

Chapter 23: Denny House, formerly the Magdalen Asylum

Introduction

- 23.1 The Magdalen Asylum/Denny House was Ireland's longest-surviving mother and baby home. It was founded in 1765 in Lower Leeson Street, Dublin (close to the junction with St Stephen's Green), by the philanthropist Lady Arabella Denny. It closed in 1994.

Origins

- 23.2 Lady Arabella Denny was closely involved with the Dublin Foundling Hospital which admitted deserted and abandoned children. J D Widdess, author of a history of the Magdalen Asylum, stated that, having received many letters from unmarried mothers who had been forced to place their children in the Foundling Hospital, Lady Denny decided to establish an institution to care for the mothers.¹ This became known as the Dublin Magdalen Asylum. A number of similar institutions opened in Britain and Ireland in the late eighteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century there were over 300 Magdalen Homes in England and at least 41 in Ireland, including 19 in Dublin and Dun Laoghaire (then known as Kingstown), all run by religious denominations. The Magdalen Asylum in Leeson Street admitted former prostitutes and unmarried mothers who were expected to engage in various types of work, such as laundry, needlework, and domestic duties to support their care and provide them with training that would enable them to find employment when they left the institution. The asylum was established specifically to cater for woman of the Protestant faith and, in contrast to other Magdalen institutions in Ireland, it admitted pregnant women, provided they were 'first fall' cases, that is, women experiencing their first pregnancy.²
- 23.3 The *Handbook of Dublin Charities*, published in 1903, stated that 'The home is especially intended for Protestant young women after a *first* fall and for those who are about to become mothers'. The home was 'in connection with the Episcopal Church'. The main income came from pew rents³ and collections in the adjoining Magdalen Chapel, which was opened in 1768, to provide revenue for the home. In

¹ J.D.H. Widdess, *The Magdalen Asylum, Dublin, 1766-1966* (1966).

² Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries: Chapter 3: History of the Magdalen Laundries and institutions within the scope of the Report, p. 41. This is based on a paper submitted by Maria Luddy.

³ Pew rents were payment made by prosperous individuals or families to reserve a pew in the Magdalen Chapel for their exclusive use.

1900 the total receipts for the chapel and asylum were £1,510 9s 5d; a laundry associated with the asylum contributed £135.⁴ Women in the Magdalen Asylum in Leeson Street were described as ‘penitents’. They were forbidden to use their own name or speak about their past; they were given a number when they were admitted, and they were known as ‘Mrs One’, ‘Mrs Two’.⁵

23.4 A total of 14 people were recorded as resident in the home in the 1911 census; 11 ‘inmates’ and three staff members, including a matron and portress (female porter). Twelve of the women were members of the Church of Ireland, one woman was a Baptist and one was Presbyterian. The youngest ‘inmate’ was 18 years of age; ten of the women were described as in ‘domestic training for domestic service’. The census described the institution as a ‘Magdalen Home’; the adjoining chapel was also recorded in the census. No babies were recorded in the 1911 Census. However, by 1921, the Magdalen Asylum had been transformed into a mother and baby home, exclusively for Protestant women experiencing a ‘first fall’. While the institution continued to be referred to as either the Dublin/Leeson Street Magdalen Asylum/Home, it no longer operated as a Magdalen Home style institution.

23.5 In 1910 the Nursery and Rescue Home and Rotunda Protestant Girls’ Aid Society was established at Little Fortfield, Templeogue, Dublin. This home was established as a shelter for Protestant ‘first fall’ women who had ‘fallen into sin’, with the intention of ‘restoring them to respectable life’.⁶ By 1922, it had admitted almost 200 women, many of whom were subsequently taken back by their families or relatives; some married; a majority were placed in domestic service by the home. Around 192 children were born in or admitted to the home. Many were either taken by the mother when she married or taken by relatives or placed with a network of nurse mothers used by the home. A majority were admitted into orphanages and 23 died while under the home’s care. By 1922 this home found it financially impossible to continue in operation, so it was decided to close and concentrate on the nursing out of children born to Protestant unmarried mothers. In 1922 the home had 26 children at nurse under its management. The renamed Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children’s Aid Society affiliated with the Magdalen

⁴ Williams, *Handbook of Dublin charities*, p. 156.

⁵ Maria Luddy *Prostitution and Irish society, 1800-1840* (Cambridge, 2007), pp 85-6.

⁶ The Nursery and Rescue Home and Rotunda Protestant Girls’ Aid Society, Little Fortfield, Templeogue, Dublin, *Eleventh Annual Report, 1919-1920* (Dublin, John Falconer, 1920), p. 4.

Asylum and would in future be responsible for placing children born to the women in that home at nurse.⁷

- 23.6 The Magdalen Asylum moved to Eglinton Road in Donnybrook in 1959. On 4 June 1980 the High Court approved a proposal to vary the scheme under which the charity would operate in the future. The name was changed to Denny House; the restriction of admissions to Protestant women only was removed. Denny House would give priority to Protestant unmarried mothers and their children, but they could now admit separated, deserted or recently widowed women with their children and Catholics if accommodation was available.

Sources

Institutional records of the Magdalen Asylum/Denny House

- 23.7 Most of the institutional records relating to the Magdalen Asylum/Denny House are held by PACT - which was formerly known as the Protestant Orphans Society. These records were digitally copied by the Commission. They include:
- Magdalen Home case files, 1927-1994: These contain an admission form, medical certificates, correspondence and detailed notes on a woman's background, medical details, her activities and behaviour in the home, and discharge details for mother and baby. They include the woman's name, age, home address, religion, occupation, various questions regarding the pregnancy, and the amount she could pay per week to the home. These files become more detailed from the 1960s. Correspondence includes letters from local clergymen, mothers of the 'girls', and some of the women who were in the home. There are approximately 1,000 individual files; a small number are missing.
 - Mother and Child Case Books, 1920-1961: These contain information about the mother's background; her admission and discharge; details of births; health details for mother and baby; and discharge details for mother and baby (seven volumes)
 - Case Committee Books, 1955-1976: These contain background on mothers, admission/discharge, details of birth and discharge of baby (three volumes)
 - Case Committee Notes, 1952-1973: These are loose notes with similar information to the Case Committee Books. (1 file)

⁷ The Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children's Aid Society, Thirteenth Annual Report, 1921-1922 (Dublin, 1922), p. 5.

- Monthly Meeting Committee Books, 1973-1988: These have similar information to Case Committee Books plus details of the management of the home (2 volumes)
- Monthly House Report Books, 1958-1973: These note discharges/admissions, health of mothers and babies, management of home (3 volumes)
- Matron's Report Books, 1945-1957: These are monthly with the same details as above (2 volumes)
- Daily House Report Books, 1973-1994: These contain morning and evening reports on activities, health and behaviour of mothers and babies (24 volumes)
- Baby Books, 1970-1994: These have details of babies' birth, progress in home, and discharge details (4 volumes)
- Interview Book, 1990-1994: These provide details of mothers seeking admission (1 volume)
- Annual reports: 1958, 1962 and 1963
- Discharge Books, 1980-1994: These note the background of mothers, updated accounts on their activities and behaviour in the home, and discharge details (4 volumes)
- Records and Particulars Book of Maternity Home (or Hospital) known as Magdalen Home, 1961-1982: This contains details of admission/discharge of mother, birth of baby and discharge of baby (1 volume)
- Church of Ireland Register of Baptisms solemnised in Magdalen Asylum Church, 1869-1983 (1 volume)
- Correspondence concerning the transfer of Denny House records to PACT, 1994-2013.

The Nursery Rescue Society Archives

23.8 PACT also holds the records of the Nursery Rescue Society which was affiliated with Denny House. These records relate to fostering arrangements, placements in children's homes and adoptions, and contact with the birth mothers. The records include

- Minute Books, 1909-1989 (18 volumes)
- Annual reports, 1914-1978 (61 items)
- Agenda Book, 1938-1943 (1 volume)

- Little Fortfield Mother and Baby Home records, 1909-1921 - journal and 'girls and babies' register (2 volumes)
- Children's case files, 1927-1965 - details of fostering, adoption (including to Canada, USA, Australia and UK), education and employment arrangements for children under care of society (c.200 files)
- Index cards relating to children's case files (1 file)
- Children's ledger listing all children under care of the society, 1945-1972 (1 volume)
- Surrender and Adoption Forms, c.1930-1965 - separate forms signed by mothers and adoptive parents (1 file)
- Nursery Rescue Society notebook on children giving details of child's health, progress and where they were placed by the society, 1965-1975 (1 volume)
- Documents relating to history of society and regarding transfer of assets to PACT, 1989-1990 (1 file)

Department of Local Government and Public Health/ Department of Health

23.9 There is information about Denny House in the evidence given to the Commission on Relief of the Sick and Indigent Poor and in the files of the Department of Local Government and Public Health/Department of Health: some of these files are in the National Archives, the remainder were supplied under a Discovery Order. There is very little information available about this home during the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s; later files are rich in personal histories. The main Department of Health files used for this chapter are:

CCP/INA/0/483137
 CCP/INA/0/482129
 CCP/INA/0/432660
 CCP/INA/0/483891
 INACT/INA/0/444689
 INACT/INA/0/451287

Governance and Administration

23.10 The Magdalen Asylum was overseen by guardians and governesses. Male donors were described as guardians and the management committee was drawn from their members. Women donors, or the wives of prominent men, were known as

governesses, and they were involved in the internal running of the home.⁸ When the Nursery Rescue Society affiliated with Denny House, three of the governesses joined the Nursery Rescue Committee.⁹ By 1958 the women were being described as associate guardians. The archives do not include the minutes of the management committee or meetings of the trustees. The guardians and associate guardians/governesses included the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin and on occasion his wife, plus prominent Dublin doctors, including leading paediatricians and gynaecologists. Miss B Odlum, the organising secretary of the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Society served as an associate guardian for many years. In 1952 the Minister for Health, James Ryan, attended the AGM.¹⁰

23.11 As the list of records indicates there were a number of active committees, though it is unclear when these committees were established, or whether their responsibilities changed over the period covered by this report. It is clear that similar committees existed before 1920. The case committee (first entry in the surviving records is for 1955) met once a month. The meetings discussed the individual cases - mothers and children. The home also appears to have had appointed visitors; the case committee records state:

- That the visitors should be free to walk around the Home on their own and talk to the girls.
- That staff and girls should feel free to discuss any problems with the visitor.
- That any problems arising about the mothers and babies should be dealt with by the case committee.
- That a special book should be kept for the visitors to note any household needs, suggestions or problems.

Premises

23.12 Denny House occupied the original 18th century premises in Lower Lesson Street which was close to the junction with St Stephen's Green until 1958. The 1911 Census describes it as a 'first-class dwelling' with 18 rooms. When the original premises were sold in 1958, the site was described as being approximately 22,800 square feet in area, 9,312 square feet of which was occupied by 'a fine masonry church structure' and two three-storey houses with basements. It had a 123 feet

⁸ *Rules and Regulations for the Asylum of Penitent Females: with an account of the receipts and disbursements* (Dublin, Sheppard and Nugent, 1785), p. 1.

⁹ The Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children's Aid Society, *Thirteenth Annual Report, 1921-1922*, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Irish Times*, 28 May 1952.

frontage onto Lesson Street and 46-foot frontage onto Earlsfort Terrace.¹¹ The original buildings were demolished. The home moved to Eglinton Road in Donnybrook in March 1959.

23.13 There is no indication that this home was overcrowded at any time, in contrast to the other mother and baby homes. In 1950 a Department of Health inspector reported that she had visited and inspected this home and the Bethany Home. She described both as 'clean and well kept; comfortable beds and they appear to be well fed'. However surviving records suggest that the heating was probably inadequate; and the home suffered frequent problems with leaks, broken boilers and other shortcomings. Matron's Report book in 1946 reports frequent shortages of fuel, which meant that at times they were unable to use the 'range'/stove in the kitchen. However, the home managed to secure coal from the Gas Company and unidentified fuel from the Church of Ireland labour yard. In 1953 the Matron recorded that 'The continuous burning fire has been put into the [day] nursery', replacing the previous open fire which did not provide adequate heat. In 1954 'due to colder weather and fewer numbers' the 'girls' were eating their meals in the kitchen and the staff were eating in the boardroom 'which is much warmer for everybody'. That boardroom was turned into a nursery with a new 'stove fire' in 1955. At around the same time a governor provided two 'aladdin heaters' - which were fuelled by paraffin; they were still in use when the Lesson Street premises closed. In 1955 the Matron complained that the nurse was running an electric fire in her bedroom 'off the light plug which is expensive and causes fuses frequently'; a gas fire was later installed in her bedroom. The Commission has not seen many details about the sanitary facilities, although in 1949 a new bathroom was installed, plus a water tank in the roof to ensure a 'satisfactory' supply of water to the new toilet. Despite its location in the centre of the city the home had quite a substantial garden. Matron's Report Books give details of bottling applies, and making gooseberry, rhubarb and blackcurrant jam from 'our own fruit'; in 1948 'a large turnip crop seems possible'. There are also frequent references to employing a gardener.

23.14 In 1955 Matron lamented that 'The house is in great need of repairs and I cannot get anyone to do them'. She also reported that Miss Lyster (sic) had spent an hour in the home on 3 May 1954:

¹¹ *Irish Independent*, 19 July 1958.

and went into great detail. She was sympathetic and helpful and called this building a “housewives’ nightmare”. On the strength of the expense of running it, she suggested that we should ask the Minister for Health for an additional grant.

- 23.15 Miss Litster’s report stated that the home occupied two houses, ‘over 200 years old’ that ‘have not been designed for labour-saving’. ‘The Home is as well-kept as can be expected; charges for upkeep and repairs must be large’. She described the nursery, ‘formerly the board room’, as ‘large and airy, containing 9 cots with wooden frames. Here there are 3 infants, 2 being breast-fed. All 3 appear healthy and thriving and were clean and comfortable’. The remaining two were in prams in an outside shelter; all the infants were described as healthy, well cared for and contented.
- 23.16 It appears that efforts were underway by 1955 to sell the premises; Matron noted that two valuers had visited recently. A special meeting was called in March 1957 to consider the sale and the purchase of alternative premises. This would require an application to the court for permission to sell and to dispose of the adjoining chapel and its chattels. The guardians determined that it was essential to move, ‘having regard to the state of repair of the premises...and to the expense and inconvenience involved in carrying on the work of the Asylum in these premises’. The home plus the adjoining chapel was sold on 25 September 1958 to the state-owned Irish Sugar Company for £23,000. The houses and chapel were demolished and a modern office complex was constructed on the site. The new home at 83 Eglinton Road - a detached nineteenth-century suburban house, cost £5,250 and the trustees proposed to spend approximately £4,000 fitting it out.¹²
- 23.17 Mothers, children and staff moved to Eglinton Road between 23 and 25 March 1959. The guardians were concerned that news of the sale of the Leeson Street premises might create the impression that the home had closed, so they issued a Change of Address notice to Church of Ireland clergy, asking that it be brought ‘to the notice of Parish Organisations and your Parishioners’. The annual report for 1963 described Eglinton Road as:
- an ordinary house in an ordinary road, and has a friendly and welcoming look even from the outside, while once inside the door, the cheerful brightness of

¹² Irish Independent 15 December 1958.

the newly decorated hall and the comfort of the rooms and the friendly efficiency of the staff must bring a sense of relief and security to many a frightened girl and her worried parents. The move to Eglinton Road from the old Magdalen premises in Lower Lesson Street is in line with modern trends which do not favour the old “institutionalism” of barrack-like buildings, bare furnishings, dark paint and the usual large notice at the entrance.

23.18 A newspaper advertisement, seeking to recruit a midwife, said that the home had 12 beds.¹³ The mothers were accommodated in single or double-bedrooms and there was space for nine cots.

23.19 Conditions undoubtedly improved following the move to Eglinton Road and the surplus money that was available for equipment and improvements. Matron’s report books describe new nursery curtains, an ‘elegant new gala washing machine’ and a Burco boiler; a television and the purchase in 1963 and 1964 of a spin dryer and a tumble drier, which meant that it was no longer necessary to send sheets to a commercial laundry in the winter. The home had a temporary chapel, pending the construction of a new chapel. A new laundry and a new bathroom were also constructed. The most significant expenditure involved the provision of a delivery unit, and associated facilities. (This is discussed below). In 1979 Miss Clandillon described the home as:

a detached red brick house on three floors. There is a large reception room on the left of the hall and a living room on the right. [Matron’s] office is also on this floor. There is a dining room and well laid out kitchen area. The gardens are spacious. To the side of the reception room is the chapel (C.of I).

The first and second floors are well designed with eight bedrooms, one occupied by the Matron and one by the cook/housekeeper who is off duty from 4 pm. There is also a delivery room but the Matron informed me that this is seldom used now.

Staffing

23.20 In the 1911 Census there were three staff and eleven resident women. As noted earlier, the Commission has not seen any detailed records of the running of the home before 1945 when the first of the Matron’s report books survives. When Miss Litster carried out an inspection in May 1955 she reported that the staff

¹³ *Cork Examiner*, 23 March 1964.

consisted of: 'Matron (not a nurse), nurse, student nurse, night attendant, cook, porter'; they were caring for three expectant and four post-partum mothers and ten babies; six babies were in the home without their mother. She also noted that the housework was 'done mainly by the mothers'. Matron's book suggests that the nurse who was present in May 1955 was a qualified midwife. Staffing fluctuated and there were many changes, but there would appear to have generally been a resident matron and a resident cook/housekeeper; at times there was also a nurse. Matron's book makes occasional references to outside staff. In 1952 a man came for three hours most mornings; he was paid 5s a day, and 'does polishing and cleaning'. She noted that 'a woman cleaner and a napkin (nappy) washer will be urgently required when all girls leave next week'. In 1953 the home employed a Catholic nurse - her religion was noted - who was given notice within two months because there were 'no admissions in view'. She was described as 'an unsatisfactory influence in the Home'. At this time the home was employing a second, part-time cleaner, presumably because there were few resident mothers. In 1955 it advertised for a porter, but Matron reported that 'total wage of £4 with meals does not exceed unemployment benefit enough to make it worthwhile to do it 7 days a week'. They hired a portress who cleaned the house and washed nappies in addition to her other duties. The small size presented some difficulties when it came to retaining qualified staff. In 1958 the medical officer reported that he had spoken with the nurse, and she did not wish to remain because she had 'very little scope for her qualifications and she felt she was getting rusty'. By the early 1960s there is some evidence that the home was recruiting former 'inmates' for domestic duties. One mother was hired as 'cook/general'; she was given a bed sit, a 'late pass at times' and her own key; her child was either being adopted or placed in a foster home. However, this arrangement was not a success because this woman became pregnant (the butcher's assistant was suspected to be the putative father) and she was dismissed.

23.21 Staffing became more critical when babies began to be delivered in the home and it had to meet the requirements of the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934*. In 1963, when women were giving birth in Eglinton Road, it proved impossible to recruit a permanent nurse so they had to rely on temporary appointments or agency nurses. The annual report lists the staff in 1963 as matron, a nurse and a housekeeper. In 1972 Matron noted:

No answer to any advert, I am finding the constant changing of staff very trying and tiring. We have a night nurse at present but they will only work 5

nights at the most as they are mostly married from the Agency and it is often very difficult to get relief at weekends.

23.22 Staffing difficulties persisted despite the decision in 1973 that all mothers should give birth in hospital. The home continued to be registered under the 1934 Act. In 1979 Miss Clandillon reported that there was a resident cook/housekeeper, who was off duty from 4 pm; a matron, who was a trained midwife; and, if necessary, the home would call on an agency midwife. The local doctor and a public health nurse visited three times a week. At the time of Miss Clandillon's visit there was only one woman in residence; two had left some days earlier. Throughout the 1980s, when Denny House provided short-term accommodation for a larger number of pregnant women and unmarried mothers and their children than in the 1970s, a resident nurse was in charge and agency nurses were hired when the mothers and/or babies required additional care, especially at night. By this time Denny House also had a social worker, who was unpaid, but appears to have played an active role.

Finances

23.23 Some financial reports/accounts survive but the earliest is for the year 1958. In the 18th and 19th centuries the income for this home came from pew rentals (payments by prosperous individual/families to reserve a pew in the Magdalen Chapel for their exclusive use) and from charity sermons and bequests. In the early/mid-twentieth century there was an annual charity sermon in the Magdalen Chapel, preached by a Church of Ireland archbishop or bishop. For example, the 1929 sermon was preached by the Bishop of Ossory.¹⁴ The governesses organised annual gift days and sales of work, and a number of branches of the Mothers' Union raised money on its behalf. The annual report for 1948 reported that an improvement in the balance sheet from £119 to £309 was largely due to the interest taken in the asylum by various branches of the Mothers' Union and to the fact that a special effort was made during the year to cut down expenses as far as possible 'in order to meet the cost of projected repairs'.¹⁵ The annual report for 1963 lists receipts from collections taken in the dioceses of Kilmore and Ferns and in the parishes of Rathfarnham, Donegal, Carlow, Maryboro and Killeshin on behalf of the home. It also received many gifts in kind, baby clothes, women's clothes, fruit, vegetables,

¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 11 February 1929.

¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 1 June 1949.

cots and prams. The annual report for 1963 mentions a 'generous cheque from a friend of the Home', who stipulated that it should be used to purchase 'up-to-date household equipment, including a refrigerator'; the governors proposed to also buy a spin dryer, a heated cot and garden seats. In 1966 a bicentenary appeal was launched with the target of raising £10,000.¹⁶ There is no information available as to its success. Accounts for the year ended December 1971 record a sum of £616 under the heading 'Bi-centenary appeal' that was used to make a final payment for the cost of the extension to the house, containing a laundry and a chapel.

23.24 When the Bethany Home closed in 1972 the property was sold for £38,000. In 1974 a High Court judgement determined that the net proceeds of the sale - £37,232 and an additional £4,000-£4,500 in other securities should be allocated to the Magdalen Home, Eglington Road (later Denny House) and Miss Carr's Children's Home on Northbrook Road, with the Magdalen Home receiving 85% of the proceeds.¹⁷

23.25 In contrast to the Bethany home, Denny House was in receipt of state funding from 1920. In 1916 the UK government introduced a programme of grants to local authorities and voluntary agencies in urban districts (including county boroughs), for health-visiting, maternity centres, midwifery facilities and day nurseries. In 1918 the sum of money provided was increased and the items covered were extended to include provision for the young children of widowed, deserted and unmarried mothers and Exchequer payments for health visitors. By 1920 this grant was providing financial support to a number of Dublin voluntary organisations that assisted unmarried mothers and their children, including the Magdalen Asylum (Denny House) and the Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children Aid Society. The grant covered half of the cost of boarding out these children up to the age of five, which would reduce the amount of money that a single mother needed to provide, and half of the estimated costs of keeping mother and baby in the Dublin Magdalen Asylum. In 1925 an official from the public health section of the Department of Local Government and Public Health told the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor that this was the only residential institution that had applied for funding under this programme. The home submitted accounts of its expenditure, with sub-headings twice a year, together with a table giving dates of a mother's admission, the date of birth of her child and the number of days

¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 21 October 1966

¹⁷ *Irish Times*, 13 November 1972.

spent in the home. The DLGPH reimbursed the home for half of the cost of maintaining mother and child, up to a maximum of six weeks before the birth and one year after the birth. This official claimed that the maintenance cost per person was approximately 32s 6d a week.¹⁸

Note on Department of Health Annual Returns:

| Year | No. of Cases | Days in Magdalen Before Confinement | | Days in Magdalen After Confinement | Total Days Eligible for Grant |
|------|---------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | Not Eligible for Grant | Eligible for Grant | | |
| 1952 | 23 | 857 | 644 | 2453 | 3097 |
| 1953 | 9 | 309 | 208 | 974 | 1182 |
| 1954 | 10 | 442 | 273 | 1201 | 1474 |
| 1955 | 22 (18 girls) | 647 | 459 | 2335 | 2794 |
| 1956 | 22 | 597 | 502 | 2147 | 2649 |
| 1957 | 15 | 192 | 258 | 1039 | 1297 |

23.26 The Magdalen Asylum expected a payment, or at least a partial contribution from every woman who was admitted; these payments might come from her family or a local clergyman and it would appear that women who had not paid an agreed contribution were pursued. The case committee noted that one woman who had been in the home in 1956 had paid all arrears, which had amounted to £9 7s 6d. She told them that 'she is settling down'; however they noted that she continued to smoke. The mother of one woman sent twelve dozen eggs in part-payment for her maintenance. The mother of another woman who left owing £10, sent £7. The case committee noted that this woman had been asked for money by the Rotunda. It was agreed that one member of the committee would discover from the Rotunda whether an application had been made to the woman's county council for financial assistance.

23.27 There is no evidence that any Public Assistance Authority (PAA) paid for the maintenance of a mother or child before the mid-1950s. When Miss Litster visited in May 1955 she suggested that the Matron should approach the local authority

¹⁸ Oireachtas Library, Minutes of evidence to the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Indigent Poor, 10 June 1925.

from which every mother in the home came, requesting that they should contribute to her maintenance, as happened in Catholic mother and baby homes. The matron replied that 'her Committee would have to give this very careful consideration as a great emphasis is placed on secrecy'. Miss Litster suggested that there appeared to be no reason why this should not be done in cases where the 'girl's' parents were aware of her pregnancy. This file suggests that the Magdalen Asylum began to approach local authorities following Miss Litster's visit. Counties Laois and Donegal sought the Department's approval to pay for mothers in 1956. A handwritten note on this file, dating from 1967, or slightly later, stated that 'accounts are not received from these institutions'. In 1971, two of the women admitted were paying patients, one was maintained by her parents and one by the firm that employed her; the remainder were paid for by the regional health boards.

- 23.28 The annual report for the year 1958 shows that subscriptions and collections totalled £80 and the home received a special donation of £100 from the Representative Body of the Church of Ireland (this would appear to have been an annual donation); a 'bring and buy' sale raised £18; annuities yielded £92 and dividends a further £474. The two largest sources of income were 'inmates payments' at £523 and a grant from the Department of Health amounting to £755 (presumably from the Maternity and Child Welfare Grant). The total income was £2,825 - wages and salaries amounted to £959; provisions £623; fuel, gas and electricity £205. By 1962 total income had increased to £3,347; 'inmates' contributed £1,006 but the Department of Health grant had fallen to £694 - reflecting smaller numbers in the home; salaries and wages had increased to £1,151. The contributions from 'inmates' included payments by PAAs and social insurance payments (maternity benefit) and maternity grants to which many of the women would have been entitled. This report stated that a member of the ladies' committee had volunteered to collect maintenance contributions for the 'girls' and to handle applications for government and local authority grants; she 'worked indefatigably to help the girls with claims for county grants or insurance benefits where applicable'. In 1963 the weekly cost per admission was approximately £12. During the previous year '10 of the girls were maintained without charge, as a lack of means is not a bar to admission'.
- 23.29 Accounts for the year ending December 1971 showed subscriptions, donations and collections, included a grant from the RCBI, totalled £1,252. Contributions towards maintenance, including local authority payments, totalled £1,368, grants

from the Department of Health £2,233, and a refund of two years' of income tax amounted to £1,038. Income totalled £7,390. The largest single expenditure item was salaries, wages and superannuation at £3,284.

- 23.30 Capitation payments by local authorities were not keeping pace with rising costs in any of the mother and baby homes. In 1972 the accountants to the Magdalen Asylum asked the department to approve a doubling in the weekly capitation rate for mothers and children from £4 and £2 respectively to £8 and £4. They enclosed a copy of the latest accounts. A review of the accounts for the years 1970 and 1971 by the department determined that the average weekly cost per patient in 1971 was £12.60; they described the current capitation rate of £4 per week for a mother as 'highly unrealistic'. The department suggested that allowing for other sources of income a minimum payment of £6.50 was necessary. They recommended a capitation rate of £7, but decided to abolish the payment under the Maternity and Child Welfare Grant, which a governor of the home described as 'the sting in the tail'. This compared with £10 a week paid in Bessborough and £8.40 in Dunboyne. The rate paid for women in this home had not increased since 1967. Within a short period the home was again seeking a higher capitation rate and approval was given for £10 beginning in July 1973; this compared with £12 for Bessborough. There was a further increase in 1974 to £12, which remained the figure until the end of the decade.
- 23.31 Women who were receiving maternity benefit and later (from 1973) unmarried mothers' allowance were expected to contribute towards their maintenance in the home (in addition to the maintenance grant paid by the regional health boards). In 1973 it was agreed that women could keep £15 from their insurance payments. By 1983, weekly maintenance payments had increased to £42 and £21. There is no indication that this home faced acute financial difficulties, but its services were subsidised by donations and bequests.

The Mothers

- 23.32 The institutional records include the rules for admission as outlined in 1927 (which is the earliest year within the Commission's remit for which they are available). These rules stipulated that admission was confined to women who were members of the Church of Ireland or 'any Protestant denomination', and to 'first fall' women 'if they have hitherto borne a thoroughly respectable character'. Women were only

admitted on the permission of the 'Vice-Patroness or the lady acting as such', and character references were required. The rules stipulated that 'mentally deficient girls are not suitable for admission'. A medical certificate, which should stipulate that they were free from venereal disease and other infectious diseases, was required. Mothers could be admitted before the birth and were expected to remain for at least six months after the birth of their baby. The home would not care for the baby when the mother left but she would be assisted in making arrangements for her child. Every woman 'or her friends' was expected to contribute to her upkeep while in the home. Women had to give an undertaking to conform to the rules of the home, obey the Matron, and do such work as was assigned to her; the rules specified that no outside laundry work was undertaken.

- 23.33 A total of 1,416 mothers were admitted between 1921 and 1994; the largest number of admissions was in the 1980s. The numbers in this home at any one time were always small; the highest average occupancy was 13 in 1932. Before 1980, virtually all the women were Protestant; any Catholic woman, who had inadvertently been admitted, was sent to another institution. In 1980 the charter was amended to permit the admission of Catholics.
- 23.34 The character of the home changed in the 1980s - see below. In that decade, most women were now admitted following the birth of their child.
- 23.35 The modal age of the mothers was in the late teens; very few women were over the age of thirty.
- 23.36 Most women, 29%, gave Dublin addresses; over 13% came from counties Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan, and almost 10% were from Northern Ireland.
- 23.37 Pregnant women were generally admitted approximately two months before the birth of their child and that remained constant from the 1920s until the end of the 1970s. The major change was in the length of stay after the birth; this fell steadily over the years.

Referrals

- 23.38 The institutional records show the referral pathways for 1,008 of the 1,416 mothers. Over one-third - the largest single category - were referred by a clergyman; almost 15% by a PAA; almost 16% by a voluntary organisation and

over 14% by a social worker. Referrals by social workers increase significantly from the 1970s. Many came through the Church of Ireland Social Service. These referral letters often contain background information about the women, their families and the circumstances of their pregnancy. In 1927 one clergyman explained that

This is a particularly painful case. The girl's father is dead, and her mother is married again. They are very respectable people, but not well enough off to afford much payment. It will be a severe strain on the step-father to pay the promised sum. I have done all in my power to get the young man to marry this girl, but he positively refuses, although he does not deny the fault. As both parties are Protestants the girl's people do not like to have the matter made public in the Courts. In any case the young man has no visible means, and the girl's mother is too poor to prosecute, perhaps a losing case.

23.39 The letters from clergymen tend to describe the women as members of 'respectable' or 'very respectable' families. Religion was important, as was social class: in 1930 one Church of Ireland rector explained that 'The girl - a very nice girl - has unfortunately fallen, and as the other party concerned is not of her religion nor of her class in life, her parents who are parishioners of mine do not on any account wish her to marry him'. In 1944 a clergyman explained that 'I am endeavouring to keep things quiet in the village - at any rate, until the girl gets away ... [the woman] will not divulge who the father is. You will, I am afraid, find her very stubborn on the whole matter. I do not mean by this that she will be disobedient or troublesome'. The mother of one pregnant woman, writing in 1944, asked the home to permit her daughter to remain with friends as long as possible, because 'we are not well off people and every 10 shillings counts, especially having to stay so long'. She continued, 'It was a hard blow to see a child's life disgraced and ruined, if ever it becomes known. Everyone doing their part to keep it secret'. In 1945 a Church of Ireland rector who had referred a parishioner, informed the Matron that he had visited her in Holles Street hospital and had discovered that the putative father of her child had tried to visit her but had not been permitted to see her. He expressed concern that: 'As she seems very attached to the baby I would be afraid that she might marry the man as a means of keeping it with her'. The file contains a letter from her boyfriend to the young mother:

I hope the day is dawning near when we would meet again with hand in hand ... and you a free girl once again. I hope and pray to live to see the day that

you and I shall be sweet hearts again. I shall say no more until I see you in [place] and I hope that day is coming on it can not come too soon. I was saying I would go up on St Patrick's day but if it was a thing that I could not get to see you it would be foolish. So please write and let me know when you are coming home and if you do not be to [sic] long up there ... A lot of people does be asking for you so I say you are up in Dublin at a job and of course you like it ok ... I hope you will drop me a line before long ... your fond sweet heartboy.

23.40 It is not clear whether she received this letter. This woman's former employer arranged for her to take a job as a servant to her sister in Northern Ireland; she promised that the baby could be placed in a foster family nearby. One letter concerning a pregnant woman, who was travelling to Dublin by train, where she would be met at the station by a representative of the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Society explained that: 'She is to wear a tan coat, green hat, red shoes and a poppy'. The date was November 1957.

23.41 During the 1950s, admissions to all mother and baby homes declined, presumably because of the fall in the number of 'illegitimate' births, and this home was no exception. In September 1952 for example, there were only three resident women; there was only one mother and child in the home for several months in late 1953 and early 1954. In 1953 the Magdalen Asylum contacted Bethany Home regarding its admission policy. Under the terms of the trust, they were not allowed to admit any but 'first fail' cases. Very few such girls were now seeking admission; the number of illegitimate births had fallen sharply and they suggested, given that Bethany admitted women having a second or subsequent 'illegitimate' pregnancy, that 'first fall' cases coming to Bethany should be 'diverted' to the Magdalen Asylum. Bethany's management committee declined this request, noting that the 'vast majority' of women admitted were 'first falls' and that if they excluded 'first fall' mothers the numbers admitted to Bethany 'would be negligible'.¹⁹

23.42 In January 1959, when there were six 'girls' in the home, the matron commented that she was:

Glad to have enough girls in to be company for one another; it is always difficult when there are only one or two, and no matter how hard the staff may

¹⁹ Bethany Home Management Committee minutes.

try, we are far too middle aged to be at our most useful with 1 or 2 girls in their teens, as happened at the beginning of December.

- 23.43 The refusal to admit women who were giving birth to their second or subsequent child was maintained into the 1960s, though on occasion a woman might gain admittance without that being known. In 1964 a clergyman in Cork was contacted because the home had failed to secure any contribution for a woman who had been discharged. They informed him that: 'As you know we never refuse to take girls because they cannot pay. [The woman's] child has proved to be unadoptable (on medical grounds) as was her first child. She should therefore never have come to this Home which is for first cases only'.
- 23.44 The clergyman suggested that the woman's mother or uncle should 'settle' her debt. He explained that it was 'a great surprise and shock for me to learn from your letter that this was [the woman's] second child'. He claimed that neither the boy she was about to marry or his parents were aware of her previous pregnancy: 'it would be a terrible shock to them to discover this later, as they are bound to do'. He sought permission to inform them. An unidentified man, from the same area (possibly the woman's uncle) then contacted the home; he had apparently heard the story, and suggested that he would have paid the outstanding bill. He had not been aware that this was the woman's second pregnancy; he reported that her fiancé had heard the full story, 'do you realise that this could well breach [sic] their marriage plans which is to take place next month, after all [the fiancé] was willing to marry her even when she had a child, just what must he think now ... if anything happened to [the woman] in the past, it should certainly not be broadcast now'. It is evident that the clergyman had informed the young man's parents; he claimed that he would have a very uneasy conscience if 'I left the [family] in the dark about what I know ... especially as [the fiancé] had asked me to marry them. There has been a great deal of deception in this case'.
- 23.45 The proportion of mothers who were giving birth to their second or subsequent child rose steadily from the late 1960s. In April 1972 two of the eight resident women were pregnant for a second time; a 1973 a pregnant woman was admitted, who had given birth to her first child in 1969, while in this home. The proportion of mothers giving birth to a second or subsequent child increased in later years.

Births in Denny House

- 23.46 A total of 869 women were admitted before giving birth and stayed until after the birth. Twenty per cent of these women gave birth in Denny House; 38% gave birth in the Rotunda; 25% in Holles Street and 15% in the Coombe. Only two babies were born in Leeson Street and it would appear that these were emergency deliveries because the policy at that time was for women to attend ante-natal classes and give birth in a Dublin maternity hospital.
- 23.47 Following the move to Eglinton Road preparations began for births in the home. In 1959 the case committee requested the general committee 'to expedite deliveries in the Home for the following reasons: Girls have to go to hospital at the time when they need most help; greater privacy; Home would be able to help more people'. At a subsequent meeting the medical officer reported that a consultant obstetrician, who was attached to the Rotunda, 'is very willing to take on Home deliveries if appointed and to do antenatal care'. It was agreed that the doctor would decide whether women should give birth in hospital or in the home.
- 23.48 There is no indication that the Home had previously been registered under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934*. It does not appear on the register of private maternity homes in 1957 or 1958, or in the inspection reports for 1937/38 or 1944/46 of homes in the Dublin County Borough that were registered under this Act. A handwritten note on a Department of Health file in 1974 stated that it only registered under the 1934 Act in the 1960s. However the home was visited regularly under the Dublin Maternity and Child Welfare Scheme; for example the annual report of the Dublin city medical officer of health for 1940 stated that the home 'was visited several times during the year by the Medical Officer and found very satisfactory'. The Dublin corporation inspector of midwives visited the home in the autumn of 1956. According to the Matron, the inspector stated that 'as we don't have confinements here, we will no longer be on the list of Homes registered'.²⁰ Following the decision to permit births in the home, an application was made to Dublin Corporation in December 1960 to register under the 1934 Act. Some weeks later the same Dublin Corporation inspector, who had visited Leeson Street in 1956, confirmed that it would be recognised as a maternity home under the 1934 Act, when the instructions given by the Dublin fire brigade - they required an escape ladder on to the chapel room - had been carried out and approved. In May

²⁰ This is not a correct interpretation of the Act's requirements – see Chapter 1.

1961, the Matron was informed that the home had been registered and that they had been provided with the forms that should be completed to comply with the Act.

23.49 The first two babies were born in the home in May 1961. The annual report for the year 1962 highlighted that fact that this was

the first full year in which deliveries have been carried out in the Home. We are proud to have achieved this ambition and are happy that the girls entrusted to our care have expressed their appreciation of this arrangement and the privacy it ensures. There have been 18 deliveries in the Home during the year - the latest being our first twins. No obstetrical abnormalities or emergencies were encountered. Two very small babies were transferred to the Paediatric Unit of the Rotunda Hospital, so that they might have the advantage of the special facilities there for the first few weeks of life.

23.50 The visiting obstetrician reported that 'On the material plane we can be proud of the facilities and equipment of the Home, which need not fear comparison with any other similar institution. I wish to record my own pleasure in being associated with the Home and to thank all the staff for their willing and efficient co-operation during the year'. In October 1966, it was noted that 78 babies had been born in the home since May 1961.

23.51 Occasional comments in the Matron's books suggest that the home was scrupulous about having the appropriate equipment. In 1967 the Matron ordered a second smaller oxygen cylinder to be kept in either the post-natal or delivery room so that they would not have to rely on one cylinder. She noted that one of the maternity cases in the current month was expected to be a breech delivery. An anaesthetist attached to the Rotunda paid a visit and advised the Matron to purchase additional equipment, including 'a baby's oxygen resuscitator' and an infant's laryngoscope. By this time however, the Department of Health was pressing for all women to give birth in maternity hospitals where specialist medical and nursing staff were available at all times. Facilitating births in Eglinton Road placed considerable pressure on the Matron; there were potential risks for mothers and infants and the home was very reliant on temporary agency nurses. In 1972 the Matron commented that 'Having the girls delivered in hospital has lightened the night work burden for me considerably and the girls do not seem to mind going into hospital for a short time', which would appear to suggest that they had suspended deliveries because of staffing difficulties. A report by a Department of Health

medical official in 1978 stated that, until 1973, ante-natal and post-natal examinations were carried out in the home, but since 1973 the women attended regular clinics in the Rotunda and gave birth in the hospital. Eglinton Road had space for 12 women but they preferred to cap the numbers at ten; the maximum occupancy between 1973 and 1978 was six women at any time.

- 23.52 Of the 21 women admitted during the year 1973, 13 were referred by the Church of Ireland Social Service; one by Dr Barnardo's; seven were referred by their local rector, a doctor or a health officer. Nine of the 21 women kept their baby; 10 infants went to children's homes to await adoption. One premature baby died, and one woman who only remained in the home before the birth made her own (unspecified) arrangements for her child.

From Magdalen Asylum to Denny House

- 23.53 The numbers admitted began to fall towards the end of the 1960s. In 1970 the Matron noted that the

Fact that there are still no bookings for the Home has caused concern, [inspector] from Maternity and Child Welfare Dept. visited the Home last Thursday morning. She stated we will probably have to shorten the time of the girls stay in the Home before and after confinement, she said that the age now of the unmarried mother in the last two years is usually under 18 years of age and in many cases the parents do not know of the pregnancy... [she] also said it is time we changed the name of the Home or dropped the title altogether, but this is only a suggestion.

- 23.54 The Matron contacted the social worker at the Rotunda about the lack of bookings and was informed that the number of Catholic and Protestant unmarried mothers had doubled over the past three to four years. The Rotunda social worker suggested that they should shorten the length of stay. The closure of Bethany to admissions in late 1971 - the home closed the following year - meant that this was the only Protestant mother and baby home. However that does not seem to have resulted in a noticeable increase in admissions. In the autumn of 1972 the Matron expressed concern that they had not received 'any bookings and will only have 1 girl and baby in home from Wednesday'. She continued to check with the Rotunda, in an effort to determine how many Protestant women were giving birth and had not been in the Home. The governors were obviously considering amending the charter because they sought information about Catholic women and deserted

wives. The visiting obstetrician told them that 'deserted wives are usually independent their problems are usually care of their children and paediatric nursing'.

- 23.55 In 1973 the Department of Health examined the viability of the home. One official estimated that it cost £30 a week for each mother. The average length of stay now ranged from two weeks to two months. When an inspector from the Department of Health visited, she expressed concern at the 'very small numbers and would like to see the Home kept going'. There were no mothers or children resident in November 1973. On a number of occasions during the 1970s the minutes of the monthly committee meeting record that there were no mothers in the home. It closed for three weeks summer holidays in 1974 and again for a week at Christmas. For much of the time between the summer holidays and Christmas there were no resident mothers or children. It also closed for a three-week summer holiday the following year. In April 1976 the minutes of the committee meeting reported that: 'From 10th of last month, the Home began to fulfil its purpose and operate normally again. Two years since so many were in the Home'. There were five women, two babies and one child - all admitted in the past month.
- 23.56 Conversations about the future of the home continue throughout the 1970s in the Department of Health and among the governors and matron. Mothers were returning home or to work shortly after the birth of their child but children who were being adopted were not generally placed until they were approximately six months old. Consideration was given to providing accommodation for pre-adoption babies (without their mothers). However, both the obstetrician and the Rotunda social worker indicated that this was 'a work outside the present scope and that ongoing expenses for staff would exceed any payments received for the babies care'; they suggested that there were not sufficient Protestant babies 'to keep the project going'. The obstetrician emphasised that it would be essential to have a paediatrician on call, night and day, if babies were being kept without their mothers. The social worker suggested changing the name of the home to something more modern; she also highlighted a need for bed-sitting rooms for ante-natal residents. Department of Health inspectors continued to recommend that it remain a mother and baby home for Protestants. In December 1974 the committee reported that the department inspector had said that 'the Home had a very good report as a Nursery Home and the patients seemed to have excellent care'. She discouraged them from de-registering as a maternity home, suggesting

that there should be a need for one Protestant home for unmarried mothers and their children. But the numbers remained tiny which encouraged a flexible approach to women's demands. One pregnant woman who was admitted in 1975 went out to work as a part-time child minder, three or four days every week, and an unmarried pregnant woman spent her weekends in the home, because otherwise she would be alone when her housemates went home. This woman was described as of a mixed marriage and not practising any religion. The Matron and the home's social worker liaised with the social worker in Holles Street about her care.

23.57 In 1978 the medical officer reported that most of the women admitted were from outside Dublin. The length of stay varied but it was usually from three to five months. Over the previous two years there had been on average 13 'girls' in the home each year. Cherish, an organisation that supported single parents, contacted the Matron and suggested that they should concentrate on providing temporary accommodation for mothers and infants immediately after the birth. Many mothers had to place their infants in residential care when they left hospital, because they had nowhere to go, and this disrupted the bonding between mother and infant. Cherish also wanted the home to provide emergency accommodation for mothers and babies from the country who often arrived at its offices with nowhere to live. Cherish also suggested extending the facilities to woman of all Christian denominations.²¹

23.58 A growing number of women in the home with their child were awaiting accommodation in Miss Carr's Flatlets in Northbrook Road - see Chapter 25. In 1979 the Matron addressed the Protestant Child Care meeting in Miss Carr's Home, describing the changes that had taken place in the work of the home over the previous ten years 'and the possible scheme to broaden the scope of the work'. Miss Clandillon paid a visit to discuss the proposed changes. At the time of her visit there was only one resident woman. Consideration was being given to admitting women who were not Protestant. Miss Clandillon told the Matron that many women no longer went to mother and baby homes. She suggested that the home should take Protestant women 'from any part of the Republic' (there is no indication that they were not already doing this), and they should advertise in parish magazines, newsletters and women's magazines and place small notices in

²¹ Information provided to the Commission by Cherish which is now called One Family: <https://onefamily.ie/>

church porches. This was the practice of the Catholic agency CURA. The Matron stated that abortion was responsible for the drop in admissions, and many women were now staying with friends before giving birth. Miss Clandillon obviously believed that it should continue to operate as a Protestant mother and baby home; however, there appeared to be little demand. In April 1979, when there were only two resident women, the committee recorded that

Any inquiries re admission have only been of a tentative nature. There are so many organisations and suggestions of alternative care for the girls before and after confinement. Two inquiries last month from Social Workers were for RC girls, neither were refused but were offered short accommodation stay, however both girls made other arrangements apart from the help of the Social Workers, one brought her baby to her Aunt's home and the other girl has found accommodation near her home for herself and her child.

23.59 There were no resident women between June and late August 1979. A senior official in the Department of Health told the guardians that 'this Department would encourage efforts by your Board to develop and expand the work of the Home with unmarried mothers and wives who for one reason or another require assistance and care'. He emphasised that the department was not in a position to advise the board. In June 1980 a resolution passed at the joint meeting, presumably of the trustees and governors of the home, determined to change the charter to enable them to admit unmarried mothers without religious restriction, and, in certain circumstances, married women who were separated from their husbands or deserted and pregnant widows. The name of the charity was changed to Denny House, which honoured the home's 18th century founder Arabella Denny and the restriction to Protestant women no longer applied.

23.60 In 1981 the Matron of the renamed Denny House wrote to the Department of Health explaining that over the past three to four years the home had been underused, so the board 'after much consideration, decided to apply to the Court to vary the Scheme...the primary purpose of the Home is now to provide residential accommodation for and the other needs of unmarried mothers and their infants, irrespective of religion'. The Matron noted that recent applications came from unmarried mothers who had given birth and sought temporary accommodation for up to three months while they made long-term arrangements. Following the changes to the charter, women were being admitted to Denny House in the final weeks of pregnancy. They gave birth in a Dublin maternity hospital, presumably

the hospital of their choice, because the records show no consistent pattern, and they returned with their baby shortly after the birth. During their time in Denny House they were expected to decide whether or not to keep their baby and to make future living and housing arrangements. Mothers had to take responsibility for caring for their baby while in the home to make them aware of the demands of motherhood. When Denny House staff met the department's social work adviser, they cited several instances where young women, who had planned to keep their baby, changed their mind 'when faced with the reality of caring for the small baby', and contrary cases where women who had planned on adoption also changed their minds. The decision to admit Catholic women had an immediate impact. In July 1981 there were six mothers and five babies in Denny; one infant was in hospital; all five of the recent admissions were Catholics.

- 23.61 In 1982 Denny House told the Department that 'a wind of change' had blown through the home, with the appointment of a new Matron. They planned to offer cookery and budgeting classes, elementary biology (presumably a euphemism for birth control), and marriage counselling. The home, which only accommodated ten women, had a waiting list.

Life in the Magdalen Asylum and Denny House

- 23.62 In 1925 Emily Buchanan, a former member of the Dublin Board of Guardians, and a long-term member of the Committee of the Home and of the Protestant Children's Aid Society, told the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Indigent Poor that 'the secret of saving both mother and child is to be found in our system'. The objective should be to save the child 'physically' and the mother 'morally'. She explained that mothers gave birth in either the Coombe or the Rotunda hospitals and returned to the home with their baby. They were

obliged (if physically possible) to nurse the infant for 8 or 9 months during which time the girl is trained for domestic service and in needle work - making outfits for both children and mothers. There was an average of twelve women in the Home at any time; they arrived 2-3 months before the birth.

When the baby is weaned the girl is sent to a situation and the child is handed over to the Boarding out Committee who place it with a 'nurse' carefully selected and who visit the foster homes at least once a month.

- 23.63 The 'girls' contributed towards the maintenance of their child 'in proportion to their wages'; she claimed that the death rate among the children was 'almost nil' and few women defaulted on maintenance payments although many mothers went to England. Miss Buchanan suggested that a mother who nursed her child for 8-9 months 'grows to love it devotedly - She will face the world for its sake - and does. Second offences in such cases are rare'. She claimed that the Boarding Out Committee inspected the children every month, and they wrote to the mothers about their children.
- 23.64 Following this model, she suggested that small mother and baby homes, with 15-20 resident women, under religious management, should be opened in every county. 'You must get to know the girls individually. They must get kindly and sympathetic treatment and to my mind treatment with a distinctly religious bias. To my mind these girls want something like that to fall back upon'.²²
- 23.65 It would appear that most mothers in this home breastfed their infants. In 1948 the Matron noted that eight of the nine babies were being breastfed; the exception was a premature baby. In May 1955 she recorded that 'As there is a surplus of [breast] milk here, the Rotunda nurse calls daily for it. The girls are glad to keep other babies, so we do not let the Rotunda pay their usual price -2d per ounce'.
- 23.66 Occasional comments in the records indicate that some women used an alias. This may have replaced the earlier very impersonal Mrs One, Mrs Two in the nineteenth century register. In 1945 Matron's book noted that four new dresses were needed 'as we will soon have 14 girls in Home'. Some women appear to have arrived with a complete wardrobe, but others had to be kitted out; it is not clear whether uniforms were mandatory or supplied only to women who had inadequate clothing. In 1951 the home was 'very short of girls underclothing and we have a lot of old stockings'; the Matron had ordered 'girls afternoon dresses'.
- 23.67 Voluntary workers were active in the home; in 1953 the Matron noted that one volunteer was holding singing classes (which must have been difficult as there were only three mothers in residence); another taught embroidery and a third had started a class in handcrafts and painting. There were also dressmaking classes; most of the women made babies' dresses. Following the move to Eglinton Road,

²² Oireachtas Library, Minutes of Evidence, 23 Sept. 1925.

the Matron wrote that they were spending 'a good deal of time in the garden. Very gratifying to see the amount of embroidery, knitting and sewing which they are completing in addition to the routine household mending and in many cases they have done work which they had never attempted before'. This would appear to refer to household laundry, which was now being done in the home following the purchase of a washing machine and spin dryer.

- 23.68 When Miss Litster inspected the Leeson St premises in 1955 she remarked that most of the work was done by the mothers although the records note the hiring of temporary staff to carry out nappy washing and cleaning. By the early 1960s, a physiotherapist attached to the Rotunda hospital was running relaxation classes. In the mid-1970s a volunteer arranged for the women to assemble boxes used to package a board game; mothers would be paid for this work.
- 23.69 Matron's book records excursions to gather blackberries, visits to the Zoo, the cinema, and the Gaiety pantomime during the 1950s. In 1956 a named doctor, who was associated with the charity, drove three mothers to the Children's Fold - a children's home in Monkstown - 'which pleased them a lot'; this may have enabled the mothers to see their children. In a later entry she wrote that she was 'Glad to say that the girls all go out from time to time, church, shopping, visiting another girl in Rotunda and occasionally going to the cinema'; 'on probably the wettest day of the month', she had taken three women to Glendalough 'where we had a picnic tea'. The Matron recorded the Christmas day menus, which followed the traditions of Irish homes at the time, with either turkey or a goose, and other trimmings.
- 23.70 By the 1950s (there are no comparable records for earlier decades), the home was taking an active interest in the mothers' health. Women were tested for TB and given BCG immunisation; many underwent eye tests and were fitted with prescription glasses, and they were sent to the dental hospital for treatment. Babies received BCG and other infant immunisation; the Matron arranged for the public health nurse to call to do this. The public health nurse also checked the children's health and development. A nurse from the Rotunda reviewed the babies' diet and recommended changes.

Religion

- 23.71 In the 19th and the early 20th centuries, religion was seen as playing a major role in the rehabilitation of unmarried mothers, and the regime in the Magdalen Asylum

reflected that culture. There was an adjoining chapel that was open to the public; it appears that women in an advanced stage of pregnancy attended services in a gallery, which presumably gave them privacy. There are several references to baptisms in the Matron's book; and in one case there is a note that the Matron had baptised an infant who was ill. In May 1952 the Matron reported that 'all the mothers had been churched'.²³ There are further references to churching in later entries. In 1953 the Matron noted that 'The girls went to Church on 5 days of Holy Week and 3 of them went to Holy Communion on Easter Sunday which was a happy day here'. There are occasional reports of mothers being baptised in St Peter's Church in Aungier St. In 1952 the chaplain visited twice a week, on one day he spoke to each woman individually; on his second visit he met them as a group. In the mid-1950s he was giving classes in church history. Attendance was said to be voluntary, but the Matron noted that 'all the girls go'.

23.72 In 1954 the nurse was holding weekly bible classes and she and another woman (who was probably the housekeeper) led evening prayers; the Matron led the morning prayers. The Matron hoped to recruit someone who could come in 'to play hymns in the evenings between 8.30-9pm'. One of the resident women was visiting the Metropolitan Hall, a Gospel Hall in Abbey St. She informed the Matron that "I have found the Lord. I have been converted". This has caused much quiet rejoicing in the Home'. In 1955 the Matron reported that some women went to services in St Ann's Church in Dawson Street, others went to Christchurch in Leeson Park. 'Their choice depends on their desire to avoid being seen by acquaintances'. They also attended sessions of the diocesan youth conference 'and liked that very much'. The chaplain issued a series of rules relating to 'religious work' in the home. This stipulated that the women should attend services at either St Ann's or Leeson Park. 'Family prayers', morning and evening should be taken by the Matron or her deputy. Other members of staff should not take classes or prayer meetings in the house. The Matron noted that these rules were not acceptable to the nurse or another staff member, who was probably the housekeeper, 'both of whom have told me that they are here because of their wish to do mission work among girls'. Both women resigned as a consequence. The chaplain also specified that the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the New Every Morning and Acts of Devotion should be used for daily prayers, 'and no other'. However, it appears that his efforts to determine religious practice were not wholly

²³ This was a religious service where mothers who had recently given birth were 'purified'. It appears to have been universal in the Catholic church; it is unclear how extensively churching was practiced in the Church of Ireland.

successful because there were reports of women attending ‘a healing service’ given by a named ‘Brother’; others attended ceremonies in the Merrion Hall.

- 23.73 The home expected a high level of attention from its chaplain. In the late 1950s the Matron met the Archbishop of Dublin and asked that a new chaplain be appointed because the then chaplain, who was attached to a Dublin city parish, did not have sufficient time to give to the home. It was also visited by Methodist and Presbyterian ministers and occasionally by the Archbishop of Dublin. Every woman was given a copy of the Bible when she was leaving the home, if she did not already own one.
- 23.74 When the home moved to Eglinton Road a temporary chapel was set up almost immediately, pending the construction of a chapel adjoining the house. In 1973 the Matron reported on the baptism of two babies: ‘It was a very happy occasion, we had 19 people for tea in the Nursery and 7 babies. One girl brought her baby from the flat, another of our girls and her baby came from the country. We had 2 babies in the Home at the time and [a mother] invited their families and her friends, 2 were African’. The home maintained close contact with the archbishops and bishops of the Church of Ireland. In October 1975 the archbishops of Dublin and Armagh and the bishops of Tuam, Limerick and Clogher had lunch with three governors and were shown around the home.
- 23.75 During the 1970s the records indicate a gradual blurring of denominational boundaries between the agencies that assisted unmarried mothers. One woman, who was pregnant for the second time, was referred by Ally, a Catholic charity that arranged family placements for pregnant women. A Catholic religious sister, who worked with CURA, the Catholic Hierarchy’s agency to assist women in crisis pregnancies, inquired whether they would admit a pregnant woman, but as this woman was Catholic they were unable to do so. The home admitted a number of women who claimed not to practice any religion. The change to the charter reflected the reality. In 1980 the renamed Denny House was visited by two social workers who were attached to Pelletstown and the Matron was invited to visit Pelletstown.

Putative Fathers

- 23.76 Some of the individual case files in the institutional records refer to the putative father. In 1957 the rules of the home stipulated that there should be strict

supervision of male visitors and generally the only male visitors permitted were a woman's father or brother. From the 1960s, however the women's boy-friends begin to feature in the everyday life of the home. In 1961 the Matron noted that one woman's fiancé arrived and asked to see her; her parents did not know that she was in the home and she had no visitors. Matron noted that her fiancé 'seems anxious about her and appears to be a responsible person. He is paying all expenses. I told him it was against the rules of the Home but that I would put it before the Committee. Having driven from [a distant part of the country] I allowed him to see her for a few minutes while I contacted a few members of the case committee by phone'. In 1965 one mother was reported as having disobeyed the house rules; she had gone out on a Sunday afternoon with the father of her child. Her parents were informed. This mother was described as 'very apologetic on her return and she was given a second chance and has settled down again and not given any further trouble'. In 1972 one pregnant woman was discharged 'at her own request' to live at the home of the father of her baby; it was reported that they might marry. In 1974 a woman who was staying in the home until she found accommodation - she had already arranged a job - was permitted to attend a dance with her boy-friend. The Matron hired a night nurse to look after her child until 2 am. The Matron asked the committee whether such an arrangement should be permitted in future. One mother who was admitted, and hoped to marry the father of her child, had several meetings with a clergyman who was advising the family. The marriage took place shortly after she left the home with her baby.

- 23.77 A growing number of women were marrying the father of their child after the birth. Others were co-habiting with their boy-friends, but there were several instances where the relationship proved difficult. One mother, who gave birth and returned to Denny House with her child, had 'a row with the father of the baby' some days later. She discharged herself 'against the advice of her social worker who was called in'. This woman was given a room in a mother and baby flat. A pregnant woman who was described as 'undernourished, tired and frightened', had bruises and cigarette burns on her body - inflicted by her boyfriend. She had to be protected against further assaults. Denny House changed her ante-natal clinics to a different hospital because he used to wait for her at her original hospital. A mother and her child were admitted to Denny House because her relationship with the father of her child was 'unsatisfactory because he was jealous of the baby' and he occasionally beat the mother. As she was fearful of meeting him it was

arranged to transfer mother and baby to Bessborough. In 1982 Denny House arranged for a marriage counsellor to give a four-week course to the mothers.

Mental Health and Special Needs

- 23.78 The institutional records from the 1950s contain much greater detail about the women than the records of the larger mother and baby homes and they provide some insights into the mental health of the mothers. Although there is a lack of comparable records for other homes, it would be unrealistic to presume that Denny mothers were atypical in this respect. In 1956 one mother, who gave birth in the Rotunda, refused to see her child. The Matron noted that 'there were many discussions with the hospital and our case committee met also. The Rotunda psychiatrist examined her and said that her mental condition was such that she should not see the baby and that it would be suitable for adoption'. The home determined that she should not be readmitted on her discharge from the Rotunda; the woman's mother collected her from the hospital and brought her home. A mother who had 'an attack of hysteria' and 'behaved abnormally for 4 days' was seen by the Rotunda hospital psychiatrist who diagnosed 'a mild attack of post-puerperal mania'. He arranged for her to be admitted to St Patrick's psychiatric hospital. In 1959 the medical officer to the home stated that the mental health of one woman 'presented us with an insoluble problem'. This woman had several violent outbursts and one occasion she broke a window. In 1956 the case committee reported that a mother was troublesome', she slapped her baby, who was described as 'nervous'. They suggested that she should be seen by the doctor 'in company with other girls, so as not to draw attention to her mental state'. Although the doctor did not recommend that she should be seen by a psychiatrist, she was later admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Another woman, who was reported to have experienced, 'several attacks of violent hysterics' was sent to a psychiatric hospital where she was visited by her father. Her case notes stated that there it was possible that she would take up employment when she left the hospital; the home was seeking a 'solution' that would 'safeguard' her son, and give the mother 'a chance'.
- 23.79 There are many references in the institutional records to women who were depressed. One woman took a drug overdose in 1976. A mother who was described as 'very restless...went on hunger strike and behaved very strangely'. Arrangements were made for her admission to a psychiatric hospital, and the Matron watched her during the night before her admission. 'Next morning docile at

first but when 3 nurses from St Brendan's²⁴ arrived she refused to go. We telephoned for social workers, she jumped out the window. Finally went'. In 1971 a mother who was described as 'depressed after birth, now better'; was seen by a psychiatrist. This was not the woman's first child. The file noted that she 'Had breakdown after parting with first child. Was looking after children'. Another woman who had been discharged from the maternity hospital was described as 'depressed for 3 days, threatened suicide. Nurse came next evening and took her home'. In 1970 one woman was reported to have been 'emotionally disturbed for over a week before she left, partly due to a delay in the adoption of the baby'; however, she left the home 'quite calm' and her mother had sent 'a good report'. In the late 1970s another mother, who was awaiting a vacancy in a nursery for her child, who was to be adopted, 'became depressed after 3 weeks when no definite arrangements could be made on account of shortage of cots in [a children's home]. She became angry and difficult'. Matron arranged for this mother to be seen by a gynaecologist, and having spoken to her, he arranged for her to be sedated. The home hired a night nurse to care for her baby. It was reported that 'she behaved normally when she knew her baby would probably be moved the following week'. This mother returned to her home. Another mother was re-admitted to hospital for medical care because she made herself ill after discharge from hospital as she decided she wanted her baby after the baby was placed in a children's home to await adoption'. This woman's parents agreed that she could bring the baby home; the baby remained in Denny until the mother was discharged from hospital and collected her baby. She was described as 'happy and well on discharge'.

- 23.80 The original charter for the Magdalen Asylum precluded the admission of women with special needs, but that policy appears to have eased by the 1950s, perhaps because there were few women in the home. One such woman was described as 'a problem'. Arrangements were made for her to be seen by the Rotunda psychiatrist, accompanied by her mother; the case committee described her baby as 'unadoptable', though no details were given. The Matron emphasised that this woman

is not to go out alone as she is entirely irresponsible in her conversation. We manage to keep her occupied with small jobs and that is the best we can do. The other members of the staff and I feel that mental defectives are not

²⁴ Grangegorman Mental Hospital.

suitable companions in a small Home such as this and hope that in future we need not admit such girls or if admitted keep them when their presence endangers the smooth running of the Home.

- 23.81 In the late 1960s the home accommodated a teenager who was described as a 'mongol'; she was accompanied by her mother who cared for her daughter. Arrangements were made for mother and daughter to eat together, apart from the other residents; her baby was born in the Rotunda. In the same year they admitted a much older woman, who was described as having the 'intelligence of 15 year old'. She 'settled in remarkably well to the life of the Home and is very co-operative with staff and girls, she can work well at times but only at her own pace and time'. The case committee recommended that this woman should be seen by a psychiatrist; 'her people' claimed that 'she is not co-operative at her home'. In 1973 they accepted a woman who was pregnant for the third time; she was referred by the Church of Ireland moral welfare committee. This woman, in her 30s, was brought to the home by her mother, who hoped that she would remain as long as possible. She was described as a low IQ - she could read a letter but not write a letter and she had worked in Bethany for several years. She was reported to have settled into the home. They also admitted a pregnant mother of two who was separated from her husband; the child was not her husband's. She had arrived from a psychiatric hospital and was 'helpful in the Home and has not caused any anxiety up to this'. A woman admitted some years later was 'a retarded girl but not a mongol'. She was described as 'good tempered, well behaved but childish and has very little idea that she is going to have a baby'. This woman had been in institutional care since she was four or five years old. 'She can read and write a little, she cannot carry a conversation but can say short sentences, she enjoys company and does not like to be left on her own at all. She can wash and dress herself and do little household duties. She has settled in well with us and seems quite happy'. There is no indication whether the pregnancies of these women with intellectual disabilities had been reported to the Gardaí.

Post 1980 Admissions

- 23.82 Many of the women who were admitted in the later years appear to have been experiencing a variety of personal difficulties. In 1981 Denny placed an advertisement seeking a 'responsible person ... to assist in the running of a small home for single mothers, with their babies, ability to handle young mothers under

stress and small babies essential'.²⁵ In 1982 the committee recorded that all the women were in good physical health but 'most of the girls have emotional problems'. Some women left abruptly, and some returned later. One woman had 'seemed contented to be back in the Home but then towards the end of this week became determined to return to [...] and we allowed her to go away for the weekend', but she did not return. Her boy-friend contacted Denny and indicated that she would probably return because the people that she was staying with 'will not keep her any longer'. She was described as 'a very trying girl, has no money, is a very heavy smoker, could get some Home Assistance²⁶ each week but would not get up in the morning to collect it. If she returns to the Home I would certainly like some help with her...will be a very bad influence on any girl coming to the Home'.

23.83 An older single mother was referred with her baby by the social worker in the Rotunda; she asked Denny House staff to determine whether she was capable of looking after her baby. This woman was described as having a 'low IQ...very slow in every way but has improved since admission, she needs constant supervision'. A woman who was referred by Cherish, and was described as a 'special case', was 'rather difficult after admission, defiant in manner if corrected for smoking upstairs, and dissatisfied with the food, particularly the evening meal. She bought extra food and cooked it for herself but she has eased off that now and has improved in manner. She is out most of the day, her baby is due soon'. Another mother was admitted with her six-week old baby because her social worker wanted to determine whether she was capable of looking after the infant. This woman was described as 'very disturbed'. After she had spent four weeks in Denny the staff and the ladies committee decided that they could be of little help. At this point the social worker began to plan to place her child with a foster family with a view to adoption, however the mother, having agreed to this arrangement 'on the surface', made accusations in the public health clinic that Denny was trying to take her baby away. Another mother, who was admitted with her two-week old baby was described as

of slow mentality and not capable of looking after her baby. She needed constant supervision - which we could cope with during the day owing to so few girls in the house - but at night [...] failed to wake up to feed her baby and

²⁵ *Irish Press*, 15 June 1981

²⁶ Home assistance had been replaced by Supplementary Welfare Allowance in 1977 but the name continued to be used – see Chapter 1.

continuously took her baby into her own bed although she had been told not to.

Denny told her social worker that they could not be responsible for the baby's safety because they did not have night staff, so this mother was transferred to Pelletstown. A woman was 'found to have hit her baby and she became very sullen and uncooperative'. A psychiatrist determined that her baby should be removed temporarily to a children's home, and it was reported that the mother 'improved for a while, and become more co-operative'. When she was permitted to reclaim her baby, a decision that was thought to be 'best for both' she left and appears to have returned home. Her baby was adopted. One woman, who was described as 'slightly retarded' was initially admitted for two weeks, but it was decided to extend her stay 'as the staff feel she is unable to cope'. The records relating to another mother state that 'it is combined opinion of nursing staff that she is far too immature and not fully aware of the responsibility entailed in looking after her baby. Case is to be discussed with psychologist and Social Worker'.

- 23.84 A social worker from the west of Ireland requested that a mother and baby should be admitted with a view to assessing the mother's mental state and capacity to cope with her child. This woman was described as 'mildly mentally handicapped'. However, while in Denny House her behaviour became very disturbed; a staff member from Denny House had to collect her from a Dublin hospital, where she had gone with her baby. She was transferred to a psychiatric hospital; the Western Health Board agreed to pay the cost of an agency nurse in Denny to look after her child, pending a placement with foster parents.
- 23.85 When Gardaí or social workers came into contact with vulnerable women, who were pregnant and were members of a Protestant church, they often sent the women to Denny House. In one case where a pregnant woman had run away from her home in Northern Ireland, the Matron determined that she was 'a very complicated case as she was of very low IQ and needed more care than we could offer'. A woman, who was for a time the only mother resident with her baby was described as 'a girl who needs a lot of help and understanding', disappeared for several days, leaving her baby in the home. She returned and discharged herself and her child, despite being advised not to do so. This woman had planned to place her child in a children's home, presumably prior to adoption, but had changed her mind.

- 23.86 In 1982 it was noted that of the ten girls admitted only three presented major problems. One mother was admitted with her baby because 'she had encountered problems at home'. Her emotional state was described as 'bizarre' and she failed to settle in Denny; mother and baby returned home within a day. A second mother, who was admitted with her son, 'had a long history of mental disturbances. Her behaviour was quite psychotic and bizarre'. Denny House tried to have this woman admitted for psychiatric treatment but the hospital could not care for her child, who remained for a brief period in Denny House before being sent to temporary foster parents. When the mother was discharged from hospital, the social worker asked Denny House to readmit her and her child but 'from personal observations we declined because of the long-term history of illness and the very poor supportive behaviour of [her] family and baby's father'.
- 23.87 A number of women remained in Denny House for only a very brief time and some, who were brought there by a social worker, refused to stay. One mother was described as 'very emotionally upset and no amount of care by the staff drew any response'. She was 'adamant about not staying in Denny House'. When her infant had to be readmitted to hospital, she discharged herself and 'went back to PF'. Another mother who appears to have been emotionally disturbed 'became aggressive when the staff spoke to her about the care of the baby and decided to take her own discharge'. She had been away from the home for the day, having not made any arrangements for the care of her baby. Another woman, who was admitted with her child for short-term care because she was unable to cope, stayed in Denny while undergoing some form of therapy. Mother and baby then went to live in the putative father's flat. Another mother, who had been receiving psychiatric treatment since her early teens, was sent to Denny with her child in order to see whether she could cope with the baby. She became 'very disturbed' and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital; her baby went to a children's home.
- 23.88 In 1984 the Denny social worker, who was an unpaid volunteer, refuted claims by the Department of Health that the home was overstaffed: 'the type of girls we have are largely problem girls be it, homeless, mentally retarded, on drugs, drink and some in trouble with the law - not to mention the social problems of being unmarried. For that reason the Home needed to have experienced staff on hand at all times'. Turnover could be 'very frequent as housing or parents permitted the girls to leave'. She attached a list of recent admissions; the women were referred by maternity hospitals, a probation officer, Ally, the Eastern Health Board, a

psychiatrist, the Protestant Adoption Society, CPRSI and Cherish. The Department of Health recommended that responsibility for Denny House should be transferred to the community care section of the Eastern Health Board, and that happened in 1985. By the mid-1980s there are references to heroin addiction; one mother, who was in Denny House with her child and was being treated at the Jervis St Drug Centre, disappeared and had to be traced by her social worker. Two mothers underwent treatment for alcohol addiction. One woman who had been admitted was discovered to be HIV positive so protective gloves and gowns were ordered.

- 23.89 A set of house rules drafted in 1981 stated that 'Each mother takes full responsibility for her baby with the help and supervision of the staff. Mothers are expected to play their part in the day to day running of the house'. Visitors were welcome in the afternoon and evening. Mothers would continue to meet their social worker, if possible, while in Denny House; if that was not possible the Denny House social worker would fill that role. They recommended that each mother and her social worker should visit the home before booking a place. Breakfast was at 8.30; lunch at 1 pm and tea at 4.30. Visiting hours were 2-4.30 and 6.30 to 9. Alcohol was forbidden; a mother was required to take her baby if she was going out unless she had made an arrangement with the staff or another mother. Women were required to be back by 8.30 pm unless given permission. Disposable nappies²⁷ were not permitted and babies were not to be in 'other rooms'. Women had to supply their own washing powder and soap. Smoking was forbidden in the kitchen, dining room and upstairs.
- 23.90 Many mothers and children who were in Denny House in the 1980s were awaiting long-term accommodation. Housing remained a major difficulty, perhaps the major challenge for mothers who wished to keep their child. Other women were in Denny House because of difficult relationships with their family. In February 1984 three of the four mothers with children who were admitted were homeless; all were referred by social workers. When one mother was discharged from the home and her baby went to foster parents, Denny House 'managed to secure temporary accommodation...at the Magdalen Convent, Donnybrook, as the mother refused to have her home'. In another case the records state that 'there was a lot of family conflict as a result of her intention to keep the baby'. A volunteer with Denny

²⁷ Cloth nappies were probably used much more widely than disposable nappies at this time.

House 'spent the entire afternoon of that day trying to restore harmony between girl's mother and her boyfriend with good result. The girl and child were discharged home (rented accommodation)'. One mother and child who spent three months in Denny House in the mid-1980s had been discharged from hospital to her parents' house. Because of disagreements with her family she was admitted to Denny House. The staff reported that she needed constant supervision in caring for her baby, and had a poor standard of hygiene. Mother and child moved into a flat in Ballymun. A pregnant teenager was admitted because of family problems particularly with her step-father. Another young pregnant woman was admitted because there was 'great tension in the home, her father does not speak to her. The siblings want her to place baby for adoption. She is very "anti" family at present'. The mother of another young pregnant woman was aware of her pregnancy and was supportive; however this young woman could not remain at home because her father would discover that she was pregnant. Another pregnant woman came to Denny because she was frightened. Her father had threatened, 'to kick the baby out of her' and had refused her permission to eat in the family home. Another mother arrived with her baby following a row with her mother; she was now homeless. She was not in contact with the baby's father, who was an alcoholic.

- 23.91 Denny introduced family counselling talks and discussions but they claimed that this received 'a mixed reaction - most felt it beneficial but were rather disappointed as regards the fact that they were collectively asked to discuss their own problems to each other, this they resented'.

The Children

- 23.92 The institutional records analysed by the Commission show that a total of 1,294 living children were associated with Denny House. Of these, 1,134 were born in or admitted to Denny House. An additional 139 children were not associated with Denny House - their mother left the home before giving birth, or did not return after the birth. The discrepancy between the 1,134 who were admitted and the 1,294 living children relates to children whose mothers, having given birth in hospital, returned having arranged for their child to be adopted, or placed in an institution. There is no information available regarding the discharge date or possibly the death in the institution of 101 children.

- 23.93 A total of 1,134 children were admitted to the Magdalen Asylum/Denny House. There is no date of admission for 25 children.
- 23.94 The peak in admissions of children was in the 1980s; in earlier decades the number of children admitted in any year never exceeded 20. The length of stay was highest in the 1920s, it fell steadily from the 1940s, and by 1960 it was under 50 days. A total of 55 children, who were associated with Denny House, died. This includes children who died in the home, children who were admitted to the home and died elsewhere and children who were never in the home but whose mothers were resident before the birth; 13 children died in the 1920s, 24 in the 1930s, 16 in the 1940s and two in the 1950s. The last death of an infant associated with Denny House was in 1959. Thirty-four of these infants are buried in Mount Jerome cemetery. The burial place of the others is not known; they may have been buried by their family or in a plot owned by the hospital where they died.
- 23.95 The infant mortality rate was substantially lower than in other mother and baby homes. However, the trends are broadly similar to the other homes. Mortality peaked in the 1940s and fell sharply around the end of that decade. Children who were under 28 days old accounted for 46.3% of the deaths; 48.1% were aged between 29 days and a year, and the remaining children were over one year when they died. Just under one-third died in the home; 35 died in hospital, one died at a private address and one died in Bethany.
- 23.96 The question arises as to why the infant mortality rate in this home was much lower than in other homes. The small size was undoubtedly a factor; babies had much less exposure to infection than in larger homes and, in contrast to the other homes, there is no evidence that it was ever over-crowded. Mothers were screened before admission for infectious diseases, which would have prevented the entry of women suffering from venereal disease which contributed to infant mortality. The home did not admit older children who might transmit infectious diseases to infants. The apparently high rate of breastfeeding would have been a significant factor in reducing infant mortality in the 1920s-40s. Although the detailed records are available only from the 1940s, these suggest that doctors - a general practitioner, paediatrician, obstetrician and psychiatrist - were regularly called into this home, and several served as governor or in another capacity.

Exit Pathways

23.97 The exit pathways changed very significantly during the years examined by the Commission. In the 1920s, 73% of children whose exit pathway is known were nursed out, as were 30% in the 1930s - a decade for which no information is available about the outcomes of half of the children. In the 1940s, 76% of children were nursed out, and informal adoptions, which were not common in the earlier decades, accounted for 12% of known outcomes. The introduction of legal adoption in 1953 brought a major change in the outcomes for children, most significantly a major decline in the number placed at nurse. In the 1950s (and adoption began only in 1953), 51% of children were placed for adoption. This rose to 62% in the 1960s. The data for the 1970s show that just under a quarter (23.9%) left with a family member, which included their mother; 14% were placed for adoption but almost 62% went to 'other institutions' - it is highly likely that many of these children were subsequently adopted. The 1980s marks another major change - this was the decade when the renamed Denny House opened its doors to Catholic mothers and the number of resident women and children increased significantly. In the 1980s, 58% of children either left with their mother or they were taken by another family member, and the figure for the 1990s was almost similar.

Placed at Nurse

23.98 As was noted in the introduction, from the early 1920s the Magdalen Asylum worked closely with the Protestant Nursery Society. The annual report of the Protestant Nursery Society for 1922/23 stated that this was 'the first year of our new arrangement'. The society placed children born to mothers who were in the Magdalen Asylum in Protestant foster homes. In 1932/33 the society placed 15 children; they placed 17 in 1941/42, the largest number of any year.

23.99 Foster parents recruited by the Protestant Nursery Society received £1 14s 8d a month, a sum that remained unchanged until the 1940s; foster parents recruited by Bethany received £1 10s. The society sought foster mothers in the counties close to Dublin, in order that members of the committee could visit the foster homes as could the mothers, many of whom were in service around the city. Many foster mothers were recruited through the Mothers Union, and chapters of this charity raised money to support this society. However, it proved difficult to secure sufficient Protestant foster homes and by 1938 the society was placing infants with Catholic foster parents. They emphasised that this was a temporary arrangement and no child would be left in a Catholic foster home after his/her third birthday. In

common with local authorities and charities that placed children in foster homes, the Nursery Rescue Society found it increasingly difficult to find foster homes during the war years, because of shortages of food and rising prices. In 1939/40 they reported that the war had reduced the incomes of people who made a regular subscription to the society and several mothers had lost their 'situations' or were forced to accept lower wages which meant that were unable to maintain their contributions to their child's upkeep. The annual report for 1943/44 stated that the increasing number of foster children and the rising cost of food and clothing was causing 'great anxiety'. The peak in the number of children placed in foster homes by the Nursery Rescue Society was in 1942/3 when they had 73 children on their register, compared to 41 in 1922/23. The numbers remained high throughout the 1940s; there were 72 children at nurse in 1948/49; this fell to 46 in 1951/2, and the reduction accelerated following the introduction of legal adoption. In 1957/58 it was reported that, for the first time, no infants were transferred by the Magdalen Society. A number of the older children were sent to Protestant boarding schools. In 1951/2 the society noted that 'Placing children in country foster homes has the additional value of increasing the child population in districts where the Protestant schools have difficulty in keeping up their numbers'. Some boys were sent to the cathedral school in Tuam where they were trained as choristers. The cost of their education was assisted by a grant from the Galway Protestant Orphan Society.

- 23.100 Mothers were expected to contribute towards the cost of foster care for their child, and the society also received funding from the DLGPH under the Maternity and Child Welfare Grants scheme. The annual report for 1923/4 stated that four of the 38 children under the care of the society were entirely supported by their mother; two by Barnardo's, one partly by the mother and partly by Barnardo's, three were wholly supported by the society, and the remaining 28 children were partly supported by the mother or her relatives. In 1927 two mothers who had married in England, not to the fathers of their children, were sending money every month towards the cost of their foster home. When mothers travelled from England to visit their children, the society exempted them from contributing for that month, although one mother 'refused this option'. Requiring the mother to support her child and continuing to promote maternal love were seen as contributing to the mother's rehabilitation. Mothers were encouraged to visit their children 'when possible...from time to time, so that they are not allowed to lose their mother-love and sense of responsibility, but a dangerously close influence is avoided which might cause difficulty as the child grows older'.

23.101 In 1924-25, total receipts of the Protestant Nursery Society amounted to £649; the largest single item, £262, was 'payments by mothers on behalf of children', followed by £193 from the DLGPH. The report for the year 1922/23 noted that 'Most of the girls are paying their share towards the support of the children honourably and punctually'; however, two had disappeared. These two mothers were described as 'both girls of a low, of what may be called the workhouse class, and had always given us much anxiety'. By 1940 the society had 'a growing number of deserted children on our hands. The time is long gone by when these girls can be expected to have much sentimental feeling towards their children, and it is with increasing difficulty that we are able to get regular payments from the mothers'. In the earlier decades a mother's contribution was determined by her earnings; however, in 1950/51 payments by all mothers were set at 25s a month, on the grounds that 'all girls leaving the Asylum can now command good wages'.

23.102 The society did not approve of unmarried mothers raising their children. The report for 1929/30 emphasised that

The care of her child is one of the most important levers in the reformation of the mother, the love and regard for it acting as a deterrent should temptation assail her. At the same time, it seems a very doubtful desirable arrangement that she should retain the charge of it personally, especially if a girl. As the child grows up, and learns something of life, it is inevitable that either a very painful situation must arise, or the daughter must think lightly of her mother's lapse, and therefore be herself more open to temptation.

23.103 They were much more enthusiastic about mothers who reclaimed their child at a later date, generally following her marriage. The report for 1952/3 stated that 'over the past eight years 16 mothers have eventually taken the children themselves'.

23.104 Two of Ireland's leading female paediatricians, Drs Ella Webb and Dorothy Stopford-Price were honorary physicians to the Nursery Rescue Society. The annual reports contain references to illness or occasional deaths among the children at nurse. In 1922/23, one child died from pneumonia. This was the only death among the 42 children aged from seven months up 'born under the unfavourable conditions which handicap our poor little ones, even before they enter a world where we try to provide them with the loving care which would otherwise be denied to the unwanted child'. In 1927/28, there were no deaths, although one case of pneumonia 'gave us some days of acute anxiety'. In 1929/30

however two young children died but 'in neither case due to any neglect of the nurse. Both were taken to hospital and everything possible was done for them'. A girl who died of measles in the early 1930s was described as 'a mentally deficient as well as delicate, and her death can hardly be regretted'. Another infant suffered from acute pneumonia that year but survived. There were epidemics of measles and whooping cough in several of the 'cottage homes' in 1934/35 but none of the 57 children died, though a number had been seriously ill. There were further outbreaks of infectious disease in the following year, but no deaths, and the report for 1938/39 expressed the hope that an epidemic of whooping cough is 'nearly over'; one 'delicate baby' was in St Ultan's children's hospital, and a boy was convalescing in the Sunshine Home. Two children died in 1939/40, 'a little girl who was always delicate but who had been nursed through bronchial pneumonia and then measles, got whooping cough and bronchitis and passed away; a little boy died of pneumonia'. A boy died of meningitis in 1947/48. The last death of a child recorded was in the early 1960s when a five-year old boy, who was described as 'always delicate' died in hospital of broncho-pneumonia; the report noted that the last death had occurred seventeen years earlier.

Adoptions

23.105 There are references to 'adoption' in annual reports of the Nursery Rescue Society from the early 1920s; in 1922/23, for example, it reported that two children had been 'happily adopted; and we have received very pleasant accounts of 3 who were so taken in former years; but as a rule the adopting parents prefer to drop all links with the child's past'. In the following year the society had received a number of offers to adopt children, which were being explored. They expressed the hope that 'we may look to this outlet to keep our numbers within bounds and to prevent a cloud of discouraging difficulty settling on our future'. Adopting parents signed an agreement. The adoption form in 1923 was as follows:

We [adopting couple] of [address] do hereby adopt [name] to be our son, undertaking to feed, clothe and educate him as our own, and to bring him up in the faith of the Church of Ireland.

23.106 The early 'adoption' forms were handwritten, later forms were typed. These were signed, witnessed and dated. The mothers signed a form surrendering the child. One adoption in the 1940s stipulated that the 'adoption' would take place 'on the understanding' that the child's mother, 'while surrendering all claim to her may by arrangement with us visit her from time to time as her Godmother'.

- 23.107 These early 'adoptions' in the 1930s and 1940s were informal adoptions if they were in Ireland but many of them were legal adoptions in Northern Ireland, and occasionally in Britain. At least one request seeking children to adopt came from the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Society in Northern Ireland. It would appear that children being adopted in Northern Ireland were escorted there by women members of the Salvation Army. In 1948/9 the society sent a child to the United States by plane for legal adoption. The report for the following year stated that 'During this year the rage for adoptions has reached an unbelievable peak, not only here and in the rest of the British Isles but also in America'. The society was 'inundated with demands for adoptions'; they decided not to engage in any 'distant adoption' without personal recommendations. The report for 1951/52 noted that ten children were adopted during the previous year, three to the United States, one to Australia and six to Ireland.
- 23.108 Following the passing of the *Adoption Act 1952* the society referred all applications for adoption to the Protestant Adoption Society. The report for 1953/4 stated that a total of 29 'adoptions' which took place before the passing of the Adoption Act had been legalised - including some that took place 15 or 20 years earlier. These involved contacting the mothers to secure a sworn statement of consent. They noted that this required 'a very tactful approach to mothers, who may have married and whose husbands might not have been aware of the child's existence'. They secured the mother's consent in all but two cases.
- 23.109 The introduction of legal adoption changed the work of the society. The number of children placed in foster homes fell sharply. Children who were awaiting adoption were generally transferred to a children's home. The society expressed its thanks to the Children's Fold 'for kindly keeping several babies for us until an improvement in their health makes them suitable for adoption'. The children who remained in the long-term care of the society tended to be children with special needs, or children whose family histories were deemed to make them unsuitable for adoption. The report for 1957/58 stated that 'Except for the children whose mothers do not wish to part with them, it is all too clear that, in future our work will be more and more with the backward child, as all others with normal intelligence and good backgrounds will surely be adopted'. The society welcomed the opening of Sunbeam House in Bray which provided a school for 'mentally backward children'. In the 1950s, foster children who needed medical care in Dublin, but did not necessarily require hospitalisation, stayed in the Magdalen Asylum. By the late

1960s a number of mothers were placing their children in foster care while they decided whether to keep the child or place her/him for adoption and there are a growing number of reports of babies who were being raised by their grandparents.

23.110 The Commission has not seen any evidence about the closure of Denny House or when or why that decision was taken. The last available annual report of the Protestant Nursery Society is for the year 1978.