

PRONI

Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

Archiving in support of the Truth Recovery Programme

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22nd October 2025



Department for
Communities

An Roinn
Pobal

Department für
Commonities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland



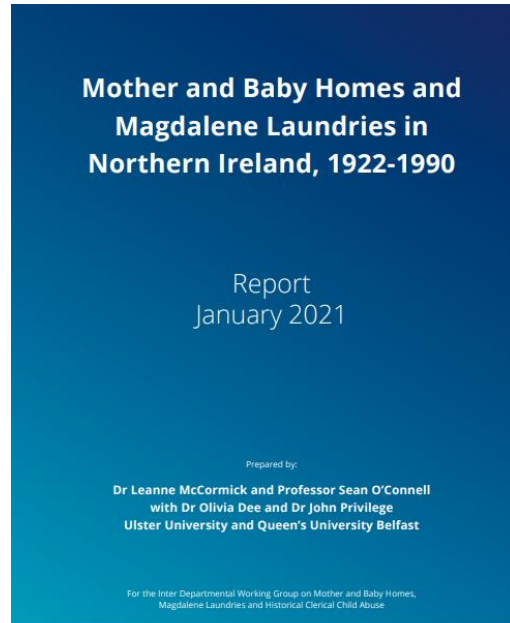
- c. 70 staff
- Over 3 million physical documents
- c. 220,000 digitally preserved records

‘Protecting and Providing Archives for All’

Public Records Act (N.I.) 1923

Public Records – from government departments, statutory bodies
Private Records – from non-government-supported sources; families, businesses, churches, etc.

The Northern Ireland Context



The Executive Office
Truth Recovery Programme

Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill

[AS INTRODUCED]

LEGISLATIVE COMPETENCE

At Introduction the First Minister and deputy First Minister had made the following statement under section 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998:

"In our view the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly."

Truth Recovery Independent Panel



PRONI - *Truth Recovery Records Project*

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023

2024

2025

2026

Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act (N.I.) 2022

Recommendation 4A of the Truth Recovery Design Panel's Report

"An immediate statutory preservation order guaranteeing the protection of all relevant records until they are gathered.

This requirement should extend to all **State and non-State** institutions and agencies, officials, representatives and professionals that serviced them."

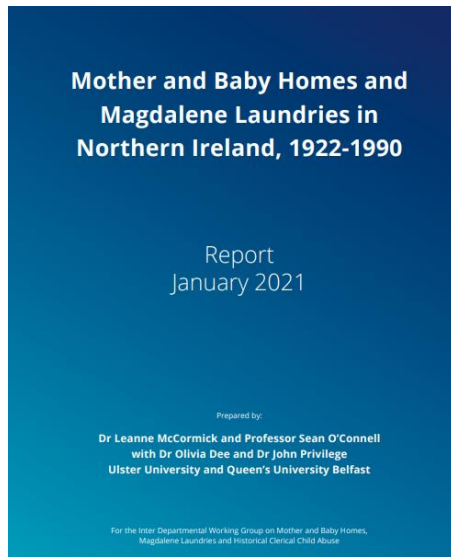


Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Institutions

Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922-1990

Profs. L. McCormick and S. O'Connell, 2021



📍 7 Mother and Baby Institutions

📍 4 Magdalene Laundries

Records held by:

- Religious Orders
- Churches
- Charitable organisations
- Voluntary Adoption Agencies – with 'inherited' records



● Phase 1 – Archive Survey

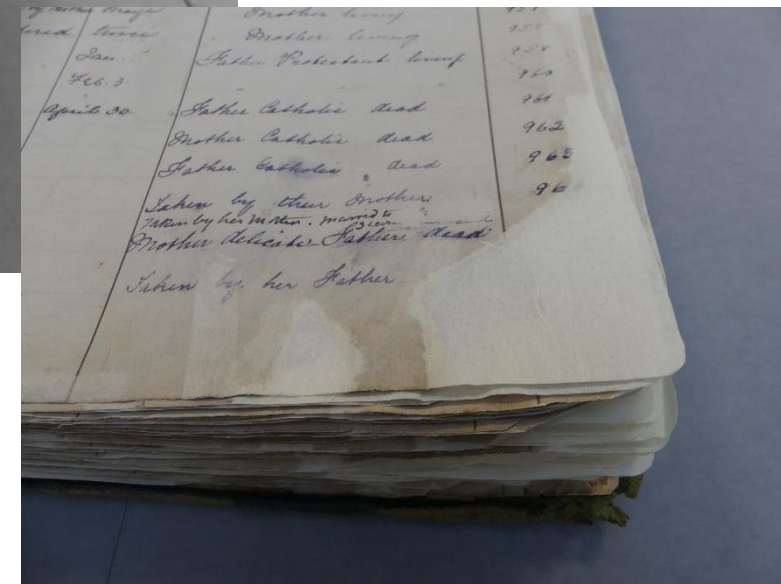
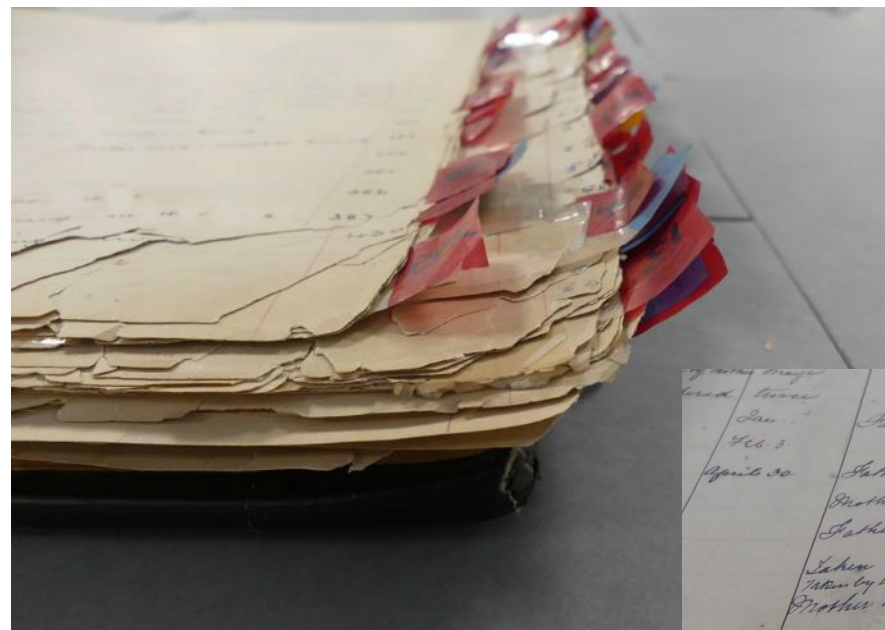
The survey identified >4,500 items:

- Over 200 registers
- Over 2000 index cards relating to individuals
- Over 2000 case files relating to individuals
- Other administrative or 'corporate' information



Phase 2 - Pilot Project

- Develop acquisition strategy
- Prepare documentation
 - Options for deposit
 - Private Deposit Agreements
- Arrange meetings
- Negotiate access
- Establish operational team
- Create operational workflows

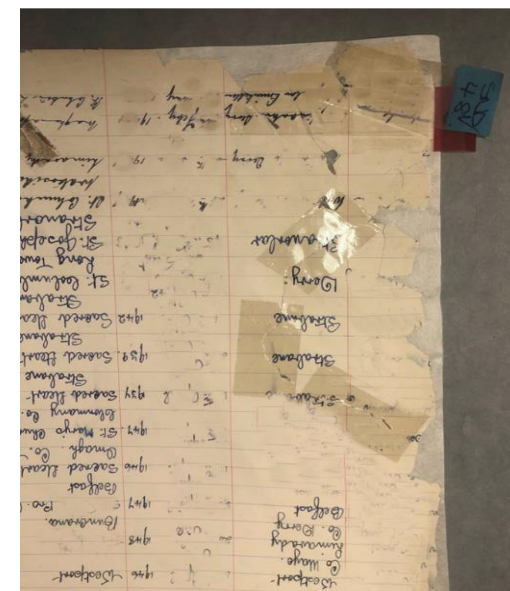
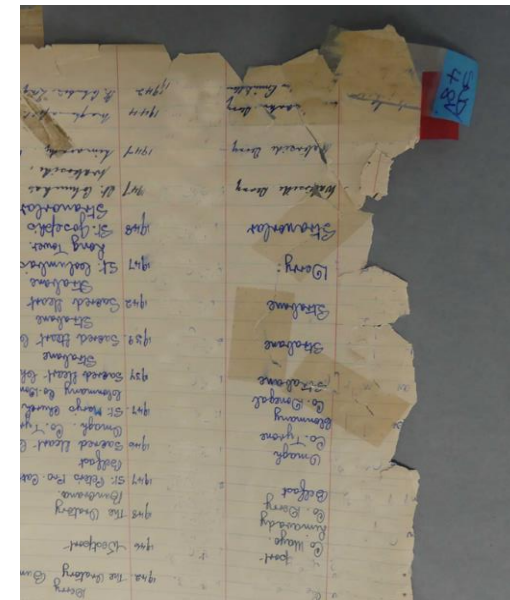


Register, (1880s-1940s), before and after conservation treatment

Phase 2 - Operational Progress



- Team expansion
- Need for research support
- Need for dedicated Project Conservator
- Workflow developed



Phase 3 - Full project

Options for preservation

- Transfer original documents to PRONI (indefinite loan)
- PRONI digitise the collection and retain a digital copy
- PRONI digitise the collection, record holder agrees to retain and actively preserve a digital copy

Options for digitisation

- Temporary deposit - records digitised in PRONI, Belfast
- PRONI team digitise records at the record holder's premises

Options regarding access for investigation

- Individually tailored Data Sharing Agreements
- Full access to Panel researchers
- Redacted access to Panel researchers



Team members using portable digitisation equipment in London, January 2025

Phase 3 - Full project

Several organisations have now deposited records, including:

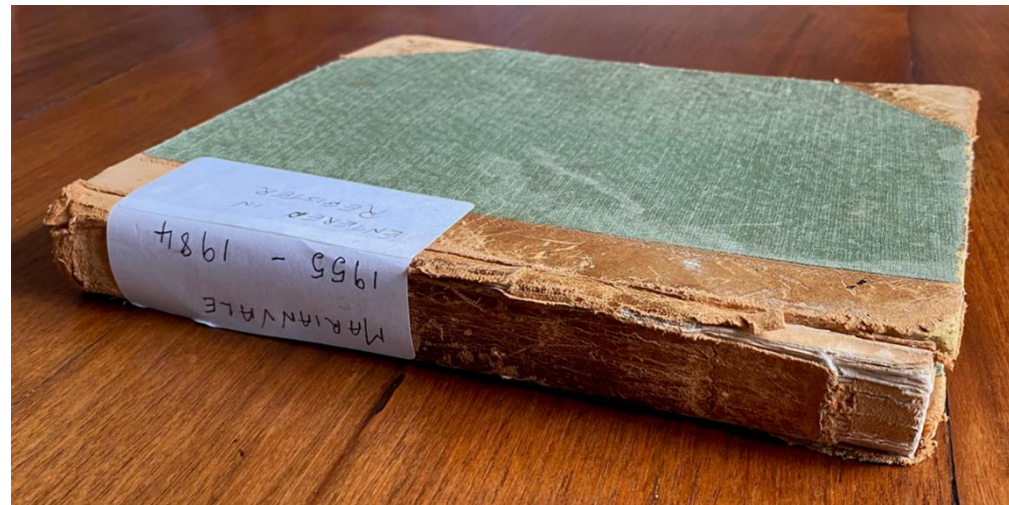
- Church of Ireland
- Roman Catholic Parishes
- Religious Orders
- Adoption Agencies
- Church & charitable organisations

Over 5,500 records received to date

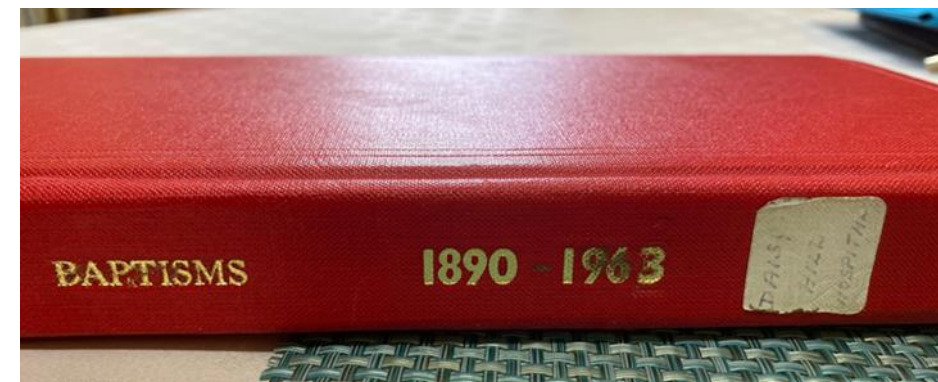
Over 50,000 digitized images created to date

Records of all N. Irish Mother and Baby Institutions secured
= names of c.10,500 women and girls

Records of all four N. Irish Magdalene Laundries secured
= names of c.3,500 women and girls



Marian Vale, Newry - Baptisms (1955-1984)

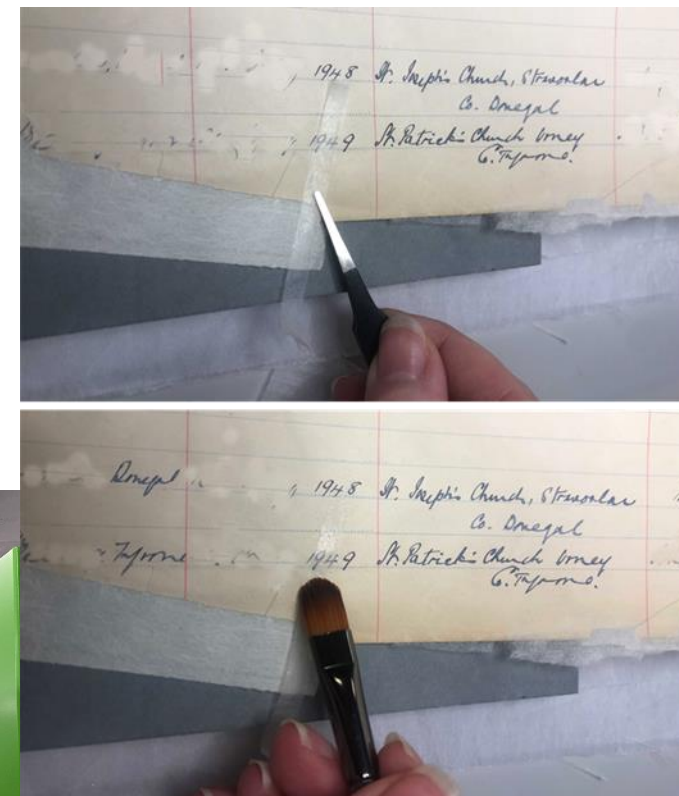


Parish Register containing relevant baptism entries (1890-1963)

Phase 3 - Engagement with Victims & Survivors



Engagement Event at PRONI in 2024



Conservation in action

Current and ongoing archival work

- Records from official sources have been surveyed, e.g. Health Trusts, Courts Service:
 - 18,000 adoption case files
 - Adoption court files
- Records relating to pathways and practices – e.g. baby ‘homes’, burial and cemetery records, etc.
- Statutory Public Inquiry and Redress Service – Bill being scrutinized by MLAs; Standardised Redress payment scheme imminent
- The Truth Recovery Independent Panel final report due by 31st March 2026.



PRONI staff briefing the Assembly Committee for the Executive Office in October 2024

Cross-border issues

Baby 'Homes' in Northern Ireland

- Portadown
- Newry
- Belfast
- Ballycastle

Baby 'Homes' in Republic of Ireland

- Fahan in County Donegal
- Sligo
- Stamullen, Co. Meath
- Dublin
- Cork



Mother and Baby Institutions



Magdalene Laundries



Baby 'Homes'



Use of language and terminology

- 'Victims and survivors' – **affected person**
- 'Home' - **institution**
- Mother / Birth Mother
- Care, providing refuge
- 'Illegitimate' – **nonmarital birth**
- 'Girls' – infantilising women
- 1st offence, 2nd offence – pregnancy as crime
- 'Name in class'/house name

Language used to describe individuals

- Comments regarding low IQ or intelligence
- Derogatory comments about personality or appearance
- Comments about the company they keep, promiscuity, lack of morals, etc.



Truth Recovery Archive

- Establishment and operation of an ‘Independent Archive’

*“Measures to ensure access to records: a statutory preservation requirement; data protection law implementation guidance; and **legislation to establish a permanent, dedicated, independent truth-telling archive;**”*
[Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability Report, 2021]

- Skills, knowledge and experience
 - archivists and conservators
 - social workers and psychologists
 - legal professionals



PRONI team, Independent Panel members and Executive Office officials view and discuss Workhouse records in January 2024

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