THE HOME

[This PDF is a printable version of the booklet published at http://motherandbabyhome.com/booklet.pdf]

"The Home," by Catherine Corless, Journal of the Old Tuam Society, Vol. 9 (2012), pp. 75-82, as reprinted by The Children's Home Graveyard Committee, Tuam, County Galway, Ireland.

Commitee

Chairperson:	Teresa Killeen Kelly
Secrtary:	Caroline Canny
Vice Secretary:	David Collins
Tresurer:	Anne Creaven
Researcher:	Catherine Corless
Members:	Padraig Dooley
	Anne Tierney
	Ellen Dooley
	Anne Collins
	Mary Mullen
	John Lowe
	Cllr Martin Ward
	Maura Ryan
	Arthur McDonagh
TY Students:	Dervla Higgins
	Amy Morris
	Emma McCormack
	Lisa Zukovic

Special thanks to:
- The Journal of the Old Tuam Society (JOTS) for this article and for the picture on page 1
- Catherine Corless for picture on page 3
- Teresa Killeen Kelly for pictures on page 21 and 22

Dear Community

I am writing to you as Chairperson of The Children's Home Graveyard Committee which was formed in 2013.

This committee was established when it was made known that almost 800 children are buried without recognition or headstones in a small section of the Dublin Road Estate where once stood the old orphanage called St. Mary's (known locally as the 'Home'). It was run by the Bon Secours Sisters from 1925 to the summer of 1961.

Our Committee wants to ensure that these children will be remembered and that their resting place will be recognised as such. Therefore we need the people of Tuam and hinterlands to become patrons to this project to help us achieve this goal. We feel that it is time that these children are given a proper resting place on consecrated ground, documented as such on Ordnance Survey Maps and mapping of graveyards.

Our committee wishes to mark the site with a plaque inscribed with all the children's names, date of death and age; marking the entrance according; devise a brochure so that the public will know where to find the graveyard and hold a remembrance mass for all of the children who rest there.

Teresa Killeen Kelly

The Home by Catherine Corless

The closing of the Tuam's Mother and Baby Home, in 1961, did not bring to an end the sad legacy for those who had been resident there. This article outlines the history of this institution and gives voice to some harrowing personal accounts of children who spent time at "the Home".

In March 2010, a *Tuam Herald* headline "*Stolen Childhoods*" caught my attention.(1) The fate of orphaned children had been foremost on my mind, as I struggled to gain information in my research on the old Mother and Baby Home which was located on the Dublin road in Tuam. It was a home for unmarried mothers and was run by the Bon Secours Sisters from 1925 until it closed its doors in 1961. Either the memory of many of those I spoke with had dimmed over the years, or perhaps the stigma of unmarried mothers still existed, but I found reluctance on their behalf to share any information.

The *Tuam Herald* article concerned a former resident of the Home, "Martin", who had written to the editor. He wrote that he had been placed there in 1947 at the age of two, and was seeking information on his early years there. He also gave an account of how at the tender age of five, he was placed in a foster home to a very uncaring family, and had to endure many years of hardship and misery, until he eventually could leave there and head for England. I immediately contacted the editor, who kindly forwarded my request to "Martin" to get in touch with me, which he subsequently did. Throughout our correspondence, I gained a wealth of information and a real insight into the plight of these children, unlucky enough to be born into the dysfunctional system of Mother and Baby Homes, in an Ireland where the church, state, and society deemed illegitimacy almost criminal.

My correspondent wished to waive his anonymity and requested I use his proper name. His foster mother had denied him even that and had referred to him as "Sonny" all his life. He was christened Michael Hession, and now lives in the south of England.

The Bon Secours Sisters

The Bon Secours Sisters were a nursing congregation who had come

from Dublin to take charge of the hospital wing of Glenamaddy Workhouse. In a pamphlet he wrote, Bishop James Fergus gives us an insight into the work of the Sisters.(2) He was sent to Glenamaddy as a curate in 1921, and gives a glowing account of their nursing skills. Up to this period in our history, the workhouses catered for the destitute, old and infirm, orphans and unmarried mothers, but now, after the Treaty, the Irish Poor Law, which had instigated those systems, was about to reform.(3) The reforms required by the Irish Free State, were to place administration on a county basis, and to separate the treatment of the sick entirely from poor relief, to establish County Homes for the aged and infirm, and to make separate arrangements for those with mental illnesses in workhouses, unmarried mothers and children. The Galway Board of Health decided to close all workhouses and Union hospitals in the county, but decided to keep the hospital wing open in Glenamaddy Workhouse for destitute and orphaned children, under the care of the Bon Secours Sisters. Bishop Fergus concluded that this was a great compliment to the Sisters and their work. This part of the workhouse was in dire need of re-roofing and refurbishment, but as the years passed, nothing was done. It soon became clear that a new premise was needed.

Mountbellew and Portumna were suggested, and the transfer to either place canvassed, but the Sisters had set their sights on Tuam, and sought to have the transfer made to there. In 1925, the *Tuam Herald* under the heading "*Conversion of Workhouse into Children's Home*" gives the cost of the transfer as £5,000.(4) It also relates to the disputes between the members of the Tuam Town Commissioners on this enormous cost, with some members stating that the people of Tuam and Archbishop Thomas Gilmartin bitterly opposed the relocation of the Home to Tuam. It's interesting to note here, that in Bishop Fergus's pamphlet, he recorded that "*one or two Tuam Town Commissioners voiced some opposition to the transfer*" but he does not include the archbishop in this opposition. It was finally agreed by all to move the Children's Home to Tuam.There was a small delay in the transfer, as the building earmarked was then occupied as a military barracks by the Irish Free State, though preparations to leave were underway. According to Bishop Fergus, Mother Euphremia and Sister Hortense and some of the older children

were the first to make their way to Tuam Workhouse. They found their new surroundings in an awful state, with weeds everywhere and long grass entangled in barbed wire. In some of the rooms, floorboards had been torn up to make firewood. Otherwise, the buildings were in fairly good repair. Gradually the remaining Sisters, mothers and children arrived, and the work of clearing and cleaning began in earnest with paths laid out, and painting to be done. Within a few years the grounds were tilled from wall to wall and were producing crops and flowers. The regular staff was increased to four by the arrival of Sr. Gabriel. The first superioress was Sr. Elphage, and she was succeeded by Sr. Priscilla Barry, who spent the rest of her life in Tuam.

Bishop Fergus also gives mention to the three women who stayed with the Sisters all their lives, Bina Rabbitte, Annie Kelly, and Mary Wade. Dr. Thomas B. Costello was the Medical Officer for the Home and the Rev. Peter J. Kelly, a grandnephew of the former Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. John McEvilly, was chaplain. The building belonged to Galway County Council and they were responsible for repairs and maintenance, and a capitation grant was paid to the nuns for the cost of upkeep of the mothers and babies, and for the salaries of doctors. A maternity unit was added later.

The next description of the Children's Home I found was from the travel writer Halliday Sutherland. He described it as a long, two-storied building in its own grounds. "*These were well kept and had many flower beds. The Home is run by the Sisters of Bon Secours of Paris and the Reverend Mother showed me around. Each of the Sisters is a fully trained nurse and midwife. Some are also trained children's nurses. An unmarried girl may come here to have her baby. She agrees to stay in the Home for one year. During this time she looks after her baby and assists the nuns in domestic work. She is unpaid. At the end of the year she may leave. She may take her baby with her or leave the baby at the Home in the hope that it will be adopted.*

The nuns keep the child until the age of seven, when it is sent to an Industrial School. There were 51 confinements in 1954 and the nuns now looked after 120 children. For each child or mother in the Home, the County Council pays £l per week... Children of five and over attend the local school... The whole building was fresh and clean... I walked along

the path and was mobbed by over a score of the younger children. They said nothing but each struggled to shake my hand... Then I realised that to these children I was a potential adopter who might take some boy or girl away to a real home. It was pathetic... At the Dogs Home in Battersea, every dog barks at the visitor in the hope that it will be taken away."

Mr. Sutherland then left the Home behind him where he had tea at the Archbishop's Palace where Dr. Joseph Walsh gave him a friendly reception. I thought his description of the Home to be purely clinical and lacking in any form of compassion. Had he sought permission to speak to the mothers who were confined there, he may have come away with a different account.

A former resident of the Home, who would have been a child when Halliday Sutherland visited, was the late John Cunningham, former Editor of *The Connaught Tribune*. In his article "*Emotional minefield of the rights of mothers and adopted children from the Ireland of yesterday"* he gives an account of the searing and emotional partings of mothers and babies.(6) John spoke to a woman in her sixties, who spent most of her life in the Home and gave this account of her experience. As John relates, she put it this way: "*What were the young women to do? Many weren't wanted at home, they were ostracised by society... in those days a young woman could not become pregnant and stay at home. It was as simple as that. I saw the devastation when they were parted from their children... they nursed the child and looked after it for a year and then they went one way and the child stayed to be adopted, or to be boarded out a few years later. I don't know if many of them recovered from the heart-breaking parting. For instance, I was boarded out myself. That was the way Ireland was at the time... But I will never forget the parting of some of the mothers and their children. It was heart rending*."

John added that to understand the complexity of these partings, we must look at the situation the unmarried mother was in. She would not have been able to face her family with a baby without a father. To them, she was a "*fallen woman*", a disgrace to the family who had brought them shame. She would be penniless without any support. Her only hope was to head for England and start a new life. Indeed, many unmarried pregnant girls would have headed for England to have their babies rather

than face the Mother and Baby Homes. Halliday Sutherland in his chapter on the Magdalene Home, gives a table of figures from the "*Crusade of Rescue in the Diocese of Westminster*" for single unmarried women, who had asked this charity for help. For the years 1950 until 1953, the number of those who had come from Ireland was 485, and of those, 51 were from Co. Galway.(7) This flight to England is also brought to light by social worker Ruth J.A. Kelly.(8) In her research on the plight of unmarried mothers, she notes that many charitable services in England were left unable to cope with the large numbers arriving from Ireland. Quoting an English social worker "*the fear of these girls has to be seen to be believed... what sort of society do you have in Ireland that puts the girls into this state?*"

And what of the fathers of these illegitimate babies? Neither church, state nor society laid significant blame, shame or responsibility on their shoulders. The only effort made, was the passing of the 1930 Illegitimate Children (Affiliation Orders) Act which was a weak attempt to facilitate unmarried mothers in suing the fathers of their babies.(9) As outlined by Dr. Sandra L. McAvoy the passing of this law allowed the Poor Law Guardians to initiate proceedings against the father if the child was supported on the poor rate,(10) but obtaining a decree involved cross examination of the mother and corroboration of her evidence. An alternative was for a woman's employer or parents to bring a civil action for "*seduction*" claiming loss of services as a result of her pregnancy. Costs in such cases could be high and awards low. The woman herself could prosecute, but doing so, remained an ordeal in a society where pregnancy brought disgrace, and the legal process was intimidating. Cases were not easy to prove and corroboration was still required. If the man defaulted in his payments, the remedy was a return to court which was a slow and costly process.

Fostering of Children from The Home

The system at that time was to board out children to foster parents once they reached the age of four or five. The prospective foster parents received an allowance for clothing and food for the child. Advertisements were placed regularly in the *Tuam Herald* looking for foster parents. Applications were made on a special Form (A) and were lodged with

the Secretary of the County Home, Loughrea. The council then sent out a form to be signed by the parish priest and the Home Assistance Officer. In some instances this system worked well, but more often than not, the system was greatly abused.

Michael's Story

Michael Hession who had inspired the "*Stolen Childhoods*" article was one of the many children fostered out from the Home in the 1950s. Michael was one of the unlucky ones. He was fostered out to an uncaring family who treated him little better than a slave. In his correspondence with me he noted that his only memory of leaving the Home was waiting in a hallway with long windows draped in heavy amber curtains, being driven way out the country in a black car and being deposited at a thatched house, where he was to spend the next twelve years of his life. Michael had also included in his correspondence copies of officialdom, which were given to him when he applied through the Freedom of Information Act to the Western Health Board for his personal records. Among those records was a copy of the Form of Contract which was signed by Michael's foster mother where she agreed to all the conditions in the indenture to protect, feed and clothe him. The sum of £1.50 per month was to be her allowance for his care, and a clothing allowance of £5 a year was to be allocated. Michael was not to benefit from this allowance for it was never spent on him. He called his new home "*the Abyss*".

He wrote that he often wondered how the selection of children to go to foster homes was done, and added: "*we could have been raffled, take your pick or lucky dip... or maybe auctioned-off.*"

I initially felt that surely, this could not be the case, but I found that various reports in the *Tuam Herald* on the Board of Health meetings at the time, echoed Michael's belief. Under a heading "*Boarded Out Children for Cheap Labour in North Galway*", The *Tuam Herald* reported "*The present system of fostering out children is not too efficient and an effort was not always made to find the home that most suited the child or the child that most suited the home. The allowance given to foster parents was not always spent on the child's welfare.*"(12) In another article under the heading "*Councillors Hear of Complaints in Inspectors*

Report" the *Herald* reports "*Greater care should be taken in the selection of foster homes... it would be well to explain verbally to the foster parent the conditions under which the child has been boarded out, e.g., the obligations of the foster parent to send him to school regularly, to facilitate inspectors, to allow inspections of all part of the foster home, and to expend the full amount of the clothing allowance... These conditions are embodied in the boarding out contract, but few foster parents ever read this document and in general they seem to be quite unaware of its contents.*"(13)

Michael's letters were harrowing to read because of the picture he formed of a little boy used and abused beyond belief. His foster family denied him adequate food and clothing, and expected him to do the work of a man – digging and clearing drains, rebuilding big stone walls, repairing double ditches, barbed wire fencing, cutting acres of thistles. His foster mother often kept him from school against his will, to look after their farms, six miles apart.

Michael remembers a kind woman who lived near one of these farms who had given him tea and scones on one occasion when his bike was punctured and he had called there for a pump. He said he was so hungry at other times he was driven to deflate his bicycle tyre to ask for that pump again, knowing that he would he get another hot cup of tea and a little kindness.

Michael was also able to obtain from the Western Health Board records of his health during his years at national school, days of absence, and general reports of his ability at school. He proved to be a bright student despite missing many days on account of his foster mother keeping him at home to do farm labour. Indeed, he was also able to obtain a copy of a letter sent by the principal of a technical school to the Children's Officer, County Buildings, Galway, asking: "*What is to be done with Michael Hession of … boarded out to … I was speaking to him some evenings ago and he is very upset that he is missing classes at the Tech. He deserves a chance*."

Michael's story is by no means an isolated case. Again, an Inspector's Report presented to the Galway County Council in 1956 revealed "*a very undesirable and unpleasant state of things... the callous treatment meted out to some of these unfortunate children, as instanced in the*

report, bears comparison with that imposed in the better class prison camps in totalitarian countries during the war. Neglect seems to be quite the common thing in some cases, and in the others, it borders on cruelty. Farm animals, or a certain valuable species of dog, are better treated than humans, and there is an urgent need to review this whole system of boarding out children who by accident of birth have neither home nor family."(14)

Paddy's Story

"Paddy", whose experience in a foster home very much echoes that of Michael's asked me not to mention his real name or any personal details. He too was born in the Home in the year 1946. His mother who lived quite a distance from Tuam was sent there by her family in fear of disclosure of the pregnancy to a narrow minded uncharitable community. Remember, being an unmarried mother was a very significant stigma in Ireland at the time.

Like most of the children who were born in the Home, his memories were almost non-existent of the Home itself as he was fostered out when quite young. However, he well remembers his foster home, and it still pains him to speak of living there. I found it remarkable that it was Paddy's wife who spoke with bitterness; such was the impact on her of her beloved's ill-treatment as a child. It is interesting that in Paddy's case, his mother paid for his keep in the Home right up to when he left at the age of 16. As Paddy was to discover in later years, his mother worked two jobs in England, presumably to ensure her son's welfare in the Home in the hope that he would have the best options open to him. The Sisters however did not inform her that Paddy had been fostered out but still graciously received and kept each instalment that she sent them. Paddy's foster family went on to have eight children, and it was his job to help look after them, along with the farm work and, of course, the bog. All he remembers from an early age is work, work, work. He also remembers an inspector calling to the foster home. Before his arrival Paddy was washed and dressed in clothes and shoes he had never seen before. But after the inspector's departure, the good clothes disappeared and he was handed his everyday rags. In fact, Paddy recalls he never owned a pair of shoes as a child, winter or summer. Picture a little

boy farming in the depths of winter, shoeless! Paddy doesn't remember going hungry in this household, but he will always remember being the last to be served a meal at the table. He was a foundling, an outsider, illegitimate. He was not allowed to forget it.

Elizabeth's Story

Another former resident I spoke with, who requested I just call her "Elizabeth" and who now lives in New York, also spent some miserable years with the foster family chosen for her. She was just four years old when placed there in August, 1941. Her one abiding memory is of one day sitting on a small three-legged stool in the kitchen when suddenly the woman whipped the stool out from under her and hit the husband over the head with it and blood poured down his face. She also recalls being locked in a shed overnight as punishment. Her one little bit of consolation was that her birth mother was in a position to visit her at the foster home, and on one occasion when she found the little girl filthy and infested with lice, she immediately contacted the authorities who then filed a report. A Managers Order (MO), dated June, 1943, states that "Elizabeth" be handed over to her mother.

Kevin's Story

I found myself in the happy position of helping "Kevin" to find the whereabouts of his birth mother, whom he had never seen or heard from. Kevin from Mayo was born in the Home in Tuam in March, 1942, and at the age of 3, he was fortunate to be placed with a childless couple who looked after him well throughout his life. He requested anonymity as his story is ongoing and he has siblings to consider.

After working in England in later years, he returned home to Co. Mayo and it was then that he began to wonder about his real identity. He was able to locate his records from the Western Health Board in Galway, who hold all the records of the Home in Tuam, and from his own birth certificate he found his mother's name and former address.

Following up on this information, he located an uncle in Co. Mayo who made him welcome, but unfortunately was not able to tell him where his mother went after she left the Home in Tuam. She just simply seemed to have disappeared. But what he did disclose was that there was a sister

born, a few years before Kevin, whom he was subsequently able to locate. Kevin got on with his life, married and had a family, but always kept alive the notion of finding his mother some day. Kevin's daughter had spent many years trying to locate her also and had even sought the help of the Salvation Army in England, without success. I was so moved by their story that I offered to help with my own research resources, which have often bore positive results. After many months, much in-depth researching, and frequent cross checking with Kevin's daughter, we narrowed the possibilities down to two families. I took a chance on one surname and phoned a family in the British midlands. After exchanging some brief details, I realised that, yes, I was on the right track! Kevin's mother had married twice (the name changes being the biggest obstacle in tracing her), and had in all, seven more children. The heartbreak to come was that she had passed away only four years earlier. I relayed the news to Kevin and his family, who, although being sad at her passing, were really overjoyed to have a least a grave to visit. They are now looking forward to a reunion with their new found family.

Adoption

By the early 1950s adoption became legal in Ireland. The vast majority of applications came from the USA, and it was nearly always babies that were sought. A report in the *Tuam Herald* of that era, gives an insight into the process. "*Within the last 18 months six children from the Children's Home in Tuam have been adopted by families in the U.S. The Home Assistance Dept. of Galway Co. Co. are at present investigating applications for 14 more adoptions for U.S.A. Inquiries revealed that Miss Áine Walsh Staff Officer of the Home Ass. Dept. and her staff have a really tricky job to perform in the adoption of children by Americans. The applications generally come from clergymen in the States on behalf of childless couples. This is the start of a very tedious and intricate process. The Co. Co. staff then get down to the routine of getting all available information on the applicants, through Church and State Authorities, background, religion, reputation and finance are inquired into, before the Galway Authorities are satisfied that a child from the Home will be bettered by adoption…. Photographs of children are sent across the Atlantic, but in some cases wealthy couples have come to Tuam and*

made choices first hand. The Home Assistance Dept. arranges for emigration. Passports and Visas are obtained, travel tickets are procured, the child is clothed and arrangements are made for the safe conduct to the American Port of debarkation…. In all cases, Catholic children go to Catholic homes, and other denominations are adopted only into foster homes of their own creed."(15)

Local Memories of the Home

Throughout my research on the Home and in speaking to local people, one particular memory seemed to resonate, that is, the sound of the children's clogs as they filed in two rows to the national schools each day. Most of the children would have been in the 5 - 8 years age bracket, as this was the age set out for them to attend the local schools. After they made their communion they were either sent to foster homes or sent to industrial schools. The boys wore short pants and knitted jumpers, the girls in light cotton frocks in summer and tweed skirts in winter. Everyone knew them as "The Home Babies". In the schools they were discouraged from integrating with the so-called ordinary pupils, and at home time in the afternoon they always left about 10 minutes early. This, I presume, was to ensure that they would be out of sight by the time the rest of the class were set free. I was about six years of age when I had my first encounter with two of the "Home Babies" in the cloakroom of the Mercy school.

In fact I played a little childish prank on them. An older girl had suggested to me, to wrap an empty sweet paper in the shape of a sweet, as she had done, and offer it to them, assuring me that they would take it. Being a victim of teasing myself, of course I jumped to the bait for one-upmanship. I thought it funny at the time how those little girls hungrily grabbed the empty sweet papers, but the memory of it now haunts me. I did not know then of the impact that prank must have had on those little girls who would very rarely have any sort of treat. I remember a nun coming into the cloakroom and shooing us out, the "Home Babies" one way and us another way.

Perhaps, if there had been less discrimination in the classroom against these children, if they were not separated to one side of the classroom and instead allowed to integrate, if they were treated with a little more

kindness from the teachers, and if we were enlightened of their plight, I would have known better. Perhaps, I would have shown some compassion instead.

Closure of the Home

"*Children's Home to be closed after 33 years*" was the caption on the front page of the *Tuam Herald* on the 4th of February, 1961. Galway County Council, who was the controlling authority, agreed with the Department of Local Government and Public Health to the closing of the institution. For some years past the renovation of the Home was under consideration, but this was finally rejected by the department on economical grounds. The occupants were to be sent to similar institutions such as, the Sacred Heart Home, Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath, St. Patrick's, Cabra, and Sean Ross Abbey, Roscrea.

By the summer of 1961 the Home was evacuated. The Tuam Town Commissioners discussed the matter of what to with the building. Some suggested to place the proposed new clinic there, but this was strongly objected to as unsuitable and unacceptable, because of its dilapidated state, and because the clinic needed to be centrally located for ease of access.

The Home, where hundreds of children had passed through over the decades was destined to crumble and decay behind the high stone walls that surrounded it. Over a decade later it was decided to raze it to the ground, and to build a housing estate on the seven acres where it stood.

The Little Graveyard

When the Sisters and the children vacated the Home, this gaunt, dark, formidable building stood silent for many years, its grounds sprouted brambles, nettles, and weeds, and its only visitors were a few local boys who scaled the high wall looking for adventure in this wilderness. It was on one of those escapades as the boys played at the very rear of the gardens in the Home, that they came upon a sort of crypt in the ground, and on peering in they saw several small skulls. I'm told that they ran for their lives and relayed their find to their parents. There didn't seem to be much local knowledge of a graveyard in the Home, and it was presumed that this area was used to bury the famine victims, and

later perhaps the Home stillborn. With the building of the new housing estate, the old high walls that surrounded the Home were pulled down, and the graveyard area became a dumping ground. One of the new residents who had acquired one of the houses had heard the story of the partly open crypt and decided to investigate, and to take some sort of action to give those little souls some dignity. He and his wife contacted the late Joe Burke, local councillor, and he in turn organised the County Council to close the entrance to the crypt, level the ground and re-seed the area. This couple then took it upon themselves to build a little grotto in the graveyard and planted roses and creepers all around the surrounding wall. For the past 30 years, this wonderful couple have volunteered their tireless service to keep this little graveyard in prime condition.
After many interviews with people of the locality, no one could answer my question as to why there would be a crypt in this area. I only ever had heard of a vault being on consecrated ground, or otherwise located in the grounds of the landed gentry. On checking the 6" Ordnance Survey map for 1905 of Tuam which shows the layout of the workhouse, before it became known as the Home, I noted a sewage tank in the vicinity of the graveyard. This tank served the workhouse, so this was not a burial ground back then. I next checked a 2007 O.S. Map for the same area, it being on the same map scale of 1:2000. By placing a tracing of the 2007 map on top of the 1905 map, it is quite evident that this tank is right in the middle of the graveyard. The graveyard is recognisable on the 2007 map by the fact that it is the only green area left within the housing estate, and it juts out at a angle. The map does not indicate it as a graveyard. This sewage tank would have become idle when the new sewerage and drainage scheme was brought into Tuam in late 1930s.
There was also an underground tunnel somewhere in the Home, its location or use I have not been able to determine, but according to a *Tuam Herald* article, during the War years, it would have been big enough to house all the Home occupants if an air-raid was forthcoming.(16)
The article reads: "*The Co. Galway Homes and Home Assistance Committee at their monthly meeting held in the Children's Home Tuam, on Wednesday, decided to prepare a tunnel at the Children's Home for use an air shelter for the occupants of the Home…. Mr. Corbett suggested that a tunnel in the Institution should be used as a shelter... Secretary -*

It could, and the Assist. Co. Surveyor for this area could have it prepared to be used as such."
There was a tender for the Children's Home for the new drainage scheme.(17) It was around this time that the scheme was brought up the Athenry road area, and it seems likely that the Home would have availed of this scheme.

Deaths in the Home
Throughout the years of the Home's existence, I noted several advertisements in the *Tuam Herald* archives, placed by the Home for "Tenders for Coffins". One such Advertisement for the year 1939 read as follows. "*Tender for coffins for Children's Home, plain and mounted, in three sizes, must be 1" thick, made of seasoned white deal, clean and free from knots and slits, pitched and stained in large, medium, small sizes. Mounting must be similar make, but mounted with Electro Brassed Grips, Breast and Crucifix.*"(18)
These advertisements appeared sporadically indicating that deaths were a regular occurrence in the Home. I needed to investigate further. What I found was that a staggering number of children lost their lives in the Home. While the following figures are shocking, it should also be remembered that Ireland had at this time a very high infant mortality rate, with routine vaccinations for commonplace diseases such as measles and tuberculosis and other advances in medical care still some decades off.
For the years 1925 - 1926, 57 children, aged between one month and three years, (plus two, aged six and eight years) died in the Children's Home.(19) Of this number, 21 died of measles, other causes were convulsions, gastroenteritis, bronchitis, tuberculosis, meningitis, and pneumonia. Another outbreak of measles for the months November to December in 1936, took the lives of 22 children, all under 3 years of age.For the years 1930 to 1960 (when the last death as recorded), I took a random list of children from each decade who had died, the full amount of deaths being too numerous to record. Other causes of death were as follows; pertussis (otherwise known as whooping cough), anaemia, influenza, nephritis (kidney inflammation), laryngitis, congenital heart disease, enteritis, epilepsy, spinal bifida, chicken pox, general

oedema (dropsy), coeliac disease, birth injury, sudden circulatory failure, and fit. Measles became less of an epidemic. Most of these children were under three years old.

I now needed to check the cemetery register to see if there was a special plot for all those little angels, and if there was some sort of memorial to them. The Tuam Cemetery Register is now in the keeping of Galway County Council.(20) To my astonishment, on viewing the register, I found that only two of the children who had died in the Home were registered in this book, but they have been buried with their kinfolk. Where were all the others buried? The County Council Archivist suggested that perhaps the Bon Secours Sisters kept their own register.

Following her advice, I wrote to the Bon Secours Archivist in Cork, but she informed me that they did not have any records on the Home, that when they left Tuam, all records were forwarded to Galway County Council, who later handed them to the Western Health Board in Galway. On contacting the WHB they had no knowledge of a register. Perhaps none was ever kept, or it was lost in time. Perhaps some of the children were claimed by relatives to be buried in cemeteries outside the Tuam area, but it is possible that with so-called illegitimate children far outnumbering orphaned children in the Home, and knowing that relatives would not acknowledge them in life, it is quite unlikely that these relatives would claim them in death. Is it possible that a large number of those little children were buried in that little plot at the rear of the former Home? And if so, why is it not acknowledged as a proper cemetery? The Ordnance Survey now indicate all "cilleens" (cemeteries for unbaptised babies) on their current maps. This little cemetery is not acknowledged in any shape or form, and would have been forgotten about only for the kindness of the local couple who tend it so well. What remains now is to erect a specific memorial in this cemetery indicating that here lie the "Home Babies".

In his correspondence with me, Michael Hession had penned a poem about his life. The following two lines from his poem sums up this whole sad era in our history:

"Suffer us Children that carry this cross,
Suffer us Children that Ireland forgot."

(Sadly, I have just recently heard that Michael has passed away. I truly

hope he has found the peace that had eluded him all his life).

References

1. The Tuam Herald, 11th March 2010, Omnibus.
2. The Bon Secours Sisters, and St. Mary's Children's Home (First in Glenamaddy and later at Tuam).
Bishop James Fergus. (Copy in possession of Bon Secours Sisters, Cork).
3. Report of the Irish Poor Law Commission By Charles Eason, M.A. (Read before the Society on Thursday 26th January 1928).
4. The Tuam Herald, 3rd October 1925.
5. Sutherland Halliday Irish Journey. Wyman & Sons Ltd., Fakenham, UK. 1956.
6.The Connaught Tribune 24th April 1998. Tribune Extra.
7. Sutherland Halliday Irish Journey 1956.
8. Kelly Ruth J.A. Motherhood Silenced The Liffey Press Dublin 2005.
9. Report of the Irish Poor Law Commission Vol. 32 30th October 1929.
10. McAvoy Sandra L. The Regulation of Sexuality in the Irish Free State 1929-1935 Cork University Press 1999 p.p.253-266.
11. The Connaught Tribune 25th April, 1931.
12. The Tuam Herald 24th October 1953.
13. The Tuam Herald 30th June 1956.
14. The Tuam Herald 30th June 1956.
15. The Tuam Herald 27th November 1954.
16. The Tuam Herald 20th July 1940.
17. The Irish Independent 27th April 1937.
18. The Tuam Herald 25th February 1939.
19. Register of Births, Deaths and Marriage. Community Services, 25 Newcastle Rd., Galway.
20. Galway County Library Headquarters, Nuns Island, Galway, Register on Microfilm: GC/ENV l/28

The flower will lose its beauty,
All fountains their water,
The sea its birds,
The forest its beasts,
The earth its harvest-
All these things will pass before
Anyone breaks the bonds of our love
And I cease caring for you in my heart'.

Matthew of Rievaulx

Martin Sixsmith author of the book "The Lost Son of Philomena Lee" interviewed Catherine and Aiden Corless and Teresa Killeen Kelly for a documentary which is to be aired in May on the BBC.

The Committee at the graveyard
Oct. 2013

If you feel you can become a patron of this project Please contact:

Chairperson:
Teresa Killeen Kelly
63 Parkmore Estate Tuam
Tel: 086-3369281
Email: tsrkelly@gmail.com

Secretary:
Caroline Canny
Primary Health Care Coordinator
Western Traveller and Intercultural Development
Bru Bhride Tuam
Tel: 093-52515
Email: caroline.westtrav@gmail.com

Treasurer:
Anne Creaven
51 Athenry Road Tuam
Tel: 087-6403123

You can also make a donation to the project's St. Jarlaths Credit Union Account:

A/C Number: 12747355
Sort Code: 90 39 71
Quoting Reference No.: 497047

A Postal Order/Bank Draft/Cheque can be made payable to the Children's Home Graveyard.

Or contact Catherine Corless on 093-38043 or email the committee on childrenshomegraveyard@gmail.com For alternative arrangements.

We are asking families, groups and businesses to donate and become a patron.

I _____wish to become a patron
By donating

€50 ____

€25 ____

€15 ____

Other ____

Looking forward to a positive response

Chairperson: Teresa Killeen Kelly

Please fill in your details:

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Contact Details: _____

Tel: _____

E-mail: _____