

# The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home

1906 – 1964

**Other Names:**

- Berry Street Foundling Hospital
- Berry Street

## Details

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The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home was the new name given in 1906 to the former Victorian Infant Asylum and Foundling Hospital. It accommodated babies and children up to the age of six. It also functioned as a maternity home, foundling hospital, adoption agency and trained Mothercraft Nurses. In 1964 it became known as the Berry Street Babies' Home and Hospital.

The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home was the new name given in 1906 to the East Melbourne institution formerly known as the Victorian Infant Asylum and Foundling Hospital. It was also known as Berry Street. It was located on the corner of Berry and Vale Streets, East Melbourne.

From 1914, it was run by a body incorporated under the Hospitals and Charities Act 1890, called the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home Incorporated.

In 1907, the institution began providing training for nurses. Berry Street would remain a significant training centre for mothercraft nurses until 1975 (although trainees were not known as Mothercraft Nurses until the 1930s). Nurses were apparently known as The Berry Street girls and were "familiar and popular figures around the streets of East Melbourne", according to Penwill. The Past Nurses' Association was formed in 1931, and held regular reunions and other social activities.

An article from 1911 states that, as a rule, the Foundling Hospital does not receive an infant without their mother, "who must promise to stay at least six months. If she refuses to stay so long she is plainly told she must take her infant with her ... In some cases, however, the mother is dead, and then the infant is, of course, not refused". At that time, there were 44 infants at the asylum, and 97 were boarded out (*Weekly Times*, 9 December 1911).

Children at Berry Street were sometimes accommodated in different premises to the institution in Berry Street, to give them "a change of air" and to convalesce from different diseases. The 1910-1911 annual report stated that some of the babies had spent time at a house in Bentleigh, owned by a Miss Buckley, who placed two of the rooms in her house at the disposal of the Hospital for three weeks, and also provided fresh milk and eggs. That year, the Hospital also used another house in Terry Street, Balwyn. The Committee reported that Mrs Robert Reid offered them "a newly-completed cottage at Balwyn, rent-free for three years ... The offer was gladly accepted, the cottage furnished and a tent erected on the land. The cottage and the tent will accommodate from ten to twelve babies, with nurses and attendants. Children are sent out in rotation, according to the discretion of the Matron, and it is felt that much benefit will accrue to the little ones generally, when the place is thoroughly organised" (1910-1911 annual report).

Children were sent to these alternative lodgings (referred to in one article as "supplementary asylums" in rotation (*Weekly Times*, 9 December 1911). The hospital's use of the Balwyn location ended up being short-lived: an

article in the local newspaper from March 1912 referred to an “unsatisfactory sanitary condition in connection with the foundling hospital” relating to disposal of its sewage. “It is greatly to the advantage of the neighbourhood that this institution is not continuing in the old premises” (*The Reporter* (Box Hill), 1912). The hospital’s annual report for 1911-1912 stated:

*It was with great regret that the Committee were forced to close the cottage home at Balwyn, so kindly donated rent free by Mrs Robert Reid, and from which such good results were anticipated. During the cool months of the year, this cottage home fulfilled all expectations; but with the advent of summer, the fact of the property not being sewered militated to so great an extent against the inmates of the cottage, and the residents in the neighbourhood, that its abandonment for the purpose of a convalescent home was compulsory.*

Berry Street had long been advocating for a country home, “handy to Melbourne”, to house its children. Such a home would enable the buildings in East Melbourne to function as a receiving home, and provide a more salubrious environment for children. In 1913, the Committee purchased a property at Beaconsfield to provide such a country home. The [Beaconsfield Babies’ Home](#) was opened on 6 May 1915.

Since the Victorian Infant Asylum was founded in 1877, it had been the practice for children to be taken care of at the institution until they were old enough to earn their own living. This practice changed however, around the 1920s period, and it became a babies’ home, caring for children only until they reached the age of three or four.

In 1927, the institution purchased a mansion named ‘Minerva’. It was situated on a neighbouring property in Vale Street. The building was renamed ‘Tandarra’ and became Berry Street’s Infant Welfare Training School. Mothers attended Tandarra with their babies for advice and treatment on feeding and caring for their children, or to rest after difficult births. Tandarra was officially opened on 1 November 1929, by Lady Somers, wife of the Governor of Victoria.

Mothers who were admitted to the Home were required to sign an agreement that they would remain at Berry Street for six months after the birth, so that they could breastfeed the infant. Penwill remarks on how this arrangement must have made relinquishing a baby for adoption even more heartbreaking for mothers, even if the natural feeding had real benefits for the child.

During the Second World War, Berry Street was taken over for use by the military. In 1942, staff, children and mothers were moved to Beaconsfield Babies’ Home.

When the army vacated in 1945, it enabled some renovation work to be done at Berry Street. The new institution was officially opened on 13 December 1945.

In 1949, a new Toddlers’ Wing was opened, for children of 18 months to 3 years of age. (This was renamed the Appleton Wing in 1969, after a long-serving Committee member.)

In August 1956, the Foundling Hospital and Infants’ Home was declared an approved children’s home under the Children’s Welfare Act 1954.

Staff and former residents of the Home fondly remember the twice-weekly visits by the Lolly Men. In the early 1950s, Douglas Robertson and his colleagues started bringing bags of sweets for the children every time their garbage truck came past Berry Street. When Mr Robertson retired, the Past Nurses’ Association presented the Lolly Man with a pewter tankard acknowledging 26 years of support.

It had long been the practice at Berry Street to board out children in foster care where suitable placements could be arranged. Usually, children were not boarded out until they had reached at least 12 months of age. The doctors who served as honorary medical officers at Berry Street favoured boarding out, and a ‘natural home life’ for the children.

In 1953, for the first time in its history, no children were boarded out. From this point in time, adoption was a far more common practice than boarding out or fostering.

In 1956, the Home was approved as a registered Children's Home under the new Victorian child welfare legislation.

In 1964, the word foundling was finally dropped from its name, and it became known as the Berry Street Babies' Home and Hospital.

The Berry Street Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

A woman who was sent to Berry Street as a pregnant teenager in 1963 told her story in a submission to the Senate inquiry. "In September I was taken in as a resident to hide out my pregnancy and shame to Berry St. I was glad to be at Berry St to be away from the trouble I had caused at home and to be with other bad girls like me". She had expressed her wishes to keep her baby, however her parents and the almoner (social worker) at the Royal Women's Hospital arranged for the baby to be adopted. After the birth of her daughter, Berry St sent someone to collect the woman from the hospital, alone. "I got back to Berry St and the matron came out probably because I was still screaming, she said I hope you have learned your lesson" (Submission no 8, 2010).

## Gallery

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**Berry Street Foundling Hospital, Melbourne - toddlers having their dinner**



**Berry Street Foundling Home, East Melbourne, Donation Box**

**Description:** This is a photograph of the Berry Street Foundling Home donation box, with "Please, Help the Babies" written on the lid.



**Foundling Hospital Gift Cot**

**Description:** This is a copy of an illustrated article published in *The Argus* on Saturday 25 August 1923, p.27. The image shows staff and children from The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home. The original caption reads: 'Of the displays made by charitable institutions sharing in the Wattle Day collection yesterday, none made greater appeal to the sympathies of the public than that of the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home, East Melbourne and Beaconsfield, of which Mrs. Montague Cohen is president. Sister Sutherland is seen in charge of a gift cot in Collins street, near the Equitable Building corner. The twins in the cot were the centre of much interest throughout the day.'

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### Berry Street Foundling Hospital

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in *The Argus* on Tuesday 19 December 1922. The image shows children at a party. The original caption reads, 'Each year at about Christmas time the boarded-out children and their fostermothers are entertained at the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home Berry Street, East Melbourne. There was a happy party yesterday, and Father Christmas had a busy time.'

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### Foundlings or not, all are well cared for

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in *The Argus* on Friday 27 July 1923. The image shows babies from The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home. The original caption reads, 'Scenes at the home on the occasion of the annual meeting yesterday are depicted.'

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### Berry Street Babies' Home and Hospital, East Melbourne

**Description:** This is a copy of a photograph of the Berry Street Babies' Home and Hospital. There is a sign that reads: 'Help the Berry Street Babies' Home & Hospital. Donations please.'

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## More info

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### Chronology

- The Victorian Infant Asylum (1877 - 1902)
  - The Victorian Infant Asylum and Foundling Hospital (1902 - 1906)
- **The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home (1906 – 1964)**
  - Berry Street Babies' Home and Hospital (1964 - 1975)
    - Berry Street - Child and Family Care (1975 - 1992)
      - Berry Street Incorporated (1992 - 1994)
        - Berry Street (1994 - current)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [The Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home \(Incorporated\) \(1914 - 1964\)](#)  
Date: 1914 -

#### Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)  
The Berry Street Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

#### Related Organisations

- [Beaconsfield Babies' Home \(1915 - 1946\)](#)

The Beaconsfield Babies' Home and the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home were both run by the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home Incorporated.

Date: 1915 -

### Related Concepts

- [Medical experiments \(1803 - 1970s\)](#)

CSL conducted trials at the Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home

Date: 1959 - 1961

## Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012
- Swain, Shurlee, [Berry Street Babies' Home](#), eMelbourne: the city past and present, 2008
- [Christmas Appeals: special need for help](#), The Argus, 14 December 1916
- [Home for foundlings - the proposed hospital - claims of the Infant Asylum - can it meet the want?](#), The Argus, 10 June 1899
- Hughes, Gary, [Polio vaccine tested at orphanages](#), The Age, 25 October 2004
- [Dangers of overlapping \[letter to the editor\]](#), The Argus, 19 November 1909
- [His first show](#), The Argus, 20 September 1929
- [Nurse as Father Christmas](#), The Argus, 1923
- [A wireless appeal for jam](#), The Argus, 8 March 1930
- [Foundlings enjoy Christmas](#), The Argus, 20 December 1928
- [Foundling babies at health exhibition](#), The Argus, 8 October 1924
- [Youngest flower seller](#), The Argus, 8 May 1930
- [At the foundling hospital](#), The Argus, 1 August 1930
- [Ready for their baths](#), The Argus, 27 February 1932
- [Christmas is party time ...](#), The Argus, 15 December 1952
- [Foundlings or Not, All are Well Cared For](#), The Argus, 27 July 1923
- [These Girls Love Babies](#), The Argus, 2 July 1953
- Cerreto, Alicia, [Berry Street 140 Years: restoring trust and hope](#), 2017
- [The Victorian Infant Asylum \(1877-1902\) later known as Berry Street](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to The Foundling Hospital and Infant's Home
- [Ray Willis interviewed by Lyn McLeavy in the Bringing Them Home Oral History Project \(2000\)](#), 12 June 2000
- Loh, Morag (ed.), [Growing up in Richmond](#), 1979

## Other Resources



**Title:** Foundling Hospital and Infants' Home, Blank Admittance Form

**Type:** Image

[Details](#)

## Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

# Records

- [Records of Victorian Adoptions \(c. 1908 - current\)](#)
  - [Berry Street Heritage Collection \(c. 1877 - current\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
  - [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/the-foundling-hospital-and-infants-home/>