

Remains of 133 'abandoned' women exhumed at convent

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THE remains of 133 "abandoned" women will be dug up from a convent graveyard in Dublin over the next few weeks in what is believed to be the largest single exhumation in the history of the State.

The mass exhumation of the private graveyard at High Park (convent, Drumcondra, which began yesterday, is part of a land sale deal by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in a bid to raise funds to cover convent debts.

Interred in the graves, some of which are dated as late as the 1980s, are the remains of women

who were taken in by the convent after being stunned or isolated by their families and society for a variety of reasons.

More than 20 were called Magdalen and many were laundry workers at the convent.

Their remains, being dug up by workers employed by Patrick Massey Undertakers, will now be brought to Glasnevin cemetery for cremation.

The Catholic Church granted permission for the mass exhumation after the convent made the case that the sale of the land, on which the graveyard is

sited, would save the convent's present facilities.

The sisters recently accumulated heavy debt after building a new centre for women in need, according to a spokesman for the Catholic Church.

"It was a case that the exhumation of the remains of those past would be helping the women there today. The Dublin Diocese deemed it fitting and gave permission," said Jim Carwell of the Catholic Press Office.

The only other option was to build a wall around the graveyard in the centre of the 12-acre site "but access to the graves would

have been cut off," he said.

Mr Carwell said the exhumation was being carried out with the "greatest sensitivity" and that anyone who knew the women would have been informed.

Permission was also granted for the exhumations by Dublin Corporation and the Department of the Environment under the Local Government Sanitation Services Act, 1948.

The High Park laundry which took in washing from a wide area of the city, closed down some years ago.