



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Mother-and-baby Institutions – Disposal of  
Bodies: Stakeholder Briefing

19 June 2024

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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### Mother-and-baby Institutions – Disposal of Bodies: Stakeholder Briefing

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Ms Paula Bradshaw (Chairperson)  
Ms Connie Egan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Pádraig Delargy  
Mr Harry Harvey  
Mr Brian Kingston  
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin  
Ms Emma Sheerin  
Ms Claire Sugden

**Witnesses:**

Ms Toni Maguire                                      Archaeologist and anthropologist  
Ms Siubhánín Ní Chutneagan      Campaigner

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** I welcome Toni Maguire, consultant archaeologist, and Siubhánín Ní Chutneagan. You are welcome, ladies. Are you happy to brief the Committee?

**Ms Toni Maguire:** Thank you very much for having us this afternoon. As you know, I am an anthropologist and archaeologist. My research at Queen's University Belfast into the locations within the landscape of cillíní in 2004 started my passion to investigate infant burials at marginalised furtive sites.

My involvement in Milltown Cemetery started in 2008, when I was contacted by Brian Gibson, the legal representative for the diocese. I was subsequently asked, at that meeting in Lisbreen, if I would take on the research to identify the location and extent of burials in land sold by the diocese to Ulster Wildlife Trust in 2000. At that meeting, I was told that the Church had no money, and I said, "No problem, I am willing to take on the research", but I had a number of stipulations in lieu of payment. The first and most important stipulation was that I would stay with the project until it was completed to my satisfaction, not the Church's. The second was that any land that was brought back into the stewardship of the cemetery was to be cared for and basically never disturbed or used for burial again. Monsignor Colm McCaughan, who was present at the meeting, agreed and accepted my terms on behalf of the diocese. The subsequent research into the land at Milltown Cemetery and the Bog Meadows over the four years that I worked there is well documented. As a result, 6.28 acres containing approximately 11,000 souls was brought back into the cemetery in 2011, with promises from Bishop Noël Treanor that the land would never again be used for burial. However, my experiences in dealing with the Catholic Church and religious groups over the past 16 years have proved that their promises do not always hold water. Milltown has just issued news that it is releasing new areas for burial — new graves — in the proximity of the current burial graves — the babies' graves.

The issues surrounding the Tuam mother-and-baby home hit the headlines in about 2013 or 2014. When I visited Tuam, I could see that the site did not hold individual baby burials, as Catherine Corless had thought, but there was evidence of tunnels within a small section of land. I spent the next couple of years between the North and the South supporting various groups that were investigating other mother-and-baby homes for marginalised burial, including Sean Ross Abbey in Roscrea and Bessborough in Cork.

To my knowledge, the only mother-and-baby home to be investigated for burial so far in the North has been Marianvale in Newry. When I started the research into that site, I got the usual statement: "There are no burials. There are no records", or whatever. However, that was not entirely true. Among the documents at the parish house in Carrickcruppen was a baptism register for Marianvale, which made very interesting reading. The data showed that, along with women from elsewhere in Northern Ireland, pregnant women were being moved from mother-and-baby homes in the South of Ireland up to Marianvale in the North. They appear to have stayed there for a short time until their baby was born, and then they disappeared from the record — from the registers — and were either sent back to the mother-and-baby home that they had come from in the South or were just released.

That register also recorded information on the babies from Marianvale. Some were to be adopted, and, whilst some entries did have adoption order references, others did not. In some cases, it actually recorded information on the adoptive parents, such as their name, location and the changes that they made to the birth names of the babies whom they were adopting. Some simply noted that they were to be registered in Killarney. There were quite a few entries like that, and I tried to find out the reason for that. It turns out that there is a large children's home in Killarney, so I deduced that a lot of babies were being moved back down there to be adopted. One entry noted that a child was to be registered in the diocese of Cincinnati. It took me a while to consider why women were being moved and brought to Northern Ireland to give birth, because that is basically what it seemed like. I then realised that a baby born in the North of Ireland was a British citizen and was entitled to a passport but babies born in the South were not necessarily entitled to all their documentation. That could make it easier if babies were being adopted abroad.

There was another option as to why moving women around might be beneficial for the institutions concerned. Women incarcerated in homes — I stress that they were incarcerated — would naturally form friendships with other women in mother-and-baby homes. That could be difficult if they wanted to keep their babies in defiance of the pressure to have them adopted. The movement of women to another institution could undermine them further and perhaps make it easier to push the option of adoption on them. There is one other issue that came to me, namely that of plausible deniability by the institutions. If someone came back to an institution looking for their birth mother or information on their adoption, the order could state categorically, "There is no record of your birth at this institution", because, in fact, there would not be; it would be in a completely different legal jurisdiction.

I will discuss the fragility of records. I have dealt with Milltown Cemetery since 2008. As I came into that research on behalf of the diocese, I had access to records for roughly six weeks. When the diocese suddenly realised just how big the issue of marginalised burial in mass graves in Milltown Cemetery was, the records were withdrawn. I had to then resort to finding records and information elsewhere, with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) being my main source. However, there are still major issues with marginalised infant burial. In Milltown, for instance, there is a grave that is recorded in the registers as LM59. LM59 was opened in 1957 and contains nine individuals: three women and six babies. According to the gridded system in Milltown Cemetery as it stands today, LM59 does not exist. Where is LM59? Where are all the other graves? Gravediggers have said to us that there were loads of graves at the section where LM59 is. There are far too many questions and far too few answers.

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** That was very powerful. Thank you very much.

Have you approached the Department for Communities about whether it is going to legislate to regulate cemeteries that are not in state ownership?

**Ms Maguire:** Part of the issue is that private cemetery status has allowed religious institutions to, basically, legally get away with what they did. That applies to any burial ground that is attached to a religious group or order, or any institution that is governed by a religious group or order. It has virtually no legislation governing how you bury someone, how long you bury them for, and what you do with their remains if they are removed. In Milltown Cemetery in the 1970s, a large swathe of public ground — poor ground — was reclaimed by the cemetery. We have affidavits, which I have supplied to you, from people who were in the cemetery at the time, saying that those remains were removed, coffins

were broken up, bones were thrown in a skip, and some of the larger bones were dumped down in the Bog Meadows, where the babies are.

Very recently, on — what date in February?

**Ms Siubháinín Ní Chutneagan (Campaigner):** It was 1 February.

**Ms Maguire:** On 1 February, I was in Milltown Cemetery. I have been very concerned lately because they have been digging up the area where the babies are buried. They uncovered a disarticulated human femur. The police were called, and the cemetery's response to why the human femur was discovered in shallow soil was, "Well, you know, we reclaimed graves in the 1970s, and those are just bones from there that were dropped down the bottom". Further verifying statements from gravediggers and managers of the cemetery since the 1970s up to date reveal that those things have happened over and over again.

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** The Executive Office is going to hold a public inquiry. In what way would you like to see further investigation into your area of work?

**Ms Maguire:** The person who spoke before me — Eunan — made some very good points. Part of the issue is about the protection of records, as we found out with Marianvale. I have yet to investigate a site where I have not heard, "There's been a fire", "There's been a flood" or about some other act of God to account for the fact that there are no available records. That is not the case. There are records. They are available and are held by the religious orders etc concerned.

Part of the issue with the private cemetery status is that we need access to those records. People cannot join the dots without them. For someone to understand what happened at Marianvale fully, they need to be able to trace the mothers and babies who were brought from the South of Ireland into the North and then separated. To get the full picture, records have to be taken into a setting where they are preserved, looked at properly and accessible for people who are looking to find out what happened.

**Ms Egan:** Thank you so much, Toni and Siubháinín. We have met before. You have shown me pictures, and I have been down to Milltown. The scale is what I found most horrifying. Some will find it very hard to believe that it happened, but I hear more and more evidence about the issues being linked, which Eunan talked about. We have also heard from other people giving testament to the Committee about the culture that existed in this society around vulnerable people, women and people in poverty. It was absolutely horrendous. I want to give you the opportunity to elaborate on the scale of the unmarked graves in Milltown and the number of babies in those graves. I know that our remit is mother-and-baby homes, but I want to give you the opportunity to talk a wee bit more about any other people and family members who are in those graves, because I really want the scale of this to be put on record.

**Ms Maguire:** There are two main areas of public ground, as it is referred to, in Milltown Cemetery. There are three main fields in the middle of the cemetery that would originally have been outside the boundary. That is not consecrated land. There is also the large area at the bottom, where burying of babies continued into more recent years from roughly 1937, with the records going up to 1986. Gravediggers said that they just stopped recording at that point, but they continued burying until the 1990s. It is thought that 80,000 souls are buried in the land in the top section, and we have the figure of 11,000 for the bottom section. Those are not the true numbers for either area, however, because the graves were left open for a time. It was not the case that they opened a grave, conducted a burial and closed that grave. One grave, OG138, which is at the bottom section of Milltown Cemetery, contains 429 infants — that is 429. That grave was opened in 1974, and they were still burying in it in 1986. That grave was left open.

Part of the issue, throughout that long history, is that, because of the teaching of the Church, when a baby died at home, children who were stillborn or who died soon after birth and were not christened were therefore outside the remit of care of the Church and not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground. People had to find a way around that. There were two ways to do that: either they would sneak in and quietly put the baby into an open grave, which is a burial for which there would be no records; or, as would often happen, they would choose to avoid the stigma of burial in poor ground and bring the child to an area known as a cillín, which is like a folk religion site. The cillín would be close to something memorable in the landscape by which people could identify the spot and know where to go back to. In those cases, the baby would be buried in a small, shallow grave. Custom

dictated that the baby had to be buried between sundown on the day that it died and sunrise the next day, which further emphasised the furtive nature of the burials and the fear around some of those burials.

Those cases are actually categorised as "the dangerous dead". There were all sorts of categories for people who were buried together in mass graves. Nine times out of 10, they were the poorest of the poor: they did not have much in life, and they had less in death. When I asked what had happened to the records of the burials that had been reclaimed in the 1970s, I was advised that, "Well, they were just Tippexed out". I could not believe it. They were saying that they had just Tippexed them out. I was dumbfounded, and still, every time I think about that, I am dumbfounded. There are large numbers, and every grave in those sections of land are mass graves: it is common to see 30 or 40 buried in every grave.

**Ms Egan:** Thank you. It is shocking that there are 400 babies in an unmarked grave with no records of them for people's families.

**Ms Maguire:** The records are simply in the register. We have a register for those 429 babies, because that is a later section. In 1962, they brought in a stillbirth register in the North of Ireland, but that did not come into the South of Ireland until the 1990s. Prior to 1962, the only chance of having a record of the existence of a stillborn baby was if they were registered in the cemetery's records: there would be no birth certificate and, therefore, no corresponding death certificate — they would just disappear into the ether.

**Ms Egan:** May I ask one more quick question, Chair? That is concerning when it comes to mother-and-baby homes but also in relation to other areas. It is very important that we preserve those records and the graves for the families but also for the purpose of finding out the truth of what happened.

Can you talk a bit more about what is happening in Milltown? From what I have seen, evidence suggests that the mass graves are being dug up and sold as new graves. That has an impact on the families of those in the graves, but it could also have an impact on the families that are now burying in them and think that they have a plot in a grave where the rest of their family is but find out that it is actually on the site of a mass grave.

**Ms Maguire:** I was alerted to that. I thought that that was done and dusted. I thought that that land was safe, protected and that the Church was going to honour the promises that it made. Late last year, however, I happened to speak to someone who just casually mentioned that their parents had bought a grave in Milltown Cemetery. I thought, "But there are no graves. There is no new ground in Milltown Cemetery for sale".

Actually, the cemetery was closed in 1980 because there were no new graves. What happens is that the cemetery seems to close, and, maybe a decade or so later, it will open again, and there will be an announcement, "We've found new land". There is no new land in Milltown Cemetery. When we went down to find out what had happened, we discovered that they have 14-ton diggers that are, supposedly, digging drainage trenches in a very patterned manner across the whole section of land where the baby graves are.

Some of these burials are 12 inches below the soil. Twelve inches, and they are layer on layer on layer. You go on to that land with something like a 14-ton digger with a toothed shovel on the front of it tearing up trenches, and you will destroy the evidence that is there. We also know that lorries were coming in the early hours of the morning to remove huge soil heaps from the land, so anything that was disturbed and broken up has gone.

There is also a section on the right-hand side at the bottom of the cemetery know as section D. There are no records for section D in the cemetery office, although we have affidavits from not only gravediggers but past managers from Milltown Cemetery. They said, "We laid out those graves. We buried babies and individuals in those graves", and they have signed affidavits to that effect. Yet, according to the cemetery, "We have no records". That is why it is selling the land. Again, it is a plausible deniability issue, because the cemetery is saying, "We have no records to show that there are burials here". I have spoken to gravediggers who currently work in the cemetery, and they said that digging up remains was quite a regular thing.

Earlier this year, the diocese had told us that it had an archaeologist doing a watching brief. That normally means that, if someone is on land that they suspect may have burials, as the digger takes off

the surface, literally inches at a time, an archaeologist walks in front, behind the shovel, to make sure that nothing is disturbed. We attended for 14 days in a row, and on only two of those 14 days was an archaeologist even present on the site. When the femur was uncovered, there was no archaeologist. It took a phone call from someone in the digger before, 15 to 20 minutes later, someone arrived.

**Mr Delargy:** I have a lot of questions, to be honest, but I want to touch on just two issues at the minute. You mentioned the first, which is cross-border working and the fact that you have been working all across Ireland on this. I think, Paula, that you mentioned DFC as well. For something as critical as finding answers here, we cannot work in silos. I am keen to hear what is already in place to ensure that there is that cross-border cooperation and learning. What do we need to learn from what has happened and gone wrong in similar circumstances, and how do we ensure that it is done better?

**Ms Maguire:** I had a meeting with some members of the committee looking into the mother-and-baby homes issue in the North. I was due to speak to the commission in the South in March 2020, but COVID hit, and that did not happen. I spoke to the commission here and gave it a lot of information and pointers.

There are some areas where, I suspect, records are outside the control of the Church, such as Marianvale. The babies born to Marianvale were not born in the home, because it opened much later. It did not open until the 1950s. The babies were born at Daisy Hill Hospital, so Daisy Hill Hospital will have records. We were informed that the files are known as the 132 files because that was the address of the home — 132 Armagh Road. The hospital will have information on any infants who died, and, very likely, the hospital buried the babies, but we still have not found the babies who are recorded as having died at Marianvale, which leaves that as an open case. That needs to happen.

When babies were being transported to the South of Ireland, there has to have been a paper trail; there has to have been. There are also money trails to look at. Think about every mother who went into a mother-and-baby home: there will have been a number of trails of finance. First, there was the family. The Church will have asked for a donation towards the upkeep of their sinful daughter. Secondly, there was the unpaid labour that that woman went through for God knows how many years. Thirdly, there is evidence from some of the people who were adopted as babies by families in America that the adopting families were asked for a donation to keep the baby and the mother, which was very expensive. Fourthly, some were asked to sign a covenant that they would send a yearly donation, for as long as they lived, back to the order concerned. Those are four individual streams of information on money alone. There has to be some way of going back, even through government, to check what stipends were being paid to the mother-and-baby homes in support of mothers. What stipends were being asked for in support of a baby who died, to provide a coffin, maybe a grave and maybe a burial? You have to think outside the box when you are dealing with these institutions, because I guarantee that the Churches and the orders involved did.

**Mr Delargy:** There is —.

**Ms Maguire:** Sorry, I do not think that I finished answering your question. There is not a lot of cross-border communication and help in place right now. There have been some cross-border communications between the various commissions, but more needs to be put in place. I have real hope for our commission in the North because, historically, the Church and state here did not have the hand-in-glove relationship that they had in the South. The commission needs to have sufficient teeth. Records exist, and the commission needs to be able to go after them and get them.

**Mr Delargy:** That brings me to my next question. You said that, so far, Marianvale is the one in the North that has been investigated.

**Ms Maguire:** It is.

**Mr Delargy:** What are the next steps? What comes next?

**Ms Maguire:** When I started to investigate these sites, I originally started looking at cillíní in the landscape, which were small individual areas of ground where babies were buried. They would not be accepted by traditional religion. At that time, the sites and monuments record had 11 sites for County Antrim. I found 97 — 97. The sites and monuments record has updated its records. The same sort of criteria exist for those cillíní as exist for burial within institutional sites and poor grounds. Through the research, I found that certain patterns emerged when I interrogated the data. Those patterns are

useful when you come to look at any institution where marginalised burial occurred. There are certain spots in the landscape that you will definitely want to investigate, and, if possible, you will need to have collaboration with geophysics — an amazing tool for research. However, none of those is 100%. You cannot argue with the archaeology in the ground. At the end of the day, all of the different things — the maps, the aerial photographs, the ethnography, the geophysics — are pointing you to, and closing in on, the areas of interest that you then need to excavate. That has to happen without any excuses. It will happen. I am sure of it.

**Mr Delargy:** It is shocking to hear the number of sites in County Antrim alone. I am sure that the picture is similar across the North, so there is definitely a lot more to be done on that. Critical to this is that it cannot wait.

**Ms Maguire:** No.

**Mr Delargy:** People need answers —

**Ms Maguire:** Absolutely.

**Mr Delargy:** — now.

**Ms Maguire:** I have been doing this work for 16 years, and I still get stonewalled at every institution that I go to. That is OK, because it goes with the job, but I am one of those beasts who will not give up. I will find the information. It is there to be found. Often, the churches and orders will drop something or say something that indicates that they have records. At the end of the day, do not try to fool me.

**Ms McLaughlin:** Thank you, Toni, for your evidence. There is synergy between your evidence and Eunan's. Thank you for being dogged and keeping going. We have talked a lot about Milltown, but this happens everywhere. I have a story to tell, as, I am sure, do many other families. My parents and a sister who died at six months are buried in Ardmore Cemetery, but I also have a brother buried in that cemetery, and I have no idea —

**Ms Maguire:** You do not know —.

**Ms McLaughlin:** — where he is. He was born but died shortly afterwards, and, because he was not baptised, he was not Christian, he was not worthy —.

**Ms Maguire:** He was considered to be pagan.

**Ms McLaughlin:** Yes. He was not worthy of being buried in a site, so he was put in the ground somewhere in that cemetery. I have done a bit of investigation and think that I know the area where he is buried, but there is no physical memorial there at all. It is funny, because it is adjacent to the burial site of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. They have massive statues on plinths — going into the site, it looks majestic — where the sisters of the Good Shepherd convent, which was the Magdalene laundry in the Waterside, are buried, yet my brother, who died at home after a home birth and complications and children from that place are buried literally adjacent to there and have no memorial or anything.

**Ms Maguire:** According to the Church, they were unworthy of memorialising. They were unworthy. There are definite patterns to be seen when you look at a site. If you have an east-west-aligned church, for instance, the land just to the north of it is overshadowed by the church. That section tends to be darker, a bit damper and not so nice. That land is reserved for women and young children. Outside the northern boundary is where, often, babies or individuals who committed suicide were buried. There were different categories within the category of "dangerous dead". They definitely could not be buried with the great and the good; that would not be tolerated. They were marginalised and separated, and it was a case of, "Here are the people whom we accept; there are the people whom we do not".

People trying to find a solution for burying a baby in Ireland — Christian people coming forward to look for that — tried to get their baby buried as close as they could to what they saw as blessed ground, without being able to bury them in that blessed ground. That was always the scenario. We often see definite patterns when we go to a site, and we can read the landscape when we walk on it. If the land has been disturbed in any way, such as having been dug over, as at Milltown Cemetery, it is more

difficult to read when you walk on it. The vegetation over a grave will be different. You will see areas of land that have not been dug around the grave, and all that will add to the picture. In the spring, for instance, when fresh grass seeds and other things come up, if you hunker down and look, you will see rows of graves that you do not see when you are standing up and looking down.

There are definite ways in which you can walk out, start your investigation and focus it on where it needs to be. I fully understand what you are talking about.

**Ms McLaughlin:** My baby brother was born with original sin, so he could not be buried. People who committed suicide — that was a mortal sin — could not be buried in a site either. The cruelty of our past and of religion is still alive and well for all to see. We are trying to deal with that. I suspect that those areas are mass graves. It is about how we start to deal with the problem when it is so widespread. It happened in every parish in the Twenty-six Counties, so, without a doubt, it happened in every parish in the Six Counties. The scale of it is untold, and the damage is lasting. People of my generation and others are still trying to deal with what went on. We can talk about the problem, but how do we resolve it in a humane way that gives respect to the dead and what happened to them without disturbing them?

**Ms Maguire:** We can very gently excavate. When we did the excavations at Milltown, for instance, we went down only to the presence of the top layer. It was not necessary to go further. If you disturb those graves in any way, you could literally destroy the very thing that you are trying to protect.

You follow the archaeology. Once you come upon a grave, you have to follow the direction and see how far the archaeology stretches. You need to identify that, and that needs to be taken very seriously. Some of those 97 cillíní that I discovered in documentation and on maps were just gone by the time that I got around to looking at them — somebody's housing estate was over the top of them — so that is exactly what you have to do.

The same thing is happening in the South, for instance, where large institutions are being sold off without identifying where the burials are. Planning is saying, "Yeah, OK, you are selling it. Let's put up a block of flats". When an area of an institutional building or church is coming up for sale, there has to be something in the planning permission that recognises the potential. It is not always only the babies who were buried within the institutions. With a home birth, quite often, people bury close to a convent because they consider it hallowed ground. So, there are possibilities of a cillín being established outside the boundary, and you are not even aware that it is there. However, archaeologists will know that there is potential for it being there, and archaeology teams need to be given the chance to go in and establish whether there is archaeology that needs to be taken into consideration. If the land is clear, fine — happy days, away you go — but, until that happens, we continually lose those sites and the babies who are there.

**Ms Sugden:** Does the Church seem interested in preserving the sites?

**Ms Maguire:** No.

**Ms Sugden:** No?

**Ms Maguire:** No. Some of the affidavits that I sent into the group contain statements from people who were brought into work, for instance, in Milltown Cemetery and were told, "We know the babies are all over here, but we've established a car park on it. We know they go much further, but, until the issue is raised, don't deal with it". Everyone was brought to a tiny postage stamp of an area, and 11,000 people were supposed to be buried in that small area — not even remotely possible.

Also, there is the issue of a lease. If I buy a grave in a council cemetery, I buy a grave in perpetuity. If I buy a grave in a private cemetery, I get a lease: basically, I rent the grave for a period. Currently, the graves in Milltown Cemetery that are being sold were leased for 75 years. As the law stands, the cemetery is legally entitled to remove remains and resell the grave, which is where we come back to private cemetery status.

**Ms Sugden:** Does the Church recognise the wrong? It is a difficult one. I suppose that it was guided by a faith and a religion in what it did. Surely, if the Church recognises the wrong, there is an attempt to address it by preserving the graves. Where I am really struggling with this is that what the Church is allowing to continue to happen is horrifying.



**Ms Maguire:** It is. What does that say about us as a culture?

**Ms Sugden:** It was the Church itself.

**Ms Maguire:** Exactly.

**Ms Sugden:** I am concerned about what it says about what the Church did back then and whether it is regretful.

**Ms Maguire:** When I started the research, I had that meeting at Lisbreen and explained to representatives of the diocese, "Look, what happened in the past has happened in the past. We cannot change what happened in the past. However, you can do a lot going forward. There has to be recognition. We are not looking to nail anybody to the wall for this. We are looking for recognition. Bring back the land that has the burials etc".

That was what I thought we had agreed to, but the current actions show me that that is not the case. They are quite happy to wait for a decade or two and then turn around and bring out the land again. While they may be, on the face of it, very sorry that it happened, I am not so sure that it is not simply that they are very sorry that they got caught. It is still not being addressed.

The diocese has said that the records for Milltown Cemetery are being digitised, but past managers and gravediggers have said that massive volumes of records are missing. I do not believe that they are missing; I think that they are not available. Therefore, if they continue to do what they are doing, unchallenged, it means that they are not sorry for what they did in the past. Siubháinín contacted Bishop Noel Treanor when we discovered that this land was being disturbed, and he told her, "It was a long time ago, and I have moved on to a different job". He was basically washing his hands of it. That is really not good. It is not a good look for the Church.

**Ms Sugden:** That is shameful.

**Ms Maguire:** They could do so much. I said to them before, "This is doable". It is doable, but their constant argument is, "We do not have land for a new cemetery in west Belfast". They recently sold 73 acres for development. That land is sold. Fair enough — I know that people need houses — but there is no extra infrastructure. They could have established a brand-new cemetery there, but the money would not have been instant. It would have had to come over time. Instead, they decided to come back to Milltown Cemetery. According to figures that were quoted to me, they expect to make £7 million to £7.5 million from the resale of graves in Milltown Cemetery in land that is already saturated with burials.

**Ms Sugden:** Do they believe that they need to do what you and others are working towards, or is it against their beliefs, if you like?

**Ms Maguire:** I had numerous meetings with the diocese. At one of the most telling ones, a legal representative of the diocese informed me, "We are in the business of making money". I thought, "Wow. There I was, thinking that you were in the business of saving souls, but there we go. How wrong can you be?".

**Mr Kingston:** Thank you, Toni, for all the information that you have brought us. It is astonishing and shocking. Even though we have heard some of it before, you are giving more detail. I talked earlier about disrespect for the living and the dead. It is about the power of the Roman Catholic Church, the oppression of people and the neglect shown by the state in allowing things to happen. Wrongs were done in the past, but there is a continuing cover-up. You are trying to shine a light on that, and it is right that you do so.

I have some knowledge of this through the work of Agnes Close and others on the baby plot at the City Cemetery, where infant deaths and early childhood deaths are marked. The stone states, I think, that over 7,000 babies are buried in an unmarked plot. At least there is a stone recognising the scale and number of babies buried in the plot at the City Cemetery. Agnes and others have done a lot of work, which the council supported in the end.

The only question that I have is on the process with the truth recovery panel. Were you able to feed into the panel's work and its interim report? Did the panel capture what you have said?

**Ms Maguire:** I do not think —.

**Mr Kingston:** Where are we with the public inquiry? Is that moving, or is it just on the shelf?

**Ms Maguire:** I think that it is moving to a certain extent. For instance, I was informed recently that the baptism register from Marianvale that I saw is no longer available. We had a meeting very recently, in December, with the Diocese of Down and Connor, at which Siubhainín asked, "Where are the records for Milltown Cemetery kept?". We were informed that they were kept in an attic of St Peter's Church. God forbid that there is ever a fire. It beggars belief. That is what we face all the time. It is about control. The diocese has total control, not only over the land but over the information in the records that is vital for getting a clearer picture of what happened in the past. Something has to be done to retrieve the records and keep the hard copies, because, if we do not, they could be lost. Some years ago, there was an incident outside Milltown. Someone who was passing noticed a skip and saw that some of the large ledgers — they are massive — were in it. The lady who saw them contacted the 'Andersonstown News' at the time, and it did an article. The cemetery office said, "Sorry. Those were thrown out by mistake". That is exactly the issue that we have here. It is plausible deniability. If there is no record book in the office that correlates, for instance, to section D, where we have ethnographic evidence that burials were conducted, how can we argue with that? Let us go in and have a look. Let us go in and take it. LM59 is so far outside the cemetery. There are two sections, two sides. You can have similar numbers, but they are slightly skewed. That grave, as it is recorded, if it is in section A, it is beside the motorway. If it is in section B, it is under the Boucher Road. That is how far away it is.

**Mr Kingston:** Right. Will you clarify whether you were unable to present evidence to the independent panel?

**Ms Maguire:** I spoke to — let me get it straight that I have got the right one — Sean O'Connell. He came to see me, and he had some other members with him. I gave him a lot of the information that you are getting today. I pointed him to where there is, I believe, other information that, unfortunately, I cannot get access to. I have also spoken to the PSNI on some of the issues; especially, potentially, the issue of moving citizens from one jurisdiction to another. What control was involved there? How was that traced? How can you track that? I have done that as well.

I really hope that the commission will get through a lot, and I think that it will, but speed is needed to a certain extent. It is important to move fast, because documents just disappear.

**Mr Kingston:** Can you or the officials tell me, Chair, whether the public inquiry is actually under way?

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** No. The Committee has not even been briefed on the terms of reference for that yet.

**Mr Kingston:** So, it is not under way formally.

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** No, but we have been told that the Bill that will bring it about is in the legislative programme.

**Mr Kingston:** OK. Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** Thank you so much. Would you like to say anything, Siubhainín?

**Ms Ní Chutneagan:** Yes. I would just like to thank you all for speaking to us today. I would like to say something on behalf of the families. We need to find our relatives. We need to mark that they existed. We are a group of families, many of whom had children who died and had their organs stripped without our knowledge. We never signed anything to allow that to happen. Many of those infants were buried in the land that we are talking about that was sold for the Bog Meadows, and the Roman Catholic Church then used it as a dump: it was paid by companies to allow skips and landfill on top of those graves. We know that the graves are there. We have the research. We have the grave numbers. The Church will not give up its records, but Belfast City Council has records through its burial orders — one issued for every person, infant or adult, who died in the city of Belfast — even when it was the Belfast Corporation. If we can get an independent body to access those records and it can then match them up with what the diocese will produce, we will have the exact number of people who are buried in that cemetery.

I would like to touch on one more thing —

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** Yes, of course.

**Ms Ní Chutneagan:** — from the families' point of view. When the Diocese of Down and Connor opened the upper poor ground in the 1970s, the Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service had to step in and stop it because there is disease in that land. That is why it was unable to sell any more of it. There is disease in that land and in those 100-year-old graves that it has been reclaiming daily. Our fear is that they will unleash a pandemic into the community. I would like the Committee to be aware of that.

**The Chairperson (Ms Bradshaw):** Thank you. That is a really strong point to end on. Thank you so much for your evidence today. We always reflect on everything that we have heard and chase it up with the authorities. Thank you for now.