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Documentary Sources for Magdalen History and the Challenges

Jacinta Prunty

This paper is based on research in both an already published history of the institutions run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Refuge in Ireland (more commonly known as Our Lady of Charity, abbreviated as OLC) and a forthcoming study of the order's archival collections.¹

The weight of negative publicity around the Magdalen asylums, or laundries, creates special difficulties of interpretation for a project of this kind. It can be hard to read the history of OLC impartially. There is a need, as such, to handle the material with care and to step back, in order to understand it in context. At the same time one has to be sensitive in dealing with this history, respecting what it may mean for persons formerly resident in Magdalen institutions or connected with them in other ways. Self-awareness in the researcher is all-important: awareness of one's epistemological, methodological, ideological and practical positioning, one's limitations as a researcher and how one's stance is always coloured by cultural conditioning and previous experience.² In my research, intended to be a contribution to scholarship, every effort has been made to deal critically and fairly with the available sources, drawing on historical, geographical and theological understandings that have developed over several decades. The present paper attempts to address some of the difficulties and challenges involved in establishing and understanding the historical record.

In my work on this history, I have drawn on the full range of records produced by the institute, including records self-consciously made for the writing up of its own internal history. These are annals, obituaries and *circulaires*, created in accordance with established patterns and using standard formulae, and extensively mined for the compilation of promotional house, jubilee and centenary histories. An appreciation of the spiritual as well as practical purposes for which these classes of records were created is necessary, as is the institute's understanding of history which is as much theological as chronological and narrative.

OLC in Ireland: the back-story

In studying the two Magdalen asylums or laundries operated by OLC in Dublin, at High Park and Gloucester Street (later renamed Sean McDermott Street), the structure and internal government of the congregation in Ireland needs to be grasped at the outset, as this affected every aspect of its mission. Moreover, it lies behind the making of congregation records and their archival arrangement, and has influenced the approach adopted here.

In brief, each house was autonomous, that is, self-governing, with control over its own finances and property, record-making and preservation, recruitment of members, election of superiors, deployment of personnel and everything about its work. Each new monastery was founded by sisters sent from another house (in the case of the first monastery of Dublin, the 1853 founding sisters were from Paris and Rennes), but, either immediately or shortly after the foundation, the parent house held no authority whatsoever. Its role in the foundation would always be honoured but it had no further responsibility and the links between the houses would be spiritual rather than practical. The completeness of the cut-off is nicely illustrated in what was called the second monastery of Dublin, Gloucester Street which, though founded from High Park in 1887, was completely autonomous from the outset, the only real link for many years being an agreement brokered by the archbishop that the nuns from Gloucester Street, a confined city-centre complex, might be buried in the nuns' burial ground in High Park.³ The third monastery of Dublin, Kilmacud, was founded directly from High Park in 1944. The Grange was founded in 1956 with sisters jointly from High Park and Sean MacDermott Street; it sought and achieved autonomy (within the federation) in 1969.

The federation of the monasteries in Ireland in 1948, though it imposed a mother general with rights of visitation and the responsibility (with her council) of appointing the local superior, as well as establishing a common novitiate at High Park, did not otherwise impinge on the independence of each of the other houses.⁴ It was only in 1969, with the setting up of the apostolate committee as a communications mechanism, that there was any real interchange across the federation.⁵ The replacement of autonomy-within-federation by more centralised and democratic structures, for what was at all times in Ireland numerically a very small religious institute, post-dates this study, with the Irish houses becoming a province when they joined the Union of Our Lady of Charity in 1995.

What held these autonomous houses together was the adherence to a common constitution and common rule as handed on by the founder John Eudes. In addition, what was affectionately known as the ‘old cradle’ of Caen, the original refuge he founded in 1641, exercised the role of guardian of the tradition; it set itself up as a working model of how the wishes of the founder might be lived out and the place where the early customs and practices were most perfectly preserved. It became a touchstone against which all houses might measure themselves. The autonomy of individual OLC monasteries must be set against the enormous moral authority wielded by Caen right up to June that year, when the original quayside premises was levelled in the bombardment of 1944. Chevilly, its successor in terms of leadership in the post-war reconstruction of the OLC network in France, would never carry the same weight.

The autonomy of OLC houses gave the local bishop a greater role (and greater trouble) than he had with convents under a strong, central authority, such as the Good Shepherd Sisters, the Religious Sisters of Charity or the Holy Faith Sisters. The ambitions of bishops for their own diocese could also be at odds with the plans and self-understanding of local monasteries. In the case of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge in Dublin, the influence of successive archbishops is to be noted, with Archbishop Byrne, for example, overruling the sisters’ decision to join in a loose type of union with their French houses in 1932. The heaviest shadow by far is cast by the long-reigning and extraordinarily active Archbishop John Charles McQuaid (1940–72). It was Dr McQuaid who effected, with great speed, an Irish federation of the three monasteries (High Park, Sean MacDermott Street, St Anne’s Kilmacud) in 1948, to thwart moves towards amalgamation of the Dublin houses with others overseas. He was founder of the third (Kilmacud) and fourth (The Grange) monasteries and, while he did not have a free hand in what they undertook or how they ran each monastery – the constitutions were the sisters’ principal protection – he certainly tried to exercise authority over their affairs.

When the OLC house at Angers, under Soeur Marie Euphrasie Pelletier, was granted permission by Rome to establish a generalate or central government in 1835, it marked the start of a new congregation, Notre Dame de Charité du Bon Pasteur d’Angers, or the Good Shepherd Sisters. Though this new congregation had little to do with the arrival in Dublin of the OLC sisters in 1853, it needs to be mentioned as an ever-present influence in the

background. The fear of being overtaken by a far more dynamic institute (in terms of new foundations and numbers) was soundly based in that several OLC houses did shift allegiance to the generalate of Angers. There was no denying that Rome favoured centralised government, which the Good Shepherd epitomised. However, every threat to OLC autonomy was met with an increasingly trenchant attachment to the ‘primitive observance’ and the most ‘faithful’, and narrow, interpretation of the institute’s rule of life. Caen and Paris/Chevilly, the French houses with which Dublin had the closest historic ties, were implacably opposed to any sort of centralised government that might undermine the traditional autonomy of the houses, making for an ever more political and (to my mind) senseless campaign. The recent ‘reunification by merger’ can be seen as a final resolution of this division. By happy coincidence, I was present in Angers, working in the archives on 28 June 2014, when the liturgy to mark this historic union took place and can testify to the excellent relations that were in evidence on that occasion.

Writing the history: culture and context

In the writing of history, tracking down the documentary sources is generally the first step. The real trouble starts then. The ultimate purpose of documentary research is to arrive at an understanding of the meaning and significance of what the document contains.⁶ This is the historian’s greatest challenge. There is first the literal understanding, requiring language skills and palaeography. Interpretative understanding requires much more but, at its simplest, according to John Scott, ‘interpretation requires an understanding of the particular definitions and recording practices adopted and of the genre and stylisation employed in the text’, and how these might have changed over time and from place to place.⁷ The criterion of ‘meaning’ cannot be applied without simultaneously balancing what the researcher has decided in respect of the other criteria (authenticity, credibility, representativeness); all are interdependent.⁸ There is the question of what to do with the scraps? The gaps? How to be fair to the evidence? The challenges are all the greater, the more contested the field of historical research, as it undoubtedly is in this case. I would argue, however, that the same core challenges face any researcher working with the documentary records created by a religious order.

There is the organisational culture of the institute and the context within which the records were created to be considered. What sort of records

did they keep and for what purposes? What models or templates did they follow? What instructions were laid down for record-keeping in their own constitutions or directories? It is not only a matter of reading between the lines but of trying to understand how exactly the lines were set down in the first place. Record-keeping was part of the culture of Notre Dame de Charité from its foundation. Community annals, found in most religious institutes, were written up with great fidelity in OLC for an expressly spiritual purpose: to trace in the events of history the wondrous working out of God's care. Just as the order itself, at Caen, had been founded against all odds,⁹ the monastery of Dublin (founded 1853), beset with difficulties in its early years, was 'destined from all Eternity by the Providence of our Celestial Father' to be the seventeenth house of the institute.¹⁰ Annals, therefore, were self-consciously created as notes for the later writing-up of the institute's own internal history. The factual content – places, dates, names, events – is generally reliable, but the historian needs to be alert to the genre of writing involved: the finger of God is very clearly at work.

The obituaries or 'virtuous lives' of both the sisters and of the women residents are another type of record common across religious institutes. Composed to honour the memory of the dead and to edify the living, the emphasis is always on the holy dispositions of the dear departed at the time of her death and the many spiritual comforts that were extended to her. As with the annals, the obituary was intended to demonstrate how God was active in the person's life, through storms and tears, working out her salvation right up to the ultimate encounter with him that is death and eternal life.¹¹ All is taken up with the final moments, the passing to eternity and into the arms of a merciful God, while the historian wishes for just a few scraps more on the ordinary back-story. There are, in fact, few problems with the factual content of the obituaries – parentage, dates of reception and profession, offices held, and final illness – but the genre of writing must be understood by the historian and corroboration of, for example, the virtues listed, sought in other records, insofar as that is possible.

Notifying other houses of the death of a sister to ensure that she received the suffrages or prayers she was entitled to, and following this up with an obituary or 'death letter', collectively called '*Les fleurs de Notre Dame de Charité*', was one part of a rather formal correspondence between autonomous houses best expressed in the circular letters. Just as it was important to notify other houses of the death of a sister, similarly, a newly-

elected superior could rely on prayerful remembrance internationally, once the other houses had been told.

The *circulaire* tradition

Notre Dame de Charité had a strong *circulaire* tradition dating from the foundation of the order by John Eudes, who wrote frequently and with fervour on the unity and bonds of charity that he wished to be found among the sisters.¹² Though bound by the same rule, each monastery was autonomous in its government; it was through a rather formal correspondence between houses that a spiritual unity was maintained. The novice mistress was to tell the novice news of other houses, ‘in order to enlarge her sympathies and stir up her zeal and affection for everything that concerns our Sisters’.¹³ Though heavily stylised, the community circulars are important documentary records. All letters were headed with the aspiration, ‘*Vive Jésus et Marie*’, and opened with a pious wish or appropriate line from sacred scripture. The salutation, opening spiritual reflection and offering of respect to the recipients followed an expected pattern.¹⁴ The concluding assurances of affection and spiritual unity were similarly formulaic, though no less sincere. In between, the circular letter carries, as per instructions, ‘an account of the spiritual and temporal state of the house’, the superior’s two fields of responsibility. Religious highlights of the year (feastdays, processions, preached retreats) are dealt with, followed by an account of professions, jubilees, illnesses and deaths among the sisters, before turning to the core mission of the house, the refuge or Magdalen asylum, where a similar pattern is followed: religious highlights, retreats, jubilees of the ‘consecrates’ (those women who made long-term promises to live out their days in the refuge), obituaries of the women, an update on the laundry and other means of generating an income, the life or progress of the ‘class’ of women (which was invariably described in hopeful terms) and an account of building projects completed or in hand. At the end of each letter a figure for the total household was always given, broken down into professed sisters and novices of each class (choir sisters, lay sisters, and *tourières* or outdoor sisters), penitents, boarders (*pensionnaires*) and school children, and finally the chaplain and various workmen (such as vanman, gardener, carpenter, engineer, errand boy).¹⁵

The earliest surviving *circulaire* from Gloucester Street is handwritten and in French. Once the sisters here resort to print (1892), far more content can be carried, following the example set by High Park and Caen, but without

departing from the traditional formula.¹⁶ The circular letters and annals are inter-related in that one provided material for the other, and the moral obligation to produce a lengthy, informative missive at no more than three-year intervals ensured that the writing-up of the annals was not neglected for too long.¹⁷ In both circular letters and annals, the factual content – places, dates, names, events – causes few problems where they are produced, as the term suggests, during or at the end of the year to which they relate. Where they are copies, summaries, extracts or translations – all of which feature in the Dublin monasteries of OLC as well as original circular letters and annals – things are a little more problematic, while the lapse of years before annals are continued introduces difficulties. In my research, drafts of circular letters, where they have been retained, are preferred over the final version as more frank in style and fuller in content; this is the case regardless of whether the draft was composed in French or in English. Letters, minutes and accounts are generally preferred over annals, especially where there is a conflict of dates, but in some cases, there is no source other than the annals. Obituaries of the sisters and of the women residents feature in both the annals and the circular letters and there are also accounts of the jubilee celebrations of both, but in neither class of record is there full coverage. To convey a sense of how God had been active in the community – against a time-line that stretched to eternity – neither annals nor circular letters needed to be comprehensive and complete, nor was it intended that they be treated as such. House histories, which are derived largely from the annals, need to be recognised for what they are and the genre of historical writing that they contain.

It is the structure as much as the content of the circular letters that reveals the way in which the women in the refuge were seen by the sisters as part of the household, under the banner of Our Lady of Charity. The daily rhythms of prayer, work, recreation and rest; the cycle of feasts and the liturgical year; and the overall atmosphere of the refuge, were derived from and closely tied to that of the convent proper. All was underwritten by the same spirituality and shot through with the same regard for the common life, the virtue of obedience and the centrality of prayer.¹⁸ The same can be said, in general terms at least, of the Magdalen refuges run by the Good Shepherd sisters, as they shared the same rule, founder and mission as the sisters at High Park and Sean MacDermott Street. For the historian, understanding – and indeed accepting – how intertwined the Magdalen refuge was with the convent is, I would argue, a significant starting point for further investigation.

Language and terminology

There are numerous difficulties with language and terminology in this study, which need to be addressed along the lines of what is envisaged by John Scott in the assessing of documentary sources.¹⁹ The language employed in the internal documents of OLC is generally invested with religious and moral weight and, while I have tried to maintain a professional, critical distance from the sources, it is simply not possible to write history without employing at least some of the language and concepts used at the time. The reader needs to be alert to this challenge and to bring their own judgement to bear on the records used in what is an academic study, and on the language and tone in which they are written. An election letter will communicate the strong points of the new superior and note the merits of her predecessor; a jubilee booklet will burnish the achievements of the institute; an account of a school play will make much of the talents of the young actors and the rapt attention of the audience. These are not necessarily false or biased in the literal sense, but the reader needs to be alert to the type of source upon which the narrative is based at any particular point and the audience that the record-creator had in mind.

There are particular problems with translation, where there are shifts in meaning over time. What is now rightly taken as offensive may not have caused offence at the time and vice versa. The ‘disposal’ of children was the legalistic term used by the state departments responsible for reformatory and industrial schools, where something like ‘destination on leaving school’ would be employed today. What is now termed ‘special needs’ or ‘learning needs’ is a field that is especially difficult to deal with, with ‘mentally deficient’, ‘subnormal’ and ‘retarded’ just some of the many now derogatory terms in common use across the period of this study. The term ‘sexual immorality’ is another contentious concept and is employed in numerous instances where ‘sexual abuse’ would be more correctly used today. The shocking term ‘depraved’ was used of children, as well as of adults. There is always the question of context; language is culturally embedded, institutionally and socially, and where there is no understanding of the culture, the language – even if in the vernacular – may be misread. In any closely-knit organisation, terms and phrases are used that have a resonance that may not be picked up by the outsider; where a distance of decades and even centuries intervenes, there is an increasing likelihood that this will be lost. What might be termed ‘insider jargon’ is one problem; another is inconsistency in use and spelling,

so that one is not sure if the same thing is meant again in the same way. A few examples might underscore the challenges that were inherent in this research.

Across the records of Notre Dame de Charité du Refuge, there is the use of French terms in English and English terms in French; the culture of the organisation, with its shared constitutions and customs, meant that not everything was – or needed to be – translated. A literal translation may not at all convey the meaning that term carried to those who used it. A devotion that was ‘*sensible*’ carried great feeling or emotion, such as undertaking the Way of the Cross or placing oneself imaginatively before the newborn Jesus of Bethlehem, ready to render him some spiritual service. The common English understanding of foyer, a waiting area in an office block or hotel, does not do justice to the French term ‘*le foyer*’, the hearth of the home, a warm and welcoming place which one shares with family and close friends. The OLC ‘foyer project’ in Dublin carried this latter meaning, which was probably lost on anyone outside the order. Similarly, the term ‘*surveillant(e)*’ does not carry as negative a force in French, where it generally means supervisor, superintendent, guardian, caretaker, the person who watches over or looks after; the schoolmaster on duty is termed the ‘*surveillant*’, while the term ‘*surveillante de salle*’ is employed for a ward sister or head nurse.²⁰ The term ‘a relaxed monastery’ was one of real contempt; a ‘regular’ monastery, that is, one which followed ‘*le règle*’ to the letter, was truly edifying. ‘Tourier sister’, meaning outdoor or extern sister, is used as if ‘*tourière*’ was a common and universally understood English term, as are many other in-house or archaic terms, such as clothing, ‘*la prise d’habit*’ or reception of the religious habit.

Misreadings are possible with Latin terms used in English, and even more so when the Latin term comes to English via French. Capitulants were the delegates at a chapter with voting rights. The term ‘cell’ refers to the bedroom of an individual sister; the same term, ‘*leurs cellules*’, is used in reference to the penitents retiring to their bedrooms after night prayers.²¹ The term ‘penitent’ itself is particularly problematic. Taken as part of the spiritual culture of the nineteenth-century Catholic church, it was the term used for all who sought to break with their past and embark on a new life of virtue. Thus every person who frequented the sacrament of penance (confession) was a penitent, and as all Catholics were obliged to do so at least once yearly, and exhorted to do so more frequently, there are countless sermons addressed to penitents and on the subject of penitence, and innumerable pious tracts with the term in the title which have nothing to do with Magdalen asylums per

se, as any search of the contemporary literature will reveal. In the use of the term ‘penitent’, the emphasis was not on the past sinfulness of the person but on his or her ‘firm purpose of amendment’, on the making of the new man, or indeed the new woman, who has been forgiven and is starting out afresh. The use of the term ‘penitent’, therefore, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century records needs to be considered within the larger and more general discourse around sinfulness and penitence, which were by no means reserved to the class of women most usually associated with Magdalen asylums. And well into the 1960s, the Catholic church did not tire of warning its members of all grades and stations of their inherent sinfulness and their need for penitence.

The terms ‘*enfants*’ and ‘children’, in relation both to sisters (whether novices or professed) and to women residents, were widely used within the congregation of OLC over much of the period covered by this study and feature repeatedly in direct quotations. Soeur Marie de St Stanislas Brunel, the superior of the Paris house from which the first sisters were recruited for Dublin, solicited help for these ‘children’ about to travel so far away from her.²² While use of that term in relation to adults would rightly cause outrage today inside or outside religious life, the term did not carry the same weight of offence in the pre-Second Vatican Council era, with its culture of obedience, patriarchy and spiritual motherhood. For a novice to be judged ‘docile and submissive’ augured well for her future in the convent, but it meant she was teachable and willing, not merely (one would hope) a doormat. The term ‘girls’ was used in general conversation and correspondence in OLC into the 1950s without too much regard for the age of the women concerned.²³ It is not likely at the time that women in their late teens, twenties or even thirties took grave offence at this, while the term ‘our older girls’ probably did not unduly upset the women concerned either but this is merely presumption and the issue of language is not really addressed in OLC until the 1960s.

Allowance needs to be made for the style of address and the vocabulary employed in some records, modelled as they were on traditional forms brought from France and composed for specific ends. The *circulaires* were produced, as the title suggests, to be read aloud in the other houses, to inform the sisters of the graces received and the sufferings endured since the date of the previous circular letter, so that the spiritual ties that bound the houses might be strengthened and all encouraged in their common vocation. The overwrought language that characterises the circular letters is surpassed only

in the obituaries of both women residents and sisters, where much is made of the holy dispositions of the person at the point of departure to edify the reader and cause him or her to reflect on their own impending death.²⁴ The text of a sermon or lecture delivered before a live audience for fundraising purposes, where hyperbole may well be used for dramatic effect, can seem wildly exaggerated when published; nor did the sisters themselves have the power to restrain an overly zealous preacher once he got to the pulpit or, even worse, when he undertook to deliver a radio appeal.²⁵

The difficulty of names

Personal names have given rise to difficulties in the reporting of research. The form of the name to use, the spelling to adopt and whether or not to abbreviate the name are not easily decided. The French form of the founder's name, Jean Eudes, is frequently found in English-language documents, but for the sake of consistency the English form, John Eudes, is used here except when quoting directly. All Sisters of OLC (whether of the Refuge or of Angers) had their family names and then their religious names, with both French and English versions used interchangeably in the early years. Thus the founding superior in Dublin was Mère Marie de Coeur de Jésus Kelly, or Mother Mary of the Sacred Heart Kelly (Evelina Marie), referred to by lay people and in outside correspondence simply as Mrs Kelly; her successor was Soeur Marie des SS Cinq Plaies O'Callaghan – Sister Mary of the Five Wounds O'Callaghan (Mrs O'Callaghan); and the first novice admitted to profession in Dublin was Soeur Marie de Coeur de Marie Tobin – Sister Mary of the Heart of Mary Tobin. For legal purposes, it was always the family name that was used: 'to Mrs Mary Tobin, superioress for the time being at High Park Convent'.²⁶ The title 'Mother' was substituted for 'Sister' on election as superior but was still used by the community when the person concerned was no longer in office, as a term of honour (though she would sign herself 'Sister', to add to the confusion). Soeur Marie de St Ambroise Desaunais, Caen, also used the English spelling 'Ambrose', and she was not the only person to have more than one signature. The name of the Good Shepherd foundress, Soeur Marie de Ste Euphrasie Pelletier, is spelt 'Euphrasia' in English; similarly the name of one of her successors, Soeur Marie de Ste Domitille Arose, is spelt 'Domitilla' in English. But, in these and many other cases, there is no consistency of use within the records. The use of surnames only for second and subsequent references in the same section, as is usual

in academic writing, cannot be adopted where, for example, there are four O'Callaghan sisters involved in the story (and there are very many instances of siblings in this research). And as the sisters did not use their surnames in their usual daily exchanges among themselves and were rarely known by their surname alone (unlike, for example, their male contemporaries), it would be odd to refer in writing to 'Tobin' or 'Goss' or 'Staunton' (unless the full name has already been used in the same paragraph).

The register entries for the women residents in the refuges or asylums also pose problems as every woman will have at least more than one name. First, there is her own family name, then the house name assigned on admission and by which she was known during her stay, to afford anonymity. Some of the women left and re-entered several times and so had several house names. In addition, a small percentage of the women opted to stay as 'consecrates' and took what was a religious or consecrate name. For example, Julia Byrne entered aged forty years on 13 October 1914, and was given the name 'Cyril'; she entered again on 5 June 1918, and was then given the name 'Rachel'; her consecrated name was 'Magdalen of St John'; she died 22 November 1927.²⁷ Surnames also create problems, as some women used first their single and then their married names, while others first appeared in the register under their married names and subsequently gave their single names.²⁸

The place-name that causes most difficulty in this study is Gloucester Street North (or Lower) / Sean MacDermott Street Lower.²⁹ The second OLC monastery of Dublin, founded in 1887 from High Park, was the Mercy convent and Magdalen asylum at Gloucester Street in the north inner city, itself the successor to the Mecklenburgh Street lay asylum, which backed onto Gloucester Street and became incorporated into it. The place-name 'Gloucester Street' (without reference to 'Lower') was still used in OLC circulars and other records long after Dublin Corporation renamed the street in 1933 (after one of the signatories to the 1916 Proclamation of Independence). As all property leases were in the name 'Gloucester Street', this is understandable from a legal perspective, but there was also force of habit and (it appears) widespread continued popular use of the old, familiar name. Both names were used for the same street in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The entry in Thom's street directory for these decades reads 'Sean MacDermott Street Lower (formerly Lower Gloucester Street)'. Only in the 1960s does 'Lower Sean MacDermott Street' or simply 'Sean MacDermott Street' become the standard form of the street name used in OLC circles.

‘Gloucester Street’ is therefore employed here, qualified when necessary with the name ‘Sean MacDermott Street’ until the 1960s, when only the later name is used.

Whether to use the popular understanding or the canon law interpretation of ecclesiastical terms is another issue that had to be resolved. The terms ‘nun’ and ‘sister’ are widely employed interchangeably despite their distinct meanings in canon law. The French term ‘*religieuse*’ never really took hold in its English form, in Ireland at least. Strictly speaking, as the Religious of Our Lady of Charity did not have papal or full enclosure and did not make solemn vows, they were sisters not nuns and their institute was a religious congregation, not a religious order.³⁰ This at least was Rome’s early twentieth century ruling, in which religious women taking simple perpetual (not solemn) vows and without papal enclosure were recognised as ‘real’ religious and their apostolic activity as a legitimate exercise of a convent’s mission in Leo XIII’s *Conditae a Christo* in 1900. These points were further developed in *Perpensis* (1902) and confirmed in the revised code of canon law promulgated in 1917.³¹ In an effort to allay concern around the status of the vows taken by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the Eudist priest Gabriel Mallet in 1911 explained that the vows taken by the founding mothers in 1666 and approved by Alexander VII were indeed ‘solemn vows’, but this category was suppressed in the early 1800s by Pius VII for all French monasteries. The ‘simple perpetual’ vows that replaced them were no different in meaning or status, except that they did not carry the exterior sign of papal enclosure.³²

Despite this clarification, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the Presentation Sisters and numerous other members of ‘active orders’ with simple vows, continued to be referred to by clergy and laity alike as nuns. In media coverage, they were practically always nuns, not sisters. The term ‘*religieuse*’, which features strongly in the documents held in Rome, in the early records of the Dublin houses and in correspondence from Caen and other French houses, is translated here by the term ‘sister’. ‘Sisters’ is used most often in the present narrative, but there are occasions when ‘nuns’ is used, as that was the term employed in the document or debate under discussion at that point. As both terms were used interchangeably, even by the sisters themselves, it would be straining a point to make an absolute ruling. A decision had also to be made on whether to use the term ‘order’, which was used by the sisters right up to the Second Vatican Council; it is used here in its general, popular sense, as it was employed by the sisters themselves and as it was used by the general public.

The term ‘enclosure’ also gives rise to difficulties, as the sisters did not have ‘strict enclosure’ in the canonical sense, which is confined to religious who take solemn (not perpetual) vows. What matters for this historical study is that, as far as the sisters understood their rule and the prescriptions of the 1917 revised code of canon law, any breach of the enclosure – such as admission to hospital or study at college – required a special written permission from the archbishop, or his deputy in these matters, the vicar for religious, and was most carefully recorded in the register of profession.³³ Well into the 1960s, exit beyond the cloister was only for the most exceptional reasons and most of the sisters had never crossed outside since the day they had professed their vows. That the sisters used only the term ‘monastery’ for houses of the order, not the more usual term ‘convent’, reflects this self-conscious sense of being a community set apart from ‘the world’ by the rule of enclosure. The term ‘monastery’ is employed most usually here as reflecting this self-understanding and to avoid confusion, as this is the term found in practically all the source materials. However, it is acknowledged that a strong case could be made for its replacement in the discourse by ‘convent’, and that is certainly the more appropriate term from the perspective of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Refuges? Asylums? Laundries?

Another layer of difficulty arises from the replacement in the public discourse (since the 1990s) of the terms ‘Magdalen refuge’ and ‘Magdalen asylum’ with the generic term ‘Magdalen laundry’, a shift that has now probably been made permanent by its use in the title of the inter-departmental committee to establish the facts of state involvement in these institutions and throughout the resulting report. The OLC sisters who ran refuges in Dublin take offence at the term ‘laundries’, as at no time did they run laundries but rather refuges (or asylums), homes and hostels for women, nor did the women ever ‘live’ in the laundries, which were always quite separate from the residential quarters, a point which others also made and which is taken up in the McAleese Report.³⁴ One instance only of the term ‘Magdalen Laundry’ has been found in the course of research in the OLC records and that is on a rubber stamp used in the laundry at Gloucester Street on an unknown but early date bearing those words. Another rubber stamp, probably from the 1950s, carries the text ‘Gloucester Laundry and O.L.C. Home’.³⁵ Laundries were simply the means of generating an income adopted by practically all nineteenth century

charitable enterprises in Ireland trying to help women or girls. They were not particular to Magdalen refuges, though these were the institutes that relied on them the longest.³⁶ The laundry business was already in place in each of the two asylums the sisters came to manage, while washing was the principal means of livelihood for hundreds – and perhaps thousands – of women in the city.³⁷ Women's charities invariably fell back on laundry work, as did individual poor women too; had some other enterprise been capable of generating a regular weekly income, no doubt that would have been adopted instead, but the women at the time, laywomen or sisters, did not see other openings in Dublin.

The term '*le refuge*' is used in the French tradition on which the Dublin monasteries are based. The first monastery of Caen on maps of the 1700s is simply labelled '*Le Refuge*' and the sisters were generally known as Notre Dame de Charité du Refuge, that is, the Religious of Our Lady of Charity who followed the tradition of Caen, to distinguish them from Notre Dame de Charité du Bon Pasteur d'Angers, the Religious of the Good Shepherd under the Angers generalate. However, 'asylum' was the term in general use throughout Britain and Ireland. The title 'St Mary's Asylum' had been given to the Drumcondra Road institution long before the sisters arrived to take charge, and that is the term that travels to High Park where it is used in correspondence and advertising well into the 1880s and intermittently afterwards. 'Magdalene Asylum' labels the premises on the 1838 six-inch Ordnance Survey map that was to form the core of the extensive Gloucester Street / Sean MacDermott Street complex. The term 'refuge' has always had positive connotations, implying safety, respite and care. The term 'asylum' had similarly positive connotations in the nineteenth century, as in 'orphan asylum', 'blind asylum', 'widows' asylum', 'asylum harbour'.³⁸ It was applied in particular to proper facilities for the mentally ill to convey a place of safety and refuge, where specialised care and humane treatment would prevail, as opposed to the punishment of prison, the harshness of the workhouse or the notorious cruelty of the private and profitable 'madhouses'.³⁹ As a shorthand for 'lunatic asylum', it became associated in Ireland with the county or district facilities for patients with mental illnesses, overtaking the wider and more general understandings. Both 'refuge' and 'asylum' are found throughout the sources; the term 'refuge' is generally preferred here, as historically the more accurate term and the one used most often within the order itself, considering that these homes or shelters were modelled, albeit at many removes, on '*le*

refuge of Caen. However, where contemporary fundraising literature and correspondence refers to the 'asylum' – the title carried from Drumcondra Road to High Park in 1857, and already in place when a small group of OLC sisters took charge of Gloucester Street in 1887 – then that term is employed here, as it would make no sense to do otherwise. Both terms should be considered as interchangeable in the present text and the concepts of safety and shelter that they embodied when first employed in nineteenth century Dublin kept in mind.

The issue of terminology was a sensitive one for the McAleese inquiry, which had to contend with the sensationalist language of popular commentary, as well as archaic and offensive historic terminology, and everything in between. Moreover, there were four separate religious congregations involved in the inquiry, each with its own 'in-house' language, operating ten 'laundries' in different circumstances and in different parts of the country, most of which had been inherited from a lay body to start with and so carried with them the terminology of their foundation and early years. The chronological span of McAleese's study, from 1922 to 1996, made for an additional layer of complexity, as terms that were in widespread use across different types of institutions, such as 'inmate', were replaced in time by more respectful terms. The inter-departmental committee chaired by Dr McAleese sought 'to avoid language which might in any way label, stigmatise or demonise those concerned', while it was also determined 'to avoid any terminology which might prejudice its findings or suggest a bias in any particular direction'. After extensive consultation with former residents, some of whom objected strongly to the use of labels such as 'victim' or 'survivor', the committee decided to keep to the non-emotive and factually accurate term, 'women admitted to the Magdalene Laundries' and 'the women of the Magdalene Laundries' as required by the context.⁴⁰ Similarly, the McAleese Report steers clear of emotive terms such as 'incarceration', 'torture' and 'slavery', all of which have been widely and unquestioningly used in public discourse and indeed in some academic writing. Keeping to the evidence it gathered, and to the fair analysis of that evidence, its findings are all the more compelling by being expressed in careful and unambiguous language. In my use of language, I have tried to follow the practice employed by Dr McAleese, 'to avoid distress to any party and to avoid labelling those women against their wishes'.⁴¹

Assessing the records

Record-keeping was part of the culture of Notre Dame de Charité from its foundation and there is much evidence within OLC records that simply does not exist elsewhere. Inevitably, the records vary in terms of how complete, how credible and how representative they may be. Thus the founding correspondence for High Park, for example, is extensive, frank and very detailed, involving multiple parties and different perspectives, in both French and English, while the official correspondence with Archbishop McQuaid can be cross-checked and augmented from draft letters, copy letters, private memos, manuscript annotations and entries in the federation council minute books. There are other records which, though complete, contain far less detail than one new to the field might expect, especially the registers of admission to the women's refuges (for reasons explored elsewhere). Some areas lend themselves to meticulous record-making, as in building, engineering and repairs, where the records are very full. Benefactors are always remembered. Accounts of religious ceremonies can be lengthy and finely detailed where they are meant to recreate the liturgy for those who did not have the privilege of being present. Architectural and landscape word-pictures can be so vivid as to transport the reader imaginatively to the place being described, their express intention. Accounts of religious art were in themselves meditations on divine mysteries; in the case of OLC, references to church art and furnishings presume not just a shared Catholicism, but also a shared spiritual heritage through the founder, John Eudes. Reformatory and industrial school records employ the language and structure of the state regulating body which issued pre-printed forms and registers along with instructions on the information to be kept.

Meetings, assemblies and chapters at local (community), federation and general (international) level were pivotal in setting direction for the works or ministries of the sisters, as well as regulating their own internal life. Important questions (as well as much that was routine or insignificant) were decided at council meetings and by elected delegates in chapter, and carefully written up for their own successors. There is no proxy for these records which, though difficult to handle (the canon law and constitutional contexts need to be appreciated), repay close attention.

These comprise manuscript originals, along with authenticated copies of outgoing correspondence, where the authorship can be established, and the role played by a secretary or scribe identified, especially relevant in group

correspondence (on behalf of the community) and in communications with state bodies. There is ample internal evidence of the soundness of the documents. That they have been held continuously within the congregation up to the present day, without being split, places provenance beyond question.

Assessing the credibility of a document involves, as Scott sets out, an appraisal of how ‘distorted’ its contents are likely to be, allowing that ‘there is always an element of selective accentuation in the attempt to describe social reality’.⁴² In questioning the ‘sincerity’ of a document, the researcher always asks what individual or collective interest may have been felt by the author(s) of the document under scrutiny, what was the author’s situation at the time of its creation and the degree of proximity to the events in question. In the case of OLC, the sisters created, signed and dated records in the discharge of their duties in the knowledge that they could be moved without notice to another post, while the cycle of elections meant that the superior and her councillors ‘laid down their charge’ at three-yearly intervals, even if they were re-elected. The sisters created records safe in the knowledge that, outside of the business purposes for which they were created (such as dismissing a novice or admitting a sister to profession of vows), they would be kept confidential in perpetuity which, of course, enhances the credibility of the records and their usefulness to historical research.

The representativeness of the records is more difficult to address. The long delay in putting the OLC collections at Beechlawn (DARGS) on a professional footing, and the good judgement of the first person appointed to the task (Sister Teresa Coughlan OLC), spared many records from being culled before they were even examined, so that what has been catalogued may be taken as what has indeed survived. My involvement in the arrangement and description of the High Park papers (OLC1) allows me to vouch for that with unusual authority. There have been some sad losses due to carelessness or a misguided zeal for tidying, while the issue of deliberate destruction – what was not kept at all for posterity, and why – is something that the historian has always to ponder.⁴³ But what can be said in the case of the OLC collections is that very, very much was held, as the various catalogues demonstrate. The prescriptions of the rule and constitutions, and the self-governing or autonomous character of the house, did make for meticulous record-making and record-keeping, well beyond anything that I have encountered for other apostolic communities operating in Ireland over the same period.

The bombardment of Caen in June 1944 destroyed the archives and library

of the founding house of the order; the loss included an unbroken series of letters from High Park which had faithfully maintained the link with the ‘old cradle’. But correspondence from Ireland was found among the collections of other OLC houses in France, most usefully *circulaires*, election letters and obituaries of which no file copy had been kept by the Dublin side. Minutes and annals from other houses confirmed visits from Irish sisters, with notes on fluency in French giving an inkling of how useful the visit might have been. The material held in Rome was of the utmost importance in revealing what was happening behind the scenes to persuade OLC monasteries to agree to a union of some sort, and the very real basis there was for apprehension about a forced incorporation into the Good Shepherd congregation. It is the access to opinions offered in confidence in blunt form that make these records so useful, and similarly with the McQuaid papers in the Dublin Diocesan Archives. Where incoming letters were annotated – terse comments, question marks, heavy, red underlining – the real matters at stake stand out. The Department of Justice files (National Archives of Ireland) from the 1950s complete a triangle with the McQuaid and OLC papers, a three-sided conversation with interesting offshoots. Access to relevant papers from several government departments (Education, Justice, Health, Finance) can also be made via the Ryan Report by way of its extensive quotations from internal departmental records.⁴⁴

The temptation is to write up what the records allow, rather than to sift out what is truly significant. In my own work I admit to erring on the side of including rather than stripping back, but this is done with future researchers in mind and the varied threads that they might wish to follow up. While there is an abundance of evidence to support some lines of inquiry, others are more difficult to follow through satisfactorily, as there are traces or hints only in the documentary record. In so many areas, life carried on without needing written records at all, as in the friendships forged, the games played, the meals served, the prayers memorised. Most internal records were created by sisters in leadership positions, as superior, secretary, bursar, mistress, principal, manager or director, making it difficult to hear the voice of the ‘ordinary’ sisters or women residents, let alone that of the teenagers and children in care. Some records are missing, regrettably the annals from Gloucester Street which were certainly extant in 1937, when a booklet was published to mark its golden jubilee.⁴⁵ Because of the lack of local council minutes for Sean MacDermott Street in the 1950s and 1960s (minutes may

not have been kept), its modernisation process cannot be covered in the same detail that was possible for High Park. Where state funds and state regulation were involved, as in the reformatory schools, the paper record is much fuller compared with, for example, the hostels – though, in all cases, it is not just what was created that matters but what was preserved. Uneven sources have meant uneven treatment in this study, though none of the houses or works was without a body of records. Overall, the range of record types within OLC is very broad – correspondence, constitutions, annals, minutes, visitation reports, registers of admissions and departures, sodality lists, obituaries, title deeds, receipts, feast-day greetings and more. These are found in a variety of archival formats, including bound volumes, folded bundles of accounts, ornate liturgical books, music scores, postcards, scrapbooks, building plans, relics, audio tapes and 16mm film.

The McAleese Report

The final multi-volume report of the ‘Inter-Departmental Committee set up to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries’ (February 2013), under the independent chairmanship of Senator Martin McAleese and hence known as the McAleese Report, is, along with the Ryan Report, the other landmark inquiry of significance to this study. Included is a scrupulous account of its identification, examination and archiving of the fullest possible range of records (chapters 4, 6 & 7). It also gives a very useful review of existing historical analyses of the Magdalen laundries prior to 1922 (chapter 3). Under routes of entry to the Magdalen laundries, it deals with the criminal justice system (chapter 9), industrial and reformatory schools (chapter 10), and health authorities and social services (chapter 11), in each case including the legislative basis for placements in these institutes and the policies and practices of the many bodies involved. Lengthy extracts from documentary and witness testimony is included in all cases. On publication, the McAleese Report was applauded for the pre-eminence it gave to the personal testimony of former residents, whom it praises for their courage in speaking up after many years of feeling forgotten and not believed. Its note that most of the former residents who shared their experiences with the committee had previously been in an industrial school adds to the poignancy of their personal accounts.⁴⁶

While the McAleese Report must be hailed as a landmark in its own right and an invaluable resource for the history of Magdalen laundries in

Ireland, some restrictions around how I have used it in this history of OLC in Ireland need to be stated. These arise out of its particular mandate – ‘to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries’ – and its inclusiveness, covering all ten institutions of this type, run by four different religious congregations, with varying levels of completeness in terms of records.⁴⁷ First is the issue of admissions. The finding that twenty-six point five per cent of all admissions were ‘referrals made or facilitated by the state’ is widely quoted without Dr McAleese’s important caveat that this figure is based on the cases ‘for which routes of entry are known’. In High Park, something about how a person came to be there can be gleaned from the register for eleven per cent of all admissions between 1922 and 1971. Out of every one hundred women, therefore, there is nothing whatsoever known of the background story for eighty-nine. This was in accord with the community’s policy of giving accommodation to any woman who sought shelter (once a bed could be found); no questions were asked and the absolute minimum information was kept. The dangers in extrapolating from the minimum data held in the register are self-evident. The register for Sean MacDermott Street is a little fuller in that something of the ‘route of entry’ can be deduced for forty-five out of every one hundred entrances between 1922 and 1966, but that still leaves a large number of women about whom nothing can ever be known from the documentary record on why they sought admission. These were the women who were not ‘brought by’ or ‘sent by’ any person or institute according to the register. Some may – or may not – have been ‘self-referrals’; judgement must be left completely open as it is simply not possible to know what circumstances were behind each case (as the evidence currently stands). Register information for the other institutes that were part of the McAleese inquiry appears to have been fuller in terms of detail, though there was one institute where no registers were extant and another where some years were missing.⁴⁸ It would be methodologically unsound, therefore, to ‘retrofit’ the general findings of the McAleese Report, based on cases ‘for which routes of entry are known’, to the refuges run by OLC Dublin.

The second issue with the McAleese Report is the protection of the identities of the women involved and the treatment of the Magdalen laundries as a collective, so that there is simply no way of matching certain statistical findings or personal testimony with either of the refuges under study here, namely, High Park and Sean MacDermott Street, or indeed with any other

institution. The protection of sensitive personal data was paramount and rightly so, and special legislation was passed to permit full disclosure to the committee. The committee also decided that, ‘with regard to broader principles of privacy and confidentiality’, no woman who was admitted to any of the laundries would be named or otherwise identified by the report, regardless of whether she was living or deceased.⁴⁹ The formal, individual names were used whenever the report refers to that particular institution, but the term ‘Magdalen laundries’ was used when referring collectively to the ten institutions, and statistical analysis was based on one massive database of residents created from all extant records covering all ten institutions.⁵⁰ The McAleese inquiry was set up ‘to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries’ and the OLC story is subsumed into this. The McAleese Report is crucial to this study but not exactly in the particular, detailed way that one might expect.

In conclusion

In summary, this merely preliminary survey of the questions which have to be dealt with in research of this kind, the history of the institute and the documents which record it introduce us to another world. In writing the history of OLC in Ireland, I have drawn on the full range of records produced by the institute, including records self-consciously made for the writing up of its own internal history. These are annals, obituaries and *circulaires*, created in accordance with established patterns and using standard formulae, and extensively mined for the compilation of promotional house, jubilee and centenary histories. An appreciation of the spiritual as well as practical purposes for which these classes of records were created is necessary, as is the institute’s understanding of history which is as much theological as chronological and narrative.

To interpret the records as faithfully as possible, we need to understand the sort of records that were kept and why – their provenance, original order, evidential value, informational value, completeness, the tradition of record-keeping within the institute – as articulated by the founder – for business reasons, but also for spiritual reasons. Particular classes of records require a special effort on the part of the researcher, for example annals, *circulaires*, obituaries. We need to have a grasp of the organisational culture as well as the cultural context in which these records were created, including autonomy, the role of Caen, and the centrality of ‘*le Règle*’. We must understand, for

example, the offices within which the records were created. Who created them and for what? What did they feel they needed to record, what mattered, and what did not? What were the various roles in the organisation? What was the role of the secretary; of Soeur Déposée? We need to understand the implications of the cycle of elections, and the ‘laying down’ of the charge at three-year intervals. We need to see the models or templates in use and understand the larger institutional context – in this case the OLC houses internationally, always keeping the autonomy of each one in mind. Finally, and very importantly, in the case of the Magdalen asylums, there is a particular need to understand the asylum within the context of the monastery. They were the one institution. One reflected the other and there were countless parallels. The asylum could only be understood by understanding the convent.

And, as a last word here, it must be remembered that the intention of all that was done was to build toward the ultimate purpose of the institute, as set down by John Eudes in the fourth vow taken by the sisters: the salvation of souls.

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Notes

- 1 Jacinta Prunty, *The monasteries, Magdalen asylums and reformatory schools of Our Lady of Charity in Ireland, 1853 to 1973* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2017); paper on the archival collections in *Archivium Hibernicum* (forthcoming).
- 2 Keith Jenkins, *Rethinking History* (London: 1991, reprinted 2008), 31.
- 3 Memo, ‘Document in reference to the sepulture of the sisters from our monastery of Gloucester Street’. 11 June 1901 (DARGS, OLC1/2/2 no.10).
- 4 Declaration signed by Archbishop McQuaid, 3 November 1951, relating to decree of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, 28 June 1948 (DARGS, OLC1/5/1 no.20).
- 5 Report on the work of the Apostolate Committee, appointed August 1969, 1972 (DARGS, OLC5/5/7 no.1).
- 6 John Scott, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 28.
- 7 Scott, *A Matter of Record*, 30.

- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 ‘Souhaits particuliers’, *Oeuvres complètes de Bienheureux Jean Eudes*, x (Vannes, 1909), 76.
- 10 ‘Donations and bequests received from the foundation of this convent in the year 1853’ (DARGS, OLC1/9/4 no.2).
- 11 Models of this type of writing were to hand, with other monasteries providing Dublin with suitable examples. See, for instance, ‘Abrégée de la vie et des vertus de notre très honorée Mère Marie de la Ste. Trinité Heurteaut, décédée en notre Monastère de Vannes, le 25 février 1709’. Note at end, ‘copié en février 1857 pour notre Monastère de Dublin’ (DARGS, OLC1/7/3 no.5).
- 12 Constitution XL, de la directrice, 147.
- 13 Explanation of the rules, constitutions and customs of the Religious of Our Lady of Charity, taken from the replies of the Blessed Mother de Chantal, and from the Venerable John Eudes, founder of this congregation, collected by the first Religious of the Order and the original revised by the superiors and deputies who assisted at the general council held at our monastery of Caen in the year 1734’. Translation, in manuscript, of 1734 edition (DARGS, OLC1/5/1 no.1). Explanation of constitution XXXIX, 286.
- 14 *Customs and usages of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity, order of St Augustine, with the formulary of the clothing and the profession of the religious*, text of 1738 edition, trans. Peter Lewis (Aberdeen, 1888), article XXII, Style of letter-writing, 241–3.
- 15 Acknowledgement is made of notes by Delphine Le Crom, titled ‘La correspondance entre les monastères’, 27 août 2010.
- 16 Les soeurs de la communauté de Notre D. de Charité de Dublin, 104 Gloucester Street, to Très honorées et chères Sœurs, 24 avril 1890 (NDC Caen, Archives Versailles).
- 17 The missing Gloucester Street annals may be reconstructed, in part at least, through the circular letters, copies of which have been provided by NDC Caen to DARGS.
- 18 ‘Les constitutions des religieuses du Monastère de Notre-dame de Charité de Caen’, 79–174; ‘Règlement pour les filles et femmes pénitentes’, 175–87, in *Oeuvres complètes de Bienheureux Jean Eudes*, x (Vannes, 1909).
- 19 Scott, *A Matter of Record*, 30–31.
- 20 *Concise Oxford French–English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); *Dictionnaire Cambridge Klett Concise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); F E A Gasc, *A Concise Dictionary of the French and English Languages* (London, 1892).
- 21 ‘Règlement pour les filles et femmes pénitentes’, *Oeuvres complètes de Bienheureux Jean Eudes*, x (Vannes, 1909), chapitre I, de leur réception, 176. The term ‘*dortoir*’, dormitory, is also used.
- 22 Soeur Marie de St Stanislas Brunel, Paris, to Monseigneur l’Archevêque de Dublin, 31 August 1853 (DDA, Cullen, 325/8 nuns no.208).
- 23 This was the position in other refuges also, see *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries* (Dublin: Department of Justice and Equality, 2013) (known and referred to hereinafter,

- from the name of its chairman Senator Martin McAleese, as the McAleese Report), part 1, ch.1, par.8.
- 24 See, for example, High Park, draft circular letter, 6 January 1878, 9–13 (DARGS, OLC1/3/1/ no.12).
 - 25 For an example of an overwrought appeal, see text delivered by R J Tyndall SJ on 10 January 1937, Gardiner Street Church, ‘Victims of the slums, moving appeal for penitents’, *Irish Catholic*, 21 January 1937. The first radio appeal appears to date from 1938, on behalf of Gloucester Street, and is in the same style (DARGS, OLC2/2/2).
 - 26 Grant of right of burial in Prospect Cemetery, no. 2627, issued 6 January 1878 (DARGS, OLC1/8/2 no.19).
 - 27 Register of penitents, St Mary’s Asylum, High Park (DARGS, OLC1/8/2 no.6).
 - 28 For research purposes, databases have been constructed from the registers of entry, but for the most part the house names of the women and girls are used, as they afforded anonymity at the time – and continue to do so. The full family names of women or girls who entered any of the homes post-1911 are not used, in accordance with data protection legislation and for ethical reasons (to honour the commitment to absolute confidentiality given to each woman at the time of her entrance); 1911 is taken as the cut-off date due to the publication online of the census of that year while it also gives a full ‘closure period’ of one hundred years. An exception has been made in the present paper in the case of Julia Byrne for the purposes of illustrating this point, and because her date of death is more than eighty years ago.
 - 29 The spelling of Sean MacDermott Street is confirmed on www.logainm.ie. This is also the spelling in *Thom’s Directory* and in most official documents, but the variants ‘Sean McDermott Street’ and ‘Sean MacDermot Street’ are also to be found.
 - 30 Caen, *circulaire*, 1 avril 1911, refers to the terms ‘simple perpetual’ and ‘solemn’ vows, and the implications these have for enclosure (DARGS, OLC1/2/3 no.7).
 - 31 Louise O’Reilly, *The impact of Vatican II on women religious: case study of the Union of Irish Presentation Sisters* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 15–16.
 - 32 Gabriel Mallet, à la très Révérende Mère Supérieure du Vénérable Monastère de Notre Dame de Charité de Caen, Rome, avril 1911, copie (DDA, Walsh papers, EV6).
 - 33 High Park register of profession; sisters resident outside the monastery (date, name, reason, return), 151–5 (DARGS, OLC1/6/1 no.1).
 - 34 ‘Terminology’, McAleese Report, part 1, ch.1, pars 5, 6.
 - 35 Laundry stamps (DARGS, OLC2/12/1 no.1).
 - 36 Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, a study in urban geography* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), 267; McAleese Report, Introduction, par.18.
 - 37 The occupations with significant numbers of women in Dublin, 1841, were: boot and shoemakers 1,408; washerwomen 1,529; dealers (unspecified) 1,756; servants (domestic) 18,274. Seamstresses, dressmakers, milliners, staymakers, hatters, bonnetmakers, hatmakers and glovers (numbers combined) 8,661. Census of Ireland for the year 1841, City of Dublin, vi, ‘Table of Occupations of persons above and under fifteen years’, General report, 23.
 - 38 ‘Asylum’, *The Oxford companion to the mind*, ed. Richard L. Gregory (Oxford:

- Oxford University Press, 1987).
- 39 *Report from the select committee appointed to inquire into the expediency of making provision for the relief of the lunatic poor in Ireland, 1817*, H.C. 1817 (430), viii.
- 40 ‘This terminology is not intended to obscure historically used terms, to convey a sense of voluntary residence to all cases, or indeed to convey any particular meaning other than to identify in a respectful way the women to whom this Report refers’. McAleese Report, part 1, ch.1, par.10.
- 41 McAleese Report, part 1, ch.1, para.10.
- 42 *ibid.*
- 43 Scott, *A Matter of Record*, 25.
- 44 *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (Dublin: Department of Health and Children, 2009), commonly known, from the name of its chairman Mr Justice Sean Ryan, as the Ryan Report.
- 45 *Souvenir of Golden Jubilee of Monastery of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, Gloucester Street* (Dublin, 1937), 21.
- 46 ‘The majority of the small number of women who engaged with the Committee had been admitted to the Laundries either by a non-state route of referral or, most common of all, following time in an industrial school’; 53 former residents ‘as members of representative and advocacy groups’; seven former residents who ‘did so directly in their own right as individuals’, and a further 58 women currently resident in nursing homes under the care of the religious congregations. McAleese Report, Introduction, pars 7, 18, 23.
- 47 *ibid.*, part 1, ch.3, par.7.
- 48 *ibid.*, part 1, ch.4, pars 13–16.
- 49 *ibid.*, *ibid.*, part 1, ch.4, pars 47–57.
- 50 *ibid.*, part 1, ch.1, par.14.