



"ESKDALE." A GIRLS' HOME.

ESKDALE

Background

Eskdale, the fourth cottage to be erected at the Burnside Presbyterian Orphan Homes, was the generous gift of the Hon Sir Samuel McCaughey, Knt, MLC a wealthy pastoralist and owner and breeder of one of the world's most renowned herds of Vermont sheep. Sir Samuel had no previous known association with Burnside but is understood to have been associated with various members of the Board. In contrast to most of those associated with the Homes he was an Irishman who migrated to Australia in 1856. Following his death, Burnside received an endowment of £20,000.

Then foundation stone of Eskdale was laid on 30 December 1914 by Sir Ronald Craufurd Munro-Ferguson, Governor General of Australia. The Home was officially opened on 20 November 1915 by Duncan Sinclair, a member of the Board as Sir Samuel was unable to attend due to illness. With the completion of this Home there was now accommodation for 120 children at Burnside. The Home became 'No 5 Cottage' when the former administrative block (Airlie) was converted for residential purposes in 1919.

Eskdale was designed by the architects AL McCredie and Anderson and was erected at a cost of approximately £3,000 by Mr R Lightfoot. The architect, Gregory Nolan, has described the building as follows:

"Eskdale is a three storey brick and stone building in the Federation Style dominated by a three storey corner tower. The tower is capped with a conical slate roof and displays excellent brickwork mouldings with sandstone quins to the windows.

A mansard roof with timber finishing dominates the complex massing and forms a second attic over the dormitory. The attic also projects forward to abut the tower. The complex federation style roof is of slate with terra cotta ridging and exposed rafter ends. It also displays a slight skillion to the eaves. The verandah has been boxed in.

Then ground floor of the building is partially recessed and is of rusticated sandstone, while the remaining levels are brickwork. The windows are both casement and double hung with brick arches and sills.

The floors throughout are timber, except in the play areas, and the ceilings are timber boarding. The walls are cement rendered.

The quality of the work throughout is very high and special attention has been given to the tower. The brickwork displayed here is of the highest quality, as is the flashing work from the tower to the surrounding rooves.

The plan follows closely the model set out in Cumbrae of one large dormitory upstairs and kitchen, dining and playroom downstairs. The exception is that Eskdale has a second floor, or attic, formed in the roof space and features a tower.”

Eskdale was larger in scale than any of the previously built homes. In many respects it marked a turning point in the development of Burnside which had been forced by the pressure of numbers to stand aside from the original ideal of building homes that appeared like ordinary family homes. The capacity for 60 children now available in Eskdale made the semblance of “any well-conducted home” difficult to achieve. Eskdale is also set apart from its predecessor homes in being the gift of a single donor. It is partially at least a monument to its donor as most clearly evident in the strong symbol of its Eastern tower rarely seen in domestic architecture except of the grandest type.

Eskdale initially accommodated 60 girls and was always a girls’ home except in the immediate post war years when it acted as the ‘half-way house’ to children from other Homes which were undergoing renovations and remodelling.

WAR YEARS

During the years 1942 to 1944 almost all the children at Burnside were moved into temporary homes in the Blue Mountains at Springwood and Woodford. Eskdale was used at that time by the Deputy Director’s Officers and Staff of the Second Australian Army.

1945 TO PRESENT

When the children returned to North Parramatta in January 1945 their numbers had declined by a third. It would appear that the girls did not return to Eskdale, or

if they did it was only for a short period. Possibly the size of the home was inappropriate for the Homes in the post-war era.

Eskdale's function changed several times within the next decade. In 1947 it became a temporary kindergarten home for children aged from 3 to 6, then housed girls from other Homes whilst their premises underwent renovations – Cumbrae girls from about 1948 until July 1950 as well as some from Glencoe from June to December 1949, Dunkeld girls from July 1950 to August 1952, Novar girls and some from Lincluden from August 1952 until December 1953. The number of girls housed in Eskdale in this period ranged from about 26 to 34.

Eskdale was closed as a Home in December 1953 when all girls were transferred to the renovated Ivanhoe where the modern appointments made it easier to run than Eskdale.

It appears that Eskdale may have remained unused for quite some time thereafter.

By 1980 trends in child care dictated that the shortest possible period in alternate care was desirable. Most residents at North Parramatta were there for respite purposes. Those for whom a return to the family was not possible were absorbed into Family Group Homes in suburban environments or were placed into foster homes. A home on the Eskdale scale was no longer required. For a short period the community program 'Uncles and Aunties' operated from Eskdale but most of the building was unused.

In 1985 the building was adapted to house the Archives of the Uniting Church. They vacated in 2010 for the building to be renovated into modern office space required for Burnside's expanding services.

Today Eskdale is used as offices for Burnside staff.