

## Chapter 21: Regina Coeli

### Introduction

21.1 Regina Coeli was not a conventional mother and baby home. The Regina Coeli Hostel opened on 5 October (Rosary Sunday) 1930. It was run by the Legion of Mary, a lay Catholic organisation, founded in 1921 by Frank Duff, who was a senior civil servant in the Department of Finance. A report covering the first nineteen months from 5 October 1930 to 11 May 1932 indicated that it catered for two distinct categories:

- Unmarried mothers and
- General, which the report subdivided into 'young and elderly and good, bad, indifferent, criminal, proselytized and Protestant'.<sup>1</sup>

21.2 This hostel admitted homeless women, separated women, alcoholics, women with mental health problems and other destitute women; some returned on many occasions. This Commission is concerned only with the unmarried mothers and other women who entered the hostel with their children. Regina Coeli provided both short-term and long-term accommodation for many pregnant single women and for mothers and children. A total of 5,631 women and 5,434 children who come within the Commission's Terms of Reference were in Regina Coeli between 1930 and 1998, (the end date for the Commission's investigation). Regina Coeli was the only institution in Ireland prior to the 1970s that supported unmarried mothers who wished to raise their child(ren). It offers insights into an alternative to the other mother and baby homes. Unlike the other institutions that have been examined by the Commission, Regina Coeli never received direct state support for maintaining mothers and children.

### Sources

#### Institutional records

21.3 The records of women admitted to Regina Coeli are held by the Legion of Mary. They consist of entry cards that are filed alphabetically. Records of the mothers and children that come within the Commission's Terms of Reference are therefore mixed with the records of other women who entered Regina Coeli. This meant that the relevant records had to be extracted manually. The Legion of Mary facilitated

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<sup>1</sup> The Regina Coeli Hostel, Report 5 October 1930-11 May 1932; Dublin Diocesan Archives/AB7/b/Lay organisations.

the Commission's staff who photocopied all the cards on site. The Commission then identified and recorded all pregnant single women and unmarried mothers; separated and widowed pregnant women and women in these categories who entered the hostel with one or more children. Married women with an extra-marital pregnancy or an extra-marital child are also included.

- 21.4 These cards record the woman's name, address and date of admission, and departure, her age, marital status, name and address of near relatives, and where she was living before she came to Regina Coeli. Other information recorded includes whether she was working and, if so, the name of her employer. Many women were working as domestic servants and in these cases the name and address of the employer is recorded. If the woman had been referred to Regina Coeli, the name of the person, oftentimes a priest or a voluntary organisation, is recorded. The cards also record when the woman was last at the sacraments and they include a question as to whether the woman has been confirmed (the sacrament of confirmation) but that is rarely recorded. The woman's religion is recorded. The religion of the birth father, if known, is usually only recorded if he is not a Catholic.
- 21.5 It is also generally recorded whether a woman spent time in another institution, such as another institution being investigated by the Commission or an industrial school or orphanage; whether she had a previous pregnancy and where that baby was born.
- 21.6 The card was updated if the woman left the hostel and returned. Most details of daily life for residents that are given in this report are taken from these records. Some cards span decades and sometimes include an update about the child: adopted, fostered, or sent to an industrial school. If the child was boarded out or settled directly from the maternity hospital, the records often give details of the child's birth taken from the register of births. Some cards include information about the mother or child that was recorded many years later. For example, the record of a woman who entered the hostel in 1939 contains an additional entry in 1966 to say that she had died. The record of a woman who entered the hostel in 1942 contains an entry from 1954 saying that she had lived in England but had returned to Ireland, had just got keys to a house and 'seems wonderfully happy and quite settled down'. Other cards record queries or contact made by children looking for information about their mothers.

- 21.7 Some cards record whether or not a woman had 'confessed' to the events leading to the pregnancy. They record whether the woman arrived pregnant or accompanied by her child or children, and whether she had other children who were not in the hostel. The cards use the term 'second offender'. They generally record whether the woman's family is aware of her pregnancy, and whether the woman is using an alias, rather than her own name.<sup>2</sup>
- 21.8 Information as to the 'putative father' is included in as much detail as was available; for example, an entry from 1933 states that 'a T.D. is responsible for her trouble. She had been going to Leinster House and creating scenes there, trying to see him'. She had been sent to Regina Coeli 'by the porter from Leinster House'. The cards often record cases where a pregnancy resulted from rape or incest, though these words are generally not used; rather reference is made to the putative father being a family member or the woman having been 'assaulted'. Whether or not the father of the child was supportive and whether he acknowledged the pregnancy or child was also recorded, if known.
- 21.9 The cards sometimes also give background information about the new resident, including physical descriptions and comments on her presentation, her background or general demeanour. They often record an initial observation: 'seems like a good girl'; 'seems very untruthful'; 'very indifferent about everything', 'is a strange person', 'seems wanting in sense'. The health of the mothers and babies is noted, including references to any hospital stays by the mothers or babies while in Regina Coeli and the name of the hospital. There are references to mothers undergoing tests at the Lock Hospital - the hospital that treated sexual diseases - and the outcome of these tests is recorded: whether she has 'the all clear' or needs treatment.
- 21.10 Comments are also recorded about the woman's prospects of marriage. One card stated that the putative father would be willing to marry the woman if she produced a clear blood test result (free from venereal disease). The record on a woman who was admitted in 1951 states that 'marriage [is] improbable'. A 1958 entry states that the woman 'knew the man about a year - no question of marriage'.

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<sup>2</sup> This only appears to have happened in very rare cases – fewer than ten.

- 21.11 The information on these cards was entered by a Legion of Mary voluntary worker. The Legion of Mary has told the Commission that at any time the hostel might have had 140 volunteers working on a weekly basis.<sup>3</sup> ‘Different volunteers wrote up the cards at different times’. These case records provide an unrivalled source of information about unmarried mothers and children. Because of their unique nature, they are quoted extensively in this report.

### **Other Sources**

- 21.12 The mothers and children in Regina Coeli were not maintained by central or local government. Some limited evidence relating to Regina Coeli exists in a number of Department of Local Government and Public Health (DLGPH) and later Department of Health files that are available in the National Archives; the most important of these are HLTH M 60, and H10/70/1. Regina Coeli is mentioned intermittently in the Clandillon Papers, which were supplied by the Department of Health to the Commission. These papers include records of pregnant women who contacted the Custom House (the headquarters of the Department of Health) seeking assistance during the 1940s and 1950s; many of these women had been sent back from Britain. (These women are discussed in Chapter 7). The other files relating to Regina Coeli in the various Department of Health discoveries were concerned with the threatened closure and reconstruction of the hostel - these contain extensive details of costs and architectural plans, but very limited information about life in the hostel. There is also some information about Regina Coeli in the files of the Dublin Diocesan Archives.

### **Origins**

- 21.13 The hostel opened in North Great Brunswick Street, in part of the former North Dublin Union, next door to the Morning Star hostel for homeless men, also run by the Legion of Mary, that opened in 1927. In 1918 the North and South Dublin Unions merged to become the Dublin Union. Thereafter all in-house admissions were to the former South Dublin Union (in James’s Street). The former North Dublin Union was occupied by the British military authorities during the war of independence, but by the mid-1920s it was vacant. When Dublin Corporation was dissolved in 1924, local administration was controlled by three government-appointed commissioners. They offered the former North Dublin Union buildings to

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<sup>3</sup> A member of the Legion of Mary is sometimes described as a ‘legionary’ and the female members are sometimes described as ‘Sisters’. As far as possible, the Commission is using the term ‘member of the Legion of Mary’ but the other terms are frequently used in quotations.

the Catholic charity, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, for use as a hostel for homeless men, but the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Byrne did not wish the SVP to undertake this work, and the premises were given to Frank Duff who was a personal friend of one commissioner, subject to certain conditions.<sup>4</sup> A Department of Health file, dating from 1951/2 states that there were

no records of the agreement to give these buildings to the Legion of Mary; the arrangement was purely informal and the buildings were apparently taken over piecemeal by the Legion as the need arose. Although the Dublin Board of Assistance complained from time to time about “encroachment” by the Legion of Mary they took no positive action in the matter.

21.14 Planning for a women’s hostel began in 1929. There is no indication that Regina Coeli was originally planned as a mother and baby home. In a long memorandum written in 1950, Frank Duff stated that

Primarily it was the derelict type of woman that was in view, but from the very first moment the unmarried mother presented herself for admission and was accepted in her capacity of destitute.

They did not admit ‘girls possessing means’ because it was believed that they could make other arrangements. Finola Kennedy notes that, shortly after Regina Coeli opened, a pregnant woman applied for admission, and this resulted in ‘the inauguration of the “Mater Dei”<sup>5</sup> aspect of the hostel, a type of hostel within a hostel specifically organised on the basis of units for mothers and children’. By Christmas 1930, less than two months after the hostel had opened, women from Regina Coeli were giving birth in the Coombe Hospital.<sup>6</sup> The August 1932 report gives the capacity of Regina Coeli as 78; it is unclear how this was divided between the two groups.

## Religion

21.15 Regina Coeli was run by the Legion of Mary and their religious mission was central to its operation. In this respect Regina Coeli was similar to many rescue homes established in Britain and the United States by religious communities both Protestant and Catholic, who believed that spiritual and material rehabilitation were inextricably linked. In the 1932 report on Regina Coeli, Frank Duff emphasised that ‘Every entrant is made the subject of a special and individual attention,

<sup>4</sup> Finola Kennedy, *Frank Duff*, pp 86-8 (London, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Mother of God.

<sup>6</sup> Kennedy, *Frank Duff*, p. 91

directed in the first place to the creation of moral fibre through the frequentation of the Sacraments'. Before Regina Coeli opened, he suggested that many of these women would have 'enjoyed free lodging in a Protestant shelter, at the expense of attendance at Proselytising institutions'; the only option for destitute unmarried mothers from outside Dublin who fled to the city was to seek admittance to 'the Protestant home' - a reference to the Bethany Home. He claimed that most women who entered the hostel were 'found to be neglecting the Sacraments', and while 'no pressure is brought to bear on them in the Hostel but an early return to regular practise is the unvariable [sic] result of some period of residence'. Between October 1930 and May 1932 he claimed that eight Protestants who had stayed in the hostel were received into the Catholic church.

- 21.16 Religion played an important role in the life of Regina Coeli. In the first 18 months two retreats<sup>7</sup> were held in the hostel. There was a chapel/oratory, but it is unclear when it opened. A member of the Legion of Mary who worked in Regina Coeli said that

When our oratory opened then there would have been weekly mass, and occasionally mass during the week. But very few of our residents would attend it, they would always be welcome but no one was ever forced to attend.

- 21.17 Daily prayers were part of the routine, but she claimed that no one was obliged to take part.<sup>8</sup> In 1942 Frank Duff wrote to Archbishop McQuaid, thanking him for the restoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Regina Coeli and Morning Star Hostels,<sup>9</sup> which seems to suggest that the hostels had that privilege at some earlier time, but then lost it. Retreats were held in Regina Coeli on 10-12 May and again on 13-15 December 1947. In 1948 Frank Duff thanked the Archbishop for granting the status of a semi-public oratory in Regina Coeli. Retreats appear to have been a regular feature of life in the hostel; there is reference to the regular Easter retreat. In 1961 and again in 1969 there is evidence that the hostel was granted permission to hold Easter religious ceremonies in the hostel.

- 21.18 The individual records of women in the hostel indicate that much emphasis was placed on confession, including a note of when a resident was last 'at the

<sup>7</sup> A period of intensive prayer and religious ceremonies lasting one or more days.

<sup>8</sup> Ann-Marie Graham, *Unmarried mothers: the legislative context in Ireland, 1921-1979* (M.Litt thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2012): <http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/4000/1/M. Litt. Thesis.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Dublin Diocesan Archives/AB8/b/XXI/79/12/3.

sacraments'. Some cards record whether the woman had made a 'good' or 'bad' confession. All the children were baptised and subsequently consecrated to Our Lady and all the mothers were churched.<sup>10</sup> At this time children were baptised within days of their birth, when the mothers were still in a maternity hospital; children baptised while resident in the home were baptised in St Paul's Church, Arran Quay. The records of children who were long-term residents in the hostel give the dates of their first communion and confirmation.

## The Women

### Admission Pathways

- 21.19 A total of 5,631 women who come within the Commission's terms of reference are recorded in the institution's admission records. There are records of 5,434 children; 809 women were accompanied by more than one child. Of the 1,426 women who were in the hostel without a child, 999 left prior to birth; 222 left to give birth and did not return; 141 stayed in the hostel after the birth of a child, but without a child; 14 arrived after the birth and without a child and there is no information on 50 women.
- 21.20 In the 1932 report Regina Coeli claimed that the hostel assisted women who were in grave difficulties 'for whom no alternative existed'. The only facilities for unmarried mothers in Dublin were the Dublin Union (which included Pelletstown, see Chapter 13) or Protestant homes. (St Patrick's Guild operated a small maternity home, but it only accepted women who could pay). It was alleged that some women were reluctant 'to face the Union'; furthermore the Union would only admit 'Dublin girls', which meant that for the 'the large number of those flying from the country,' the Protestant homes were the only option. Between October 1930 and May 1932, 101 women were admitted to Regina Coeli; 26 were described as 'waiting mothers' - pregnant; 45 gave birth after admission and 30 arrived with their baby. The outcomes for these mothers were: two went back to previous employment; 19 settled in indoor situations (live-in service); six settled in outdoor situations; 12 married; 23 returned home; 39 were in Regina Coeli or in the Coombe Hospital.
- 21.21 Women were referred to Regina Coeli by a variety of individuals and agencies. Some women were brought or referred by their employer, particularly those in

<sup>10</sup> DDA/AB7/b/Lay organisations. A ceremony that involved a religious blessing of mothers who had recently given birth.

domestic employment. One woman met Frank Duff on the street and he brought her to the hostel. Another common referral pathway was through the almoner (social worker) of a Dublin hospital. In 1930 for example, 'An unmarried mother with fifteen day old baby entered the hostel. B went to City of Dublin hospital (Baggot Street) on 17th April, 1931 and was referred to us. She tells me that the baby has been adopted by the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society'. Women and children were referred by inspectors of boarded out children. The almoners of the Dublin maternity hospitals referred women who had recently given birth and had nowhere to go. The records of two women, in 1944 and 1949, state that they were referred by the almoner in the Coombe Hospital and the almoner in Dr Steeven's Hospital (a general hospital) respectively. Many women were referred by members of the Legion of Mary: a woman in 1945 was admitted following a phone call by a member in Sancta Maria; another woman was sent by a member in Raglan Road; other women were referred by priests.

21.22 Regina Coeli features regularly in the records of pregnant women who contacted the inspectors in the Department of Local Government and Public Health/Department of Health seeking assistance in the 1940s and 1950s. In the years 1944-48, 73 of the 680 women who contacted the department were sent to Regina Coeli and large numbers were referred to the hostel during the Emergency years, though it was often full and they had to be sent elsewhere. Many of these women had been returned from Britain while others came to Dublin from other parts of Ireland, often destitute and not knowing where to go. The department used Regina Coeli as short-term emergency accommodation while inspectors tried to secure the agreement of a local authority to pay for the woman's maintenance in a mother and baby home and a place was being sought for her in one of those homes. Many of the 999 women who were in the hostel and left before giving birth went to mother and baby homes. The number of women referred by the Department of Health fell during the 1950s because arrangements with local authorities and with the mother and baby homes had become more streamlined, and there was less pressure on places.

21.23 Some women who could not afford to stay in a private nursing home came to Regina Coeli seeking accommodation. A woman in 1943: 'Came to hostel pregnant nine months. Has been with [Nurse who ran a nursing home on Dublin's North Circular Road], for past 3 weeks. Came here as she cannot afford to pay'. In a small number of cases the referral came from a politician as in the case of a

woman in 1947: 'Wrote to her local TD who contacted General Mulcahy [leader of Fine Gael] regarding her admission here. Had a letter from Mr X, manager of an enterprise in Galway who had written to Sr. R [one of the voluntary workers in Regina Coeli]. The file on a woman in 1941 stated that her sister had taken her home, 'but husband did not like her in the house so she had to leave'. A woman was referred by a priest in 1937, 'Was to be married but man decamped'. A woman in 1942 was referred by Parnell Square Hostel. She 'was working as domestic servant. Her mistress told her to get another job as she did not appear to be settled down. She is very weak; eight men in her life. A doctor gave her medicine-seems to have had an abortion. Seems to be a dull girl but not stupid'. A woman in 1949 was referred 'By woman to whom she told her tale. Father of baby is drafted in Middle East with Royal Air Force. Pregnant. Lived with her grand parents. Never saw her parents and knows nothing about them'.

21.24 Some women wrote seeking admission, for example a woman in 1951 'Applied for permission by letter and was accepted'. A woman in 1953 'Was housekeeper to priest one month before entry. No mention of family at all. Is not in touch with father of baby'. A woman in 1958, 'was living in a flat with children. Put two other children for adoption'. Regina Coeli tried to find her accommodation but was unsuccessful. A woman in 1975 was referred by her family. She was 'separated from coloured man for some years'. A woman in 1983 had been 'Deserted by husband who is an Algerian Muslim [sic]. Parents have disowned her'. A woman in 1970 was 'Referred by two nuns. She had been here before making tentative inquiries. She was very anxious to keep the baby so 2 of the nuns brought her here. Her mother knows about the baby but refused the nuns' request to take her home'. An interview with two voluntary members of staff from Regina Coeli, recorded in an academic thesis, described the referrals they received:

A lot of our, em...we didn't have any referrals as such but a lot of our girls would have been recommended by their priests. You know if they were in trouble they may have gone to their priest for assistance and they would have sent them over. The hospitals also recommended girls to come to us, but mostly it was word of mouth.<sup>11</sup>

21.25 On occasion a mother would be referred to Regina Coeli whilst attempting to have her children returned from an industrial school. A separated woman who entered

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<sup>11</sup> Graham, *Unmarried Mothers*

the hostel in 1956 with one of her two children, and pregnant with a third, had another child in Goldenbridge Industrial School. The record stated that ‘the Department of Education notified us about 21/1/1957 that [the child] would be sent here from Goldenbridge School on a supervision certificate - that is, we must notify the school authorities if [the mother] leaves here’. In 1952 a separated woman was ordered to stay in Regina Coeli for three weeks on probation from the court.<sup>12</sup> She remained for five years with her child.

### **Circumstances of Pregnancy**

- 21.26 The institutional records usually contain some information about the circumstances of the woman’s pregnancy, such as whether she became pregnant by her boyfriend, through a casual sexual encounter, or as a result of rape. One entry from 1931 makes it clear that the woman in question was totally ignorant about sexual reproduction: ‘the father of the child is a man called [...], whom she knew for four months, frequent intercourse, never knew that it was that way children were brought into the world’. Most often it simply stated whether the putative father was her boy-friend; it sometimes recorded whether he was willing to marry her. In most cases, whilst the putative father was named, no further mention is made of him. Some records gave additional details. For example, a woman ‘Is five months pregnant, does not know who is responsible, has been carrying on with men since she was seventeen years of age but is adamant she never took any money from them’. Another woman in 1946: ‘Got pregnant while she was in the British Forces stationed in Palestine’. Some descriptions are colourful: a woman in 1941 ‘Came to hostel pregnant’. It notes that the father of her child ‘respected her all along ‘til one night they both took cocktails to which they were not accustomed with result - she does not remember the occurrence’.

### **Rape**

- 21.27 The cards also recorded instances of possible rape or incest. Rape is often recorded as assault or an attack. A woman who entered Regina Coeli was employed at St Patrick’s Hospital (a psychiatric hospital). ‘She was assaulted on her way into the hospital. Reported the matter to the Guards’. A woman who was admitted in 1942 ‘was attacked while going for a message. Does not think she has any sin’. A woman, who was admitted in 1945 from the Coombe Hospital with her baby boy ‘States that a man assaulted her when returning home late one night’.

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<sup>12</sup> The Commission is not aware of any statutory basis for this court order.

The record card on a woman in 1941 stated 'Expecting a baby. Father - a neighbour - assaulted the girl when he was in drink'. A woman came to the hostel in 1955, four months pregnant. She did not know the identity of the father; she got a lift from him and was assaulted. In the case of another woman, 'The man responsible is [...], a neighbour who returned to England a few days after he assaulted her'. A woman admitted in 1950 'was working in a mental hospital and was assaulted by two men whom she knew when coming from work'. In relation to a woman in 1939, a doctor 'called and said [...] should take action against father of child when baby is born. He said [...] was a very nice girl'. Any blood relationship between the mother and the putative father was recorded, for example, in the case of a woman admitted in 1951, 'her uncle is responsible'.

### **Attempted Abortion**

- 21.28 A number of women appear to have attempted to terminate their pregnancy. There are references to women drinking substances that were sent to them from England or going to doctors to have the baby removed. In 1943, a separated woman arrived at Regina Coeli; she was a domestic servant who had been assaulted by a lodger in the house where she worked. He sent her to a doctor in Merrion Square and she paid him £3 but his intervention failed to terminate the pregnancy. The report states that the doctor refused to take further action unless she paid him more money. A woman had a miscarriage in the hostel in 1943 and was removed to the Rotunda; she returned to Regina Coeli when she was discharged. Her records state that 'Doctor had said it was a complete abortion. Suspected [...] brought in drugs to [...]'. The records of a woman who came to Regina Coeli in 1938 stated that the doctor had been called as a result of statement she made about taking a dose to destroy the baby. The doctor ordered her to bed and said he would call again. He also advised that the Gardaí be notified. A detective called to the hostel and took a statement. This statement was signed by the woman and a member of the hostel staff. The file on another woman who arrived in 1948 noted that 'she has been taking stuff to settle her condition'.

### **Pregnant from Ireland<sup>13</sup>**

- 21.29 The hostel often provided short-term accommodation for women who were described as Pregnant from Ireland (PFIs). These were pregnant Irish women or new mothers who were sent back from England by local authorities or Catholic

<sup>13</sup> This section should be read in conjunction with Chapter 7 which describes the wider story of PFI cases. The focus here is primarily on evidence from Regina Coeli records.

charities. This role reflected the fact that the Legion of Mary was very involved in welfare services for emigrants - speaking to young women who were taking the boat to England, and through that work Legionaries would have come into contact with pregnant women who were travelling to Britain.<sup>14</sup> They were also in regular contact with English Catholic charities and members of the legion worked with Irish emigrants in Britain.

- 21.30 Regina Coeli's involvement with PFI cases began shortly after the hostel opened. The report covering the years 1930-32 tells the story of a woman who was sent to Regina Coeli by Father Craven of the Crusade of Rescue, Westminster Archdiocese. The report claimed that 'cases from England are not ordinarily taken, but Fr. Craven certified as to his conviction that mother and baby would not be saved if they stayed in England. She was indescribably hardened and had already disposed of her baby to Protestant hands'; after some months in Regina Coeli 'she is frequenting the Sacraments, and manifests a great love for her child with which she vows she will never part'.<sup>15</sup>
- 21.31 There are many references in admission records to women being returned to Ireland when it became evident that they were pregnant. A woman in 1935 'Went to England, arrived in Liverpool last Tuesday. Stayed in a Catholic hostel. Was met at the boat by Girls Protection Society who discovered her condition and warned her to return to Ireland at once. She arrived back in Dublin this morning'. Another woman, admitted in 1932, spent nine months in London and was 'sent back pregnant last October'. In 1934 a woman was 'Sent home by the CPS<sup>16</sup> and met in Dublin by member of CPS who took her to the Union'.
- 21.32 Some women who planned to travel to England were stopped before they left Ireland. In a case in 1936:
- Legion prevented her from going to Scotland with her two sisters, who had asked her to come over and made arrangements for her when they found out she was pregnant. Protestant Ladies Maid had asked [...] to tell her when baby was born she would take it and pay her compensation for having given it over.

<sup>14</sup> Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population decline and independent Ireland, 1920-1970*, pp 299-302.

<sup>15</sup> Regina Coeli report October 1930-August 1932

<sup>16</sup> Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland

- 21.33 The number of PFIs who were repatriated rose during the years of the Emergency, as English mother and baby homes and other welfare agencies came under increasing pressure; some had to relocate from the large cities. Despite an agreement that women would not be sent back to Ireland without advance notice, giving either a charity or the department inspectors the time to arrange for their maintenance in a mother and baby home, many women ended up in Dublin, with no arrangements for their future. Many of these women were given temporary accommodation in Regina Coeli but Miss Litster complained that after a few days in the hostel they were often 'unwilling to go to an institution under the care of nuns', because they preferred 'a certain free and easy' atmosphere in Regina Coeli, including permission to smoke.
- 21.34 Some of the cases below highlight the way in which women who went to England, either pregnant or who became pregnant in England, returned to Ireland.
- 21.35 In the case of a woman in 1958 there is no reference to her coming back from England but she was put on a train for Limerick with her baby, where she would be met, at the train, by Miss Harris of the London Welfare Office.<sup>17</sup> Another woman in 1945 'was sent by Southwark CPRS'. A woman in 1953 'Came with baby aged 7 months born in England'. She had been transferred to the hospital from a home in Surrey and returned there for about six weeks after the birth with the baby. A doctor recommended that both should be sent to Ireland and the Southwark branch of the CPRS arranged for her repatriation. A woman who was three and a-half months pregnant when she went to England in 1935 'was met at the boat by the Girls Protection Society,<sup>18</sup> who discovered her condition and warned her to return to Ireland at once'. One woman was returned from the United States in 1955 when it was discovered that she was pregnant. Her records state that she 'was in America since she became pregnant. States Legionnaires there had her sent back. Had three more children while resident in the hostel'.
- 21.36 Some women returned from England because they were unable to work. A woman, five months pregnant, admitted in 1945, 'arrived back from England last night with a letter addressed to Legion of Mary, Dun Laoghaire. Has all arrangements made by Welfare Association in Leeds to stay in England but

<sup>17</sup> Information about Miss Harris can be found in Chapter 7.

<sup>18</sup> This may be a reference to the International Catholic Girl's Protection Society. For details see Jennifer Redmond, *Moving histories. Irish women's emigration from independence to Republic* (Liverpool University Press, 2018) pp 88-93.

Ministry of Labour insisted on her returning when she could not work'. A woman in 1932 went to a job in England but when she realised she was pregnant her employer sent her home. In the case of a woman, admitted in 1943, 'the factory where she worked paid for her fare home and will take her back'. In 1944, a woman 'arrived from Reading tonight and was brought by sisters [members of the Legion of Mary] from the Bureau, Westland Row'.<sup>19</sup> 'Was seven months in England. Was pregnant when she went and was deported'. Another woman, 'a V.D case' was deported from England in 1943. Another woman was sent to Regina Coeli as a 'refugee' from Leeds in 1941.

### **Women who were admitted and those who were refused entry**

- 21.37 Regina Coeli did not distinguish between 'first offenders' and 'second offenders'. A woman who entered the hostel in 1948 with her three-week-old baby 'is a second offender. Had another baby three years previously in Castlepollard. Tried to gain admission to Castlepollard again; was refused, and the Rev Mother told her to come here'. A woman in 1944 'Came to the hostel eight months pregnant. Refused to go to Roscrea' [Sean Ross]. In 1943 a woman 'entered hostel nearly nine months pregnant. Was in Tuam Maternity Home for 5 weeks. Left there and is adamant that she would not return there'.
- 21.38 Regina Coeli refused to admit, or re-admit, women who were classified as a 'street case', that is, women who were, or had been, engaged in prostitution. They were generally referred to the Legion's Sancta Maria Hostel.
- 21.39 Some women were described as 'not the type for here'; one woman was sent to St Rita's nursing home on Sandford Road (see Chapter 2). It is probable that she was not admitted to Regina Coeli because she had sufficient means to pay for accommodation in a private nursing home. A file on a woman who had been in Regina Coeli in 1949 records that she called in October 1954 seeking re-admission, 'is in trouble again. Meeting decided not to accept her in view of the way she had placed last child after signing a statement about NSPCC'. Her child had been placed in an industrial school. 'Meeting decided that she could not come here 'til M. has been returned to her. Returned with children'.

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<sup>19</sup> The Emigrants Section of the Dublin Archdiocese's Catholic Social Welfare Bureau was based at 18 Westland Row, opposite the railway station (now known as Pearse Station). This station was the terminus for trains from the west of Ireland and passengers taking the boat from Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead (a major route for people travelling to and from England) travelled by train from Westland Row to the boat. Members of the Bureau and the Legion of Mary, met and interviewed intending emigrants at the railway station, and on the train to Dun Laoghaire, Daly, *Slow failure*, pp 278-9.

21.40 Some women were refused admission because they were married or were known to have accommodation. A woman who first entered the hostel in 1941 with her baby subsequently married and returned with her husband, but was refused admission as they had accommodation. In 1984 a woman who arrived at the hostel with two of her children, including a son aged fourteen, was refused entry to the hostel as he was too old.

#### **Overlap with other scheduled institutions**

21.41 The Regina Coeli files record extensive references to other institutions which are being investigated by the Commission (scheduled institutions). Roughly 1% of the women admitted (a total of 72) gave a mother and baby home or the Dublin Union as their previous address. A woman who was admitted in 1944 had given birth to a baby in Pelletstown, went from there to Sancta Maria, who sent her to Regina Coeli. A woman admitted in 1957 had been in Castlepollard. 'She did not like Castlepollard so left and came back to Dublin'. A woman in 1944 'came from Pelletstown for one night with baby and returned to Pelletstown the next day.' Some women only stayed for one or two nights in Regina Coeli, while on the way to another institution. A woman returned from England in 1962 with her baby; her record noted: 'is wavering about keeping the child, but with a bit of encouragement might.' The CPRSI, (who had probably organised her return from England) arranged for her to be admitted to Pelletstown. In 1942 a woman went to Pelletstown from the hostel; another woman travelled by bus to Bessborough in 1946. She wrote shortly afterwards to Regina Coeli asking to return with her baby but 'was advised to stay there'. In 1945, a woman arrived in Dublin by bus and was admitted to Regina Coeli for one night before travelling to Castlepollard. One common pathway was for women who came to Regina Coeli to go to the Dublin Union and from there to Pelletstown. A woman in 1943 was 'anxious to go to Castlepollard but cannot afford to pay'. A woman came with her baby in 1942 from the county home in Castleblayney.

21.42 Some women had spent time in industrial schools or other institutions. A woman who arrived in 1943 'Was eight years in Booterstown Convent - Sisters of Mercy and then two years in Sisters of Mercy Baggot St training for laundry work. Left Regina Coeli 24/9/1943. Returned on 30/8/1944 with baby born in Pelletstown. Went back to Pelletstown with baby on 31/8/1944'

- 21.43 The mother of a young woman who arrived in 1940 had died when she was only two weeks old. She spent two years with a nurse mother in Kent and was then transferred to a Barnardo's Home in England where she remained until she was seventeen. She then went to an institution in Belfast, remaining for three months before being sent to the Bethany Home where she remained for three years. In 1937 she broke a window and was sent to the Dublin Union, where she remained until she came to Regina Coeli in 1940.
- 21.44 Some women who were refused entry to other institutions came to Regina Coeli. In 1946 a woman stated: 'Tried for admission in several places today. Went to St Kevin's but would not be taken in without a doctor's note. Went to Pelletstown next day'. The record on a woman in 1943 states that 'Dr [...] sent her to Pelletstown today but she was refused admission and sent here.' She left Regina Coeli to go to Bessborough after a stay of less than a month. In the same year a woman came to Regina Coeli from Holles Street Hospital after trying Basin Lane (a night refuge) and St Patrick's Guild. A woman arrived in 1945 with her fourteen-month-old child who was born at a private address and baptised in the Roscommon county home. The record stated she 'left Roscommon on 6/1/1945 with child to go to Summerhill Convent, Athlone. Baby could not be accepted by Sr. [...] who said the child was deformed and would never walk. Came to Dublin. Went to Sisters of Charity and the Bureau (presumably the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau) and was sent here.'
- 21.45 Women also sought the services of Regina Coeli when they had tried and failed to get baby 'settled' or 'fixed' elsewhere. A woman in 1933: 'Came from South Dublin Union- a cousin claimed her out this morning and took her to Eccles St (probably St Brigid's orphanage) to see if she could get the baby fixed up, was refused there, tried Dunleary also refused. [...] told her to come here if she failed to get her baby fixed'. A woman went to Regina Coeli in 1937 with her baby. She was recorded as having gone 'to Henrietta St and St. Patrick's Guild - neither would take her. Has no money.'

#### **Long stays and multiple entries**

- 21.46 A unique feature of Regina Coeli was the fact that many women entered the hostel on multiple occasions and others stayed, sometimes intermittently, over the course of many years. Some of these long-stay women gave birth to a number of children during their years in the hostel. Many women kept in contact with the staff in the

hostel after they had left and sometimes returned for a further stay (not pregnant). One woman, who entered the hostel in 1953 pregnant, wrote in 1970 seeking admission for herself, her husband and children. On more than one occasion women who subsequently married, informed the hostel of this and sent some wedding cake. These examples indicate the nature of the relationship between the residents and Regina Coeli.

- 21.47 A woman who arrived in 1954 stayed for nine years. Her daughter is recorded as being 'placed'; she was sent to Booterstown Convent.<sup>20</sup> It seems that this girl returned to Regina Coeli for holidays. A woman who arrived in 1953 stayed for ten years with her two children. A woman who first entered in 1940 was resident intermittently for ten years. In 1950 it is recorded that she was pregnant; she left in 1961.
- 21.48 A woman, who came in 1955, gave birth to six children during the course of her fifteen-year stay. A woman, who is first recorded in 1943, stayed in Regina Coeli for 14 years and gave birth to three children during that time. Another woman stayed with her child in Regina Coeli for eight years from 1945. A woman was admitted in 1952 and left in 1966. A woman entered the hostel in 1957 pregnant. Her first child was born that year, a second was born in 1960 and a third in 1962. It would appear that they had been placed with a foster mother but retained a relationship with the hostel. There are references to them returning on occasional weekends. One of the children is recorded as pregnant and leaving the hostel in 1986 to live with the father of her child. A second child was reported to have given trouble in the hostel, and a meeting decided that she could no longer remain there. She was placed in High Park special section in May 1971.<sup>21</sup>
- 21.49 A woman spent fourteen years on and off in the hostel with her son, from 1946. Another woman also arrived in 1946 with her three-month old baby. The baby was placed in Cavan Industrial School in 1948. The woman was readmitted to Regina Coeli in 1965, brought by a member of the legion. A woman lived in the hostel intermittently over a period of twenty-six years, between 1939 and 1965. She married while resident there. A woman arrived pregnant in 1950 and gave birth that year. She died in 1963; her son left the hostel in 1965, having apparently been resident there for the first 15 years of his life. He was taken by a female

<sup>20</sup> This is probably a reference to St Anne's Industrial School.

<sup>21</sup> There was an industrial school and a Magdalen laundry at High Park.

member of the Legion of Mary and apprenticed to clock making. A pregnant woman entered the hostel in October 1952; she returned with her son from the maternity hospital and gave birth to a second child in 1958 while living in the hostel. Mother and children moved to accommodation in the north inner city in 1969; she had spent 17 years in Regina Coeli.

- 21.50 A woman arrived in 1952, seven months pregnant. She gave birth to a boy in the Rotunda and returned to Regina Coeli with her infant. Her eldest child was brought to Regina Coeli to join her. She gave birth to additional children in 1954, 1957, 1960 and 1962. There is evidence that she gave birth to another child, but no date is recorded. Mother and children moved to a flat in the Liberties, 18 years after coming to Regina Coeli.
- 21.51 A separated woman with a son, who was boarded out, entered the hostel pregnant. A daughter was born in 1955. She gave birth to four additional children between then and 1969. The family moved to a house in 1978, 23 years after she had entered the hostel. A woman arrived in 1931 pregnant and gave birth to a child; she gave birth to twins in 1941. She entered and left the hostel on many occasions; she was last admitted in 1952, 21 years after her first stay in Regina Coeli. Another woman arrived in 1940 with a two-week-old baby. She remained there for 28 years, leaving occasionally and returning.
- 21.52 Another distinct feature of the Regina Coeli hostel was the fact that many residents maintained contact following their departure. A woman who came to the hostel in 1943 with her child, who was almost three years old, left to go to a room in the south inner city but returned occasionally, as she 'finds the room lonely'. When former volunteer workers were asked about women who returned to the hostel, they replied that 'that has always been a feature and still is a feature'.<sup>22</sup>
- 21.53 A woman entered the hostel for the second time in 1941 with her twelve-month-old baby who was born in Pelletstown. She had been a 'nurse child' and had been in the Dublin Union for six weeks. The records indicate that she left the hostel and returned with four children in November 1950, leaving and returning again with another child in 1952; another child joined her from hospital the following year.

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<sup>22</sup> Graham, 'Unmarried mothers',

21.54 A woman entered the hostel in 1948 with a one-year-old child; she gave birth to a baby over a year later. In 1951 she suffered a serious stroke and was described as unsuitable to undertake the care of the children. Her son remained in the hostel until approximately 1963; her daughter remained until she married in the late 1960s.

### **Regina Coeli and Protestant institutions**

21.55 The records of mothers who were in Regina Coeli often express a fear that she would bring her child to the Bethany Home<sup>23</sup>, or that she would give her child to a Protestant social worker or a Protestant foster mother. They describe attempts by members of the Legion of Mary to 'rescue' mothers and/or their children from the Bethany Home. If a mother had been resident in the Bethany Home before coming to Regina Coeli she would be instructed to attend confession immediately and apparently asked to give a full account of her time in Bethany, including whether she had allowed her child to be baptised while there, or had denied her own faith. The records relating to a woman, admitted in 1932, state that the baby went to Bethany Home and then to Pelletstown.

21.56 In 1936, the mother of a young baby who was living in Regina Coeli assisted another mother to travel by train to Belfast with her infant. This second mother placed her baby in a Barnardo's Home. When this became known, the mother who helped was reprimanded by two voluntary workers.

The terrible responsibility of the baby's soul was pointed out to her and after a severe talking to she was told that she must leave the hostel on 20th inst. As an act such as she had done made her subject to such drastic action. She admitted doing it. Left the next day. Went to [...] who had already arranged to settle baby in Athlone School<sup>24</sup> on 24/7/1936. [the mother] went to friends in Fairview.'

21.57 A woman returned to Regina Coeli in 1937. Her entry card states 'a previous child (one and a half years old) was rescued from Bethany Home last week and placed by CPRS'. The son of a woman, admitted in 1937, was 'rescued' from the Bethany Home and baptised in Arran Quay Church. The mother explained that 'Priest would not allow her to tell her long-term boyfriend she was pregnant as he was a Protestant. Baby was later taken from Bethany Home ... and out into Gloucester

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 22.

<sup>24</sup> Almost certainly the industrial school which was sometimes known as Summerhill.

Street, and was then taken by the CPRSI'. A woman admitted pregnant in 1937 was reported to have two 'other' babies in the Bethany Home; the CPRSI arranged to 'rescue successfully'. Another woman was 'rescued from Bethany Home by CPRSI with baby' in 1939. A woman was brought to Regina Coeli that year by a Catholic priest from Kilcullen 'who rescued her from Bethany Home'.

- 21.58 A woman came to Regina Coeli in 1937; her baby died shortly after birth. In 1939 she was recorded as pregnant and in the Bethany Home. Her record states that the 'CPS had written to her mother and Canon F to claim her out. Bethany authorities are arranging a marriage'. The woman's mother travelled to Dublin, removed the baby from the Bethany Home and the CPRSI placed the baby with a foster mother. The infant's mother was reported to be working and returning to Bethany every night.
- 21.59 In 1934 a mother came to Regina Coeli and returned to the hostel having given birth in the Rotunda. In November 1935 it was recorded that mother and baby had been taken to the Bethany Home by members of the Protestant Friendly Society, who had been put in contact with her by the minister (it is not stated which Protestant denomination) in her home town. She had written requesting her baptismal certificate, and 'says now she is a Protestant'.
- 21.60 A case recorded in the Archbishop Byrne papers in the Dublin Diocesan Archives stated that a man who would appear to have been a Protestant clergyman had written to Bethany in relation to a Catholic girl who had gone to him  
 and I took up the case...girl back from England where she had been for previous two years. Very threatening and troublesome brought to her senses at last and was admitted to the Regina Coeli hostel on the 4th. She has an offer of marriage in Ireland and is likely to be married if she can be relieved of the child. Mother took daughter and infant home.<sup>25</sup>
- 21.61 In 1944 a woman came to Regina Coeli with her baby from Belfast. Her record states that she had initially gone to the Bethany Home before going to Miss Cruice (St Patrick's Guild). By 1944 Bethany had given a commitment not to admit Catholic women and it would appear that they had referred this woman to St Patrick's Guild. A woman and her baby were admitted to Regina Coeli in 1951

<sup>25</sup> Dublin Diocesan Archives. AB8 Items 22/7/1/15.

from the Bethany Home when it became known that she was a Catholic. Her record states, 'The CPS have the case in hand'. Her child was baptised in Arran Quay Church. A woman came to Regina Coeli in 1948 seven months pregnant. She was referred by Miss Cruice. 'She had called to Bethany Home who had sent her to Miss Cruice. The mother and baby went to Bessborough soon after the birth. A woman who arrived pregnant in 1948 had spent two months in Sean Ross 'representing herself as a Protestant. She later went to Bethany Home where they got very suspicious as she did not know the hymns or prayers. On being questioned she went away.'

- 21.62 The records relating to a woman in 1955 state that her child was in The Children's Fold, Boley, Monkstown (a Protestant children's home). 'She said Catholics would do nothing for them. Wrote to Fr H Parish Priest Blanchardstown telling him about the child in the Protestant home and asking him to take action with the girl in the matter'. A woman who was admitted to Regina Coeli in 1944 and subsequently left the hostel with her child was reported to have given her baby to a Protestant woman in Wicklow. The Legion of Mary contacted the Gardaí who notified her parish priest and the Rathdown Board of Assistance. The CPRSI suggested that Regina Coeli should bring the mother back to the hostel and encourage her to retrieve her baby. A member of the Legion of Mary collected the mother, secured a letter from a solicitor and went to the Irish Church Missions. They collected the baby the next day and brought the child to the county home in Rathdrum, where Miss Litster had arranged admission.
- 21.63 In 1944, a woman is reported to have gone to the Irish Church Missions (ICM), Townsend Street (a Protestant charity) to try and get the child 'fixed' and was told she would have to pay 40s a month until the baby was two years old. In 1945, a resident in Regina Coeli asked the ICM to take her child, but the ICM officer told her that 'he could not help her as he had eleven children to fix before he would touch Catholic children. [the woman] was warned that her action meant expulsion from the hostel but she went that evening to the Rotunda'. Mother and baby were immediately sent to Pelletstown from the Rotunda. A woman who was admitted to Regina Coeli in 1952, six months pregnant, was described as a Protestant. While she was in the Coombe, having given birth, the almoner of the hospital informed Regina Coeli that Protestants, who were interested in her, had asked to be notified when she arrived into the hospital. They visited the new mother and arranged for her baby to be placed in the Children's Fold. A woman came to the hostel in 1959

with a six month old baby, having been referred by the CPRS. It is recorded that the woman had

given the child to the Protestant Adoption Society but when her mother found out she wrote to [the woman] telling her to get the child back from the Protestants. She had to go the courts to get it back. Rev Fr. Harvey of the Crusade of Rescue helped her in the case.<sup>26</sup>

### **Race and Ethnicity**

- 21.64 A small number of children in Regina Coeli were the offspring of Irish mothers and African, Asian or West Indian fathers. An entry card in 1955 states: 'Child's father was Indian. Child is slightly coloured'. The child of a resident in 1966 was described as 'coloured. Father is West Indian'; another child in 1979 was 'coloured'. A woman is recorded as having two children, a son and a daughter. The entry card states that her son, 'is quite African. Unclear whether L is the daughter of same father'. A woman was admitted in 1963 with five children: 'Putative father is a Pakistani. The children are coloured'. Another woman 'came with coloured baby'. The entry for a woman in 1980 states, that her son, 'is slightly coloured-[the woman] reported to have contact with coloured man.' One mother who was in the hostel in 1973, who had been born in an Irish provincial town, was described as 'coloured'. A woman, who was resident in 1958: 'Married a Nigerian Muslim. Joined him in Nigeria last year and found he had 4 native wives. Says he was very cruel to her'. A resident in 1953, 'Has not seen the man responsible - an African'. Her child was described as 'very clearly half-negro'. A woman who came to Regina Coeli in 1964 'was living with a coloured man...has a girl - this child is also coloured'. 'Evidently her parents had a shock when they saw the child was coloured and refused to keep her there'.
- 21.65 A number of women were noted as being members of the Traveller community, but there is no further comment concerning this. One woman is described as 'a travelling person'; and 'Is a strange type'. Two other files state: 'They are travelling people'. A woman: 'Travels around. Parents were caravan people'. In 1975, a woman was described as 'an itinerant'. A 1974 resident 'Lived with her parents; travelling people'.

<sup>26</sup> This obviously happened in England; Fr Harvey was based in the archdiocese of Westminster.

**Mental illness and intellectual disability**

21.66 A number of women were reported as experiencing mental illness. In 1952, a woman was described as speaking and acting peculiarly.

Guard and doctor summoned and on a later date [the woman] was committed to Grangegorman mental hospital. Later released back to RC and again re-admitted various times, including under Garda escort to Grangegorman...on Christmas Day 1959 after having attempted again to strangle [her son].

21.67 There are repeated references to this mother attacking her son and being admitted and re-admitted to Grangegorman. In 1960 a woman was described as 'a mental case and has cancer of the throat'. A woman who arrived in 1940 was 'very strange and had to be isolated in the Cedar room. Is mentally affected. Dr W saw her but would not commit her to Grangegorman, says she has a wild fever.' She was sent to Cork Street fever hospital but was transferred to Grangegorman. Another woman was described as 'very strange'. She was admitted to Grangegorman as a voluntary patient in 1950. The entry card concerning a woman who arrived with three children in 1964 stated that she was raised in a county home and later adopted. She married but separated from her husband and was described as having had a nervous breakdown. Her records noted many suicide attempts. One report described her as a 'pleasure seeking psychopath with an addiction for alcohol' but no sign of mental illness. She was committed to Grangegorman and spent time in other hospitals. The last line stated that she 'had been found, dead in England, murdered?' The records on one widow who entered Regina Coeli in 1964 with three children, following the death of her husband in an accident, recorded that the priest who had assessed her 'could not make up his mind whether she was mental or sheer devilment. We have his permission to have her treated in St. Brendan's [Grangegorman] if we decide she needs it' She was admitted by ambulance and under escort shortly afterwards. In 1974 a woman who had arrived the previous year was committed to St. Loman's, a mental hospital in Mullingar, by her family doctor.

**Criminal behaviour and prostitution**

21.68 Regina Coeli was unusual in that it admitted women who had been, or were currently, involved in crime. There are references in the records to residents who had some contact with the Gardaí in relation to theft or violence. There are also some references to women stealing from each other or having violent altercations. A woman came to Regina Coeli in 1933 from Mountjoy prison 'where she had been

on remand for months'. A woman came with her four-week-old baby in 1944, who was born in Mountjoy. She 'appeared at Bray court and was discharged on probation.' Another woman had just finished a sentence of six months in Mountjoy in 1941 when she came to Regina Coeli. Another woman, also resident in 1941, 'was in trouble for taking a blanket - the property of the woman who was looking after the baby - and was in prison for two weeks.' One woman 'charged' a fellow resident who had struck her with a hatchet during a row in 1938. She withdrew the charge the same day. In 1947 a resident got one month's imprisonment for having struck another resident with a hatchet. A woman was arrested in the hostel in 1939 for striking another resident. A woman who had been resident since 1931 was arrested for begging in 1938. A woman was charged in 1942 with stealing clothes from other women in Regina Coeli.

- 21.69 Women who were engaged in prostitution were generally sent to the Legion's Sancta Maria Hostel. The two hostels were in close communication, and regularly cross-referred. However some 'street cases' were admitted to Regina Coeli, particularly those who were seeking to give up soliciting. A separated woman who worked as a prostitute on the quays came to Regina Coeli in 1965. Her estranged husband had been committed to prison for 21 months for living on her criminal earnings and she had been in prison for two periods of two months for soliciting. The record states 'Is anxious to give up the street life and get her children back.'

### **The Children**

- 21.70 A total of 5,434 children were admitted to Regina Coeli and there is information about the date of admission for over 99% of the children. Children came to Regina Coeli with their mother, and remained with their mother; in a small number of cases a child might remain in Regina Coeli, while their mother was in hospital, prison or otherwise temporarily absent. Admissions peaked in the 1940s when over 30 per cent of the children were admitted; 225 children were admitted in 1942 and 233 in 1943 – statistics that mirror the peaks experienced by other mother and baby homes during these years. The numbers admitted in the 1950s were just over half the figure for the 1940s; in the 1960s less than one-fifth of the 1940s number were admitted. (The small number may reflect the need to rebuild the hostel). The number admitted rose sharply in the 1980s, reflecting the increase in the number of mothers who were keeping their child

**Mothers who kept their children**

21.71 Before the 1970s, Regina Coeli was the only institution that assisted unmarried mothers to keep their infant. The following are the percentages of mothers who are known to have kept their babies within Regina Coeli. It is possible that other mothers left with their babies and raised them outside the hostel. Although the mothers who kept their babies were a minority until the 1970s, the proportion was undoubtedly much higher than for any other institution catering for unmarried mothers.

1930s:	29.71%
1940s:	30.60%
1950s:	43.10%
1960s:	39.20%
1970s:	72.50%
1980s:	87.30%
1990s:	79.40%

21.72 In the early years it appears that the outcomes for children from Regina Coeli were not very different to other mother and baby homes. In the period from October 1930 to August 1932, eight children were placed by the CPRSI; seven by St Patrick's Guild; 26 by the Legion of Mary; 13 had died; eight were with their mothers in their own homes; 13 were in Regina Coeli and 26 had not yet been born. The increasing proportion of mothers who kept their child is evident in the data for length of stay. By the 1950s the average length of stay for children was significantly longer than in previous decades.

21.73 In a lengthy memorandum written in 1950 and submitted to the Department of Health, Frank Duff stated that

From a very early moment it became a principal idea of the Hostel that mothers should be encouraged to keep their children permanently. Such a course was not hitherto possible to girls in their circumstances. The best that could be aimed at was that they would retain them for a period of a year, so as to give the child its chance of life. After that everything operated to bring about separation. A job was found for the mother and the child went off to fosterage or into an industrial school. But in the case of the Regina Coeli there was no date at which the mother had to make up her mind. Each new day brought growth of affection for the child and the natural mother to keep it and be responsible for it. From first to last the hostel has urged this latter

consideration on the girls. The cry too commonly heard is that these girls should be 'given their chance' as if no responsibility whatever lay on the mother in respect of the child.

- 21.74 Duff believed that as the fathers had failed in their duty to the children, there was a greater responsibility on the mother. He claimed that 'As a result of the interaction of proper natural affection and the encouragement and facilities provided....a great proportion of the girls are not only prepared but determined to keep their child'. The hostel grew rapidly and soon expanded into adjacent buildings - all of the buildings were part of the former workhouse. The expansion in numbers was concentrated 'on the unmarried mother's side'. The arrival of babies 'rendered necessary a complete reordering of the system of the Hostel'. The original plan, as in the Morning Star Hostel, was that the residents would leave the hostel in search of work every morning, and have their dinner in one of the various charitable institutions around the city or at their place of work. The presence of mothers and babies made it necessary to provide food and care throughout the day. The Legion of Mary took over additional premises and instituted a day system that involved feeding babies and older children. He claimed that the babies' diet was 'as directed by the Child Welfare Department of Dublin Corporation', whose nurses and doctors gave 'constant and invaluable aid to the Hostel'. At a later date, probably in the 1940s, the Catholic Social Welfare Conference<sup>27</sup> began to subsidise the dinners, which enabled the hostel to improve the quality. The older children attended neighbouring schools.
- 21.75 One of the core principles behind all Legion of Mary hostels was that no services should be provided free of charge. The basic charge in Regina Coeli was 6d a day, including supper. Dinner, which was served in the middle of the day, cost an additional 1s 3d depending on a person's means. There was no charge for babies under 6 months of age; older babies were charged 1s a week. Mothers were expected to find outside work, or undertake work in the hostel to earn this money. However most work in the hostel was carried out by members of the Legion of Mary.
- 21.76 The dormitories and other provision for unmarried mothers and their children were separate from the other residents. In the early years the mothers and children

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<sup>27</sup> Duff probably means the Catholic Social Service Conference, which was established in 1941 to co-ordinate social services provided by the Catholic church in Dublin. Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, pp 90-3.

were accommodated together in dormitories, but when it was realised that the residents included 'six rather big boys of ages 8 to 10', Frank Duff states that a decision was taken to renovate 'old accommodation at the back of the premises' and six mothers and their sons moved there. Duff conceded that the accommodation was 'rather defective from many points of view, notably in regard to the congestion caused. Observers remarked that we now had our own little slum'. He claimed that these family units resulted in 'the establishment of the happiest sort of home-life and the growth of the domestic virtues'.

21.77 Frank Duff was opposed to children being committed to industrial schools. In his 1950 memorandum he stated that

One of the very grievous aspects of our work has been the fact that by reason of some legal technicality it is possible for any woman to apply to the district courts and automatically to have herself relieved of the care of her child, the latter being sent to one of the orphanages. A certain society has constituted itself a port of easy call for any woman who has this idea in regard to her child. The girl has but to present herself to them and the remainder of the thing works out almost as a mechanical transaction. It is not necessary to point out that this state of affairs constitutes a standing incitement to women, and a certain proportion of them prove too weak to stand that incitement. The result of this breaking up the little family unit is not for the good either of mother or child. A formidable proportion of the women thus relieved of their children get into trouble again... Based upon Regina Coeli experience of such cases, it can be confidently asserted that over sixty per cent of such girls thus come to disaster, and it is at least likely that the proportion is very much higher. Then what happened to the children who are thus taken away? The number of children who emerge from industrial schools at the age of sixteen and then come to grief is so considerable that a number of years ago the government set up a commission of enquiry to investigate the question.

21.78 He claimed that one-third of the 'street girls' in Sancta Maria Hostel had been in industrial schools, likewise 'a formidable proportion of the men resident in the Morning Star'. In a short hand-written letter which accompanied this report, which was addressed to a senior official in the Department of Health, he highlighted the 'operations of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which are obviously countering our work'.

- 21.79 There is evidence that Regina Coeli encouraged mothers to reclaim their children from industrial schools. A woman first entered the hostel in 1953 with her seven-month-old baby. She gave birth to twins the following year and the record states that the twins were committed from St Ultan's Children's Hospital to Goldenbridge Convent,<sup>28</sup> placed through the courts for one year in the newly opened section for children of sick mothers. When the mother returned to Regina Coeli without the twins, she was told she could not be re-admitted without them. She telephoned Goldenbridge Convent and arranged to take them that evening which she did. She was then transferred with twins to St Eithne's, Rosary House, within Regina Coeli.
- 21.80 In 1942, Helen Murtagh, a Catholic social worker in Birmingham, travelled to Dublin to examine facilities for unmarried mothers. She was concerned about the number of pregnant Irish women in Birmingham and sought to understand the reasons why they left Ireland. She met Dr McQuaid and officials from the Department of External Affairs and the DLGPH including Miss Litster. Before she left Ireland she wrote to Dr McQuaid contrasting provisions in Birmingham and in Dublin. In the course of her report she stated that 'It grieved me very much to see the babies needing so much at Regina C. It is merciful work, but I could not help comparing them with our eight nurseries where every mother can stay with her baby, all because the Ministry of Health pays again & again to build future citizens'.<sup>29</sup>
- 21.81 In 1943 the Joint Committee of Women Societies and Social Workers submitted a report on boarded-out children and children in institutions to the DLGPH. They had visited a number of children's homes and other institutions, but they did not visit Regina Coeli. In her commentary on that report, Miss Litster stated that 'a great change in public opinion will have to take place' before Irish unmarried mothers could keep their children. 'The experiment has been tried in Regina Coeli of helping mothers to go into rooms and maintain their own babies'. She had also assisted a number of mothers who wished to keep their child, but she claimed that 'No permanent success attended these efforts. As soon as the children were at an age to be admitted in an Industrial School steps were taken by their mothers to have them admitted'. (It is unclear whether this comment applies to Regina Coeli mothers or only to those who had been assisted by Miss Litster).

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<sup>28</sup> Ryan Report: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL2-07.PDF>

<sup>29</sup> DDA/AB8/b/XIX.

- 21.82 A report by Miss Litster in 1947 noted that the hostel is crowded with unmarried mothers from every part of Ireland. A nominal sum is charged for board and lodging and when the girl is destitute nothing is demanded. Generally the girls go to the Rotunda Hospital for confinement returning to the Hostel, from which after a period they go out to daily work, their babies being looked after in the Hostel during their absence. No solution to the baby's future offers from the Hostel. Despite the poor living conditions, some mothers preferred Regina Coeli to the more conventional mother and baby homes because they could smoke, make tea for themselves, and go out to pictures.
- 21.83 The reference to making tea is highly suggestive of the institutional regime in mother and baby homes. But the real difficulties that the mothers in Regina Coeli faced in keeping their children should not be discounted. When she reviewed data on younger children committed to industrial schools in the years 1953-55, Miss Litster discovered that a large number of those committed came from Regina Coeli and Sancta Maria hostels, though she noted that the authorities in these hostels tried to dissuade mothers from doing so.

#### **Children left in Regina Coeli without their mother**

- 21.84 It was quite common for women in Regina Coeli to go home and leave their child in the hostel, and on occasion the hostel staff had to contact them and ask that they return. A woman left in October 1934, leaving her baby in the hostel. She 'was written to twice requesting her to return from her home. A nun went to her home place to look for her and found that the woman was getting married (not to the man responsible). Her mother came to RC to look after the baby. Baby died in hostel on December 1'. He was described as 'abnormal and delicate'. A woman went home in 1938 'promising to return to look after baby' but later efforts to find her failed. The district nurse said that the child could not be kept in Regina Coeli, 'but must go to the Union' and the dispensary doctor issued an admission ticket. The Gardaí located the mother in her home, where she had been for some time. The Legion of Mary determined that two of their members should go there and ask her to return to the hostel; if she refused they would hand her the baby. This mother returned reluctantly to Regina Coeli; her child was placed in Newtownforbes Industrial School<sup>30</sup> shortly after her return.

<sup>30</sup> Ryan Commission: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL2-10.PDF>

- 21.85 In 1936 a mother left the hostel and 'did not say where she was going'. She left her baby, who had curvature of the spine, in Regina Coeli. A voluntary worker took the child to the local dispensary doctor, who supplied a ticket enabling the child to be admitted to the Dublin Union. A woman arrived in 1957 with her child who was almost three-years old and left shortly after without her child. The Gardaí were notified and members of the legion visited a number of places where they thought she might be. They eventually wrote to St Kevin's (the Dublin Union), asking them to take the child, who was sent to Pelletstown. A woman was recorded in 1954 as 'going to London and husband's sister will take the baby', which happened shortly after the mother left. In 1952 an infant 'was minded by other mothers for a period of 5 months while her mother was away/staying out all night/in hospital'.
- 21.86 Women might leave their babies in the hostel while they went home to visit family or attend funerals. It is not known whether this was done for convenience or because their families were unaware they had had a child. In 1939 a woman went home for ten days; during that time her baby was in Regina Coeli and also spent some time in hospital. A woman returned home in 1952 for her mother's funeral. She wrote to Regina Coeli on a number of occasions asking to extend her time at home, which eventually lasted over three months. Her baby died while she was away. Some mothers left their children to go on a holiday. In 1954 a woman entered Regina Coeli pregnant and returned to the hostel following the birth. She then got married and left her baby in the hostel while she went on honeymoon. In 1942 a woman left her son to be 'minded here for a month as his mother went on holidays with her employer.' Women also left their babies while they went to hospital. In 1976, a two-year-old child was minded in Regina Coeli while the mother was in St. Brendan's. Another mother left her child in Regina Coeli for a period of six weeks while she went to the Rotunda for 'a serious operation' in 1944.
- 21.87 Women were permitted to leave their children in Regina Coeli when they were in prison. In 1939, a mother 'was arrested for stealing £4 in wallet from lodger in mistress' house. She was put on remand. Baby minded here.' A woman who entered the hostel in 1939 four months pregnant struck another resident in 1945, and was sentenced to a month's hard labour. Her baby stayed in Regina Coeli. In 1953 a woman arrived with her two-week-old son, who was later admitted to hospital. The mother went home eight weeks later - her son was still in hospital - following a letter from her mother that the father had had a stroke. A meeting of the hostel staff decided to withhold permission to leave, 'til girl's mother had

promised to send girl back within specified time'. Her baby was reported as ready for discharge in January 1954, eight months after admission to hospital, and the hostel sent a telegram to her home asking her to return immediately. This was followed by a letter in March threatening to bring the child to her home if she failed to return; they also wrote to the woman's mother warning of the consequences. Her son was brought to her home in June. The legion members did not meet his mother, but the grandmother took charge of the child.

21.88 Some children who were resident in Regina Coeli were admitted to hospital and did not return. The records show that they were placed or settled from the hospital. A woman arrived in 1946 with her three-month-old son, who was born in Castlepollard. He was admitted to St Clare's hospital; his mother left Regina Coeli two weeks later and was suspected of going to England. When her son was ready for discharge from St Clare's there was no trace of the mother. The Gardaí were notified. Miss Litster arranged for his transfer to St Kevin's hospital pending her return. A baby was admitted to St Clare's in 1953. The maternal grandfather signed an undertaking to claim him on discharge, but later records indicate that the Gardaí were contacted because his mother could not be located.

21.89 A woman left in 1954 with her baby. The sister in charge in Pelletstown contacted the hostel to say that the woman, who was known to her, had been seen in Phoenix Park with the baby and later a baby that appeared to resemble her baby was found on the doorstep of Pelletstown. A Garda sergeant called with clothes and wrappers which were easily identified as from Regina Coeli. A member of the hostel staff confirmed the baby's identity. The mother was arrested and remanded in custody. Her cousin bailed her out and she was sent to St. Patricks, Crofton Road, Dun Laoghaire - a Magdalen Laundry - for two years.

#### **Children with special needs**

21.90 One baby was described as 'a cripple and simple'. The child's mother was given notice to leave the hostel in December 1946. She returned with a letter from the NSPCC requesting that she be kept in Regina Coeli with her child until the child was admitted to a Sunshine Home. However this mother again went out without the child and was told to leave immediately. She went to a rented room with the baby. The daughter of a resident in 1953 was described as a 'spastic'; she was brought to 'school for spastics in Finglas'. She had had an epileptic fit while being taken by her mother to an orthopaedic hospital.

**Fostering and Adoption**

- 21.91 Some children born to mothers who were in Regina Coeli were fostered (or placed at nurse). In the 1930s the names of several women who were described as involved in boarding out children are mentioned. The records relating to a woman in 1938 stated that 'Baby taken from Mrs [...] foster home as she was not following Mrs C's rules and Mrs C will have no more to do with her'. One named woman is described as 'settling children'. There are also references to Miss Plater, and Nurse F, who ran a nursing home on the North Circular Road. Women were often sent to Nurse F for a period after they had left Regina Coeli, which would suggest that they were not keeping their baby. A woman in 1933 was 'referred here by Miss Cruice, who then took her baby'. Another baby was taken by Miss Cruice in 1940. In 1947 a mother and her baby went to Nurse H in Upper Leeson Street, who placed many children at nurse in the Dublin area. In 1949 a mother went home and her child remained in Regina Coeli 'pending settlement by Miss Litster', who presumably arranged for him to be boarded out or placed at nurse.
- 21.92 In order to have a child placed at nurse by a charitable organisation, or by an individual such as Nurse F or Nurse H it was necessary for the mother to pay money to cover the cost of keeping the child.<sup>31</sup> The individual case records give some information about payments to have a child placed, including payment to a priest to have the baby 'settled'. A resident in 1936 arranged for a woman in Liverpool Street to foster her child 'straight from hospital. Fr [...] said she had got woman's name from an advertisement and intends to pay £25 down for settlement'. The entry card for a resident in 1941 states 'E called to Miss Cruice about settling the baby but Miss Cruice will not settle it without a written promise of payment. E went home as mother was very ill. She left baby here having signed a guarantee for Miss Cruice to pay 7/6 weekly for the baby's keep here until Miss Cruice settles it in a few weeks' time'. In 1943 it was reported that a mother 'had £30 or so for settlement of baby and had given £15 of it to Miss [...]'. An entry about a mother in 1949 reports that a named doctor is interested in the case as is Father Barrett (Director of the Catholic Social Services Council). There was £100 for settlement of the baby.
- 21.93 There are infrequent references to seeking money from the putative father of the child. One woman appears to have taken a legal case; she 'reported that baby

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<sup>31</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 11.

was to be adopted by order of the court, £80 was awarded her, £15 for herself and £65 for Fr. Kenny<sup>32</sup> for the child'. A resident in 1941 'Took out affiliation order against man and on 19/6/1942 he was ordered to pay her 5/ weekly.' When a woman was admitted in 1944, her entry card recorded that 'The priest in Tipperary saw the man responsible and when he refused to marry her got sufficient money to pay expenses and £50 for adoption of the child.' The record of another woman, admitted in 1943, states that the 'Man responsible promised to pay for fixing of baby'. The father of a child, born in 1943, 'did not answer her letters but promised her sister to pay for baby's adoption.'<sup>33</sup> A woman successfully took the father of her baby to court for maintenance in 1945. A resident in 1948 'Reported . . . that man agreed through solicitor to pay £120 for complete adoption'. A child lived in Regina Coeli for two years after his mother had left the hostel; the boy's father paid for his maintenance until a member of the Legion of Mary took the child 'for adoption'. In other cases contact was made but the putative father refused to take financial responsibility for the child. In the case of a resident in 1947 the 'Man responsible knows of her condition but refuses to accept any responsibility'. With respect to another woman 'Man responsible knows of her condition but can do nothing for her as he married another woman in a Registry office'. In 1970 the file notes that Garda C 'is getting after the man to support N'.

21.94 Some babies were 'settled' directly from the hospital and the mother went home. A woman who was in Regina Coeli in 1938 'went to Rotunda, baby girl had been settled by Fr Kenny'. The woman went home. A woman in 1935, 'Had baby fixed by Holles St. Matron'; she and her baby were sent to the Dublin Union from the maternity hospital. Another woman's record in 1943 states that 'baby taken direct from hospital by Fr Kenny on 24/4/1943 and [the woman] taken home the same day by her mother.' In a small number of cases the baby was taken by a family member. The record for a woman in 1942 states that 'her married sister is taking the baby to Glasgow with her'. Another woman was taken home by her sister-in-law in 1939, 'who is taking the baby'. In 1933 a child went to the mother's sister.

21.95 In 1935 a resident in Regina Coeli brought her baby to a foster mother who had agreed to take her child for a sum of 30s a month, and Mrs Clancy (an inspector of boarded out children) certified the foster mother as suitable. However in the same year another baby who had been placed with a foster mother was 'taken to the

<sup>32</sup> Of the Rotunda Girls Aid Society.

<sup>33</sup> These were all informal adoptions.

Union by the foster mother as Mrs Clancy would not let her keep it. Baby admitted to South Dublin Union on 27/1/1933 as there was no one paying for it here’.

- 21.96 In some cases the voluntary staff in Regina Coeli assessed the mother’s fitness to care for her children. A mother arrived with a week-old baby in 1963. She was described as a ‘case for Sancta Maria’ but she could not be admitted there with her child. ‘Decided at a meeting of 15/11/1963 that she was unfit to look after the child, arrangements to be made to have the child settled’. This child is recorded as going to Pelletstown for a week but there is no information as to the ultimate destination. There are also instances where a mother left with her baby to go to a foster placement; a woman came to hostel pregnant in 1944; ‘Baby taken by foster mother Mrs [...]’. In two cases members of religious orders, one a priest, one a nun, took children from Regina Coeli in person; it is not clear where they brought the babies.
- 21.97 Women in the hostel were told to give 48 hours’ notice of a baby being fostered to the Inspector of Boarded Out Children. A woman arrived pregnant in 1935. She gave birth to a baby in the Rotunda and returned to the hostel. The baby was taken by a foster mother when approximately three months old. ‘Was warned by sisters that she should give 48 hours’ notice to Inspector of Boarded Out Children but did not’.<sup>34</sup> The records show that another mother in 1952 referred to the father of her child arranging a foster home through a newspaper advertisement. In 1934, a baby was ‘taken by a foster mother...but taken back the same evening as foster mother feared interference by Mrs Clancy, the local inspector of boarded out children. The baby was then taken to another foster mother, who visited Regina Coeli with the baby some months later. The baby was ‘doing well’. The baby’s mother also visited the hostel.
- 21.98 After the commencement of the *Adoption Act 1952* on 1 January 1953, there are references to foster parents formally seeking to adopt the child in their custody. A woman was in Regina Coeli with her child in 1939. ‘Mrs [...] of NCR is “placing” the baby’. (NCR refers to the North Circular Road in Dublin’s inner city.) In 1954 the foster parents applied to Regina Coeli seeking details of the mother’s address so that they could adopt this child. In 1958 a mother left Regina Coeli and was located in Gloucester St Convent - a Magdalen laundry. However the sisters ‘agreed that she should be with the baby’. Arrangements were made for a member

<sup>34</sup> The Children Act required the foster mother to give notice – see Chapter 1.

of the legion to collect her, but her child 'was taken for adoption...by arrangement of nuns'. A woman entered the hostel in 1964 eight months pregnant and she was admitted to St Kevin's hospital by ambulance. Her record shows that 'she is not coming back here, all arrangements are made for the adoption of the baby'. There is evidence that Regina Coeli continued to place some children in foster care after the introduction of legal adoption. A report on a boarded-out child, born in 1959, stated that she had been placed by Regina Coeli hostel.

#### 21.99 **Industrial schools**

In some cases where mother and child were separated, it is clear that a mother wished to remain with her child(ren) but was unable to do so. The file relating to a child in 1938 recorded that he was being taken to a foster mother for the night and that an NSPCC inspector was sending him to Pelletstown. However the medical officer at the Dublin Union refused to admit this child to Pelletstown and he was returned to his foster mother. This mother, who had given birth to more than one child was 'indoor to Mrs [...] - presumably working as a domestic servant, and her employer 'insisted on getting a note from us to the effect that the babies had been settled up. We sent it'. Some days later this mother returned to Regina Coeli; 'she could not bear to be separated from her children'. However mother and children were refused entry 'because she would barely make payments and elder child too old.' Two of her sons were sent to the industrial school in Drogheda, a third son went to Carriglea - an industrial school in Dun Laoghaire,<sup>35</sup> and a daughter went to Sligo (presumably to the industrial school).

21.100 There are frequent references to children being placed in industrial schools by court orders. Some mothers sought a court order because they were unable, too poor, or unwilling to care for their child. In a number of cases it would appear that Regina Coeli petitioned the courts to make an order in respect of the child. In some cases, Regina Coeli would not allow a woman to remain with her children if she could not afford to pay. It would appear from the records that many mothers were unable to pay for their upkeep, but while some remained there long-term, others were not permitted to do so. A woman came to the hostel in 1937 with three children (one is described as having been 'rescued' from Bethany Home). '[the child] was committed to Drogheda School. Srs. M and R and Bro. Duff (presumably Frank Duff) were present in court'. A woman who came to the hostel

<sup>35</sup> Ryan Report: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL1-10.PDF>

in 1955 had her son 'placed through the courts on 19/10/1961 in St Patrick's pending a vacancy in Stillorgan'.<sup>36</sup> Another child was committed to Artane Industrial School<sup>37</sup> in 1964. The record relating to a woman in 1937 states: 'child was to be placed in an industrial school and Mrs C [NSPCC inspector] asked that mother and child be admitted until then. They stayed for 10 days when child went to an Industrial School, Kilkenny and the mother went to indoor work'. In 1958 a two-month old baby was placed in an industrial school in Kilkenny through the courts. A woman admitted in 1942 applied to the NSPCC inspector in 1944 'to put child in school. . . We consented as [mother] is away all day at work from it'. The baby was admitted to St Kevin's without the mother and was subsequently sent to an industrial school in Sligo. The file notes that the mother 'had not informed us of this'. A woman arrived in 1953 with her baby. She applied to the NSPCC the following year 'to have baby settled...but officer would not help without letter of consent from the Hostel'. This child was placed in Goldenbridge industrial school through the courts. The NSPCC was involved in placing many Regina Coeli children in industrial schools. The record for a woman in 1941 states that '[...] is staying indoor with Mrs O'C, NSPCC and that society is getting baby into school, we will have no further responsibility of baby'.

### Health Care: Disease and Mortality

- 21.101 Regina Coeli was located in the centre of Dublin in a disused former workhouse which was a nineteenth century building with primitive sanitary and washing facilities. The hostel admitted unmarried mothers and children, and destitute women, some who would have been sleeping on the street or staying in other homeless shelters, so it is not surprising that there were numerous outbreaks of infectious disease. The hostel was staffed by volunteers, who were members of the Legion of Mary. It did not employ a nurse(s), midwives or a visiting medical officer. Frank Duff was committed to the principle that care should be provided by volunteers, not paid professionals.
- 21.102 There is no evidence that Regina Coeli applied for funding under the Maternity and Child Scheme in its early years. In December 1934 the hostel applied for exemption from the provisions of the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934* which applied not just to an institution where women gave birth but to an institution,

<sup>36</sup> It seems that this child was being placed in Pelletstown pending a vacancy, presumably in St Anne's Industrial School, Kilmacud; there was no industrial school in Stillorgan.

<sup>37</sup> Ryan Report: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL1-07.PDF>

'wholly or partly used or intended to be used for the reception of pregnant women or of women immediately after child birth' (see Chapter 1). The request for exemption was approved and signed by Gerald Boland (Minister for Posts and Telegraphs), who was acting on behalf of the Minister for Local Government and Public Health. It stated that the 'Institution is not carried on for private profit'. However a handwritten note dated 30 January 1947 stated that the exemption order did not issue - it appears that this was confirmed by the Secretary of the Department of Health.

- 21.103 It was never envisaged that women would give birth in Regina Coeli and the hostel never had a designated resident or visiting midwife on its staff or a visiting obstetrician. The admission record for one woman in 1941 states that 'I explained to her that this was not a maternity home.' By December 1930, shortly after the hostel opened, women were being sent to give birth in the Coombe Hospital. At some later date the Rotunda Hospital - which was closer - became the hospital where women in Regina Coeli gave birth and attended ante-natal clinics. At this time most Dublin mothers gave birth at home and the city's maternity hospitals sent medical teams into the community to perform deliveries. There is no indication that Regina Coeli considered using this service. Regina Coeli also admitted women with their new-born infants, who had been discharged from all the Dublin maternity hospitals - women who had not been in the hostel before giving birth.
- 21.104 The annual clinical report of the Rotunda hospital for 1945 includes information on unmarried mothers who gave birth in the Rotunda in the years 1940-44, which shows that the largest cohort were discharged to Regina Coeli. The report stated, in reference to unmarried mothers, that 'approximately half of the mothers were anxious to have their babies adopted or boarded out or looked after by relatives and only about 2% were planning to marry the putative father or to look after the baby permanently themselves'. It noted that the hospital almoners were unable to remain in contact with these mothers and children.
- 21.105 This study suggested that both mothers and children often required 'a prolonged period of convalescent treatment under skilled nursing and medical supervision' following their discharge from the maternity hospital but 'Unfortunately the existing homes have not all got medical and nurses facilities'; and they were also

overcrowded - 'conditions which are detrimental to the health of both mother and child'.<sup>38</sup>

### Unmarried Mothers giving birth in the Rotunda

		Regina Coeli	
Total unmarried mothers		Mothers	Babies
1940	229	58	57
1941	241	75	69
1942	295	146	139
1943	319	144	131
1944	275	100	92

21.106 A DLGPH file in 1943 that examined provisions for ante-natal care for unmarried mothers in various institutions noted that expectant mothers in Regina Coeli were sent to the Rotunda for a medical examination on the first suitable day following their admission. It claimed that women attended ante-natal clinics regularly until the birth of their child. Expectant mothers received a special diet in the hostel, which consisted of an additional pint of milk daily in addition to 'a good midday meal of meat, vegetables and milk pudding'.

21.107 Infant mortality in Dublin was substantially worse than in comparable cities in Britain and it proved difficult to reduce it. Mortality in the city's tenements and city-centre cottages was extremely high, yet the mortality among illegitimate children was a multiple of that figure. Overcrowding, which facilitated the spread of infectious diseases, was a major factor; likewise the relatively low rate of breastfeeding (which was a reflection of poverty and poor nourishment of mothers). The poor quality of milk used to feed infants, which was often watered down, from tubercular cows, or riddled with infection was another contributory cause. The city of Dublin implemented a variety of schemes to reduce infant mortality, including the feeding of malnourished mothers, and providing depots to supply clean milk.<sup>39</sup>

21.108 Regina Coeli experienced outbreaks of infectious diseases almost from the beginning. In 1931 there is a record of a child being admitted to hospital with diphtheria: 'Corporation sent the following day and took away the bed clothes for

<sup>38</sup> Text and the table that follows: *Irish Journal of Medical Science*, no. 236 (August 1945), pp 235-7.

<sup>39</sup> Annual reports of the Dublin medical officer of health, 1929-54

disinfecting'. In April 1933 the Dublin city manager informed the DLGPH that the medical officer of health had notified him about a measles outbreak in Regina Coeli; he described the hostel as 'an institution founded for giving lodging to women of very poor class and their babies'. He reported that 'as many cases as possible' were sent to Cork Street Hospital, but as there was insufficient space to remove all the sick children, the public health section of Dublin Corporation had appointed a temporary nurse to look after these children in the hostel.

- 21.109 Appointments of temporary nurses for periods lasting weeks, and sometimes one to two months to tackle epidemics in Regina Coeli, were a regular feature throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The nurse who was appointed during the 1933 epidemic returned in 1935 to deal with another measles epidemic. There were further measles epidemics again requiring temporary nurses in August and December 1936; epidemics of gastro-enteritis, also requiring temporary nurses, were reported in the autumn of 1936, February - March 1937, April 1937 and May 1938. The records of individual mothers record details of deaths during these outbreaks. In 1935 a baby died in the hostel during an epidemic of measles. The record on another woman who had lived in the hostel since 1932 stated: 'Baby very ill on 7/2/1934 - refused to take it to hospital. Sent it to Clonskeagh Fever Hospital on 19/3/1934 but it was sent back- no room for it anywhere. Baby died in hostel on 22/3/1934'
- 21.110 The reports of the Dublin City medical officer of health record regular visits by the city's public health officials to the hostel and the Sláinte Welfare clinic in nearby Blackhall Place was available to mothers and babies in the hostel. Nurses weighed infants in the clinics and referred children that needed attention to a doctor. They gave weekly lectures on hygiene and mother craft but it is not known if any Regina Coeli mothers were present. The 1939 report on public health in Dublin city stated that unmarried mothers were visited 'in the ordinary way' by district health visitors; their records were kept in a similar manner to married women and they were addressed as married women in the clinics.<sup>40</sup> A later note on a Department of Health file indicates that the local dispensary doctor was responsible for medical care at Regina Coeli, but he found it difficult to visit the hostel 'except occasionally'.

<sup>40</sup> These reports are an invaluable source of information about maternal and child health in Dublin. Unfortunately many of these annual reports, including reports for most of the war years, are not available.

21.111 There is no indication of any response by the DLGPH to frequent requests by Dublin Corporation to approve the appointment of temporary nurses in Regina Coeli. In 1940 the Dublin city manager applied for approval to appoint both a day and night nurse because of an outbreak of German measles; the file noted that there was no suitable sleeping accommodation for the night nurse in the hostel. On this occasion however an official in the department noted that

There is an outbreak of some sort (including typhoid) about once a year at this institution. There is no official information re medical attendance. I understand that the M.C.W. M O<sup>41</sup> or the local disp[ensary] doctor may have managed to look after the babies on previous occasions.

21.112 He noted that some of the babies might have been transferred to St. Kevin's hospital. The department's attention was prompted on this occasion because the Dublin city manager applied for approval to appoint a doctor to attend at the hostel. Another official noted that 'The medical arrgts [arrangements] at this home are not satisfactory and it seems that if the Corporation do not bear the cost in this instance, proper medical attention is not likely to be provided otherwise, should the necessity arise in the future'. Dublin Corporation explained that in the past it had not claimed money from the department for these temporary appointments at Regina Coeli but would do so in future. The department was insistent that these claims should not be made under the Maternity and Child Welfare Grant scheme.

21.113 Temporary nurses were appointed on several occasions in the early 1940s to nurse epidemics of flu, enteritis and other infectious diseases. In the autumn of 1940 Regina Coeli suffered an outbreak of typhoid, which obviously affected adult women, because cases were sent to the nearby Hardwick Hospital.<sup>42</sup> In 1942 the department expressed concern that cases of gastro-enteritis were being nursed in Regina Coeli, as opposed to sick patients being transferred to a fever hospital. The department had received complaints from two named doctors who were attached to Dublin hospitals 'that cases are often moribund before transfer to their institutions'. The Dublin medical officer of health, Dr Russell, was asked to investigate why the hostel was not sending children with infectious diseases to hospital. He reported that temporary nurses were appointed in May 1940 following reports that there were eight cases of diarrhoea among children in the hostel. Because there was a qualified nurse in charge of the children, and a doctor had

<sup>41</sup> Maternity and child welfare medical officer.

<sup>42</sup> St Laurence's Hospital incorporated The Richmond, Whitworth and Hardwick Hospitals.

reported that the cases were not severe, it was decided to nurse them in the hostel. It was believed that these cases might be due to 'faulty feeding methods, and would clear up on proper adjustment of diet'. The fact that accommodation in the city's fever hospitals was limited was also a factor. He wished to keep hospital beds for children from the slums, where there was no possibility of them being nursed at home.

21.114 A baby was admitted to the infirmary in Regina Coeli with enteritis and died there in February 1942. A baby was removed to the infirmary with green diarrhoea and died there on New Year's Day 1942. There are frequent allegations that children in Regina Coeli were not transferred to hospital in time. In 1946 a baby was admitted to St Kevin's hospital and then transferred to St Clare's. The Regina Coeli records state that 'St. Clare's phoned here next day to say baby had been admitted the previous evening in a dying condition and asked why it was left so long.' A baby in 1942, 'died here in infirmary on 14/1/1943. Had not been seen by Dr [...] who refused to give a death certificate. Rotunda doctor had not seen it for three days so also refused a cert'. Some babies died in the hostel because they were refused admission to hospital. A mother 'says she took the child to Temple St on 19/6/1941, doctor admitted child, nun refused it when it arrived in ward because it came from Regina Coeli. She took it to St Ultan's Hospital but they had no bed'. Another baby was admitted to Cork St Hospital with measles, however three days later it was reported to have scarlet fever and was returned to the hostel where it died shortly afterwards. Dr Russell claimed that there were advantages in sending nurses into the hostel because 'there was no qualified person available in the home to effect prompt isolation of and so prevent the spread of infection among the healthy children'. The nurses isolated 18 children with enteritis in one 'ward' in the hostel; two more serious cases were transferred to fever hospitals. No children died. The hostel was being visited by the medical officer in charge of maternity and child welfare.

21.115 A report on Dr Russell's handling of the Regina Coeli epidemic was compiled by Dr Lysaght a medical inspector in the DLGPH. At the conclusion he commented: 'My own personal view is that the retention of unmarried mothers and children in this Hostel is altogether wrong. St. Patrick's Home, Pelletstown appears to me the proper place for all such cases where they are under the care of nurses; better [sic] are available', though he acknowledged that Pelletstown was overcrowded. He also noted that one of the doctors who had referred to 'moribund' cases stated that

this comment applied more widely to 'neglected ones from poor surroundings retained too long at home without medical and nursing attention'.

21.116 In 1942 Regina Coeli applied to a Dublin medical officer for funding to buy an electric water heater and Dublin Corporation duly applied for departmental approval for £19 to cover the cost of the heater, and £14 for installation. In response to that application the DLGPH noted that the hostel 'does not appear to have been approved under the Maternity and Child Welfare Scheme'. There were further epidemics and more temporary nursing appointments. The number of deaths in Regina Coeli peaked in 1943, which coincided with a spike in admissions. In 1944 yet another outbreak of measles resulted in Dublin Corporation appointing a doctor to attend the hostel for six weeks. When departmental approval was sought, an official noted that

some arrangement should be made whereby the authorities of Regina Coeli would always have the services of a doctor available. I have previously recommended that a resident MO should be appointed. The death rate amongst infants in this Institution is excessive. The arrangement made does not appear to be satisfactory.

21.117 Dublin Corporation had proposed appointing a doctor who was attached to the nearby St Laurence's Hospital, as medical officer to Regina Coeli. The department suggested that this appointment should be permanent; the medical officer should pay daily visits to the hostel. However a colleague cautioned that the hostel was not under the control of the Public Assistance Authority and, while the appointment of a medical officer seemed necessary, the cost could not be charged to the poor rate. Dr Conn Ward, the Parliamentary Secretary at the DLGPH, sanctioned this appointment but reiterated that the cost could not be recouped under the Maternity and Child Welfare Grant.

21.118 1946 appears to have been a crisis year. Deaths were lower than in the years 1942-44 but admissions had fallen. Twenty-two infants died between 2 February and 26 August, three in St Clare's hospital. Regina Coeli recorded several cases of gastro-enteritis among children who had recently been discharged from the Rotunda, Holles Street and St Kevin's hospitals. This particular epidemic prompted Dr Deeny, the chief medical officer of the DLGPH to ask whether the department had 'any relation to the Hostel', and whether it was possible to carry out an inspection. An official expressed the opinion that the Regina Coeli Hostel

came within the definition of maternity home and suggested that an authorised inspector could 'enter and inspect the Hostel at all reasonable times'.

- 21.119 Ten of the children who died in 1944 died in Regina Coeli, the remainder died in various hospitals. The largest number, 26 died in St Kevin's hospital; two died in St Clare's Hospital, which had opened in October 1944 as an infectious diseases hospital for children (see Chapter 2). In 1945, 13 deaths took place in the hostel, 23 in St Clare's. [A number of children born to Regina Coeli mothers died in Dublin maternity hospitals shortly after birth and were never resident in the hostel.] St Clare's accounted for 17 of the 33 deaths that took place in Regina Coeli between January and 12 August 1946; two children died in the hostel.
- 21.120 In August 1946 a department medical inspector and another doctor visited Regina Coeli 'with a view to suggesting measures to reduce infant mortality'. They recommended the appointment of a visiting medical officer and a day and night nurse, who should ideally have training and experience in children's diseases. They also recommended establishing an isolation ward where new arrivals and suspected cases could be isolated until cleared by the medical officer. Although the arrangements for preparing infant feeds were 'fairly satisfactory', they suggested that it would be desirable to provide a separate kitchen with adequate sterilising equipment. There were only seven permanent members of staff, no qualified nurse or doctor to care for the babies and mothers in the hostel. The permanent staff consisted of members of the Legion of Mary. The Legion of Mary has told the Commission that up to 120 volunteers would have contributed two hours work every week. At the time there were 220 residents. The medical inspector noted that the policy of the Legion of Mary was to encourage mothers to go out to work, leaving their baby in the hostel in the hope that this would enable the mothers to keep their children. He reported that 'a considerable amount of money would need to be spent in repair, decoration, furnishing and suitable equipment before it could be considered suitable. The voluntary effort, beyond doubt laudable, in my opinion is unable to cope with the situation in a satisfactory manner'. He described the state of hygiene in the hostel as 'fairly satisfactory'; each baby had its own bottle. However it was not possible to encourage breast feeding if mothers went out to work.
- 21.121 Following this inspection, the department wrote to Regina Coeli asking it to arrange for 'a small deputation of the authorities' of the hostel to meet the department's

medical advisors to discuss measures to prevent infant deaths. In November, Dr Deeny reported that he had met representatives of the hostel and efforts were continuing to ensure that there was adequate medical and nursing care. In December a representative of the Legion of Mary informed him that the hostel had recently refused to admit three babies from the Rotunda because they believed that they were suffering from enteritis. These babies had died in St Clare's hospital; a fourth child admitted with her mother at the request of the almoner in the Rotunda, had been removed to St Clare's the day following her arrival and had died. At this time it would appear that discussions were underway about 'the Medical Missionaries' - presumably a reference to the Medical Missionaries of Mary<sup>43</sup> - taking on nursing duties in the hostel. However Frank Duff claimed to 'have a prospect of a team from the Richmond Hospital' - he suggested that this arrangement 'would be preferable as obviating two controls working in the same place, and also the question of accommodation'. In January 1947 Dr Deeny instructed a colleague to 'Pl[ease] keep after this place'; he wanted a report within ten days. His colleague reported that Mr Duff claimed to have secured the services of a medical officer, who was a member of the Legion of Mary and a full-time voluntary worker. From the summer of 1946 the legion was sending reports to the department about babies admitted to St Clare's from the hostel; they highlighted the number of these children who had recently arrived in Regina Coeli from Dublin maternity hospitals; these reports continued during 1947.

21.122 The department arranged to meet Frank Duff in July 1947 and again later that year; the primary concern was to confirm the appointment of a medical officer. Notes on children who were suffering from gastroenteritis indicate that the named doctor, who was a member of the Legion of Mary, was working at the hostel in the spring of 1947; however it is unclear how long he remained. In December it is recorded that Frank Duff had promised to appoint him as medical officer to the hostel. However there is a short note from Dr Deeny headed, 'Regina Coeli Medical Appointment', stating that he had discussed 'this matter' with the Archbishop of Dublin. 'He himself felt that little could be done to improve this place'.

21.123 The department carried out an inspection on 30 July 1948. The inspector, who was shown over the building by Frank Duff, reiterated that there should be proper

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<sup>43</sup> A religious order founded in Drogheda in 1937.

medical and nursing supervision; there was none at that time. The doctor who had been expected to take up the position had left and was not expected to return. One of the 'lady supervisors' was being trained at Fairy Hill, which was described as an 'open-air hospital';<sup>44</sup> following her time there she was planning to attend a course at the Rotunda; this had apparently been arranged by Dublin paediatrician Dr Robert Collis. The department's medical inspector recommended that an architect should inspect the buildings and determine what repairs and reconstruction was needed. He indicated that the interior needed cleaning and painting and adequate heating, bathrooms and lavatories and a properly-equipped nursery needed to be installed. He also recommended the appointment of a visiting paediatrician; adequately trained nursing staff to supervise infants and infant feeding; proper beds, bedding and bed linen; adequate laundry arrangements and arrangements for the care of sick adults.

21.124 In his memoirs, Dr Deeny records that 'At some medical meeting or other, possibly in the Royal Academy of Medicine', Bob Collis said that the Regina Coeli Hostel was in a terrible state, that babies were dying there and that conditions were abominable'. Dr Deeny stated that he went to visit Regina Coeli to see whether these allegations were correct and he determined that enteritis was prevalent in the hostel. He commented that

'Frank Duff resented any interference from anybody, was bound by the rules and regulations of the Legion which he had written himself, was a living saint, having devoted his life to this extraordinary mission. He turned off his hearing aid at meetings if he did not wish to agree to something...It was very difficult to come to any conclusion on what he was doing, but he did have babies with enteritis there. After my shouting at him, he agreed to allow me to help.

21.125 Dr Deeny's secretary in the department organised 'a whip-around' and collected £25, which he used to persuade Frank Duff to set aside 'a little room, which we furnished as a kind of quarantine station'. He arranged that every woman arriving with her baby would be placed in that room for five days. If the baby was healthy, mother and infant would be admitted into the hostel. He claimed that this isolation process 'gradually cleaned up the place'. He also claimed that many of the infants

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<sup>44</sup> It was established by the paediatrician Dr Collis to provide care for refugees arriving in Ireland.

who were arriving into Regina Coeli with enteritis had been discharged from the Rotunda.<sup>45</sup>

21.126 When Dr Deeny informed the Minister of Health, Dr James Ryan, about Regina Coeli, the minister decided to pay a visit. Deeny described the hostel as

pretty grim...Here and there, through those great empty workhouse wards, the women had made little private areas. An old bed, a cradle made from an orange box, a couple of other such boxes for a bedside table or a stool, a rag of a floor rug, pin-ups and holy pictures and a clothes line and this was their home.

21.127 He claimed that Dr Ryan promised Frank Duff £30,000 'Sweep money' asking that each woman should be given 'a decent cubicle, fix up the sanitation and the heating and so on'.<sup>46</sup>

21.128 A report of the consultative health council<sup>47</sup> dated 3 August 1948 included details about infant mortality and facilities in Regina Coeli.

For the year ending 31 March 1948

Admissions (presumably of children) totalled	74
Requiring hospitalisation	21
Admitted to St Clare's	10
Deaths in hospital	16 (21.6% of total admissions)

21.129 Nine children died in St Clare's, three in fever hospitals, three in St Kevin's hospital and one in Regina Coeli. The cause of death listed for those who died in St Kevin's was marasmus in two cases and malnutrition in one case. The report stated that they had failed to 'trace' the cause of death of the infant who died in the hostel. It noted that 'A "Nursery" is available into which illegitimate infants are received, their mothers being accommodated in a special department. All babies under six months are isolated before admission'.

<sup>45</sup> Deeny *To Cure and to care* (Dublin: Glendale Press, 1989) pp 96-7. The Commission cannot determine whether this is true.

<sup>46</sup> Deeny pp160-161 If Dr Ryan visited Regina Coeli, he would have visited before February 1948 when the Fianna Fáil government was defeated in a general election. Deeny's memoir was written many years later; he may be confusing some events; the promise of funding from the Hospitals Trust is recorded at a meeting in December 1948.

<sup>47</sup> The consultative child health council was established in May 1948 by Minister of Health, Dr Noel Browne, to advise him on measures that would improve children's health, and particularly measures that would bring about a reduction in infant mortality. These figures cannot be compared with the data in the statistical appendix which has been presented by calendar year.

- 21.130 A sub-committee of the consultative health council that focused on infant and child health in Dublin was chaired by the paediatrician, Dr Robert Collis. Most of their recommendations related to the general population. They emphasised the importance of breastfeeding, regular weighing of infants, artificial feeding when necessary and isolating infected infants. They noted that the death rate of children born to single mothers was more than three times the rate for 'legitimate' babies; this was a problem 'to be faced resolutely if the general infant mortality rate is to be reduced'. The report examined conditions in institutions that accommodated unmarried mothers and their children. They described Regina Coeli as unsatisfactory; infant mortality was three times the rate in Pelletstown. The hostel was 'lack(ing) almost every proper facility in regard to both nursing and structure'; it was utterly unsuitable for new-born infants. They claimed that infants in Regina Coeli were 'not being properly cared for or adequately nourished at present. For instance from reports received we understand that babies have no suitable nursery; and that often tiny newborn babies are kept with their mothers in improvised cots and in crowded cold dormitories and are only fed 4 times in 24 hours'.
- 21.131 In 1947 Regina Coeli applied again for exemption from the requirements of the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934*. The hostel had been sent a registration form but a woman, described by the department as 'the nominal head of the Institution (I think)' said that they were unable to comply with the requirements of this Act. The department referred her to the Dublin Corporation health department. Dr Deeny described the requirement that Regina Coeli should register as a maternity home, as 'an excellent opportunity to enable us to achieve some of the improvements - very necessary - specified by Dr OS'.
- 21.132 Shortly after this Miss Litster noted that Frank Duff had agreed to apply to Dublin Corporation to register the hostel under the 1934 Act. She indicated that, if the hostel was to comply with the legislation, the essential requirements were the appointment of a visiting children's doctor and trained nursing staff and the provision of equipment in the institution. She reported that Frank Duff hoped to secure the services of a second nurse who was a member of the Legion of Mary. Miss Litster suggested that it was important 'that the proper conduct of the hostel should be secured within the constitution of the Legion of Mary, that is, by voluntary workers attached to the Legion'. She acknowledged that the hostel was 'not an ideal home for mothers & babies. It has however since its inception,

filled a want, and it does something which no other home in Eire succeeds in doing. It 'keeps mother & child together'. The children in the hostel appeared to be healthy and contented. Their mothers clothe & care for them as best they can and were it not for the existence of the hostel these children would be for the most part in industrial schools. Separation of mother and child would be in most cases complete. The hostel has kept mother & child together and has saved the State the cost of maintenance of the children in Industrial Schools ...The spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion which activate the Legionaries who work in the Hostel is to my mind the fine flowering of a selfless humanity.

21.133 Miss Litster was adamant that this was 'not something which may readily be replaced by paid labour'. She advocated finding a compromise between the government's requirements for professional staff and the Legion's culture of voluntary service.

21.134 In December 1948 officials in the Department of Health discussed the registration of the hostel as a maternity home with representatives of the Legion of Mary. The department assured Frank Duff and his colleagues that the Minister (Dr Noel Browne) 'appreciated the very important work' and wished to 'do everything possible' to assist. However they reiterated that the hostel must have adequate medical and nursing staff. Frank Duff replied that all the work was done by voluntary staff and employing nurses or a doctor 'would give rise to very considerable difficulties'. He would welcome an arrangement where nurses on the staff of Dublin Corporation would visit the hostel daily and 'on request'. He gave a commitment that he and his fellow-workers would co-operate 'in every possible way' with nurses and doctors. Dr Harbison, Dublin Corporation superintendent medical officer of health promised that if that was done, he would recommend that the Dublin city manager would make an annual grant to the hostel, and the department gave a commitment that the Legion of Mary could apply to the Hospitals Trust for a grant to meet capital expenditure. They also suggested that Mr Duff apply to the Public Assistance Authority for a grant towards the running costs of the section of the hostel that accommodated destitute women. Frank Duff claimed that he had made many unsuccessful applications to the PAA but 'it appears to him that the Board of Assistance was very much opposed to his efforts to help these women and children'.

21.135 Frank Duff wrote to the Archbishop of Dublin immediately after this meeting. Dr McQuaid appears to have been much more supportive of the Legion of Mary than his predecessor Archbishop Byrne. In 1942 he donated linen (no further details available) to Regina Coeli and the president of Regina Coeli thanked him: 'it would have been beyond our power to secure such superb material, of which we stood in greatest need'. She also thanked him for his interest in the hostel. In December 1948 Frank Duff thanked him for the cheque that he had sent as a contribution to the cost of 're-conditioning' Regina Coeli.<sup>48</sup> On 16 December, shortly before the meeting with the department, the Archbishop had reported that 'Dr Collis again insisted that Dr Spain<sup>49</sup> and he were the only medical upholders of the Regina Coeli at that Council meeting<sup>50</sup> and that he only drew attention to the defects of the place in order to get help for the hostel'. He suggested that Frank Duff should meet Dr Spain.<sup>51</sup>

21.136 Frank Duff informed the Archbishop that 'astonishing things took place at the meeting with the governmental deputation'. The officials all professed 'their intensive favour for Regina Coeli and the work it does'. They suggested that it was the only institution of its kind in the world, making 'an invaluable contribution towards the particular problem', and it should be given financial aid. However they highlighted the hostel's weak spot, the absence of staff with professional qualifications, and suggested that this adversely affected the attitude of the medical profession towards the hostel. The department recommended that the nurse who visited weekly should make a daily visit, and this would satisfy the medical professionals. Mr Duff told the Archbishop that these visits would not constitute an assumption of authority over the work carried out in the hostel, adding, 'They (presumably the department officials) would also seek to provide adequate medical assistance'. He reported that the department had suggested that he apply for £10,000 towards the cost of improvements, and promised him that it would be granted. He also reported that 'they would recognise us as qualifying for a grant under the welfare code of 50% of our annual expenditure'. This is not minuted in the department's records; it would appear to be a reference to the proposal by the Dublin Corporation medical officer that he would recommend that the city manager should pay an annual grant to the hostel, but no amount or

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<sup>48</sup> DDA/AB8/b/XXI/79/12/8: Regina Coeli.

<sup>49</sup> Holles Street.

<sup>50</sup> The consultative health council meeting.

<sup>51</sup> DDA/AB8/b/XXI/79/12/13.

percentage as mentioned.<sup>52</sup> Mr Duff told the archbishop that ‘the attitude of the four of them was delightful. It was not like a conference of officials but of very earnest Catholics’. He claimed that the officials insisted that Dr Collis did not represent them and he reassured the archbishop that ‘we are not abandoning our idea of getting regular nurses on the Regina Coeli staff, and we will take energetic measures in that direction’. He thanked the archbishop for permission to use his name ‘in the event of the going being bad’, though the need did not arise.<sup>53</sup>

- 21.137 When the department approved capital expenditure for Regina Coeli some months later (see below starting paragraph 164), an official suggested that they should insist on Frank Duff agreeing to the appointment of a resident doctor and nurse, but that did not happen. In December 1949 Dr Deeny noted that a public health nurse visited Regina Coeli at least one a week ‘and oftener if she thinks necessary, so that there is some more care being given’.
- 21.138 In February 1949 the department contacted Dublin Corporation to inquire ‘on what grounds it was decided by the City Medical Officer’ that Regina Coeli was not to be regarded as a maternity home for the purposes of the 1934 Act. The Commission has not seen any record of a reply to this letter. A file headed ‘Hospital Statistics: List of Voluntary and Local Authority Institutions and Private Maternity Homes’, compiled by the Department of Health in approximately 1960 (it is not dated) lists Regina Coeli under the heading of ‘Voluntary Institutions’; it is listed together with voluntary homes for the elderly and on another list in the same file with the heading ‘Private Voluntary Institutions for the Elderly’. It is not listed among the maternity homes. There is no evidence that Regina Coeli was ever registered or inspected under the 1934 Act.
- 21.139 There is no indication that Regina Coeli appointed trained nurses from the ranks of its members. The Legion of Mary member who was being trained in nursing abandoned the effort, and Miss Litster reported that Frank Duff had decided ‘not to follow up this idea’; he hoped to identify one or more trained nurses who were members of the Legion of Mary. She reported that some attempts had been made towards re-organisation in the hostel; the dining and recreation rooms were being combined and the current dining room was being equipped as a nursery.

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<sup>52</sup> Institutions approved under the Maternity and Child Welfare Scheme could recoup 50% of approved costs, but they had to submit records of expenditure.

<sup>53</sup> DDA/AB8/b/XXI/79/12/14.

- 21.140 The battle over medical appointments continued. In 1951 the department considered a report given to the Dublin medical officer, which has not been seen by the Commission. In reply, an official told the Dublin city manager that 'in my opinion it was wrong that Mr Duff should dictate to the local authority as to the person who would provide their much needed service to the people under his charge'. It emphasised that the secretary of the Department of Health had agreed that the service should be provided by the Corporation's Maternity and Child Welfare Section, by staff of that section 'and not under any special arrangement as regards the appointment of a special doctor to meet Mr Duff's convenience'. A subsequent minute indicated that the city manager 'does not wish to pursue the matter any further in view of the difficulties raised by Mr Duff'.
- 21.141 By 1952 the Dublin public health department was arranging to hold a clinic in Regina Coeli under the maternity and child welfare scheme. An additional medical officer was appointed later that year; the duties included a weekly clinic at Regina Coeli. By March 1953, a total of 25 clinics had been held in Regina Coeli; they were attended by 2,091 women, infants and children. Women and children underwent medical examinations; and baby formula (for example, Cow and Gate, Farex, Bengers Food) and various vitamins and dietary supplements were distributed. The Dublin chief medical officer for maternity and child services told the department that 'a very high degree of delicacy has to be observed in questioning mothers in this clinic, more particularly at the onset of our operations there, as any incautious handling would only negative our efforts at Child Welfare'. All staff were instructed 'to tread very warily'. As some mothers were at work their children were brought to the clinic by other mothers. By this time, the children were being immunised against diphtheria and whooping cough. Some women in the hostel contracted TB and there are also references to women receiving a TB allowance.<sup>54</sup>
- 21.142 When two members of the Legion of Mary who had worked in Regina Coeli were asked whether doctors and nurse 'came in' to the hostel, one replied that they didn't; the second said that a doctor and nurse came on Wednesday; that was the practice when this woman began working in the hostel in 1962 or 1963. One woman noted that there were many children 'with problems' such as measles, anything contagious'. One suggested that the children of unmarried mothers had

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<sup>54</sup> This was almost certainly the Infectious Diseases Maintenance Allowance which was introduced by the *Health Act 1947*.

more medical problems than other women; she blamed this on poor nutrition during pregnancy, before they came to the hostel.<sup>55</sup>

### Deaths

- 21.143 There is no separate death register for Regina Coeli. Most deaths of mothers or children who were resident in the hostel took place in hospitals. The Commission has compiled a list of deaths, based on the paper records of a woman's entry to the hostel. It records a total of 734 child deaths and 13 deaths of mothers. These records note the date of death, often the place of death, and the cause of death, although the latter is only available in approximately 40% of child deaths and a lower proportion of maternal deaths.
- 21.144 The records show the majority of deaths of women occurred before 1950. The cause of death is not recorded in most of these cases however most do not seem to be related to the pregnancy or birth. Three mothers died in the Rialto Hospital, a TB hospital, and one mother died in the Pigeon House – another TB hospital. One mother gave birth to stillborn twins in the Rotunda in 1942; she died there a few weeks later. In 1944, a mother who had been a resident of Regina Coeli since 1932 'got ill suddenly in dormitory and was anointed'. She was removed to St Kevin's hospital and died there. A woman who was five months pregnant when she arrived in 1935 went to the Dublin Union some time later and died there. A woman was admitted in 1944, her child was placed with a foster mother by the CPRSI later that year. She went home but returned to Regina Coeli as she could not stay at home because the neighbours were suspicious. She left the hostel in December 1944 to take up indoor work. A later note recorded that the hostel was informed that she committed suicide by drinking a bottle of Lysol; her mother and father were told she died from natural causes and were not told about the baby. A woman entered the hostel pregnant in 1987 but there is no reference to the birth of the baby. She was found dead in a nearby street in 1992; her remains were buried in the 'Alone' plot in Glasnevin following her funeral mass in Church Street.

### Deaths of children

- 21.145 734 children who were associated with Regina Coeli died. 68% of the deaths occurred in the 1940s; 335 children died in the years 1941-45. The number of deaths fell sharply in the late 1940s, in line with national trends and trends in other

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<sup>55</sup> Graham 'Unmarried Mothers'

mother and baby homes. 1949 was the last year when the number of child deaths was greater than ten. The last child death was recorded in 1983.

- 21.146 Most children died in Dublin hospitals; 19% died in Regina Coeli. St Ultan's children's hospital and St Clare's a children's hospital for infectious diseases that opened in October 1944 accounted for 30% of the total deaths. Almost one-quarter of the children – 23% died in either St Kevin's hospital or in Pelletstown; 8% died in Cork St. or Clonskeagh fever hospitals. The high proportion of deaths in hospitals that treated infectious diseases shows that they were a major cause of child deaths in Regina Coeli
- 21.147 There are a number of instances of stillbirths and infants dying suddenly in the hostel. In 1953, an infant was 'found dead in cot...No inquest necessary as it had heart trouble. Remains removed to the morgue'. In 1934 a woman 'stayed in bed ill. When another resident brought her dinner in bed she said that her baby had been born. It was dead in the bed with her. Baby removed to Union. Mother attended by two doctors from Rotunda hospital. No inquest necessary as baby had been still born'. An infant whose mother came from England in 1945 having 'got into trouble with an American soldier', died in the hostel; the infant was reported to have had a bad heart. A child died in the dormitory in March 1945; the record stated that the infant 'had been delicate from birth'. Gardaí were called when a baby was found dead in a cot but 'after examination were satisfied baby died from natural causes, was delicate and wasted'. A baby was found dead in bed beside her mother in 1942: 'though she had a cot, she did not use it, no inquest'. A three-month old baby was found dead in 1945 as the mother was carrying it to hospital. 'Baby taken by Guards to morgue on 4/12/1945 for post-mortem. No inquest.' When a child was found dead in his cot in Cedar Room in 1951 the Gardaí were notified and his body was removed to the morgue. However no inquest was needed. Another child of this mother was taken to Clonskeagh fever hospital in 1956 suffering from whooping cough and died of bronchial pneumonia. A three-month old baby died, in 1942, in a 'weaning fit'. The mother gave her infant an elaborate funeral with white plumes and a mourning coach. One of the last children's deaths in 1964 was the eleven-year old grandson of a widow, who had come to Regina Coeli two years earlier from England, with him. He died in the hostel, and his remains were taken to St Kevin's hospital; no cause of death is recorded on the hostel records.

**Accidents and Abuse of Children**

21.148 The cases cited above indicate that the hostel called the Gardaí in cases of possible infanticide. The record relating to a mother in 1939 state:

Baby was found dead in bed beside [mother] next morning...though [mother] said it was alright at 7.30pm, there was to be an inquest, coroner satisfied with his report. Doctor advised that mothers should not keep babies in bed with them. Guards did not attach importance to tightness of baby's clothing. [mother] was quite unperturbed and sisters were not satisfied that she was entirely innocent.

21.149 The fact that children lived in this hostel for long periods, in a large building that was never designed to reduce the risks of accidents, and the large numbers of active children in the hostel undoubtedly led to an increased risk of accidental injury. There are references to burns and scalding by boiling water. In 1936 one girl 'Got a very bad fall in the yard behind the big house'; a boy 'crushed his finger under a heavy rock in the garden. Had to get his top finger amputated'. In 1940, a small boy 'had head stitched about...after blow of stone thrown deliberately' in 1945. In 1955 a two-year-old boy was admitted to St Kevin's hospital with severe burns on his back. Another fell off the 'Big House staircase' in 1955 and was removed to the Richmond hospital. A child with a head injury was admitted to Richmond hospital after a fall in 1958. A boy who had been in the hostel since he was four years old injured himself when he was eleven; he 'fell over bannisters in Rosary House and fell from top to ground'. He was detained in the Richmond hospital. A boy who arrived in 1942 suffered from scarlet fever and measles; he received stiches to his head when another boy threw stones at him, and he broke his arm.

21.150 In 1943, a baby boy 'fell into a pot of boiling water and died from his injuries'. Another baby was 'scalded by hot water on legs while mother was working in kitchen' in 1949. Yet another baby 'burnt his hands on fire'. A baby who was 22 months old in 1945, 'fell into a pot of boiling water left on floor in cottage'. He was removed to the Richmond Hospital and died as a result of his burns. In 1953 a one-year old girl 'was scalded by falling tea pot'. She was admitted to the Richmond Hospital and died four days later; an inquest was held into her death. In 1960 a press fell on a girl; she was admitted to the Richmond hospital with a broken leg and required stitches to her head. This child was readmitted to the Richmond the following year with burnt hands.

21.151 There are also reports of children having been abused or neglected. Some reports refer to the mental health of the mother when the incident occurred. A mother was reported in 1957 to be ill-treating her child: 'was beating it and not giving it the bottle properly'. A mother came to Regina Coeli in 1943 with her child. Her record states '[...] and baby to hospital. [...] called without baby on 8/12/1943. Said she had been to indoor work. Women suspect she had abandoned the child'. A mother arrived with her baby girl in 1939; her baby became ill and was admitted to Temple St hospital. A nurse later phoned for details of the case as the child was very neglected. It was decided to contact the NSPCC about the case. The mother was suspected of not feeding the baby properly:

Returned to hospital and then returned to hostel. Has bronchial trouble and developed whooping cough. Sisters noticed [mother] acting rather peculiar. [Mother] refused to take baby to St Ultans. Dr [the dispensary doctor] saw it three times but [mother] would not do what he ordered. [Mother] created a scene in GPO. Guards got in touch with Catholic Girls Society who had her sent back here. Baby taken from her that night lest she should harm it. Both went to the Union. Dr [...] of the Union said she was very troublesome and he was thinking of committing her to Grangegorman'

21.152 A woman who first entered Regina Coeli in 1939 and later married was summoned in December 1956 for neglecting her children. A woman came to Regina Coeli in 1933 with her eight-day old baby. 'Attempted to strangle her baby on 13/6/1933 so the sister sent for her mother who took her home. Mrs C took charge of the case. Did not get imprisonment through her influence.' A woman came to Regina Coeli, seven months pregnant in 1939. Her baby was reported as seriously ill in the infirmary with measles the following year and died. She returned pregnant and was re-admitted in 1947. She left with her baby a week after giving birth. A detective contacted the hostel because a baby had been abandoned in Temple Bar that evening, and the baby's blanket had the initials RCH (Regina Coeli Hostel). A woman came to the hostel in 1943 eight months pregnant. She returned following the birth with her baby. Her record stated 'Is neglectful of him. Baby sent back to Rotunda and then transferred to Clonskeagh Hospital'; he died there. A woman who had arrived in 1942, four months pregnant, was reported to be 'neglecting baby. She is a bit mental'. Mother and baby were admitted to the Dublin Union; the baby died the following day.

21.153 The records relating to a woman in 1947 state that a baby who was taken out of the hostel in 1947 to return to Kilkenny. 'Notified by Garda had been abandoned by mother in Temple Bar previous evening at 6.20pm. Identified by laundry mark on our blanket. [Mother] Taken to St Kevin's by Garda.' A baby daughter of a mother who came to Regina Coeli in 1936 was reported to have died in the Adelaide hospital later that year.

An inquest was held as it had just been brought to Hospital. Mother and father are street singers. Baby died of pneumonia. Coroner remarked on loss of weight as checked with feeding list here and its sudden development of pneumonia. Sr. O appeared for the Hostel. Verdict: death due to malnutrition through no fault of mother.

21.154 In 1946 a woman came to Regina Coeli with a seven-week old baby who had been born prematurely in Pelletstown. She was brought by an official from St Kevin's.

Dr Coffey<sup>56</sup> phoned - admits baby is in very bad condition and has notified NSPCC and Bridewell that [...] insisted on taking child out, and she has undertaken to relieve us of all responsibility in event of baby dying. Baby admitted to St Clare's on 5/4/1946. It died on 9/4/1946. Inquest held in St Clare's 18/4/1946. [member of Legion of Mary] attended. Coroner gave verdict that baby died from natural causes but police later informed [...] there might be proceedings taken against the girl. She was interviewed at Bridewell the next day and told not to leave Dublin pending decision of Attorney General.

21.155 Another case records that:

Guard called 3/2/1941 as baby found at [...]. From the description given it is surmised it is [woman who had been in Regina Coeli's]. Child was in a pram with a brown blanket and quilt on it. There was a hot water bottle and feeding bottle in pram. Reported next day child had been placed in Union...Was charged on 21/2/1941 and committed to Pelletstown on a year's probation.<sup>57</sup>

21.156 In December 1944 it was reported that a woman who arrived in Regina Coeli some months earlier with her baby, 'had beaten the child very severely on previous days - possibly due to her own ill health. Baby admitted to St Ultans on 25/10/1945 -

<sup>56</sup> A paediatrician attached to the Dublin Union.

<sup>57</sup> The Commission is not aware of any legal basis for a committal to Pelletstown. It is possible that the woman agreed to go there.

both lungs affected. [baby] died 6/12/1945 - both lungs had been collapsed.' There is no reference to a Garda investigation or an inquest. The mother was described as being in 'better frame of mind now. More reconciled about baby's death.'

21.157 There are also allegations that Regina Coeli neglected children who were in the hostel's care, particularly with respect to infant feeding. A baby was admitted from Regina Coeli to St Kevin's and then sent to St Clare's in 1946: 'St. Clare's phoned here next day to say baby had been admitted the previous evening in a dying condition and asked why it was left so long.' In 1937 it was, 'Reported by Mrs Clarke, NSPCC that [...] had complained at the office that the baby was neglected here. Mrs Clarke was shown the weight chart for the feeding kitchen which showed it gained weight until the week before it went to hospital. Mrs Clarke settled the baby in High Park on 11/6/1938.'

21.158 There are further references to foster mothers being neglectful of babies in their care. A woman came to the hostel with an eight-day-old baby in 1946: 'Reported as giving child to [...] around June, 1946. Child described as being 'badly neglected...as baby was very ill decided to take it to hospital before admitting her here...baby looks very neglected and very poorly clad'. The mother was readmitted to Regina Coeli, her baby was admitted to St Clare's.

21.159 The records on a woman who came to Regina Coeli five months pregnant reported that in January 1942 'she had got baby settled with foster mother in Wicklow...Reported 23/4/1943 baby was very bad in Union...Reported 23/7/1943 baby was blind from neglect by foster mother. Baby had died on 7/4/1944'. A mother came to the hostel in 1945 with an eleven-month-old baby. 'Had been living with her uncle. Says the aunt ill-treated the baby...The child's body is bruised from the uncle beating it'.

### **Feeding/Nutrition**

21.160 The institutional records mention a 'feeding kitchen' in Regina Coeli. A mother in 1934 'was spoken to for having a bottle of cold milk which she proposed to heat under the tap and give the baby during the night. Left as a result with baby'. There are some references to breastfeeding: in 1932: 'As it was found out that she was breastfeeding [a child aged almost three years] at night it was arranged to leave the child in [...] at night. [Mother] objected at first but gave in'. [This was

presumably in order to wean the child off breastfeeding]. The various health reports and inspections during the 1940s contain references to inappropriate feeding, and this also features on some of the individual records. A woman entered the hostel in 1935 eight months pregnant. She returned with her baby having given birth in the Rotunda. The baby, described as 'very delicate', was admitted to St Ultan's children's hospital at four months, and returned to the hostel shortly afterwards. The file noted 'Baby very ill due to faulty feeding at night. Found on 17/7/1935 that she had equipment in a case to feed the baby at night. [...] was notified as Dr [...] had forbidden such feeding. [Mother] was offered choice of Union or courts. Refused to go to either. Taken to Union'. A later report noted that the mother was in the Dublin Union; her child was in Pelletstown and died there. A woman came to the hostel in 1941 with her 11-day old baby, who died. The record noted that '[...] had been feeding the child in hospital but denied that here and had him on a bottle. Was only 4 lbs weight'. A woman was admitted when pregnant, and returned having given birth in Holles Street in June 1942. A report five days later noted that 'she was very troublesome in hospital, refused to nurse the baby and it had to be put on a bottle.'

### **Restructuring the hostel - creating family units**

21.161 In 1949, the Department of Health forwarded an application to the Hospitals Commission for funding to carry out improvements at Regina Coeli Hostel. The application proposed to segregate mothers and children by the age of the children, providing accommodation that was 'appropriate to each age group'. It proposed to convert a ground-floor refectory to accommodate mothers and babies from birth to six months. When the Hospitals Commission inspected Regina Coeli there were 19 mothers and babies in this category. They noted that 'the mothers and infants using it will both sleep and spend most of their day' in that room. A first floor dormitory would be converted to provide sleeping accommodation for mothers and babies aged from six months to two years, and the second floor would provide similar accommodation for mothers and children aged from two to four years. At this time there were 30 mothers with children aged from six months to two years, and 26 mothers with children aged from two to four years. The work in these dormitories involved painting and decorating and the installation of a central pot-stove in each dormitory. Work had already been completed on the ground-floor dormitory, but the other dormitories were described as 'very dilapidated looking and depressing in contrast'.

- 21.162 The most ambitious improvements planned were in the accommodation provided for mothers with children who were over four years of age, who were described as 'a growing problem owing to the age of the children and the fact that some of the mothers go out to daily work'. The legion had settled some of these 'small family units' in cottages at the rear of the hostel. Frank Duff's 1950 memorandum indicated that these early units were 'defective from many points of view, notably in regard to the congestion caused'. The application to the Hospitals Commission proposed to reconstruct the dormitories in a vacant building, dividing each dormitory into 'six cubicles and a common room...with an open fireplace for cooking proposed and an adjoining sanitary annexe', with a washroom, toilets and bath. The plan was to reconstruct nine dormitories to provide 54 units for mothers and children. These units were to be organised on the basis that most women went out to work, but at least one woman in a unit of six acted as housekeeper and looked after the children.
- 21.163 The Hospitals Commission reported in favour of these proposals. They noted that the family unit would be 'comparatively inexpensive and...very necessary'. Much of the work was being carried out by members of the legion; the remainder was being carried out by direct labour, 'on a day-to-day basis', so the main cost related to materials. However they highlighted the need for repairs to the roof, gutter, stone stairs and the main fabric of the building, and absence of a fire escape. Given these costs they recommended that the work should be limited to five dormitories, creating thirty family units, which would meet current needs. There were 26 mothers in Regina Coeli with children aged four years and older.
- 21.164 When the Hospitals Commission submitted their report to the Department of Health the department carried out its own inspection. The medical inspector endorsed the recommendations of the Hospitals Commission. He described the proposed improvements as a very serious approach to the 'unmarried mother and child problem' However he described the overall condition of the building as 'far from satisfactory' because of lack of funds. The bed clothing was 'dirty'; the hostel had sufficient blankets but sheets and bedspreads were in short supply; beds were in need of replacement and there was also a need for new cots. The department inspector was informed that the laundry was carried out in St Kevin's - the Dublin Union - but he claimed that 'the bed clothes appeared not to been washed for quite a long time', and some of the sheets and pillow cases were made from disused

cotton flour bags.<sup>58</sup> He suggested that the laundry facilities should be improved, perhaps there should be an electric washing machine for babies' nappies. The 'Grey Building' which was being converted into family units had been vacant for some time; the floors were in need of repair and 'appeared to me to be dangerous'. He noticed water coming through the roof. A later departmental memorandum commented that 'There does not appear to be much point in giving a Grant for the rehabilitation of a building if the leaking roof of the building is not also repaired'.

21.165 By the end of 1949 the department reported that the chimney and roof were being repaired, and work was advancing on the family units. The inspector commented that 'it looks very neat and clean and comfortable. The residents have a common sitting room which is also very comfortable'. He inspected the beds and he reported that the beds and bed linen were 'not very clean or in good condition, mattresses are also short'. Some of the Legion of Mary volunteers informed him that they needed '½ ton coir and 1000 yards of ticking,<sup>59</sup> 500 sheets and 500 blankets'. This purpose of the department's visit appears to have been to determine the final cost of the work.

21.166 A report by the Hospitals Trust records a grant to Regina Coeli for capital expenditure, amounting to £10,830; the only description given is 'improvements'.<sup>60</sup> The amount was greater than the £10,000 that was originally approved; the additional money was provided to complete the work on the western block. However the legal advisor in the Department of Health had queried whether Regina Coeli was eligible for this funding, because, under the *Public Hospitals Act 1933*, eligibility of mother and baby homes for funding was confined to institutions for mothers and children who were under five years of age. The department decided that a request for additional funding, to reconstruct another disused wing which would cost approximately £12,000, should be rejected. The officials recommended that any further work of this nature should be supported by the local authority, not by the Hospitals Trust. The Regina Coeli records suggest that each of these 'blocks' (Frank Duff's word) had a name: St Fidelma's Unit; St Ita's Unit; Cedar Room; St Leila's; St. Mellas; St. Aideen's; St. Dympna's; St. Brona's; St. Nessa's, St Eithne's. It is not clear from the description of these units whether the

<sup>58</sup> This was a common practice in Ireland at the time.

<sup>59</sup> Coconut fibre which was commonly used in mattresses; strong fabric used to cover mattresses.

<sup>60</sup> Hospitals Trust, *Irish Hospitals 1930-1955* (Dublin 1956)

mothers and children ate in these units or whether they ate in a larger communal dining-room.

21.167 In 1950 the county manager of Tipperary South Riding contacted the Department of Health to inquire about Regina Coeli because he was considering sending some mothers there. A senior official in the department informed him that the Committee on County Homes recently visited Regina Coeli and they were 'very much impressed by it'. He stated that

The Department is not officially sponsoring Regina Coeli. We are however watching the experiment very very carefully and it may transpire that the Regina Coeli are on the right lines in their handling of this very difficult problem. We do not openly send girls to Regina Coeli but if one or two are sent from different counties we could watch the position and see whether it should be encouraged.

21.168 There is no indication that South Tipperary or any other local authorities sent women to Regina Coeli and it appears that the department's enthusiasm for the Regina Coeli approach did not persist. A memorandum in December 1951 noted that the members of the inter-departmental committee on the reconstruction of county homes who visited Regina Coeli

were favourably impressed by the excellent spirit of the members of the Legion of Mary and by the pleasant relationship which exists between the voluntary workers and the residents. The atmosphere of the Hostel was considered to be in many ways superior to that of the usual institution, from the point of view of the happiness of the residents, but the members of the Committee were unanimously apprehensive of the changes that must take place as the children grow older. This aspect of the scheme was mentioned by the Committee members to Mr. Duff, but, while expressing himself as having no fears for the future, he did not explain how the difficulties referred to would be overcome.

21.169 The hostel had a close, if informal, relationship with Dublin Corporation, and it was routinely supplied with equipment that was being discarded by St Kevin's hospital and replaced with new items, including used sheets, towels, kitchen equipment and furniture. This suggests very minimum standards for such items applied in the hostel. The Department of Health paid the ESB bill.

- 21.170 In 1955 the Dublin Board of Assistance contacted the Department of Health in relation to a proposal by Regina Coeli to rebuild large sections of the former North Dublin Union workhouse, at an estimated cost of £200,000; £70,000 would be spent rebuilding the Morning Star Hostel (for men), the balance would be spent on Regina Coeli. It was anticipated that the money would be provided from the funds for improving county homes. In November 1956 a staircase collapsed in the hostel (it is unclear whether this was in the section that accommodated unmarried mothers and their children), and some of the voluntary workers, members of the Legion of Mary, were injured. The following year an architect's report concluded that although measures might be taken to make the building less dangerous for some time, ultimately it would be necessary to demolish most of the building.
- 21.171 By 1963 the survival of Regina Coeli was in jeopardy. The Minister for Health (Seán MacEntee) stated that it would be 'a grave misfortune' if the hostel could not survive, noting, correctly, that it was 'a feature of the Social Services of Dublin which would be irreplaceable by other methods'. During the summer of 1963 two city-centre tenements collapsed with the loss of a number of lives. Dublin Corporation carried out emergency inspections of city tenements, and other vulnerable buildings, including Regina Coeli. The Dublin Health Authority condemned the building as unsafe, and ordered the evacuation of the 250 residents. They offered the Legion of Mary the former Crooksling sanatorium in north Dublin as an alternative hostel. Frank Duff resisted the proposal to close the hostel,<sup>61</sup> and a compromise was reached. This involved demolishing part of the building, the east block, and the erection of chalets to provide temporary housing. At the time there were 54 single mothers and 90 children in the hostel.
- 21.172 This was only an interim solution. In May 1965 the secretary of the Department of Health contacted the Dublin Health Authority about the need to rehouse the families in Rosary House (West Block). 'It is understood that your authority had been in touch in recent months with the Legion of Mary concerning the number of such "families" for which the health authority should make provision in the proposed new accommodation'. The letter emphasised that 'in view of the structural condition of Rosary House, the Minister is most anxious that this building should be evacuated at the very earliest opportunity'. It suggested that the residents should also be rehoused in temporary chalet accommodation because the department was uncertain as to the future requirements for the facilities

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<sup>61</sup> Cork Examiner, 5 August 1963

provided in Regina Coeli. It indicated that plans for the building of new units at Regina Coeli should be drawn up having taken account of the demolition of Rosary House.

21.173 In 1966, the Dublin Health Authority outlined proposals for the accommodation to be provided in the renovated Regina Coeli for 'elderly ladies and unmarried mothers'. It would comprise 79 bed rooms and ancillaries for elderly ladies and units for unmarried mothers comprising of 44 beds in total. The proposed 'family units', designed for the mothers and children, would consist of 11 double units, with 11 bedrooms, a toilet, kitchen and living quarters and one washroom per unit. The estimated cost was £71,000, including fees for architects and surveyors. A note to the Dublin Health Authority from the Department of Health stated that built-in wardrobes 'though considered desirable, may have to be reconsidered on the grounds of economy' and 'wash-hand basins may not be deemed necessary in bathrooms as they are being provided in each bedroom.'

21.174 The 1960s was a time of high price inflation. In February 1967 a Department of Health file noted that the plans submitted for the family units, old ladies units, kitchen and dining hall had been examined:

In the Family Units a mother and child have been allocated a bedroom of 120 square feet. A cubicle of 60 square feet has been allocated for each of the Old Ladies. A new Dining Room to serve 120 people (children will be catered for at a separate setting) is based on 12 square feet per person. This is a reasonable figure. The new Units provide accommodation for 167 people and the estimated cost of £156,000 gives a cost per person of £939 which is not unreasonable in present day figures.

21.175 The plans submitted had suggested that the grounds should be landscaped by patients and staff of Grangegorman hospital (St Brendan's mental hospital), presumably as a means of reducing the cost. However the author of this report wanted to include an estimate for lawns etc:

At present the site is in an appalling condition and it would be a mistake to erect new buildings without allowing sufficient site work to show the buildings off in a proper setting. I think this is very important at Regina Coeli which has visitors from all over the world due to the widespread work of the Legion of Mary.

21.176 The rebuilding took two years longer than the time stipulated in the contract. Part of the delay was attributed to a prolonged cement strike. In 1973 the total costs were estimated at £362,000; all but £10,000 was covered by a loan taken out by the Eastern Health Board. In 1977 the final cost was estimated to be £365,000. It would appear that work started in 1979; half the cost was borne by the Hospital Trust Fund; the other half was borne by the Eastern Health Board, but financed through the state's Local Loans Fund.

### **Alternative housing**

21.177 One recurring issue for Regina Coeli was the difficulty of finding alternative housing for mothers and children who had been in the hostel for some time and should leave. In 1950 Frank Duff noted an imperative need for this, especially in cases where the mother had married. He noted that, 'thanks to the good offices of Mr [...]of Dublin Corporation', they had secured housing for one of the two women who had recently married and was setting up home with her child and her husband (not the father of this child). He also wanted some form of hostel that would accommodate the boys raised in Regina Coeli when they became older. He returned to this request in the 1960s, when the hostel was threatened with closure, asking that the mothers and children should be housed by Dublin Corporation but there was an acute housing crisis. Homeless families were living in squalid accommodation in the former Richmond Barracks and Dublin Corporation was giving priority to families with four or more children, so that request was unlikely to be met.

### **Marriages**

21.178 In 1950 Frank Duff highlighted the fact that many women who were in Regina Coeli with their child later married. He claimed that marriage had eased 'the accumulation of babies' in the hostel. Some mothers married the father of their child, which he claimed had 'a surprising angle' as the marriage was not in prospect when the woman had entered the hostel. He claimed that 'normally the father would have evaded responsibility' but in a considerable number of cases the man is subject to second thoughts. He claimed that a very large number of marriages had taken place from the hostel and that many women had married men who were not the father of their child.

The men in question have shown an almost universal readiness to accept the child which was not their own - some took on more than 1 child - not in a

single case known to the Hostel has the child been under disparity as compared with children subsequently occurring in that family.

He claimed that in several cases the adopted child was 'the man's favourite'. Other women had returned to their family home with the child.

- 21.179 The case records confirm that marriages did take place. A woman was admitted to Regina Coeli with a baby who died. She returned in December 1952 and her daughter was born two months later. In 1956 she married 'a legionary with his own home to whom she had been introduced by the Hostel'. She collected her daughter and they moved to her new home in Drumcondra. A woman arrived to the hostel, pregnant in 1950. She went on to have three children while resident there. 'Arrangements were set on foot to bring about a marriage between [...] and a Limerick man,...who applied for a wife in August, 1954. There was some correspondence and interchange of photograph.' A woman became resident in the hostel with her son in 1932. 'About September 1940 a man called - was anxious to re-marry as his wife was dead. Had good home in [...].' He was introduced to a woman in the hostel. They married and she and her child went to live in his house. Another record noted that 'Efforts are being made to bring about a marriage between [...] and [an ex Morning Star resident].' They married in 1956. A woman married a man who was deaf and non-verbal (described in the records as a deaf mute) who was resident in the Morning Star hostel in 1948. In 1939 a resident married a widower who had called looking for a suitable wife. He had three children the eldest of whom wrote to the hostel to say thanks 'for sending them their new mammy'. The records show two marriages between residents of Regina Coeli and Morning Star Hostel in the 1950s and one in the 1960s.

### **Work**

- 21.180 Much of the work in Regina Coeli was done by volunteers. The Legion of Mary informed the Commission that up to 120 workers would have carried out two hours a week of voluntary work in Regina Coeli. There are references to women leaving Regina Coeli (sometimes for a number of months) to work while other women in RC minded children. The records examined by the Commission show that the staff and other residents facilitated women going out to work and this was aided by other women often minding the women's children while they worked. However, if the mother was seen not to be playing her part in looking after her own child this would be noted and the arrangements permitting the woman to go out to work and leave her child would be reviewed and perhaps changed. Some mothers worked

in the hostel, though much of the work was carried out by voluntary workers who were members of the Legion of Mary. There are references in the files to women going 'on sticks' - if she had not secured outside employment. Finola Kennedy, Frank Duff's biographer, in her evidence to the Commission stated that he (Frank Duff)...could see women... paying their way, you know. None of you probably remember, but you could get these little bundles of sticks. The men might chop them if it was a big piece of wood and the women might bundle them'. These bundles of sticks were sold by neighbourhood shops; they were used as kindling for fires.

- 21.181 Most of the women who worked outside the hostel were employed in service jobs, in hospitals and other welfare or commercial institutions, though some women worked as servants in private homes. In 1951 Frank Duff mentioned that a number of women were working in the Chest Hospital (St Mary's) in the Phoenix Park. He also noted that the employers of women who worked as domestic servants in private homes did not always know that they resided in Regina Coeli.<sup>62</sup> In 1932 a woman was hired as a domestic servant, 'was there for a short time, her baby was minded by one of our women'. A woman in 1952 'went by permission to work for two weeks to former mistress'. In 1934 a woman 'went back to indoor work, baby minded here'.
- 21.182 Two former volunteers said that women worked in 'the Richmond hospital across the road, Jervis Hospital, there were several restaurants...And they could get like domestic work or like waitressing work, a lot of them were maids in the hospitals and stuff like that and some of them would be servants in big houses and stuff like that. One of the mothers would, they would arrange between them you know between the five or six mothers, that one of the mothers would stay at home and look after the children of all the mothers and all those mothers would pay that mother and that's how they all made their contributions, they were equal'.<sup>63</sup>
- 21.183 These child-minding arrangements did not always work smoothly. One woman who got a job as a live-in domestic servant left her child in Regina Coeli. The record shows that 'it became difficult to get girls here to mind the baby as [...] does not visit the child, get clothes for it or pay for its minding.' In 1937 a woman was recorded as bringing her baby with her to work. 'She said that she did not intend to

<sup>62</sup> DDA/AB8/b/XXI/79/12/19 (1951).

<sup>63</sup> Graham, 'Unmarried Mothers'.

do anything with baby but could not get it minded here while she works'. In 1935 a woman who got a job as a caretaker left and took her son with her.

### Finances

21.184 Regina Coeli was heavily reliant on voluntary contributions and the voluntary work of Legion of Mary members. Finola Kennedy refers to 'bazaars, flag days, Rosetta Days, when paper flowers were sold, Beetle Drives, and even a special night of greyhound racing at Shelbourne Park stadium', plus financial contributions from W. T. Cosgrave, his sister and Dr McQuaid.<sup>64</sup> The hostel also benefited, as has been described, from various forms of support given by Dublin Corporation. Frank Duff expected all men and women who lived in Legion of Mary hostels to make some financial contribution. In 1950 he stated that

None of the services of the Hostel were supposed to be provided free. In fact it has always been a cardinal point...that as far as possible our residents should be given the impression that they are more or less paying their way. This is a point of importance when there is question of morale. But at the same time the charges which are made are very small, bearing no relation whatever to the things that they receive. Nevertheless they work in the desired way. The basic charge in the Regina Coeli is sixpence a day, which includes breakfast and supper and all the general amenities. The charge for the mid-day meal I have already specified. For a baby up to six months of age there is no extra charge. After that age the sum of one shilling per week is levied in respect of each child.

As to the manner of meeting the foregoing charges: some of the girls have petty resources which are sufficient to cover what they have to pay. Then it is more than easy to secure outdoor work for any girl capable of performing it. In fact our problem is that we are not able to meet the demand for it. In general this sort of work is highly paid. In third place for those who are for one reason or another incapable of providing for themselves in the manner aforesaid, we have a work system in the Hostel which meets the gap between what they have and what they have to pay.

It is hardly necessary to mention that the receipts from all the foregoing avenues fall far short of the expense of maintaining the Hostels, in spite of the fact that all our labour is voluntary. There is not in the entire system even one paid worker. The balance of the expenditure is provided by all sorts of

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<sup>64</sup> Kennedy *Frank Duff*, p. 93

expedients - an annual Flag Day, a system of penny a week collections, whist drives, etc. And nowadays an occasional legacy is beginning to trickle in to us.

21.185 Although Regina Coeli was designed to care for destitute women, some of the women paid for their upkeep. There are references to 'has money', 'can pay, 'mother will be responsible for payments'. In some instances the exact amount that a woman paid on entry is recorded, though it is not stated how long she would be staying. It is noted that a woman who arrived in 1939 recorded 'will pay £5 now'. In 1942 a woman 'has £30 which she is to hand in'. In 1942 a woman came to Regina Coeli and gave £2. In 1943 the entry notes that the Red Cross would pay for a woman and her daughter. In the same year the CPRS took responsibility for paying for a mother. In 1944 a woman was admitted to the hostel seven months pregnant. The record of entry stated that the manager of a bank would guarantee payments. In 1945 a woman who had employed a resident in Belfast as a domestic servant said that she would send payment for her in Regina Coeli. In 1953, a resident was warned about irregular payments. She tendered 7s 6d, which was not accepted, and she was told to leave two days later. She 'went on that date with baby to St Kevin's as casuals'. In 1953, a woman who had previously been in Sancta Maria hostel came with a baby girl; the records state that Sancta Maria would pay for her. In 1957, the entry card for a woman says that the 'County Council will be responsible for her payments'. One entry also states that, if a resident has sufficient funds to stay elsewhere, she must leave. A woman entered the hostel in 1990. She paid £6 for a one week stay and was given provisions. As has been described above, in some cases the father of the child paid towards the cost of maintaining mother and child in the hostel.

### **The Later Years**

21.186 In the early decades of the hostel (1930s-1960s) the majority of entrants were unmarried mothers who were coming to the hostel either pregnant or with their small babies, often because they had no-where else to go. From the 1960s onwards the circumstances of the women entering the hostel changed and some women sought entry because of domestic violence, homelessness or drug addiction. In 1978 the Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children sent a questionnaire on housing to member agencies. The eighteen agencies that replied recorded that 184 clients sought assistance with housing over a four-week period. The majority were pregnant women; 63% were leaving

home; 24% were leaving privately-rented accommodation. The Federation commented on the low instance of forward planning by mothers. Most agencies helping with housing were in Dublin, but more than half of their clients came from outside Dublin - so the pattern of pregnant single women coming to Dublin, which was identified in the 1920s, continued. The Federation concluded that there was 'a high incidence of housing breakdown' when a single woman became pregnant.

- 21.187 Regina Coeli continued to house significant numbers of mothers and children although the quality of accommodation was poor. There was a second spike in the numbers of children in the hostel in the early 1980s. By this time many single mothers and their children went to Regina Coeli in the belief that this would help them to secure local authority housing. In 1980 the Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children reported that housing was the primary concern of 53% of first-time callers to the Federation; 7% of these callers were then living in Regina Coeli. In 1983 a woman was referred by Brú Chaoimhín (Cork Street Night Shelter) where she had been staying for seven weeks; she was waiting for council housing. A woman who arrived in 1980 with two daughters, aged 13 and 11, had been living in England for 18 years. She returned to live with her sister in Dublin in 1979 while her brother-in-law was in prison. When he was released, 'He threw [...] and the girls out'. She and her daughters were in Regina Coeli for nine months; she then moved to a Dublin Corporation flat in Ballymun.
- 21.188 Although public attitudes towards unmarried mothers had changed, some single mothers continued to encounter opposition from their families, and family tensions inevitably escalated in cases when a mother and her child(ren) were living with family members, often in small and potentially overcrowded homes. One mother of three who arrived with her children in 1982 had been staying in the homes of her mother and her sister. A mother of one had been living with her parents but they had had a row and she could no longer live in the family home. Another woman was asked to leave the family home at short notice in 1987; she moved into a Corporation flat some days later. These family tensions persisted until the end of the century. In 1993 a woman who had planned to place her child for adoption, but had changed her mind, came to Regina Coeli, while waiting for local authority housing. 'Parents put her out and do not want to know anything about the baby. Nuns who were looking after her are trying to get her a flat in Dublin where she is doing a FÁS course'. The parents of one woman who arrived with her child in

1998 were separated. She had tried to live with her mother but they did not get along. She moved into her father's flat when he was away but 'no room now'.

21.189 Regina Coeli also provided emergency housing for women who were separated or had been deserted by a husband or partner. One woman arrived from England with her son because her partner was in prison. A pregnant woman arrived in 1981 with two children, having apparently been deserted by her partner, a professionally-qualified man of African birth. Her older children were born while she was in Pelletstown. An eighteen year old who had eloped to England at the age of sixteen was brought to the hostel with her child by a Dublin priest. It was reported that her husband had been beating her since their marriage.

21.190 The profiles of the mothers and children who were in Regina Coeli from 1930 to 1998 reflect the elements of continuity and change in the history of single mothers and their children, in twentieth-century Ireland.