

St Joseph's Home for Boys

1925 – c. 1967

Details

St Joseph's Home for Boys in Surrey Hills was the new name given in 1925 to the St Joseph's Home for Destitute Children. It accommodated boys aged between 4 and 12. In around 1967, the name changed to St Joseph's Home for Children.

In his book, Patrick Wheatley-Kenyon recalled the meals he had as a resident of St Joseph's during the 1930s:

Breakfast was always porridge or semolina, a slice of bread and honey or 'Cocky's Joy' (Golden Syrup), and a cup of tea. We had Marmite or peanut butter sandwiches for lunch with the occasional piece of fruit. Dinner, however, was always special. We used to hang about the kitchen savouring the smell of stew or cottage pies cooking. Rhubarb and apple, rice custard or apple pie and custard were often our dessert. Several Sisters were always on hand to feed the smaller children. Every Saturday morning we lined up for Senna Leaves, Epsom Salts or Castor Oil to keep our bowels in good order. Personally, I preferred tea made from the Senna Leaf (Wheatley-Kenyon, p.13).

He writes that all children left St Joseph's and the nuns (the "Brown Joeys") at the age of nine (he was sent on to [St Augustine's](#) in Geelong).

In late 1946, St Joseph's Home for Boys received a small number of boys, transferred from a Tasmanian institution. Boys' Town was situated in Glenorchy, Tasmania. When the Salesians of Don Bosco took over the management of Boys' Town in 1946, some of the younger children from Boys' Town were transferred to the Sisters of St Joseph at Surrey Hills.

According to Jenkinson, by the mid 1950s St Joseph's accommodated Catholic boys aged from 6 to 12 years of age. Approximately half were Wards of the State. In 1956 accommodation was available for 112 boys within large dormitories of 12 to 29 beds.

Ryszard Szabliski was admitted to St Joseph's in the late 1950s. In his book, *Orphanage Boy*, he describes his impressions of the buildings:

A large red brick building bounded by a high red brick wall dominated the street corner ... Passing through a red wrought-iron gate, we stepped onto a small porch and faced a stained glass-panelled door ... Up two flights of stairs I followed her until we entered a dormitory replete with about twenty-five cream-coloured iron-framed beds neatly arranged in three rows. Several evenly spaced double-hung windows faced the outside world ...

I followed [Sister G] out of the dormitory back to the stairway. Retracing our steps down one flight, we then took a different route and ended at a short corridor. We went left and passed through a sunlit passageway. Windows ran its length on both sides. Turning right we entered a broad, covered, dark-timbered walkway. Through several windows on my left I saw more rows of iron-framed beds. It was another dormitory. At the end of this walkway we descended an uncovered concrete stairway and came to a wide gap among the red brick walls of the orphanage. We walked along asphalt through the gap to a concreted yard. I saw boys running around, others idling and some just sitting (Szablicki, pp.54-55).

He continues:

Every inch of ground was covered with concrete and asphalt, no grass or dirt. No trees, only branches and leaves from the outside world hanging over the red brick walls. My new play yard, surrounded by red walls, was a place to access my friend the sky ... My clothing was the usual one-size-fits-all, with no true colour. I struggled with the underpants my nuns made. The material had a rough texture somewhere between canvas and dishcloth, and lacked stretch ... Our towels were made of the same dull, striped material. Cut into one metre lengths and about fifteen centimetres wide, they had the absorbency of perforated plastic (p.55).

Szablicki writes of his memories of receiving haircuts at St Joseph's:

I enjoyed haircut time. It was always in the evening and we got to stay up late because it took so long to do everybody's hair. Two barbers came and they did the clipping and snipping in the other dormitory. We lined up and, two at a time, sat upright each on a dark timbered chair placed one behind the other. The pungent smell of Dettol hung in the air as the buzz of electric clippers broke the routine of our dormitory life. The barbers knew only one way to cut our hair, but a thousand ways to nick our skin (p.56).

By the mid 1960s fewer boys lived at the Home given the introduction of the Catholic Family Welfare foster care and adoption programs. Approximately 80 children aged from 5 to 9 years were accommodated with siblings under 5 years also accepted. The percentage of children who were Wards of the State had increased. Children would only be accepted for private placement if they were referred through the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau.

Gallery



St Joseph's Home, Surrey Hills, boys in the grounds



St Joseph's Home, Surrey Hills, dormitory



St Joseph's Home, Surrey Hills, bathroom



St Joseph's Home, Surrey Hills, building



St Joseph's Home, Surrey Hills, gathering in the grounds

More info

Chronology

- St Joseph's Home for Destitute Children, The Society of St Vincent de Paul (1888 - 1890)
 - St Joseph's Home for Destitute Children, Sisters of St Joseph (1890 - 1925)
- **St Joseph's Home for Boys (1925 – c. 1967)**
 - St Joseph's Home for Children, Sisters of St Joseph (1967 - 1991)
 - St Joseph's Home for Children, Christian Brothers (1991 - 1997)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart \(1866 - current\)](#)
Date: 1925 - 1967

Related Organisations

- [Boys' Town \(1945 - 1956\)](#)

Resources

- James Jenkinson Consulting, [Guide to out-of-home care services 1940-2000 - Volume One: Agency Descriptions](#), November 2001
- Murray, Suellen, John Murphy, Elizabeth Branigan, Jenny Malone, *After the orphanage: life beyond the children's home*, 2009
- Swain, Shurlee, *Traces in the archives: evidence of institutional abuse in surviving child welfare records*, Children Australia, 2007
- McFadyen, Roy, *At a cost*, 2005
- Wheatley-Kenyon, Patrick, *In the shadow of a legend: an Aussie's search*, 2004
- Collins, William Michael, *The early years 1928-1935: the Company of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament (Grey Sisters)*, 1953
- Miller, Wayne, [Submission no 15 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Davis, William, [Submission no 227 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005

- Sheedy, Anthony James, [Submission no 283 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Walker, Charlie, *Charlie, the ratbag orphan : an orphan survivor in Australia*, 2010
- Walker, Alan Charlie, [Transcript of Alan Charlie Walker's presentation to the Family and Community Development Committee: Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations](#), 18 February 2013
- Cade, Mark, [Submission No 38 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- [Heritage Display](#), MacKillop Family Services website, 2013
- [St Joseph's Home\(s\) for Children \(1888-1997\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to St Joseph's Home for Boys
- [Charlie Walker interviewed by Rob Willis in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 23 February 2010

Records

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

Records

- [MacKillop Family Services Records, Victorian institutions \(1857 - current\)](#)
 - ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)
 - [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
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