

Chapter 8: Profile of unmarried mothers in the mid twentieth century

Introduction

- 8.1 One of the serious shortcomings of the material that is available to the Commission is the absence of the mothers' voices from the time they were pregnant and making decisions about their children and the shortage of contemporary information about their lives, the circumstances of their pregnancy, and the attitudes of family and putative fathers. This absence is especially noteworthy for earlier decades because the mothers who came to the Commission inevitably were pregnant in later years. Some stories emerge occasionally from the registers of the institutions under investigation, but these are not common. This chapter attempts to provide some impressionistic evidence about the mothers. What happened when they discovered that they were pregnant? What action did they take? Where did they go to seek help? How did their family and the father of their child respond on being told that they were pregnant? What choices, if any did they have? This chapter summarises the stories of many women - the large number given is an attempt to capture the similarities and diversity of the experiences of pregnant single women, and their families in the Ireland of the 1940s and 1950s.
- 8.2 The core information comes from the files and case-notes kept by inspectors in the Department of Local Government and Public Health/Department of Health over roughly a twenty-year period from 1940-1961.¹ There are over 2,000 card index notes relating to women who were pregnant or had recently given birth. In some cases the women contacted the department; in other cases the department inspectors were contacted by a charity, such as the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland, or by a maternity hospital, or a family member. Some relate to women who were repatriated from England (see chapter 7); the remainder were women who had not left Ireland. The overwhelming majority were not natives of Dublin, though some women lived and worked in Dublin. This information is supplemented with occasional pieces of information from other contemporary sources.

¹ Department of Health, RM/ARC/O/489984; RM/ARC/O/489986; RM/ARC/O 489989 These records contain the names and sometimes the addresses of the women.

- 8.3 There are some limitations with these records. The information on these cards was written by the department inspectors. They generally give us the woman's story from becoming pregnant to her admittance into a mother and baby home or some other 'solution' to her pregnancy. They rarely tell us anything about her experience in a mother and baby home, or a maternity hospital. The inquiries that were conducted into a woman's history could be extremely intrusive. One woman, who went to England pregnant and returned of her own accord, informed the CPRSI that she had a miscarriage some years previously in Glasgow. When she arrived at the department she carried a letter stating that she needed a VD inspection; the CPRSI would bring her to Dr Steevens' Hospital and 'will try to have her kept as widow patient'; meanwhile she was staying in Cork Street Hostel. Social workers attached to English charities appear to have frequently contacted a woman's parish priest - one file noted that they were doing so to 'find out the family background'. Some details came from meetings between a department official and the woman, but the source was often a Catholic welfare organisation or an almoner in a Dublin hospital, and therefore the information might come with certain inbuilt prejudices and attitudes. Despite these shortcomings, this is an extremely valuable source, given the dearth of contemporary evidence. The case histories are of women from modest family backgrounds - women engaged in lower-grade service employment, the daughters of labourers, farmers and tradesmen; women who lacked financial means or social/family support. Women from professional and prosperous business families also experienced crisis pregnancies but few appear to have sought assistance from the department inspectors, though many would have visited the offices of St Patrick's Guild or the CPRSI. Their stories are missing here; likewise the stories of Dublin-born women.
- 8.4 When Bessborough (see Chapter 18) opened in 1922, the women and children who were admitted came via the county home; they had to enter the county home before being sent to Bessborough. Women admitted to Pelletstown in the early years had to first go to the Dublin Union (see Chapter 13). By the late 1920s the local authority had granted permission to dispensary doctors to send a woman to Bessborough, without first requiring her to enter the county home, and in time women were also admitted if they had a letter from a local authority member or senior officer or occasionally from a priest.
- 8.5 These entry methods required a woman, or a close relative, to approach either the local authority, the dispensary doctor, or a local priest, and to inform them of her

pregnancy, which often meant that her circumstances would become known locally; and some family members would be aware of her pregnancy. The position may have been somewhat different in Dublin. Given the size of the city, in theory at least, it should have been possible for a pregnant single woman who lived in Dublin, to make arrangements, with less prospect of her pregnancy becoming widely known to neighbours, family and friends. It is also possible that Dublin working-class families may have been more willing to support a pregnant daughter, so that she was not forced to leave home. The three Dublin maternity hospitals admitted single women, and had done so for generations. There is evidence that the city hospital in Galway and the county hospital in Kilkenny - to take two examples - did not welcome single mothers, and they were probably not atypical - many women had to give birth in the county home. Some single women admitted to Dublin maternity hospitals claimed that they were married, sometimes giving the name of a married sister - an indication of the stigma associated with an unmarried pregnancy.

- 8.6 During the 1930s, (as explained in Chapter 7), an inspector in the DLGPH became involved in making arrangements for women who were repatriated from England, either pregnant or with a young infant. It appears that women in similar circumstances who had not travelled to England began contacting the Custom House (the headquarters of the DLGPH); alternatively welfare workers in Dublin hospitals or Dublin-based charities contacted the department on their behalf in an effort to secure their admission to a mother and baby home. These files begin in the early 1940s, so there are no means of knowing whether Irish-based women were contacting the department in earlier years. The fact that these women, or somebody working on their behalf, contacted the department reflects the difficulties that Irish unmarried mothers faced in finding an institution that would admit them without demanding payment. Some women made contact because they had nowhere to go; some because they were unable to circumvent the system, which required the authorisation of a local authority for their admission to a mother and baby home. Miss Litster, a department inspector, handled many sensitive cases, such as a woman with a positive Wassermann test - who had to be admitted to the Lock Hospital; cases where a mother was suffering from TB, and a bed had to be secured in a sanatorium, but she would only be admitted when arrangements (unspecified) were first made for her child.

Flight

8.7 Miss Litster's account, written in 1945, sets the context for these stories.

Numbers of expectant mothers drift to Dublin every week, hoping to find a home willing to receive them and to keep the baby later. The main object of most of them is to get back home or to work as quickly as possible so that a prolonged absence will not be remarked upon and suspicion aroused. They are recommended in Dublin to different societies. An expectant mother coming to Dublin...may go from one Society to another and find that none can aid her because they have no institution or home in which to house her before confinement and that nothing can be done to secure the baby's future unless she can find a large sum of money. If the Societies get in touch with me, I try to persuade the girls to seek admission to one of the Special Homes and am frequently successful. Many however will not. These girls often disappear and it is fairly certain that they have sought shelter from the Irish Church Missions.²

8.8 Women often turned up at the offices of the DLGPH in the Custom House, penniless and homeless. Many were given short-term accommodation in Regina Coeli (see Chapter 21), while arrangements were made to secure their admission to a mother and baby home. When Regina Coeli was full they were sent to the night shelter in Cork Street; if the night shelter had no vacancies, they went to other hostels. The CPRSI arranged short-term accommodation for repatriated women in a nursing home on the North Circular Road run by a Mrs Farrell and that home continues to feature in many case records during the 1950s. In 1947 Miss Litster explained that 'placing applicants for admission to maternity homes is now practically whole-time employment'. She asked the department to examine whether it would be practicable to establish a bureau - away from the Custom House - under either the department or the public assistance authority, working in close conjunction with the various social service societies, 'to cope with the ever-increasing numbers of applicants for admission to maternity homes'.³

8.9 Many of the women who turned up at the Custom House were referred by almoners in Dublin maternity hospitals or by charitable organisations including the Legion of Mary. Women were also referred by welfare officers in the British armed

² Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

³ Department of Health, INACT/INA/0/474129.

forces or welfare officers attached to British factories. One woman was referred to St Patrick's Guild by an Oblate father in whom she confided when he was giving a mission in her home town; she contacted the Custom House and was later admitted to Castlepollard. One pregnant woman in 1947 was referred by a female member of staff in the Bank of Ireland - the woman worked in the staff restaurant; another was sent by a welfare officer in CIÉ - the national transport provider. The files contain several referrals by the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association in Belfast and the Legion of Mary hostel in that city. From 1942, all men and women from independent Ireland had to apply for a permit to take up employment in Northern Ireland. Women who might have been living there for several years lost their residency rights if, as commonly happened, they were dismissed from their job because they were pregnant. There are several instances of women turning up unannounced at Sean Ross or another of the special homes, having been dispatched there by an English Catholic charity, without any provision being made for their maintenance. Miss Litster then had to contact the relevant public assistance authority and persuade them to assume financial responsibility. In 1951 one woman from Offaly, who was pregnant for the second time (by the same man) was reported to have come to Dublin, where she 'went to women on stalls at [Nelson's] Pillar for advice. One took her home and gave her her bed'. The woman was then admitted to the Coombe Hospital. A 16-and-a-half-year-old pregnant woman travelled to Dublin and went to Archbishop's House seeking assistance. She was referred to Pelletstown, who in turn sent her to the Dublin Union. Her parents were separated; when the department arranged for her to go to Sean Ross, her mother declined 'on grounds that girls had to work there'; she was admitted to Castlepollard. A 16-year-old school girl travelled to Holles Street alone by bus (a journey of more than 50 miles) to give birth. Her baby weighed 6lbs; the file noted 'Girl said to have been normal in appearance, neighbours do not suspect'. Her mother placed the baby with a foster family, and she apparently returned to school.

- 8.10 The department in later years provided travel vouchers covering the cost of fares to special homes, but on many occasions Miss Litster, or another department inspector, had to give mothers the cost of their bus fare and some money for food; they often found it difficult to secure reimbursement.
- 8.11 Personal impressions, and representations by priests, nuns or doctors, appear to have played a key role in the decisions made by charities such as St Patrick's

Guild or the Rotunda Girls' Aid Society, on whether to accept an infant for placement. A pregnant shop assistant (putative father a commercial traveller) was described as 'lovely girl, nicely mannered'; St Patrick's Guild agreed to accept her baby 'after a month or two', meanwhile the woman who was in Cork Street Hostel would be admitted to Sean Ross. By contrast another was described as an 'ordinary working-class girl'. In 1947 Fr Murray of the Rotunda Girls' Aid Society explained to the department that

I try to help a decent class of girl, a 'first offender', whose fall was due mainly to ignorance or weakness. By a decent class of girl I mean one of a good family whom it will be possible to rehabilitate in her former position in life.

All my foster-mothers are selected with a view to final adoption and I always give them my assurance that the mother was a 'first offender' of respectable parents and that her child is perfectly healthy...I have found by experience that my foster-mothers are most particular about the health of the baby and the respectability of the mother, they always require at least a brief outline of the mother's history.⁴

- 8.12 There are instances where a priest referred a woman to the CPRSI, who then sent her to the department; it would appear that the CPRSI determined whether to assist a woman based on her family circumstances - sometimes on the basis of respectability rather than money. St Patrick's Guild accepted only women who could pay for their child to be placed at nurse. In both instances the intervention of a local priest or doctor could prove vital in persuading these societies to support a mother or child. The notes on a young woman who went to Manchester recorded that she 'made favourable impression of [sic] welfare society in Manchester'. The file of one young Mayo woman states that her local parish priest was 'interested in case, some hope of marriage'. Her parents were described as 'decent people, big family'.
- 8.13 Random letters in Bishop of Galway Michael Browne's archives record a pregnant woman who was 'recommended by a local doctor, family of girl paying for child' (June 1939). In another case, 'the Jesuits in Galway...seem to have taken a great interest in the case from the beginning' - this woman's child was placed with St Patrick's Guild and arrangements were made for adoption by a bank manager and his wife. But a Galway woman, who wrote to Miss Cruice (St Patrick's Guild)

⁴ Department of Health, CCL/INA/0/478958.

seeking assistance for her sister, was referred to her parish priest and advised that her sister should go to Tuam. A woman wrote to Miss Cruice asking her to accept 'a young girl of 18 years who is expecting to become a mother in October. Her parents are very poor and it is a friend that is helping her. I know the terms are £1 a week. Would you be kind enough to reduce it to half if possible? I will take her up next week if you would kindly let me know as soon as possible'. She received a blunt rejection, as did a local priest who contacted Miss Cruice about the same case. This young woman explicitly stated that she did not wish to go to Tuam. It is also evident that Miss Cruice kept parish priests informed about any pregnancies among unmarried women in their parish - and any details that she had as to a putative father.⁵

- 8.14 The women who were rejected by St Patrick's Guild were initially referred to the Dublin Union, but as Dublin increasingly refused to take in women from other parts of Ireland, they were sent to the Custom House. Some made their way independently to Regina Coeli and the hostel contacted Miss Litster, who interviewed the mothers and might make arrangements for their admission to a mother and baby home. There were also referrals by Church of Ireland clergy; the department referred these women to Bethany. In 1947 Regina Coeli referred a woman on her third pregnancy. She was not a Catholic and had been refused admission by Bethany and the Irish Church Missions (ICM), but following Miss Litster's intervention, the ICM agreed to accept her. Miss Litster also received requests for assistance from pregnant women who were natives of Northern Ireland, but she had to point out that they could not be maintained by a public assistance authority.
- 8.15 Several files note that a woman is 'anxious to get away [to a special home] as soon as possible' - presumably to avoid her pregnancy becoming known. One woman, who arrived at the Custom House from a provincial town, three months pregnant, was advised to get a job in Dublin and contact the Custom House at a later stage in her pregnancy. A woman from Northern Ireland, who had been working in the Dublin area for a short time was described as 'getting very restless in St Kevin's...appears anxious to get rid of baby and go back to work'. Some women attempted to remain at work as late as possible in their pregnancy in order to have some money; the pressures of concealing a pregnancy at work added to the strain.

⁵ Galway Diocesan Archive, Bishop Michael Browne Papers, B/12/139.

One young woman working as a domestic in a Dublin nursing home, who came to the department offices roughly six months before the baby was due, was reported to be in 'anxious mental state'. The staff of the nursing home were not aware of her pregnancy; she was described as very unwell and taking medication to control vomiting. One 17-year old became pregnant by a fellow-worker, a porter in the institution where she worked. He had been warned that she was under age and he would lose his job 'if he brought her into his flat'. She was described as 'slim and pretty; very haggard, admits to tight lacing...anxious to work as long as possible'. She had moved to a domestic servant job in a private house. Several women were anxious that their employer should not know of the pregnancy - perhaps because they hoped to return to work there, or would need a reference to secure future employment elsewhere.

- 8.16 The story of flight and admission to several institutions gives some insight into the difficulties that a single woman faced when pregnant. One young woman, who had gone to England when pregnant, gave birth in the school where she was working as a domestic servant. A woman who suffered from epilepsy, who had travelled to England when pregnant 'would not be accepted in an English hospital'; she was admitted to Sean Ross. One 19-year old who went to England pregnant was described as 'destitute'. Several pregnancies were detected when women underwent a medical examination preparatory to taking a job in England, or during the medical inspection that Irish emigrants had to undergo during the war years in order to secure a travel pass. It is not clear whether these women were aware that they were pregnant before they underwent the medical, but the diagnosis inevitably meant no job, or dismissal from a job - and no alternative other than returning to Ireland.
- 8.17 One woman, who had spent much of her childhood in an industrial school, was dismissed from a domestic position in a Mercy convent in Cork when it became known that she was pregnant. Another domestic servant, 19 years old, working in a private home in Limerick also lost her job in similar circumstances. A Longford woman who worked as a domestic servant in a large country house in Northern Ireland had her residence permit withdrawn when her pregnancy became known; she came seeking assistance in Dublin. The putative father was a prisoner of war. Another young woman lost her job in St Michael's Hospital Dun Laoghaire because of her pregnancy. She had been raised in an industrial school; her only relative was a married sister, who was unwilling to keep her, perhaps because her

husband was unemployed. The matron of St Kevin's Hospital gave a pregnant wardsmaid, who had worked there for nine years, a week's notice of dismissal when she became aware that she was pregnant. The department tried to arrange a medical certificate from a doctor in the Coombe which would mean that she did not lose her nine years' service (presumably pensionable). A 20-year-old waitress was dismissed by the manageress of a Dublin golf club when she was discovered to be pregnant; her mother would not help and her step father was described as 'antagonistic'. A student nurse in an English hospital had to leave the hospital and her accommodation when her pregnancy became known. In the case of a barmaid who went to England when pregnant, the file noted that 'Patient must return to Ireland immediately as she has no means of support and will not be kept in her lodgings any longer'. She was admitted to Castlepollard. A woman working in an isolation hospital in Essex had to leave her job (and living accommodation) two to three months before her baby was due; she was seeking information about homes in Ireland. The assistant matron contacted the CPRSI but claimed that this woman was finding it difficult to get a place in a mother and baby home; she announced that she might place her child in a Protestant home - which may have been a tactic to persuade the CPRSI, whose mission was to rescue Catholic children from proselytization, to assist her; a place was found in Castlepollard.

- 8.18 Some employers showed more compassion. The matron of the Rotunda was willing to re-employ a woman who had been working in the hospital and gave birth there - the Rotunda Girls' Aid Society was arranging for the child's 'adoption'; this was prior to the introduction of legal adoption. There are many cases of pregnancies among women working as domestic servants in private homes. This is not surprising; domestic service was by far the largest employer of women, especially those without educational qualifications or skills. Some employers dismissed a servant on discovering the pregnancy, others kept the woman until the birth, and there were some who took mother and baby back following the birth. A family doctor whose servant left his employment when she became pregnant, without informing him of her pregnancy, intervened to find a place for her in a special home, and assumed responsibility for bringing her there. One pregnant domestic servant, who was referred to St Patrick's Guild by her employer, returned to that house - in a very affluent part of the city - following her discharge from Holles Street; mother and baby were later admitted to Castlepollard. Another employer who was 'going away...was anxious to have her [a pregnant servant] fixed up before she leaves'. A Mayo woman, who worked as a domestic servant in

a large house in the south Dublin suburbs, had to leave her employment when it emerged she was pregnant. She did not have an insurance card, and she claimed that her employer had stopped doctors' fees out of her wages. The department was contacted about this case by a Dublin woman, who employed her sister as a servant. A later report indicated that this sister had intervened and ensured that the employer stamped the insurance card; she also pressed for the repayment of money stopped for medical expenses. One woman - described as a mental nurse - is reported as having been promised 'her employment back' after baby's birth', and the employer of a domestic servant in a provincial town arranged that her sister in Dublin would give the pregnant woman a temporary home until other arrangements were made.

- 8.19 Women who wished to keep their child found it almost impossible to find accommodation. One woman travelled from Tipperary to Dublin 'of her own accord' attending ante-natal clinics at the Coombe Hospital and giving birth there. She lived with her widowed mother in one rented room in Tipperary, and claimed that the landlord would not permit a baby in this flatlet. She was anxious to keep her baby - meanwhile she was admitted to Sean Ross.
- 8.20 It was not uncommon for women to spend time in two or three institutions. One pregnant woman from Cork, who was sent to Miss Litster by Regina Coeli, was willing to be admitted to Sean Ross, but when she was examined in the Rotunda the doctor deemed it too risky for her to travel, unless she did so immediately. As her public assistance authority had not yet approved her admission to a home, she had to remain in Dublin. She gave birth in the Rotunda, was discharged with her baby to Regina Coeli and went from there to St Kevin's while Miss Litster tried to secure approval for mother and baby to go to Sean Ross. A woman who arrived at Regina Coeli was reported as having been refused treatment in the Rotunda Hospital because it was her second pregnancy, so she had to apply for a ticket of admission to St Kevin's. One woman who went to England pregnant and returned of her own accord wandered around Dublin in an advanced stage of pregnancy. She contacted Gloucester Street convent⁶ who directed her to St Kevin's; she gave birth the next day. Another woman who had been two years in Gloucester Street convent but was then taken home by her mother, returned to the convent allegedly of her own accord when she became pregnant - it was her first pregnancy. The

⁶ Now Sean McDermott Street; this was a Magdalen laundry.

convent sent her to St Kevin's but the department arranged for her transfer to Sean Ross. A Wexford woman who went to London was sent back the same evening, and admitted to Regina Coeli in an advanced stage of pregnancy. She then left Regina Coeli and turned up at her local presbytery where the priest arranged for her to be admitted to Sean Ross. She called into CPRSI the following day and told them that she would not stay in Regina Coeli; the CPRSI suggested that the authorities in Regina Coeli ask her to sign a statement that she had left at her own risk, because they believed that the birth of her child was imminent. One young woman who was being sent to England by an employment agency was discovered to be pregnant, so did not travel. She was admitted to Castlepollard but was promptly sent to Dublin because she wanted to smoke - she was refused admission to her local county home - where she had previously been an 'inmate' (uncertain why) and was finally sent back to Castlepollard. A medical examination of a PFI, carried out in St Kevin's hospital revealed that she had a previous pregnancy, so she could not be admitted to Castlepollard as planned.

- 8.21 The journey from Dublin to a mother and baby home in an unknown part of Ireland must have been a harrowing experience for a pregnant woman or a mother and infant. It would have been especially so in wartime conditions, when buses and trains often ran late. There are occasional reports of women being accompanied by a representative of the Dublin Union or the CPRSI - this generally applied to younger women (under 18) or women who were viewed as 'simple' and in need of assistance, or at risk of flight. Some women were transported in an ambulance - which would have brought a patient to Dublin for medical treatment but on many occasions they travelled alone, subject to the curious stares of fellow-travellers. Older residents of Castlepollard say the Dublin bus would stop at the gate of Manor House without comment. One young woman who was working in Belfast for over a year 'without a residence permit' was being sent to Regina Coeli by the Belfast Legion of Mary. The department phoned asking that they send a description of the 'girl' and the time of the train to Regina Coeli. Women who were brought to the train station or bus depot often failed to take the bus or train or disembarked at a different stop and disappeared. 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.
- 8.22 Some women left mother and baby homes with their infant. They often ended up in Dublin seeking assistance and were admitted to another institution. A native of

Mayo who returned from England and was admitted to Castlepollard - following a plea from Miss Litster that she not be sent to Tuam - left and came to Dublin, giving birth in the Rotunda. She placed her child with St Patrick's Guild without giving an address, and returned to England, but was returned to Ireland the same day 'when her passport was examined'. Back in Dublin 'she made a scene at Marlborough Street' (perhaps at the offices of the RGAS) and was admitted first to Regina Coeli and later to St Kevin's. At this point she agreed to be transferred to Tuam with her child. One woman who had pleaded not to be sent to her local county home was admitted to Bessborough but ran away and was then admitted to Regina Coeli. A Limerick woman working for a few months in Dublin, and admitted to St Kevin's and from there to Pelletstown, was reported as wanting to go to Sean Ross. An ambulance was duly arranged to bring her there, accompanied by the matron of a county hospital, because she was advanced in pregnancy, but the pregnant woman then refused to travel and the doctor insisted that she not be subjected to pressure. It was alleged that 'influence has been brought to bear on her' since going to Pelletstown. The Mother Superior in Castlepollard wished to send a woman away 'because of recalcitrance', but her baby was delivered in the home. A native of Leitrim who had been working in Belfast was admitted to Castlepollard in 1946 and left three months later. The Mother Superior at Castlepollard contacted the International Catholic Girl's Protection Society to meet her (presumably off the bus) but she evaded them and disappeared. She came to Regina Coeli two months later, 'penniless and verminous'; mother and child had to be sent for 'cleansing baths'. The child was admitted to St Clare's Hospital (see Chapter 2), suffering from gastro-enteritis. His mother disappeared, reportedly travelling to England to take up nursing but she was admitted to St Kevin's Hospital as a temporary patient some months later; her son was also admitted to this institution. A young woman, who was referred to Miss Litster by Regina Coeli and given temporary accommodation in Cork Street Hostel while arrangements were made to admit her to Bessborough, was 'seen off' on the Cork train by a worker in the hostel but failed to arrive - Bessborough had sent someone to meet her at the train. In some cases personal resistance was finally overcome. One 20-year-old woman who refused to be admitted to any home and was supported by her mother in this decision, was sent with her child from St Kevin's to Castlepollard, under an escort arranged by the Dublin Union. A woman who left Regina Coeli without her two months old son, who subsequently died, was traced by Gardaí to the Good Shepherd convent in Limerick (a Magdalen laundry). A file on a woman who gave

birth in Holles Street and was removed with her child to St Kevin's noted 'parents writing abusive letters to girl and demanding removal of child'.

8.23 One of the longest files concerns a woman who is described as a 'cripple'. She was sent from Sean Ross to Holles Street where her baby was born. Sean Ross refused to readmit her and her child. Mother and baby were removed by ambulance from Holles Street to the county home, but her mother was determined that they should not remain there, and she sent a telegram stating that she was bringing them back to Holles Street. The CPRSI met the grandmother and another daughter in Dublin and tried to agree a solution. Meanwhile mother and baby remained overnight in a private house in Dublin 'but won't be kept tonight'. The grandmother explained her reluctance that they should be in the county home was because they had 'a lot of cousins' in that town. A priest in Westland Row church arranged for St Ultan's Hospital to take the baby for a month, after which St Patrick's Guild agreed to take charge. The child's mother returned home.

8.24 Some women who were admitted to Regina Coeli while arrangements were being made for their admission to a mother and baby home, refused to leave that hostel, because they had greater freedom (including freedom to smoke); some refused to enter any institution run by religious sisters. For women who had grown up in country areas, religious sisters were strange, rather frightening creatures; they would have been more familiar to women who had attended school in towns or cities - though they might also have feared them because of their experiences at school. A file suggests meeting the mother of an infant, who was born at home 'to find out if she is now willing to go to Manor House' but she did not attend the arranged meeting. There are also cases of pregnant women, admitted to Castlepollard or another home, leaving after a few days, with no record as to what happened next; where did they go?

Privacy/secretcy

8.25 Most women who came into contact with the Custom House were determined to keep their pregnancy a private matter - not known to parents or family, not known to the local doctor or priest, and, occasionally not known to the staff of their local council. Many files emphasise that parents did not know and were not to be told. This is often underlined. However, it appears that English and Irish charities might contact a parent(s) in cases of teenage pregnancies, and English Catholic charities often contacted a woman's parish priest to find out some information about her

family background. The file on one 17-year old who went to England, while pregnant, to help a married sister who had had a nervous breakdown recommended that the English social worker should inform her parents 'in view of the girl's age'. Arrangements were made for her to go to Castlepollard. Parents might know of the pregnancy and be equally concerned about keeping it a secret from neighbours and the local community. The parents of one pregnant woman were employed by a local priest and feared that they would lose their employment if he discovered that their daughter was pregnant.

- 8.26 This desperation to preserve secrecy is evident from the case files. Several women initially gave false names, incorrect home addresses or personal stories that turned out to be untrue: for example claiming that parents were dead - presumably to prevent them being contacted. Before agreeing to pay for a woman's maintenance, the public assistance authority would check out these details, often reporting that there was nobody of that name at the address given. It is highly probable that these inquiries would have made her pregnancy known in the locality. In one case a woman, recently arrived in Dublin from Clare, and staying in a bed and breakfast, was referred to the CPRSI, who noted that she 'told so many obvious lies that the Society sent her away'. One 17-year old 'had told a lot of lies and denied pregnancy but people [her parents] have got the name of man responsible'. A woman who gave birth in Holles Street in 1957 did not admit that she was not married until after the birth. She had been working in England for two years, came to Dublin pregnant and attended ante-natal sessions. She did not wish to part with her baby, so plans were afoot to send her to Bessborough. Her widowed mother declined to help. A woman admitted to the Rotunda from Bethany, under a false name, somehow came to Regina Coeli, where a social worker suspected that she had given a false name. A priest in the town, where her 'married sister' was alleged to live, reported that the 'married sister', who was in reality her mother, 'had a daughter who "got into trouble"'; the priest had assumed that she was in the county home. Arrangements were allegedly being made for her baby to be adopted by a couple travelling to Arabia. When one county secretary was unable to identify a woman's family he made further inquiries in the next county. The almoner in St Kevin's subsequently phoned to say that the woman had admitted that her story - a dead mother, pregnancy resulting from a sexual assault - was untrue. The county secretary travelled to St Kevin's to question this woman, and discovered the name of the putative father, a local businessman, who had written promising to contribute £50 towards the child's

adoption. In another case the mother of a child who was in Regina Coeli disappeared while her child was in hospital for treatment, and it was discovered that the personal details that she had given were false.

- 8.27 One of the most elaborate cases of deception concerned a young woman who arrived at the Custom House allegedly accompanied by her stepbrother, who then brought her to Castlepollard and paid for her maintenance. He claimed that the matron at the Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda (her home town) had told him that £30 would arrange an adoption. He paid £50 to St Patrick's Guild before the baby was born. The woman's mother, who had been reported as dead, then arrived from London and announced that the supposed stepbrother was 'no relation'. This young woman gave birth in the Coombe and went home with her mother, but the latter contacted the Custom House and explained that her daughter did not want to part with her baby and was 'in bad hysterical condition'. She sought advice about pursuing the putative father - presumably the man who had presented himself as a stepbrother - for maintenance; the department referred this woman to a solicitor.
- 8.28 Families often sought to conceal a daughter's pregnancy from the local authority, while simultaneously needing to arrange for them to pay for her maintenance in a mother and baby home. The file on one Kildare woman, the daughter of a labourer, noted that her father 'knew some employees in the County Council offices'; he was 'extremely anxious that the matter should be treated very confidentially'. Several women had relatives working for the local authority and were concerned that their pregnancy would be known. In one such case the woman did not want any address given in the accounts from Castlepollard. Another asked that only her initials should be used on forms and accounts.
- 8.29 One woman refused to attend her local dispensary doctor for medical examination - which appears to have been demanded before the public assistance authority would agree to pay for her maintenance in Castlepollard; she feared that her 'condition would be broadcast' if she did. One woman gave birth at home - her parents were reported as unaware that she was pregnant; her mother assisted at the birth, which took place without any medical attention. The mother gave the infant a private baptism; the birth was not registered, and the department, who learned about this case from the CPRSI (though details are not given), noted that some family members were 'not aware of the presence of baby in the home'. This baby died. There were probably many similar stories that have not been recorded.

A doctor contacted the CPRSI about a Mayo woman, but she did not wait until arrangements had been made, turning up at the society's offices. The woman feared that Castlepollard would write to her parish priest; she lived at home and her parents were not aware of her pregnancy.

- 8.30 This determination that a pregnancy should not be known to neighbours meant that many women refused to enter particular mother and baby homes. Reasons commonly given were that the woman had a cousin in this home or knew of a girl from their parish who was an 'inmate'. Many women refused to go to the county home or to a mother and baby home near their home because they feared discovery. As the local authority in Galway would pay only for women who were admitted to the Children's Home in Tuam, and all 'inmates' were from either Galway or Mayo, more women refused to go to Tuam than to any other home. One young woman from Galway with a temporary address in Cork Street Hostel, 'does not want to go to Tuam on any account says an aunt lives there and she would be recognised in the Home'. A mother left the Tuam home with her baby and settled in Dublin (it is possible she was a live-in domestic servant), but she was evicted when her child became ill. Having tried and failed to get admission to Regina Coeli and long-term support from a charitable agency (though CPRSI provided short-term assistance), mother and baby were forced to return to Tuam. Files record Tipperary women who were unwilling to be admitted to Sean Ross, but would go to Bessborough; a Meath woman who would not go to Castlepollard if anybody from her home area was there. A woman from Cork was reported as saying that 'she will do anything rather than go to a home so near her own home'. One 20-year old who had returned from England and was admitted to Regina Coeli was sent to Castlepollard without waiting for the county manager's approval because a married woman from the same parish had arrived into Regina Coeli and the young woman 'became hysterical on seeing her there'. The father of one woman, a night-watchman had to pay the Dublin Health Authority 10s a week for 12 weeks towards the cost of his daughter's stay in Braemar House (Cork) because she wished to leave Dublin. By contrast a woman in her mid-thirties, who was admitted to Castlepollard, which was quite a distance from her home, was unhappy there, and asked for a transfer to an institution in her own county. She was physically handicapped and needed assistance, so arrangements had to be made to escort her to Dublin and place her on a train. She was met by ambulance at her destination.

The local authorities

- 8.31 One of the main tasks for department officials was to secure the agreement of the local authority, after 1942 it was the county manager, to pay for a woman's maintenance in an approved home. This was often a complex and lengthy process. Many women who were not repatriated probably ended up in the Custom House because the department was seen as the only agency that could persuade an unwilling or unsympathetic county manager. County managers often disputed liability - based on the address, or whether the woman had lived and worked outside the county of her birth. The files record many disputes over townlands and county boundaries: disputes between South and North Tipperary; between Limerick city and county, and between Cork city and the three districts in the county - all trying to evade financial liability. Local officials often made detailed inquiries in a locality in order to determine whether the woman had given a correct name and address - a process that might well betray her pregnancy.
- 8.32 When the department contacted Donegal county council asking them to assume financial responsibility for a woman who had given birth in England, they responded by sending detailed forms which she should complete. The department phoned asking them to withdraw the forms, and then phoned the English welfare agency asking them to elicit further details from the woman; it is uncertain whether Donegal accepted responsibility. In one case where a woman had left Limerick - the file stated that she had had an unhappy home life, the city manager disputed liability for her maintenance. It was quite common for a county manager to suggest that a woman whose case was referred to him should be maintained by the Dublin health authority. When a local priest contacted the county manager seeking financial support for a Galway woman who went to England when pregnant and was being returned to Ireland, the county manager suggested that if she remained in Dublin for a short time the Dublin public assistance authority would look after her; the file indicates otherwise. When the Offaly county manager refused to accept financial responsibility for a woman, it was suggested that she should be put on a bus to Tullamore and instructed to present herself to the county home. The file noted that 'the Department can have nothing to do with this; she must act on her own responsibility'. The county manager in Meath refused to pay for one repatriated woman because she had been working in Dublin for some years before going to England. One of the most outrageous attempts to evade financial liability concerned a 17-year old who had been born in Dublin and brought to Donegal as an infant, where she was raised by her grandparents; her parents

had gone to England and apparently abandoned her. At approximately 17 she went to work in Sligo, became pregnant by a local man, and was admitted to the county home. The Sligo authorities put her in an ambulance and sent her to St Kevin's hospital with a note stating she was 'a case for Dublin'.

- 8.33 Efforts to determine which county was liable for maintenance could be extremely intrusive. In the case of one domestic servant referred to the Customs House by the CPRSI, information was sought as to whether 'pregnancy is the result of association in Leix [sic] or Kilkenny, and how long she has been employed in Co Leix'. It was determined that 'pregnancy occurred 5 miles from home' - in Kilkenny. The woman was then sent to Sean Ross.
- 8.34 In one case of a woman returning from England, the Roscommon county manager refused to pay for anywhere except the county home. After several letters Miss Litster persuaded him to agree a 'swap' with the county home in Longford. Given these protracted negotiations, and the unsympathetic response perhaps it is not surprising that when authorities in Birmingham were contacted to arrange for the woman's return to Ireland they reported that mother and child had disappeared. Another Roscommon woman on her second pregnancy was unwilling to go to the county home because a cousin was a nurse there. The county manager agreed that she could be admitted to the Longford county home but he demanded that she travel by train to Roscommon station, where she would be collected by ambulance and brought to Longford - arrangements that made no practical sense, and appear to have been designed to punish or humiliate the woman. Roscommon insisted on a similar arrangement in the case of a Roscommon woman who was returning from England and was to be admitted to Sean Ross. She had to travel from Dublin, to some point in the county where an ambulance could collect her and bring her to Sean Ross. A 35-year-old Donegal woman, pregnant for the second time, refused to go to a county home and declared that she would go to England if she was not admitted to a special home - the county manager relented and she was approved for admission to Castlepollard. By 1957 the convention that only first-time mothers were accepted in mother and baby homes was breaking down.
- 8.35 There were particular difficulties for women from more comfortable family backgrounds, whose parents were not aware of the pregnancy and were not to be told, because the county manager might refuse to maintain her in a special home, arguing that the parents should pay. One woman had travelled to Nottingham,

pregnant, and was about to lose her accommodation (and presumably her job). When the county manager was asked to assume financial responsibility in a home, he reported that the family were 'comfortable' with over 100 acres of land valued at £37 (presumably the rateable valuation); the household included a six-year old 'ailing child', this woman's child. It is unclear what happened. With county managers disputing financial liability, department officials and those associated with various charities had to interview women, often on several occasions, in order to 'disentangle stories' and determine which local authority was liable. On the other hand, some managers accepted financial responsibility for women from comfortable family backgrounds. One woman with a clerical job, whose father was 'said to hold a high position in the Garda' was maintained by her local authority in a mother and baby home - this was all brokered by Fr Barrett of the CPRSI. In one unusual case a woman friend and work colleague kept a pregnant woman in her flat. This pregnancy was diagnosed when the woman was being treated in a Dublin hospital for varicose veins. Her friend contacted the CPRSI, who contacted the relevant local authority - but the county manager disputed the address given as not in the county; and noted that the woman's family was 'fairly well-to do', i.e. that they should pay for her maintenance in a home. The woman was determined that they should not be informed. The desperation is captured in the note on this file 'Can anything be done?' An official in the Department of Health persuaded the Dublin health authority to pay for this woman, who was allegedly a nurse in their employment, but Dublin then disputed the personal details given. After a lengthy correspondence, Dublin did pay her bill in Sean Ross and the CPRSI arranged for the baby's adoption.

- 8.36 A summary of this work written by Miss Clandillon in 1970 noted the difficulties in persuading local authorities of the need to maintain confidentiality. When one 20-year-old woman, the daughter of a county council labourer in Meath, whose parents were unaware of her condition, was being repatriated from England, an assistance officer turned up at her parents' home demanding payment for her maintenance in Sean Ross. The department inspector asked a senior official to raise this behaviour with the county manager. One 18-year-old Galway woman had gone to England when she discovered she was pregnant: her mother knew of her pregnancy, her father did not and the putative father, a local man, had gone to America. The woman and her married sister in England were anxious that she should not go to Tuam, which was close to her home, so the department contacted the county manager (without divulging her name) to secure agreement for her

admission to a special home. He replied that he 'cannot justify extra cost of maintenance in extern home and presumes girl cannot contribute to difference'. The CPRSI attempted to secure the necessary money from her married sister, and they were willing to take the baby 'at a few weeks old', which would reduce the expense. It is unclear what happened. Another county manager told the department that he would pay transport costs to Castlepollard, but not to any other home. The woman, who had returned from England, travelled to Castlepollard by bus. When one Wexford woman was admitted to St Kevin's Hospital pregnant, the Wexford county manager demanded details of her parents' circumstances, and whether they knew of her pregnancy 'so that the usual investigations can be made'. She was admitted to Castlepollard, but he refused to pay for her maintenance. A woman who had been working in England for four years, and returned home to Wicklow to care for her mother and find a job locally became pregnant. The county manager disputed liability on the grounds that she had only recently returned to the county.

- 8.37 The file on one baby born in Castlepollard to a woman who lived on a small farm with her widowed mother and brothers - the latter did not know about the baby, though her mother did - noted that her baby was boarded out in Westmeath for £2 5s a month. Two local officials were alleged to have visited the baby's mother, who was described as 'not very sound mentally', and persuaded her to give an undertaking that her sister who worked in Dublin earning 35s a week would contribute 5s a week towards the maintenance of the baby. This sister contributed £1 a month but Westmeath then demanded an additional £1; the woman claimed that 'threats were made of making trouble for the baby's mother if she didn't pay'. The local NSPCC officer was making arrangements for the child's (age not stated) admission to an industrial school. This confrontation probably occurred because the child was boarded out in Westmeath, whereas the mother's home address was in Offaly.
- 8.38 The department approached the Galway county manager asking him to agree that a baby with a serious medical condition, the 'illegitimate' child of a Galway woman who was a domestic servant in Dublin, could be treated in the central hospital in Galway. The mother planned to resume her job in Dublin, but the county manager refused to assist, leaving the department trying to persuade St Kevin's Hospital to take the baby. In the case of a young woman from Wexford, who had worked as a domestic servant in Dublin for four months and for a previous 15 months in

Wicklow, Wexford refused to assume responsibility. Wicklow also tried to avoid paying for her upkeep in Castlepollard. In 1950 the county manager of Cork would admit a woman who was being repatriated from Birmingham only to the west Cork county home; he justified this decision (which was contrary to the department's policy that unmarried mothers should not be in county homes), because, he claimed it was impossible to get paid help for the county home. This unfortunate woman was willing to go to any home provided that her relatives were not informed. In 1955 the county manager in Louth refused to admit a woman and baby returning from England to any home other than the district hospital in Drogheda or Dundalk, which was also contrary to department policy. When asked for an explanation, he replied that he would reconsider the decision if he received a "firm undertaking" from the CPRSI to assume responsibility for the baby when it was six months old'. In the event, an English Catholic charity arranged for the baby's adoption, relieving the county manager of all charges. A Tipperary county manager tried to send a mother on her second pregnancy to the county home in 1959, which was also contrary to government policy. When the department contacted the county manager in Wicklow about an 18-year-old woman from that county who had been referred by St Patrick's Guild, they noted that the county manager 'does not consider family worth helping - standard poor, sister had forced marriage in April'. Sister Elizabeth of St Patrick's Guild suggested that in view of her age it would be better to send this woman to Castlepollard or Sean Ross, rather than the county home, and the department inspector agreed to write again to the county manager. When the Carlow county manager was asked to take financial responsibility for a woman who was a native of that county and had been living there when she became pregnant, he demanded to know the whereabouts of the putative father; it was reported that he had disappeared when informed of the pregnancy. One file records a complaint from Fr Barrett relating to a woman being repatriated from England, who did not want her parents informed of her pregnancy; the Longford county manager had contacted her mother 'on question of maintenance'. The Monaghan county manager refused to assume financial responsibility for a PFI unless he was given the name of the putative father; the English social worker who was dealing with this woman reported that she was unwilling to divulge it. In the case of one woman from Clare who gave birth in Birmingham, having left Ireland when pregnant by a local man, Fr Barrett phoned the department to report that the mother and child welfare committee in Birmingham were 'worried about girl. Had stopped a letter from her mother to girl telling her that 3 [underlined in original] gentlemen had been out to her house and

had informed her of daughter's condition - she was not to return home ever!' The department informed Fr Barrett that they would write to the county manager seeking an explanation.

- 8.39 Galway was the local authority that showed the greatest determination to extract financial contributions. When they were contacted about a woman who was returning from London having gone there pregnant, the 'county secretary agreed [to accept financial responsibility] but mentioned that family circles might be investigated and contributions asked'. The department stressed that this woman's parents were not aware of her pregnancy and should not be informed. When one Galway woman was being repatriated from Birmingham, Canon Flint was informed that 'there is no alternative to the Children's Home Tuam'. On this occasion the county manager 'agreed to admit to Children's Home provided girl disclose name of father of the child with view to proceedings for maintenance'. The department inspector advised a representative of the CPRSI, who was arranging for mother and baby to return home - it was her second child - that 'if girl presented herself to Children's Home Tuam she would probably be admitted but there would be no use in asking County Manager beforehand'. These files contain a limited number of cases where politicians became involved. General Sean MacEoin, a Longford/Westmeath TD, intervened 'to vouch for bona fides' of one woman. Longford had refused to pay for her upkeep in a mother and baby home, but the county manager subsequently agreed - presumably as a result of political intervention. One woman who had been in Castlepollard with her infant, left the home and took up employment as a domestic servant for a county manager; he placed her child in the county home. Her mother informed the department that the county manager had written saying that if her daughter left his employment she would have to remove her child. A further letter from the same woman stated that she was satisfied with the position.

Families

- 8.40 The most common response of a family member(s) to news of an extra-marital pregnancy was a determination to protect the woman's reputation and that of her family. Some women travelled to Dublin or to England, determined that their families would not know about the pregnancy; others confided in one or two close relatives. Most of the women whose case notes survive left home; the collection contains very few Dublin women. The most desperate women were those without families - daughters of unmarried mothers, former 'inmates' of industrial schools or

former foster children. In a number of cases, both parents had died, and the pregnant woman had no immediate family to whom she might turn in search of advice or assistance. One woman working as a domestic servant in Drumcondra went to High Park Convent (a Magdalen asylum) seeking advice. One of the saddest stories concerns an 18-year old, who was pregnant for the second time. She had sought admission to Pelletstown, apparently on her own initiative; they sent her to the CPRSI. She had been raised by named woman (address given) and thought that this woman was her mother, but was never told that she was a foster child. Her first baby, born in Sean Ross, had been adopted. She did not wish to marry the father of her second child and had not informed him of her pregnancy. She was given temporary accommodation in Regina Coeli pending admission to Castlepollard. A 21-year-old woman, born in the Wicklow county home to a single mother, went to England and gave birth there; mother and child returned to the county home where she was born. A 24-year-old factory worker who was pregnant in England had been in St Vincent's convent Limerick (an industrial school) until she was 14 years old. She was unable to read or write. She hoped to marry the father of her child and was trying to locate her baptismal certificate. A 19-year old who returned to Ireland of her own accord, when she discovered she was pregnant, could not read or write. The eldest of eight children, she claimed that her parents kept her at home from school to mind the other children. One woman's file stated that her baby was due around the same time as her mother's ninth child.

Concealment

- 8.41 A constant theme, especially from women who had gone to England, was that their family should not be informed. Other women had informed one or two family members of their pregnancy, but were adamant that other relatives should not be told. The sister of one 18-year-old woman planned to persuade her to inform her parents, but the department inspector suggested that 'it would not be wise for this to be done without her consent'. One woman who had been keeping house for three bachelor brothers would rather withdraw her application for assistance from the public assistance authority than have them informed of her pregnancy. She was in difficult circumstances, now living with a married sister; her brother-in-law refused to let her remain in his house. One pregnant woman thought that her mother might have detected the pregnancy 'but became tearful when it was suggested she should tell her definitely'. All communication with one woman had to be sent to a local priest, who was 'helping the girl'. She lived with her parents

who were unaware of her pregnancy. A 19-year old who gave birth in her home had succeeded in concealing her pregnancy until the birth. The married sister of one pregnant woman who was staying with her in Dublin was 'in a panic to get her away before her condition becomes apparent'. A nurse in a mental hospital was sending money home to support her widowed mother and did not wish her to know about the pregnancy. The cost of her stay in Sean Ross was met by the Dublin health authority; her child was taken by St Patrick's Guild.

- 8.42 Some parents were supportive. The mother of one pregnant 18-year old contacted the CPRSI to say that her daughter had returned home and was being cared for by her local doctor, so she no longer needed a place in a mother and baby home. This mother thought they might contact the society at a later date (presumably about adoption). A 16-year-old girl who ran away from home on discovering she was pregnant was brought by the Gardaí to Gloucester Street Magdalen Home; they sent her to St Kevin's. When her father was contacted (presumably by either the Gardaí or the authorities in St Kevin's) he came to Dublin to bring her home (she was only three months pregnant), until she went to Sean Ross. Some women asked a social worker, Miss Litster or another third party to contact their parents and ask whether they would take her home.

Rejection

- 8.43 Reports of sympathetic parents are outweighed by stories of rejection. A Clare woman who returned home from England pregnant, asked to be admitted immediately to a mother and baby home because her mother would not keep her at home. One woman was 'turned out of her house by step-father - a publican with £5'; the putative father denied responsibility. A priest from the Oblate Order contacted St Patrick's Guild on her behalf, and the county manager agreed to pay for her maintenance in Sean Ross, leaving the possibility of extracting a contribution from her family to a later date. A 20-year-old woman from Cork, who was returned to Ireland, had previously lived in her family home with her father and a married sister (there is no information as to whether the married sister's husband and/or family lived there); her sister and father 'put her out'. A woman, whose mother was dead and whose father had remarried, gave birth in her aunt's home, but when another niece returned from England, her aunt refused to let mother and baby stay. She dispatched them to Dublin to the new mother's sister; she refused to help, and sent mother and baby to St Kevin's. The CPRSI agreed to take the baby in about two months. One woman whose parents disowned her when they

discovered that she was pregnant (the father of her child wanted to marry her but she refused - it is unclear whether this affected her parents' attitude) was sent to England by her local doctor and priest, but was returned home within two weeks, and admitted to Castlepollard. A woman, who was living at home with her widowed father and her brother and his wife, was admitted to Holles Street with a threatened miscarriage; her brother refused to let her return home. She went to Castlepollard. One mother, who knew of her daughter's pregnancy, 'refuses to have anything to do with her'.

- 8.44 One of the most harrowing stories (not from these files) concerns a young woman who gave birth in the county home in Wexford in 1960 and left with her seven-week-old baby to return home. She returned to the county home having slept in the fields with her child for two nights; her family refused to let her into the house.⁷ A 20-year-old woman travelled to Dublin 'having been turned out of her home by her father on discovery of her condition'. The mother of a two-month-old baby who was in St Kevin's agreed that her mother could be informed of the birth; she wrote to Fr Barrett rejecting her daughter and grandchild. A happier story concerns a shop assistant who was living in Dublin with her two sisters. She left them a note stating that she had gone to work in Belfast. When they discovered through a friend that she was pregnant, and in a Dublin nursing home, they visited her. Less happy was the experience of an 18-year old from near Tuam. The English authorities wrote to her parents informing them of her pregnancy. Her mother refused to have her daughter home, and insisted that she should not be admitted to Tuam. The county manager would only agree to this if her parents agreed to pay £1 2s 6d (presumably per month) - which was the difference between rates in Tuam and in a special home. He insisted on a signed undertaking from her mother before authorising this. It is unclear what happened.
- 8.45 Some families may have rejected a pregnant daughter because they lacked the means to assist her, or were unwilling to do so, because they were poor and with large numbers of dependent children. The mother of a pregnant 16-year old was reported as 'having very little means at her disposal and is unwilling to take other members of the family into her confidence'. This woman's sister told the department inspector that Fr Barrett would not take the baby; they referred her to St Patrick's Guild. Some of the women who contacted the Custom House are

⁷ Department of Health, INACT/INF/0/499216.

recorded as one of 11, 14, even 16 children - many still at home, and it would have been difficult to welcome a daughter and her child into such crowded and often impoverished households.

- 8.46 The file on a Kerry woman living with her widowed mother and brother on a small farm - her five sisters were all married - recorded that mother and brother were aware, 'but have done nothing'. The woman was admitted to the Rotunda. After the birth, the almoner contacted her local parish priest and they tried to place her baby with one of her married sisters, who was childless, but the file recorded 'not much hope'. Mother and baby went to Dunboyne. One woman, who had gone to England aged 15 to work as a domestic servant, and remained there for approximately five years, returning pregnant to Ireland, was reported to have 'lost touch with her family for years - did not know how many brothers and sisters she had at home'. She alleged that her parents were not interested in her. The father of her child, described as non-Catholic, paid her fare to Ireland; she was admitted to Sean Ross. The file on one 19-year old who had given birth at home noted 'Conditions unpleasant for her at home'. The county manager was reluctant to agree to pay for her upkeep in a special home. A local priest brought her to the offices of the CPRSI. He reported that 'set up at home very bad - girl's father does not speak to any of the family and she is afraid of what he might do to the baby'. This priest contacted the county secretary who approved her upkeep in a special home. The woman indicated that she wanted her baby to be adopted.
- 8.47 One of the most disturbing cases concerned an 18-year old who was in Regina Coeli. She had been living at home with her parents in provincial Ireland; when she informed them of her pregnancy, 'Her own father (a Civic Guard) beat her badly'. Her mother sent her to an aunt in Dublin, but her aunt refused to keep her - hence her arrival in Regina Coeli. They referred her to the Rotunda. When she was examined, the hospital insisted that she remain there until her baby was born. The department suggested that one of the Regina Coeli volunteers should suggest to her father that he should 'approach the Co. Manager and make arrangements [for admission] to Castlepollard'; the local authority required him to pay 10s weekly towards the cost.

Family Strategies

- 8.48 While some women went to England or to Dublin to prevent their families knowing of the pregnancy, others travelled with the advice and assistance of family

members. A Sligo family sent their pregnant daughter to England, where she gave birth, 'to get child adopted' but she was returned and admitted to Castlepollard. This was not an uncommon story. A 20-year old went to England in 1957 accompanied by her mother; her father was said to have 'disowned her'. A mother who travelled to England with her pregnant daughter and tried to 'make arrangements there' - her husband did not know of the pregnancy - returned to Ireland with her daughter having failed to do so. The daughter was admitted to a special home. One of the oldest women was a 45-year old, with an elderly mother and brother who were described as 'very poor'; the woman was described as a cripple; the putative father was a migratory worker, roughly 20 years younger. When her mother and brother became aware that she was pregnant they sent her to Birmingham, where a social worker with a Catholic charity arranged for her to return to Ireland by plane. She was admitted to Castlepollard, and it was discovered that she had TB. The Sisters wanted her to be moved to a sanatorium, but the medical officer sent her to the Coombe Hospital, where her baby was delivered by caesarean section. Mother and baby returned to Birmingham where it was reported that her married sister would take her child. It emerged that the infant had cerebral palsy, so the mother returned to Ireland to care for her elderly mother and asked that her child be returned to Ireland. It is unclear what happened to this child.

- 8.49 The parents of one woman who became pregnant by her second cousin encouraged her to go to England, but the Catholic Welfare Society told her that they would be unable to arrange adoption because of the relationship between the infant's parents. They tried to send her back to Ireland to give birth, but she refused to travel. One of the most unusual cases concerns a 19-year old who went to her great grandfather in Liverpool. Her widowed father was aware of the pregnancy but refused to permit her to bring her child home because there were seven children resident in the house. Her great grandfather urged a priest in Liverpool to arrange for the baby's adoption. The woman was described as 'a decent respectable girl' but easily influenced.
- 8.50 A family member, most commonly the mother, might contact agencies such as the CPRSI seeking advice and assistance. This was especially common in cases of teenage pregnancy. The mother of a 15-year-old girl, one of ten children, contacted the CPRSI; the file noted that the family were farmers and would be in a position to pay for the adoption. One 79-year-old father accompanied his pregnant

daughter to England. He had hoped to trace the putative father but failed to do so and was returning to Ireland. Father and daughter were staying with another daughter, in one room; this daughter had recently been discharged from a sanatorium. A small farmer, the father of 14 children, brought his 24-year-old pregnant daughter to Dublin where he assumed that arrangements would be made for her care; she claimed to have been assaulted. A mother travelled to England to bring back her pregnant daughter, who had been diagnosed with a heart condition; she also brought back a second daughter, who was working in England. Another mother contacted the department seeking her daughters' admission to a mother and baby home; she did so to avoid having to send her to the local dispensary doctor - which was the normal channel for admission. The mother of a Cavan woman asked the Sisters of Killeshandra convent to contact the department on her daughter's behalf, perhaps because her husband was not aware of the pregnancy.

- 8.51 Mothers were the family members who were most sympathetically disposed towards a daughter's pregnancy, but they often had to face a hostile husband or son. One woman, who wanted her daughter and baby to be admitted to the local county home, would try to persuade her husband 'to take her home, he is not disposed to do this at present'. The note on one file states: 'Father old. On his death mother will allow [...] to take child home'. The department hoped that a young epileptic woman would be taken home, the mother indicated that she would ask 'brother [presumably the brother of the pregnant woman] if he would consent' to this. In the case of one child, born in Sean Ross, who was described as 'retarded', the maternal grandmother was willing to take the child but a son who lived with her 'threatened to walk out of the house if the child was taken over the threshold'. The infant was eventually given a medical certificate, apparently clearing the infant for adoption in the USA. By this stage the maternal grandmother was no longer willing to accept her daughter (without her child) back into her home.⁸ In 1967 the mother of a pregnant unmarried woman wrote to Fr Good, of St Anne's adoption society, because she was too ashamed to contact her local priest. In the course of telling him about her daughter's pregnancy, she wrote that: 'I am afraid the brothers will give her a beating and of course she would deserve it if they did but the [quiet] way is the best way'.⁹

⁸ Department of Health, INACT/INA/O/464099

⁹ Cork diocesan archives, St Anne's adoption society, box 3.

- 8.52 The matron of Pelletstown was contacted by the local priest and the mother of a pregnant 17-year-old woman, who explained that she was partly dependent on her daughter's wages to run the home. Arrangements were being made for her baby to be adopted.
- 8.53 Some parents sent a pregnant daughter to live with a married sister, or a married aunt in England or in Dublin, and some pregnant women did likewise without informing their parents of the pregnancy. A Kerry woman, who went to her sister in Birmingham, had not told her parents she was pregnant and did not wish them to know. Her sister wrote and told them. A Donegal woman, described as 'a bit simple', was brought to Glasgow by a married sister when it emerged that she was pregnant. When the baby was several months old this sister brought mother and baby to the local Catholic welfare society, hoping to arrange an adoption, but they suggested that the baby might have special needs. A woman who went to her aunt's house in Leicester, apparently without telling her that she was pregnant, was asked to leave. A 15-year old who was sexually assaulted was sent by her parents to her married sister in England; she contacted the London county council who took her into care and were arranging for her to be escorted back to Ireland by Miss Harris (see Chapter 7). Another 17-year old, who had been sent to her sister in England, was returning, because there was no room for her. A brother was escorting her back to Ireland. This was not an uncommon story - there was an acute housing shortage in England in the aftermath of the war, and Irish families may not have realised that married couples might be living in cramped accommodation with no space to keep a pregnant sibling. Another woman who was staying with her sister had to leave because the landlady objected to her being there. She had been engaged to the father of her child, who now refused to marry her. One woman who went to her married sister in England was told that her brother-in-law would not allow her to stay. A 17-year old was sent to an aunt in Lancashire, who immediately contacted the local Catholic welfare society, and planned to accompany her back to Ireland. A woman, who arrived in London accompanied by her sister, who brought her to their brother's house, was immediately sent back to Ireland with the same sister - who was returning to her work. A woman, who had been working in England for some time, but became pregnant when home on holidays, was brought back to Ireland by her brother who worked in England. He was 'very anxious about her - not too sound mentally'; he had to return to his job in England. She was placed in a psychiatric hospital, having originally been destined for Sean Ross.

8.54 A woman who was sexually assaulted while working in Belfast, went to America 'knowing she was pregnant', but returned to Ireland some months later - her brother paid her fare. Her parents were dead but her siblings in Ireland were not aware that she had returned. The parents of an 18-year-old woman died shortly after she had been admitted to Sean Ross. The department contacted the county manager, asking for her child to be taken into care so that she could return home to mind her younger siblings - there was a family of eight.

Putative fathers, and a possible marriage

8.55 Most files record information about putative fathers, though not the names. They were farmers' sons, labourers, factory workers, commercial travellers, plus an occasional married man or older man. Files from the early and mid-1940s record putative fathers who were in military service, in Ireland or Britain; including members of the American or Canadian forces; one woman named a German prisoner of war, who was held in Ireland. In at least one case where a woman repatriated from England in 1944 named the putative of father as an army private based at Finner Camp in Donegal, the department wrote to his commanding officer.

8.56 Many pregnant women went to England, as did many of the putative fathers. Some men went to avoid the anger and retribution of the woman's family and perhaps that of the local community. Emigration also meant that they could avoid interrogation by local authority officials and demands for a contribution towards the cost of maintaining mother and child. Stories of men accompanying a pregnant girlfriend to England having promised to marry her, only to abandon her there, are all too common. In one case the father of the putative father, a cattle dealer, gave the woman £50. One woman went to England believing she was pregnant and was followed by her boyfriend. She was not pregnant but became pregnant in England. The file on a 17-year old who was admitted to a county home, noted that 'girl appears to have been completely taken in by put. father who has since had to marry another girl'.

8.57 England was not the only bolt-hole. Other men emigrated to Canada or the USA. In one case where a wedding had been arranged three months earlier, 'on the eve of the wedding the putative father absconded to England'. A farm labourer followed the mother of his unborn child to England, apparently anxious that they marry, but changed his mind. She returned to Ireland and went to either

Castlepollard or Bessborough. When the daughter of a small farmer in Kerry announced that she was pregnant, the putative father, a local farmer 'said he was sorry but he had a girl in America whom he intended to marry'. A woman who gave birth to a still-born infant in the local hospital later went to England pregnant, with the father of her child, who abandoned her. Her mother was aware of this second pregnancy but her father did not know - he was reported as having been very upset over her first pregnancy. This woman was reported to be living in a very bad area.

- 8.58 One of the most common reactions, throughout history, to the pregnancy of an unmarried woman was to arrange for her to marry the father of her child. Some files note that the couple married, and plans for the woman's admission to a special home are dropped. One man was willing to marry, but would not accept the baby - an indication of the stigma associated with fathering a child outside marriage. One woman was engaged to marry a man who was not the father of her baby; her fiancé was aware of the pregnancy but would not take the baby; neither would her family. The RGAS hoped to arrange an adoption 'fairly quickly'. The department suggested that she go to Regina Coeli until the adoption was arranged because they believed her local authority would dispute maintenance, presumably because her family was described as 'fairly comfortable'. The more relaxed regime in Regina Coeli also facilitated continuing contact between the woman and her fiancé. In one case where a woman who gave birth in England, having lived there for several years, was returning to Ireland, the file noted that the putative father was prepared to marry her 'but there is a temporary estrangement', and the 'county manager fears sending her to Castlepollard will impede their getting together'. He would prefer that she remain in Regina Coeli - a decision that also relieved him of the cost of maintaining her.
- 8.59 In some instances a woman's parents or a local priest tried to arrange a marriage; likewise English Catholic welfare societies. Several files record that the father of the putative father 'would not agree to marriage, matter in the hands of a solicitor'; such cases were almost invariably initiated by the woman's parents. One woman who had gone to England disclosed that the father of her child was a temporary national teacher in her home parish; the parish priest met the young man, but he refused to marry her - it is unlikely that he secured a permanent post in that parish. When an Irish woman working in England became engaged to the father of her future child - an RAF officer - her parents made contact with him independently

and discovered that he was married. One Irish woman in Birmingham gave birth to two children by the same Irishman. The first child was adopted through Birmingham social services. Canon Flint tried to arrange for their marriage, but the file noted 'no hope now'; she was repatriated to Ireland on her second pregnancy. Her mother was aware of the first child but not of the second pregnancy. The mother of one pregnant woman acknowledged that the name and address given to the almoner in the Rotunda was incorrect. This mother was keen to institute proceedings against the putative father; her daughter who was now in Castlepollard eventually divulged details. The parents of one woman contacted the department to secure her admission to a mother and baby home, but the last record on file stated that their daughter had divulged the name of the father of her child and a marriage was being arranged.

- 8.60 Cases where the woman's parents were utterly opposed to marriage are at least as common as reports that her parents were trying to arrange one. The widowed mother of one pregnant woman dismissed the putative father as a 'featherhead' and indicated that she would not agree to their marrying; the family - farmers - was described as 'quite comfortably circumstanced'. The mother of one 23-year old would not permit her to marry the 18-year-old father of her child; both went to England, but she was returned and was admitted to Sean Ross. The parents of a 29-year-old pregnant woman originally opposed her marriage to her 19-year-old boyfriend, however the young man, who worked in England, visited on several occasions and they eventually agreed. The fact that he was Protestant, and she was apparently Catholic, may have also been a factor in their opposition. One 20-year-old woman who went to England with the father of her child - a next-door neighbour - was uncertain about marrying him because her parents were opposed to their marriage and were not aware of her pregnancy. One woman was living with the father of her child - a widower; they had arranged to marry and had bought a wedding dress and furniture but she was now unwilling to marry him 'as he has begun to ill-treat her' so arrangements were made for her return to Ireland.
- 8.61 In one case neither set of parents would agree to marriage. The woman and man were only children; the putative father was unemployed and he was unwell, probably suffering from TB - many Irish families would have ruled out marriage in a case of TB. The woman was sent to Dublin by a Dominican priest in Cork; she was 'absolutely without money', living in a bedsit but had nothing to eat. The department asked this priest to contact the county manager. A further report

noted that 'the girl is greatly disturbed'; her boyfriend told her that the priest had seen the county manager who stated that the board (presumably health authority) would have to be consulted. They feared that their fathers would learn of the pregnancy; the woman's father was a friend of the manager. The department contacted the county manager - presumably to ensure confidentiality; he gave approval for her admission to Castlepollard or Sean Ross.

- 8.62 Social distinctions between families could prevent couples from marrying. Matchmaking and dowries had not yet disappeared in rural Ireland. Parents might oppose marriage if a proposed spouse or a family member suffered from TB, physical or intellectual disability or mental illness. One 19-year old, the son of a 'well to do farmer', admitted paternity of a child whose mother was the daughter of a local gardener and lodge keeper but he later denied paternity when his father was present. A man was willing to marry a 16-year-old woman, who was pregnant with his child. She was described as crippled because of contracting polio; however the file notes that 'parents consider marriage unwise in view of her crippled condition'. The pregnant daughter of a labourer had been 'keeping company' with the 22-year-old son of a guard and a teacher - his parents objected to the relationship. The young couple went to Birmingham, presumably because of the pregnancy, and lived together as a married couple. The girl's parents addressed letters to her as Mrs X. Her parish priest (in Ireland) tried to persuade the woman to return following the birth of their child and enter a special home. He claimed that her parents would press her to return - but it is unclear what happened. The opposition of the young man's parents probably reflected the fact the woman was only 16-years old and a labourer's daughter. In the case of one pregnant woman, who was described as 'a cripple...uses a crutch' the putative father, a lorry driver, would not marry her. (It may be that her handicap was the reason.) The county manager was determined to pursue this man for maintenance. In one case where a marriage had been arranged the putative father had a nervous breakdown and was admitted to a mental hospital. When the woman visited him after the birth of their child, she determined that it would be unwise for them to marry. The CPRSI took her infant. The file noted - underlined 'People not to be informed'. Another couple planned to marry but the putative father had TB and a doctor advised that they postpone any decision. A nurse in a sanatorium, who became pregnant by a patient, was 'terrified in case he may find out'. She was staying with the proprietor of a Dublin nursing home, who claimed that the 'girl is not very responsible, stays out late at night...perhaps it might be

better for her to remain a few months with baby'. She was admitted to Sean Ross. The couple had arranged to marry, but the wedding was deferred when the man had to return to the sanatorium. Meanwhile the woman's sister had written to a priest who knew about the pregnancy, urging that they should not marry. Records indicate that the child was adopted.

- 8.63 The file relating to a Kerry woman who came to Dublin and lodged in a private house, when she discovered that she was pregnant, stated 'no chance of marriage', and arrangements were made for her admission to Bessborough. But a representative of St Patrick's Guild phoned some days later and reported that a marriage had been arranged and cancelled the Bessborough booking. A further entry noted that the records almoner in St Kevin's reported that the woman had been admitted and 'there was apparently no question of marriage'. In another case a marriage was arranged for a 21-year-old pregnant woman, but not with the putative father. In the case of a woman who became pregnant in England the putative father would marry her but only in a registry office. One case concerned a widow with children, and the putative father, her brother-in-law who was a widower with children. The initial report stated 'no question of marriage', but a later note stated that 'PP has arranged marriage and obtained dispensation'. A file on the 19-year-old farmer's daughter, whose child was fathered by the son of a neighbouring farmer, notes, 'advised informing the PP and trying to arrange marriage, otherwise parents to get in touch with Manor House' [Castlepollard]. One woman went to England with the father of her child, who promised to marry her, and was living with him when the child was born, but he had no intention of marrying. The English social worker who met the couple reported that 'the girl feels let down', and was willing to enter a special home. The Wexford county manager inquired whether her family could contribute to her maintenance; the department confirmed that the parents were not aware of the baby; they persuaded the local authority to pay for her maintenance. A pregnant woman who was referred to Miss Litster, but did not keep her appointment, turned up five years later (no explanation given). She had married the father of her child; they were now parents of four children, 'poor but happy and children are well and healthy'.
- 8.64 One putative father was the woman's widowed brother-in-law. The parish priest reported that there was a prospect of marriage, but the man went to England. The pregnant 18-year-old woman told an almoner in St Kevin's that there had been no arrangements for marriage and her parents would not permit her to marry her

brother-in-law. This report suggests that there was a disagreement between her parents and the priest; the woman's views are not stated. There were other cases where the putative father was a brother-in-law.

- 8.65 A 40-year-old farmer would not marry the local woman who was pregnant with his child, but he appears to have been in contact with the local priest and doctor. Another man paid for the woman to travel to England and promised to marry her, but was recorded as having no intention of doing so. An 'older' woman (35 years) became pregnant by a married man, who brought her to England and 'parked her with relations of his own', before returning to his wife in Ireland. A Cork woman who had been living in England with the father of her child and was pregnant for a second time, was reported to be willing to return to a mother and baby home provided that she could bring her first child. When one woman told the father of her child that she was pregnant he gave her £10 and suggested that she should 'go away'.
- 8.66 Many men abandoned long-term girlfriends on discovering that they were pregnant. It may be that the rate of non-marriage in such circumstances was higher in Ireland than elsewhere. A 39-year-old woman, who fled to London, had been 'keeping company with man responsible for 9 years'. He also left the country when he learned of her pregnancy. She was admitted to hospital in London suffering from extremely high blood pressure; instructions were given that she was not to be given any exciting news. Her baby was born by caesarean section and adopted in Cork. She returned to her job in a Dublin department store, which had been held for her by the employer. Another pregnant assistant who travelled to England, by agreement, to meet the father of her child - a shop assistant from the same town - who had agreed to marry her in England, could not find him when she arrived. Her story was not unique.
- 8.67 Some putative fathers were unable to marry the mother of their child because they were unable to support a wife and family, or did not own or control the family farm. In the 1950s Ireland had the lowest rate of marriage in the western world and the latest age of marriage. One man told the woman that he could not afford to marry her. A 20-year-old woman went to England with the father of her child at an early stage in her pregnancy, and lived with him there. He told her that 'he can't afford to marry', so the Birmingham Catholic Welfare Society determined to return her to Ireland. This was a tragic family - her mother was in a mental hospital and two

family members were being treated for TB. There are cases where a couple had two 'illegitimate' children; some of these men were married, others were single, yet files record no prospect of marriage, as in the case of a 19-year-old Limerick woman. The file on a 20-year-old shorthand typist reported 'had hopes of marriage but man now unwilling'.

- 8.68 Some women were unwilling to supply any details about the putative father of their children or they were unable to do so. One explained that she had been home from England at Christmas, and was drinking in a public house with two men - she did not know which man was the father of her child. A farmer's daughter who became pregnant by the son of the next door neighbour was determined that neither family should know of the pregnancy. Several women claimed that the putative father had been killed in an accident - some specified road accidents; such stories may reflect an unwillingness to divulge a name; some may be true. One woman reported that he would have married her, but was killed. One woman had 'narrowed down to two', the possible fathers. One file noted that the putative father was 'usual behind a bush'. Several women said that they became pregnant by men they had met at a dance. Such stories would have confirmed the worst fears of many priests, who thundered about 'the devil at dances' and similar themes. One putative father was reported to be 'engaged to another girl apparently in same condition'. Several men had given the women false names or false addresses; others met them always at a cinema or a public place and the women did not know their address. The putative father of the unborn child of a Kildare woman who was physically handicapped, arranged for them to marry, but then went to England. Her mother informed the Gardaí. The local doctor who examined the woman referred to a 'bottle of pills' produced by the PF. This woman's widowed mother was willing to raise her child but sought 'Assistance' (presumably home assistance). One 20-year old who was in America for two years became pregnant by a college student (described as not coloured), and came home because her father was ill. She went to London but returned to Ireland. Most women knew the identity of the father of their child, who was often a long-term boyfriend.
- 8.69 It was quite common for the putative father to deny parentage. A building worker, who followed a pregnant woman to Dublin and visited her in hospital, when interviewed at his place of work, apparently by a department inspector, said 'plenty of others as well as me'. There are many stories of duplicity, family opposition to a

marriage and other domestic dramas. In the case of one pregnant woman, working in Dublin who had been admitted to Castlepollard, her parish priest interviewed the putative father and reported that his parents opposed the marriage, but he was willing to marry her and had asked for her discharge. However no marriage materialised - the next report indicated that he had left the country.

Complex Stories

- 8.70 A number of pregnancies were the result of sexual assault; some were incestuous, and in other cases either the woman or the man was married. Some of the most difficult cases concern pregnant widows, who probably suffered a higher level of social ostracism than a single woman. There were several cases of women who were living with a married sister and became pregnant by their brother-in-law. A number of men, or more unusually women had entered into a bigamous marriage. Some putative fathers paid for the woman's maintenance and the child's 'adoption'. One married man was recorded as in good standing. A married woman, who gave birth to two children who were not her husband's, was maintained in a private nursing home in Dublin by the putative father.
- 8.71 One woman returned from England with her four children to be admitted to a county home - her 'common law' English husband and father of her children was in prison. One woman was brought to St Patrick's Guild by the mother of the father of her child - a married lorry driver, who was separated from his wife, and childless - he had served time in prison. He had 'installed her in a flat in Rathmines'. This woman was described as willing to go to a special home but 'does not wish to part with her baby at present'. A young woman who had been living in London for two years was admitted to St Pelagia's Home, pregnant - her baby was 'coloured'. The home was run by the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts but, in contrast to their Irish homes, they allowed women to leave the home on outings. While in St Pelagia's this young woman became involved with a married man in his fifties. His wife and family contacted the Crusade of Rescue, claiming that the marriage was breaking up because of her, so they determined to send her back to Ireland 'immediately because of moral situation'. She was sent to Dublin at short notice and admitted to Pelletstown while arrangements were being made for her to go to Bessborough. It is unlikely that she was permitted 'outings'. One married woman who was pregnant by a man who was not her husband was referred by a local priest to St Rita's, Sandford Road (Mrs Keating's nursing home - see Chapter 2). She had to pay £3 3s a week for the maintenance of her child, who was described

as 'mentally deficient'. The department explored possible homes for the child; the baby was sent to Stamullen (see Chapter 2) where the county manager would pay for his maintenance, after some delay because of his state of health and lack of vacancy. A married woman, mother of two 'legitimate' children, whose husband was in the British army, had an extra-marital birth. The authorities in Cardiff were concerned to repatriate her because they feared she would abandon her third child. Some married men were prepared to make a contribution towards the cost of adoption; one Galway man stipulated that his wife must not be informed. One married man 'of good standing' who was the putative father of the child of a woman being repatriated was contacted by the CPRSI and asked to pay for her accommodation as a private patient in a mother and baby home.

- 8.72 A young widow with one child, whose husband had committed suicide, fled to England pregnant, leaving her child with her mother. She stayed with a relative but after the birth it emerged that she was suffering from TB. English and Irish Catholic charities, the department and the county manager were all involved in making decisions in this instance. It was arranged that the woman 'a stretcher case' would travel to a sanatorium in Ireland, accompanied by a Red Cross nurse; an ambulance would meet them at the boat. Her mother would be paid to maintain her child; however her child was boarded out, after a short stay in a district hospital. This was one of several cases where the personal tragedy of an extra-marital pregnancy was compounded by TB. One woman who had given birth four years previously and was living with her child in Regina Coeli contracted TB and had to be admitted to a hospital close to her family home. The department arranged for the care of her child while she was in hospital; her parents were not aware of the child.
- 8.73 A young Irish woman, who left her husband with whom she had two children, went to London to live with her married sister and had a child by her brother-in-law. When her sister learned of this child's parentage she arranged for him to be taken by London county council. The mother was reconciled with her husband in Ireland, and he was aware of the child's existence, 'and would have it here only for his mother who lives with them and will not have the child about the place at all'. It was hoped that he could be boarded out nearby until his mother died.¹⁰

¹⁰ Cork Diocesan Archives, St Anne's Adoption Society box 12.

- 8.74 The mother of one 22-year-old repatriated woman in Regina Coeli had to be contacted to sign papers committing her to a psychiatric hospital. It is unclear whether her mother had been aware of her pregnancy. The department went to considerable efforts to have her child admitted to Stamullen, to the point of asking a county manager to get a Stamullen child boarded out to make way for this infant. By the mid-1950s Stamullen had emerged as the institution where infants whose mothers could not care for them were sent; such as the one-month old child of a TB sufferer with one lung, who was returned from England, who needed medical attention.
- 8.75 Some of the most complex stories relate to women who were separated from their husbands. One 39-year-old Cork woman, mother of three children, had been separated for five years. One child was being raised by her mother, two by her husband. The county manager reported that she was also the mother of three 'illegitimate' children and there was a suggestion that local clergy had asked her to leave the country; Cork was prepared to accept responsibility. She was referred to St Patrick's Hospital, Fermoy. One young woman who became pregnant at the age of 17 had married the putative father 'against priest's advice'. Her child was born prematurely and died; 'she left her husband and returned to her mother'. She went to England on a second pregnancy but was sent home with her child to a county home. A woman on her third pregnancy was living with an elderly man who survived on home assistance. She had applied for home assistance as the man's wife but his actual wife was living in the next county. A pregnant woman, described as 'simple', who had been separated from her husband for ten years, had arranged to marry the father of her child, assuming that her husband was dead; she had then discovered that he was alive.
- 8.76 One of the longest files concerns a young woman, described as a children's nurse, who gave birth in England. She returned to Ireland with her child and stayed in the Gresham and Royal Hibernian hotels (two of the most expensive hotels in Dublin) and placed her infant in Stamullen. She returned to Dublin at a later date when her child was ill and brought him to Temple Street Hospital for treatment. When he was returned to Stamullen she was reported as going on a pub crawl with a taxi driver and was arrested for stealing in a hotel, winding up in Mountjoy. The last report stated that a wedding with the putative father had been arranged and the couple were emigrating to Australia. It is unclear what happened to her child.

Sexual offences

- 8.77 Three sisters from Cavan were described as 'on the streets' in London. One was admitted to Castlepollard with her baby; another gave birth in London, the putative father was Turkish, a third was reported to have married an Iraqi (outside the Catholic Church) and was living in Baghdad. The London Catholic Welfare Society contacted the family's parish priest in Cavan. A 16-year old was charged with indecency in a public place in England; her probation officer contacted her parish priest in Ireland who described the family background as 'not good; father useless'; the family was large, her mother refused to permit her to come home, saying that she could not control her; she was admitted to St Anne's Kilmacud (a reformatory and industrial school).
- 8.78 A small number of cases concerned statutory rape - where the woman was under the age of 17. An 18-year-old girl, who had been in a foster home but was now working as a domestic servant, became pregnant by a 30-year-old neighbour of her foster home. The file recorded that she had sexual relations with him 'before she was 16 and even before puberty. She says she never told her foster-mother thinking it was no harm'. This man had recently married another woman who was also pregnant. The young woman refused to go to Sean Ross, because there were 'local girls' in that home; she was admitted to Castlepollard. A teenager who was attending a technical school was assaulted on her way home by the son of a well-known horse dealer.
- 8.79 A 21-year-old woman accused her father of being the father of her child. She had been interviewed by detectives and court proceedings were imminent. She had reported the incest to a missionary priest who ordered her to leave home 'at once'. The father of a 14-year-old pregnant girl was serving a term in Mountjoy prison for incest. A mother brought her 17-year-old pregnant daughter to the CPRSI. The father of her child was reported to be her 22-year-old brother. The woman's father was not aware of the pregnancy. The mother was anxious that her daughter should be admitted to Bessborough; she was also concerned for another 14 year-old daughter at home.
- 8.80 St Patrick's Guild would not take babies born from incestuous relationships for adoption. A 20-year-old woman, pregnant for the second time fled to Wales, but was thrown out by her landlady. Her baby was born in Wales. This was a case of incest; a local priest interviewed her brother who denied paternity. Mother and

baby returned home, but her mother refused to let her stay. One woman who gave birth at the age of 15 - a court prosecution of the putative father collapsed - was described as giving trouble; she had apparently beaten her mother and would not come in at night - so she was brought to the Magdalen laundry in Donnybrook. Her child was placed in Stamullen pending adoption.

Religious and moral concerns

- 8.81 Religion and sectarian divisions permeate all aspects of the history of Irish unmarried mothers, and they feature in many of these files. The mission of the CPRSI and St Patrick's Guild, and British societies such as the Crusade of Rescue was to prevent Catholic infants becoming Protestants and to rescue women who were believed to be in danger of losing their Catholic faith. Those who worked with single mothers and their children appear to have been on the alert for indications that a Catholic mother, or more probably, a Catholic infant, was being handed over to a Protestant charity. When one young woman gave birth in the county home in Trim, her father contacted the Irish Church Missions to arrange for them to take her child, but this became known and his parish priest contacted the county manager. It was suggested that the grandparents might foster their grandchild and be paid for doing so through home assistance. The parish priest agreed to keep an eye on this case. A child, placed at nurse in Dun Laoghaire by a Catholic mother through the Irish Church Missions, was taken from the foster home to a Catholic orphanage; this appears to have happened because of a watchful neighbour. A number of Catholic women, who had previously been supported by the ICM, were admitted to mother and baby homes; some defied that process. A Catholic Monaghan woman, who was brought to the ICM by the Protestant father of her child, came to the attention of the authorities when her child, who was born in the home of an ICM foster family, was treated for scabies. She went to Sean Ross presumably with her baby, but returned almost immediately to the ICM home; arrangements were then made to admit her to Bessborough, but her ICM house-mother reported that she and baby had left for Belfast.
- 8.82 In 1946 Miss Litster noted that many Catholic women were admitted to homes maintained by the Irish Church Missions. She noted that 'the information available' suggested that these mothers 'have tried and failed to obtain help from Catholic sources'. Bethany Home had agreed some years previously not to admit Catholic women or Catholic babies, 'and apparently have kept that agreement...I do not think that the Irish Church Mission [sic] seek out Catholic unmarried mothers. On

the contrary, the mothers seek out the Irish Church Missions and ask to be admitted'.¹¹ Miss Cruice, the former Secretary of St Patrick's Guild had arranged a meeting between Miss Litster and representatives of the Irish Church Missions. Reverend Coates, Director of the ICM, was willing to give an undertaking not to admit any Catholic mothers or babies 'provided he were given assurance that any who appealed to the Missions for help would receive shelter and help from Catholic sources, and would not be told to apply for admission to a County Home'. According to Miss Litster, 'that assurance, as things stand, cannot be given'.¹²

8.83 Mrs Glover, the Bethany matron, referred a number of women to St Patrick's Guild. In 1951 a department inspector interviewed a woman who had given birth in the Bethany Home. She admitted that she was a Catholic but had presented herself to Bethany as a Protestant; she had worked for a Methodist family who believed that she was a Protestant. Her employer appears to have assisted her in securing an affiliation order in court. A Catholic woman was a domestic servant for the widow of a Protestant clergyman, who referred her to the Magdalen Asylum (later known as Denny House). They sent her to the CPRSI. One mother and baby were sent by a senior assistance officer attached to a local authority, to Castlepollard, with instructions that 'Baby was to be baptised Catholic and adopted into Catholic family'; the woman and her parents were Protestant and would pay for adoption. The Mother Superior asked that she be referred to a Protestant society; the department contacted the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Committee.

8.84 One woman was engaged to the Protestant father of her child but her parish priest in county Monaghan would not give her a letter of freedom permitting her to marry him. Her child was born with cerebral palsy; her boyfriend was paying the bills but 'his people have more or less put him off the marriage'. The child was diagnosed as 'mentally defective'. One pregnant woman who was referred by her local priest was engaged to marry a Protestant, but the file noted that the marriage would not now take place - it is not known what happened to prevent the wedding. In another case the putative father was Protestant and the woman Catholic; he was travelling to Dublin to see her. The St Vincent de Paul Society, who were in contact with the woman, were keen that she go to Castlepollard before his visit, but the woman was not willing to leave until she had met him. A later note stated that the woman had 'Promised to give up P.F if he does not agree to condition for

¹¹ Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

¹² Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489778.

marriage', presumably either to raise the child as a Catholic or that he become a Catholic. The woman travelled to Castlepollard. A woman who was admitted to a county home as married and a Protestant, left shortly after the birth with a man who claimed to be her husband. It emerged that she was single and a Catholic. They were traced (unclear by whom) to a guesthouse in Limerick and the infant was baptised by a local priest. St Patrick's Guild took charge of the baby. A Mayo woman in a 'non-Catholic home in London', contacted a London Catholic welfare worker; instructions were given that she return immediately to Ireland - the woman was unwilling to go to Tuam, but the Mayo county manager would maintain her in Castlepollard.

- 8.85 A woman left Castlepollard with her new-born baby and went to CPRSI in Dublin. When they contacted Castlepollard the Mother Superior demanded that she return. The woman refused, stating that there was a prospect of marrying the father of her child who was in England. She also refused to go to Sean Ross, so she was sent to a nursing home on Dublin's North Circular Road, which the CPRSI used as a short-stay home for unmarried mothers. She then went to the Protestant Adoption Society representing herself as Protestant, but they contacted the CPRSI seeking information. The ultimate outcome for mother and child is unknown. A Monaghan woman, who went to the Irish Church Missions and was received into the Church of Ireland, subsequently disclosed that she was pregnant. She then went to the CPRSI and explained that she had married the father of her child in a registry office. Arrangements were made to bring her by ambulance from the Rotunda Hospital to the county hospital in Monaghan.
- 8.86 In 1958 the department was contacted by phone from Regina Coeli. One of the workers had learned that a 19-year-old Wicklow woman was in Bethany and due to give birth. The Legion of Mary worker phoned Bethany, who confirmed that she was in the home 'with her mother's consent [underlined in original]' and she was 'received into their church before she was admitted'. Regina Coeli referred the case to the CPRSI who suggested they contact the department. Bethany reported that this woman had one child in Pelletstown, and she intended removing that child to Bethany, but when Regina Coeli contacted Pelletstown, they had no knowledge of any child with the woman's surname. Following lengthy efforts to contact the mother of this young woman, two members of the Legion of Mary went to Bethany to meet her - she apparently answered the door. The file notes that 'Girl was abusive at first had been "instructed" by Irish Church Missions in January - said

she was desperate. Broke down finally and said she would come back'; her three-month-old daughter had not yet been baptised. The legionaries left mother and infant in Bethany promising to call again; she wanted her baby adopted 'does not want her committed or sent to foster home. Said she would like to make a fresh start if room could be got for mother and herself...Told by Bethany to "be strong" against Legionaries'. The Legion of Mary tried to involve the department, but although they referred this case to the assistant secretary there is no indication that the department took any action.

8.87 One 20-year-old woman travelled to England with the putative father, 'who is said to be divorced'; they planned to marry in a registry office, but as she was under age she required parental permission. The CPRSI accepted responsibility for her baby. A woman was 'sent over hurriedly 4-5 days ago' to Regina Coeli when a British Catholic charity discovered that she was making arrangements to transfer her baby to a Church of England home. Some months later when the child was eight months old a priest intervened to try and get mother and child out of Castlepollard. A 20-year old woman was 'sent back by nuns there - had been keeping bad company'. The father of her child was married and was reported as trying to divorce. She wished to return home and was put on the bus to Roscommon by the CPRSI but she wrote to them the following day saying that her father would not keep her; she was staying nearby with her grandmother. Her behaviour was described as 'unbalanced'; the CPRSI agreed to make arrangements for the mother and her unborn child. An Irish woman was living in London with the putative father of her child. The file noted that he was not a Catholic and there was no prospect of marriage. He accompanied her to the Crusade of Rescue in Westminster. Their landlady, a Catholic, later rang the Crusade of Rescue and said that the story that her parents were dead had been concocted. The woman was under age, one of nine children; both parents were alive. She claimed that the 'putative father helped her to invent the first story - of good family himself and thinking of his own ends'. The woman was sent to Bessborough.

8.88 The CPRSI assisted any case where there appeared to be a risk that a child would not be raised as a Catholic. A Donegal nurse, who had worked in Glasgow for seven years, and became pregnant by a named non-Catholic man, was assisted in going to Castlepollard. It is unclear whether Donegal public assistance authority paid for her stay; however they paid for her child's treatment in Coole orthopaedic

hospital. Catholic charities in Britain invariably treated cases where the woman was co-habiting with the father of her child as urgent. A file on one case - where the couple had gone together to England when she discovered she was pregnant - noted that it was 'desirable to remove her from his bad influence'. One Offaly woman, whose first child was being raised by her mother, was described as 'a weak type in moral danger'. She was in England 'with father of both her children and his wife who does not know position'. The Offaly county manager agreed to her going to Dunboyne but he was prepared to maintain her and her child there for only a few weeks because of the cost. She had been living and working in England for five years.

- 8.89 The threat to place a child in a non-Catholic family was an effective means of securing the support of a charity such as the CPRSI. A 19-year-old woman was living in a non-Catholic nursing home; this case was described as 'urgent'. An 18-year-old who had been a domestic servant in a Protestant house in Ireland was sent by her employer to the latter's sister in England when it emerged that she was pregnant. An English Catholic charity expressed fears that she would 'avail of Protestant Rescue' - though that may have been a strategy to encourage prompt action by the Irish authorities.
- 8.90 A Cork woman in her late thirties, whose first child was born in England and adopted through the Crusade of Rescue, faced difficulties in placing her second child, and she was reported as arranging a non-Catholic adoption. She was immediately sent to a special home in Ireland. A Monaghan woman threatened to give her child to a Protestant home, possibly because her local public assistance authority had refused to maintain her in a special home. One woman whose baby was born in Sean Ross took the child to her mother in London. The Mother Superior of Sean Ross wrote to an English Catholic charity expressing her doubts about the baby's religious welfare and an unidentified priest agreed that there was danger, so mother and child were returned to Sean Ross. The file noted that the baby 'does not appear to be an adoptable baby, may prove to be MD [mentally-defective]' so arrangements were being made to place him in an institution.
- 8.91 The Department of Health was the contact point for English local authorities and English Catholic adoption societies who were processing the adoption of English-born children of Irish mothers. Many mothers appear to have returned to Ireland without signing consent papers. The department was also the contact point for

English local authorities and Catholic charities in cases where an Irish mother had given birth in England and disappeared. The department, and most especially Miss Clandillon, was concerned about possible adoptions by non-Catholic families. When she was forwarding a query from Lanarkshire to the children's officer in Wexford she noted that she was 'not altogether happy about the case...we are not given the names of the proposed adoptors [sic], nor is their religion stated'. The form that had to be signed noted that the mother had already given consent - this was merely a confirmation. She continued:

If you are not satisfied that the adoptors [sic] are Catholics and if the mother is willing to withdraw her consent it would be advisable to refer the case to Catholic Protection and Rescue Society. In these circumstances it would be best not to return the forms to [a Lanarkshire official], until the Society has had time to act. We had a case some time ago in which the mother had given her consent to the adoption of her baby by non-Catholics. Catholic Protection saw the mother and she agreed to travel over for the hearing with somebody from the Society who briefed a lawyer there. The upshot of the case was that the baby was brought back to Ireland'.¹³

8.92 At no point in this letter is any consideration given to the interests of the child - who might have already spent some time with adoptive parents. The wishes of the mother are also treated with scant consideration. A similar obsession with religion occurs in the case of a woman who had a child, presumably in Ireland and later married in England. Her daughter had been boarded out with a family in Ireland for many years; her mother and stepfather called to see the teenager, and her mother was anxious to take her to live with them when she reached the age of 16 (and would no longer be in the care of the local authority). Miss Clandillon was 'rather worried about the matter as it is not clear whether the marriage took place in the Catholic church or whether [...] are suitable people to have the care of [...]'. She contacted a parish priest in Manchester, near where the mother and stepfather lived, seeking information. This is another example of the blurring of the line between church and state.

8.93 The files record strong prejudice against Irish women in Britain associating with men from ethnic minorities. The CPRSI feared that a Monaghan woman who had recently given birth in London and was scheduled to return to Ireland might no

¹³ Department of Health, RM/ARC/0/489433.

longer be willing to enter a mother and baby home 'because she had got in touch with a coloured man'. A pregnant woman who had recently arrived in England was described as working in a 'low type of café frequented by coloured men. Not given time to go to Mass'. The English Catholic welfare society was 'anxious to get her out of these surroundings as soon as possible'. A woman who was repatriated from Lancashire was reported by a religious sister, who worked with the local Catholic welfare society, to be living in 'a mixed lodging house, where she shares a room with three other girls and coloured men are among the lodgers'.

Outcomes for the children

- 8.94 In the majority of cases, family assistance did not extend to welcoming the new mother and baby back to the family home. While women entered mother and baby homes prior to giving birth, others only went to these homes after the birth - an indication that for many women the real problems began following their discharge from a maternity hospital or nursing home. Some women gave birth at home and were then admitted to a mother and baby home, as happened with a young woman who was keeping house for her widowed father, a farm labourer, and four brothers. Her local priest had contacted the CPRSI seeking a place in a mother and baby home. It is not clear if her father and brothers wanted her and her baby to leave home or if this was done on the initiative of the priest. This was one of several cases of babies born at home 'who will not be kept at home'. The mother of one single mother wrote to the department stating that 'her husband is aware of the existence of the baby and is willing to forgive her but will not accept baby'. Some files indicate that parents were prepared to take mother and child and provide for them - but that might mean placing the child at nurse. One father dispatched his daughter to England with her new-born child, only to have her sent back by an English Catholic charity. However when this widowed father was contacted he agreed that mother and baby could come home - she was accompanied by a welfare worker to make sure that all was well.
- 8.95 Another widower, whose daughter had been housekeeping for him, was willing to have her return home, but without the baby. That was all too common. Equally, if not more common were statements such as 'parents know about baby but are unwilling to take mother and baby home'. In another case it was reported that the woman's mother, 'a widow has no home to bring her to' and counties Meath and Dublin disputed financial liability.

- 8.96 A number of women were pregnant for a second or a third time. There are many instances where a woman's family was raising her first child, but seemed unable or unwilling to take a second baby. One Louth woman, who was pregnant for the second time by her employer, gave birth to her first child in her parent's house without medical care. She told the CPRSI that she 'does not know what parents did about it - they said it was stillborn'. Her parents were not aware of the second pregnancy. They were described as small farmers; the 25-year-old putative father was supporting his parents so could not marry. She was sent to Dunboyne. The parents of a 21-year-old woman, on her second pregnancy, were raising her first child. They knew of her pregnancy, but 'have turned her out', so she went to London. A woman pregnant for the second time (there is no information as to the whereabouts of her six-year-old daughter) reported that her parents had prevented her marrying the father of her first child. The father of her second child was English and Protestant and she had approached the Protestant Adoption Society who referred her to CPRSI. She is described as wanting to go to Bessborough. If a pregnant woman had a married sister, she was often contacted by the Catholic charities to see whether she would take the baby and there are reports of children being adopted by a married, childless sibling or an aunt.
- 8.97 Some parents who were raising a daughter's first child were unwilling to raise a second or subsequent child. The mother of a woman, who was pregnant for a second time, contacted the department and asked that she be sent to a mother and baby home. In both cases the father was their next door neighbour - he was paying £1 maintenance for the first child, who was being raised by her maternal grandparents. Payments had ceased and the putative father was being brought to court. The grandparents were unwilling to raise a second child, because their home was crowded - with parents and six resident children (mainly adults). The woman was admitted to Pelletstown. In the case of one woman, pregnant for the second time, whose three-year-old child was being raised by her parents, the father of her first baby was reported to be anxious to marry her, but he did not know about her second baby. It appears that this child was placed in a district hospital in Louth. There are several cases where a woman, pregnant for the second time, had been working and contributing towards the upkeep of her first baby. One Longford woman, repatriated in 1944, had given birth in Sean Ross in 1936. She had taken up a domestic service job in Dublin, having agreed to pay Longford county council 5s a week towards the upkeep of her child, who was presumably boarded out. In 1947 she is reported as unemployed and owing them

£6; Longford enlisted the assistance of the NSPCC in securing the arrears. She decided to have her child committed to an industrial school, which would relieve her of financial responsibilities but may not have been in the best interests of her child. A 34-year-old Donegal woman was pregnant for the fourth time: two children were at home with her mother, a third had been 'adopted' in Dublin. She had arranged with the midwife and doctor for a home birth, but her mother was 'anxious to get her away'. A factory worker, who lived with her widowed father and brothers, and her first child, believed that she would have to arrange for her second child to be adopted. She was being admitted to a special home; and expected that the neighbour who minded her child while she was at work would continue to do so while she was in the mother and baby home.

- 8.98 There is evidence of growing resistance/impatience at the requirement to remain in a mother and baby home for two years. One woman wrote to the Taoiseach, John A Costello, asking that her daughter be permitted to leave Castlepollard and leave her baby behind. Many mothers wanted to place their child either in a home or with a family and return to paid employment, but the system frequently did not facilitate this. A domestic servant who made this request was sent to the county home in Wicklow prior to taking paid employment in the county sanatorium. The aunt of a woman admitted to Sean Ross explained that the woman's mother was anxious to have her daughter released home for a week's holidays; and this was arranged. They were also trying to have her baby placed at nurse, but could not afford the £100 fee. Miss Litster pressed for arrangements to be made that would enable the woman to return home. One woman from Wicklow, who was referred to the CPRSI by a local priest, had been planning to travel to England. She was reported to have agreed to remain in Ireland if she could go to a home in Dublin. 'Appears she had heard stories of length of stay in Roscrea and Castlepollard and knew girls there'. Her family were aware of her pregnancy and they could visit her if she was in Dublin. The local authority 'could not see any reason for maintenance in St Patrick's Navan Road' (Pelletstown) - the department tried to change their mind, but the outcome is not recorded. The aunt of one woman who was in Pelletstown wrote to the minister asking that she should not have to remain for 12 months in the home 'as her help was required at home'. The department suggested that her aunt should take the baby, but she was afraid that the neighbours would know that it was her niece's child. The aunt later decided to adopt the baby. A woman who had been in the county home in Stranorlar with her three-year-old son contacted the department because 'she was anxious to get out'.

This woman wrote regular letters to her mother, who was in Gloucester Street Magdalen Home, threatening to take her child to England. The authorities told her that because she was a native of Sligo she would have to return there if she wanted her son 'fixed up'. Further 'frantic' letters followed from the woman saying that the matron of the Donegal county home would not let her leave without her child. Mother and baby were finally transferred to Sligo; the woman went to her aunt; her child to Nazareth House, and her mother who had been in Gloucester Street left the convent after 12 years there. Women were obviously conflicted about future arrangements for their baby, and some changed their minds; it is impossible to establish whether this happened because of pressure being brought to bear on them, by family or by the authorities in the mother and baby home. One mother in Sean Ross was noted as having told the Mother Superior that she was unwilling to have her child adopted, but she told the department inspector 'that she was anxious to have him adopted'. A file relating to a woman from the west of Ireland who gave birth in Belfast City Hospital described her as 'not willing to be separated from her child', and arrangements were being made for her to be admitted to Castlepollard; however a further note indicated that her baby was being admitted to Nazareth House and the mother was not going to Castlepollard. Another file notes that the mother was 'not at all interested in child'. A woman who had been repatriated from England and admitted to Sean Ross 'panicked about adoption of baby and left Sean Ross, turned up at CPRSI who promised to take child at three months if she went to Manor House'. The file notes, 'Sending her by bus'. Some women in Sean Ross applied to have their children admitted to an industrial school so that they could then leave - see Chapter 19.

- 8.99 A small number of files indicate where the mother went following her discharge from a mother and baby home. One 19-year-old domestic servant, who had been working in Dublin, gave birth in one of the city's maternity hospital; she and her child were sent to Castlepollard. Two years later, in 1946, she took up a domestic position in the Leopardstown hospital (a British military hospital), and from there transferred to a military hospital in England. When she left Castlepollard, her child went for a brief period to a county home, but she removed him and placed him at nurse in Dublin. The county manager agreed to pay for his boarding out in Dublin. This mother subsequently reclaimed her child and brought him to England.

Conclusions

- 8.100 The stories recounted above give some indication of the hardship, heartbreak and complexities associated with single pregnancy in the Ireland of the 1940s and 1950s. They highlight a number of key factors: the fathers of these children; families and the central role played by the local authorities. Religion is also central in a variety of ways: denominational charities in Britain and Ireland acted as advice and referral centres and their values often determined a woman's fate, and the wish to ensure that a child was raised in his/her mother's religion was implicit in the decisions made by department officials. Priests were often the first people to be contacted by pregnant women; the person who wrote or telephoned the CPRSI or the department, an indication of the lack of social services, and some distrust of local authorities - most especially women's fears that their pregnancy might become known. The department was sensitive to the concerns of women who were desperate to keep their pregnancy private, and they were highly critical of local authorities who betrayed that confidentiality; they tried to meet the women's wishes to go to a particular home or not to go to a particular home, but there is no sense that any alternatives were available to entering a mother and baby home, and placing a child for fostering or adoption.
- 8.101 The files reveal the gradual break-down of the rule restricting entry to special mother and baby homes to first-time mothers. One woman on her second pregnancy, who had left Ireland, wrote to Sean Ross asking to give birth there but wishing to leave when her child was three-four weeks old. It was suggested that she should be admitted to Dunboyne, which was originally opened as a mother and baby home for women on their second or subsequent pregnancy. By 1955 however it is evident that Bessborough and the other special homes were accepting some women on their second pregnancy, presumably because of falling numbers. However in 1957 Bethany refused to accept one Protestant woman, who was pregnant for the fourth time and Braemar House was likewise unwilling to admit her; the department hoped that Miss Litster might persuade them to change their mind when she visited Cork. A Leitrim woman in Birmingham was pregnant for the third time. Her first child was born in England and 'taken by Birmingham Catholic Rescue', because the mother refused to return to Ireland. Her second child was born in Castlepollard and boarded out by Leitrim. When she became pregnant for a third time she wrote to Sean Ross asking for admission, but the Mother Superior informed the CPRSI that as she had not lived in Leitrim for five years, the local authority was unlikely to accept maintenance charges. The

department proposed to contact the authorities in England to see 'if other help forthcoming'. This woman gave birth to a daughter in England and again wrote to Sean Ross asking for admission. The department suggested that the Mother Superior might appeal to the local authority 'on moral grounds'. This apparently proved successful. Her efforts to secure admission to a mother and baby home, and countless other stories in this chapter, call into question the widely-held opinion that women were sent to these homes against their will. Mother and baby homes were often the only shelter available to unmarried mothers.

- 8.102 As noted earlier, these files do not reveal any information about the women's experience in a mother and baby home. A woman in Castlepollard was described as 'very despondent' when seen by the department inspector. The inspector asked a social worker to write her a cheerful letter; she is unlikely to have been the only woman in a mother and baby home who was depressed or 'despondent'. In one case it is reported that a woman had received a letter from a man with an address in Kent advising her to abscond from Pelletstown. The department advised the Mother Superior and doctor to get an ambulance and send mother and baby to Castlepollard. A later report from Castlepollard said that 'she gives great trouble to the sisters. Does not wish to part with baby'. This snippet appears to indicate that the woman's letters were opened and read in Pelletstown, secondly that she was transferred to Castlepollard without regard to her wishes. A mother's wishes were generally respected when it came to deciding which mother and baby home she might enter, but women had much less traction when it came to bigger decisions - about her future and that of her child. A Kilkenny woman 'wanted a quick adoption at first' but she was told that this was not possible, so she agreed to go to Castlepollard; the CPRSI was involved, as was the local doctor. Many files note statements such as father 'anxious to have baby adopted soon after birth so that girl can return home' which suggests that this critical decision was being made by a parent, not by the woman. 'Girl anxious to keep baby', recorded on one 1951 file is noteworthy - one of very few statements to this effect. Women could be subjected to the influence and advice of several individuals/agencies that might tug in different directions. The records on one woman note that a local priest was 'instrumental in getting her away to England' and he was annoyed at the 'interference' - by the CPRSI - because he had arranged for the baby to be admitted to Nazareth House. One woman who gave birth in Castlepollard ran away with her child and returned home - on foot. Her parents took charge of the child and the child's mother - allegedly 'of her own volition' - went to the Magdalen

home in Donnybrook. But two years later she was reported to be 'fretting after the child, would not agree to adoption; stated her father would be cruel to the baby. Said she wanted to go home at once; appeared to be on the verge of a mental breakdown'. The sister in charge in the Magdalen home arranged for her to return home for a brief visit. The department suggested that the woman needed a medical or psychiatric check-up, but there is no indication that this happened. The last report stated that she was at home, and wanted to find employment as a domestic servant close to her home and her child.

- 8.103 These diverse stories indicate that women who became pregnant outside marriage faced a series of crises: homelessness, loss of employment, destitution, possible rejection by their family. Mother and baby homes provided immediate relief from these challenges, but these women had little if any choice about the long-term future of their child. Few women at this time earned enough money to support themselves and their child, and even fewer would have had the confidence to withstand the opprobrium that they would face, from family, neighbours and society.