

# St Vincent's Boys' Home

1891 – 1985

- Other Names:**
- St Aloysius Boys' Home
  - Westmead Boys' Home
  - St Vincent's Westmead
  - Westmead Catholic Homes for Boys
  - Westmead Home

## Details

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St Vincent's Boys' Home was established in 1891 by the St Vincent de Paul Society. It was originally located in Surry Hills as a refuge for homeless children. It then moved to Redfern, then to Five Dock, and finally to Westmead in 1896. From 1896 until 1968, the Home was run as a joint venture between St Vincent de Paul and the Marist Brothers. From 1968 until it closed in 1985, the Marist Brothers were the sole managers of the home. From 1985, the Marist Brothers delivered services to children in 2 houses in Darcy Road, Westmead, as well as a medium-term program in Blacktown.

In 1891, in the midst of a severe depression, members of the Surry Hills Conference of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, headed by Patrick Joseph Minahan, set up a rented house in Upton Street, Surry Hills, as a refuge for homeless children. The refuge, initially known as St Aloysius Boys' Home, moved to Riley Street, Surry Hills, then to Five Dock, and finally to Westmead in 1896. In 1895 the Home, which up until that point had been privately funded, officially came under the control of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and the name was changed from St Aloysius Boy's Home to St Vincent's Boy's Home.

The foundation at Westmead, then a sparsely populated farming area in Sydney's west, was intended to be a large Home where boys could learn a trade and the basics of farming. Following a recommendation by the Archbishop, the Society of St Vincent de Paul invited the Marist Brothers to partner with them to operate the Home.

The Catholic Church set up children's Homes to defend the Catholic faith, which was still a minority religion in Australia in the early 20th century. The goal of organisations like Westmead was to ensure Catholic children did not end up being housed with Protestants or given Protestant religious instruction. In 1914 Archbishop Dr Kelly caused a controversy by attacking the Mittagong Farm Home, run by the State Children's Relief Board. Charles Mackellar, the Board's President, was angered by a *Herald* report about Kelly:

*The report says that at a meeting of the Westmead Catholic Homes for Boys "Dr Kelly said that the institution (i.e., the Westmead Home) was a home in the true sense of the word-not like the State Home at Mittagong with its prison conditions, where nearly every child had a policeman's hand on his shoulder, etc., etc." I shall refrain from stigmatising Dr Kelly's remarks in any harsher way than by saying that they give an absolutely incorrect idea of the management of the Mittagong Farm...*

Kelly's remarks were made to the wealthy Catholics who funded the Westmead Home, and were probably exaggerated. Catholics, Protestants and the State Children's Relief Board were in competition for children, with

each convinced their method was best, but the irony was their methods varied little. Like Mittagong, St Vincent's was a farm home for boys, run as an industrial school.

The industrial school model continued until World War II when secondary education became more important. Boys from Croagh Patrick Home in Orange, rural NSW, were sent to St Vincent's to do secondary school. After World War II the industrial school model was seen as inappropriate and the trade aspect of the Home was wound down. By the mid-1950s, St Vincent's was run more like a boarding school for disadvantaged boys.

St Vincent's Boys' Home became an institution approved to take British Child Migrants, and in 1955, 4 child migrants were in residence. It was also mentioned in the Lost Innocents Report (2001) as an institution involved in the migration of children to Australia.

In the early 1960s there was further change when the internal schooling of the boys at Westmead began to be phased out, with the boys first attending local Catholic schools and eventually a wide range of schools in the area.

Until 1968, the Home at Westmead was a joint venture of the Society of St Vincent De Paul and the Marists. The Society was responsible not only for the financing of the work, but also for controlling the admission of the boys, most of whom were referred by the local branches of the Society. The affairs of the Home were controlled by a Management Committee made up of men from the Society who met on a monthly basis at Westmead to oversee the operation and to decide on admissions.

In 1968 the St Vincent de Paul Society withdrew from the partnership, leaving the Marist Brothers solely responsible for the ownership and operation of St Vincent's.

By the 1970s, Australia was a very different society from Australia in the days when the Home was founded. Attitudes to social welfare had changed considerably, and the 1970s was a period in which the older models of institutional out-of-home care gave way to foster care and smaller residential units. St Vincent's went through a process which saw the reduction of numbers and a change of program on the Westmead site.

The Home at Westmead was founded at a time when Australia saw its future in material growth and rural expansion. The vision of the men of the Society in founding a Home on the industrial school model was seen as way of giving boys from disadvantaged backgrounds an opportunity to be part of the Australian dream. The gradual change to the boarding school model was seen as a means of allowing orphaned boys and those whose families could not support them to gain an education. Later, however, as social welfare policy came to emphasise the maintenance of the family unit wherever possible, and Government funding arrangements supported this approach, removing children from their families fell from favour.

Eventually, in 1985, the old Home was vacated in favour of smaller group homes. In 1985 the service moved from the old building at Hawksbury Road into two houses in Darcy Road, Westmead and a medium-term program in Blacktown. The Blacktown service moved to Toongabbie and in 1998 the service became a semi-support community-based programme. These services run by the Marist Brothers became known as Marist Community Services from 1994.

By the time it moved from the Westmead site, St Vincent's was one of a range of services in Western Sydney working, in close liaison with Government departments, with boys who could not live with their families for whatever reason. This work evolved with the establishment of Marist Community Services in 1994.

## Gallery

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**St Vincent's Boys' Home**

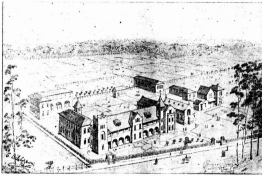
**Description:** This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.

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## St Vincent's Boys' Home in Upton St, Surry Hills

**Description:** This is a sketch of the small rented house in Upton Street, Surry Hills, that was occupied by St Vincent's Boys' Home in 1891. It appeared in an article in the *Catholic Freeman's Journal* on 13 April 1939 titled "1891 - Westmead - 1938: History of St. Vincent's Boys' Home". The image is captioned "An impression of the humble, first home in Upton-street, Surry Hills, which was the beginning of the great work for orphan boys now being done at Westmead Boys' Home by the St. Vincent de Paul Society." The date the sketch was made is unknown, however the article in which it appears states that the building had "long since been demolished", so it can be assumed that it dates from around the time that St Vincent's Boys' Home occupied the house.



## Plan of New Buildings at Westmead

**Description:** This image is a sketch of the proposed development of St Vincent Boys' Home, Westmead. It shows a number of large buildings surrounded by farmland and bush. It was published in an article in *The Catholic Press* on 16 September 1899.

# More info

## Related Entries

### Run by

- [St Vincent de Paul Society \(1854 - current\)](#)

The St Vincent de Paul Society ran St Vincent's Boys' Home.

Date: 1891 - 1968

- [Marist Brothers \(1872 - current\)](#)

The Marist Brothers ran St Vincent's Boys' Home from 1968 to 1985. From 1898 to 1968, the Home was run by the St Vincent de Paul Society in partnership with the Marist Brothers.

Date: 1968 - 1985

### Related Events

- [Visit of John Moss \(1951\)](#)

John Moss inspected this home as part of his 1951 tour and report

### Related Organisations

- [Kendall Grange \(1948 - 2000\)](#)

The first group of boys sent to Kendall Grange in 1948 were taken from St Vincent's Boys' Home, Westmead.

- [St Joseph's Home for Children, Croydon \(1925 - 1981\)](#)

Older boys were transferred from St Joseph's Home Croydon to St Vincent's Westmead

- [Croagh Patrick Home \(1929 - 1969\)](#)

Boys who completed primary school at Croagh Patrick Home were often sent to St Vincent's Boys' Home to complete their secondary education.

- [St Michael's Orphanage \(1902 - c. 1960\)](#)

Most boys went from St Michael's Orphanage to St Vincent's Boys' Home (Westmead) when they were older

### Related Concepts

- [Child Migration \(1800s - 1970s\)](#)

## Resources

- Community Affairs References Committee, [Lost Innocents: Righting the record - Report on child migration](#), 30 August 2001

- Carroll, Caroline, [Finally, we Forgotten Australians are believed](#), 16 November 2009
- [The Cry of the Children: Mr P McGarry Introduces a Deputation: The Chief Secretary's Sympathetic Words](#), Freeman's Journal, 25 November 1915
- Burns, Gerald, *A simple work: the story of St Vincent's Boys Home, Westmead, 1891-1991*, 1991
- [Catholic Church schools and homes with the most child abuse claims revealed](#), ABC News, 17 February 2017
- [Denis Golding interviewed by Roslyn Burge in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 23 August 2011
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, *A piece of the story : national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families*, November 1999

## Records

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

### Records

- [Records of St Vincent's Boys' Home \(c. 1900 - current\)](#)
  - [Frank Weston interviewed by Catherine Johnson in the NSW Bicentennial oral history collection \[sound recording\] \(17 February 1987 - 17 February 1987\)](#)
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