

Order says Magdalen deaths were registered

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The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Aug 23, 2003;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times (1859-2010) and The Weekly Irish Times (1876-1958)

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Nun claims many of the records relating to women who worked in laundries were destroyed by fire

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OLIVIA KELLY

Every woman who died in the Magdalen laundries within living memory was registered with the Department of Health, according to the order who ran the laundries.

In a statement responding to a report in *The Irish Times* that women had been buried in the graveyard at a Magdalen laundry in High Park, Drumcondra, Dublin without their deaths being registered, Sr Anne Marie Ryan of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity said yesterday: "In living memory, all women who died in our care were registered at Department of Health offices, Griffith Avenue, Dublin. We

believe that this practice always persisted - although we do not have the records available at this time to indicate this. Many of our records were destroyed by fire over the years.

"We are in contact with the Eastern Region Health Authority in an attempt to trace the Griffith Avenue records," she added in a statement emailed to RTÉ's *Five Seven Live*.

Sr Ryan said that women in the laundry had been attended to by two GPs prior to their deaths and the doctors had been involved in the certification process.

"Where possible, families were contacted at the time of serious illness and death.

"We in fact did not always have the full home address of women in our care. This was not a practice we would have initiated or wanted.

"To suggest that there was anything irregular about the death of any of these women is preposterous and untrue," her statement concluded.

A spokesman for the Department of Health told *The Irish Times* last night that it "could not substantiate" the order's claims that it registered all the deaths.

"If we knew the names of the people who died, we could check the register, but without the names it would be very difficult.

"We would have to check who was

resident in the Magdalen laundries, and check how many deaths were registered with the Department. Even then it would be very difficult to know for sure; it would have to involve an extensive investigation."

The Irish Times reported on Thursday that the remains of an additional 22 women were discovered when 133 bodies were being removed from the graveyard at the High Park laundry in 1993 to allow its development for housing. All but one of the 155 bodies were then cremated at Glasnevin Cemetery.

Death certificates existed for only 75 of the initial 133 bodies which had been buried over the previous 100 years. It

is a criminal offence in this State to fail to register a death which occurs on one's premises.

According to the Department of the Environment, an initial exhumation licence was granted to the Sisters on May 25th, 1993, in respect of 133 named women.

But the firm of undertakers carrying out the exhumations had to stop work when the remains of an additional 22 women were found.

A further exhumation licence was issued on August 31st, 1993, to take out "all human remains".

The Department said death certificates were provided in only 75 of the cases covered by the initial exhumation licence.

The General Register Office issued "no-trace" forms for 34 other cases, and said it could not conduct a search of the remaining 24 as "insufficient details" were provided.

The Department added that in the case of the 34 "no-trace" women, "it appears that the statutory registration procedures were not complied with at the time of their deaths".

Only one of the remaining 24 women was referred to by her first name.

The rest were identified only by a religious name such as "Magdalen of Lourdes" or "Magdalen of St Teresa". The Department said it only had a

record of 14 additional remains. It added it had sought "no additional information" for the extra licence.

In an earlier statement replying to inquiries from investigative journalist, Ms. Mary Raftery, Sr. Ryan said the exhumation and re-interring of the bodies of the 155 women "was approved by all relevant authorities, and we have had no queries from families about our decision in the intervening time.

"One family took the remains of a deceased relative to a family plot at this time. The remaining 154 were respectfully cremated and laid to rest in Glasnevin Cemetery at a public ceremony."

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