

St Michael's Orphanage

1902 – c. 1960

Other Names:

- St Michael's Home
- Baulkham Hills Orphanage
- St Michael's Boys' Home

Details

St Michael's Orphanage, run by the Sisters of Mercy, was opened at Baulkham Hills in 1902. It was also known as St Michael's Boys' Home. The Orphanage housed boys aged 5 to 12 years. Around 1960, the institution became St Michael's Children's Home and housed boys and girls.

St Michael's Orphanage was established by the Sisters of Mercy Parramatta in 1902. It was a Home for boys too young to attend St Vincent's Boys' Home Westmead – many boys went from St Michael's to be placed at St Vincent's when they were older.

Trimmer (1989) states that the Home was originally situated in a small cottage opposite St Michael's Church on Windsor Road, Baulkham Hills. In 1917, the large Home was built and was officially opened in March 1918.

It was a three storey building of brick and slate roof on a concrete base. The dining room was 100 feet by 30 feet with roomy verandahs, balconies, dormitories (four 100 feet by 30 feet) and a large basement used as a wet weather playground. Water was connected and lighting was provided by a petrol gas pump.

Classrooms, dressing rooms and bathrooms were added to the existing building and in 1940 an infirmary was built. Between 1902 and 1952, 2780 boys found a home at St Michael's. The orphanage also housed its own dairy for production of butter and milk, a vegetable garden, fowls and some fruit trees. Most of the funding eventually came from the very successful Annual Reunion Car Drive and Fair. Older boys were sent to St Vincent's at Westmead where they were taught trades (Trimmer, 1989).

From 1921 St Michael's Orphanage, like most private institutions at the time, received 5 shillings per week from the New South Wales Government for every orphan in its care.

William (George) Fossey, a former resident of St Michael's, emailed Find and Connect staff in 2012 to say:

"I was at Baulkham Hills Orphanage which was on the Kellyville Road just outside of Parramatta. My memories are vague, but I do remember that I helped out with the chicken farm that they had which was at the back of the convent which was on the other side of the road from the orphanage."

In 2007 Frank Heimans interviewed Ray Aquilina, a former resident of St Michael's, about his time in the orphanage. Ray was placed with his brother because their father, a single man, had to work night shift, but

according to Ray the majority of boys in the home were from foundling institutions and were aged five and older.

Ray's account is mostly positive and often funny, and he describes the dairy, riding the lift used to carry vegetables indoors, the process of meal times and the challenges and rewards of being raised alongside 150 other children. But Ray was only three and a half, and being separated from his father was very hard.

We walked down and I looked at this building and I thought "we're going in here". I just had something in the back of my mind that told me this was going to be a fixture.

We went in and it was the biggest building that I'd ever seen in my life. I suppose it was like somebody looking at a castle it was just so big. We went up the front stairs and we pressed the bell and a nun came out. We went into a little room there we talked for a few minutes and I gather they were busy because it didn't take too long. Then come on we'll take you round to the rocking horses so we walked around into the refectory where all the kids ate. There were two rocking horses there. There was a little one and there was another one with two baskets on the bigger one. Paul got on the bigger one, I was on the little one and then Dad said "I'm just going to get the coupons" The war was out and there were coupons for butter and whatever. I knew at that stage he's not coming back ...

[Interviewer]: How did you feel at three and a half being left in an orphanage?

It was terrifying. I'd never had so many people around me all the kids. I'd never run to a regime. You had one nun with one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty kids and when you went in of a night time to wash. You'd stand at your basin and you'd wash you right arm, soap it up, wash it off then you'd dry it and wash your other arm then the left leg and everything was done to direction. After that the area where we went to class and school was out an end door and I don't know what I was doing trying to do up a sandal or something or other. Everybody disappeared and suddenly I was stuck in this big wash room. Where did everybody go to? I had no idea and I remember wandering through the place crying I didn't know where I was. One of the women thought it was one of the cutest things she'd ever seen I think. Picked me up in the kitchen there and I stayed there until the kids came. They kept an eye on me after that to make sure I knew which way I was going.

Like most boys in St Michael's, Ray Aquilina moved to St Vincent's Westmead for high school. According to the book by McGrath, some children came to St Michael's Orphanage from Waitara, an institution run by the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney Congregation (McGrath, 1997).

In 1960, the institution became known as St Michael's Children's Home.

Gallery



Eastern side of St Michael's Orphanage Baulkham Hills 1940s

Description: This is image is on The Hills, Sydney's Garden Shire Council Library website.

More info

Chronology

- **St Michael's Orphanage (1902 – c. 1960)**
 - St Michael's Children's Home (1960? - 1982)
 - St Michael's Family Centre (1982 - c. 2013)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta Congregation \(1888 - current\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [St Michael's Family Centre \(1982 - c. 2013\)](#)
- [St Vincent's Boys' Home \(1891 - 1985\)](#)

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

Resources

- 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

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

Records

- [Records held by the Convent of Mercy Archives \(1898 - current\)](#)
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