

Kedesh Maternity Home

1926 – 1986

Details

Kedesh Maternity Home was established by the Mission of St James and St John in 1926. It accommodated pregnant women and mothers and babies shortly after birth. It was first located next to the Women's Hospital in Carlton but in 1929 moved to Kew. In 1986 the Home was closed, and was replaced by the Kedesh Hostel in Box Hill.

Kedesh Maternity Home, run by the Mission of St James and St John, was established in 1926. Its first location was at 210 Cardigan Street, Carlton, adjoining the Women's Hospital. More than 250 'girls', unmarried mothers, passed through Kedesh in the next two and a half years.

In 1929, the Missioner Canon Lambie acquired more spacious premises for Kedesh, at 131 Stevenson Street, Kew. By 1935 this address had changed to 79 Stevenson Street, however the premises remained the same.

In its early days, Kedesh was run by Matron Keir (who did not retire until 1942). The Matron liked the 'girls' to come to the Home two months before their baby was due. However, she reported that many young women were anxious to leave their homes earlier, or their parents were anxious to have them 'away', and thus these women stayed at Kedesh for more of their pregnancies.

During this period, after giving birth at the Women's Hospital, the mothers returned to Kedesh and looked after their babies for a period of around 2 months (Cole, p.88 & 93). Over time, this practice changed and mothers and babies no longer returned to Kedesh after the birth. One history of the Mission describes the approach taken by Kedesh to the adopting out of babies in the 1960s:

... most girls had little to do with their baby once it was born; it would be adopted from the hospital under a tight veil of secrecy. This was believed to be best for the mother and the baby. The babies were adopted by 'good Christian families' and the girls were told 'you'll have your baby and you'll go home and forget'.

Some mothers chose to keep their babies, but the vast majority 'wanted' their babies to be adopted, according to Cole's history of the Mission (1969). Subsequent writers have established that mothers of 'illegitimate' children in institutions like Kedesh were given very little encouragement or support to keep their babies.

Babies who were not able to be adopted from Kedesh were sent to babies' homes operated by the Mission of St James and St John (the Arms of Jesus Home and later St Gabriel's).

When the Kedesh Home for unmarried mothers was first proposed by the Mission, some raised concerns that healthy young women would be housed with young women with venereal disease (VD). In response to this desire to keep separate women suffering from venereal disease, the Mission established two other homes around the same time as Kedesh came into being: the Horseshoe in Carlton and Ramoth in Ferntree Gully.

In 1942, Sister Rogers became Matron at Kedesh, and remained until her retirement in 1961. Just before her retirement, Matron Rogers attended the laying of the foundation stone by the Archbishop at the new Kedesh, built on an adjoining property to the 'old' Kedesh (which was demolished in 1962) at 79 Stevenson Street.

The new Kedesh could accommodate 24 'girls', along with the resident staff. The new building also saw some new practices and approaches at Kedesh. According to Cole's 1969 book, the young women at the new Kedesh received regular counselling from social workers and attended ante-natal classes.

The new building did not result in a change in the institution's approach to counselling young women at Kedesh. Cole's 1969 history contains a story about one young woman, written to provide 'some indication of the work of caring being done at Kedesh' (pp.94-95). 'Marie', aged 18, came to Kedesh about five months into her pregnancy. Marie had herself grown up in institutions and in foster care. Although at first she found the routine at Kedesh 'irksome', Cole writes that she soon realised that 'there must a programme in order that harmony may exist'. He describes a breakthrough that occurred when Marie apologised to a nurse for her rude behaviour. When Marie's baby daughter was born, Cole writes that 'she realised that she had no chance of keeping her and signed an adoption paper'. Marie was heartbroken: 'this was the only thing that she had ever had that had belonged to her, and because of her circumstances she had to give up the baby' (p.95) Marie's story, according to Cole, had 'a happy ending'. She contacted Kedesh a few months later to report that she was now a married woman, and a while after that, she happily informed the Mission that she was expecting a child.

The story of 'Marie' that appears in this history of the Mission of St James and St John, as well as its depiction of Kedesh as an institution, reveals much about how the institution, and society in general, regarded single mothers and their options for keeping their children. It tells us less about the views of the young women at Kedesh, and how they experienced their time in this institution.

One submission from a former resident of Kedesh to the Senate inquiry in 2011 into the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices tells a very different story to the institutional histories like Cole's. This woman remembers the overwhelming fear and shame that she felt when she found out that she was pregnant, aged 14. She writes to the Senate that, from the moment when she first visited the doctor to confirm the pregnancy, 'Decisions were taken out of my hands' (submission no 232, 27 June 2011).

In her submission, she described the attitude of her doctor, which was shared by the staff at Kedesh, where she was sent during her pregnancy: 'you'll have your baby and go home and forget'.

I was sent to Kedesh in Kew for many months in 1969. I felt safe there but also isolated and lonely and very ashamed of myself. The surrounding area was nice and we were walking distance from the Kew shops. We had a cooking and cleaning roster in this rather large grand building. Outings during the week consisted of walks to the shops and bus trips to Queen Victoria Hospital for Ante-Natal visits. Visitors were allowed on Sundays.

This woman's submission contradicts 'official' accounts such as Cole's description of the services offered to Kedesh residents: 'I don't recall receiving any counselling or ante-natal education'.

(This woman, who describes herself as a relinquishing mother in her submission, concluded her submission to the Senate by talking about the reunion she eventually had with her daughter.)

By 1964, 2000 young women had come through Kedesh. After the long stints by Matron Keir and Matron Rogers, Matron Stephen took over in 1962, the year when the 'new Kedesh' opened. Matron Stephen resigned in October 1968. Miss Elizabeth Bradshaw took her place in February 1969. Another long-serving staff member mentioned in Cole's history was Dr Alice Correll, Kedesh's doctor for more than 22 years.

From the late 1960s, there was a decline in the number of babies being adopted. The introduction of a single mother's pension in the 1970s led to a sharper fall in adoption rates.

By the 1980s, the programs at Kedesh had shifted towards support services for pregnant young women. In 1979, Kedesh bought a flat near the Home, where young mothers had supportive accommodation for the first few months after their babies were born.

During this period, the Mission was interested in providing support services to young single mothers who were not in its 'care', particularly in Melbourne's inner suburbs. PRAPS (Pregnancy and Parents Support Program) came into being in 1982. It was operated out of St Luke's Anglican Church in North Fitzroy, and Kedesh Maternity Home, Kew.

As an institution, Kedesh was becoming more and more irrelevant. Kedesh at Kew closed in 1986.

The Mission then established Kedesh Hostel at Box Hill, which consisted of a suburban house and a number of flats for 6 single mothers and their children. It became the headquarters of Pregnancy and Parent Support (PRAPS).

Since 1991 the Box Hill PRAPS replaced Kedesh and was renamed the Centre for Young Women and their Children (CHOICES).

In 1997 the Mission of St James and St John became part of Anglicare Victoria. At this time, records of the Mission were transferred to Anglicare Victoria. These included records of the various orphanages, homes and other residences run by the Mission. The custodian of these records is Anglicare Victoria.

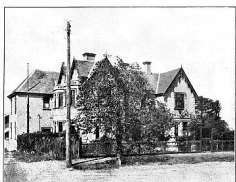
Kedesh Maternity Home was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Inquiry* (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

Gallery



'The new Kedesh'

Description: This illustration appeared in an article, 'Who cares?', in the Mission of St James and St John's journal, *The Brothers* vol 38, no 4, August 1961 (page 4).



Dedication and opening of Kedesh: The new maternity home for unmarried mothers 131 Stevenson St., Kew. Tuesday 16th April 1929

Description: This is a digitised version of a document held by the National Library of Australia.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Mission of St James and St John \(1919 - 1997\)](#)

Related Events

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

Kedesh Maternity Home was mentioned in submissions 89, 232, and 393 to the Inquiry Committee as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

Related Organisations

- [Arms of Jesus Babies' Home \(1925 - 1935\)](#)
Some babies whose mothers were at Kedesh were transferred to the Arms of Jesus Babies' Home.
Date: 1926 - 1935
- [Ramothe \(1926 - 1927\)](#)
The Mission of St James and St John established two institutions for women with venereal disease (The Horseshoe and Ramothe) so that Kedesh Maternity Home would only house 'healthy' young women.
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- [Ramothe Toddlers' Home \(1927 - c. 1932\)](#)
Many children housed at Ramothe Toddlers' Home had previously been at Kedesh Maternity Home.
- [Butler House for Homeless Girls \(1934 - 1940s\)](#)
Butler House was intended as a home for 'homeless and friendless girls', especially young women from Kedesh and Fairhaven.
- [St Gabriel's Babies' Home \(1935 - 1975\)](#)
Some babies whose mothers were at Kedesh were transferred to St Gabriel's Babies' Home.
Date: 1935 - 1974
- [Beryl Booth Court \(1978 - 1991\)](#)

Resources

- Swain, Shurlee with Renate Howe, *Single mothers and their children : disposal, punishment and survival in Australia*, 1995
- Nunn, H.W., [Social Services \(Chapter VIII of A Short History of the Church of England in Victoria 1847-1947\)](#), Issued by the Editorial Committee of the Centenary Celebrations, Melbourne Diocese, 1947
- Tonkin, Karen, [Submission no 468 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- *Who cares?*, The Brothers, 1961
- Lahey, John, *Fostering a sense of history*, The Age, 23 August 1993
- Testro, Ron, [He's a man with a mission](#), The Argus, 26 July 1956
- [Australian-first historical forced adoption redress scheme opens in Victoria](#), ABC news, 4 February 2024

Other Resources



Title: 'Who Cares?'

Type: Image

Date: c. 1961

[Details](#)

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Anglicare Victoria Records \(1886 - current\)](#)
- [Kedesh Maternity Home for Unmarried Mothers: Programs and invitations ephemera material collected by the National Library of Australia \(1926? - 1986?\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/kedesh-maternity-home/>