

Home of the Good Shepherd, Ashfield

1913 – 1969

Other Names:

- Rosemount
- Rosemount Ashfield
- Convent of the Good Shepherd
- Good Shepherd Convent

Details

The Home of the Good Shepherd was a convent and industrial school that was opened by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in 1913. It was located in Victoria Street, Ashfield and cared for women and girls, mainly referred from the courts but sometimes placed voluntarily by families or guardians. The records of the Home of the Good Shepherd are held by the Good Shepherd Archives in Abbotsford, Victoria. The Home of the Good Shepherd closed in 1969.

In 1933, *The Australian Women's Weekly* described the Convent of the Good Shepherd as offering a home 'to girls and women who want to rest and reform'.

According to historian Peter Quinn, this home was one of the few non-government institutions to receive funding from the NSW state government to run juvenile justice institutions. Like many religious organisations, this home supported itself with a commercial laundry, worked by the residents.

According to research done by the staff of the Northern Territory Department of Health, the Home at Ashfield was a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the Northern Territory were sent after being forcibly removed from their families.

Like other Good Shepherd institutions around Australia, Ashfield had high walls, enclosing a number of large buildings with lush gardens "where the children were typically disallowed from spending time and not without supervision" (Murray, 2020).

In August 1954, two adult residents of the Home, aged 29 and 25, attempted to escape using a rope made from sheets, but were injured when they had to jump the last 20 feet from their bedroom window. One woman had been working in the laundries at the Home for 13 years, and said to the press that she was 'tired' and wanted to find a job in the 'outside world'.

The women's attempted escape sparked media interest in the Home of the Good Shepherd, and an inquiry by the Department of Labour and Industry into working conditions for its residents. There were a number of articles about the Home in September 1954, in mainstream and Catholic newspapers. One investigation found that the Home's 180 residents worked around 35 hours a week, for no pay ([Sun-Herald, 12 September 1954](#)).

In the article, the Mother Prioress described the different types of residents at the Home of the Good Shepherd. She said that 55 girls (aged from 15 to 18) were there under Court or parental authority. The remaining girls and women were "voluntary inmates and were free to leave at any time, or to come and go as they pleased." She added, "All inmates were locked in dormitories at night, because 'restrained' and voluntary inmates did not have separate dormitories".

According to the article, the 124 voluntary inmates included:

- 22 auxiliary sisters who made an annual promise to work at the home and assist the sisters
- About 65 adult women who were described as “subnormal, socially maladjusted, or have sought refuge in the home, shunning normal society”
- About 30 women aged between 18 and 30 years of age who originally entered the home under Court orders or parental direction and have stayed on.

Some former residents of the Convent of the Good Shepherd have told their stories to inquiries. One woman, who came to Ashfield from [Hopewood Home](#), told the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care that in 1958 she was placed in the Good Shepherd Convent by her guardian, LO Bailey, at the age of 14. She said the Youth Welfare Association of Australia, which ran Hopewood, paid the Convent a weekly sum to care for 13 of the Hopewood girls. She wrote:

The Good Shepherd Convent was in fact a COMMERCIAL LAUNDRY housed in a CLOSED INSTITUTION (a description given to my husband by Cardinal Clancy and Father Brian Lucas) where girls convicted in court could go (instead of Parramatta Girls Home or similar gaols) to serve their sentence...this Convent was a...de-facto prison...girls were locked-up 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, the Convent was totally enclosed by high stone walls (in some places topped by barb wire) and all the doors locked... 13 rather naïve girls found themselves in prison, 3 girls continued to receive an education but the other 10 were put to work in the Convent's "COMMERCIAL LAUNDRY", 6 of these girls were confined in this de-facto prison until they were 18, these girls spent 4 years or more working as UNPAID LABOURERS... When they neared their 18th birthday, they were called out of the workrooms, told to change their clothes, they were given a small suitcase which contained all their possessions, they were given [one pound] and shown the door. These girls were just dumped on the street a few days before their 18th birthday, they were not given a chance to tell the other girls that they were leaving.

I have asked [in Towards Healing hearings] if the nuns really believed that all of a sudden so many Hopewood girls became so BAD that they needed incarceration in a "CLOSED INSTITUTION" they ignore this question.

I have asked why we were NOT PAID, they claim THE ARBITRATION COMMISSION gave them permission not to pay us. BUT THEY WON'T TELL WHEN AND WHERE THIS DECISION WAS HANDED DOWN SO I CAN CHECK IT MYSELF (submission 93, 2003).

Another former resident, Julia, spoke about the restriction of residents' movements in the Home at Ashfield in an oral history interview:

... it was all lock and key. It was like a gaol, really, because every time you moved from this section to that section to that, it was all with the nuns with their keys and lock this door you go through, lock that door behind you ... no, you didn't walk anywhere without a lock and key ... you couldn't go up to the dormitories during the day because they were locked and so on. And in the morning, you only were allowed out when they unlocked the doors (quoted in Murray, 2020).

From the 1950s, residents in Good Shepherd institutions were “slowly allowed increased contact with the world outside the walls”. However, as noted by Kovesi (2010), for the most part, this only occurred when “medical emergency impelled it” (Kovesi, 2010).

Gallery



Home of the Good Shepherd (Ashfield)

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



A girl making a bed in a dormitory at the Home of the Good Shepherd girls home, Ashfield

Description: This is a digital copy of a black and white image from the John Mulligan Photograph Collection, ca. 1960-1976.



Girls playing basketball at the Home of the Good Shepherd girls home, Ashfield, 8 October, 1963

Description: This is a digital copy of a black and white image from the John Mulligan Photograph Collection, ca. 1960-1976.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of the Good Shepherd \(1863 - current\)](#)

Related Events

- [Interstate movement of Northern Territory children \(1930s - 1970s\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Hopewood \(1944 - 1970\)](#)
At least 13 girls were sent from Hopewood to the Home of the Good Shepherd in 1958.
- [Toongabbie \(1948 - 1960\)](#)

Resources

- [Glowing praise for Good Shepherd nuns](#), Southern Cross (Adelaide), 8 October 1954
- Gill, Alan, [Bad girls do the best sheets](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 24 April 2003
- [Here is the Truth on the Ashfield Home](#), Catholic Weekly, 9 September 1954
- Good Shepherd Sisters Sydney, *Good Shepherd Sisters Sydney 1913-2013: A brief history*, 2013
- 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 of the Good Shepherd Sisters, New South Wales \(1913 - 1981\)](#)
 - [John Mulligan Photograph Collection, ca. 1960-1976 \(c. 1960 - c. 1976\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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