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Methodist Children's Home (1922-1959): Information to supplement the entry on the Find & Connect web resource

The Methodist Children's Home was run by the Methodist Homes for Children (MHC) and in a letter to the Assistant Minister for Child Welfare on 18 July 1942 (*Methodist Home for Children: reports and general correspondence*, SRO 1924/0755 v1), the Acting Secretary of the MHC gave some background on the Home's development. Methodist Children's Home opened on 14 October 1922 in a home that dated from around 1895, which was built as a 'Mission for Natives' by Canon Garland and known as Dullhi Gunyah. When 'it was decided to remove natives from the vicinity of large towns' the Methodist Church bought the property to use as a Home for children 'bereft of their parents'. A second cottage was built on 11 October 1924.

An undated and unsigned description of the Home in 1934 (SRO 1924/0755 v1, p.79 either April or May 1934) says that the Home was subsidised by the Child Welfare Department (CWD) at the rate of 7 shillings per child per week. When it opened in 1922, it had 8 boys and 1 girl and at the inspection of April 1934 there were 51 children, boys and girls.

After the age of 10 years, boys were transferred to the Werribee Farm School (Tom Allan Memorial Home) as it was 'not considered advisable to keep children over that age of both sexes in the one institution'. The author of the 1934 document, who was probably an officer of the CWD, 'understood that it is the intention of the Methodist authorities to conduct this institution on the cottage system, similar to the Parkerville Homes and Fairbridge Farm School.' The author noted that having a number of cottages with a cottage mother 'in charge' of each was an 'ideal' situation but 'naturally takes a great deal more money.'

A letter from the Secretary of the CWD to Rev. Butler of the MHC on 4 August 1933 also talked about the gap between the ideal and what was needed to reach it. The Secretary said that running a Children's Home 'carries with it a moral obligation to do the best in every way in the interests of those young lives for whom you are caring' but that there was evidence of 'financial convenience clouding the ideal'. He went on to say that he felt that 'one ideal is only a stepping stone to another ideal and it is more like the will-o-wisp, ever moving on as we progress, as so it should be, otherwise we lose the stimulant to effort.' The CWD also expressed high aims for the Home, but in practice their own financial support was very lean, being £12 per year per child in 1933.

The Methodist Children's Home was governed by the MHC Board. One of the Board's roles was to approve children for admission and forward the names of those children to the CWD to be entered onto the department's list of 'Foster Children' resident at the Home. At this time, a 'foster child' was a term used to describe any child who was resident in an institution. An example of this process is recorded in the Inspector's Report of 6 September 1938 (SRO 1924/0755 v1, p.160). The Inspector noted the presence of a child who was not on the CWD's list of foster children for the Methodist Children's Home. The Matron, Mrs Crowley, 'stated she had not sent in the Foster Form for this child as she did not know whether they were going to be allowed to keep him in the Home. She informed me that the Board had met the previous evening and that the matter of this child remaining in the Home had been brought forward for discussion and she expected to receive definite instructions within the next day or two...'. It is quite likely that there were a number of 'informal' admissions such as these over the years – and those children may not even have been entered onto the Admission Register of the Home.

Occasionally, Inspector's Reports (SRO 1924/0755 v1) comment on whether a particular child should be in that Home. For example in the November 1933 Report, the inspector wrote that a brother and

sister, aged 2 and 3 years were 'too young for institution life' and that action was being taken to try and find a foster mother for them (the children returned to their father four weeks later).

In March 1935 the CWD Institution Officer went with the Inspector to the Home and gave a description of the cottages and grounds (SRO 1924/0755 v1). 'The approach from the main gate to the Home is a plank road flanked by virgin bush and is not at all impressive. The ground surrounding the Home is dirty black sand' and apart from a 'basket-ball arena' there were no lawns or play areas. There were three cottages. Lynn Cottage was the main building, 'nicely built in brick' and was home to the Matron, some of the staff and 36 children. There were two dormitories 'big airy rooms, very clean but overcrowded. Instead of each inmate having at least 700 cubic feet of air space only 500 feet is given'. There was no lino or curtains or other 'small *furnishings* required by the regulations'. The Institution Officer was not impressed with the bathroom, writing that it 'passes my comprehension' how the Matron and staff could get the boys clean after they had been playing in the dirty sand. There were two more cottages, 'very old' and wooden which had been 'recently renovated' but were not in good condition. The cottage closest to Lynn Cottage was used as a kitchen and laundry but was 'in disrepair'. The stables and cow-shed were too close to this cottage (and were the cause of continual complaints by the CWD until they were replaced in 1939). The other 'old cottage' had the dining room and more dormitories. The dining room was 'good, but needs renovating' but the dormitories were 'not of the best' and needing more furnishings. There was a south-facing verandah on the side of this building where 'the bed-wetters and some of the younger children sleep'. The dormitories were 'very unsightly' with some beds being 'full-size with short mattresses' and another bed 'repaired with fencing wire' because 'the legs had come adrift'. All in all, the Institution Officer felt that the Home as it was when he inspected it 'compares very unfavourably with other institutions'. The Institution Officer noted that all institutions had been 'hit...very seriously' by falling donations during the depression but that the time had now come to require the 'Methodist Authorities' who were 'new to institution work' for 'neglected and orphaned children' to bring the Home up to a modern standard. He concluded his description of the Home with praise for the Matron and wrote that the 'children reflect the good food they are receiving, are happy, contented and well-clothed.'

Although the physical conditions did not meet departmental standards, the children reportedly (SRO 1924/0755 v1) had 'more freedom' at this Home than others in the State and this impressed the Secretary of the CWD, according to a note he made on the file below the Inspector's Report of October 1936.

The 25 May 1941 Inspector's Report (SRO 1924/0755 v1) noted that a gravel playground had been built at the Home. A report on 5 November 1940 said this had been donated by the Mayor of Fremantle, Mr Locke. According to the Inspector's Report on 6 April 1939, Mr Locke had been a Treasurer of MHC. He donated £70 per year to the Victoria Park home, this being the stipend he received as a member of the Fremantle Tramways Board. A tennis court had been donated by the Como Tennis Club and was finished by the time of the Inspector's Report in December 1941. However, not all donations were as generous. Inspections throughout the 1930s noted that the children were well-dressed. These clothes were second-hand. But the Matron explained to the Inspector in October 1935 that many of the donated clothes were 'in such a state that nothing else could be done but burn' them. The Inspector wrote, 'from this it would seem that some people have the idea that anything is good enough for an institution where children are housed.'

Clothing the children was difficult, as the Inspector's Report and a memo from the CWD Institution Officer noted in September 1933 (SRO 1924/0755 v1). A family group of children had been admitted to the Methodist Children's Home with hardly any clothes. The CWD Institution Officer wrote about these children to the Chief Clerk of the CWD. He said that the fact that the department did not

supply children in Homes with clothes made it difficult because 'a lot of children are admitted with the clothes they stand up in only.' The Institution Officer had 'discussed this question of supplying outfits for children in institutions very fully with the late Secretary, Mr Watson' who told him that 'it was not possible' for the department to supply clothing. The Chief Clerk agreed with Mr Watson and no clothes were supplied for the children at this time.

Reports (SRO 1924/0755 v1) show that the children from the Methodist Children's Home went to East Victoria Park (or Vic Park East) Primary School from 1923 to at least 1938. Some senior girls went to the Kent Street High School. The Inspector's Report on 28 October 1936 noted that the children did not 'march from school in the usual crocodile manner, but are allowed to wander back to the institution acting in the same manner as ordinary children would if returning to their own homes.' They were dressed 'quite as well as any ordinary children going to school' according to the Inspector's Report a year earlier. In 1953, the annual report of the Child Welfare Department (*Signposts* 2004, p.351) noted that some of the older girls went to the Perth Technical College to study dressmaking and millinery, hairdressing and commercial courses.

As part of a general exodus of institutions during World War Two, children from the Methodist Children's Home were evacuated on 31 March 1942 to Werribee Farm School. Three girls, all of whom were wards of the State, stayed at the Home so they could go to Kent Street High School. An inspection at the Methodist Home for Children's East Victoria Park site on 1 July 1942 reported that the children were due to return from Werribee Farm School on 7 July 1942 because there was a soldier's camp next to Werribee and the Methodist authorities did not think that proximity was good for the children.

The Methodist Children's Home was required by the CWD to make and keep certain records. At the inspection of the Home on 22 March 1937 (SRO 1924/0755 v1, p.133), the Inspector noted that there was no Punishment Book, Medical Register or Journal of Events. The March report noted that there had been 'no recent cause to administer punishment for serious breaches of discipline' but that 'sometimes children are given a slap with the hand'. At the October inspection of that year (p.142), there was still no Punishment Book. A Punishment Book (with one entry) was in place by the Inspection on 8 February 1938 (p.147). The March 1938 inspection records information from the Punishment Book and Medical Register (p.150). The CWD's inspection of the Home's children and records at the Werribee Farm School on 22 June 1942 noted that the matron had left and that therefore no records were able to be inspected.

Between 1937 and 1940 some of the punishments reported (SRO 1924/0755 v1) included:

- 'Minor complaints' about 'behaviour' - 1940
- Returning home more than two hours late from the pictures, with the punishment being 'the strap' -1939
- Going out to lunch after Girl Guides Parade without permission and telling lies, with the three girls being 'strapped' - 1938
- Stealing from the pantry, with the punishment being 'sent to bed' – 1938, 1939
- Stealing from the pantry, with three boys being 'strapped' - 1938
- Truancy, with the punishment being 'the strap' - 1939
- Truancy, with two boys being 'locked in a room for 2 hours and denied fruit for the next day' - 1938
- Hoarding rubbish under the mattress, with the punishment being 'the strap' - 1939
- Hitting other children, with the punishment being 'made to do extra work' and 'given half a lunch' - 1939
- Taking flowers out of the garden, with the punishment being 'caned' - 1938

- Being 'disobedient, speaking very rudely and being stubborn for some hours', with the punishment being 'strapped' - 1938
- Stealing and destroying another boy's bank book, with the punishment being a 'strap on the legs, administered by Matron' (this child was subsequently transferred to Swan Boys' Home) – 1938
- Destroying trees, with the punishment being a 'strap on the legs, administered by Matron' – 1938
- Insolence, with the punishment being a 'strap on the legs, administered by Matron' - 1938
- 'Giving cheek' and 'getting into tempers', with the punishment being 'the strap' - 1938
- Misbehaviour in Sunday School, resulting in children's names being entered in the punishment book, but the punishment not recorded - 1938
- 'Causing us bother' - 1937

The Inspector's Reports sometimes mentioned special activities (SRO 1924/0755 v1). The Inspector's Report of 25 January 1933 said that 25 children were on holidays 'with Methodist families lasting from 2-5 weeks' in the metropolitan area and country areas such as Kalgoorlie and Albany. This seemed to be a common practice. In the 1920s it was also reported that the children went to the country for the long holidays.

The Inspector's Report in December 1933 said the children were at an afternoon performance at Boans Ltd when the inspector visited. In the October 1935 Report, the inspector wrote that 'all the bigger children were going to the Royal Show' and in October 1934 the children were reported to be 'excited about the Show and the Duke's visit.' The May 1941 Report noted that the older girls were going to a Girl Guides concert at Anzac House on that evening and 'their uniforms were all being pressed for the occasion.'

The Inspector's Report of 6 September 1938 said there was a large room in the wooden building that was set up in 1938 for the boys' recreation. However, it was not used very much by the boys because they were 'all small lads' who would 'prefer to go to bed early.' The room was used at night for 'reading and sewing and playing games' by the older girls and it was also used on Sundays for religious services. The Inspector's Report from 17 January 1940 described a 'Model Doll's House with four rooms and an attic' that had been set up and furnished. The Inspector said this was 'undoubtedly an item of interest to the young girls.' The Sewing Room and Play Room (too hot to use in summer) noted in Reports from the 1930s were not mentioned in the 1940 Report.

General life at the Home was also described from the authorities' viewpoint in Inspector's Reports (SRO 1924/0755 v1). Apparently, a cow was kept at the Home in the 1930s and 1940s so that the children could have milk every day, and it was noted in a 1936 Inspector's Report (July) that there were also 100 head of poultry. At the report of 25 May 1941, the Inspector noted that a 'large stewpan of Melon and Ginger jam' was on the stove and the younger children, 'the tinies' were a 'clean healthy happy looking lot of children'.

The food for children was recorded in the Inspector's Reports from the 1920s to the 1940s (SRO 1924/0755 v1). In 1927 a 'Dietary Table' was drawn up. It shows that children had breakfast (bread and milk or porridge, with bread and jam) very day. Lunch was bread and butter or dripping, with jam and cake. Dinner was meant to be different each night, but it is not clear from the Inspector's Reports that there was much variety. There was generally some kind of meat dish with a pudding.

A sample of meals reported from the various years includes:

- Soup and steamed pudding – evening meal 1925

- Sausages, vegetables and sago milk pudding – evening meal 1926
- Beef stew and sago pudding - 1927
- Pea soup and milk pudding – evening meal 1930
- Pea soup and suet pudding - 1932
- Soup and milk pudding – evening meal 1933
- Rabbit lambs fry, and cheese and bacon – lunch 1933
- Meat pie and milk pudding – evening meal 1933
- Stew and sago pudding – evening meal 1934
- Stew, bread and butter custard – evening meal 1935
- Vegetable soup, stewed apple and custard, followed by a raw apple – evening meal 1936

In 1931 a parent working on a railway construction in the country had placed his three children in the Home (SRO 1924/0755 v1). He wrote a letter to the CWD on 27 February 1931 saying that he had been informed that his 'children were underfed' and asked the CWD to investigate. On 9 March, Miss Stewart inspected the children's lunches at the school. She reported that the lunch was '1 and one half fairly thick slices off a sandwich loaf of bread, one sandwich butter only, 2 fig jam – no butter, and a small piece of cake wrapped in newspaper.' As a comparison, the teacher showed Miss Stewart a lunch from a child from 'an average home'. Miss Stewart reported that this had 'about the same amount of bread but cut much thinner' with tomato and butter, but no cake. She then spoke to the children about their lunches and one of them 'said he did not get enough to eat'. Miss Stewart did not agree and said in her report that the child 'looked very well indeed despite this fact.' In June 1933 the inspector reported that she had visited the Victoria Park East school to examine the lunch of a child from the Methodist Children's Home. She found the lunch was 'fairly well cut but badly wrapped.'

The health of children in the Home also interested CWD inspectors (SRO 1924/0755 v1). There was an outbreak of mumps in 1939, reportedly even infecting Matron Crowley. There had also been whooping cough at the Home from the end of 1938 to early 1939, with many children suffering. The Inspector's Report of October 1937 noted that the children had been immunized against diphtheria. The 1937 and 1938 Inspector's Reports mentioned that there was no room to isolate children with infectious diseases. Sick children could stay home from school, but this didn't always result in the child getting more rest. An Inspector's Report in December 1935 noted that one of the older girls was home with a sore foot, but was doing the ironing. However, it seems that other conditions merited bed-rest. Another girl was sick in bed with a 'bilious attack' when the Inspector visited and in July 1934 there were three children in bed with the 'flu' during the inspection.

Some of the medical conditions reported in Inspector's Reports (SRO 1924/0755 v1) included:

- Sandy blight - 1941
- Eye trouble - treated, apparently successfully, in 1941 with Clarke's Lotion and Golden Eye Ointment
- Prolapse, requiring a boy to be hospitalised for 3 months in 1941
- Squint - 1941
- Abscess in ear - 1941
- Cold – 1927, 1932, 1939, 1940
- Rash - 1940
- Chicken pox – 1934, 1940
- Pneumonia – 1926, 1937, 1938, 1940
- TB gland – 1940
- Mumps - 1939
- Poisoned toe - 1939

- Whooping cough – 1932, 1935, 1939
- Sunburn - 1939
- Earache – 1939; Discharging ear - 1937
- 'Severely' bruised knee - 1939
- Tooth extraction - 1938
- Operation to the roof of the mouth - 1938
- Chronic eczema – 1938, with the remedy being a tonic and special ointment from the Doctor and hair cut very short around the ears to 'avoid infection'
- Tonsillectomy - 1938
- Infantile Paralysis – 1938 (later updated as 'misdiagnosed'), with prevention measures being to spray the children's noses every day, give throat gargles and wash hands in Lysol every morning and evening
- Scarlet Fever – 1934, 1938
- Rheumatism - 1937
- Stone bruises on soles of feet - 1936
- Bilious attack - 1935
- Chest condition - 1935
- Fainting turns - 1935
- Nerve - 1935
- Measles – 40 cases in one period in 1935
- Flu – 1933, 1934
- Croup - 1932

Children's illnesses were treated at a range of hospitals and medical clinics (SRO 1924/0755 v1), including the Children's Hospital; the Infectious Diseases Hospital (1938); and Sr Ballantyne's Hospital (1938 and 1941). In 1939 and 1941, Dr Paton's clinic is mentioned in relation to treating eye complaints. Dr Peacock (1937, 1939, 1940), Dr Crisp (1940) and Dr Williams (1936, 1937) also treated children from the Home. In 1940, children received dental treatment from the practice of Dodd and Herman and the Government Dentist Van was present at the Home during the December 1941 inspection.

The state of the children's dining room was also included in reports of inspections (SRO 1924/0755 v1). In March 1933 the Secretary of the CWD went to the Methodist Children's Home with the inspector. After the inspection, he asked for the Welfare Officer of the Methodist Homes for Children and the Secretary of the Ladies' Committee to come and see him. At that meeting, he told them that the children should not sit on benches (or 'forms') to eat. They should have chairs, for two reasons. Firstly, chairs were more 'homelike'. Also, sitting on benches made the children 'crouch over the tables and not sit up straight, which is undesirable.' The CWD Secretary's memo says that the children's 'tables still had on them the table-cloths used for the last meal' and were dirty with spilt food. He brought this up at the meeting, and suggested that 'the white cloths should be removed after each meal and the tables covered with some material such as red baize and a palm or two about the room' and that 'some pictures' placed on the walls of the Home 'would give the place a more homely appearance.' The Inspector's Report of 22 November 1938 says that there the Home had just bought 'new supplies of tablecloths' and 'four dozen towels'. The report of 8 June 1938 notes that the 'new linoleum' in the dining room was 'well polished'.

In most Inspector's Reports (SRO 1924/0755 v1), the condition of fly-wire screens was noted and toilets were checked to see that they flushed properly. The Inspector stated in the Report of 28 February 1939 that 'one of the cisterns in the girls' lavatory was over-flowing, whilst the pipe in the second lavatory was clogged. Matron assured me that this matter was receiving attention and showed me a docket on which new valves were on order.' Hand basins, baths and urinals were

regularly inspected for cleanliness. Two new bathrooms 'with two showers, bath and hand basin in each' had been installed and impressed the Inspector during the March 1937 inspection. This was a great improvement on the 'impossible' situation in October 1935, where the CWD Acting Institution Officer wrote that there was 'one porcelain plunge bath' for all staff and children, and 'four children bath in the same water consecutively.' During 1938 and early 1939, the Inspector was concerned about toothbrushes and hairbrushes. For example the Inspector's Report on 6 September 1939 says that 'no brushes or combs, tooth-brushes or paste visible in the Dormitories or Bath rooms'. Matron said that the children didn't have bags for these. Some of the children, she said, 'keep them in their cases, some in the cupboards in the Dormitories, some in the cupboards in the bathroom.'

In terms of the dormitories, comments were made in the Inspector's Reports (SRO 1924/0755 v1) about furnishings, bedding and general cleanliness. The CWD inspection on 29 November 1938 reported that there was 'very little space between beds' but that conditions were satisfactory apart from that and there was no follow-up comment regarding the 30 August 1938 inspection, where it had been noted that the 'fibre mattresses are very thin even though they appear to be new'. On 25 March 1942, the Inspector's Report noted that the boys' beds were 'again' being fumigated because of 'bugs' – a problem that had existed since the early 1930s. On 24 December 1941, fumigation of the 'wooden building' was reported. This time it was 'vermin.' The condition of the wooden building had been previously reported as 'dilapidated' and needing to be replaced with a brick building. In the Inspector's Report of 3 September 1941, it was noted that the Matron had had 'a dreadful time removing vermin from the old wooden building and beds' when new mattresses and 'cyclone white beds' were purchased.

According to reports (SRO 1924/0755 v1), the supply of water was a persistent problem at the Home, which appears to have come from tanks on the property rather than from Scheme water due to low pressure in the Sussex Street main line and the fact that the Home was on top of a hill. In the Inspector's Report of 22 November 1938, it was noted that a new 3,500 gallon tank had been installed, giving 1,000 extra gallons of water and that a 1,000 gallon rain water tank was also being prepared to be put under the roof of one of the larger buildings and provide extra water. The dry state of the grounds at the Home was mentioned in many Inspector's Reports during this period and the lack of water was a consistent explanation. However, the CWD was also concerned about the ability of the Home to put out a fire with such low supplies of water available and not enough fire extinguishers (the Inspector's Report in August 1938 notes that the Fire Brigade recommended six extinguishers but there were only two). In 1938, it was reported that extra water was being carried in by buckets from a local woodyard.

The Methodist Homes for Children (MHC), which ran the Methodist Children's Home, was often called upon to provide funds to upgrade facilities at the Home. New stables had started being built in March 1939 (SRO 1924/0755 v1) after many complaints in Inspector's Reports and discussions with the authorities from the MHC which, in 1939 donated a Maytag washing machine. This cost around &#pound;40, a great improvement on the previous troughs and coppers in conditions 'not worthy of the name of a laundry', according to a report in March 1936. The Inspector's Report of 5 September 1939 noted that the washing machine had 'considerably lightened the work for the staff'. Later Reports of that era make special mention of the washing machine continuing to work well.

The November 1940 Inspector's Report (SRO 1924/0755 v1) stated that a young man who had lived at the Home from 1922 to 1929 called in during the Inspector's visit. The young man was now a fitter and turner but had recently joined the Royal Australian Air Force to train as a pilot. He told the Inspector that he had been 'very happy there and wanted to see the Home again.'

Government reports (*Signposts*, 2004, pp.349-351) show that children from the Methodist Children's Home were placed out 'at service' with employers from the 1920s to the 1940s. By 1953, there was accommodation for up to 60 children including girls of all ages and boys up to 9 years. Four new 'modern and attractive cottage homes' on the site were noted in the Child Welfare Department's annual report in 1954 and the 'kiddies' were reportedly (*Signposts*, p.351) 'grouped in small families under the care of house mothers'. Published government reports do not identify the number of children who were privately admitted until 1957. In that year, there were 34 children in total, five of whom were wards of the State and two other children who were described as 'female migrants' (eight unaccompanied child migrants from Britain had been admitted to the Home during the 1950s). The proportion of children who were privately admitted to the Home continued to far exceed children who were wards of the State until the end of the decade.

From 1932, government reports (*Signposts*, 2004, pp.349-351) also recorded the number of children under the age of six years who were accommodated at the Methodist Children's Home. There were two of these young children resident in June of 1932 and 1933; between 7 and 11 children from 1934 to 1940; 12 youngsters in 1941; one child in 1944, no young children in 1945 and generally between 4 and 8 youngsters in the 1940s; and 5-12 young children at the June headcount each year between 1950 and 1959.

In 1959, the Methodist Children's Home site was renamed collectively by the name of its largest building, 'Mofflyn House'. It quickly became known as 'Mofflyn' and it continued under the Mofflyn name into the 1960s and beyond.