

St Gabriel's Babies' Home

1935 – 1975

Other Names: • St Gabriel Church of England Babies' Home

Details

St Gabriel's Babies' Home, Balwyn, was established by the Mission of St James and St John in 1935. St Gabriel's took over from the Mission's first babies' home, Arms of Jesus in East Melbourne, which closed in 1935. It accommodated babies up to the age of 18 months, many of which were adopted out. St Gabriel's Babies' Home had a Mothercraft Training School. It closed in 1975.

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During the first 10 years of operation of St Gabriel's, more than 800 babies were cared for there. Over 350 of these babies were adopted.

Those babies who were not adopted often were transferred to other institutions in the 'chain' of Homes operated by the Mission. After St Gabriel's, some babies went to the Toddlers' Home in Bendigo (St Luke's). If children had not been adopted by the age of six, they were transferred to the Glenroy Homes (St Agnes' for girls and St Nicholas' for boys).

'Problem' boys were sent from the Mission's homes for boys and girls to St Paul's Training School at Newhaven on Phillip Island, to receive vocational training in farming, carpentry and engineering.

St Gabriel's Babies' Home had a Mothercraft Training School, which was registered in 1938. Mothercraft nurses undertook fifteen months of training to be able to work in private homes, maternity hospitals, day nurseries and residential units for babies and infants.

In 1940, the Mission described St Gabriel's on its fifth anniversary:

The two nurseries for the babies, one for those up to 12 months, and one for those who have reached the toddler stage, are bright and sunny. White cots set against cream walls are covered with primrose linen spreads. Adjoining the nursery is the bathroom, fitted with lockers, one for each baby; bath tubs on stands and heated towel rails.

The 1950s in Victoria saw government and community concern about the conditions in children's homes, and the lack of interest and affection given to children in institutional care.

During this decade, medical trials were conducted on children in orphanages in Victoria, including children at St Gabriel's. The Age newspaper investigated these experiments in 1997, and found that hundreds of children in 'care' were used for medical studies.

A description of St Gabriel's in 1961 emphasised not the facilities at the Home, but the way that the Mission and the staff perceived their role caring for children at the Home:

The little ones are happy, healthy and well cared for, and those who tend them are happy also in the knowledge that they are doing a job of work for their Lord and Master that is really worth while. They are giving these tiny ones a chance to start their lives in an atmosphere of love, sympathy and affection.

Sister Brenda Smith became Matron at St Gabriel's in 1962, an experienced nurse with an interest in early childhood development. Matron Smith reflected on the babies for whom foster families or a return to their own families was not possible: 'This, I think, is our greatest challenge: that we may give these babies sufficient love and individual attention and mothering so that their developing personalities may be undamaged and whole.'

Matron Smith oversaw an extensive renovation project at St Gabriel's in the late 1960s. The Minna Johnson Cottage was built beside the Babies' Home, staffed by two cottage parents. Extensions to St Gabriel's commenced in 1967 and the new facilities were opened in 1969.

In 1974 St Gabriel's Babies' Home was sold to the Mental Health Authority and the Minna Johnson Family Group Home was relocated to North Balwyn. St Gabriel's Babies' Home closed the following year. Monk and O'Donoghue point to the growth of pre-adoptive fostering and the rising cost of training mothercraft nurses as important factors behind St Gabriel's closure at this time.

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.

St Gabriel's Babies' Home was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families.

Gallery



Happy scene at St Gabriel's

Description: This photograph was published in the Mission of St James and St John's journal, *The Brothers*.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

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

Related Events

- [Medical experiments \(c. 1945 - c. 1970\)](#)

The Age newspaper reported in 1997 on medical experiments conducted on babies at St Gabriel's in the 1950s.

Related Organisations

- [Arms of Jesus Babies' Home \(1925 - 1935\)](#)

St Gabriel's Babies' Home opened in 1935, replacing the service previously run at Arms of Jesus Babies' Home.

Date: 1935 -

- [Kedesh Maternity Home \(1926 - 1986\)](#)

Some babies whose mothers were at Kedesh were transferred to St Gabriel's Babies' Home.

Date: 1935 - 1974

- [St Luke's Toddlers' Home \(1932 - 1979\)](#)

Some babies were transferred from St Gabriel's Babies' Home to St Luke's Toddlers' Home in Bendigo.

Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

Resources

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#), 1997. *Relevance:* St Gabriel's Babies' Home was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families
- Paul, [Bringing them Home - Paul story](#), Bringing Them Home: stories from the report, 2001
- 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
- Testro, Ron, [He's a man with a mission](#), The Argus, 26 July 1956
- O'Neill, Cate, [The importance of photos](#), Find & Connect web resource blog, 17 June 2015
- [Babies Home: New building at Balwyn](#), The Age, 25 February 1935

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Anglicare Victoria Records \(1886 - current\)](#)
- ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)

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