

Drapers' Hall

1962 – 1981

Details

Drapers' Hall was established in 1962 by the Fairbridge Society Incorporated. From 1962 to 1964 it was located in a house in East Terrace, Adelaide, and then around 1965 moved to Crafers. It accommodated children from Britain between the ages of 6 to 16 who had been brought to Australia as part of the Fairbridge Family Migration scheme. Up to 20 children lived at Drapers' Hall at one time. Drapers' Hall closed in 1981 and became a respite care facility for people with an intellectual disability known as the Crafers Community Unit.

In 1962 the Fairbridge Society, which had been operating farms and institutions for migrant children in other states for decades, opened its last institution in Australia, Drapers' Hall. Its first location was on East Terrace, Adelaide, in a building known as Redcourt (in 2024, a sign on the building refers to it as Morecroft House).

At the Adelaide site, Drapers' Hall accommodated 13 children between 1962 and 1964. All of the children came to South Australia under Fairbridge's family migration scheme. The children at Drapers' Hall were all from "one parent" families, and after a temporary stay at the institution were reunited with their parent.

The first building for Drapers Hall had accommodation for 20. Between June 1962 and June 1964, 13 children stayed there. A report from 1965 stated that no children were currently at Drapers' Hall, and claimed that the Adelaide Committee of Fairbridge was unwilling to sponsor children from one- or two-parent families. On his visit to Australia from Britain in 1965, the Director of Fairbridge visited Adelaide, to investigate "future prospects for Drapers Hall" (NAA A446 1964/46181, p.33).

Following Major General Hawthorn's visit, Fairbridge purchased a property on Fairview Road in Crafers in 1965 (Mount Lofty Districts Historical Society Inc, 2015) formerly known as Craig-ard. It was renamed Drapers' Hall in recognition of the Drapers' Company of London who funded the Society's purchase of the property. The oldest portion of the building dated from 1874, and consisted of six rooms. An additional nine rooms had been added by later owners.

Drapers' Hall continued to cater solely for children who came to Australia as part of Fairbridge's Family Migration scheme. In South Australia, children travelled to Australia with their parents (unlike in WA, where "one parent" children travelled unaccompanied by family). However, these children were separated from their parents immediately upon arrival and lived at Drapers' Hall before being reunited with their parent/s.

In contrast to the experience of many children at Pinjarra or Molong farm schools who came under the Fairbridge family migration scheme, most residents of Drapers' Hall were able to see their family members regularly. The location in Crafers was not far from Adelaide, and the children attended school in the community, at Crafers Primary School and Heathfield High School.

The Hall accommodated up to 20 children at a time and over the course of its existence housed more than 200 children. Children were generally between the ages of 6 and 16, however, the 1971 Fairbridge Society Annual Report lists the youngest child to 'join them' that year was a boy of only 4 years of age.

In a 2012 article, Grant asserts that children at Drapers' Hall had a very different experience to those sent to Fairbridge farm schools in WA and NSW, due to the proximity of their parents, the more accessible location and the children's participation in the local community. Notwithstanding these significant distinctions between Drapers' Hall and Fairbridge farm schools, parents whose children were at Drapers' Hall did complain about the conditions there, with one woman describing the staff as "mean" to the children, making them box one another and confiscating their personal possessions (Grant, p.64).

In Grant's article, which draws on oral histories, written statements and interviews with former staff and Drapers' Hall children and parents, one mother, Edna Swindley, tells of becoming fed up with being separated from her children and removing them from the Home through a bedroom window to stay with her in her room at a migrant hostel. Apparently staff did not pursue the family after this occurred. Grant writes that in South Australia, parents in the family migration scheme were not required to sign a document giving legal custody to Fairbridge and the Immigration Department, as was the case in WA (Grant, 2015, p.64).

In the late 1960s and 1970s admission was arranged directly through the Warden of the Hall or through the South Australian Secretary of the Fairbridge Society. Correspondence at the National Archives of Australia states that in 1967 there was a "long waiting list" for Drapers' Hall. The Fairbridge family migration scheme provided the only avenue for some people to migrate from Britain to Australia, as the system regarded single parent families, and families with many children, as "liabilities" (Grant, p.53).

Drapers' Hall closed in 1981 and became a respite care facility, known as the Crafers Community Unit, run by the Strathmont Centre for people with an intellectual disability. In the late 1980s the building was sold and became a private home.

National Redress Scheme for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse

In 2021, the Commonwealth and South Australian governments have agreed to be a funder of last resort for this institution. This means that although the institution is now defunct, it is participating in the National Redress Scheme, and the government has agreed to pay the institution's share of costs of providing redress to a person (as long as the government is found to be equally responsible for the abuse a person experienced).

Gallery



Drapers' Hall

Description: This photograph was published on Facebook by the Mount Lofty Districts Historical Society Inc with the caption, "Drapers Hall during the Fairbridge Society ownership". The Facebook post from 5 November 2015 titled "On the Market - Drapers Hall (Craigard) continued" has some information about the the Fairbridge institution in Crafers and some comments from former residents.

More info

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- [Fairbridge Society Inc. \(1909 - 1987\)](#)
Date: 1962 - 1981

Related Events

- [Child Migration Programmes Investigation, UK Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse \(2017 - 2018\)](#)

Resources

- Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, [Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report](#), March 2018
- Jeffery, Chris and Sherington, Geoffrey, *Fairbridge: Empire and child migration*, 1998

Records

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

Records

- [Fairbridge Society, Records \[United Kingdom\] \(1908 - 2007\)](#)
 - [Visit to Australia of Major-General Hawthorn, director and secretary of Fairbridge Society \(1964 - 1968\)](#)
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