

PRESS RELEASE

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JFM Research publishes critique of McAleese Report

Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) has published the first in a series of critiques of the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries* (IDC Report). Published to coincide with the second anniversary of the State apology, JFMR's critique discusses issues around death, the institutionalisation of former Magdalene women, as well as JFMR's research on Magdalene graves and duration of stay.

Instead of answering questions on the serious issues surrounding deaths in Magdalene Laundries, Chapter 16 of the IDC Report gives exclusive attention to the religious orders' version of events and completely ignores survivor testimony, as well as substantial submissions from JFM raising concerns about the funeral and burial practices in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries.

To-date, JFMR has recorded the details of 1,663 women who died in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, almost twice the figure cited in the IDC Report. JFMR's data accounts for the number of women who died in the Magdalene institutions between 1835 and 2014. The IDC Report on the other hand does not count the deaths of women who died in the laundries before 1922 and those who continued to live institutionalised lives in the charge of the religious orders.

For the period covered by the IDC Report (1922 until the closure of each laundry), JFMR has recorded 768 deaths, while the IDC states that 879 women died during this time. The reasons for this discrepancy are complex and are discussed in **Section 1.5** of the critique.

JFMR has included the data on those whose deaths occurred outside the parameters set in the IDC Report, because they relate to matters of great concern that are in the public interest (see **Section 2.1.1** in particular). We also include these women out of respect for those who, as it appears to us, have not been afforded dignity in death.

The JFMR report also outlines recent research of Glasnevin's records (**Section 2.1.1**) which has revealed that **for 131 women who died in High Park, no trace of their whereabouts can be found in the cemetery's archives**. Out of these 131 women, 54 died between 1922 and 1991 when High Park closed, i.e. the time period covered by the IDC Report. Just **33 out of 187 women whose names are inscribed on a headstone for High Park laundry are actually buried at that location**.

The same research has revealed **over 100 new names** of High Park women previously not known to JFMR, **most of whom are buried in unmarked graves at 7 separate locations in Glasnevin**. These women died between 1886 and 1999, while 30 from this cohort died between 1922 and the closure of High Park in 1991.

Similar research into the Sean McDermott Street records reveals that **51 women whose names are inscribed on three headstones at a particular location in Glasnevin are not buried at that location, but are interred elsewhere**. The vast majority of these women died within the time period covered by the IDC Report.

Many of the questions surrounding the High Park exhumations that were first raised twelve years ago by Mary Raftery remain unanswered. Mary's collaborator Sheila Ahern has generously given JFMR access to the Mary Raftery Archive and we have used this information to shed further light on the circumstances of the exhumations (**Section 3**). In this regard, we call on journalists to continue from where Mary Raftery left off and use this material to obtain answers to the questions left unanswered by the IDC.

The JFMR report also outlines the organisation's most recent research on duration of stay through the examination of electoral registers (**Section 7**). JFMR asks why the IDC chose to reveal the number of electoral rolls for each laundry but not the number of women who were registered to vote during that time, especially

considering that the information available to JFMR from some of these registers would appear to raise serious questions about the IDC Report's accuracy on duration of stay.

We conclude that the message from the IDC Report is clear: As far as church and State are concerned, the Magdalene women matter as little in death as they did in life.

On Saturday February 28th and Sunday March 1st, the fourth annual Flowers for Magdalenes events will take place at Magdalene graves around the country (further details in Notes to Editors). JFMR is calling on members of the public to visit the Magdalene graves and lay a flower to honour these women who lived and died behind convent walls.

Notes to editors:

JFMR critique available here: http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/JFMR_Critique_190215.pdf

Appendices 1 and 2 (to be read in conjunction with the critique) available here:

http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/JFMR_Critique_190215_app1.pdf and

http://www.magdalenelaundries.com/JFMR_Critique_190215_app2.pdf.

Flowers for Magdalenes events:

Dublin: Glasnevin Cemetery, 1st March, 2pm

Cork: St. Joseph's Graveyard, 28th February, 12pm

New Ross: St. Stephen's Cemetery, 1st March, 2pm

Details to follow for Galway, Limerick and Waterford

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Key findings

- To-date, JFMR has recorded the details of 1,663 women who died in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, almost twice the figure cited in the IDC Report. JFMR's data accounts for the number of women who died in the Magdalene institutions between 1835 and 2014. The IDC Report on the other hand does not count the deaths of women who died in the laundries before 1922 and those who continued to live institutionalised lives in the charge of the religious orders.
- For the period covered by the IDC Report (1922 until the closure of each laundry), JFMR has recorded 768 deaths, while the IDC states that 879 women died during this time. The reasons for this discrepancy are complex and are discussed in **Section 1.5** of the critique.
- The IDC Report omits public cemeteries that are used by the religious orders after the closure of the laundries and thus the IDC missed an opportunity to provide assistance to the family and friends of deceased Magdalene women who would like to visit the graves of their loved ones.
- The IDC failed to produce a breakdown by institution of how many women entered each Magdalene Laundry, even after eighteen months with unparalleled access to the records of the religious orders. The exclusion of this vital information makes it impossible to calculate the mortality rate for each laundry.
- These complications, combined with the omission of information on individual burial sites also make it difficult to establish the full extent to which deaths are excluded from the Report.

- JFMR does not have the details for 142 women whose deaths are recorded in the IDC Report. This means that for these 142 women who died between 1922 and the closure of the laundries we do not know their final resting place.
- As part of our various submissions to the IDC, JFM supplied all of its research materials and databases of names on Magdalene graves. Despite having this information and access to the records of the religious orders, the IDC nonetheless managed to omit certain deaths from the Report and did not identify the discrepancies outlined by JFMR in **Section 2** of the critique.
- For 131 women who died in High Park, no trace of their whereabouts can be found in Glasnevin Cemetery's archives. Out of these 131 women, 54 died between 1922 and 1991 when High Park closed, i.e. the time period covered by the IDC Report. Just 33 out of 187 women whose names are inscribed on this headstone for High Park laundry are actually buried at that location.
- Similar research into the Sean McDermott Street records reveals that 51 women whose names are inscribed on three headstones at a particular location in Glasnevin are not buried at that location, but are interred elsewhere. The vast majority of these women died within the time period covered by the IDC Report.
- JFMR has discovered the names of 106 women previously unknown to us who died at High Park and are buried at 7 separate locations at Glasnevin. These women died between 1886 and 1999, while 30 from this cohort died between 1922 and the closure of High Park in 1991.
- Despite the IDC Report's assertion that the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity were at '*an advanced stage*' of rectifying the headstones, just 10 new names have been added to the gravestones. None of the new names match any of those on the exhumation licence.
- So-called 'legacy cases' were not included in the Report's statistics for levels of State involvement. That is, the women entered the institutions when Ireland was under British rule and consequently the IDC disclaimed any responsibility for their fate, even after the foundation of the State. In ignoring this research the IDC dismissed many women whose experiences reveal a very different reality to that depicted by the committee.