



JUSTICE FOR MAGDALENES RESEARCH

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Submission to An Bord Pleanála

Re: Lands at Bonnington Hotel, Swords Road,

Whitehall, Dublin 9

Case Reference: PL29N.306721

13th March 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) makes this submission to An Bord Pleanála in relation to the proposed development by Liffeyfield Ltd at The Bonnington Hotel, Swords Road, Whitehall, Dublin 9 (**Case Reference: PL29N.306721**).

JFMR is asking An Bord Pleanála to place a condition on the development which would ensure that a memorial is erected to honour the women and girls who lived and died at the former Magdalene Laundry at High Park.

JFMR is a non-profit, voluntary organisation. Our main aim is to educate the general public by researching the Magdalene Laundries and similar institutions and by providing information and support to the women who spent time in the Magdalene Laundries and their families. It is in this context that we make our submission on the proposed development at the Bonnington Hotel.

2. HISTORY OF LANDS AT THE BONNINGTON HOTEL

The site of the proposed development at the rear of the Bonnington Hotel (currently the hotel car park) was previously the location of St Mary's graveyard at the former Magdalene Laundry at High Park. The following is a brief history of what transpired at the site. In 1993 the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge decided to sell an 11.5-acre portion of their land at High Park, Drumcondra. The lands in question included St Mary's graveyard, which had been in use from 1886 to 1986. Most Magdalene women and girls who died at High Park were buried at Glasnevin Cemetery. However, 'consecrated Magdalenes'—i.e., those women and girls who, in exchange for taking on a quasi-religious status, allegedly consented to spend the rest of their lives at the Magdalene Laundry—were buried at St Mary's graveyard. Being buried on the grounds of High Park was an integral part of being a consecrated Magdalene. In 1993, in order to facilitate the sale of their lands, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity applied for a licence to exhume the remains of 133 women who were buried at St Mary's. There was much criticism of the exhumations at the time; however, in 2003 when Mary Raftery investigated the matter, troubling details of the circumstances surrounding the exhumations emerged. The Sisters had applied to the Department of the Environment

for the exhumation of 133 women, however, unbeknownst to the public, when the undertakers were carrying out the task of exhuming the bodies an additional 22 remains were discovered. The Department of the Environment subsequently supplied an additional exhumation licence to allow the removal of 'all human remains' at the site. It also emerged in 2003 that when they were making their application for an exhumation licence, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge told the Department of the Environment that they could not produce death certificates for 58 women, 24 of whom were listed under quasi-religious names. While these issues were examined by the *Inter-departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries* (IDC), the IDC did not conduct a comprehensive investigation and many questions remain unanswered.

After media reports in 1993 that 133 women were being exhumed at High Park, JFMR's predecessor organisation, the Magdalene Memorial Committee (MMC) was founded. The MMC sought a public funeral for the exhumed women and successfully campaigned for a memorial to be instated, in the form of a plaque on a bench at St Stephen's Green in Dublin, which was unveiled by then President Mary Robinson in 1996. On 11th September 1993 the cremated remains of 154 of the 155 women were re-interred at Glasnevin Cemetery (one family took possession of the remains of their relative so she could be buried in their family plot). Despite the MMC's calls for a public funeral, the ceremony committing the ashes to a plot in Glasnevin Cemetery effectively took place in secret. The members of the MMC were notified by a journalist on the morning of the ceremony and managed to arrive at Glasnevin just as the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity were leaving, but in time to view the urns before the grave was filled in.

3. CURRENT STATUS OF THE LANDS AT HIGH PARK, DRUMCONDRA

In 1993 the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge sold the 11.5-acre portion of land in question to Regan Developments. The lands were subsequently developed, and the area where the graveyard was once located now comprises a car park, as shown in the photographs below. This car park is now the subject of the proposed development at the Bonnington Hotel.



4. MEMORIALISATION

The former High Park lands have been the subject of a number of planning applications since 1993, and on at least one occasion, Dublin City Council (DCC) placed a condition regarding memorialisation at the site, for example:

Formal recognition of the significance of this site in the social history of the community is required in its redevelopment. This shall take the form of a memorial on the site to both the women who lived there and the Sisters of Charity who provided St. Mary's Home and the Magdalene laundry. The relief panel over the former entrance to St. Mary's depicting Mary Magdalene shall be incorporated into the memorial; which shall be located in the open space surrounding the buildings. Details of the memorial, its setting and precise location shall be the subject of a compliance submission which shall include detailed drawings. This submission shall receive the written agreement of the Planning Authority before development commences. REASON: In order to provide formal recognition of the historic use of this site.¹

To our knowledge, no memorial has been erected at the site to date. It is hugely important that this is rectified, and that the location of the former graveyard from which the 155 women were exhumed is specifically acknowledged. The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity showed little regard for the women who were buried on their campus—women who legitimately expected that their final resting place would be at High Park.² JFMR respectfully suggests that the new development planned at the Bonnington Hotel provides an opportunity to ensure that the women who lived and died at High Park are acknowledged. JFMR recognises that Liffeyfield/The Bonnington Hotel had no role in the exhumations. However, we submit that they do have a responsibility, as the current custodians of the site, to acknowledge its history, particularly given that there are now plans to erect a development on the very location from which 155 vulnerable women were exhumed.

¹ Planning Reference 0686/94. It is our understanding that this development did not proceed.

² It is instructive to note that the Sisters' own graveyard at High Park remains intact and in pristine condition to this day.

5. MAGDALENE SURVIVORS

JFMR wishes to give the final word to a Magdalene survivor. In 2015, Maisie K.³ provided us with the statement below in relation to the Magdalene graves at Bohermore in Galway. Maisie's words are of vital significance to the proposed development at The Bonnington Hotel.

There are now new headstones on the two large graves of the Magdalene victims in the cemetery at Bohermore. Those poor souls who most of their lives worked and slaved without pay behind locked doors. They washed, scrubbed, cleaned and ironed the dirty laundry of the people of this province, of every class and creed, including those who ruled their lives with tight-fisted control.

The Mass for their burial was held in the church of the nuns' convent there, attended by their victim colleagues behind locked doors. When they were young they were put into the Magdalene in secret. They died in secret. They were buried in secret. Nobody walked behind their hearse to the graveyard, not even a cross put on each of those graves with an RIP on them. Those who did that did not stop to think. They were at least worthy of that bit of dignity. The nuns in charge seemed not to think so.

No politician ever voiced a condemnation of it. The heads of the clergy ignored it. If anyone from the public died, their death notice would be read off the altar in the public church of the parish they worked and lived in. But no such thing for the women of the Magdalene. No death notice on a paper. One would not have to use 'Magdalene Laundry' as the address. Where there is a will there is a way to do things.

³ This is a pseudonym.

These poor women were seen as and treated as nobodies. I was one of them. As I walked along I thought to myself, looking at those graves, there but for the grace of God I could have been one of them. It was once said, a grave yard is no place for class distinction. For those I lived with and worked with it was. Thank God at last somebody had a conscience to give some bit of dignity to those graves.

Signed

Maisie K