

St John's Hostel

1941 – 1970s

Other Names:

- St John's Church of England Hostel
- The Church of England Hostel

Details

St John's Hostel opened in Alice Springs in 1941. It provided accommodation for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children from remote areas who were attending school. In 1945 six Aboriginal boys from St John's were transferred to the Church of England Hostel for Inland Children at Kensington Park in South Australia. St John's Hostel also took in children under the care of the Welfare Branch. St John's closed in the 1970s.

St John's Hostel was established in 1941 by the Reverend Percy McD Smith, the first Anglican Priest-in-Charge at Alice Springs. Concerned at poor conditions and the lack of educational opportunities for Aboriginal children living at The Bungalow, which was also known as the 'Half-caste institution', the Reverend Smith began this new hostel in Bath Street in Alice Springs.

St John's aimed to provide a home for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children from remote areas whose parents wished them to come to town to further their schooling. Initially a small number of boys were housed in the sleep-out area of the Church of England rectory and they attended school in town. As numbers grew Father Smith recognised that a larger building was required. Funds were raised with contributions from the Church of England and building began.

During the Second World War, St John's was used as a recreation centre for troops. In 1945 all building work was completed and the hostel was officially opened. That same year six Aboriginal boys from St John's were selected for placement at the Church of England Hostel for Inland Children at Kensington Park in South Australia to further their education. Although the primary purpose of St John's Hostel was to provide accommodation for children who were studying in Alice Springs, children under the care of the Welfare Branch were also placed in the Home.

In 1946 St John's Hostel was described in the local press:

There is the new St. John's hostel of the Church of England, a fine two-storeyed building for boys and girls, with dormitories for younger and older children, for children from those in the infant school to those studying for the leaving examination. At present about 20 children are accommodated, but the building is planned in its present state to hold 50 children.

The Hostel had been built with two separate wings, one for boys and one for girls. The dormitories were described in 1948 as 'large', each with separate study rooms and libraries. Children ate together in a dining room.

In 1951 a newspaper article noted that due to that lack of an institution in Alice Springs for children regarded as "delinquent". A boy who had been committed to the custody of the State Children's Council was placed at St

John's.

In an interview for the National Library of Australia's Bringing Them Home project recorded in March 2001, Ted Hampton reflected on St John's Hostel where he had been placed at the age of 12 by his parents in order to further his education.

It wasn't really bad because there was a lot of mixed kids there. There was non-Aboriginals as well as so that's the main reason why it was as good as it was, because some of these kids were pastoral kids I believe... They certainly instilled the church ethics within us there

Ted attended the Hartley Street School which was across the road from the Hostel. He also remembers attending church 2 to 3 times a week and learning church rules and catechisms. He felt that the staff were 'trying to make us Christians'. In 1953 Ted was sent from St John's Hostel to St Francis House in South Australia. A significant number of Aboriginal boys had been moved from Alice Springs to this Home since the late 1940s.

St John's Hostel closed down in the 1970s.

Gallery



St John's Hostel, Alice Springs

Description: The description states: Front of the Saint John's Hostel, Alice Springs. A desolate courtyard with a small supervised boy playing in the dust. A two storey building of two wings joined by entrance section. Flywired dormitories on top floor.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Anglican Diocese of Carpentaria \(1900 - 1996\)](#)
Date: 1941 - 1968
- [Diocese of the Northern Territory \(1968 - current\)](#)
Date: 1968 - 1970s

Related Organisations

- [St Francis House \(1946 - c. 1961\)](#)
- [Church of England Hostel for Inland Children \(1945 - 1946\)](#)
- [The Bungalow \(1914 - 1942\)](#)

The Reverend Smith opened St John's Hostel as a response to poor conditions at The Bungalow.

Resources

- [Ted Hampton interviewed by Anne Ronberg in the Bringing Them Home Oral History Project \[sound recording\] \(2001\)](#), 25 March 2001
- [Church of England Activities - Children's frolic planned](#), Centralian Advocate, 21 October 1949
- Briscoe, Gordon, [Racial Folly - a twentieth century Aboriginal family](#), 2010