

Timeline cards

1840-41	A workhouse was built on a six-acre site on the Dublin Road, Tuam, Co Galway between 1840 and 1841. The building was based on the standard workhouse design and had accommodation for 800 poor people.
1846	A workhouse was opened in Tuam, County Galway and immediately received famine victims.
1916	The former workhouse served as a military barracks, first for the British army, and later for Free State soldiers during the Civil War (1922-23).
1923	6 republicans who disagreed with the 1921 treaty between the new Irish Free State and the British government were executed in the yard of the military barracks.
1924	In May 1924, the Galway authorities contacted the Minister for Defence to ask for possession of a former workshop/military barracks in Tuam, Co Galway. Arrangements were made for the building to be handed over to the Bon Secours sisters who needed to move out of their children's home in Glenamaddy, Co Galway.
1925	The Bon Secours sisters moved from Glenamaddy to the new Mother and Baby home in Tuam, Co Galway on 2 June 1925. They were accompanied by 87 children and 26 mothers.
1927	Electric lighting was installed in the Tuam home.
1929	The superintendent of the Tuam waterworks visited in December 1929 and discovered that day-time water pressure was insufficient to reach the home; it could only get water from the town water system at night, otherwise it was dependent on rainwater that was collected in a tank.
1931	In 1931, an agreement was reached with Mayo County Council to admit women and children from that county (as well as Galway) to the Tuam Mother and Baby home.
1935a	In 1935, the secretary of a sub-committee of the Galway Board of Health with responsibility for the Tuam home described the existing sewage system in the home as defective, 'being merely drains without pipes leading to a septic tank outside'.
1935b	A maternity unit was opened in the Tuam home. Before this time, mothers gave birth in the central hospital [in Galway city] and were afterwards moved to the Tuam home.
1936	Work began on a new sewage system for the Tuam Mother and Baby home. This was finally completed in 1940.
1937	The home was registered under the <i>Registration of Maternity Homes Act</i> (1934) in December 1937, which meant that after this time the maternity unit in the home was subject to state inspections.
1943	The highest number of annual births recorded was in 1943, when 143 babies were born or admitted to the Tuam home.
1944	In 1944, Miss Clandillon, a Department of Local Government and Public Health inspector, said the numbers of children and mothers in Tuam was too high and a boarding out (fostering) system was needed to reduce the numbers.



1945	When the Department of Local Government and Public Health carried out an inspection of the Tuam home in 1945, it reported that the matron was anxious to have central heating installed and the inspector believed that this might reduce the numbers of infants dying in the winter months.
1947a	In 1947, the local authority approved the purchase a quantity of penicillin that Dr Costello (the medical officer to the Tuam home) required 'in connection with an epidemic of measles in the home'. In December of the same year, approval was given to purchase penicillin to treat influenza.
1947b	When Tuam was inspected in 1947, there was one isolation room in the maternity unit for women giving birth. There was no isolation unit for newly arriving women/children to make sure they did not spread infectious diseases to others in the home.
1947c	In December 1947, Sister Hortense (the Mother Superior) informed the local authority that she could not pay for provisions and clothing unless the weekly fee for mothers and children was increased.
1948	Miss Clandillon, a Department of Local Government and Public Health inspector, criticised the practice of boarding out (fostering) children with elderly foster mothers.
1950a	The inspection in May 1950 noted that there were three new-born infants in the nursery but the cots did not have the usual bed clothes, sheets, pillowcases, mattress saver etc. One infant was wrapped in a large grey blanket. Two others had old looking jerseys on and the inspector remarked 'I think the cots and the infants should be properly dressed'. When the Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health looked at the May 1950 inspection report, he suggested that an investigation should be carried out into the infant mortality rate in the Tuam home.
1950b	The visiting committee reported in August 1950 that the most urgent matters needing attention were repairs to the floor in the nursery, toilets and central heating. They described the home as 'very clean and well-kept and in first class order considering the conditions that the nuns labour under'.
1951	In 1951, aged 87 years, Dr Costello retired as medical officer to Tuam Mother and Baby home.
1951-52	There were some concerns about the registration of deaths of children in the Tuam home.
1952a	In 1952, the Mother Superior successfully applied for an increase of the weekly fee from local authorities to the Bon Secours nuns for the maintenance of mothers and children from 12s 6d to 18s.
1952b	A local engineer wrote a letter to the Archbishop of Tuam asking him to do something about the plan to transfer Mother Superior Hortesese from the Tuam home to Cobh, in Cork. The Archbishop wrote to the Regional Superior of the Bon Secours order, but stressed that he did not want to interfere in the business of the order.
1953	In January 1953, the weekly fee from local authorities to the Bon Secours nuns for the maintenance of mothers and children was increased to £1.
1956	An inspection of the Tuam home in 1956 found that if a baby was sick, they were looked after by their mother in a spare room. The inspection criticised the fact that a maid slept in the same ward as patients and that a kitchenette was occasionally used as a nursery.
1957	In 1957, a local doctor claimed that Galway County Council had collected payments worth £4,000 from some parents of women in the Tuam home and from the fathers (mostly poor farming boys or labourers) of children born in the home. The County Council also tried to collect money from mothers/grandparents of the children who remained in the home after their mothers left.



1959a	<p>The report of the visit by Department of Health officials to Tuam in November 1959 was very critical about conditions there.</p> <p>The day rooms had a minimum amount of furniture and play facilities. The room for slightly older children had a rubber ball and two seats. It had no floor covering; children aged one to two were in their bare feet. The dormitories were a major fire hazard with children sleeping on the second or first floor in large workhouse wards with no subdivision; many had 'absolutely no heating', no floor covering and no furniture other than beds and cots.</p>
1959b	<p>When the Department of Health decided in 1959 that the home should close, Miss Reidy, a Department of Health inspector who appears to have visited a number of times, remarked that there had been a dramatic improvement over the previous twelve months (toys had been obtained and children organised into play groups) and the Sisters of Bon Secours wanted to improve it further.</p>
1960a	<p>The 1960 report of the Irish Province of the Sisters of Bon Secours described their work at Tuam as 'work especially dear to the Heart of our Divine Lord'. They feared that Tuam would close because of declining numbers as it would be uneconomic to keep it open.</p>
1960b	<p>On 27 July 1960, the Minister for Health approved the closure of the Tuam home and the transfer of the children to other institutions.</p>
1961	<p>On 16 September 1961, Julia Carter, along with caretaker John Cunningham and Nurse Burke, turned the key in the Mother and Baby home on Dublin Road, Tuam for the last time. The reasons given for closing the home included that the building was a fire-risk with the costs of repair too high, a drop in numbers of women being admitted and the availability of places in other institutions for the people who remained in the Tuam home.</p>
1971	<p>The Mother and Baby home building in Tuam was knocked down and a new council-owned housing estate was built on the site.</p>