

# Elizabeth Fry Retreat

1884 – 1957

## Details

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The Elizabeth Fry Retreat, South Yarra, was established by Quakers in 1884 as a home for female ex-prisoners. In 1943, Melbourne City Mission took over the Retreat, who offered a home for 'friendless and wayward women and girls'. In 1957 the Retreat was renamed Swinborn Lodge.

The Elizabeth Fry Retreat in South Yarra was a Home for 'fallen women' established by the Quaker, Sarah Swinborn, who served as its honorary secretary, superintendent and treasurer. It was named after Elizabeth Fry, an early Quaker migrant to the colonies.

Money to run the Retreat was partly raised by an on-site laundry operated by the women. The residents ranged in age from under 20 to 50 years plus, usually aged 30 years and over.

The Elizabeth Fry Retreat announced its affiliation with Melbourne City Mission in 1944. It described itself during this period as offering a home for 'friendless and wayward women and girls'. By this time, the residents coming to the Retreat were generally younger and, over time, the older residents moved to aged care facilities.

Under the management of the Mission, the Retreat was maintained as a 'home for wayward girls', retaining its commercial laundry operations to provide employment for the young women and funds for the facility. This work was unpopular and not many of the young women saw their future in domestic work. Many were wards of the State referred by the Children's Welfare Department.

One submission from a former resident to the 'Forgotten Australians' inquiry painted a bleak picture of life at Elizabeth Fry:

*Everyone was tightly locked up with a very high brick wall all around with broken glass imbedded in the top ... I was always hungry and permanently cold from only wearing short sleeve cotton uniforms.*

An article in the *Herald* in 1950 described residents being put in solitary confinement as punishment for misbehaviour such as cheekiness, refusing to work in the laundry or absconding (girls could climb over a fowl pen at the back of the institution and run away). The matron would lock girls in a "damp, cold cellar with brick walls and floor and a corrugated iron roof". The matron told the journalist that girls were left in the cellar in darkness and given only one meal a day. The article has a photograph of the bed in the cellar, described as an "uncovered wire mattress". Staff at Elizabeth Fry told the journalist that girls worked in the institution's laundry for no pay, 5 and a half days per week (*Herald*, 28 October 1952, p.5).

During the late 1950s, the Children's Welfare Department reduced referrals to Elizabeth Fry Retreat, using instead its own new facility, Winlaton, for girls who had offended or were seen to be 'at risk'. The Retreat was then often used by police as a refuge for girls not yet part of the Child Protection system.

Some records relating to the Elizabeth Fry Retreat are held by the University of Melbourne Archives (Accession numbers 89/90; 97/129 and single item accession 95/129).

In 2014, there is a children's playground (Argo Reserve) on the Elizabeth Fry Retreat/ Swinborn Lodge site in South Yarra. The bricks from the main building were reused as part of the playground, retaining walls, boundary walls and a fountain. The 'stables' building at the rear of the site which was used as a morgue is still standing.

## Gallery

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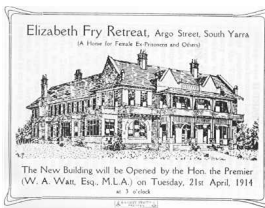


**Elizabeth Fry Retreat (later Swinborn Lodge), South Yarra**



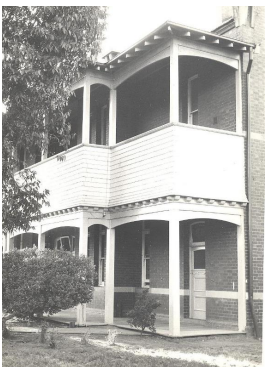
**Elizabeth Fry Retreat (later Swinborn Lodge), South Yarra**

**Description:** Photograph of Elizabeth Fry Retreat (later Swinborn Lodge), South Yarra, viewed from the street.



**Elizabeth Fry Retreat, Argo Street, South Yarra**

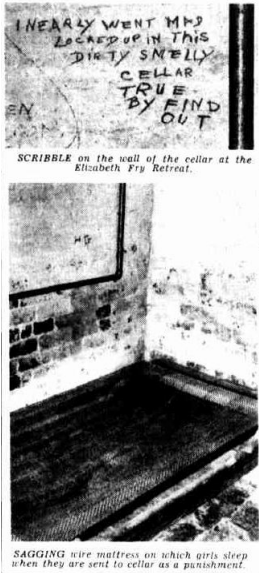
**Description:** Photocopy of a programme to mark the opening of the Elizabeth Fry Retreat [pictured] in Argo Street, South Yarra in 1914.



**Elizabeth Fry Retreat**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image of the exterior of Elizabeth Fry Retreat in South Yarra, published on the website of Melbourne Citymission.

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## Elizabeth Fry Retreat, 1952

**Description:** This is a copy of photographs that were published in a newspaper [article about Elizabeth Fry Retreat](#) in October 1952, in which the matron of the institution described sending girls to be solitary confined in darkness in a cellar as punishment. The captions read: "Scribble on the wall of the cellar at Elizabeth Fry Retreat" and "Sagging wire mattress on which girls sleep when they are sent to cellar as a punishment".

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## More info

### Chronology

- **Elizabeth Fry Retreat (1884 – 1957)**
  - Swinborn Lodge (1957 - 1979)
  - Swinborn (1979 - 1986)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Melbourne City Mission \(1854 - 1970\)](#)

Melbourne City Mission took over management of the Elizabeth Fry Retreat from the Quakers in 1943.  
Date: 1943 - 1957

#### Related Organisations

- [Royal Park Depot \(c. 1880 - 1955\)](#)

By the 1950s, the Elizabeth Fry Retreat was the only institution for offending Protestant girls and young women. As a result, such girls were difficult to place, and there was significant overcrowding at Royal Park Depot.

### Resources

- [Christmas Appeals: special need for help](#), The Argus, 14 December 1916
- University of Melbourne Archives, [Records of Melbourne City Mission](#), 12 July 2005
- Malone, Betty, *Bonds of care: Elizabeth Fry Retreat and its founders*, 1991
- Turner, Laurence, [Victoria's Unwanted Children - 6: Willing Hearts Handicapped by Lack of Cash](#), The Herald, 31 October 1952
- Leeson, E., [Melbourne City Mission 1855-1949](#), 1949

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## Records

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

## Records

- [Melbourne City Mission \[Records\] \(1856 - 1995\)](#)
  - [Melbourne City Mission Records \(c. 1900 - current\)](#)
  - [Records of Teresa Wardell \(1866 - 1984\)](#)
  - ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/elizabeth-fry-retreat-2/>