1922. The Irish Free State did not begin with a blank canvas. The social attitudes and institutions that existed under the Union continued, and legislation, regulations and financial provisions introduced before 1922 remained in force until they were abolished or amended. The Irish Free State inherited a network of agencies and institutions catering for the poor and the needy. Some were directly run and funded by the state, such as the workhouses. Some were charitable agencies that received no state support; their funding came from voluntary donations, and perhaps from some form of commercial activity, such as a Magdalen laundry. The industrial schools can be regarded as a hybrid: they were run by religious orders, but funding and decisions on admission were determined by the state.

Illegitimacy

- 3.3 'Illegitimacy has been called a social problem for the last two centuries and a moral problem from time immemorial. A problem can in principle be solved, and in trying for a solution here moralists, administrators and social scientists have written a very great deal'.¹ These are the opening remarks of Cambridge social historian Richard Laslett in his history of illegitimacy in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan from early modern times. Ireland was not alone in regarding pregnancy outside marriage as 'a social problem', and these attitudes were shared by both Catholic and Protestant churches.
- 3.4 The rate of illegitimacy varied significantly between countries, regions, and over time, though all statistics relating to 'illegitimate' births should be treated with caution. Contrary to what might be expected, the incidence of pre-marital

¹ Peter Laslett, Karla Oostveen and Richard M. Smith (eds), *Bastardy and its comparative history*, (London, 1980).p 1.

conception and 'illegitimate' births has generally been lower when couples married at a late age, as happened in Ireland from the mid-nineteenth century. Laslett suggests that the social controls exercised in countries or regions where couples married at later ages reduced the incidence of pre-marital/extra-marital births, whereas if early marriages were the norm, these social controls were less stringently enforced.² Some societies were quite tolerant of illegitimacy. In the rural northeast of Scotland 'illegitimate children were absorbed into their immediate and extended family and the community without prejudice'. Children were raised by the wider family, or by their cohabiting parents. However, in other parts of Scotland unmarried mothers were often abandoned by their families and left to fend for themselves.³ Such toleration of illegitimacy by families and communities was not the norm. Most unmarried mothers were rejected by their family and the wider society, condemned to a life of poverty. It was impossible for a single woman, without property, capital, or some exceptional skill, to earn an income that would support herself and a child, without substantial assistance from her family or the father of her child. This was true both in Ireland and elsewhere. Even today, when women have significantly greater career choices and governments give financial support to single parents, many single mothers face long-term poverty and a struggle to survive.

- 3.5 The rate of 'illegitimate' births in Ireland was extremely low compared to other countries. In 1911 the Irish figure was just over half of the English rate and one-third of the rate in Scotland. In the late nineteenth century the illegitimacy rate in Sweden was six times that in Ireland. Guinnane suggests that Irish women would have had stronger reasons for concealing a birth outside marriage than women who lived in a country where attitudes towards illegitimacy were less hostile. Guinnane and others suggest that the Irish illegitimate birth-rate was higher than the published statistics suggest, but nevertheless, having allowed for this, he concluded that 'extramarital relations were, it seems rarer in Ireland than in other places'.⁴

² Peter Laslett and Karla Oosterveen, 'Long-term trends in bastardy in England: a study of the illegitimacy figures in the parish registers and in the reports of the Registrar-General, 1561-1960', *Population Studies*, 27, 2 July 1973 p. 256.

³ Janet. Greenlees, Unmarried motherhood in Scotland during the twentieth century. *Mother and Baby Homes*, see Chapter 37.

⁴ Tim Guinnane, *The vanishing Irish: households, migration, and the rural economy in Ireland, 1850-1914*, (Princeton: 1997), pp 259-60

3.6 In the past, domestic service was the most common occupation for young single women and it is not surprising that domestic servants accounted for the largest number of unmarried mothers. Many domestic servants were young; they worked and lived away from the protection of their family. The historian Kenneth Connell suggests that one explanation for the low rate of illegitimacy in pre-famine Ireland was the fact that there were fewer live-in domestic servants than in more prosperous economies.⁵ Material in the National Folklore Collection at UCD from County Antrim described farmers who would ‘put the servant boy and the servant girl to sleep or doss in the one (same) shake-down of a bed. Not out of any badness... I had heard, but because they were wild gatherers (miserly) and didn’t want to buy more bed-clothes for a second bed, because they didn’t want the clothes torn’.⁶

In the Irish countryside before - and probably long after - the Famine it was the lucky mother, or likely mother, of an illegitimate child who was not shunned by her neighbours and despised, if not cast off, by her own family....

Pregnancy outside marriage was a shameful matter to the girl and her family; it promised a wretched future for the child and herself, and prompted guilty concern in many a prospective father.⁷

3.7 Connell, drawing mainly on evidence given to an inquiry during the 1830s, records many such comments by contemporary witnesses about illegitimacy. A woman who gave birth outside marriage was ‘despised by her equals’, she was ‘slighted and shunned by all her former acquaintances’, her ‘stain’ was ‘never forgotten’; it weighed on her family for 20 years, even her children bore some of the brunt. Some parents might permit their daughter to continue to live with the family, ‘more probably, ashamed of her and embittered by the disgrace she brought on the family, they turned her adrift’.⁸ Pregnant single women were often dismissed by their employer.

3.8 Pressure was exerted on the woman and the putative father to marry; in other instances the families collected a dowry and persuaded another man - who was probably her social inferior - to marry her. A putative father might be pressured to provide a dowry, but many women had to survive, unmarried, on whatever casual

⁵ Guinnane, *Vanishing Irish*, p. 84

⁶ University College Dublin, National Folklore Collection, Michael J. Murphy, collector Antrim.

⁷ K.H. Connell, ‘Illegitimacy before the famine’ in K.H. Connell, *Irish peasant society. Four historical essays*, (Dublin, 1996 edition), pp. 51, 62.

⁸ Connell, ‘Illegitimacy’, p 52.

work was available, this was often supplemented by begging or even prostitution. *The Farm by Lough Gur*, an account of life in rural Limerick in the late nineteenth century, tells the story of one young unmarried woman who was thrown out of the house by her father and had to live rough. He finally relented following the death of her baby; by then the unfortunate young woman was suffering from rheumatic fever.⁹

- 3.9 The stigma of illegitimacy was life-long and could extend to later generations. Folklore evidence records that:

When there'd be an out - fall (row between neighbours) or when they would start bargaining over the youngsters then you'd hear the pedigrees. "I wasn't born between a back of ditch and a Holly bush...I wasn't born between a back door and a window shut".

- 3.10 Farmers 'would move heaven and earth to prevent their daughters marrying a bastard', unless he was well-off; a woman who was 'illegitimate' would find it even more difficult to marry into a respectable family. It was commonly believed that a girl who was a 'bye-child' - illegitimate - would 'inherit the softness' - moral laxity that had led to her illegitimacy. There was no legal provision requiring the father to support his child, unlike Britain but some magistrates might award damages for seduction or loss of wages.¹⁰

- 3.11 Some mothers resorted to infanticide. Between 1850 and 1893 there were 2,501 cases of infanticide reported in the Return of Outrages, and these figures do not include the Dublin Metropolitan Police area, which recorded an average of two infant murders a year. Of the infanticide cases that were studied by Elaine Farrell, 84% of the infants were classed as 'illegitimate'. Farrell claims that:

the illegitimate status of an infant was considered the principal motivating factor for infanticide and concealment of birth in nineteenth-century Ireland due to the perceived stigma attached to giving birth outside wedlock.

Suspects also confirmed that the stigma attached to illegitimacy played a role in their decision to murder or conceal the births of their offspring.¹¹

⁹ Mary Carbery, *The farm by Lough Gur: the story of Mary Fogarty (Sissy O'Brien)*, (London, 1937) pp 49-50.

¹⁰ Connell, 'Illegitimacy before the famine', pp 51-61.

¹¹ Elaine Farrell, *'A most diabolical deed': infanticide and Irish society, 1850-1900*, (Manchester, 2013) pp 17 and 26.

- 3.12 Some infanticides were carried out by recently-married couples, indicating that a stigma extended to premarital conceptions. A number of infants were killed by family members. In other instances mothers claimed that they killed their infant because of fears that a parent or another family member would learn of the pregnancy. When the body of a new-born baby was discovered, the unfortunate mother was often identified by gossiping neighbours, who had noticed her pregnancy - yet another indication of the pressures faced by single mothers. Infanticide did not cease in 1920.
- 3.13 'Illegitimate children' were also abandoned; in 1858 Margaret Aylward, who founded the Sisters of the Holy Faith, estimated that roughly 100 children were abandoned in Dublin every year.¹² On the eve of the famine, according to Sean Connolly, roughly one baby in every hundred born in Ireland was a foundling and most foundlings were 'illegitimate'.¹³ Before 1820, Dublin and Cork foundling hospitals were taking in roughly 2,200 babies every year; few of those children survived to become adults. After 1820 both homes began to restrict admissions. Foundlings abandoned in areas remote from hospitals had probably an even lower chance of survival. Before the Irish Poor Law was established, responsibility for foundlings rested with the warden of the Church of Ireland parish where the child was found; he might send the child to the Foundling Hospital or arrange for it to be fostered in the parish. There are regular reports of foundlings in the Minutes of the Dublin Union in the 1920s (see Chapter 13).

The Poor Law

- 3.14 Most women who became pregnant outside marriage were rejected by their family and in Ireland, as elsewhere, they commonly moved away from home, drifting into cities and larger towns. Single mothers were found among the tramps and beggars that were a common feature of early nineteenth century Ireland. There was no national system of poor relief until the 1840s, when the poor law with its workhouses was established. Workhouses were not popular in Ireland, and with the exception of the famine years when many desperate and starving people had no option but to enter a workhouse, the number of residents (known as 'inmates') was well below capacity. Yet from an early stage, unmarried mothers and their children accounted for a significant number of inmates. From the 1840s, the Poor

¹² Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, 1800-1925*, (Dublin, 1998), p. 243.

¹³ Connell, 'Illegitimacy' p. 10

Law, which was funded by local taxes, admitted substantial numbers of single mothers and/or their children. The Poor Law was subject to the overall control of the Commissioners who were based in Dublin's Custom House, but responsibility for key decisions and provisions of care and its quality rested with local poor law boards of guardians (see Chapter 1).

- 3.15 In 1905 there were 2,129 unmarried mothers and 2,764 children who were either 'illegitimate' or deserted in Irish workhouses. There were 2,783 unmarried mothers in English workhouses in 1920. Given that the population of England was nine times the population of Ireland, the figures indicate that a much higher proportion of Irish single mothers ended up in a workhouse, or, alternatively they remained there for a much longer period. Many of the Irish unmarried mothers were long-term residents, who remained in the workhouse as unpaid scrubbers, laundresses and attendants for years, so it is impossible to estimate the numbers of single mothers who gave birth in Irish workhouses in a single year. Some undoubtedly gave birth and left with their infant after a short time. In 1905 a total of 2,207 children were boarded out by the poor law authorities, but it is impossible to know how many of these children were 'illegitimate'.
- 3.16 In 1862 the Irish Poor Law permitted (and encouraged) poor law unions to board out young children who were in the workhouse without their mother - in an effort to reduce the high mortality rate. Initially children were only boarded out until the age of five and they returned to the workhouse at that age. In 1869 the age limit was raised to ten; it was further increased to fifteen in 1898. Alice Litster's summary of the history of boarded out children commented that 'there was considerable diversity of practice' between Unions.¹⁴ The law provided that only orphaned or deserted children could be boarded out by the poor law authorities. Single mothers were not eligible for outdoor relief (relief outside the workhouse) and a mother could only leave the workhouse if she was accompanied by her child, though many escaped, leaving a child/children behind. This regulation, taken from the poor law, remained in force in county homes after 1922 and it became the practice in Ireland's mother and baby homes. Consequently unless a mother absconded, or her family agreed to provide for her and her child - taking both mother and child home, or paying for the baby to be nursed out (paying a foster

¹⁴ Department of Health RM-INA-0-505478

mother to raise this child in her home) - a single mother and her child were condemned to a long-term stay in the workhouse.

Other Options

3.17 Given the social stigma associated with the workhouse, and the requirement to remain there with her child, the workhouse was probably a last resort for unmarried mothers. Most single women and children in the workhouse would have been from very poor families, or they had fled from their families or been abandoned by them. Little is known about single women from middling/large farms or daughters of shopkeepers and other middle-class families. Their invisibility is not unique to Ireland. Thane and Evans, writing about single mothers in England and Wales, refer to 'middle-class secrets', noting that some families arranged discreet adoptions or abortions.¹⁵ Kunzel, writing about the United States, also comments that less is known about single mothers 'who had the resources - financial and familial - with which to keep their pregnancies private'.¹⁶ There is evidence that pregnant single women moved from their home place and came to Dublin in search of privacy. Pregnant Irish single women were travelling to British cities by the 1920s and probably in earlier years. In 1924/5 only one-third of single women admitted to the maternity department of the Dublin Union were natives of Dublin; more than one-third had arrived pregnant in Dublin, the remainder gave a Dublin address and had allegedly been working in the city, though many were recent arrivals. Rev MacInerney claimed that:

most of the "girls in trouble" are fairly respectable girls from the country, or perhaps from the city or suburbs, who are filled with a wild terror lest their sin should be detected and talked about. They will go anywhere to hide their shame and to prevent their misfortune from becoming known to their friends and relatives.¹⁷

3.18 Many of these women stayed in lodging houses until their baby was due. They gave birth in a Dublin maternity hospital and placed their baby at nurse. Some presented themselves as married women. Others gave birth in private nursing homes where standards of care and overall comfort varied greatly. The woman would pay for her care, and also pay the proprietor to place her child at nurse.

¹⁵ Pat Thane & Tanya Evans, *Sinners? scroungers? saints?* (Oxford, 2012), p. 39

¹⁶ Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen women, problem girls. Unmarried mothers and the professionalization of social work, 1890-1945*, ((New Haven, 1993), p. 68.

¹⁷ Rev. M.H. MacInerney, 'A postscript on the souper problem' *Irish ecclesiastical record*, xix, January-June 1922, p. 251.

These private maternity homes were generally small, located in private houses. The owner/proprietor may have been a nurse or midwife, perhaps a widow for whom this activity provided a livelihood. The nurse might attend the birth, or she might send the mother to one of the city maternity hospital for her confinement and then take her back later. These homes were widely condemned for exploiting desperate pregnant women. Rev MacInerney claimed that many single pregnant women came to Dublin where they fell prey to ‘the harpies who batten on rescue work’; they were offered accommodation before the baby was born and given a promise to place the baby with a foster mother in return for substantial sums of money. He suggested that £50 was a common sum to pay for having a child placed at nurse long-term. Anecdotal accounts suggest some unscrupulous nursing home operators, having taken the pregnant woman’s money, forced her to remain in the house as a servant, allegedly being trained in domestic service.¹⁸ Jenny Wyse Power, a commissioner for the Dublin Union, claimed to have met several women with babies in the Dublin Union who had spent their entire savings, £30 or £40 in one of these homes, and were forced to go to the Union because they were destitute.¹⁹ There is undoubtedly some truth behind these stories, and probably some embellishment; however, evidence presented in other chapters confirms that some of the private nursing homes neglected children in their care, and otherwise flouted the law with respect to the registration of births and ‘informal adoption’.

The origins of mother and baby homes

- 3.19 Mother and baby homes did not originate in Ireland and the earliest mother and baby homes were not established by Catholic religious orders. There is a long history of charitable institutions catering for abandoned, or neglected children, and charities that supported widows, but unmarried mothers were not a popular cause for benefactors. The origins of mother and baby homes in Britain, the USA and Australia can be traced to Magdalen Asylums and other institutions that were established to rescue and reform prostitutes. By the end of the nineteenth century every major city in Britain and the United States had several such institutions. The Dublin Magdalen Asylum in Lower Leeson Street opened in 1767 with a mission to rescue ‘first fall’ Protestant women. However, Prunty claims that the first such asylum in Dublin was the Catholic Olivemount Institute in Dundrum, founded in

¹⁸ MacInerney, ‘A postscript on the souper problem’, pp 248-57.

¹⁹ Oireachtas Library. Minutes of evidence, Commission on the sick and destitute poor, Day 7, 25 June 1925.

1742. These institutions were supported by a combination of charity and work carried out by the inmates, generally needlework or laundry. These were not popular charities so it was essential that inmates worked to contribute to the cost of the institutions; work was also seen as central the reformation of the women; 'at least forty refuges or asylums' were established in Ireland between 1765 and 1914.²⁰

3.20 By the late nineteenth century there were homes in Paris catering for single mothers, but most were established by civic groups, not by religious.²¹ In Italy many single mothers (and poor parents) left their children in foundling hospitals, such as the Innocenti in Florence or the Annunziata in Naples, without any indication as to their parentage. In France many children born to single mothers were placed in state care and boarded out.²²

3.21 In the late nineteenth century these institutions shifted their emphasis from rescuing prostitutes to preventing women from becoming prostitutes, a change that was associated with the growing number of women philanthropists. It was widely believed that many single mothers were forced into prostitution because they had no alternative means of support. In England the first homes for unmarried mothers opened in the 1860s and 1870s; they were run by charities that were associated with the Church of England. By the turn of the century the women's social services division of the Salvation Army was the leading agency providing help to unmarried mothers and their children. These newer institutions used the term 'Home'. As the historian of the mother and baby homes established in Cleveland (Ohio) noted, 'Unlike the poorhouses, these would be "homes", where religious influences were pervasive and where middle-class women could best serve their own ministries'.²³ In 1903 Dr Kate Barrett, a prominent figure in the Crittenton Homes, a network of US mother and baby homes associated with the Episcopalian church, published *Some Practical Suggestions on the Conduct of a Rescue Home*, emphasising the core principles of 'religious conversion, domesticity, and disciplines within a familial

²⁰ Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society, 1800-1940*, (Cambridge) 2007) pp 76-85; Jacinta Prunty, *The monasteries, Magdalen asylums and reformatory schools of Our Lady of Charity in Ireland, 1853-1973* (Dublin, 2017), pp 95-108.

²¹ Sherill Cohven, *The evolution of women's asylums since 1500. From refuges for ex-prostitutes to shelters for battered women*, (Oxford, 1992,).

²² Ivan Jablonka, *Ni Père, ni mère. Histoire des enfants de l'assistance publique (1874-1939)*(Paris, 2006).

²³ Marian J. Morton, *And sin no more. Social policy and unwed mothers in Cleveland 1855-1990* (Ohio state University Press, 1993) p 41

setting'. Barrett emphasised that it should be 'A true home - a God's home - where [a girl] will experience safety and love'.²⁴

- 3.22 The Salvation Army opened homes for single mothers and their babies in Britain, Canada, the United States, Australia, and in Belfast. In 1909 they opened a special maternity hospital in London that accommodated several hundred unmarried mothers every year. But with a charge of 10s to 15s a week (which was more than a servant's weekly wage), many single mothers could not afford to use it. Their policy was to admit only first-time mothers, though this was not always enforced. By the early twentieth century there were at least two dozen Salvation Army homes in London providing for unmarried mothers, who came from all parts of Britain. The homes were widely advertised in Salvation Army publications, and mothers-to-be or their relatives accounted for almost half the applications for admission. Women stayed for relatively short periods, on average three and a half months; they were expected to do housework or sewing which was sold to support the home. Salvation Army homes did not engage in commercial laundry. Prayer formed a major part of the routine. Almost one-third of mothers went to stay with family or friends when they left (it is not known how often this proved to be a long-term arrangement), the Salvation Army organised jobs as domestic servants for approximately half of the women - believing that service in a respectable home would protect their morality. The Army placed children at nurse in selected families, and later opened a home for 'illegitimate' children, but whether the children were nursed out or in a home, the mother had to pay for the cost - which could amount to up to 80% of her earnings, because there was a widespread belief at the time (not confined to Britain) that relieving single mothers of the financial responsibility for their children would only encourage further pregnancies.²⁵ Some homes insisted that mother and baby should be together for six or twelve months, but the Glasgow Home for Deserted Mothers separated mother and child shortly after birth, placing the child in a foster home, for which the mother was expected to pay.²⁶ The Salvation Army opened a home in Belfast in 1905. The majority of women admitted were either pregnant or the mother of a baby, and the number of maternity cases and unmarried mothers rose significantly from the late 1920s.²⁷

²⁴ Morton, *And sin no more* p. 58

²⁵ Ann R. Higginbotham, 'Respectable sinners: Salvation Army Rescue work with unmarried mothers, 1884-1914, in Gail Malmgreen (ed), *Religion in the lives of English women, 1760-1930*, (Croom Helm, 1986) pp 216-33.

²⁶ Greenlees, 'Unmarried motherhood in Scotland during the twentieth century: mother and baby homes p. 54.

²⁷ Leanne McCormick, *Regulating sexuality. Women in twentieth-century Northern Ireland*, (Manchester, 2007), pp 37. 50

- 3.23 The story in Scotland is broadly similar. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century charities that had previously operated reformatories for fallen women changed into homes that admitted single mothers who were pregnant for the first time. Women were sent to these homes by the parish and admitted 'only if they agreed to part with their babies, and remained there for one to three years'.²⁸ Scottish homes were generally described as maternity homes (a similar term was used occasionally in Northern Ireland), but during World War I they became known as Mother and Children's Homes. Eleven of the 22 homes listed by Greenlees were established in the 1920s, five were founded between 1900 and 1920, the remainder after 1930.²⁹
- 3.24 In Australia a number of refuges for young unmarried mothers were founded from the 1860s. They admitted pregnant women and the mothers gave birth in the home; mother and baby remained there for approximately a year. Most of these homes operated laundries, as an essential source of income 'for what continued to be unpopular charities'. These homes only admitted women 'who have fallen only once', and aimed to reform them. 'Work was interspersed with prayer, male visitors were banned and letters were subject to perusal'. Some Australian refuges which were originally founded as homes for abandoned babies began to admit pregnant women in the hope that this would save infant lives. While the early homes were founded by Protestant charitable groups, by 1900 the Catholic church had also opened mother and baby homes; before that time Catholic single mothers had relied on Protestant refuges. Swain commented that 'Pregnant women made passive penitents ... willing to work and pray in exchange for shelter and a safe confinement. Rebellion against the harsh conditions was rare and criticism of the rhetoric of sin and reform virtually unknown'.³⁰
- 3.25 In the Netherlands the first homes for 'penitent fallen' women were established by the *Reveil* - an international Protestant revival community. Mothers and children in these homes underwent a regime of religious/moral re-education that was designed to rescue women from a life in prostitution. Until 1947 an unmarried mother in the Netherlands did not have rights as a parent/guardian of her child; all 'illegitimate' children were placed under the legal guardianship of a charitable society that was of the same religion as the mother. Mothers could apply to the

²⁸ Sally Macintyre, *Single and pregnant*, (Croom Helm, 1977), p 11.

²⁹ Greenlees, 'Unmarried motherhood in Scotland during the twentieth century: mother and baby homes' (Nov 2015)

³⁰ Swain and Howe, *Single mothers and their children*, pp 75-6.

courts to secure the guardianship of their child, but guardianship was not automatically granted.³¹

3.26 In the United States the two largest chains of rescue homes targeting prostitutes - those run by the Salvation Army and the National Florence Crittenton Mission - evolved into homes for unmarried mothers. They did so, because they had lots of vacant places, and many single pregnant women had nowhere to go. Many hospitals refused to admit unmarried pregnant women; women were often dismissed from their job when a pregnancy became known, and they were commonly rejected by their families. By the 1920s there were more than 200 homes catering for unmarried mothers in the United States, run by evangelical women. These homes only admitted what they termed, 'first offenders'; women having their first child. The description of the Crittenton homes, given by Regina Kunzel, is worth quoting, because many of the features that she describes were found in the Irish mother and baby homes established some decades later.

Evangelical women conceived of maternity homes as primarily redemptive ... Religion was the foundation on which evangelical women built their redemptive program, and maternity home workers measured their own success by the rate of religious conversion confessed by the unmarried mothers under their care.

Religion informed every aspect of maternity homes, from their over-arching purpose to the details of everyday life within their walls...Days spent by unmarried mothers in early twentieth century maternity homes were punctuated by religious services.

3.27 In Salvation Army homes in 1912 'short prayer meetings are held night and morning and on Sunday afternoon a special meeting is convened, when the girls are particularly pleaded with to confess and forsake their sins'. Maternity home schedules suggest that when unmarried mothers were not praying they were working ... Expected to do the basic work of the homes, including cooking, cleaning, and laundering, maternity home residents were subjected to a fairly heavy regime, usually spending seven to ten hours a day in domestic chores. Believing "the upbuilding of character" to be "slow work", most maternity homes required the women to stay as long as necessary for redemption to take hold and stick. Many homes required unmarried mothers to sign an agreement to remain in the institution for a given period as a condition of admission.

³¹ Nelleke Bakker, *Mother and baby homes in the Netherlands in the 20th century* – see Chapter 37.

A maternity home resident could expect most aspects of her life - the way she wore her hair, the visitors she received, her mail - to come under the close scrutiny of her matron. Some homes permitted no visitors, others only female relatives; residents ordinary could not leave the grounds unchaperoned... The regulation and censorship of letters was a common practice'.³²

3.28 By the early twentieth century a template for mother and baby homes had emerged that can be found throughout the English-speaking world. Homes were run by voluntary agencies that were denominationally-based; they were distinct from the all-purpose workhouse/poorhouse. They were generally located behind high walls; isolated from the community; visitors were restricted, and women were required to stay for a specified period - at least six months after giving birth³³ in order to 'benefit' from the discipline and rehabilitation that the home claimed to provide. The regime was also designed to act as a deterrent against becoming pregnant outside marriage. Morton commented that 'At least until very recently workers at facilities for unwed mothers would have freely admitted that they were trying to control their clients' behaviour and prevent additional illegitimate pregnancies'.³⁴ A women's privacy was generally protected by giving her an assumed name. When women left the homes they were commonly placed in jobs as domestic or institutional servants, because the evangelical women who ran these homes believed that a domestic setting would provide an element of supervision and reduce the risks of another pregnancy; there is also an implicit message that the promotion of domesticity would encourage the women to marry and thus achieve their true vocation in life.

3.29 Another key feature of these maternity homes was that their mission was 'saving women, not children'.³⁵ The primary goal was to rehabilitate the mothers and prevent them from becoming prostitutes or giving birth to additional children outside marriage. Higginbotham, writing about the Salvation Army homes in Britain, noted that 'The rescue worker's first concern was the restoration of the woman to a moral life, not the welfare of her child'. Infant welfare was at best a secondary concern, which may explain why the Salvation Army placed children at nurse in private homes, despite the fact that 60% or more of nursed out children died within the first year of life. If the mothers had been placed in non-domestic

³² Kunzel, *Fallen women*, pp 26-31.

³³ Morton, *And sin no more* pp 48-50.

³⁴ Morton, *And sin no more* p 13.

³⁵ Morton, *And sin no more* p. 57

positions, she suggests that they could have cared for their children in the evenings, but the fears of moral relapse meant that the rescue workers preferred domestic situations, despite the fact that this involved separating mother and child.³⁶ The focus was on ensuring that the women became useful members of society, ensuring that they were 'trained' and placed in some form of domestic employment. The fate of the children was something of an after-thought.

- 3.30 Given this emphasis on moral and religious salvation it is not surprising that Catholic homes were established to prevent unmarried mothers or their infants being 'lost' to Catholicism. Religion was central to the mission of mother and baby homes, and in cities such as Cleveland there was 'lively competition among denominations'.³⁷ It would appear that Catholic charities were slower to establish homes. Morton noted that in Cleveland the local bishop was initially reluctant to establish a mother and baby home 'fearing that this would imply diocesan sanction for illegitimate pregnancy'.³⁸ He was not the only senior clergyman who was opposed to, or at best unenthusiastic about, mother and baby homes. In 1920 Rev MacInerney quotes a letter from the Vicar-General of Southwark, who stated that 'It is a reproach against the church that little is done for such unhappy women ... some bishops are against the way of the sinner being made easy, and discourage our efforts'. The fact that religious sisters were not permitted to qualify as midwives (a requirement in Britain for all involved in assisting childbirth) would have made it more difficult for Catholic religious to establish mother and baby homes.³⁹ It would appear that the primary motivation for establishing Catholic mother and baby homes was to counteract the possibility that Catholic women who were poor and pregnant would seek assistance from a Protestant charity.⁴⁰ By the 1930s there were at least 44 Catholic homes for unmarried mothers in the USA, operating under guidelines established by the National Conference of Catholic Charities.⁴¹

- 3.31 The Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary was a religious order that was founded in France and came to England during the turmoil of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. One of the congregation's first homes in England

³⁶ Higginbotham, 'Respectable sinners', p 225.

³⁷ Morton *And sin no more* p 38

³⁸ Morton *And sin no more* p 76

³⁹ H.M MacInerney, 'A postscript on the souper problem', p. 254

⁴⁰ Morton *And sin no more* p. 77.

⁴¹ Morton *And sin no more* p 79. The director of the National Conference was Irish-born Monsignor John O'Grady, who was instrumental in the adoption of Irish babies in the United States.

catered for unemployed working girls, helping them to find work and providing religious instruction. In 1890 the archdiocese of Westminster established St Pelagia's mother and baby home, and invited the congregation to run the home. This was the first Catholic mother and baby home in the London area. Mothers remained in the home for a year; they were taught dressmaking and cookery; at the end of that year the children went to a nursery, run by the congregation, until they were either fostered or transferred to a Catholic orphanage. The congregation opened additional mother and baby homes in Liverpool and Scotland.⁴² These homes did not receive any support from central or local government, so they were dependent on earnings (the Liverpool home did laundry for ships), and on charity, but again the evidence suggests that unmarried mothers were not charitable causes that attracted public sympathy.⁴³

3.32 Leanne McCormick has documented the existence of many rescue homes established before 1914 in Belfast and other parts of what became Northern Ireland. They included rescue homes founded by the Church of Ireland and Presbyterian churches, non-denominational Christian missions, and the Salvation Army. The Good Shepherd Sisters opened a home for 'destitute penitents' in 1867. McCormick claims that by the beginning of the twentieth century most women admitted to these homes were 'generally not prostitutes ... more likely to be unmarried mothers, girls whose parents were concerned about their moral well being'.⁴⁴

3.33 In nineteenth century Ontario 'an illegitimate birth was viewed largely as an individual problem', and mothers known to have an 'illegitimate' child would find it difficult to secure work or shelter. The first home for unmarried mothers, run by a religious organisation, was founded by the Salvation Army in 1905. The Ontario Government made it known that they disapproved of the fact that there was no Catholic mother and baby home, and in 1914 the Archbishop of Toronto asked the Sisters of Misericordia to open a home.⁴⁵

⁴² Rosemary Clerkin, *A heart for others*, (Chigwell, 1983), pp 39-50.

⁴³ Clerkin, *A heart for others*, p.51.

⁴⁴ McCormick, *Regulating sexuality*, pp 3708

⁴⁵ Karen Bridget Murray, 'Governing unwed mothers in Toronto at the turn of the twentieth century', *Canadian historical review*, 85 no 2 (2004) p 259.

Ireland

- 3.34 There was a remarkable growth in the number of charities operating in Ireland during the nineteenth century; they were mainly concentrated in the cities and larger towns. Most charities were denominationally-based. Very few catered for single mothers. Lindsey Earner Byrne commented that ‘A conspicuous feature of the voluntary assistance landscape in the early twentieth century [in Dublin] was the lack of Roman Catholic initiatives in the area of maternal welfare’.⁴⁶ If little assistance was available for poor married mothers, even less was available for unmarried mothers. They were not a cause that attracted widespread sympathy from donors, because unmarried mothers were not seen as ‘deserving’.
- 3.35 Children were seen as much more deserving cases. There were numerous orphanages, but it is unclear which orphanages admitted the children of single mothers. Orphanages tended to be subdivided on the basis of religion and social class. They contained orphans, both of whose parents had died, and many children who had lost one parent, where the surviving parent was unable to cope - widowed mothers were often encouraged to place their children in an orphanage and become self-supporting.⁴⁷ Children’s charities were motivated both by a wish to care for needy children and a determination to save their souls: Religion was paramount, and the reality and perception of ‘souperism’ - charities that took babies and raised them in a religion other than their mother’s - was a common feature of life in both working-class Protestant and Catholic communities.⁴⁸ St Brigid’s outdoor orphanage placed children in foster homes in rural areas of county Dublin. Initially run by laywomen, it was taken over by a religious order; boarding out ceased and the children were maintained in an institution in Eccles St.⁴⁹ The Cottage Home in Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire) catered for young children whose mother was dead or compelled to earn a living, but the parents or friends of the child had to contribute to their maintenance,⁵⁰ though the charge may have been waived if a Catholic mother agreed that her child would be raised as a Protestant.

⁴⁶ Lindsey Earner Byrne, *Mother and Child: maternity and child welfare in Dublin, 1922-1956*, (Manchester, 2007) pp 75-6.

⁴⁷ Mary E. Daly, *Dublin: the deposed capital. A social and economic history 1860-1914*, (Cork, 1984), pp 95-7.

⁴⁸ Oonagh Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin: philanthropy, politics and education in the early twentieth century* (Dublin 2005) Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor..Poverty in independent Ireland, 1920-1940*, (Cambridge 2017).

⁴⁹ Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums*, pp 243-7, 269. George D. Williams, *Dublin Charities, being a handbook of Dublin philanthropic organisations and charities; including benevolent and educational organisations; shelters, refuges, orphanages, hospitals, reformatories, industrial schools* (Dublin 1902), p. 141.

⁵⁰ Williams, *Dublin charities*, pp 146-7.

- 3.36 The *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, described as 'a monthly journal under episcopal sanction' published four articles on the subject of unmarried mothers between 1921 and 1924. The primary motivation behind these articles was souperism - the loss of Catholics to Protestant charities - which was a major concern of the Catholic church in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.⁵¹ Their concern was not without some justification. *The Handbook of Dublin Charities* (published in 1903) described The Bird's Nest in Kingstown, (whose secretary was Miss E Smyly) as 'a home for neglected children of the very poor', which gave preference to Catholic children and the children of mixed marriages, though it only admitted children aged seven and over.⁵² Children placed in the Bird's Nest or Smyly's home were raised as Protestants. There were numerous allegations that desperate Catholic single mothers were being assisted by Protestant rescue societies, and their children placed in Protestant institutions.⁵³ One woman, who appealed to Archbishop Byrne for financial assistance told him that 'Miss Smiley (sic)' had offered her £50 plus clothes for herself in return for her baby.⁵⁴
- 3.37 Ireland was seriously lacking in charities for unmarried mothers, especially when compared with the USA, Britain or Australia. The Dublin Hospital Girls' Aid Association, founded in 1880 by a group of Protestant mothers, offered shelter and an occupation to pregnant single women, and tried to return them to their families. The Rotunda Girls Aid Society, founded in 1890 by Fr Ridgeway, who was based at the Pro-Cathedral in Marlborough Street,⁵⁵ was for many decades the only Catholic charity in Dublin with a specific mission of caring for unmarried mothers and their children. Evidence suggests that many of the children were placed at nurse. 1911 saw the formation of the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland (CPRSI) - which assisted single mothers, and arranged for their children to be placed at nurse.⁵⁶ The CPRSI had a specific mission 'to rescue the child whose faith is in imminent danger'. St Patrick's Guild was founded in 1910 by Miss Cruice, at the request of a Dominican priest Fr Coleman⁵⁷ - to care for 'the unwanted child'. It too was motivated by a wish to counteract the numbers of

⁵¹ Prunty, *Dublin slums*, pp 234-73; The concerns were reciprocated among the Protestant community, Oonagh Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin: Philanthropy, politics and education in the early twentieth century*, (Dublin, 2005), pp 166-7.

⁵² Williams, *Dublin Charities*, p. 148.

⁵³ Sir Joseph Glynn, 'The unmarried mother', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, xviii, 1921, p 465.

⁵⁴ Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor. Poverty in independence Ireland, 1920-1940*, (Cambridge, 2017) p 237.

⁵⁵ Dublin Diocesan Archives (DDA), McQuaid papers LII/A/45/5/3/1.

⁵⁶ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, p. 115.

⁵⁷ DDA, LII/45/5/4/(1).

Catholic infants being placed with Protestant charities. It placed babies born to single mothers 'at nurse' for a fee. In a letter to Michael Browne, the bishop of Galway, Miss Cruice explained that 'St Patrick's Guild deals with what we might call the exclusive type' of single mothers.⁵⁸ In 1919 St Patrick's Guild opened a home for the care of unmarried expectant and nursing mothers in Mountjoy Square, which also operated as a training school for nursery nurses.⁵⁹ St Joseph's Guild of Rescue and the Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children Aid Society also placed children 'at nurse'.⁶⁰ While the evidence is fragmentary it would appear that most, perhaps all of these charities, demanded a contribution from the mother or her family; they did not assist destitute mothers.

3.38 Dublin, like other cities at the time, had its quota of rescue homes in the early twentieth century, all with a strong religious emphasis. In 1928 a voluntary worker with the Dublin Magdalen Asylum (later known as Denny House) told the annual Gift Day meeting that when she had returned to Dublin in 1907 there were eight Protestant institutions 'doing rescue work', but only two - the Magdalen Asylum and Bethany Home - remained. She attributed the fall in the number of Protestant rescue homes in Dublin to 'the more energetic action of the Roman Catholic authorities in looking after their own erring sisters'.⁶¹ Many rescue homes stated that they made no religious distinction but women who were admitted had to conform to the rules of the house, which included mandatory attendance at religious services. The only institution that provided lodging for a pregnant single woman - other than the workhouse - was the Magdalen Asylum founded by Arabella Denny in 1767. The 1903 *Handbook of Dublin Charities* stated that 'The home is especially intended for Protestant young women after a *first* fall, and for those who are about to become mothers'.⁶² The charter provided that it should only admit Protestant women - either expectant single mothers or women with new-born infants. The mothers generally spent up to a year in the home, before being placed in a domestic situation. The regime combined work, penance and prayer - a combination that was deemed necessary to achieve rehabilitation. The regime followed in the Magdalen Asylum was similar to rescue homes for unmarried mothers in Britain - regardless of their denominational affiliation. Women were described as penitents. They were forbidden to use their own name

⁵⁸ Galway Diocesan Archives, Bishop Browne papers B/12/13/d.

⁵⁹ Department of Health RM/ARC/O/521022.

⁶⁰ For the Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children's Aid Society see Chapter 23.

⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 15 January 1928

⁶² Williams, *Handbook of Dublin Charities* p 156.

or speak about their past; they were given a number and known as Mrs One, Mrs Two etc. and they were classified on the basis of their life history. Women who had given birth to two or more children or prostitutes were segregated from first-time mothers, and their other children were not allowed in the asylum. Luddy comments that 'it is unclear what became of them'.⁶³ By the early 1920s the Magdalen Asylum was keeping mothers in the home for approximately nine months after the birth of their child. When she left the home, often for a domestic service position that had been found by the Asylum, her child was boarded out.⁶⁴

- 3.39 Catholic Magdalen homes, such as St Mary's Asylum and Reformatory High Park did not admit pregnant women, and in contrast to what happened in the USA and Britain, none of these Catholic institutions evolved into mother and baby homes. The rules of the Good Shepherd Order which ran many of Ireland's Magdalen Asylums (for Catholics) stated that no pregnant women should be admitted. Women who were found to be pregnant were thrown out of the homes.⁶⁵ Admitting pregnant women was likewise forbidden in the homes run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity.⁶⁶ Irish Magdalen Homes, with the exception of the Dublin Magdalen Asylum - an institution confined to Protestants - were not mother and baby homes.
- 3.40 By contrast the Prison Gate Mission in Blackhall Place which met women as they left prison 'in order to try and reclaim them from their evil life and companions, by providing means of honest livelihood', and also sheltered young women from the country who had failed to find work, in order to save them 'from falling into evil ways',⁶⁷ evolved into Bethany Home in 1922 (see Chapter 22). The fact that no Catholic Magdalen asylum transformed into a mother and baby home probably reflects the fact that religious sisters were discouraged from involving themselves in maternity care - a limitation that did not apply to Protestant charities.
- 3.41 Bethany and Bessborough the two private (Pelletstown, Kilrush and Tuam were local authority homes) mother and baby homes that opened in the 1920s followed the template for a mother and baby home with minor variations. Religion occupied a central place in the homes; discipline, removal from the outside world and a

⁶³ Luddy *Prostitution*, pp 85-6.

⁶⁴ Minutes of Evidence Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor, Day 4, 11 June 1925.

⁶⁵ Frances Finnegan *Do penance or perish*. Magdalen asylums in Ireland, (Oxford, 2004), p 27.

⁶⁶ Jacinta Prunty, *Our Lady of Charity in Ireland*, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Williams, *Handbook of Dublin Charities*, p. 158.

regime of domestic tasks were major features. In the USA board meetings of the Crittenton homes opened with a prayer, as they did in Bethany - and Bethany meetings ended with a prayer. It was Crittenton policy not to reveal the name of any woman in their homes 'in order to hide her shame'.⁶⁸ This was also the practice in the Magdalen Asylum and the three homes run by the Sacred Hearts congregation, though not in Pelletstown and Tuam. McCormick, writing about rescue and refuge homes, in general, not just in Northern Ireland, commented that 'The homes were therefore an important disciplinary tool for working class families, not simply a middle-class construction to impose middle-class values. Working-class parents could remove troublesome daughters who generated concern or had the potential to bring disgrace to their family'.⁶⁹

Welfare reform 1900-1920

- 3.42 The dedicated mother and baby homes only accepted 'first fall' mothers - women who were pregnant for the first time. This distinction between a first-time mother and an unmarried mother of two or more children reflected the belief that first-time mothers could be rehabilitated, whereas the others were commonly seen as either depraved or mentally deficient. The practice of segregating first-time unmarried mothers was initiated by charitable institutions and it appears to have influenced proposals to reform the Poor Law in the years before 1914. The workhouses established in Britain and in Ireland in the nineteenth century admitted all categories of needy people and cared for them in one institution. They made no distinction between unmarried mothers and other women in need. By the early twentieth century, however, proposals for welfare reform favoured differential measures for those in need; for example the elderly poor would receive an old age pension and should no longer have to enter the workhouse. In 1906 the Vice-Regal Commission on Poor Law Reform in Ireland stated unequivocally that the workhouse was an unsuitable 'refuge or asylum' for mothers of illegitimate children. The commission recommended that first-time pregnant mothers should be sent to institutions owned or managed by religious communities or philanthropic persons - mother and baby homes. If no such institutions existed, they should be sent to a disused workhouse that was adapted for the purpose and would only accommodate single mothers and their children. This special home should be managed by a committee of contributory Boards of Guardians (in other words it

⁶⁸ Morton, *And sin no more*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ McCormick, *Regulating sexuality*, p 59.

should serve several poor law unions), with a staff of special officers, 'similar to those in charge of the religious or philanthropic institutions'. At this time many workhouse hospitals were staffed by religious sisters, and this comment would appear to suggest a similar arrangement. Women would give birth in a nearby hospital; (religious sisters did not deliver babies or supervise births) and the mothers would return to the institution and care for their children until they were at least one year old. At this point mothers should be placed in 'suitable situations' probably domestic or institutional service and the baby should be boarded out unless there were medical reasons for not doing so. Mothers on second or subsequent pregnancies should be sent to Magdalen homes and confined there. Their babies would remain with them until they were weaned. The Vice-Regal Commission drew a distinction between first-time mothers and 'more depraved cases' – mothers of two or more children. There is no indication that any steps were taken to implement these recommendations. The Irish volume of the 1909 Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws reiterated the recommendations of the 1906 Vice-Regal Commission; the Scottish report also recommended that first-time unmarried mothers should be sent to special homes run by charitable organisations.⁷⁰

- 3.43 The 1906 Vice-Regal Commission was the blueprint for the provisions that developed in the Irish Free State after 1922. The Children's Home in Glenamaddy, later Tuam, was established in a disused workhouse, and it was supported by the local health authorities in counties Mayo and Galway. In County Clare, the former workhouse in Kilrush was dedicated to housing single mothers and their children. Pelletstown was established and controlled by the Dublin Union, as a home for pregnant and single mothers and their children, though many of the women admitted were from outside Dublin. By 1922 three mother and baby homes, run by charitable organisations existed - the Magdalen Asylum, the Bethany Home, and Bessborough mother and baby home.

The Children Act 1908

- 3.44 The early years of the twentieth century were marked by a growing concern with infant and child welfare in Britain, and this impacted on Ireland, which was part of the United Kingdom. The concern was partly prompted by eugenics and the need

⁷⁰ Poor Law Reform Commission Report of the Vice-Regal Commission on poor law reform in Ireland, Volume I 1906, (Cd 3202); Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1905-09. Report on IRELAND, 1909, (cd.6153). Sally Macintyre, *Single and Pregnant*, (1977 London) p. 11.

for a large standing army; a high proportion of young working class males were too physically unwell or too small in stature to be accepted into the British army. By the end of the nineteenth century, the death-rate among adults was falling steadily, but mortality among children and infants was not showing a comparable improvement.

3.45 In 1908 the UK Parliament passed the *Children Act*, a wide-ranging piece of legislation which strengthened the provisions in the *Children Act 1897*. It contained clauses relating to reformatories and industrial schools; it even included a prohibition of juvenile smoking. The 1908 act reflected growing concern about the high rate of infant and child mortality, and the awareness that a disproportionate number of infant and child deaths occurred among children who were not being raised by their parent(s). Not all children who were placed at nurse were illegitimate, but the children of single mothers probably constituted the majority. Section I of the 1908 Act: Infant Life Protection was designed to combat 'baby farming' - a pejorative term that was used to describe circumstances where women, generally poor women, were paid to look after several children in their home. The mortality of boarded out infants and children was extremely high. There are many references to baby-farming in Britain in the late nineteenth century, both in the popular press and in medical journals, but significantly fewer references in Ireland.⁷¹ This does not mean that 'baby farming' was not practised in Ireland; the Irish authorities and journalists may have shown less interest in the matter. Ciara Breathnach has analysed one case in Dublin in 1905, where a married mother of five children was charged with causing the death of an infant under her care. The woman had taken charge of three children who were placed with her by the Cottage Home in Kingstown over the summer of 1905; all three died within a few months.⁷²

3.46 The *Children Act 1908* introduced a requirement that any person taking on the 'nursing and maintenance, for reward' of one or more infants under the age of seven, was required to give forty-eight hours' notice in advance to the local authority, stating their name, address, and the sex and date of birth of the child. If a child in their care died or was removed to another address, the local authority must be informed within 48 hours. All deaths should be notified to the coroner who

⁷¹ Sarah-Anne Buckley, *The cruelty man. Child welfare, the NSPCC and the State in Ireland, 1889-1956*, (Manchester, 2013), pp 16.17.

⁷² Ciara Breathnach, 'Infant life protection and medico-legal literacy in early twentieth-century Dublin', *Women's History Review* 26, 6, 2017, pp 781-98.

was required to hold an inquest. Local authorities were required to appoint infant protection officers to visit homes where children were nursed out to check on conditions in the home and the standard of care. These regulations applied to children who were placed at nurse by a philanthropic society, such as St Patrick's Guild or The Cottage Home and to infants who were privately placed by the mother or another family member. Infant Protection Officers could apply to have a child removed from a home if the foster mother or conditions were unsuitable - including cases of drunkenness, immorality, criminal conduct or negligence. Refusing Infant Protection Officers permission to examine a child or the foster home constituted an offence, and the visitor could apply to a judge for a warrant; the diligence of Infant Protection Officers varied. Persons convicted under Section 1 of the *Children Act* or the *Infant Life Protection Act 1897*, or from whose premises children were removed because they were insanitary or dangerous, were prohibited from taking children in future, except with the written approval of the local authority. The local authority could fix the maximum number of children to be kept in a particular dwelling or by a particular person. It could also exempt from visits 'any particular premises within their district which appear to them to be so conducted that it is unnecessary that they should be visited'. The requirement to hold an inquest in all cases of death did not apply where the child was being cared for by a relative, or 'to hospitals, convalescent homes, or institutions established for the protection and care of infants, and conducted in good faith for religious or charitable purposes, or boarding schools'.

War-Time Changes

- 3.47 Concern about infant and child welfare appears to have grown during World War One, perhaps because of the horrifying numbers of young men who were dying. The *Notification of Births Act 1907* required that notice of births should be given to the local medical officer of health within 36 hours. However, this was not binding on all local authorities - each local authority could decide whether to introduce it or not. In 1915 the *Notification of Births Act* became obligatory if the birth took place in urban areas. This change was designed to enable the health authorities to care for the health of infants, and expectant and nursing mothers in cities and towns - the areas of highest infant mortality.
- 3.48 In 1916 the UK government introduced a programme of grants to local authorities and voluntary agencies in urban areas, including county boroughs, for (1) health-

visitors, (2) maternity centres, (3) midwifery facilities and (4) day nurseries. These grants were extended to rural districts in the following year. The grants could be used to provide milk or food to needy children, if that was done as part of a wider child welfare strategy. In 1918 the sum of money provided was increased and the programme was extended to include provision for the young children of widowed, deserted and unmarried mothers and Exchequer payments for health visitors. By 1920 this scheme was providing financial support to a number of Dublin voluntary organisations, including the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland, St. Joseph's Guild of Rescue, the Rotunda Girls Aid Society, and the Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children Aid Society - agencies that assisted single mothers and placed their babies in foster homes. The grant covered half of the cost of boarding out these children up to the age of five, which reduced the amount of money that a single mother needed to provide. The Exchequer grant also paid 50% of the estimated costs of keeping mothers and babies in the Dublin Magdalen Asylum (Denny House) for a maximum of six weeks before birth and up to one year after the birth.

Conclusions

- 3.49 The evolution of the poor law, child welfare and charities during the years when Ireland was part of the United Kingdom provided the framework within which provisions for unmarried mothers and their children evolved after 1922. Key elements of the pre-1922 provisions survived: child welfare and services for unmarried mothers were the responsibility of local authorities, who might devolve their care to a charity. Poor law regulations stipulated that a single mother was responsible for her child. She could not renege on this responsibility by abandoning her child in a mother and baby home or any other institution supported by public funds.
- 3.50 Ireland was unusual among English-speaking countries in the absence of mother and baby homes before 1918. The only institutions that provided accommodation for unmarried mothers and their children were the workhouses, and the small Protestant Magdalen Asylum (Denny House) in Dublin's Leeson St. The 1906 Vice-Regal Commission had recommended that unmarried mothers should be in the care of religiously-controlled institutions, ideally institutions owned by these bodies. If there were insufficient places in voluntary institutions, local authorities

should establish mother and baby homes, but they should arrange for them to be run by religious orders or by members of a religious association.

- 3.51 By 1900 the template for a mother and baby home - secrecy, isolation, religion, domestic work and the requirement to spend a designated period in the home - had evolved in Britain, North America and Australia. The Irish homes established after 1922 followed these international models. The distinction between 'first-fall' unmarried mothers and mothers of two or more children was well-established in the English-speaking world, as a key element in provisions for unmarried mothers.
- 3.52 In the years after 1900 the British Government showed a growing interest in child and infant welfare. The *Children Act 1908* introduced regulations and inspections of boarded-out children; many of these children were born to unmarried mothers. This was also the time when several charities were established in Ireland to assist single mothers by placing their children at nurse. These charities were primarily motivated by fears of proselytization and such fears were not without some justification. The UK Exchequer grants introduced in 1918 as part of a wider package of infant and child welfare measures, were the first that public funding was provided for unmarried mothers and their children outside the poor law.