

## Chapter 7: Pregnant from Ireland

### Introduction

- 7.1 When an unmarried woman discovered that she was pregnant, a common response was to flee from her home or place of work in the hope of concealing her pregnancy from her family and the local community. Women who confided in one or more family members were often encouraged to leave home. This was not a uniquely Irish response, and it happened before the foundation of the state. In the 1830s the Irish Poor Inquiry stated that most single women who became pregnant left their home. In France many single mothers travelled to Paris to conceal their pregnancy and get rid of their infant - using the notorious turning gates at foundling hospitals, or giving birth anonymously and leaving their child with the authorities.<sup>1</sup> In the United States women also sought anonymity in the large cities. In 1925/26 Mr Mac Lysaght, a commissioner for the Dublin Union, claimed that roughly 45% of the unmarried mothers in institutions run by the Dublin Union - which included Pelletstown - were women 'who come up from the country in trouble'. Of the 110 mothers with infants in Pelletstown in 1926, 48 were from the Dublin Union area, 62 were 'from the country', though some had been living and working in Dublin before they became pregnant.<sup>2</sup>
- 7.2 Many pregnant single women travelled to Britain. It was an obvious destination. Emigration was a normal part of life for young women and men, so an announcement that a woman was travelling to work in Britain would not attract comment or intrusive questions. Many putative fathers also emigrated to avoid an affiliation order, pressure to marry, or the opprobrium of the women's family and perhaps the wider community. The flight of putative fathers was generally uneventful; their past did not follow them to England. But pregnant Irish single women often found that England was less welcoming than they had hoped.
- 7.3 The number of pregnant unmarried Irish women who came into contact with British welfare services - both voluntary and public - was so great that they were commonly known by the initials, PFIs - Pregnant from Ireland. This chapter examines the history of PFIs from the 1920s until the early 1970s when it is transformed into a flight of pregnant Irish women seeking abortions. The emphasis

<sup>1</sup> Ivan Jablonka, *Ni père ni mère. Histoire des enfants de l'Assistance publique (1874-1939)* (Paris, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Oireachtas Library, Commission on the relief of the sick and destitute poor, including the insane poor, minutes of evidence, thirty-second day, 17 Dec. 1926.

in this chapter is on the relationships between British charities and local authorities, and Irish charities and the Department of Local Government and Public Health/Department of Health. The personal stories of the women are told in the next chapter, where they are interwoven with the stories of the other pregnant women who sought assistance from the department. Both chapters should be read in conjunction to get the overall picture.

### **Church and State in Britain and Ireland and arrangements for PFIs**

- 7.4 Pregnant women were travelling to England in the 1920s, and it is highly unlikely that this was a new development. In August 1921 a Jesuit priest, based in Bournemouth, reported that in the previous year, 12 Irish women had given birth in the local workhouse. Some had become pregnant in Ireland and ‘fled over there to hide their shame’. Evidence sent to Archbishop Edward Byrne of Dublin in the 1920s suggests that Irish women continued to give birth in English workhouses during that decade. The West Derby Union recorded a number of Irish unmarried mothers and there were Irish women in St Pelagia’s Home for unmarried mothers in London, which was run by the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.<sup>3</sup> In 1923 the British National Vigilance Association wrote to the Irish High Commissioner in London<sup>4</sup>, James McNeill, asking him to deal with the problem of Irish women coming to Britain - often without money, luggage or employment - and pregnant Irish women who were dismissed from pre-arranged jobs because they were unfit for the work.<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Redmond noted that the years after independence ‘saw the emergence of a network of welfare organizations designed to help Irish women traveling to Britain and elsewhere’. They included the Legion of Mary, the International Catholic Girls’ Protection Society, Girls’ Friend Society and Irish Women Police Patron, the Catholic Women’s League, and the Port and Station Rescue Work Society.<sup>6</sup> Lucy Desmond, who worked with the Catholic Aid Society in Liverpool, gave evidence to the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor in the hope that this migrating trail could be brought to an end. Her society dealt with approximately 50 Irish women every year. She claimed that the numbers travelling to England were increasing. Women migrated ‘to hide themselves’, but as pregnant women, they found it difficult to get a job, and many

<sup>3</sup> Dublin Diocesan Archives, DDA/AB7/b/Lay organisations, Box 2.

<sup>4</sup> The official representative in Britain of all countries that were members of the British Commonwealth had the title of High Commissioner. When Ireland left the Commonwealth, Ireland was represented by an Ambassador.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Redmond, ‘The politics of emigrant bodies: Irish women’s sexual practice in question’, in Jennifer Redmond, Sonya Tiernan, Sandra McAvoy and Mary McAuliffe (eds), *Sexual politics in modern Ireland* (Sallins, 2015), p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Redmond, ‘Safeguarding Irish girls: welfare work, female emigrants, and the Catholic church, 1920s-1940s’, in Christina S. Brophy and Cara Delay, *Women, reform, and resistance in Ireland 1850-1950* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 57.

women 'drift into the Union as they have no money'. If they had some savings they would go to a maternity home (no details given), 'and get through their trouble'. The Catholic Aid Society found it difficult to place these babies.<sup>7</sup> The Liverpool Society for the Prevention of International Traffic in Women and Children told the Carrigan Committee (see Chapter 9) that they had met a total of 1947 Irish expectant mothers in the years 1926-30.<sup>8</sup> The concerns expressed by British charities were echoed - and indeed amplified - by the Irish bishops, not just in the 1920s but in decades to come.<sup>9</sup>

7.5 British charitable organisations exerted pressure on the Irish Catholic hierarchy to campaign for restrictions on the emigration of vulnerable young women - a cause that the Irish hierarchy pursued, without success, for decades. Irish government officials pointed out that most of these young women left Ireland with the consent of their parents, sometimes at their urging, and they could not be prevented from doing so.<sup>10</sup> British charities (and via them the British authorities) put pressure on the Irish hierarchy, and the Irish State, to repatriate pregnant Irish women. Earner-Byrne notes that St Patrick's Guild kept Archbishop Byrne of Dublin informed 'regarding their rescue work and the situation of Irish unmarried mothers in Britain. The Archbishop also received correspondence from concerned charities in Britain requesting his assistance'. Earner-Byrne claims that Canon Craven of the Crusade of Rescue (an English Catholic charity for unmarried mothers), 'adopted the issue of Irish unmarried mothers in Britain as a personal crusade the object of which was to force the Irish authorities and charities to assume primary responsibility for their citizens and flock'. He wrote regularly to CPRSI and St Patrick's Guild, and sent a list of Irish unmarried mothers in Britain to the DLGPH inspector, Mrs Crofts.<sup>11</sup> Redmond noted that, according to the records in the Dublin Diocesan Archives, Archbishop Byrne received communications from eight associations and institutions based in London, Manchester and Leeds. 'In total 1,203 Irish women were noted as having been helped by these organizations...376 were reported as having become pregnant in Ireland, 155 became pregnant in

<sup>7</sup> Oireachtas Library, Commission on the relief of the sick and destitute poor, including the insane poor, minutes of evidence, eleventh day, 16 Sept. 1925.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Michael Garrett, 'The abnormal flight: the migration and repatriation of Irish unmarried mothers', *Social History*, xxiv, 3 (Oct. 2000), p. 337.

<sup>9</sup> Redmond, 'Politics of emigrant bodies'; Mary E. Daly, *The slow failure: Population decline and independent Ireland, 1920-1973* (Madison Wisconsin, 2006), pp 285-9; Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'Moral repatriation: the response to Irish unmarried mothers in Britain, 1920s-1960s', in Patrick Duffy (ed.), *To and from Ireland: planned migration schemes c. 1600-2000* (Dublin, 2004), pp 155-74.

<sup>10</sup> Daly, *Slow Failure*, pp 281-3.

<sup>11</sup> Earner-Byrne, 'Moral repatriation', pp 157-60.

Britain, and the remaining 672 represented a combination of both categories'. Redmond highlights 'the impressionistic and unreliable nature of the data'. The numbers assisted declined from a high of 318 in 1925 to 144 in 1929.<sup>12</sup>

- 7.6 Material in the Archbishop Byrne papers suggests that a number of British poor law unions and several British Catholic charities were paying for the repatriation of Irish women by the late 1920s. In 1929 Canon Craven claimed that he was trying to get English Poor Law Guardians to send unmarried mothers back to Ireland, and they were willing to pay all fares and expenses, provided that he undertook to help end this emigration. He believed that sending these women back to Ireland would be 'a good way of showing authorities in Ireland a sense of what was happening'. Canon Craven feared that the children would be adopted into non-Catholic homes. The West Derby Union was willing to pay the cost of returning pregnant women to Ireland, but this could only be done at the woman's request, which seldom happened, 'the reason is their people will not receive them'. The Liverpool and County Catholic Aid Society explained that it was the 'sense of shame' that caused Irish women to flee to England.<sup>13</sup> Miss Cruice of St Patrick's Guild asked Canon Craven to write a description of his experiences with Irish unmarried mothers, which she submitted to the secretary of the Carrigan Committee.

I can safely say that quite a large number of the applications I receive are from unmarried Irish mothers. Certainly it is true that never a day passes without one or more applications either by letter or in person being made here at my office. They come from all parts of the Irish Free State and among them are a certain number of girls of respectable parentage. The majority, however, are from the peasant or labouring classes. The larger number of these Irish girls fall in England. They are, however, a large number, which is certainly on the increase, who come here to England pregnant in order to get rid of their baby and hide their shame. To me the saddest part of the whole business is that these girls are ready and even determined to abandon their children without any regard to their claim to the Catholic Faith or any regard whatsoever to their future.

- 7.7 Canon Craven quoted a letter that he had received from a doctor in England, who was caring for a pregnant unmarried Irish woman:

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Redmond, 'In the family way and away from the family: examining the evidence in Irish unmarried mothers in Britain, 1920s-40s', in Elaine Farrell (ed.), *She said she was in the family way: Pregnancy and infancy in modern Ireland* (London, 2012), p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Dublin Diocesan Archives, AB7/b/Lay organisations, Box 2.

The position as I understand from her is that she came to this country more or less to hide her shame, and being of decent parents she is anxious to get back again as soon as ever her trouble is over. Then what of the child? I have great fears for its salvation unless we can find some Catholic Convent or Institution willing to adopt it. I shall be glad of your counsel in the matter.

7.8 The canon described her attitude as:

typical. These girls seem to lack all sense of responsibility (and I assure you I am not exaggerating one little bit) they have no respect either for their religion or the Catholic priest. They will not go back to Ireland, nor will they take their parents into their confidence in order to obtain the assistance of their family. They come invariably in a blackmailing spirit saying to me 'either you take the child or I'll put it in a protestant home'. This is, I might say, the invariable rule of conduct with them. Many of them fall again, and I fear that there must be quite a large number of them on the streets of our big towns. In the course of my work I naturally meet a certain number of men and women who are doing rescue work of one kind or another. Everyone of these people whether Catholic or Protestant have the same story to tell; their hands are full of these Irish girls with their illegitimate children.<sup>14</sup>

7.9 In 1931 the English Catholic hierarchy contacted John Dulanty, the Irish High Commissioner in London, and he convened a meeting in the High Commission between representatives of the DLGPH and English Catholic welfare organisations. It was agreed that the High Commission would pay half the costs of repatriating first-time mothers, who became pregnant in Ireland. The scheme was to be overseen by an Irish committee, though Earner-Byrne notes that it was never established.<sup>15</sup> This repatriation scheme is significant, because it brought Irish government officials - the London High Commission/later Embassy, and the DLGPH into direct contact with unmarried mothers. It was also the only instance where Irish embassies took responsibility for the welfare of a cohort of emigrants. A DLGPH memorandum dated August 1934 states that

In the case of girls coming from England information should be sent to Mrs. Crofts, Department of Local Government and Public Health, Custom House, Dublin at the same time as a request is made to the Irish Free State High Commissioner for repatriation. Arrangements will then be made to have the

<sup>14</sup> National Archives of Ireland, JUS/90/4/6: Criminal Law Amendment committee (1930).

<sup>15</sup> Earner-Byrne, 'Moral repatriation', pp 157-60.

girl met at Westland Row Station by workers of the International Catholic Girls' Protection Society, 42 Mountjoy Square Dublin. She will then be sent to the special Home for her county of origin for which application will be made through the Public Assistance Boards. Applications to Mrs Crofts should state full particulars of her name, age, home (Irish) address, the date she is alleged to have left Ireland, and the date the confinement is expected. If, for any reason, the girl does not wish to enter the special Home belonging to the area from which she comes, this should be stated, but this may lead to some difficulty and delay and should be avoided if possible.

- 7.10 Non-Catholic girls would be referred to two Rescue Societies in Dublin and a special home in Cork city - Braemar. They were also free to enter any of the Catholic homes where arrangement would be made for a clergyman of their denomination to visit them. The memorandum emphasised that these provisions only applied to women who were pregnant for the first time.<sup>16</sup>
- 7.11 In 1935 Mrs Crofts travelled to London and to Liverpool. She met individuals and agencies that worked with unmarried mothers and their children, including the Mother Superior of St Pelagia's Home (run by the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts) and the secretary of the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child (NCUMC). She reported that 'In London the general view expressed by all whom I interviewed, with the exception of Canon Craven, was that the number of Irish girls who came to London pregnant had diminished considerably'. Canon Craven disagreed, but he did not supply any statistics 'which would justify his attitude'. In the homes for unmarried mothers that she visited – apparently four homes in the London area and three in Liverpool - 'there were very few Irish girls who had left this country pregnant but there were many who had become pregnant in England'. Statistics supplied by the Liverpool Society for the Prevention of International Traffic in Women and Children for the period April 1932 to 31 March 1934, recorded only four pregnant 'girls' arriving in Liverpool and five returning to Ireland, from a total of 584 women assisted by the society. Only four women from the Irish Free State had come to the attention of the Liverpool Women Police Patrols over the past year; only 17 of the 246 women admitted over the past year to Nugent House - a Catholic home in Liverpool which did require mothers to pay

<sup>16</sup> Department of Health, NATARCH/ARC/401679.

for their upkeep - were from Ireland, 32 counties; three of the 83 women admitted to a home in Kelton, Liverpool, were Irish 'and these three fell in England'.

- 7.12 These exchanges hint at some of the political complexities - Canon Craven was probably exaggerating the problem to keep up pressure on the Irish government and the Irish Catholic hierarchy. In 1932 Edith Rose of the Liverpool Port and Station Work Society claimed that the Crusade of Rescue was 'grossly overstating the needs and numbers of the Irish expectant mother and baby in London'.<sup>17</sup>
- 7.13 In autumn 1938, the DLGPH inspector, Miss Alice Litster, visited London where she met representatives of most of the institutions previously visited by Mrs Croft and representatives of London county council. She reported that the Cardinal's (that is, the Archbishop of Westminster's) Committee for Social Work in London had received 274 applications during 1937 from 'girls' of Irish birth; 89 had become pregnant in Ireland; 185 became pregnant in London or the surrounding area and 108 of the latter named Irishmen resident in London as the putative fathers. The number of PFIs seeking assistance in the period January to October 1938 was 48. On that basis Miss Litster suggested that the numbers were decreasing. In the six months ending 28 February 1938, only 12 PFIs ranging in age from 16 to 26 became chargeable to London county council. However 'the greater number' of mother and babies maintained in Catholic homes, supported by voluntary contributions, were 'stated to be Irish' - though most had become pregnant in Britain. Canon Craven continued to assert that the number of PFIs was 'rapidly on the increase', but yet again he provided no supporting evidence. Miss Litster commented that the statements in the document prepared by the Cardinal's committee, 'are, I believe, intended to make as strong a case as possible for a grant by our government in aid of the work done by the Cardinal's Committee for Irish unmarried mothers in London'. The High Commissioner, Mr Dulanty, suggested that the Irish government should provide the committee with a small grant. Miss Litster noted that the Cardinal's committee would welcome the formation of an Irish committee 'charged with similar duties'.<sup>18</sup>
- 7.14 Keeping up the pressure on the government, the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hinsley, wrote to Taoiseach and Minister for External Affairs, Éamon de

<sup>17</sup> Redmond, 'In the family way', p. 170.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

Valera.<sup>19</sup> He claimed that there were almost 100 single women who became pregnant in Éire, 'whose purpose is to give birth to their child in one of our Public Assistance Hospitals, intending to leave the child in England as a charge upon the generosity of English Catholics' - which would appear to suggest that substantial numbers of pregnant women were travelling to England - yet he went on to note that 'a considerable number of Irish girls and young women fall into sin and become illegitimately pregnant in a short space of time after arriving in this country'. He dismissed reports of 'white slavery'<sup>20</sup> suggesting that they became pregnant because 'sheer weakness of intellect and character combined with inexperience is often the cause of their downfall. Girls of this type should not undertake the adventure of migration'. The English charities catering for unmarried mothers were under considerable pressure and were forced to send many pregnant Irish women to public institutions, which had resulted in a letter of protest from the chief public assistance officers of London county council. The London county council gave the Catholic homes in the Westminster archdiocese a weekly grant for each 'inmate', which barely covered the maintenance cost. Cardinal Hinsley wanted the Irish government to pay a similar grant of 5s a week. He also sought 'more sympathetic co-operation from the Government and CPRSI' in receiving the children of these mothers. There was an element of menace in the Cardinal's letter; he 'dreads the scandal to the faith as well as the discredit to Ireland - and consequently the harmful effect on relations between our two countries' if these facts became known to English newspapers.<sup>21</sup>

7.15 Miss Litster explained that if a woman was returning from England at the expense of a public assistance authority she would generally arrange to have her met at the boat or train. On some occasions the returning woman was only given the 'bare fare'; she arrived in Ireland, with no money to pay her bus or train fare to her destination - a mother and baby home. In some instances she was 'brought to the Mendicity Institute' (a Dublin charity) who gave her her fare from the 'Traveller's Aid fund'. Miss Litster described this as 'a loose and objectionable method of dealing with such a contingency'. She would like some society to deal with these cases, and arrange temporary accommodation 'for girls who have returned hastily'. She often had to arrange temporary accommodation for the women in Dublin, generally in Regina Coeli (see Chapter 21), and after a few days in that hostel

<sup>19</sup> Earner Byrne, 'Moral repatriation', p. 161.

<sup>20</sup> Women being exploited for sexual purposes.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778, letter from Cardinal Hinsley to Éamon de Valera, 25 May 1939.

many women were 'unwilling to go to an institution under the care of nuns'. They preferred 'a certain "free and easy" atmosphere in Regina Coeli'.<sup>22</sup>

7.16 In the early months of 1940 the DLGPH contacted the CPRSI, who were based in Dublin, to see whether they would agree to assume responsibility for returning PFIs, and the CPRSI in turn approached the Catholic hierarchy. The CPRSI was concerned about the cost of undertaking these duties, and there is no evidence that the government gave a commitment to reimburse them. The department then contacted the Irish Catholic hierarchy asking them to take responsibility for the repatriation of PFIs. This request was supported by Joseph Walshe, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs. At some point in the early months of 1940 the CPRSI assumed responsibility for the repatriation of Irish unmarried mothers at the 'special request of the Cardinal and Archbishops of Ireland'.<sup>23</sup> The Irish High Commissioner contacted several English dioceses, in an effort to determine the numbers of unmarried Irish mothers and their children in England, and he forwarded the replies that he received to Dublin. The diocese of Southwark had received 160 applications from pregnant Irish women over the past three years; they claimed that 70 of those pregnancies began in Ireland. The Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society reported that there were ten Irish babies in a home with a capacity of 40. Three of the Irish mothers had disappeared. 'In many cases we are unable to secure sufficient information to arrive at any constructive decision. We know nothing of their background but they expect to be helped without question i.e. they expect to be relieved of their babies, and of course do not wish to suffer any personal inconvenience'.<sup>24</sup>

7.17 The number of women repatriated from England under the government's scheme remained low until the summer of 1940. In the year ended 31 March 1939, 41 women applied for repatriation; 24 were approved. There were 37 applicants in the following year and 21 were approved. Pressure on the repatriation scheme increased significantly from the summer of 1940. The bombing raids on major English cities resulted in several mother and baby home being relocated from London to less vulnerable cities such as Oxford. With increasing numbers of civilian casualties, and some hospitals suffering bomb damage, an emergency scheme introduced by the Ministry of Health meant that wards formerly used for

<sup>22</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

<sup>23</sup> Annual report of the CPRSI, dated April 1940, quoted in Garrett, 'The abnormal flight', p. 337.

<sup>24</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

'waiting unmarried pregnant women' were requisitioned for other purposes. Unmarried mothers were being discharged from maternity homes shortly after giving birth, because of a shortage of places.<sup>25</sup> Mrs Helen Murtagh, a Catholic social worker in Birmingham, claimed that 22 pregnant single women were 'planted all over the city'; the majority were Irishwomen, who were long-term residents of Birmingham, and therefore eligible for UK local authority support services, but the resources were not available. She feared that these women, or more particularly their children, would be taken into care by non-Catholic charities, such as the Salvation Army or Church of England Homes.<sup>26</sup> During the war British charities, social workers and local authorities became more determined to repatriate Irish women. There was a rise in the numbers of women 'returning of their own volition or sent by societies' to Ireland, including women who had been working for some years in Northern Ireland and women who were long-term residents of England or Scotland.

- 7.18 Most women were sent back to Ireland by the Westminster Moral Welfare Society. Although the society was instructed to refer returning women to the CPRSI, after two or three months, Miss Plater of the Westminster Moral Welfare Society stopped sending women to the CPRSI and referred them instead to St Patrick's Guild. There is no indication as to why this happened.<sup>27</sup> When a British welfare organisation contacted the CPRSI, the CPRSI gave the woman's personal details to Miss Litster: her name, home address, and her circumstances, that is, her expected date of delivery, details of the putative father, whether the pregnancy happened in Ireland, and her occupation and perhaps some details as to her family. Miss Litster would check on 'her bona fides'; contact the relevant local authority, asking them to agree to cover the cost of maintenance in a mother and baby home, and ensure that there was a vacancy. The CPRSI would meet the repatriated woman when she arrived and arrange for short-term accommodation in Dublin, if necessary, and her transport to the mother and baby home where she was booked.<sup>28</sup> In November 1944 the CPRSI informed Coventry city council that they required three days' notice of the arrival of a repatriated woman, and that they only looked after Catholic women. Women returning with an infant were asked to

<sup>25</sup> Pat Thane and Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England* (Oxford, 2012), pp 58-60.

<sup>26</sup> Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child. Maternity and child welfare in Dublin, 1922-60* (Manchester, 2007), p. 195.

<sup>27</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489773, Unmarried Mothers in Great Britain and Ireland, undated, but probably late 1940s; see also Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778, Fedelma Clandillon memorandum dated 28 Sept. 1970.

bring copies of birth and baptismal certificates, plus a doctor's certificate that mother and child were free of disease.<sup>29</sup>

- 7.19 In June 1940 Miss Litster reported that, because of a shortage of accommodation and the requirement to evacuate pregnant women from dangerous areas, women in England, who would normally be kept in hospital for medical treatment and childbirth, were being sent to Ireland. Little advance notice was given to the Irish authorities so there was no time to arrange for their accommodation. She complained that 'often the onus is thrown on me of inducing them to seek admission to an institution to which they were unwilling to go, and to find accommodation for those who are obstinately determined not to return to their native country'. The secretary of the DLGPH, James Hurson, told the CPRSI that women were returning to Ireland without any advance notice; they had been told to present themselves to the department's inspector, 'and apparently informed that they would be accommodated in Dublin'.<sup>30</sup> Ten pregnant women were repatriated during the first two weeks of June 1940; three from Birmingham, the remainder from London. A further three, who arrived with babies, were not deemed to be destitute; the babies were 'taken over by St Patrick's Guild'.<sup>31</sup> One of the pregnant women had been in hospital in Britain because she had haemorrhaged, and it was deemed unsafe for her to travel beyond Dublin - it was probably also unsafe for her to have travelled to Ireland.
- 7.20 The scale of wartime repatriations seems to have taxed the capacity of the Dublin charities. In March 1940, an unidentified person - probably a fellow senior civil servant - wrote to Joseph Walshe, secretary of the Department of External Affairs, enclosing two letters (which the Commission has not seen) from Frank O'Reilly of the CPRSI. This official noted that 'It looks as if the CPRSI regard the problem as one involving considerable financial responsibility and likely to be too great for them'. In June Frank O'Reilly wrote to DLGPH Secretary James Hurson quoting a letter to the effect that Mr Hurson 'expects us to accommodate anyone who may come along, without any notice to us'. The CPRSI suggested that in order to do this, they would need a hostel.<sup>32</sup> Between 1939 and 1944 the CPRSI spent £630 on short-term accommodation and travel within Ireland for repatriated women, and they sought a subsidy from the department, because they had taken on this role at

<sup>29</sup> Department of Health, NATARCH/ARC/0/404309.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

<sup>31</sup> St Patrick's Guild generally required a payment from a mother, or a payment on her behalf, if they were to accept a child.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

the request of the government. The DLGPH countered that they could claim for these costs, though probably not the cost of transport, under the National Maternity and Child Welfare scheme - which only covered half of the allowable costs.<sup>33</sup> Yet despite the wartime pressures, a memorandum written in 1947 or 1948 stated that only 150 Irish women had gone through the CPRSI's repatriation scheme since 1940; in 1947 a total of 1,538 Irish unmarried mothers applied to Catholic societies in England.<sup>34</sup>

7.21 In 1947 Miss Litster noted that 'Many of the welfare workers in Great Britain are so intent on getting rid of the Irish unmarried mothers that they are not straightforward in their dealing with them and us'. The societies that sent women back to Ireland were aware that there was no accommodation in Dublin for women who were not native Dubliners, other than Regina Coeli and 'the type of accommodation offered in this hostel is not of that high standard of comfort obtaining in the small voluntary homes in Great Britain'. The special mother and baby homes only took first-time mothers; women on a second or subsequent pregnancy would have to go to their county home. Women who were admitted to Castlepollard, Sean Ross or Bessborough would be required to stay for two years after the birth of their child, unless they could make financial arrangements 'for the child's future or the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society accepts responsibility for boarding out the child at an earlier date'. She continued 'Nevertheless, girl after girl has returned from Great Britain through these societies expecting that her baby will be "adopted" immediately and that she will be able to return at once to her work on the other side. This makes the problem of dealing with the repatriate doubly difficult'. She claimed that women who had gone to England 'to avoid local knowledge of her condition' were reluctant to return to Ireland. In England she would stay in a home for three to six months; have no difficulty in having her child adopted - at no cost (whereas in Ireland she would have to pay to have her baby placed at nurse), though the adopting family might not be Catholic.<sup>35</sup>

7.22 The number of repatriated PFIs increased significantly during the 1950s - at a time when the total number of 'illegitimate' births in Ireland was falling - and they continued to rise in the 1960s; the peak year was 1967.

<sup>33</sup> Department of Health, NATARCH/ARC/0/404309, handwritten note of phone call between DLGPH and CPRSI dated 15 Dec. 1944.

<sup>34</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489773.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

Irish women repatriated from England through the CPRSI<sup>36</sup>

1948	40
1949	50
1950	55
1951	51
1952	85
1953	112
1954	115
1955	121
1956	123
1957	100
1958	85
1959	89
1960	113
1961	181
1962	185
1963	135
1964	173
1965	19
1966	NA
1967	213
1968	120
1969	145
1970	91
1971	33

7.23 The primary reason why pregnant women travelled to England was to protect their privacy. An application to a local health authority for financial support in a mother and baby home often meant that a woman's pregnancy became known, and the long stays in Irish mother and baby homes were also a factor. The annual report of the CPRSI in 1952 stated that

Apart from the services of a few voluntary societies in Dublin, such as ours, all of which are constantly in financial difficulties, the only facilities available for the unmarried mother are County Homes and the three special Mother and

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<sup>36</sup> Garrett, 'The abnormal flight', p. 337. Garrett does not give a number for 1966.

Baby Homes.<sup>37</sup> The local authorities maintain the girls in these institutions, and a girl has little chance of going free until she has remained almost two years with the child in the institution. How can any girl remain such a long time out of touch with her home and her friends and still preserve her secret? The result is an abnormal flight to England with the consequent danger to both mother and infant.

7.24 Another annual report, also quoted by Garrett, though no date is given, stated that

In no other country in the world has the unmarried mother to remain for two years in a Home with her child. A few months is regarded as sufficient to allow the mother time to decide on the future of her child and is also believed to be adequate in helping her towards moral rehabilitation. Any longer period is regarded as punitive and it is becoming increasingly obvious that our girls will not submit themselves voluntarily to punitive treatment.<sup>38</sup>

7.25 The CPRSI believed that many women went to England because of the requirement to spend two years in Irish mother and baby homes. The introduction of legal adoption in Ireland does not appear to have reduced the numbers travelling to England. In the mid-1950s 61% of registered cases recorded by the English Catholic Rescue Society related to women who were born in the Republic of Ireland.<sup>39</sup> As mentioned above, the highest number of repatriates was in 1967. While many women decided to travel to England on discovering that they were pregnant, others were persuaded, or contrived, to do so by family members or the father of her child. In 1936 the journalist Gertrude Gaffney wrote a pioneering series of articles on the Irish in Britain. One focussed on PFIs. A priest in England told her about the daughter of a 'well-off farmer. When her people discovered her condition her mother had given her enough money to get to London and told her she never wanted to see her again'.<sup>40</sup> In 1954 and 1955 women were reported as having been advised to go to England by a doctor, and a priest respectively.

7.26 Women also came under pressure to return. Garrett's researches in the archives of the English Catholic Rescue Society reveal that "the possibility of returning to

<sup>37</sup> The CPRSI does not mention the local authority homes in Pelletstown and Tuam.

<sup>38</sup> Garrett, 'The abnormal flight', p. 339.

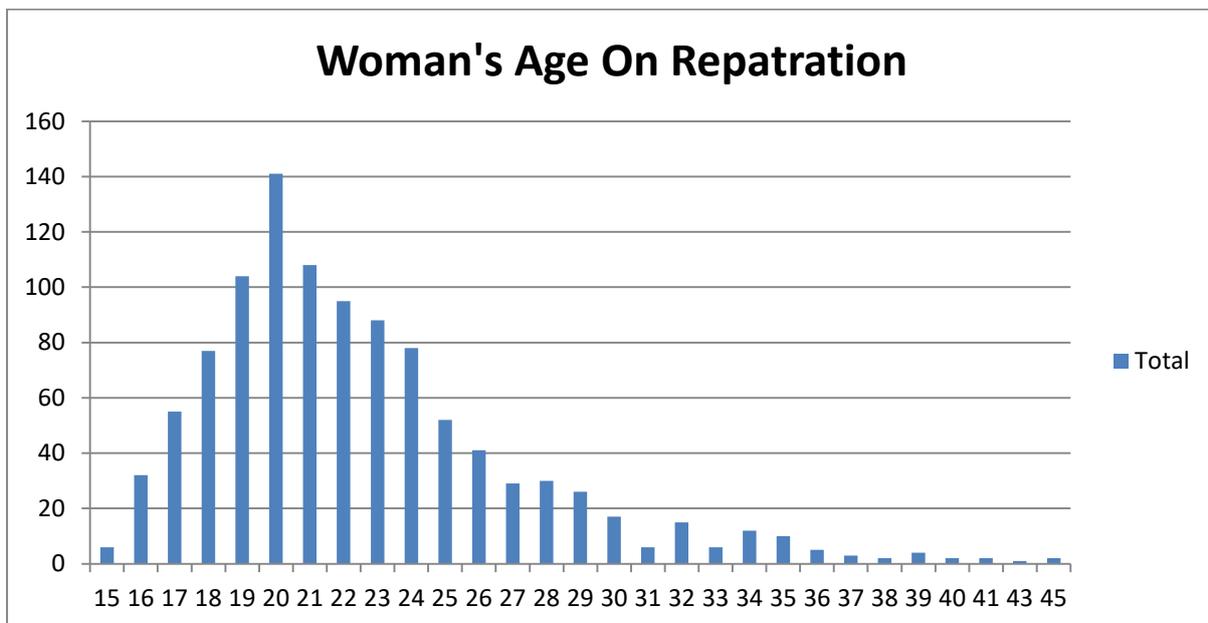
<sup>39</sup> Paul Michael Garrett, 'The hidden history of the PFIs: The repatriation of unmarried mothers and their children from England to Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s', *Immigrants and minorities*, xix, 3 (2000), p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> *Irish Independent*, 15 Dec. 1936.

Ireland” was addressed during a woman’s initial interview with one of the caseworkers’. Some women came under considerable pressure to consent to repatriation: notes relating to one woman stated that ‘if she failed to co-operate “I shall insist on you going back to Ireland straightaway’. In further correspondence the social worker threatened that if the woman failed to attend an ante-natal appointment she would inform the woman’s family of her pregnancy, and her employer - which might result in her losing her job. This story ended reasonably happily, if that is possible, because the woman’s mother suggested that she return home, and she was accompanied by her sister. Garrett concluded that ‘Case files reveal that staff at the ECRS were not only intent on delineating the choices (or lack of choices) they viewed as available to these unmarried Irish mothers, they were apt, in some instances, to pressurize them if alternative more independent courses of action were embarked on’.<sup>41</sup>

#### **PFI and the Department of Health index cards<sup>42</sup>**

7.27 The Commission has had access to three large files consisting of index cards containing details of unmarried pregnant women or recent mothers, who came into contact with the women inspectors in the DLGPH/Department of Health in the years 1944-61. There are a total of 2,291 cases, and 1,162 of these relate to repatriation. The woman’s age is recorded on 90% of the files. One in ten of the repatriated women were pregnant for a second or subsequent time.



<sup>41</sup> Garrett, ‘The hidden history of the PFIs’, pp 31-35.

<sup>42</sup> Unless otherwise stated the case histories cited in this chapter are taken from Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489984; Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489986; Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489989.

7.28 The agreement reached in 1931 provided that the Irish government would only assist in the repatriation of women who became pregnant in Ireland, but they were frequently prevailed upon to assist women who became pregnant in England, including some who were long-term residents. In 1952 the British embassy contacted the Department of External Affairs asking whether the Dublin board of public assistance would keep an Irish mother and her English-born baby. This 'girl' had written to London county council saying that she would not be kept in Ireland. The British Embassy was anxious to know the Irish policy with regard to repatriation of unmarried mothers. This woman had been in England for over a year before the birth of her daughter, so she was not eligible for repatriation. She returned to Dublin and was sent by CPRSI to a hostel in Cork Street for one night and from there to St Kevin's (the Dublin Union). The CPRSI promised to take her child 'as soon as possible' meanwhile she was admitted to Pelletstown and from there wrote letters to Catholic and Protestant charities in England and London county council.

7.29 Many pregnant Irish women who travelled to Britain (most pregnant women went to England), found it to be a less than friendly place. Women who had recently arrived were denied treatment under the British National Health Service. While free treatment under the NHS was, in theory, available to all legal residents (a category that included all Irish citizens), some services, such as ante-natal clinics, and maternity hospital care, were provided by local authorities, who did not necessarily follow NHS/Department of Health guidelines, and they may have imposed their own restrictions, for example, giving priority to local women, irrespective of medical need. Some NHS hospitals may also have discriminated against certain categories of patients - black women, or single women.<sup>43</sup> In 1968 an article in the Irish periodical *Woman's Way* quoted a social worker with the NCUMC:

The average Irish girl in Britain is the working class manual worker and is employed behind a bar or as domestic help. Her environment is often bad, possibly long hours in a smoky club listening to bawdy language. The girls have little money. They send part of the wage-packet home to the parents and if the girl finds herself with a child she fears that any lessening in the sum sent home will arouse at least suspicion. Money is one of the big problems

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<sup>43</sup> The Commission acknowledges the assistance of Professor Pat Thane and Professor Roberta Bivins in clarifying this matter.

facing the girls. Another is somewhere to live that will be morally and physically healthy.

7.30 The social worker explained that most Irish unmarried mothers did not qualify for a bed in an NHS hospital, and the emergency bed service was 'far from satisfactory'. English mother and baby homes were booked in advance so Irish women ended up being placed through an organisation that provided welfare for the homeless, or in an institution; both were 'grim alternatives'.

7.31 If women contacted the NCUMC before travelling to Britain, they were dissuaded from travelling, though this was often difficult.

In the first letter I tell the girl whom she can contact for help in Ireland; in the second I try to persuade her out of fears about the way she will be treated if she stays; in the third I tell her that she will not be eligible for a hospital bed in England and won't be able to get financial help at the time she needs it most. I'm afraid that the letters have become rather stereotyped because I have sent so many.<sup>44</sup>

7.32 Little is known about the attitude of the staff in English Catholic charities or British welfare services towards unmarried Irish women, other than the evidence presented by Garrett, which is cited above, but given the acknowledged existence of prejudice against Irish emigrants it is highly unlikely that unmarried mothers did not experience some hostility/prejudice on occasion. The Catholic church in England came under considerable pressure to cope with the influx of Irish emigrants during the 1950s - creating additional demands on church space, Catholic schools and other services, including mother and baby homes and adoption services.<sup>45</sup> In the mid-1950s, 61% of the almost 800 expectant mothers that were referred to the English Catholic Rescue Society were from Ireland.<sup>46</sup> The pressure on resources, and fears that Catholic women and children would end up in non-Catholic institutions, were key factors in their wish to repatriate Irish mothers and children. In 1963, Fr Good, director of St Anne's adoption society in Cork, advised a priest seeking information about facilities in England for pregnant Irish women 'to try his best to stop her from going to England, even if this is what the parents want. She will be sent back in some publicity if she contacts a Catholic society...they are

<sup>44</sup> *Woman's Way*, 19 July 1968.

<sup>45</sup> A.E.C.W. Spencer, *Arrangements for the integration of Irish immigrants in England and Wales* (Dublin, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Garrett, 'The hidden history', p. 27.

getting more ruthless than ever in recent times at returning them before birth'.<sup>47</sup> Thirty-one of the 100 unmarried mothers in Pelletstown, who were interviewed by Mary Frances Creegan in 1967, had returned from England; 26 had been repatriated, five returned on their own initiative; 16 of the repatriated women had not wanted to return but the welfare agency had given them no alternative. Several had been living in England for a number of years. Creegan cited one extreme case, where a woman, who had been living in England with an older sister since the age of eight following the death of her parents, was sent back to Ireland by an English welfare agency. She knew nobody in Ireland.<sup>48</sup>

- 7.33 As Creegan discovered, many women returned unwillingly. In 1952 a priest who interviewed an Irish nurse working in Lancashire, claimed that she was the only Irish woman he had interviewed who was willing to return. She became pregnant in England, by an Irish man, and was not technically eligible for repatriation, but she had to leave her job and hospital accommodation because of her pregnancy. At this point her pregnancy was reported as Irish - not the only occasion that records were changed to enable a woman to qualify for repatriation. One Monaghan woman threatened to commit suicide if she was returned to Ireland, but she eventually agreed to travel if absolute secrecy was guaranteed - she was sent to Sean Ross. Some women were apparently more than willing to come home. One 18-year-old factory worker, who was referred by the Southwark Rescue Society in 1950, had been in London for more than two years. She was described as 'depressed and anxious to embark'. Her only living relative, a sister, was aware of her pregnancy. A young woman who married her husband one month before her first child was born, probably around the age of 16, left that child with her parents, and went with him to England where she gave birth to a second child. He deserted her, and mother (now pregnant again) and baby ended up in a Salvation Army hostel. She wanted to come home with her child. It is unclear what happened. The public assistance authority approved her admission to Bessborough, but there is no evidence that she went there - and it is unlikely that she would have been accepted, as a deserted wife. A woman who had worked for several years in a Birmingham factory, and became pregnant by an Englishman who was reported to be in Korea (presumably in the armed forces), came to Dublin of her own accord and contacted a priest at Westland Row church asking for

<sup>47</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 8.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Frances Creegan, 'Unmarried mothers: an analysis and discussion of interviews conducted in an Irish mother and baby home' (M.Soc.Sc., UCD, 1967).

assistance. The Family Welfare Bureau referred her to the CPRSI who arranged a bed in Cork Street Hostel and her admission to St Kevin's. A young Mayo woman repatriated from Scotland with her infant and sent to Castlepollard left on the same day and was reported to have returned to Scotland with her child.

- 7.34 When a 25-year-old nurse discovered that she was pregnant she went to England, where she had trained, and contacted Catholic welfare societies. She reported that they were 'no help', so she returned to her married sister in Dublin and attended the Coombe hospital for ante-natal care. She was admitted to Castlepollard. A Galway woman working in Salford who became pregnant there, was sent back by a local Catholic welfare worker, because 'amount on insurance card would not entitle her to admission to Mother and Baby Home at £3-3-0 weekly'.(for mother plus child) She went to Tuam where the maintenance payment had recently been increased to £1 a week for a mother or a child in August 1952.<sup>49</sup>
- 7.35 A woman who was deaf and an orphan gave personal details that the local authority dismissed as incorrect, but the Crusade of Rescue was determined to return her to Ireland regardless. Canon Craven of the Crusade of Rescue recommended Bessborough because it appeared that she was from Co Cork - but the department inspector disagreed, presumably to protect her identity. The sister of a 16-year old who went to England pregnant, told the Westminster Crusade of Rescue that their mother had sent all the girls to England as soon as they could earn. The CPRSI were not keen to take care of this pregnant teenager; they described her as 'of very low intelligence'.
- 7.36 There are many instances where one or both parents, a sister or aunt, accompanied a pregnant woman to England with the intention of making arrangements for mother and baby. A father accompanied his pregnant 16-year-old daughter to London where she gave birth in St Pelagia's Hospital and remained with her; that pregnancy resulted in a court case in Ireland. In another case where arrangements were in train for a pregnant woman to return to Bessborough, her father called to the secretary of the CPRSI and explained that he would take full financial responsibility; she gave birth in a nursing home in London; the baby would be placed in a Catholic home. One mother brought her pregnant 18-year-old daughter to England, but was later persuaded to agree to her return.

<sup>49</sup> Capitation rates given in chapters 15 (Tuam) and Castlepollard (20) confirm the figure for Tuam, but they suggest that the figure for Castlepollard was £2 for a mother and £1 for an infant.

- 7.37 The files of St Anne's adoption society in Cork (see below) record the story of 'A simple Irish girl' who 'has been co-habiting on and off with a fellow countryman, who has several other friends'. They had three children together; the youngest was in care in England. She was living in a Good Shepherd Hostel. Fr Hall of the Clifton Rescue Society reported that 'the authorities in Britain feel that her going home is the best solution'. The woman was unwilling to return because her family believed that she was married. Fr Hall reported that 'at the moment the English authorities feel that [...] may be beginning to weaken in her opposition to returning home, but it appears to them to be the only solution as they understand she has been rather promiscuous in addition to her association with one individual on a permanent basis'. The priest from her home parish, who had obviously been contacted, told Fr Hall that 'it would be a tragedy' if she returned home. There was nobody at home except her father 'who is aged about 70 and whose mental age is 7 and who, obviously is ignorant of his daughter's bad behaviour. Her return here would only mean a transfer to another Good Shepherd convent eventually'.<sup>50</sup> It is not known what happened beyond this point.
- 7.38 An Irish woman who gave birth in an English mother and baby home was being sent back 'at once, as accommodation required in home'. She was unwilling to return. One 20-year-old, who was described as a 'difficult girl', was returned to Ireland by the matron of a council home in Middlesex and arrangements were made to admit her to Castlepollard. She obviously returned very late in pregnancy because, while in Regina Coeli, pending transfer to Castlepollard she had to be admitted to St Kevin's hospital for the birth of her child. It was then determined that she had become pregnant in England and the county manager was no longer willing to pay for her maintenance; it is unclear where mother and baby went. One woman who had gone to England and gave birth there - she and her baby were living with a married sister - wrote to the CPRSI asking to return; a priest in her English parish wrote with a similar request on her behalf. Canon Flint (Birmingham) described one woman who was sent back and was admitted to Regina Coeli as 'running from one hostel to another in England' - from Regina Coeli she was sent to Bessborough. A woman who had gone to England indicated that she would not return if she was sent to a county home - she was admitted to Castlepollard.

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<sup>50</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 8.

- 7.39 A Leitrim woman who went to England pregnant and was working as a domestic servant in the bishop's house in Birmingham was sent to a convent by one of the priests when it was discovered that she was pregnant. These Sisters sent her back to Ireland to Henrietta Street Hostel and from there she went to St Kevin's. Another woman, who married a man who was not the father of her child (the putative father was a married man resident in Ireland), a month before giving birth in England, wanted to send her child back to Ireland and would pay 10s a week towards his upkeep. There are also cases where arrangements were made for a mother and child to return to Ireland, but the mother changed her mind - one opted to stay in a home run by Sussex county council.
- 7.40 Several women were repatriated at a very late stage in pregnancy and in circumstances that presented a serious risk to health. One woman became extremely ill on the boat returning from England, and refused to travel beyond Dublin. When the Sligo health authority was asked to agree to maintain her in Pelletstown, they contacted the department asking whether it was an approved institution. A Waterford woman, who had left home on discovering that she was pregnant, went to Cork and then to England; she was repatriated by the Crusade of Rescue - without any advance notice to the Irish authorities – and ended up in St Kevin's hospital needing medical treatment. She was later sent to Sean Ross. In 1948 a woman returning from England went directly from Westland Row station (now Pearse Street station) to Holles Street hospital because she was haemorrhaging and gave birth there to a 2.5 lbs baby, who apparently survived. A Donegal woman who went to Glasgow in 1956 was returned to Ireland the following day and admitted to Regina Coeli - her baby was born one week later. Another woman sent back from England went home rather than to Castlepollard as had been arranged; her baby was born the day after she returned, in a local district hospital. The pressures to return mothers and babies to Ireland were particularly strong when it appeared that the child might have special needs. The mother of a pregnant 20-year-old with Down syndrome 'rushed' her to London when she became aware of her pregnancy, probably by a married neighbour, but she was sent back to Ireland.

### **The children**

- 7.41 Earner-Byrne suggested that the government handed responsibility for repatriated pregnant women to Catholic charities. In theory that may have been the case, but in practice Miss Litster, the chief inspector in the DLGPH, was a pivotal figure in

that process. She found emergency accommodation for women who arrived in Dublin, often without money, and without either the department or any charity having advance notice that they were coming. She contacted the local authorities to arrange for them to take financial responsibility for supporting these women, and she worked closely with the charitable organisations to secure placements for the mother and her child. The department was also the first point of contact for UK local authorities who were arranging the adoption of children of Irish mothers who may have returned to Ireland. For example, Northampton diocese Catholic charities were trying to locate a Galway woman to secure her consent to adoption - but this was difficult because 'Parents PP and neighbours unaware of child's existence'. In this instance the department inspector asked the secretary of the department 'for permission to act as representative of Northamptonshire Co. Council and interview mother'. The minister approved this suggestion. In the case of a Galway woman who had given birth in Birmingham and returned to Ireland in 1950, leaving her child in the care of a Birmingham Catholic welfare society, the department and the CPRSI tried to trace the mother to secure her consent to adoption.

- 7.42 The department generally enlisted the local children's officer - if she existed - to handle the paper work and secure the mother's consent. In 1952, for example, the children's officer of Middlesex county council sought the assistance of the Department of Health in securing a mother's consent to an adoption. They checked whether the adoption 'was sponsored by a Catholic Welfare Society and if assurance can be given that adopters are Catholic'. The department inspector informed the English authorities in confidence that the mother had been a TB patient for some years; she also interviewed the mother (presumably having been satisfied that the infant was being adopted by a Catholic family), and witnessed her signature on the forms. When one mother's signature was required to consent to the adoption of her child in Scotland a female county council official contacted the mother, indicating that she had a query in relation to the woman's social insurance, and asking her to visit her office.<sup>51</sup> Many of these requests were highly sensitive, because the mother might be living with her parents, who were not aware of the child's existence.<sup>52</sup> When the local authorities in Kerry were contacted by Warwickshire county council in 1960, seeking to get a mother's consent to adoption, (the mother was presumed to be living in her parental home), the county

<sup>51</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489433.

<sup>52</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489433.

manager contacted the department indicating that he was unsure 'what line to take...as obviously I do not know whether this adoption is or is not desirable from our point of view'.<sup>53</sup> Quite what is meant by 'our point of view' remains a mystery.

### **Returning children to Ireland: family, foster-care, and adoption**

- 7.43 One aspect of the PFI story that has largely gone unnoticed was the return to Ireland by British social services and British Catholic charities of children who were born in Britain to Irish mothers. Ireland was not the only immigrant community that was targeted in this manner. The Colonial Office provided escorts to bring the children of unmarried West Indian immigrants, many of them working in Britain's NHS, back to the West Indies, placing them with the woman's family.<sup>54</sup>
- 7.44 The CRPSI annual report for 1955 noted that London county council 'had so many Irish babies abandoned or left in their care' that a London county council children's officer was appointed to spend six months each year in Ireland 'trying to get homes for these babies'. The children's officer in question was Miss Harris; she had formerly worked with the Crusade of Rescue. Her official position was child-care officer, employed by Westminster city council. In the 1950s her Dublin office address was South Anne Street - the offices of CPRSI. Garrett has described the background to this 'Daring Experiment'. In 1954, London county council set up a sub-committee to tackle a crisis in two residential welfare nurseries, where children aged under three had been placed, because of a shortage of foster care places for infants. The children's officer reported that many of the children in one nursery had Irish Catholic mothers, so the committee determined that a child welfare officer from London county council children's department should be authorised to travel to Ireland to visit the families of the Irish mothers whose children were in this particular nursery with a view to the children being sent to these relatives in Ireland. The children's officer consulted the Home Office, to confirm that it was not illegal to transfer children to Ireland. But the Home Office believed that payments for foster-care in Ireland should only be made in 'exceptional circumstances'. The children's officer discussed this plan with Catholic charities in London, during the course of their regular meetings, and it was decided that the matter should be organised by London county council and not by a voluntary organisation. In February 1955 London county council officials travelled to Ireland to check out children's homes and foster homes and investigate the possibility of grandparents

<sup>53</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489433.

<sup>54</sup> Thane & Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints?* p. 116.

or other relatives taking the children. They also met Department of Health inspectors and representatives of the CPRSI.

7.45 Garrett notes that the reports associated with this visit and the proposal to repatriate the English-born children of Irish mothers presented an image of Ireland as 'backward, traditional and pre-modern'. They suggested that Irish children in care in England were 'somehow "out of place"'. The inspector, almost certainly Miss Harris, suggested that further work was needed in Ireland but it 'might be expected to produce satisfactory results both in terms of "child care" and financially to the Council"', and these actions might deter PFIs. If it became known that children born in Britain to Irish mothers would be sent back to Ireland (to their families) parents might be less willing to encourage their daughters to travel to Britain. The London county council files record that this welfare worker had developed a method of 'getting the grandmother to consider taking an interest in her daughter's illegitimate child'; she would also work with the CPRSI or parish priest to find foster homes. The long-term goal was to have these children placed with grandparents or other relatives. It is not certain that all the infants in care were the children of single mothers but they probably accounted for the overwhelming majority. By the spring of 1956, 48 children had been returned to Ireland: six were under two years; 18 were in the range two to five years; 15 aged between five and 11; five were aged 11-15 and four were over 15 years. Garrett highlights the fact that the repatriation had been extended to older children; London county council recorded no information about the country of birth of the children and how long they had lived in England. 'Significantly also no information is provided on the question of parental consent or on how the views of children were obtained on plans to remove them to Ireland'.<sup>55</sup>

7.46 By 1956 it was believed that there was a case for London county council welfare officer spending six months of the year in Ireland, and it appears that she secured an office in the CPRSI headquarters. The Irish authorities gave her a petrol allocation at a time when it appeared that petrol would be rationed following the Suez crisis. Some mothers refused to have their children sent to Ireland - probably because they feared the consequences of their family knowing of a hitherto-concealed pregnancy and child. It is obvious from occasional references in the files that Miss Harris was well-known to the Department of Health inspectors. A file

<sup>55</sup> Michael Paul Garrett 'The "Daring Experiment": The London County Council and the discharge from care of children to Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of Social Policy*, xxxii, 1 (2003), pp 75-92, this quotation on p. 82.

on boarded-out children in Kilkenny dated 1959, records: 'Nice little fair haired lad...Came through Miss Harris. Ask Miss H. about baptism'.<sup>56</sup> By 1964 a total of 298 children had been removed to Ireland under London county council scheme.<sup>57</sup> These placements continued until at least the late 1960s. In 1953 Minister for Health, Seán MacEntee, was questioned in Dáil Éireann about a report that London county council had two officers 'permanently stationed in Ireland for the purpose of tracing the grandmothers of illegitimate children born of Irish mothers in London and that the grandmothers are generally delighted to have the children in question transferred to their care in this country'. The minister replied that the newspaper story was 'substantially accurate'. He stated that the department had no formal contact with London county council officers; children who were placed with close family members did not come within the remit of the *Children Acts* and therefore they were not the concern of the local authority or the department.<sup>58</sup>

7.47 Other evidence suggests that the relationship between Miss Harris and the Irish authorities was more complex. In 1968 Miss Clandillon visited a three-bedroomed council cottage in Donabate, which was without running water or mains drainage. The cottage was the home of a widow and her teenage son and daughter. It also contained two brothers who had been boarded out by the Dublin health authority and three children that were repatriated to Ireland by the London Crusade of Rescue - two babies and an 18-month-old child, who was described as 'coloured'. In 1965 this woman had answered an advertisement seeking a foster mother, which had been inserted in an Irish newspaper by Miss Harris 'acting in a voluntary capacity as a liaison officer for Canon Harvey, Crusade of Rescue, London in a scheme for the repatriation of young children born to Irish mothers in London'. The Crusade paid foster mothers £2 a week; it also covered the cost of clothing and medical expenses. The children were brought from London by their mothers and met at Dublin airport by Miss Harris or her assistant. This cottage and a house in Dundrum were being used by Miss Harris and her assistant for short-term foster care. Over the previous three years, the Donabate widow had fostered approximately 40 Crusade of Rescue children; a maximum of five children at any one time. Miss Harris had also placed children occasionally in Madonna House, a children's home in the Dublin suburbs. Miss Clandillon noted that Miss Harris had placed 'a big number' of children with relatives in Ireland; the majority were

<sup>56</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489311.

<sup>57</sup> Garrett, "Daring Experiment", p. 87.

<sup>58</sup> Dáil Debates, 14 March 1963.

maintained by Westminster city council, though some were being maintained by the Irish health authorities. She was concerned that the Donabate cottage breached a departmental regulation that children who were boarded out (i.e. maintained by the health authority) and children at nurse (i.e. maintained by a charity or a person) should not be in the same foster home. The Dublin children's officer was concerned that there were too many children in this house. It also emerged that Miss Harris and her assistant did not inform the local health authority in advance when children were being placed or removed from a foster home.<sup>59</sup> Miss Clandillon's report is dated 5 April 1968; her inspection was undoubtedly prompted by a story in the English newspaper *The People*, on 31 March 1968, which carried the heading 'AMAZING TRAFFIC IN BABIES EXPOSED'. It reported that an unmarried Irish mother in London had gone to Ireland to reclaim her child who had been sent to Ireland for adoption by Westminster city council, and she had found him 'in a "baby farm"' - the Donabate cottage described above. *The People* claimed that there were nine babies in the house, and they quoted the foster mother: 'I like to have a good selection here...so that when people come they have a few to choose from for adoption'. Minding these children was her livelihood. The child of the young woman who returned looking for him had been in this cottage for six months, according to the article. They described the conditions as:

appalling. The stench was awful. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling. And cots in what Widow X called 'the nursery' were covered in dirt. In one battered pink cot was an 18 month old coloured boy lying on a torn and pitted foam mattress. There were no sheets on the mattress and the only covering was a tiny piece of blanket in one corner. A six-month old baby was in a cramped Moses-type basket. Another in a carry cot inside an ordinary cot, had his own sick all over his clothes. It had caked dry on him.

- 7.48 The foster woman alleged that Miss Harris did not inspect the house before placing babies there. She explained that she kept the children warm and fed. 'It's just as though they were in hospital. They just lie in their own cots quietly and are no trouble at all'. Miss Harris told the journalist that 'The conditions at her home are not 100 per cent, but you can't judge these things by English standards'.<sup>60</sup> Some statements in this article are open to query. The foster mother had no role in placing these children and no autonomy as to the number of children left in her

<sup>59</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489693.

<sup>60</sup> *The People*, 5 April 1968.

care - so comments about a 'selection' for adoptive parents are not credible - these decisions rested with Miss Harris. However the remarks about 'English standards' are consistent with Garret's evidence taken from London county council records.

- 7.49 The blurred lines between Westminster city council and the Crusade of Rescue are highlighted by the fact that the short-term foster homes in Dublin were visited by Miss Cutting, Deputy Children's Officer for Westminster city council, though it would appear that the children had been repatriated by the Crusade of Rescue.<sup>61</sup> Miss Clandillon explained that 'for many of these children non-Catholic adoptions were in view. To try to prevent such arrangements being made Miss Harris approached relatives living in Ireland with a view to finding homes for the children with them'. Not all of these arrangements went smoothly. One child was returned to live with his uncle in Limerick - but when the child arrived the uncle 'made some difficulties'; he was disappointed that he would not receive financial assistance, so the child ended up in the City Home.<sup>62</sup> Miss Harris obviously worked closely with the Irish health authorities. There is a record of her approaching the health authority about a 16-year-old boy who was being fostered by his aunt; the local senior assistance officer described him as 'unmanageable'.<sup>63</sup>
- 7.50 The repatriation of children in care by English local authorities was not confined to London county council. In 1960 the children's officer in Middlesex contacted the department about a two-year-old boy, whose mother had placed him privately with a foster mother. He was taken into care when his mother failed to keep up payments. The Middlesex children's officer asked that his maternal grandmother in Wexford should be visited to explore the possibility that she might take the child. The department contacted the Wexford children's officer. Miss Clandillon suggested that if the maternal grandmother was unwilling to take him, the local authority might consider placing him in foster care in Wexford, 'where we would be sure that he could have a Catholic home'; although the English social worker had mentioned the possibility of placing him with Catholic foster parents she was of the opinion that this would be difficult to achieve.<sup>64</sup> When the child's grandmother was contacted it emerged that 'this woman was not even aware of the child's existence'; the child's mother had broken all contact with her mother, and with two sisters who were married in England. Perhaps it is no surprise that the

<sup>61</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489693.

<sup>62</sup> National Archives of Ireland, HLTH/MA124/38.

<sup>63</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489311.

<sup>64</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489433.

grandmother 'absolutely refuses to have anything to do with the child [...] and states that she is not interested in where he goes or who takes charge of him'. The Wexford children's officer paid a second visit to the grandmother, but she resolutely refused to have anything to do with her grandson. The Wexford health authority agreed that he might be placed in Wexford with foster parents.<sup>65</sup> A Meath woman was sent back to Ireland with a day-old baby; shortly afterwards an application came before the courts to have her child admitted to an industrial school (presumably initiated by the mother). The children's officer in Buckinghamshire forwarded several queries concerning maintenance payments that were not being met. One related to a mixed race child placed in private foster care by an Irish mother; in a second case both the mother and the putative father (who denied paternity) had committed to making payments. The Irish address that Buckinghamshire had for the mother was incorrect – possibly deliberately so. One foster mother, caring for a child who was described as 'very disturbed', had returned to Ireland to care for a sick relative, bringing the foster child with her; the Department of Health was asked to report on his well-being.

- 7.51 In 1960 Miss Clandillon was asked to trace relatives of an Irishwoman who was the mother of three 'illegitimate' children. Her eldest child, a daughter, was raised by her parents; the other two were raised in Britain (details not given). The two younger children, who were in regular contact, were in their teens and they were seeking information about their family. Miss Clandillon contacted the children's officer in Galway but noted that 'If the grandparents are still alive they would probably be in their seventies and the shock of finding out that their daughter had two other illegitimate children might be serious'. She suggested that the eldest girl who had been raised by her grandparents might be contacted with the hope that she might write to her half-sisters. 'We have had similar cases from time to time. The urge to find some family ties is very strong in the unfortunate children who have been reared in institutions'. It transpired that the grandmother was ill but she was being cared for by her daughter, the mother of the three children. This woman had married and given birth to a fourth daughter from this marriage. Miss Clandillon arranged for the daughters in England to write to their mother, describing her as a 'slim attractive woman with brown eyes and greying hair, and with a quite pleasant manner'.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489433.

<sup>66</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489433.

- 7.52 In the 1950s and the 1960s St Anne's adoption society repatriated the British-born infants of Irish mothers, placing them with adoptive parents in Ireland. In 1957 under the headline 'For Export Only' Babies - the *Sunday Pictorial* wrote that the London county council children's department was sending babies to Ireland for adoption because 'No Catholic adopters can be found for these British babies over here'. This article stipulated that 'an abandoned or unwanted child MUST be placed in a home where the religious beliefs are the same as those declared by the child's mother',<sup>67</sup> so if children were being adopted into non-Catholic homes it would appear that this was done at the wish of the mother. The *Sunday Pictorial* asked whether 'it was right that their religion should deny the right to a home with willing adopters of any faith'.
- 7.53 St Anne's Adoption Society was founded on 7 October 1954 by the Cork diocese 'as a distinct but subsidiary body to St Patrick's Orphanage Committee'. St Patrick's orphanage committee had been running children's homes in the Cork area for approximately 150 years. By the early 1950s the demand for places in orphanages was falling. An undated file, titled 'The history and development of St Anne's Adoption Society', described 'adoption as the way of continuing the work that charity had been doing for 150 years'. Having learned that a considerable number of children of Irish unmarried mothers were being lost to the faith in England, the orphanage committee decided to rescue these children, and to explore the possibility of placing them for adoption. This brief history noted that the English Catholic hierarchy was putting considerable pressure on the Irish hierarchy 'for help in regard to huge number of Irish girls giving birth to babies in England'. There were insufficient Catholic families in England seeking to adopt a baby, prompting fears that mothers would place their children for adoption with Protestant societies, or local authorities that would permit their adoption into non-Catholic families.
- 7.54 Bishop Lucey of Cork sent the secretary of St Patrick's orphanage to England to explore the feasibility of bringing the English-born babies of Irish unmarried mothers back to Ireland for adoption. In October 1954, working with the Crusade of Rescue, he arranged for five Irish mothers to bring their babies to Cork for adoption through St Anne's adoption society; St Anne's was recognised by the

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<sup>67</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*, 14 April 1957. Section 1 (3) b of the British 1948 Children Act stated that children who could not be cared for by their parent should be placed in the care 'where possible [of] a person of the same religious persuasion as the child or who gives an undertaking that the child will be brought up in that religious persuasion'.

Adoption Board in November 1954. In 1955 Fr James Good became director of St Anne's adoption society and he held this position until 1967 though the files suggest that he continued to be involved with the society beyond 1967. St Anne's expanded, to the point that it was repatriating around 100 babies every year.<sup>68</sup> Infants were generally brought back from England by their mothers, and they were placed in a nursery run by the Sisters of Mercy, St Marie of the Isles, while adoptive parents were identified. There was a maximum of ten children in this nursery at any time. In 1959 Fr Good noted that approximately 40% at any time were unsuitable for immediate adoption - either because they were too young, or they had medical problems.<sup>69</sup> St Anne's did not publicise the fact that the children that they were placing for adoption had been born in England. In 1961 Fr Good explained to another priest that

While we welcome publicity with a view to enlisting an increase in applications for adoption, we do not seek too much of the limelight, as some of the aspects of our work would better remain unknown. We do not divulge that the babies are born to Irish unmarried mothers in England - mainly as it may sow doubts of paternity in prospective adopters. We do explain in confidence to priests every aspect of our work, but we would hope that the information would not be made public.<sup>70</sup>

7.55 Canon Harvey of the Crusade of Rescue explained that they gave priority to babies whose faith was believed to be 'in immediate danger'. If a mother could not be persuaded to bring an infant to Cork, they would arrange for somebody to accompany the child. He noted that one woman was willing to bring her baby to Cork, but she was fearful that she might be recognised on the journey. Mothers were instructed to keep in regular contact with the Crusade of Rescue until the child was finally adopted. An undated note written by Mrs Wrenne, of St Anne's adoption society, suggested that it would be extremely helpful if the mother brought baby clothes, 'tied up in a separate bag or parcel', not mixed with her own clothes. They should also be asked to supply a dozen cloth nappies for the baby, to reduce the cost to the society; 'it would seem to me that many of the girls coming over would not suffer any hardship if they were held responsible for providing at least the necessities for their babies'.<sup>71</sup> However, Fr Good subsequently told Canon

<sup>68</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14, Folder marked 'Select Minutes 1958-71'; also 'The history and development of St Anne's Adoption Society – undated.

<sup>69</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14, Misc. Minutes; Box 3, 19 Oct. 1959.

<sup>70</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14, Statistics,

<sup>71</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3, undated but in 1953-56 folder.

Harvey that they did not wish mothers to buy 'any clothes whatever when bringing their babies to Cork', though they would be happy to receive any clothes that the mother might have.<sup>72</sup> Mrs Wrenne arranged to meet the mothers when they arrived in Ireland though the arrangements did not always work smoothly. On one occasion Fr Good informed Canon Harvey that it was a 'complete chance' that two mothers were met in Cork - they had travelled on a later train. These mothers claimed that they had been told that they would be met off the boat at Rosslare by a lady - but they had to travel alone to Cork.<sup>73</sup>

7.56 An undated memorandum headed 'Irish unmarried mothers, child born in England' noted that these children were British subjects and could not claim Irish nationality under the Irish *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1935* 'on the grounds that his father was Irish, because he is *filius nullius*. He can however acquire Irish nationality *aliunde*' - by another means.<sup>74</sup> The Irish *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1935*, unusually at this time, enabled a child to claim Irish citizenship from their mother. A mother could consent to have an English-born child returned to Ireland and there was nothing in the *Adoption Act 1952* to prevent the child's adoption in Ireland.<sup>75</sup> In 1956 Fr Good wrote to a number of dioceses in England, Scotland and Wales, outlining the work of St Anne's adoption society and some key requirements, if they were to accept a child:

- Baby must be born of an Irish mother and an Irish or English father. It must be illegitimate and this must be clearly proved. We cannot, therefore, take 1) the child of a married couple, 2) the child of a married woman even though she is not married to the father, 3) any child in whose case there is a likelihood of marriage between the father and mother.
- Baby must be healthy; a recent medical certificate was necessary.
- The society is principally interested in those children whose Catholic faith is in danger. We are, however, prepared to accept any children recommended to us by an English Rescue Society.
- Travel arrangements. We usually prefer to have the mother bring her baby personally to Cork. The English Society takes care of the arrangements as far as the arrival in Cork. After that our society takes responsibility. The baby is put into our nursery where it will remain for perhaps up to three

<sup>72</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3, 1957 folder

<sup>73</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3.

<sup>74</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14.

<sup>75</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14.

months pending acceptance for adoption. The mother is kept in a hostel at our expense for a day and is then free to go to her home in Ireland or to return to England.

- Before final acceptance of a baby by this society we like to have on hand its birth and baptismal certificates, adoption forms A and E and the actual certificate of the mother's blood test.
- When the child is accepted for adoption we expect the English Society to obtain the mother's signature to the consent if she is still within its area.
- Our usual acceptance of babies is from four months to 2.5 years. We have, however, made some exceptions. Happy to clarify points as needed.
- It makes no difference to us whether the mothers are pregnant from Ireland or have become so in England.<sup>76</sup>

7.57 Fr Good claimed that St Anne's had successfully placed older children, who were in English council nurseries, with Irish families.<sup>77</sup> By 1961 he reported that St Anne's was 'giving serious help to half a dozen English societies'.<sup>78</sup> St Anne's came under pressure from English rescue societies to accept some very young children, who were deemed unsuitable for immediate adoption.<sup>79</sup> But by 1966 there were only three children in the society's nursery, and the flow of babies from England was drying up - primarily because St Anne's was unwilling to take children at a very early age. Canon Harvey explained that

We find also that the biggest obstacle to persuading Irish girls to use the Cork scheme is that they are not free from their responsibility for the child physically, even if we can find them foster parents when the child is perhaps a month old. They react sharply against the need to return from their work where they are not properly re-established, in order to take the child to Cork. They also react sharply at having to see the child again physically and handle it. This latter aspect of the Cork scheme has attracted criticism from workers dealing with unmarried mothers who are non-Catholic, but with whom we try to retain good relationships so that Catholic girls are referred to us.<sup>80</sup>

7.58 By the mid-1960s mothers returning to Cork with their babies apparently expected that St Anne's would have already identified adoptive parents, and they disliked

<sup>76</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 17.

<sup>77</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 21.

<sup>78</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 12, folder Waterford.

<sup>79</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14, Statistics.

<sup>80</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3.

the fact that the baby would spend some time in a nursery.<sup>81</sup> English law provided that a woman could sign forms consenting to adoption when the infant was six weeks old, and the child had been placed with adoptive parents. In Ireland a mother had to wait until the child was three months old.<sup>82</sup> On this, and several other occasions in the records of St Anne's adoption society, Fr Good complained about the difficulties in persuading a mother to wait until her child was three months old before bringing her/him to Cork.<sup>83</sup> A further complication was the difficulty in finding the mother to sign the final adoption consent form because she might have returned to England and/or changed her address. It would appear that some women placed their infants with St Anne's until they had determined whether to bring up their child, or make some other arrangements; St Anne's was adamant that only women who had decided on adoption should be sent to Cork. Fr Good believed that some women were of the view that they had three to six months to decide whether to place their child for adoption.<sup>84</sup> From the mid-1950s there are frequent references in the St Anne's records to 'unadoptable' children - children with special needs, both physical and intellectual. In 1954, before the society was established, Monsignor Barrett offered some advice:

Word of caution: if you accept children into your home who might for one reason or another later prove unsuitable for adoption you might very shortly find yourself with a full house which would put a closure on your admissions that would be a tremendous drawback and it would be so difficult to guard against.<sup>85</sup>

- 7.59 In 1957 Canon Harvey complained 'that your medical man or adopters obviously expect the perfect child. That condition does not prevail here'.<sup>86</sup> St Anne's feared becoming 'a dumping ground for unadoptable children' sent by English charities and they threatened to return such children to England.<sup>87</sup> They made efforts to prevent such children being sent to Ireland but noted that they had no control over the medical examination that was performed before the infants travelled to Ireland and 'many deficiencies have been brought to light by [Dr X] in his examination of the children in the nursery'. The English societies were slow to agree to the children being returned because they claimed that their nurseries were

<sup>81</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3, 9 July 1966, 12 July 1966.

<sup>82</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 9, folder marked 'Dept. of Justice'.

<sup>83</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3, 1957.

<sup>84</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 17.

<sup>85</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 12, 28 Sept, 1954.

<sup>86</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3, 1957 folder.

<sup>87</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 17.

overcrowded 'and that in any case these are Irish children, and that therefore the responsibility should rest on the Irish authorities'. The county managers of the counties where the birth mothers had once lived were also reluctant to assume financial responsibility, though 'In recent years, all the county managers have been accepting responsibility for children, natives of their county, abandoned in the care of London County Council'. This arrangement appears to have happened following an agreement between London county council and the Department of Health. Arrangements were made for the Cork health authority and matron of Midleton hospital to care for the 'unadoptable' children in St Anne's nursery.<sup>88</sup>

7.60 In the late 1960s it was decided that, because of the 'evolving culture' in England, probably a reference to the English *Abortion Act 1967*, St Anne's should also repatriate pregnant women. Initially this was done in conjunction with Bessborough. St Anne's developed a family placement service, similar to Ally (see Chapter 12). In the 1970s St Anne's ceased accepting babies from England - presumably because the numbers had fallen sharply, and the society became a regular adoption society placing children who were born in Ireland for adoption by Irish families.<sup>89</sup>

7.61 In 1970 Canon Harvey wrote a long letter to Fr O'Mahony, (who had succeeded Fr Good as director of St Anne's) where he reflected on the fall in the number of mothers and babies being referred to St Anne's adoption society. He suggested that this reflected changing attitudes on the part of Irish pregnant women travelling to Britain. 'Girls have become more sophisticated...Fairer to say that they are much more knowledgeable about changes in the practice of adoption societies on both sides of the Irish Sea'. He noted that 'women's periodicals have done a lot to inform all women about adoption'. Mothers were now very anxious 'about the suitability of potential adopters'; some were willing to remain in England and raise their child...From the time when the Irish girl was often content to remain in a mother and baby home here for six months pending vacancies in Ireland we have now progressed to a situation where in a dire emergency we can, in fact, put the girl on the same day's plane and telephone Dublin to say she is on her way'. 'The main resource we offer to Irish girls ante-natally is repatriation to conditions which satisfy social workers in England as being non-penal'. He noted that emigration in

<sup>88</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14.

<sup>89</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 14, 'The history and development of St Anne's Adoption Society'.

general was falling, some women were 'availing of abortions'. Many adoption societies had long waiting lists of prospective parents but no children for adoption. Their major challenge was placing mixed-race children.<sup>90</sup>

- 7.62 In 1967 a British social worker published an article about Irish unmarried mothers in a British social work journal, which was designed to inform British social workers about provisions in Ireland and the needs and attitudes of PFIs. The article claimed that an Irish 'girl' 'is usually convinced that everything can be arranged for her over here with the utmost speed and secrecy, and that all she has to do is to have her confinement in hospital and then "they" will arrange the adoption of her baby. She then plans to return to Ireland after her "holiday" or to remain over here to work'. The author MJ Farrah and a colleague spent some time in Ireland in 1966 to learn about the services available for unmarried mothers. She claimed that many of the women travelling to Britain were not aware of services in Ireland; the main motivation behind them travelling was 'fear of social ostracism' if their pregnancy became known.<sup>91</sup> In the same year the Irish hierarchy wrote a pastoral letter on Emigrant Problems. It made reference to unmarried expectant women who travelled to Britain, where they were 'exposed to exceptional dangers. Anything we can do to keep them at home and help them must be done with great sympathy and fatherly understanding, but it is imperative that we should spare no effort to provide for them here in Ireland'.<sup>92</sup>
- 7.63 While PFI cases were the subject of extensive consultation between church organisations in Britain and Ireland, and the issue was well-known to Irish public servants, the topic did not receive much public attention until the 1960s, with the notable exception of the Gaffney article quoted earlier. A 1968 article by Michael Keating in *Woman's Way* claimed that almost every boat carrying passengers to England would have a young pregnant woman on board. He suggested that 'as many as 500' Irish single mothers travelled to England every year, 'fugitives from a society they believe to be cold and without understanding and they are fleeing from Ireland's most dangerous weapons - the whispered insinuation and the glance through curtained windows'. He quoted Fr Feargal O'Connor, UCD lecturer and Dominican priest, who founded Ally, an organisation that placed pregnant

<sup>90</sup> Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society, Box 3.

<sup>91</sup> 'Ireland and the unmarried mother', *Medical Social Work* (Feb. 1967), p. 302. Copy in Department of Health RM/ARC/0/489367.

<sup>92</sup> Dublin Diocesan Archives, AB8/b/LVII/592: Pastoral letter of the archbishops and bishops of Ireland to the clergy on emigrant problems (1967).

unmarried women in private homes, who claimed that 'we still force these girls into isolation, into loneliness...Social attitudes in this country are very much anti and to this extent unchristian. When it comes down to personal involvement with the problem, then in fact, it is taboo'. Keating noted that Ireland was the only country to have the distinction of a tag, such as PFI. He also quoted criticism by Sean D Loftus, a lecturer in Bolton Street College of Technology, that London county council was caring for people such as 'the 14 year old Irish unmarried mother of twins'.

One aspect of the problem is very clear - many Irish girls go to Britain unprepared. Piccadilly is a cold cross-roads for the Irish unmarried mother. Most of the girls do not qualify for a maternity grant or a hospital bed. They arrive in London, not realising that 26 insurance stamps (that is 26 week's work in England) are needed to earn these benefits. Ignorance of the realities of Britain's social services complicates the problem for the girls; the candy floss gives way to cold facts. Some of the girls go to England when they are about two months pregnant and take up a job. This enables them to accumulate the necessary stamps for hospital and maternity benefits. They work as waitresses, factory hands or domestic help - jobs which are soul-destroying for many of them. Others take work in hospitals where the routine medical check-up will uncover their secret...The problems of the Irish unmarried mother in Britain are great and are complicated by emotional undercurrents. One Catholic social worker in London says, 'The fear in these girls has to be seen to be believed. What sort of society do you have in Ireland that puts the girls into this state?'

This fear increases to the stage at which a girl will invent stories of how she became pregnant. She will lie about her religion, say that her parents are dead and tell other falsehoods. London can be a lonely, soulless city for immigrants. Many living in squalid bedsitters look to their own kind for affection.

A welfare officer says, 'The average Irish girl is used to the warmth and affection of a big and close-knit family. Can you wonder that when she gets here she seizes what affection she can - at whatever cost?'

The Irish unmarried mother is often pregnant within two months of arriving in Britain. Ironically, that great day for the Irish, St Patrick's Day, shows a sudden peak in the year's illegitimacy graph in Britain; three applications in

two days to Southwark Catholic Rescue Society dated back to the festivities of 17 March.<sup>93</sup>

7.64 Keating cited statistics compiled by the *Redemptorist Record*, which suggested that Irish women accounted for 8% of pregnant single women, whereas the Irish-born only constituted 5.4% of the population.<sup>94</sup> “The facts are”, says Father Lionel Munns of the Southwark Catholic Rescue Society, “that at this office we never find a girl initially willing to return to Ireland before the birth of her child. Only a great deal of hard work on the part of our staff and the fact that we can reassure them that they will obtain help and sympathy, enable us to persuade them to do so”. However Keating noted, that ‘There is rarely some smoke without fire. A social worker I spoke to in London very recently was disturbed that two girls whom her society had repatriated, returned again to England with alarming stories of conditions in the mother and baby home to which they were sent to Ireland’.

### Conclusions

7.65 Fleeing to England was the common response of many Irish people to personal difficulties - it happened in cases of marriage breakdown, family disputes, and lack of job opportunities. England was a common destination for ex-prisoners, young men and women who were discharged from industrial schools and mother and baby homes. It appeared to offer readily-available employment, and anonymity - escape from neighbours, family or a troubled past. Given that emigration to England was a common experience, it is not surprising that many pregnant Irish women followed that path. However all commentators suggest that many of the pregnant Irish women in England became pregnant in that country though many of their children were fathered by Irishmen. While it is suggested that young Irish women living in British cities had an above-average rate of ‘illegitimate’ pregnancy this assertion has not been tested.

7.66 The experience of Irish women who sought assistance from English charitable organisations and public services was probably mixed. While English society was less censorious about pre-marital pregnancy than Ireland, much of the greater tolerance was found in the families rather than the wider society. Mass emigration from Ireland placed a considerable burden on English Catholic charities, and they

<sup>93</sup> Michael Keating, ‘Pregnant from Ireland’, *Woman’s Way*, 19 July 1968.

<sup>94</sup> Irish women could have constituted a higher percentage of young adults, so these statistics do not prove that Irish women were more likely to become pregnant outside of marriage.

were determined that as far as practicable the responsibility for unmarried mothers and their child(ren) should be transferred to Ireland. British local authorities shared that determination, and the collaboration between London county council and the Crusade of Rescue in sending Miss Harris to Ireland to place English-born children with family members is evidence of this.

7.67 The number of pregnant single women travelling to England to give birth fell sharply in the 1970s. In 1976 one Irish woman in London, who styled herself as Mrs, but was obviously pregnant by a man not her husband, contacted the Department of Social Welfare seeking an E112 form – the form that entitled a person to emergency medical treatment in another EEC (now EU) country. She was seven and a half months pregnant but could not access ante-natal care because she was not entitled to it under the NHS and, although she was booked into the Middlesex Hospital for the birth, she would have to pay, which she was incapable of doing. She had been working in a factory in provincial Ireland, and had travelled to England while pregnant. The department explained that the E112 would not cover maternity care. They suggested that she contact the Crusade of Rescue in London, who would assist her to return to Ireland, where the CPRSI would make ‘all the arrangements necessary for you...and at no cost to yourself’.<sup>95</sup> This woman was unusual in 1976. By the 1970s most pregnant Irish women travelling to Britain were seeking abortions. The number of abortions carried out on women giving an Irish address rose from 578 in 1971 to 2,185 by 1977 - and these figures were undoubtedly an under-estimate, as many women used British addresses. In 1980 Dr Andrew Rynne estimated, that allowing for this under-reporting, the number of abortions equalled the number of recorded ‘illegitimate’ births in Ireland.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489389.

<sup>96</sup> Andrew Rynne, *Abortion: the Irish Question* (Dublin, 1982), p. 22