

Methodist Homes for Children

1891 – c. 1953

Other Names:

- Livingstone Home
- Methodist Peace Memorial Homes for Children

Details

The Methodist Homes for Children in Cheltenham was established in 1891. It was formerly known as Livingstone Home. The Homes accommodated boys and girls, aged between 4 and 14. From 1952, the children were transferred to Orana, the Peace Memorial Homes for Children, Burwood.

The Methodist Homes for Children in Cheltenham were established in 1891.

The Methodist Homes for Children were originally known as Livingstone Home (the name having been taken from its predecessor, Livingstone House, a Methodist children's home in Carlton).

The move from Carlton to Cheltenham in 1891 took place in response to concerns about the inner city's lack of outdoor space for 'rescued' children. At Livingstone House's opening, it was asserted that 'this building is not an Institution – it is a Home'. Its first Superintendent and Matron were referred to as 'Father and Mother' of the Home.

It was known as Methodist Homes, rather than Home, for Children during the 1900s when it first began to shift towards a 'cottage system'.

Yet, Livingstone Home was inescapably institutional. It comprised different buildings for children of different ages and different sexes.

An article published in the Methodist newspaper the *Spectator* in 1899 stated that the aim of the Livingstone Home was to keep the children there as short a time as possible. 'After the children leave the Home, a system of visitation is carried out, and the progress of each child is carefully watched.'

In the early twentieth century, Livingstone Home made the transition from temporary to more long-term 'care' for its children.

A building known as the 'Babies' Castle' opened in the early twentieth century, with disastrous results. Staff found it difficult to cope with the demands of 16 babies in the one cottage. The babies also suffered – of the 71 babies admitted between 1904 and 1909, 16 died in the cottage. Many of the others were always sickly. As Howe and Swain point out, 'high infant mortality was the norm amongst young babies separated from their mothers in the first year of life but it seemed particularly shocking in an institution devoted to child rescue'. In September 1906, the Home reverted to its old policy of refusing admission to children under two. The cottage, known as Queen Victoria Cottage, housed school-age boys from 1908.

Another part of the site at Cheltenham was known as Cato Cottage, where young boys were sent to receive training in farm work. The Homes had its own school on-site.

The Crook Memorial Cottage was built in 1912 to house older girls, without whose work in the cottages and laundry, the Homes could not have functioned.

Mr and Mrs Trudgeon were the Superintendent and Matron at Methodist Homes for Children in Cheltenham from 1891 to 1917.

When Livingstone Home, as it was known in 1891, opened, the Rev. Bickford assured his audience that it was a Home, not an institution, and that Mr and Mrs Trudgeon were not 'master' and 'matron', but Father and Mother'.

As 'Beloved Father and Mother', they oversaw the Methodist Homes for Children during a period of growth. The Livingstone Home at Cheltenham opened in one cottage on one acre of land – when Mrs Trudgeon resigned twenty-five years later, the Homes comprised three cottages on six acres, providing accommodation to more than 80.

Of the married couple, Mrs Trudgeon had the greater responsibility, supervising everything that went on within the Home, and often escorting children to and from country placements as well. Trudgeon, as her husband was known, was confined to more menial tasks. He died in 1904.

Mrs Trudgeon displeased the Committee by applying for another position in 1912. She remained at Cheltenham but with failing health, she was increasingly unable to do the work. Mrs Trudgeon finally resigned in October 1916.

After the resignation of its first matron, the Methodist Homes for Children 'lost their last pretence of being a large family home', in the words of Howe and Swain. Mrs Trudgeon was replaced by Miss Mary Dunkin (Sr Miriam) who was never known as Mother.

Mary Dunkin was the Matron at Methodist Homes for Children from 1917 to 1921. Previously, she had been in charge of the Boys' Cottage for several years. She brought little change to the familiar routine at the Home, established under Mr and Mrs Trudgeon, her predecessors. She died unexpectedly after an appendix operation in April 1920.

Sister Nicholson was Matron at Methodist Homes for Children, Cheltenham from 1921 to 1935. A nursing sister, she moved from Bendigo to take on the role.

During her 15 years as Matron (together with her deputy Miss Ethel Scholes), she introduced many changes to the Homes. The staff's uniform changed from black dresses and large white aprons, to softer blue linen uniforms, with white linen caps. The title of 'Sister' became less common, with newcomers being known by their own names.

In the early period of her tenure, Matron Nicholson tendered her resignation to the Committee in December 1922. However, this crisis passed and she and Sr Ethel oversaw the Homes for 10 relatively peaceful years.

In 1933, Matron Nicholson was seriously ill and Sr Ethel took over her responsibilities. This was a period of upheaval for the Homes, with overcrowding and scarce resources, and some younger members of the Committee pushing for innovation and change.

In March 1935, clearly unhappy with the situation, Matron Nicholson and Sr Ethel resigned.

Miss Outhwaite was Matron at Methodist Homes for Children from 1935 to 1936. The short tenure of Miss Outhwaite and her friend, Miss Quentin as sub-matron, was marked by unhappiness on the part of other staff, and complaints were made to the Committee. It was alleged that Miss Outhwaite was too fond of the older girls and allowed them too much freedom while the younger girls had to work harder in their place. The basic needs of the younger children were being ignored.

The Committee asked Miss Outhwaite and Miss Quentin to resign as a result of these allegations. Miss Outhwaite refused, and had to be forced to leave.

According to Howe and Swain, during this time of instability Miss Outhwaite remained in communication with some of the older girls, meeting them outside the Homes and having letters smuggled in.

Some younger members of staff resigned in protest at the treatment of the Matron. Others offered to return to the Homes now that Miss Outhwaite was gone.

A short-lived period of stability began with the subsequent appointment of Miss Shatwell as Matron. Miss Shatwell was Matron from 1936 to 1939, when she resigned taking six other staff members with her.

Sister Alice Betheras was Matron at Methodist Homes for Children, Cheltenham, from 1939 to 1943. Sister Alice was a trained nurse, already on staff, when she took on the role of Matron in 1939. According to Howe and Swain, Sister Betheras, who had served with the Australian Army in Egypt during World War I, was much admired by the children for the realistic touch she could bring to the familiar Bible stories. 'Whatever the story, she always managed to bring the pyramids into it somehow'.

Sister Alice offered her resignation in late 1942. Around this time, concerns were raised by the Committee that the 'ladies' who had been acting in the position of Matron had not been managing the Homes competently. The 'ladies' on the Committee rejected the idea of replacing the Matron with a male superintendent, but agreed to put the management of the Homes in the hands of a married couple. In 1943, the committee appointed Mr and Mrs Hobson as Superintendent and Matron of the Homes, positions they remained in until 1949.

Howe and Swain's history *All God's Children* (1989) points out that the Methodist Homes for Children were an 'almost exclusively female establishment'. Their history recounts various problems associated with the employment of men at the Homes, perhaps due to the men feeling isolated in this 'very female' environment. The most serious of such 'problems' was the abuse of young girls at Cheltenham – at least three men were summarily dismissed after sexually molesting girls.

The 1940s saw a proposal to rebuild the institution on a cottage plan, to establish a 'garden settlement for children'. The 1944 Annual Report for the Homes outlined a proposal to rebuild family style accommodation cottages on the Cheltenham site 'as soon as economic and social conditions permitted'.

At the Annual Methodist Conference in 1945 approval was given to a larger scheme involving the reconstruction of the whole of the buildings on a cottage plan.

The new facilities were constructed at a site in Elgar Road, Burwood, opposite Wattle Park, which became known as Orana, the Peace Memorial Homes for Children.

In mid-1950, the Homes appointed another male Superintendent, Keith Mathieson. Mathieson went on to be Superintendent at Orana Methodist Peace Memorial Homes for Children from 1952 to 1972.

Long-standing member of staff, Miss Grace Ross, was Matron at Methodist Homes for Children from 1950 to 1952, and then at Orana Methodist Peace Memorial Homes for Children in Burwood from 1952 until she retired from the children's Home in 1959. (Ross went on to another position at the Otira Home Mission Training College in Kew.)

Thirty seven post-war 'child migrants' were accommodated at the Homes in Cheltenham, the youngest of which was six years old. The Homes, needing finances to fund the rebuilding at Burwood, were partly motivated by the offer of contribution from the Commonwealth Government towards the child migrants' accommodation. Eight refugee children came to Cheltenham in 1949-50, according to Howe and Swain. Altogether the Homes housed 37 child migrants. None of these were long-term placements.

The first transfers of children from Cheltenham to Orana Elgar Road, Burwood were in mid 1952.

In 1953, the Cheltenham land and buildings (excluding Cato) were sold to the St John of God Brothers, who operated the St John of God Training Centre there until 1967.

Today, the site is occupied by Westfield (Southland) Shopping Centre. A commemorative plaque within the shopping centre reads:

Southland commemorates the service to children given on this site by Methodist Homes for Children 1892-1953 and the St. John of God Training Centre 1953-1967.

In the Old Cheltenham Cemetery, alongside the fence opposite the Railway Station, there is a cemented area upon which is a plaque with the names of children from the Homes who are buried there.

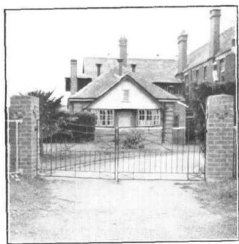
In 1989, Orana Family Services became the custodian of records of Methodist Homes for Children.

Gallery



Methodist Homes for Children, Cheltenham

Description: This is an image of Methodist Homes for Children, published in the pamphlet, *Furnishings of love* (1938)



The gates of the Home [editor's note: site of the Methodist Homes for Children]

Description: This is an image of Methodist Homes for Children, published in the pamphlet, *Furnishings of love* (1938). The caption reads: 'The Gates of the Home. The gift of Mrs H.R. Rush and Mrs A.E. Pizzey.'

The Gates of the Home.
The Gift of Mrs. H. R. Rush and
Mrs. A. E. Pizzey.



Children at tea [editor's note: Methodist Homes for Children]

Description: This is an image of Methodist Homes for Children published in the pamphlet, *Furnishings of love* (1938). The caption reads: 'Children at Tea. State School in the Background.'

Children at Tea.
State School in the Background.



Fun on the swings [editor's note: Methodist Homes for Children]

Description: This is an image of Methodist Homes for Children published in the pamphlet, *Furnishings of love* (1938). The caption reads: 'Fun on the swings'.

Fun on the Swings.



Smiles on the Slide.

Smiles on the slide [editor's note: Methodist Homes for Children]

Description: This is an image of Methodist Homes for Children published in the pamphlet, *Furnishings of love* (1938). The caption reads: 'Smiles on the Slide'.



Budding Farmers.

Budding farmers [editor's note: Methodist Homes for Children]

Description: This is an image of Methodist Homes for Children published in the pamphlet, *Furnishings of love* (1938). The caption reads: 'Budding Farmers'.



LIVINGSTONE HOME.

'Save the Children', Children's Aid Society, Livingstone Home

Description: This image appeared in the *Methodist Spectator* newspaper on 12 May 1899. 'Livingstone Home' was an early name for the Methodist Homes for Children in Cheltenham.



Who will adopt this Little Chap?

Who will adopt this little chap?

Description: This image appeared in the *Methodist Spectator* newspaper on 21 July 1905. It is of a child named Douglas, aged 20 months, described by Elza M. Presley in her monthly notes about the Methodist Homes for Children as a 'beautiful little fellow, whose appearance we feel sure will captivate someone. We would again point out that it is very necessary for us to get homes for the children as our accommodation is limited, and when both homes are full, as is the case at present, it becomes impossible to receive other cases, however urgent they may be.'



WHO WILL ADOPT THIS FINE LAD?

Who will adopt this fine lad?

Description: This image appeared in the *Methodist Spectator* newspaper on 22 October 1903. Fannie E. Webb, in her 'Livingstone Home letter' in the newspaper described the [unnamed] boy as 'a fine, sturdy little fellow'.



Ruby, 12 months. Ivy, 15 months. Elsie, 16 months.

Ruby 12 months, Ivy 15 months, Elsie 16 months [editor's note: Livingstone Home]

Description: This image appeared in the Methodist *Spectator* newspaper on 23 December 1910. In the monthly notes about Livingstone Home (an early name for Methodist Homes for Children), Ada Egglestone wrote 'Three of our babies appear, as a deputation, this month, to convey Xmas greetings to all the friends and helpers of Livingstone Home'.



The Hawthorn Path

Description: [Depicts a painting of the Gulliver's farm at Cheltenham which in 1922 was bought by Methodist Homes. By the 1950s the property was bought by the Catholic Church to eventually become the boys' home run by the St John of God Brothers. After 1966, the land was sold and later became the Southland shopping centre.]

More info

Chronology

- Livingstone House (1888 - 1891)
 - **Methodist Homes for Children (1891 – c. 1953)**
 - Orana, the Peace Memorial Homes for Children (1953 - 1988)
 - Orana Family Services (1988 - 2011)
 - Orana UnitingCare (2011 - 2012)
 - Lentara UnitingCare (October 2012 - 2017)
 - Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited (2017 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Wesleyan Church Neglected Children's Aid Society \(1891 - current\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Methodist Babies' Home \(1929 - c. 1974\)](#)

Young children at the Methodist Babies' Home who had not been adopted by the age of 4 were transferred to the Methodist Homes for Children.

Date: 1929 -
- [St John of God Training Centre \(1953 - 1967\)](#)

The St John of God Training Centre was established on the former site of Methodist Homes for Children.

Date: 1953 -

Related Concepts

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

Resources

- Immigration Museum, [Stolen childhoods](#), 2012
- UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania, *Uniting Church in Australia: agencies in Victoria delivering substitute care services*, April 2008
- Marshall, Rev. Norman, [The Methodist Homes for Children: The Beginning](#), Kingston Historical Website, No date
- [Christmas Appeals: special need for help](#), The Argus, 14 December 1916

- Swain, Shurlee, *Traces in the archives: evidence of institutional abuse in surviving child welfare records*, Children Australia, 2007
- Cleverdon, Irene V., *Furnishings of love: a record of fifty years in the services of children*, 1938
- Brown, John, *Submission no 153 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*, 2005
- Duff, G.B., *Social work of the Church: child rescue agencies of Melbourne*, The Spectator, 23 June 1899
- *Cottage home for children*, The Argus, 25 September 1948
- *Wards of the State. An astonishing number. How are they dealt with?*, The Argus, 13 January 1911
- *From the collection of Uniting Church Archives - Synod of Victoria*, Victorian Collections, No date. *Relevance:* This collection includes material relating to Methodist Homes for Children
- Uniting Church in Australia (WA Synod), Department of Media, *Western Impact*, 1977 - 2007

Records

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

Records

- [Orana UnitingCare Records \(1888 - 2011\)](#)
 - [Commonwealth Child and Youth Migration Records \(1901 - 1983\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/methodist-homes-for-children/>