

# Tresillian Mothercraft Homes, Royal Society for the Welfare of Mothers and Babies

1918 –

**Other Names:**

- Mothercraft Nurses
- Tresillian

**URL:** <https://www.tresillian.org.au/about-us/>

## Details

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Tresillian is an organisation that provides support to families caring for children under the age of five years. Tresillian's proper name is the Royal Society for Mothers and Babies, which was formed in 1918 to save the lives of infants by promoting health and education. Tresillian Homes were affiliated with most of the hospitals and agencies that arranged adoptions in New South Wales in the 1950s and 1960s and cared for babies awaiting adoption. Young pregnant women who were unmarried worked in Tresillian Homes as paid domestics.

The Royal Society for the Welfare of Mothers and Babies was incorporated by an Act of the New South Wales Parliament in 1919 and its first president was Mr S.R. Innes Noad. In 1921 Queen Mary became the patron of the Society, until her death in March 1953. On 4 August 1954 Queen Elizabeth II, who had just visited Australia, became the patron of the organisation.

In 1921 the Royal Society for Mothers and Babies opened its first 'Infant Welfare Training School' in 'Tresillian', a fine house in Shaw Street Petersham. The first Tresillian was run by Dr Margaret Harper, the Society's first Medical Director. From that point the Society, and its nurses, adopted the name Tresillian.

Tresillian aimed to help mothers and babies through teaching mothers about better feeding, nursing and hygiene. It trained nurses in 'mothercraft' and provided rest homes for mothers, as well as conducting important campaigns for a pure milk supply to prevent gastroenteritis.

In the 1960s the main home, Tresillian Petersham, housed 10 mothers with breastfed babies at any given time, along with eight artificially fed babies and, by the 1960s, five premature babies. Over the course of the year it cared for more than 130 mothers and 220 babies.

By the 1960s Tresillian became formally affiliated with a number of organisations involved in infant welfare and adoptions. These included the Infant's Home, Ashfield; the Benevolent Society of New South Wales; The Women's Hospital (Crown Street); the Salvation Army and the Sydney Rescue Work Society.

A number of women whose babies were adopted in the 1960s and 1970s because they were unmarried remember that social workers from Crown Street Women's Hospital and the Royal Hospital for Women sent them to live at Tresillian Homes while they awaited the birth of their babies. A former Tresillian staff member told the Find & Connect team in September 2012 that this was a common occurrence. Such women were not patients,

but staff of Tresillian and worked as domestic help. They received some pay and had afternoons off. Social workers preferred to send women who were on their own to Tresillian or Karitane to work, because employment in a private home or commercial laundry was so much harder and riskier for them.

In July 1967, according to the organisation's Annual Report, Tresillian also agreed to care for babies awaiting adoption, at the request of the Hospitals Commission. In that year 224 babies awaiting adoption were admitted to the various Tresillian Homes.

The Petersham site was closed in 1997 and moved to a new site in the grounds of Canterbury Hospital. As well as the Willoughby and Wollstonecraft sites, Tresillian also operates at Penrith.

Tresillian Mothercraft Homes was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Inquiry* (2012) as an organisation that was involved in forced adoption.

## Records

Medical records for Tresillian centres at Willoughby, Wollstonecraft, Canterbury and Penrith are kept for approximately 30 years. Medical records from Petersham are kept in secondary storage and date from the 1980s to 1997. No records of Tresillian Vaucluse survive.

## Gallery

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**Tresillian, Petersham**

**Description:** The first Mothercraft Centre, Tresillian Petersham.



**Tresillian home, Greycliffe**

**Description:** This image shows the building where the Lady Edeline Hospital for Sick Babies and later the Tresillian Vaucluse operated in.



**Tresillian home, Wollstonecraft, North Sydney**

**Description:** This image shows the front of the Home, Tresillian Wollstonecraft and gardens.



**Tresillian Home, Willoughby**

**Description:** This is an image of the outside of the Tresillian North Home. Nurses with prams and cots can be seen outside in the garden.

## More info

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## Related Entries

### Ran

- [Tresillian North Home \(1927 - 2023\)](#)  
Medical records for Tresillian centres at Willoughby, Wollstonecraft, Canterbury and Penrith are kept for approximately 30 years. Medical records from Petersham are kept in secondary storage and date from the 1980s to 1997.
- [Tresillian Vaucluse \(c. 1935 - October 1968\)](#)  
Please note, no medical or personal records from Tresillian Vaucluse survive.
- [Tresillian Petersham \(1921 - 1997\)](#)  
Date: 1921 - 1997

### Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)  
Tresillian cared for babies waiting for adoption.

### Related Organisations

- [The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory \(1921 - 2018\)](#)  
Tresillian and The Salvation Army were both involved in adoptions. Tresillian cared for babies waiting for adoption.  
Date: 1960s -
- [Tresillian Wollstonecraft \(1940 - current\)](#)
- [Benevolent Society of New South Wales \(1813 - current\)](#)  
Tresillian and the Benevolent Society of New South Wales were both involved in adoptions. Tresillian cared for babies waiting for adoption.  
Date: 1960s -
- [The Infants' Home, Ashfield \(1877 - current\)](#)  
Tresillian and the Infants' Home, Ashfield were both involved in adoptions. Tresillian cared for babies waiting for adoption.  
Date: 1960s -
- [Sydney Rescue Work Society \(1890 - 1982\)](#)  
Tresillian and the Sydney Rescue Work Society were both involved in adoptions. Tresillian cared for babies waiting for adoption.
- [Crown Street Women's Hospital \(1893 - 1983\)](#)  
Social workers from Crown Street sent some unmarried mothers to live at Tresillian homes in the 1950s and 1960s. Tresillian cared for babies waiting for adoption.

### Related Concepts

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

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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/tresillian-mothercraft-homes/>