<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>The lost generation of mother and baby homes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authors(s)</strong></td>
<td>O'Brien, Valerie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication date</strong></td>
<td>2010-11-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publisher</strong></td>
<td>Nenagh Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item record/more information</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10197/3039">http://hdl.handle.net/10197/3039</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The adoption of children to general sense of relief that the time
A huge number of Irish families
which something that Irish people are
stories to come out of the darkness
'unknown' here in Ireland, but
of our past. Telling previously secret
individual cost.
articulated. The telling of these
Connections in that there
His book is an important starting
He found that the exact numbers
many, but it has also
experiences has been on the lives
unknown', and as their birth mothers / Irish
families. This would be an
important task in itself, but it is
also important as, due to the very
small number of adoptions now
taking place in Ireland, Irish
families that wish to build their families through adoption now
predominantly go overseas.
Ireland is in a unique position in
that few countries have the
experience of being both a
sending country and a receiving
country in adoption.
As researchers, we are eager to
explore what the impact of the
experiences has been on the lives
of the people involved, and to see
what has happened when search
and perhaps reunions have taken
place. We are also interested in
understanding the experience of
people who have decided not to
search, or where families here in
Ireland have decided that they
do not wish to get reconnected, even
when contacts were made. Finally,
we are interested in
understanding more of how the
adoptions were organised, and
how the mothers and fathers who
were left were dealt with here
in Ireland.
Times have indeed changed here
in Ireland. The stories of adoption
were invariably linked with unplanned pregnancies and the
few options open to women. An
unplanned pregnancy can still be a
major shock, but historically it was
a great trauma as the options open
to the single woman who became
pregnant were stark. If marriage was
data not a possibility, or wanted,
the woman's fate necessitated a
solution that could deal with the
banishment, shame and secrecy associated with her'
condition'. The fathers in such cases
were kept largely invisible by a society
which only saw a role for father if
marriage was an option.

It was as a result of these circumstances that the 'Mother and Baby Homes', run by different
domestic religious orders came into
being. The 'Mother and Baby' homes were located around the
country in such locations as
Belfast in Cork,
Castlepollard in Westmeath,
Stamullen in Meath, Dublin and
Roscrea. Many Tipperary people
already knew that Sean Ross
Abbey was located in Roscrea.
This institution was closed as a
mother and baby home in the
1970s. It was one of the largest
mother and baby homes, and over
400 children left from there for
the USA over the years.
For many women, these homes offered a lifetime but for others
their experiences were
characterised by humiliation,
terror and trauma. The pain of
separation from their children
was for many a life long event
that they endured in isolation.
The reality of the birth of their
children was rarely acknowledged by family or
community.
The need to document these
stories now is crucial. While the
stories will need to be seen as part
of their own times, they
nonetheless need to be gathered.
To date, there has been little or no
access to the records held by the
religious institutions. The need
for safeguarding information on
these records is understandable,
but ethical research includes
handling information with great
sensitivity.
In the meantime, the task of
collecting the stories is important.
Collecting stories will bring a
different perspective, because we
know that many of the stories
told to the different parties at the
time of the adoptions were not
always as they appeared. Older
children who left these
institutions had been cared for by
their own mothers into
childhood in many cases, and yet
American adoptive families
were not told that the child had
been cared for in this way. The
idea of the orphan fitted more
easily with the need to find
solutions for a problem that
needed to 'go away'. Likewise,
there were women who out of
desperation agreed to letting their
children be adopted but were
never told that their children
were in fact in the USA. There
were, no doubt, successful
outcomes for individual children
placed in the USA and these
accounts need to be gathered and
heard for a balanced perspective.

Many elements of society were
involved in these adoptions, and
as a society, we have shown our
readiness to hear stories of the
past and to acknowledge past
hurts. We think the time has now
come to open up the human side
of the Irish American adoption
stories. Our goal as a society
should be to avoid creating more
pain but in avoiding pain, we
must also be assured by the
possibilities that come from
bringing former secrets out into
the open. Sharing secrets may be
possible if we are first curious as
to why events happened, are
careful about avoiding blame on
different generation and make
sure that the people directly
involved are treated with respect
and dignity in the telling. The
parties involved will have
different views of the events, but
opening up the stories might give
us all a greater understanding of
the stories that connect us.