



Crocknahattina
Baillieborough
Co Cavan

Ciaran Gormley
Bennett Construction
Forest Park
Mullingar
Co Westmeath

Sent via email to: [REDACTED]

9th July 2021

Re: Development of 124 apartments at the Bonnington Hotel, Swords Road, Whitehall, Dublin 9 (An Bord Pleanála Case Reference: PL29N.306721).

Dear Ciaran,

I refer to your email and our conversation of 6th July last. Thank you for taking the time to seek 'guidance/approval' from JFM Research (JFMR) on the matter of the naming of the above development.

In the first instance, I must clarify that while the directors of JFMR have trusted relationships with a number of Magdalene survivors, all of whom are a source of constant guidance to us in our work, our organisation is not a 'representative group'. With this in mind, while we are very happy to provide the below observations for your information, those observations should not be construed as 'approval' of the name chosen for the development.

Background

The site which is the subject of the above development was previously known as St Mary's Graveyard, which had been in use from 1886 to 1986.¹ 'Consecrated

¹ It has not been possible for us to ascertain the precise years during which St Mary's was open, as all available sources give different dates. In 1993, solicitors for the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity claimed that the cemetery was in use between 1889 to 1986, while the solicitors claimed elsewhere that the period was 1886 to 1986. The *Report of the Inter-departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries* claims that the graveyard was used from 1889 to 1976, however this is completely incorrect because we have established that women were buried there up until at least 1986.

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. Being buried on the grounds of High Park was an integral part of being a consecrated Magdalene. However, in 1993 the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge (OLC) decided to sell an 11.5-acre portion of their land at High Park, Drumcondra. These lands included St Mary’s Graveyard, so the Sisters applied for a licence to exhume the remains of 133 women who were buried there. These were not the graves of long forgotten people – women had been buried at St Mary’s as recently as 1986, just seven years before the exhumations took place. Indeed, one family learned of the exhumations via the media and managed to stop their relative’s cremation so she could be buried in their family plot.

On foot of the late Mary Raftery’s investigation in 2003, it emerged that 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, OLC 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. On 11th September 1993 the cremated remains of 154 of the 155 women were re-interred at Glasnevin Cemetery (as stated above, one family took possession of the remains of their relative so she could be buried in their family plot). Today, all that remains of St Mary’s Graveyard are two mature cedar trees which were protected under planning conditions.

We explore this issue in depth and reveal new information about the exhumations in our forthcoming publication, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice* which will be published by Bloomsbury in September.²

In 1993, the OLC Sisters claimed that the women interred in St Mary’s were cremated because the Order was concerned that the graveyard would become ‘isolated and inaccessible’. The Sisters told the *Irish Independent* newspaper that, ‘[t]he preferable choice, therefore, was to have the remains exhumed and reinterred in a public place which would be well maintained and readily accessible to visitors...The names of those interred in Glasnevin will be engraved on a headstone at the grave’.³ However, OLC did not act on their stated concern about visitors’ accessibility to the former Magdalene women’s graves. Women from High Park are buried in at least seven separate locations in Glasnevin Cemetery.⁴ Just three of these burial plots have headstones

² See: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/ireland-and-the-magdalene-laundries-9780755617494/>

³ Sr Angela Fahy, ‘Cemetery removals’, letter to the editor, *Irish Independent*, 6 September 1993, pg 19.

⁴ See: http://jfmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/JFMR_Critique_190215.pdf

(containing significant errors and discrepancies), and the other four graves remain unmarked. One of these unmarked graves is the final resting place of Mary Bridget Phelan, who died at High Park in 1902.

Mary Bridget Phelan

Mary Phelan was born circa 1876 and died at High Park in December 1902 at the age of twenty-six. Mary's death certificate states that she died on 11th December, however, the Glasnevin registers indicate that she died on 15th December. It is possible that Glasnevin's records are more accurate, as they show that Mary was buried on 16th December 1902, and most women were buried within a day or two of their deaths. Mary is buried in a communal grave in the St Patrick's section of Glasnevin Cemetery. She was interred at this location at the time of her death and therefore she was never buried at St Mary's Graveyard at High Park. Mary shares her final resting place with five other women, namely Mary Maher (DOD 1902), Johanna Prendergast (DOD 1903), Helena McGauley (DOD 1903), Elizabeth Shea (DOD 1904) and Elizabeth O'Brien (DOD 1906). All of these women died of phthisis (tuberculosis), with the exception of Helena McGauley, who died of heart disease.

While the Eneclann *Historical Naming Report* is correct in stating that a Marion Phelan is listed as resident in High Park Magdalene Laundry in the 1901 Census, we cannot be certain that she is the same person as Mary Bridget Phelan who died in 1902. We believe that the Mary Phelan (DOB 1876) who died in High Park in 1902 may have been confined in the North Dublin Union Workhouse in 1885 at the age of nine. We also believe that the same woman may have been incarcerated twice in Grangegorman Female Prison in 1896, and four times in Mountjoy in 1900.⁵ Our research indicates that it was not uncommon for a woman to find herself confined in a Magdalene Laundry after being previously incarcerated in other institutional settings.

On a point of accuracy, the Eneclann *Historical Naming Report* provides a link to 'The Ragged Wagon' a [website](#) purporting to provide the names of women who were exhumed from St Mary's.⁶ While we have no doubt the owners of 'The Ragged Wagon' website are well-intentioned, nonetheless, the page contains multiple inaccuracies, and it is unfortunate that Eneclann does not appear to have consulted our publicly-available research.⁷ The names on The Ragged Wagon' website are those inscribed on the headstones of one of the High Park graves at Glasnevin. These inscriptions are not all accurate, and the vast majority of these women were not exhumed from St Mary's Graveyard. The children named on the website are buried in the adjacent plot, but they have no connection to High Park.

⁵ Records accessed via www.findmypast.ie

⁶ <https://theraggedwagon.wordpress.com/2013/02/03/1993-riddle-of-the-magdalene-laundry-dead-who-are-they>

⁷ See: http://jfmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/JFMR_Critique_190215.pdf

The possibility of further human remains at the Bonnington site

Our primary concern in relation to any development on the land where St Mary's once stood is the possibility that further human remains may still be at the site, and we welcome the opportunity to bring the following to your attention. In June 2020, Dublin City Council (DCC) published a number of departmental reports in connection with Planning Application No. 4198/19 / ABP Ref. PL29N.307366. These documents included the City Archaeologist's report, which makes the following recommendation:

This office recommends test excavation of the site, and specifically the area of the former graveyard should be carried out, along with documentary/photographic research into the exhumation, to ensure that no further undocumented burials are present, either within or external to, the graveyard.

It is the recommendation of this office that a condition for an Archaeological Impact Assessment (including test trenching), as described below, shall be attached to any grant of planning permission for this application.⁸

Subsequently, we also became aware of ABP's report of 5th December 2019 in connection with another application (ABP Ref. PL29N.305595). ABP's report stipulated that any planning application on the site should include an 'archaeological impact assessment which has due regard to the previous institutional uses on the site and adjoining land'.⁹

We note that Roseberry Developments carried out a test excavation on 19th December 2019.¹⁰ According to Roseberry's Archaeological Report, a 'trench from north to south along the western boundary of the site was opened'. The Report states that only the northern area of the trench was tested, and that ground conditions consisting of 'backfill of the exhumed burial ground' prevented further exploration as it 'could not be removed with the available machine fittings'. Moreover, the Report states that the southern end of the trench was not tested 'as it was required for exit to the carpark' and that 'a large underground water tank is present in that part of the former burial ground which is in ownership of the hotel'. The Archaeologist's Report concludes that 'the area of the former graveyard, showed that no remains of any interest, either archaeological, or of more recent origin, were present over the large northern part of the site'. It also recommended that:

...excavation of the section of the graveyard and area to the south which is within this site boundary be monitored by an archaeologist during construction.

⁸ See: Chief Archaeologist's Report to Area Planner, Re 4198/19, The Bonnington Hotel site on Swords Road, Whitehall, Dublin 9. Nov. 28, 2019.

⁹ An Bord Pleanála, Inspector's Report on Recommended Opinion ABP-305595-19, Dec. 5, 2019.

¹⁰ Claire Walsh. Archaeological Report and Test Excavation at Site At Rear Bonnington Hotel, Whitehall, Dublin 9. For Roseberry Investments Planning Reg ABP-305595-19, December 2019.

This may result in the retrieval of fragments of grave markers, and other objects of possible significance relating to the burials, which may not have been observed by the undertakers who carried out the exhumation.

These reports prompted JFMR to investigate the matter further by consulting various archival documents, photographs and other evidence in our possession. The report of the Environmental Health Officer who observed the exhumations in 1993 states the following:

To ensure that all human remains were exhumed from the graveyard, a trench was dug across the length of the *unmarked* ground *to the front* of the graveyard. All soil removed was clean and there was no evidence of any further unmarked burials within the area of the graveyard.

This suggests that the undertakers dug a trench along the unmarked ground, but not the entire graveyard. We cannot say for certain where exactly ‘the front’ of St Mary’s graveyard was located. However, assuming that the location of a Celtic cross signifies the ‘front’ of any given graveyard, historical photographs indicate that the front of St Mary’s Graveyard may have been located to the north. To explain, Fig. 1 below is a photograph of St Mary’s Graveyard prior to the exhumations. From the location of the church building in the background (marked in red), it is possible to ascertain that the northern end of the car park to the rear of the Bonnington is where the St Mary’s Celtic cross once stood (see Fig. 2 below). If this is correct, then Roseberry Developments dug a trench in the same area as the undertakers did in 1993, which had already indicated that no further remains were detected. This also implies that the southern end of the site has never been adequately tested for further human remains.

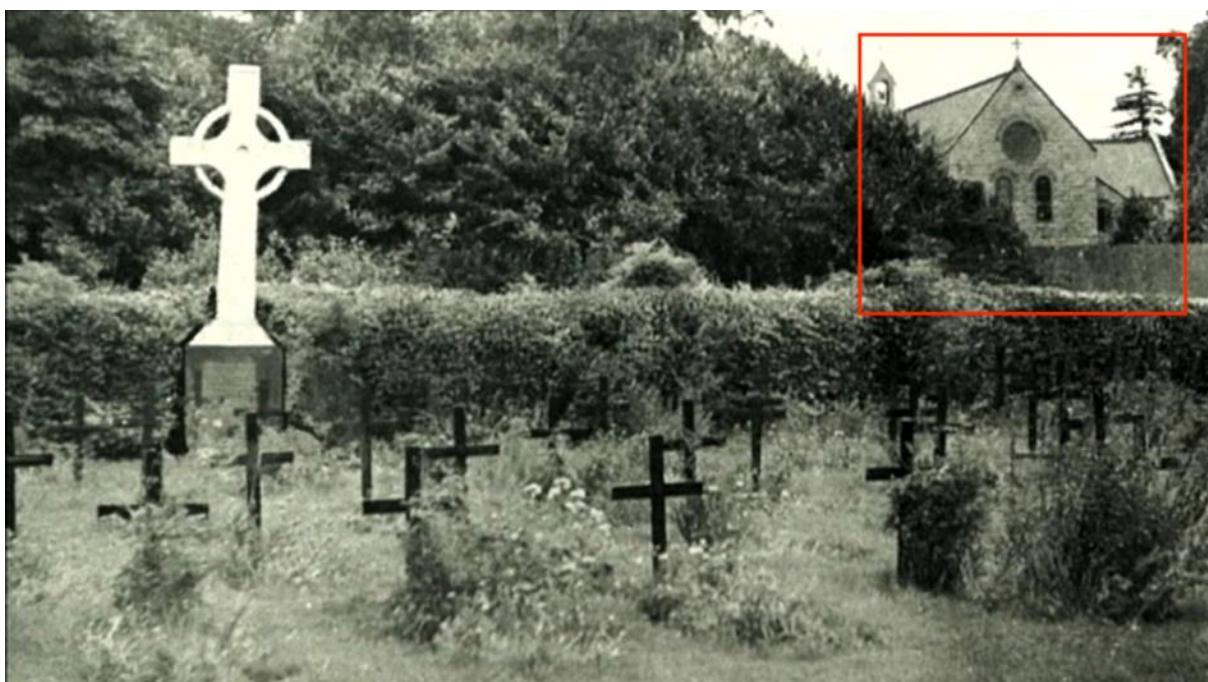


Fig. 1: Photograph of St Mary’s Graveyard prior to the exhumations. Photograph kindly provided by Tanya Sillem, RTÉ *Prime Time*. Original source unknown.



Fig. 2: View of the northern end of the car park to the rear of the Bonnington Hotel. © JFM Research

JFMR's Magdalene Names Project (MNP) seeks to honour the women who died in the Magdalene Laundries by recording their names, burial places and other information about their lives. This information is made available to family members seeking to reclaim their former Magdalene relatives. Thus far, the MNP has gathered the details of 1,837 women who died in Ireland's Magdalene Laundries.¹¹ The MNP has not yet been able to establish the burial place of eighty-two women who died at High Park.¹² Nine of the eighty-two women died in hospital, indicating that they may have been buried in plots owned by the hospitals. It is also possible that some women may have been claimed by their families after they died. JFMR is not suggesting that all eighty-two are still buried at the former St Mary's Graveyard site, however, it is nonetheless a further factor which suggests that the possibility of additional human remains cannot be ruled out.

In light of the above factors, we urge you as the company responsible for building the development, to ensure that every possible measure is taken to establish whether

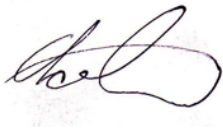
¹¹ This figure does not include unidentified women whose details we have not yet been able to verify.

¹² This figure does not include women who are named on the exhumation licence who do not appear in Glasnevin's online genealogy records. See: http://jfmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/JFMR_Critique_190215.pdf

additional unaccounted for human remains are still interred beneath the site where St Mary's Graveyard was once located. We welcome the condition on the planning grant for the provision of a memorial at the site and we are happy to discuss the matter further with you in due course.

We hope that this Report has been of assistance and we would be glad to discuss the contents with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Claire McGettrick
On behalf of JFM Research