

Regent House

1907 – 1977

Other Names:

- Presbyterian Girls' Home
- Regent House Hostel for Girls
- Presbyterian Girls' Hostel
- Presbyterian Rescue Home

Details

Regent House was a Presbyterian girls' home. It was first established in 1907, in West Brunswick, when it was known as the Presbyterian Girls' Home. In 1909 it relocated to larger premises in Regent Street, Elsternwick. From at least the 1950s, it was known as Regent House and it was a hostel for young women. In the 1960s, Regent House was a 'sister' project to Harrison House (also known as Arthur Harrison Boys' Home) in Hawthorn. Regent House closed in 1977, and staff were transferred to Harrison.

The Presbyterian Church in Victoria became involved in what it called "rescue work" with young women and girls in the 1890s, through its Deaconess and Missionary Training Institute, established in 1897. This Institute trained Presbyterian women to become accredited church workers, called Deaconesses, who went on to serve the Church "in the home mission and foreign mission fields". The home mission work of the Presbyterian Deaconesses included attending to "the condition of certain young girls and women in the community who were pursuing a course likely to end in disaster. It was felt that something should be done by the Church to try and turn their thoughts to a better way of life" ("The Presbyterian Girls' Home by Rev. JA Crockett", Uniting Heritage Service).

At the Institute, women attended lectures on biblical theology and received instruction in medical treatment and nursing. Its first location was at 10 Powlett Street, East Melbourne. According to Crockett, in 1902, 14 women and girls were received at the Institute in East Melbourne as part of the Deaconesses' rescue work. After the Powlett Street lease expired in 1903, the Institute moved to a number of different locations, including Albert Park in 1905. It found a more permanent home at 97 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, in 1915. The Institute was renamed in 1936 and became Rolland House, Deaconess and Missionary Training College (Croom, 2009).

In 1905, the Presbyterian Church established a special commission to consider how the Church could conduct its rescue work with girls and young women separately to the Deaconesses Institute (Crockett). In September 1906 the Rev RW Rock wrote to *The Age* newspaper about the Presbyterian Church of Victoria's plan to 'institute a Rescue Home for girls who, by reason of their environment, are in danger'.

This led to the establishment of the Presbyterian Girls' Home in Brunswick in 1907. The Home was located in a 'commodious, two-storey residence ... with spacious grounds' in New Street, Brunswick West (in 2019 the site is on what is now known as Union Street). The Church appealed for public help to have the Home furnished and equipped by October 1906.

The superintendent of the Brunswick Home was Deaconess Buntine. Reverend Rock wrote: 'Girls will be received from town and country, and will be placed under the kindly oversight of deaconesses of our church, and surely shelter, protection, instruction, and love in such a home as this will not be without fruitful results to the girls' (*The Age* 10 September 1906).

By 1908, the committee was convinced that the Brunswick location was not satisfactory for the Home. They required larger premises, closer to public transport, and one that would have proper facilities for a laundry. The locality also needed to be one that would provide the Home with laundry customers. The committee found a suitable property in the suburb of Elsternwick, that had originally been part of Caulfield Grammar school before it relocated to Glen Eira Road (Crockett, Uniting Heritage Service).

The Home relocated to this property in Regent Street, Elsternwick and opened officially in May 1909. Initially the Regent Street building was rented, and later purchased in full by the Presbyterian Church. They established an up to date laundry at the Home in Elsternwick. The laundry at Regent House, and the labour of the residents, was a major source of income for the institution. In 1936, it earned 800 pounds (Scrapbook, Uniting Heritage Service).

According to the *Argus* in 1926, the Home was for 'young girls who have, through lack of parental control, or environment, got out of control'. The article stated that 40 girls lived at the Home, and were trained in domestic work, English, singing, elocution and needlework, and that 95% of the Home's residents 'made good'.

From around the 1930s, the Home was run by Deaconess Hilda Foster. A clipping from November 1935 contains an account (almost certainly written by the Presbyterian Church) of Regent House and its residents. It stated that 33 girls lived at Regent House, all of "over school age".

They came from other institutions, from other States, many of them knowing neither parents nor friends, and therefore utterly dependent on our help if they are to make good.

In the Home the Church provides an opportunity for the best within the girls to be developed, and under quiet control and strict discipline they are taught the necessary routine of duties in home life.

Every morning prayers follow breakfast, and then each is assigned a special task. Some go to the laundry, where excellent work is done, and from this work comes the greater part of our income; others to the duties of the house, and others again to gardening, attending to the fowls, etc. They are kept in easy employment right through the day.

In the evenings they relax, and thoroughly enjoy community singing, reading, writing, physical culture, fancy-work, etc (November 1935 clipping in Scrapbook from the collection of Uniting Heritage Service).

Girls from Regent House sometimes went for holidays at Providence House in Cockatoo, established in 1927 by the Presbyterian Settlement which undertook social work in the inner Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy. Providence House was initially created to provide a "rest home for tired mothers and holiday home for children" from the Presbyterian kindergarten in Fitzroy. The *Argus* reported in 1939 that 30 girls from Regent House were at Providence, enjoying "happy days in the hills".

In the 1930s, the Presbyterians did joint fundraising for Kilmany Park Boys' Home and Regent House, for example, the Town and Country Fair at Melbourne Town Hall in April 1938.

A recreation hall was added to Regent House in 1942, using funds from the late Miss Annie McDonald of Ballarat. Regent House also had a chapel, a room "set aside for the worship of God".

In October 1957, the 'Presbyterian Girls' Hostel' was declared an approved juvenile hostel under the Children's Welfare Act 1954. From around 1966, the Home was known as the Regent House Hostel for Girls.

In the 1960s, Regent House was a 'sister' project to Harrison House (also known as Arthur Harrison Boys' Home) in Hawthorn, another Presbyterian institution.

Some young women came to Regent House from the Magistrates Court. In 1952, Deaconess Alice Dyke became the Presbyterian Church's probation officer and she was responsible for the placement of some girls at Regent

House. An article from 1967 listed the types of charges laid against young women and girls in the court, including “exposed to moral danger” and “unfit guardianship” The article stated that girls placed at Regent House by Deaconess Dyke “had to be taken from their homes by the magistrates because it is obvious that they will make no progress towards leading a better life because of their unsuitable environment” (“Outreach”, August 1967, press clipping from the collection of Uniting Heritage Service).

In 1967, there were 12 girls living at Regent House, under the care of a young married couple, Mr and Mrs Haddow. The cottage system had been introduced at Regent House around the end of 1966. Mr Haddow worked in his regular employment during the day and Mrs Haddow supervised the running of the hostel. There was also an assistant matron and a housekeeper employed at Regent House. The residents had household chores to perform, which varied each week and were said to be “not more than girls are expected to do in their private homes” (Outreach, 1967).

Minutes of the Regent House Girls' Home and Hostel Committee from 1967 show that in October, there were 12 girls in residence, under the care of a House Mother.

The Social Welfare Department's annual report for 1968-69 stated that Regent House Girls' Hostel had converted a detached section of the property into two self-contained “bachelor” flats, which are occupied by two girls as a further preparation for complete independence in the community.

When Regent House closed in 1977, staff were transferred to Harrison House in Hawthorn. In 1979 there was an aged care facility on the Elsternwick site, known as Regent Community.

The property that was Regent House was demolished sometime after the institution closed. In 2017, the TV show 'The Block' built and renovated 5 homes on the former site.

Gallery



Presbyterian Girls' Home, Regent Street, Elsternwick

Description: This is a copy of a photograph in a scrapbook from the collection of Uniting Heritage Service. It shows two removal trucks parked in front of the Presbyterian Girls' Home in Regent Street, Elsternwick (later known as Regent House). This photograph dates from around 1937.



Regent House, 1960s

Description: This is a copy of a photograph of Regent House, Elsternwick (previously known as the Presbyterian Home for Girls).

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- Henningham, Nikki, [Deaconess Orders](#), The Australian Women's Register, 2009

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