

McBride Maternity Hospital

1914 – 1975

Other Names:

- McBride's Maternity Hospital
- McBride Lying in Home
- MacBride Hospital
- Medindie Maternity Hospital

Details

The McBride Maternity Hospital was opened by the Salvation Army at Briar Avenue, Medindie on 28th January 1914. It took over the work of the Adelaide Maternity Home and provided accommodation and maternity services for single mothers and their babies, as well as public maternity patients. Many babies were adopted out from the hospital. In 1974 McBride Maternity Hospital ceased to operate exclusively as a maternity hospital and in 1975 was renamed McBride Hospital.

Unmarried mothers who gave birth at McBride were expected to remain there for three months. During this time they received general antenatal and postnatal care as well as assistance in learning to care for their babies. It was an unwritten policy of the hospital that no woman was discharged from care until a home or 'situation' had been arranged for her and/or her baby. Many babies were adopted from McBride and shortly after the passing of a new Adoption Act in 1967, the hospital was registered as an official adoption agency. The Matron acted as the adoption officer.

The hospital was named for Mr RJ McBride, a prosperous grazier with property at Kooringa, near Burra. He had contributed £3000 to assist in the purchase of the two-storey mansion known as The Briars. The size of the premises allowed the Salvation Army not only to provide accommodation and care for single mothers and their babies, but also to offer a private maternity hospital service to the general public. This additional service helped the Salvation Army to raise funds towards its work in South Australia. The hospital was also recognised as a training centre for obstetric nursing. In 1919 the birth of quadruplets made the news and donations were collected through *The Register* newspaper for the three surviving babies.

With beds for fifty patients the hospital was often filled to capacity. However, by the 1970s alternative care was available for single pregnant women and demand decreased. In 1974 the hospital adapted to this new situation by also providing care for patients convalescing from surgery or major illness.

This new aspect of the institution's work became more and more important and, as the hospital was no longer exclusively a maternity hospital, in 1975 McBride Maternity Hospital changed its name to McBride Hospital.

McBride Maternity Hospital was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

One woman who lived at McBride before her baby was born and subsequently adopted described her experiences in a submission to the Senate inquiry into forced adoption:

I have a vague memory that there seemed to be a seamless process of signing girls up for government benefits to pay for the accommodation with the Salvation Army.. However we also had to ‘voluntarily’ work in the kitchen and the hospital laundry, daily, right up until we went into labour to cover whatever costs there were. This kept the private wing of the hospital running as well as the part set up for adoptions. The work in the laundry was physically demanding, lifting wet sheets, hanging them out, taking off and folding them and washing and drying and ironing laundry for the hospital. It felt like a kind of penance.

On Sundays we were required to attend Salvation Army church service. My recollection is that objection was difficult. Most of the girls found the sermons distressing. The topic of the sermon usually centred on ‘sin’ and we all assumed, and were probably correct, that it was directed at us. We felt like a burden on society and the message in our minds was that we certainly didn’t deserve to keep our babies. For the few months I was there only one girl had the strength to keep her baby and resist the system set up for the adoption process. I remember having to ‘steel’ myself for the inevitable process of giving up my baby. Once in labour we were heavily medicated and I have no memory of the actual birth, but do remember staggering along a corridor just prior to birth feeling distressed and out of control of my situation.

For a long time after the birth I was grieving and crying continuously and I found it distressing that from downstairs I could hear the babies crying through the upstairs windows. We were encouraged to feed our babies (possibly to save the organisation money and reduce the workload on other staff). This gave me a week or so to bond with my baby. However, I signed the adoption papers because I couldn’t see any other option – it felt like a punishment that I had to endure. Nobody counselled me about the possibility of keeping my baby. However, I was told about the ‘cooling off’ period following signing the adoption papers. Two weeks after I signed the papers I phoned Major [redacted]. to tell her I had changed my mind and wanted to keep my baby. She told me over the phone that I would find it too much of a struggle without financial support. Major [redacted] assured me that my baby was being adopted by very ‘nice’ people. I felt powerless and unable to assert my request (Submission no 358).

Gallery



McBride Hospital, Medindie

Description: The library description states: Opening of McBride Maternity Hospital, formerly "The Briars", home of George C. Hawker, view taken in January, 1914.



McBride Maternity Hospital [B 78092]

Description: This is a copy of a photograph of the exterior of McBride Maternity Hospital. It is one of [a collection of 89 photographs](#) relating to the Salvation Army in South Australia, collected by Verity Stevenson, who was a Social Work Officer with the Salvation Army.

More info

Chronology

- Adelaide Maternity Home (1893 - 1914)
 - **McBride Maternity Hospital (1914 – 1975)**
 - McBride Hospital (1975 - 1986)

Related Entries

Run by

- [The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory \(1921 - 2018\)](#)
- [The Salvation Army, Australian Territory \(1880 - 1921\)](#)

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)

McBride Maternity Hospital was mentioned in submissions 57, 163 and 358 to the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Senate inquiry as an institution that was involved in forced adoption

Related Legislation

- [Adoption of Children Act 1966-1967, South Australia \(1967 - 1989\)](#)

Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012
- Steer, Hedley, *Social Salvation, Early development of the Social Wing of The Salvation Army*, 1996
- Kirkham, John C, *Southern Soup-Soap-Salvation, a compendium of Salvation Army Social Services in the Australian Southern Territory*, 2003
- The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territorial Headquarters (Vic), [Submission No. 46 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care: Appendix A: Children's Homes - A list of openings, closings and function](#), July 2003
- McDermott, Dallas, [Submission no 163 to the Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 28 March 2011

Records

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

Records

- [Historical information, memorabilia and photographs of the Salvation Army](#)
 - [Salvation Army Australia, Records of Homes in the former Southern Territory \(c. 1889 - c. 1988\)](#)
 - [Records of McBride Maternity Hospital, formerly Adelaide Maternity Home \(1893 - 1982\)](#)
 - [Records of the Aborigines' Office and Successor Agencies \(1866 - 2003\)](#)
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