

Magdalen plot had remains of 155 women

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JOE HUMPHREYS

The remains of an additional 22 women were discovered when 133 bodies were being removed from a Magdalen Laundry graveyard in north Dublin 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, even though it is a criminal offence in this State to fail to register a death which occurs on one's premises.

The 155 bodies were removed from the graveyard because the land at High Park,

Drumcondra, was being sold by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity to a property developer. They had been buried over the previous 100 years.

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, one of whom, "Bridget O'Neill", was said to have died as recently as April 1987.

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 of the Environment has said that 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".

As for the remaining 24 women, only one 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".

In relation to the additional bodies, the Department said it only had a record of 14 additional remains.

In its statement, the Department added that it had sought "no additional information" for the extra licence. Nor did the Department make any recommendation or direction as to whether the bodies should be cremated or reburied.

The discovery of the additional bodies, and the lack of death certificates for so many of the women, is highlighted by the investigative journalist, Mary Raftery, in her column in *The Irish Times* today.

In a statement replying to Ms Raftery's inquiries, Sister Ann Marie Ryan, of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, 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." Attempts by *The Irish Times* to contact Sister Ryan for further comment yesterday proved unsuccessful.

Mary Raftery: page 14

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