

# Kildonan, North Melbourne

1890 – c. 1937

## Details

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Kildonan was a children's home in North Melbourne, established in 1890, and run by the Presbyterian Church. It usually housed children waiting to be 'boarded out' in the country, but some children were housed for longer periods. In 1937, the children were transferred from North Melbourne to a new Kildonan Home in Burwood.

Kildonan in North Melbourne included a Home for children and also the Kildonan headquarters.

The house in Flemington Road underwent many changes during the forty seven years of its operation. A new wing was opened in 1902, and in 1914, the house was completely rebuilt. During the rebuilding, children were transferred to a home in Brighton Beach, lent to Kildonan by Mr Alexander Dick.

Between 1895 to 1911, Kildonan was run by two women: Deaconess Margaret (Maggie) Stewart, manager, and Miss Cecilia Black, matron. Matron Black took over Kildonan when Miss Stewart resigned in 1911. Black was Matron until 1921 and continued to serve on the Kildonan Committee until 1944.

Kildonan was managed by a Home committee, a group of ladies who met every Thursday morning at an office in the Scots' Church. In her history, Marjorie Robinson describes the duties of this committee:

*They would study the manager's report, hear requests for admissions, and be forced to make many 'heart breaking' decisions. Which were the most urgent: – three motherless children, with a father incapable of caring for them, a small boy in custody of the police, four small children whose mother needed urgent hospital care, a child badly damaged by maltreatment? Then letters would be dealt with, as all letters from children to manager or matron or their friends came through the office. Some would be full of complaints, but most told of happy homes and kind foster-parents. Similarly there would be some letters from foster-parents full of complaints, but others full of praise, telling of shared joys in fostering children. Other letters applying for children, or terminating fostering would be processed.*

*The business concluded, the committee ladies would catch a tram and go out to North Melbourne, where they would have lunch, inspect the Home, talk to teachers and staff, and have some personal contact with the children. The committee acknowledged that it was a group composed of human beings with normal frailty, and frequently asked itself, 'where have we failed?' or 'what more could we have done?'*

In his memoirs, *Better off in a home* (1982), Bill Smith devotes a chapter to his time as a child at Kildonan between 1924 and 1929. He found the meals an improvement on those he'd had at home, but still not always to his liking:

*Stew, tripe and boiled mutton were regular dishes, usually served with potatoes, onions or pumpkin. We complained among ourselves that meals were cold or fatty. We hated the pumpkin and we hated the rice and sago puddings that were served on alternate days ... We looked forward to the evening meal, not necessarily for itself but because it was the prelude to story time.*

Smith describes how all children at Kildonan had to perform daily duties, such as making beds, cleaning their boots and working in the kitchen, house and yard.

Every Saturday afternoon, the kids crossed Flemington Road and were let loose to play in the parklands opposite Kildonan. Saturday was also visiting day. Bill Smith writes:

*On the arrival of a visitor the children took up the cry, 'Jimmy so-and-so, your parents are here' ... When visitors arrived, the children gathered around at a distance. We would stand off watching the lucky ones with envy and hoping those fortunate children would share with us the goodies that usually resulted from such visits.*

Smith recalls that on excursions to the beach, museum or picnic grounds, the children from Kildonan would try 'cadging' pennies off the passers-by, or searching for loose change on the ground.

Smith writes that once he reached the age of ten, he was transferred to 'Kilmany' (the Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys, in Sale).

Marjorie Robinson writes that in the 1920s, it was decided to move Kildonan to another location in the country or outer suburbs of Melbourne. The North Melbourne home was experiencing overcrowding, and the inner city environment was not thought to be good for the children. Furthermore, there were concerns that the boarding out system or fostering of children was "'open to abuse' (cheap labour) and therefore the concept of keeping children all together in care for a much longer time became Kildonan policy'.

A property in Elgar Road, Burwood was purchased in 1929, but was not opened as a children's home until 1937. Children were transferred from North Melbourne to Burwood in December 1937.

## Gallery



**Moderator at North Melbourne**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image published in *The Argus* on Friday 3 July 1936. The image shows a group of children and adults. The original caption reads, 'The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (the Right Rev A Irving Davidson) with the children at the annual meeting yesterday of the Presbyterian and Scots Church Children's Aid Society, Kildonan North Melbourne.'



**Kildonan, North Melbourne**

**Description:** This is a photograph showing the Kildonan home at 149 Flemington Road, North Melbourne. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate

## More info

# Chronology

- **Kildonan, North Melbourne (1890 – c. 1937)**
  - Kildonan, Burwood (1937 - c. 1961)
    - Kildonan Homes for Children (c. 1960 - c. 1993)
      - Kildonan Child and Family Services (c. 1993 - 2007)
        - Kildonan UnitingCare (2007 - 2017)
          - Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited (2017 - current)

## Related Entries

### Run by

- [Scots' Church Neglected Children's Aid Society \(1881 - 1895\)](#)  
Date: 1890 - 1895
- [The Presbyterian and Scots' Church Children's Aid Society \(1895 - 1965?\)](#)  
Date: 1895 -

### Related Organisations

- [Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys \(1923 - 1978\)](#)  
Some boys were transferred from Kildonan to Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys, when they reached the age of ten.

## Resources

- [Kildonan Home's Fine Record](#), The Argus, 27 August 1937
- [Kildonan Homes](#), Williamstown Chronicles, 25 January 1936
- Golding, Frank, [Lost & Found: State Children in Victoria](#), Frank Golding: author, researcher, historian and consultant specialising in child welfare, 27 July 2017
- Jaggs, Catherine, *The Melbourne Child-Saving Movement, 1888-1910*, 1985

## Records

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

### Records

- [Kildonan UnitingCare Records \(1881 - 2001\)](#)
  - [Records held by Uniting Church Archives \(1923 - 1994\)](#)
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