

St Anthony's Home Croydon

1925 – 1980

Other Names:

- St Anthony's House
- St Anthony's Home for Unmarried Mothers
- St Anthony's Home for Infants
- St Anthony's Foundling Home
- St Anthony's and St Joseph's Centre of Care
- St Anthony's Croydon

Details

In 1925, St Anthony's Home moved from Petersham to Croydon. It was a Home for unmarried pregnant women and accommodated them and their babies for up to 12 months after the birth, as well as infants and children up to around the age of 3. Sister Kathleen Burford's history of the Home states that mothers and their babies lived in the Home free of charge for a year: "at the end of that period, they were free to leave, when they could take one of three options: leave the baby, or take it with her, or adopt it to the home" (Burford, 1989, p.7).

St Anthony's Croydon was run by the Society of St Vincent De Paul until 1952. The Sisters of St Joseph took over the management of the Home in 1952 and developed a range of programs including adoption services, mothercraft nursing, foster care and cottage homes. In 1980, St Anthony's transitioned into providing foster care in a cottage environment.

The new premises in Croydon were Humberstone Mansion, previously used by Wychbury Grammar School and was then known as Wychbury. The house was offered to the Society of St Vincent de Paul by a local real estate agent in 1922.

Wychbury was converted to a school and new wings, including a fibro cottage for 25 'girls' (mothers) were added by 1929. The gates of the former Devonshire Street Cemetery were donated to the Home by the Mayor of Redfern, Alderman Gilmore. The site was consecrated and opened by Archbishop Kelly in May 1925. In 1927, there were 84 infants and 17 mothers at the Home (*Sunday Times*, 3 July 1927).

St Anthony's retained the goal of the original Home at Petersham, which was to ensure that Catholic children were raised in Catholic families. An article from a Catholic newspaper in 1936 gives a sense of how the Church saw the work of the Home:

If St Anthony's did not more than rescue the waifs and strays, it would have done well. But what does it do? It rescues the mother and it rescues the babe; it feeds and clothes both of them; it is Heaven to the broken hearts of the girl-mothers; it educates the little ones of God; it allows the young mother to go back to her home, wise now and proud and unsuspected. And nobody knows (Catholic Freeman's Journal, 23 January 1936).

Sister Kathleen Burford writes that St Anthony's Croydon was very short of funds during the years of the Great Depression, due to lower donations from the public. Additionally, "An unsympathetic government withheld the

usual subsidy on the grounds that the Committee would not divulge the names and addresses of the girl-mothers in the Home. St Anthony's was faced with two unthinkable alternatives: reduce the number of residents, or keep them and be unable to provide for them". The committee's "unbounded" faith was rewarded with funds from unexpected sources and they did not have to confront this dilemma (Burford, 1989, p.7).

Around this time, there was a low death rate of infants at St Anthony's Croydon, whose nursing staff were commended by the Inspector of the Child Welfare Department (Burford, p.8). In 1943, there were 97 babies and 15 mothers at the Home (*Catholic Weekly*, 2 September 1943). When children reached around the age of 3, there were sent to other Catholic institutions – girls went to [Mater Dei](#) in Narellan, boys to [St Michael's Orphanage](#) at Baulkham Hills (*Catholic Weekly*, 2 April 1942).

As the Society of St Vincent De Paul was financially overcommitted, the Petersham property was sold. A new building, the Archbishop Kelly Wing, was erected in 1936 and the Chapel was added in 1941. The Pre-Natal Cottage was adjacent to the Chapel. The home began providing pre-natal care to expectant 'girl mothers' in 1941, sending them out to give birth in Catholic hospitals.

As the number of single mothers coming to St Anthony's grew in the war years, a 10 bed maternity hospital was built in 1944. It was sometimes referred to as St Anne's. Another impetus for the on-site hospital was so that secrecy could be maintained for the mothers. One article stated that the brothers of the Society of St Vincent de Paul were "anxious to save the young mothers possible embarrassment" when they were transferred to the public hospital to give birth and it "became known they were unmarried" (*Catholic Weekly*, 17 August 1944).

Another news article from 1944 reported that some women at St Anthony's kept their babies for the maximum period of 12 months, and that it was more difficult for the Home to have these older children adopted. The Home made an appeal in the Catholic press for adoptive parents for 4 children living at St Anthony's, aged between 18 months and 2 and a half years old (*Catholic Weekly*, 14 September 1944).

In 1946 the Home celebrated its Silver Jubilee, producing a publication that outlined its history and stated that St Anthony's was not like other institutions, for it believed the family unit was essential to child development and it was best to place children in a family – their own or a foster family – as quickly as possible. In 1946 the Committee reported the home had housed 208 babies and children and 89 mothers, 50 of whom had given birth in the hospital. In all, 123 children were discharged; 63 to their mother, 50 to 'approved foster parents' and 10 to orphanages. The Committee said;

There is consolation and joy in the fact that [a total of] one hundred and thirteen infants were absorbed into the family unit to receive all the blessings and help that only such an atmosphere can impart and wherein their future as good Catholics and good citizens can be reasonably assured every possible channel should be explored to encourage adoptions into the only perfect unit of society – the good Catholic family.

In 1952, the St Vincent de Paul Society handed over the running of St Anthony's to the Sisters of St Joseph. According to Burford, to ease the transition, the Society paid the wages of the nursing staff for three months after the Sisters arrived in 1952.

From this period, older children were transferred from St Anthony's to other institutions run by the Sisters: children aged 3-6 years were accommodated at nearby [St Joseph's Home for Children, Croydon](#), older girls went to [St Joseph's Girls' Home](#) in Lane Cove, boys to [St Joseph's Orphanage](#), Kincumber. Some older boys also went to [Westmead](#) (Burford, 1989, p.13).

After 1952, expectant mothers had their babies at [St Margaret's Hospital](#) in Darlinghurst, which had been run by the Sisters of St Joseph since 1937. St Anthony's maternity hospital was then converted into a nursery with 30 cots for babies awaiting adoption (Burford, p.24). St Anthony's added a Mothercraft training school for nurses in 1954. In 1964, the nursery building became a hospital once again, sometimes called the St Anthony's Mothercraft Hospital or St Gerard's. The hospital operated until 1979, providing services for single and married women and their babies.

St Anthony's Home Croydon was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Inquiry* (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption. St Anthony's Home was an adoption agency and arranged the placement of babies in Catholic homes. With the passage of the *NSW Adoption Act 1965*, the Catholic Adoption Agency was established and St Anthony's relinquished its adoption services to this centralised agency. In 1972 the Catholic Adoption Agency organised the adoption of 300 babies from St Anthony's, a number that "closely approximated" the number of single mothers in the Home that year (Burford, 1989, p.20).

However after this peak, adoptions began to reduce in number, in line with national trends as single mothers gained better social services and public attitudes shifted. This necessitated a reevaluation of the services provided at St Anthony's. The institution continued to provide a residential service for single mothers, staffed by a social worker from the Catholic Adoption Agency. According to Burford, this service gave priority to women who "seriously contemplated adoption" (Burford, 1989, p.21).

Sister Kathleen Burford's history provides information about the Home's admission policy for single mothers from this period when adoption numbers were steadily declining in Australia. Burford's history of St Anthony's states that "every girl was free to change her mind about adoption and if so, was not excluded from the program offered". She goes on to state that there are "sound reasons against admitting in the one Home, those who decide to keep the baby and those who seriously contemplate adoption", because those keeping their child can exert "unnecessary peer pressure" on those planning to adopt. She writes that professional social workers consider it best practice to keep the women with different plans for their babies in "separate refuges with completely different functions" (Burford, p.23).

After 1975, St Anthony's shifted from institutional accommodation for children to private foster care with Catholic families. However Burford states that St Anthony's continued to house some children, because of the Sisters' belief that "there are some children from broken homes, who do not fit into a foster home, but who adjust better in a Home with other children, such as St Anthony's Home, until they are ready to return to their own home" (p.23). The number of children living at St Anthony's declined significantly, and it shifted from institutional model of care, to Sisters acting as "House Mothers" to groups of children in cottage care.

The nurseries at St Anthony's were converted to day care services for children from the Croydon area. It became a licensed child care centre in 1979.

The hospital in the St Gerard's building, on the north side of the day care centre (formerly the Kelly Wing), closed in 1980. This building was subsequently used by the NSW government to house the Montrose child protection unit.

According to research done by the staff of the Northern Territory Department of Health, St Anthony's Croydon was a place where some children from the Northern Territory were sent.

At the end of 1979, St Anthony's amalgamated with St Joseph's Home for Children, Croydon, and the remaining children were moved into St Joseph's Cottages.

Gallery



St Anthony's

Description: This is a photograph that appears on the cover of [*St Anthony's Family Care*](#) by Kathleen Burford (1989).



St Anthony's Children's Home, Croydon

More info

Chronology

- St Anthony's Petersham (1922 - 1925)
 - **St Anthony's Home Croydon (1925 – 1980)**
 - St Anthony's and St Joseph's Centre of Care (1980 - 2003)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart \(1866 - current\)](#)
Date: 1952 - 1980
- [St Vincent de Paul Society \(1854 - current\)](#)
Date: 1925 - 1952

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)
St Anthony's Home Croydon was mentioned in submissions 78, 313, and 415 to the Inquiry Committee as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

Related Organisations

- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1976 - 1988\)](#)
Department of Youth and Community Services [II] staff referred children from Montrose Child Protection Unit to St Gerard's Home, which was part of St Anthony's Croydon
- [St Joseph's Home for Children, Croydon \(1925 - 1981\)](#)
From 1952 St Anthony's Home and St Joseph's Home for Children were both operated by the Sisters of St Joseph. St Anthony's Home absorbed St Joseph's Home for Children in 1979.
Date: 1926 - 1979
- [Centacare Catholic Community Services Sydney \(1967 - 2011\)](#)
Centacare staff worked closely with the Sisters of St Joseph at St Anthony's Home Croydon
- [Montrose Maternity Hospital \(c. 1920 - c. 1935\)](#)
Department of Youth and Community Services [II] staff referred children from Montrose Child Protection Unit to St Gerard's Home, which was part of St Anthony's Croydon
- [St Margaret's Home for Unwed Mothers \(1894 - 1998\)](#)
When women were ready to leave St Margaret's, they could go to St Anthony's with their babies for a period of 12 months

Related Concepts

- [Adoption in New South Wales \(c. 1923 - current\)](#)

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

- Ewens, Alison, [Submission no 386 to the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), May 2004

Records

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

Records

- [Personal Record Cards, St Anthony's, Croydon \(1950s - 1970s\)](#)
 - [Adoption Records, c. 1920s-80s, St Anthony's, Croydon \(1920s - 1980s\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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