

Raymond Hill

From: James Smith [james.smith.2@bc.edu]
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To: James Smith
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<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/evidence-state-sent-girls-as-young-as-14-to-magdalene-laundries-193091.html>

Evidence State sent girls as young as 14 to Magdalene laundries

By Conall Ó Fátharta

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Close to 40 new cases have been uncovered of women as young as 14 years old having been committed to Magdalene laundries by the State. As the Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) group awaits the final report by the inter-departmental group set up to "clarify" any state involvement, it provided concrete examples of 38 cases of women, some as young as 14, sent to Magdalene laundries by courts, often for years at a time, between 1926 and 1983.

The move comes just a month after Justice Minister Alan Shatter appeared to backtrack on the question of state involvement in the Magdalene laundries, despite saying in opposition there was irrefutable evidence the State was "directly complicit" in such collusion.

The records, obtained through contemporary newspaper reports, show women and girls being sentenced to time in Magdalene laundries in lieu of time in prison.

In one case, a girl of 14 was sent to High Park for two years in 1930 for perjury. In 1936, another woman was given the option of going to Mountjoy for nine months or spending 12 months in High Park for the crime of "concealment of birth".

In 1949, a woman was sent to the Good Shepherd Convent laundry in Limerick and told if "she did not stay in the convent for at least 12 months, she would be brought up for sentence". A woman of the same name is now listed as being buried in the Gloucester Street Magdalene plot in Dublin, having died in 1987.

In 1959, a girl of 17 was sent by the courts to the same laundry in Limerick for at least four years in place of 18 months' hard labour.

Most recent reference for a court committal to a laundry was in 1983, when an unnamed girl of 15 was sent to the Good Shepherd Convent in Cork for theft.

In a number of cases, the women opted to go to jail rather than spend time in a Magdalene laundry.

JFM has also outlined how the Magdalene laundry issue has been glossed over in academic studies, particularly those written by members of religious orders. The group pointed to a book written in 1985 by Sr Stanislaus Kennedy, who is a member of the Sisters of Charity.

The study, *But Where Can I Go? Homeless Women In Dublin*, refers to 14 hostels in Dublin, three of which were not hostels but Magdalene institutions — namely Donnybrook, High Park and Seán McDermott Street.

JFM spokesperson Prof James Smith of Boston College said it was "shocking" that the term "Magdalene" did not appear once in the book's 200-plus pages. "There was much-needed attention given to homelessness in the early 1980s, but applying the term 'hostel' to these three institutions hides their true identity — there were 241 resident in the three 'hostels' on the night in 1983 when the study was conducted."

"That the author also claims the 'three hostels have since their foundation provided work as an occupation or therapeutic rehabilitation' is shocking in its attempt to deny human suffering," he added.

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