



JUSTICE FOR MAGDALENES RESEARCH

**RESEARCH GUIDE FOR
RELATIVES OF
FORMER MAGDALENE WOMEN**

[Version: April 2025]

Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) is a not-for-profit organisation whose main aim is to provide for the advancement of education of 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.

INTRODUCTION

Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) has compiled this Research Guide to assist relatives of former Magdalene women and girls, both living and deceased. If you are a relative assisting a family member who is a survivor, and she has not already applied to the Magdalene Restorative Justice Scheme at the Department of Justice and Equality, the following guides may be of assistance to you.

Survivor Guide to Magdalene Restorative Justice Scheme

<http://jfmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Survivor-Guide-to-Magdalene-Restorative-Justice-Scheme.pdf>

Supplementary Guide to the Magdalene Restorative Justice Scheme

http://jfmresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Supplementary-Survivor-Guide-to-Magdalene-Restorative-Justice-Scheme_FINAL.pdf

If you are affected by adoption, you can find information and support at the Adoption Rights Alliance website at www.adoption.ie. If you are an adopted person whose mother may have been in a Magdalene Laundry, we suggest that you use this Research Guide in conjunction with resources provided by Adoption Rights Alliance at: <http://adoption.ie/records/>.

IMPORTANT: If you are a relative of a woman who was in a Magdalene Laundry and she has only recently revealed this to you, allow her to tell her story as and when she is ready. Do not try to persuade her to tell you her story or embark on any research if she is not ready.

BEGINNING YOUR RESEARCH

Before you set out on your journey, you should firstly gather whatever information you can from your family and other sources close to you. Some of the possible questions you could ask are below. Please note that this can be a difficult subject to talk about in a family so we suggest that you be as tactful as possible when asking the questions.

Suggested Questions to Ask Family Members Before Starting Your Research

- When did the woman enter the laundry?
- What part of the country was the laundry in?
- What order of nuns was involved?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the woman being in the laundry?

- Did she get out?
- Did she die in the Magdalene Laundry?

Contacting the Religious Order

Once you have gathered whatever information you can, your first step should be to contact the religious order that ran the laundry in question. If you do not know what order was involved, then we suggest that you write to all of them. We have provided a sample letter below to give you an idea of the wording you should use. A list of names and addresses of the Magdalene orders is available at the end of this document.

Guidelines for Dealing with Religious Orders

- ✓ Always communicate in writing preferably using Registered (Signed For) Post.
- ✓ Do not give the order a contact number. If you absolutely have to contact the order by telephone (e.g. to arrange an appointment), we advise that you turn off caller identification on your phone.
- ✓ Remember, you have the right to be treated respectfully.
- ✓ If you are told that you have been placed on a waiting list, ask how long the wait is and ask to be kept regularly informed of your place in the queue.
- ✓ Ask for the name of the person dealing with your query and address all correspondence to this person.
- ✓ Keep track of your paperwork in a folder or file and keep a copy of any correspondence sent to the agency.

Sample Letter to the Religious Orders:

Your Name and Address

Date

Name of Religious Order

Address of Religious Order

To Whom It May Concern:

I believe that my [state relationship e.g. mother/aunt/sister etc] was in a Magdalene Laundry that was run by your order at [INSERT ADDRESS OF LAUNDRY]. I would be obliged if you could supply me with whatever information you have on file in relation to this person.

The details are as follows:

Name of Magdalene woman

Date of Birth of Magdalene Woman

Date of death of Magdalene Woman (if applicable)

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your immediate attention.

Yours sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]

Sample Questions to Ask Religious Orders

Below is a sample list of additional questions that you might like to ask the religious order once you have established which order was involved. If you are still unsure, then send the list to all of them. You should amend the list to reflect your own situation.

- What date did my relative enter the laundry?
- What name was my relative given in the laundry?
- What were her responsibilities in the laundry?
- What hours did she work?
- Was she paid for her work?
- Are there tax records for her?
- Did her family know she was in the laundry?
- Did she receive any visitors while she was in the laundry?
- What is her education level?
- What was her health during her time in the laundry? Was she ill at any stage? Did she receive medical attention?
- Did she ever leave the laundry?
- If so, what date did she leave? Where did she go?
- Did she die while still in the laundry?
- If so, what was the date and cause of death?
- If so, where is she buried and under what name?
- Was her death registered?
- Is she still residing in the care of the religious order?
- What is her current residence?

- Was she transferred from an industrial school and if so, what were the circumstances surrounding the transfer?
 - Did the Magdalene Laundry request the transfer?
 - Did the industrial school request the transfer?

- Was she transferred from a psychiatric institution and if so, what were the circumstances surrounding the transfer?
 - Did the Magdalene Laundry request the transfer?
 - Did the psychiatric institution request the transfer?

- Was she transferred from a Mother and Baby Home and if so, what were the circumstances surrounding the transfer?

- Did the Magdalene Laundry request the transfer?
- Did the Mother and Baby Home request the transfer?
- Was she transferred from the Magdalene Laundry to a Mother and Baby Home and then back to the laundry and if so what were the circumstances surrounding the conception of the child?
- How many children did she give birth to and what became of them?
-
- Was she incarcerated in the Magdalene Laundry via the courts service?
 - What was her alleged crime?
 - What was the sentence?
 - What was the actual time served?
 - Did the Probation Service follow up and check in to ensure that she was released when her sentence had expired?

Contacting Government Departments and Other Agencies

While the Magdalene Laundries were church-run institutions, the State was also involved in referring women and girls there. Your relative may also have been transferred from a Mother and Baby Home or another institution. You should therefore write to the government department involved and seek whatever information they possess on file. Some sample questions and a sample letter are supplied below. You should amend the questions and letters to reflect your own situation.

Guidelines for Dealing with Government Departments

- ✓ Always communicate in writing preferably using Registered (Signed For) Post.
- ✓ Do not give a contact number. If you absolutely have to contact the order by telephone (e.g. to arrange an appointment), we advise that you turn off caller identification on your phone.
- ✓ Remember, you have the right to be treated respectfully.
- ✓ If you are told that you have been placed on a waiting list, ask how long the wait is and ask to be kept regularly informed of your place in the queue.
- ✓ Ask for the name of the person dealing with your query and address all correspondence to this person.
- ✓ Keep track of your paperwork in a folder or file and keep a copy of any correspondence sent to the agency.

Sample Letter to Department of Education:

Your Name and Address

Date

*Residential Institutions Redress Unit
Cornamaddy
Athlone
Co. Westmeath*

To whom it concerns:

I believe that my [state relationship e.g. mother/aunt/sister etc] was in the industrial school at [INSERT ADDRESS OF SCHOOL]. I also believe that she was transferred to a Magdalene Laundry at [INSERT ADDRESS OF LAUNDRY]. I would be obliged if you could supply me with whatever information you have on file in relation to this person.

The details are as follows:

*Name of Magdalene woman
Date of Birth of Magdalene Woman
Date of death of Magdalene Woman (if applicable)*

I would also be obliged if you could answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the circumstances surrounding my relative's admission to the industrial school?*
- 2. What were the circumstances surrounding the transfer from the industrial school to the Magdalene Laundry?*
- 3. Did the Magdalene Laundry request the transfer?*
- 4. Did the industrial school request the transfer?*
- 5. Did she ever leave the laundry?*
- 6. Did she die in the Magdalene Laundry? If so, what was the date and cause of death, where is she buried and under what name?*
- 7. Is she still residing in the care of the religious order?*

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your immediate attention.

Yours sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]

Sample Letter to Psychiatric Hospitals:

Your Name and Address

Date

*Name of Psychiatric Hospital
Address of Psychiatric Hospital*

To whom it concerns:

I believe that my [state relationship e.g. mother/aunt/sister etc] was a patient at [INSERT ADDRESS OF HOSPITAL]. I also believe that she was transferred to a Magdalene Laundry at [INSERT ADDRESS OF LAUNDRY]. I would be obliged if you could supply me with whatever information you have on file in relation to this person.

The details are as follows:

Name of Magdalene woman
Date of Birth of Magdalene Woman
Date of death of Magdalene Woman (if applicable)

I would also be obliged if you could answer the following questions:

1. What were the circumstances surrounding my relative being a patient at the psychiatric hospital?
2. What were the circumstances surrounding the transfer from the psychiatric hospital to the Magdalene Laundry?
3. Was she considered fit for work?
4. Did the Magdalene Laundry request the transfer?
5. Did the hospital request the transfer?
6. Did she ever leave the laundry?
7. Did she die in the Magdalene Laundry? If so, what was the date and cause of death, where is she buried and under what name?
8. Is she still residing in the care of the religious order?

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your immediate attention.

Yours sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]

Sample Letter to Religious Orders Who Ran Mother and Baby Homes:

Your Name and Address

Date

Name of Religious Order
Address of Religious Order

To Whom It May Concern:

I believe that my [state relationship e.g. mother/aunt/sister etc] was confined at [INSERT ADDRESS OF MOTHER AND BABY HOME]. I also believe that she was transferred to a Magdalene Laundry at [INSERT ADDRESS OF LAUNDRY]. I would be obliged if you could supply me with whatever information you have on file in relation to this person.

The details are as follows:

Name of Magdalene woman
Date of Birth of Magdalene Woman
Date of death of Magdalene Woman (if applicable)

I would also be obliged if you could answer the following questions:

1. What were the circumstances surrounding my relative being confined in the Mother and Baby Home?
2. What were the circumstances surrounding the transfer from the psychiatric hospital to the Magdalene Laundry?
3. Was she considered fit for work?
4. Did the Magdalene Laundry request the transfer?
5. Did the Mother and Baby Home request the transfer?
6. Was she transferred from the Magdalene Laundry to a Mother and Baby Home and then back to the laundry and if so what were the circumstances surrounding the conception of the child?
7. How many children did she give birth to and what became of them?
8. Did she ever leave the laundry? If so, what date did she leave? Where did she go?

9. *Did she die in the Magdalene Laundry? If so, what was the date and cause of death, where is she buried and under what name?*
10. *Is she still residing in the care of the religious order?*

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your immediate attention.

Yours sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]

Sample Letter to Department of Justice:

Your Name and Address

Date

*Department of Justice
51 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2, D02 HK52
info@justice.ie*

To whom it concerns:

I believe that my [state relationship e.g. mother/aunt/sister etc] was transferred to a Magdalene Laundry at [INSERT ADDRESS OF LAUNDRY] through the courts system. I would be obliged if you could supply me with whatever information you have on file in relation to this person.

The details are as follows:

*Name of Magdalene woman
Date of Birth of Magdalene Woman
Date of death of Magdalene Woman (if applicable)*

I would also be obliged if you could answer the following questions:

1. *What were the circumstances surrounding my relative being incarcerated at the Magdalene Laundry?*
2. *What was her alleged crime?*
3. *What was the sentence, if any?*
4. *What was the actual time served?*
5. *Did the Department of Justice monitor her during her time at the Magdalene Laundry?*
6. *Did she ever leave the laundry? If so, what date did she leave? Where did she go?*
7. *Did she die in the Magdalene Laundry? If so, what was the date and cause of death, where is she buried and under what name?*
8. *Is she still residing in the care of the religious order?*

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your immediate attention.

Yours sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]

PROGRESSING YOUR RESEARCH

Before you embark on your search, you should establish what you are trying to achieve. For example, if your relative is deceased, you might want to seek out as much information as you can about her in order to paint a picture of her life. In this instance you may want to start with obtaining her death certificate (assuming you know her full name) and working backwards from there. The section below will guide you through the process of the civil registration system and will aid you in obtaining birth, death and marriage certificates. On the other hand, you may know very little, e.g., whether your relative is alive or not, or indeed if she managed to get out of the laundry. In this particular case you will be trying to obtain information from wherever you can. Often, the best place is to start at the beginning with her birth certificate and move forward from there. The birth certificate will give you her date and place of birth and is a good foundation to build a search on.

You might also want to consider whether your relative married before entering the laundry or if she had children, so it is worth searching for this in the General Register Office. If she was not married and you think she had children, you should search for instances where the mother's maiden name and the child's surname are the same.

If you find that the civil records are not yielding sufficient information, you can also try the church (parish) records and you can read more about this below.

If your relative would have been in the laundry in either 1901 or 1911, you can search for her in the Census records which are available online at this link: <https://nationalarchives.ie/collections/search-the-census/>. Through our work on the Magdalene Names Project, Justice for Magdalenes Research (JFMR) has accumulated data from archival electoral registers and other records. Please contact us if you would like us to check for your relative's name.

The search process can take time, depending on how unusual a surname is. However with persistence you will usually be able to find a certain amount of information from various documentary sources, which will give you the basis to try and retry other sources.

CIVIL REGISTRATION RECORDS

In the course of your research you may need to consult civil registration records held by the General Register Office (GRO). Some records are available free of charge at the GRO

website here: <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/>. (Information on specific years which are accessible online is available at: <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/faq/>).

For records that are not available online there are two options: (i) the GRO's email search service (see: <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/55ccbe-general-register-office-gro-research-facility/#email-service>); and (ii) visiting the Research Room in person. To avail of the GRO email service, send an email to GROResearchRoom@welfare.ie with 'search request' in the subject line. If for example, you are seeking a death record for your relative and you know her date of death and where she died, you might phrase your request as follows:

To whom it concerns:

I would like to request a search for the death registration of [name of relative], date of death [insert date of death]. I believe she died in [insert location].

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

If you do not know your relative's year and/or location of death, your request needs to be phrased along the following lines:

To whom it concerns:

I would like to request a search for all deaths in the name of [name of relative] between [insert year] and [insert year].

Yours sincerely,

[Your name]

Once you have sent your email you will receive a response with a payment link. When your payment is processed the GRO will respond to you with a database which is a computerised extract from the relevant register. When you receive this, email the GRO again (at GROResearchRoom@welfare.ie) and ask for photocopies of any relevant entries, providing the necessary information (which will be available on the list of entries from your first request). For example:

To whom it concerns:

I wish to request photocopies of the following entries in the Register of Deaths:

Murphy, Mary. Date of Death: 1/1/76, Vol 2 Page 632

Yours sincerely,

If you wish to visit the GRO Research Room in person, it is located at Werburgh Street, Dublin 2. See the following link for information on opening hours:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/55ccbe-general-register-office-gro-research-facility/#opening-hours>.

Searching the Registers at the Research Room

Please read the following information carefully before searching the registers:

- **Take your time** looking through the books
- Search **all** of the books, even if you think you have found what you are looking for after a short amount of time
- Make sure you **check all four quarters** for registrations before 1966 (see below)
- If the date of birth/death/marriage was late in the year (November or December), you should search the book for the year after the birth as well, because it was common for these events to be registered at the beginning of the following year.
- Check the back of the books for **hand written late registrations**.
- Please note, some birth/death/marriage certificates will have different first names – e.g. your relative might be known as Bridget, but on her birth certificate the name might be Mary Bridget. So, it is important to be watchful for this phenomenon as it can lead a lot of people astray.

Format of the Register of Live Births

The format of the registers changed in January 1966 so we shall explain both formats.

Pre-January 1966:

Births prior to January 1966 were registered every three months; the books are separated into four quarters, March, June, September and December with no dates of birth included in the books. **Please ensure you check all four quarters.**

Format of Pre-1966 Registers:

Surname	First Name	Mother's Maiden Name	District	Vol	Page
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	2	421
Murphy	Bridget	Smith	Delvin	3	211
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	4	433
Murphy	Anne	Murphy*	Mullingar	5	187

*This is an example of a possible unmarried birth registration – i.e. the mother's maiden name and child's surname are the same.

Format of Post-January 1966 Registers:

Births from January 1966 are sorted alphabetically, and not separated into quarters, but dates of birth are included in the registers.

Format of Post-1966 Registers:

Surname	First Name	Mother's Maiden Name	District	Date of Birth	Vol	Page	Qtr
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	22-05-1944	2	421	3
Murphy	Bridget	Smith	Delvin	15-02-1953	3	211	1
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	22-03-1962	4	433	2
Murphy	Anne	Murphy	Mullingar	23-07-1954	5	187	4

*This is an example of a possible unmarried birth registration – i.e. the mother's maiden name and child's surname are the same.

Please Note: There will be three or four books for the year of birth, registered alphabetically.

Searching the Register of Deaths

Pre-January 1966:

Deaths prior to January 1966 were registered every three months; the books are separated into four quarters, March, June, September and December with no date of death included in the books. **Please ensure you check all four quarters.**

Format of Pre-1966 Registers:

Name	Age	District	Vol	Page
Murphy, Mary	68	Dublin S	2	421
Murphy, Bridget	71	Delvin	3	211
Murphy, Sheila	45	Dublin N	4	433

Format of Post-January 1966 Registers:

Deaths from January 1966 are sorted alphabetically, and not separated into quarters, but the date of death and marital status are included in the registers.

Format of Post-1966 Registers:

Name	Age	Marital Status	District	Date of Death	Vol	Page	Qtr
Murphy, John	68	Bachelor	Dublin S	22-05-1973	2	421	2
Murphy, Bridget	71	Spinster	Delvin	15-02-1953	3	211	1
Murphy, Sheila	45	Married	Dublin N	22-03-1973	4	433	1

Searching the Register of Marriages

Pre-January 1966:

Marriages prior to January 1966 were registered every three months; the books are separated into four quarters, March, June, September and December with no date of death included in the books. **Please ensure you check all four quarters.**

Format of Pre-1966 Registers:

Name	District	Vol	Page
Murphy, Mary	Dublin S	2	421
Murphy, Bridget	Delvin	3	211
Murphy, Sheila	Dublin N	4	433

Note: Marriages are registered in both the married and maiden surnames so you can use this to help you narrow things down by checking for a corresponding marriage under the maiden name, if known.

Format of Post-January 1966 Registers:

Marriages from January 1966 are sorted alphabetically, and not separated into quarters, but the date of marriage and spouse's surname are included in the registers.

Format of Post-1966 Registers:

Name	Spouse's Surname	District	Date of Marriage	Vol	Page	Qtr
Murphy, John	Bachelor	Dublin S	22-05-1973	2	421	2
Murphy, Bridget	Spinster	Delvin	15-02-1953	3	211	1
Murphy, Sheila	Married	Dublin N	22-03-1973	4	433	1

Requesting Photocopies

At this point you should have narrowed down the possibilities significantly. You should request photocopies of the possible entries on your list. To do this you must fill in a photocopy request form with the volume, page number and quarter and hand it in to a staff member at the Research Room.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The Reading Room of the National Archives, Bishop St. Dublin 8 is open from Monday to Friday, 10.00 till 17.00, to members of the public in possession of a valid Reader's Ticket. When you first visit the National Archives, you will need to apply for a Reader's Ticket. In order to obtain the Reader's Ticket you will need to provide photographic identification, though you will not be charged. You can download an application form for your Reader's Ticket in advance of your visit to the National Archives and fill it in before you leave. Further information is available at the following link: <https://nationalarchives.ie/plan-a-visit/>.

Some of the archives held by the National Archives that may interest you include:

1. Census 1901 (**Available online**)
2. Census 1911 (**Available online**)
3. Coroner's Inquests
4. Archives of Government Departments 1922–1979;
5. Archives of other governmental agencies;
6. Archives of the courts and probate registries;
7. Archives from other sources, including Church of Ireland parishes, health boards, hospitals, schools, charities, trade unions, business firms, solicitors' offices, estate offices;

For further information visit the National Archives website at www.nationalarchives.ie.

Church Records

In the course of your research you may need to avail of parish records (as opposed to records from religious orders). Some older records are available online at the irishgenealogy.ie website. However, you can also write to a parish connected to your relative and ask for a **full baptismal certificate and any relevant information**. These certificates often include the woman's baptism, marriage and death if applicable and can be useful in filling in the gaps. We recommend that you include a donation which might help to expedite your request. If you are having difficulty in locating the contact details for the parish in question, contact us and we will try to help.

Cemetery Records

Many cemeteries in Ireland have made their burial registers available online. In some cases the services is free of charge, however, in other instances (e.g., Dublin Cemeteries Trust) there is a charge.

UK RECORDS

If your relative managed to leave the laundry it is possible she travelled to the UK, like many other Magdalene survivors. There are a number of resources you can use in the UK to trace people (please note that the information provided below does not imply an endorsement of these services).

Find My Past

Find My Past holds many UK civil registration documents and other records: <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>.

Ancestry.co.uk

Similarly, Ancestry also has a large number of UK records: www.ancestry.co.uk.

BARNARDOS ORIGINS INFORMATION AND TRACING SERVICE

If applicable to your situation you may wish to contact the Barnardos Origins Information and Tracing Service which provides assistance to people who grew up in Ireland's industrial schools in tracing their families. See: <https://www.barnardos.ie/our-services/origins-service/>.

We hope the information in this Guide is of help to you. If you have any questions or concerns or if you are unsure of anything, don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

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Distribution of this document is encouraged, but no alterations are permitted.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR RELIGIOUS ORDERS (MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES)

Good Shepherd Sisters and the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity (these orders have now merged)

Province Administration
Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
63 Lower Sean McDermott Street
Dublin 1

Telephone: 01 8711109 or 087 7719723

Email: province@rgs.ie

Sisters of Mercy

Ms. Marianne Cosgrave
Catherine McAuley Centre
23 Herbert Street
Dublin 2

Telephone: 01-6387521

Email: info@mercyarchives.ie

Sisters of Charity

Sisters of Charity Generalate
Caritas, 15 Gilford Road
Sandymount, Dublin DO4 X337

Telephone: 01 2697833/2697935

Email: generalate@rsccaritas.com