

St Agnes' Girls' Home

1926 – 1963

Other Names:

- St Agnes' Home for Girls
- Glenroy Homes

Details

St Agnes' Girls' Home in Glenroy was established by the Mission of St James and St John in 1926. The Mission opened the Home to care for girls aged 5 to 14 who were born to unmarried mothers and who could not be cared for by their own families. The Home was closed in 1963, when its girls were transferred to the Mission's new Blackburn South Cottages.

St Agnes' Girls' Home in Glenroy was established by the Mission of St James and St John in 1926. It was near the site of St Nicholas' Boys' Home, established the same year.

The two Homes in Glenroy were seen as important links in the 'chain of Mission Homes' envisaged by Archdeacon Lamble.

The Mission opened the Home to care for girls born to unmarried mothers who could not be cared for by their own families. Girls came to St Agnes' from the age of six.

The Mission bought the property known as 'Sawbridgeworth' in Widford Road, Glenroy for the Girls' Home. It was renamed 'Wiseman House' in 1963 after the closure of the Home, and was still owned by St Matthew's Anglican Church in 2009.

Matron McLean was at St Agnes' for nine years from 1927. Her recollections of the Home shed some light on the involvement of the Mission's 'helpers' in the daily lives of the children, and the sometimes heartbreaking stories of the children at St Agnes'.

She describes the 'happy, well cared for little family' of 45 girls – 'tidy and warm, but a motley crowd, rather'. The Leagues and other 'friends' of the Home provided the girls with 'lovely woolly jumpers' and warm socks.

Girls at St Agnes' all attended local schools (usually Glenroy State School, which also had many boys from St Nicholas') in an effort to keep the girls' lives 'natural'. Matron McLean says that sisters were kept together at St Agnes', and mentions two girls who pushed their beds together every night in the dormitory.

Matron McLean concluded, 'There is no substitute for the home and normal parental love and care. There is no adequate substitute for this, although the Mission of St James and St John has always sought to be the best possible "second best"'.

The Matron describes the visits to St Agnes' by some girls' parents, and also how some children wondered why no one ever came to visit them. One former resident recalled the 'Visiting Sundays', which happened once a month:

St Agnes was on the corner of Melbourne Avenue and Whitford St and on visiting day we'd all stand on the fence and you'd hang over and look right along up near the station and see if visitors were coming, and then you'd yell 'your mother's coming'

Girls were required to work at St Agnes', with tasks including caring for younger girls, mowing lawns, darning and needlework.

Overcrowding had been a problem at St Agnes' in the 1940s: one reminiscence mentioned 'times when its sides have almost bulged and the verandahs have been weighted down by an overflow of beds'.

The G.E. Lamble Cottage for Girls was added in 1941. It was a long building with a rumpus room, and house-mother's room in the centre, with two wings, each housing 12 girls. This development reflects the growing popularity of the 'cottage system' for housing children in 'care', and the move away from congregate, dormitory-style, accommodation.

In Lamble Cottage, 12 girls were housed in each of the two rooms, and there were four cubicles for 'senior girls'.

In 1946, the Mission reported that the St Agnes' and St Nicholas' Homes were to be rebuilt on the cottage system at an approximate cost of 50,000 pounds. These plans did not come to fruition however, and girls were transferred to the cottages at Blackburn South when St Agnes' closed in 1963.

In January 1956, St Agnes Homes for Girls was declared an approved children's home under the Children's Welfare Act 1954.

The number of girls at St Agnes' had begun to decline in the 1950s, with only 27 girls living there in 1961. St Agnes' accommodated 925 girls between 1926 and 1963.

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.

Gallery



1914 Sawbridgeworth, Widford Street, Glenroy [editor's note: site of St Agnes' Girls' Home]



A perspective of one of the new attractive homes to be erected at Blackburn South for the girls of St Agnes', Glenroy

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



1950 Aerial View, Widford St. Glenroy

Description: This aerial photograph shows Widford St. Glenroy around 1950. It shows the St Agnes' Girls' Home on the left, including the George Edward Lambie Cottage. The building on the right was previously occupied by the Glenroy Girls' Home. The photograph description given by Broadmeadows Historical Society reads: "Shows the Mirror Image Houses Built for the Wiseman Brothers in the 1880s. The Houses Were Named Sawbridgeworth (L) and Ashleigh (R). When this Photograph was Taken Sawbridgeworth was Known as St. Agnes Church of England Home for Girls and Ashleigh, renamed Sunnilands, was Owned by Mr. T. Shaw Logan. Sunnilands was Demolished in 1960. B/W Photo 10x15cm"



1920 Girls from St. Agnes Home

Description: Group photo of girls from St Agnes Home; B/W Photo 10x15cm

More info

Related Entries

Run by

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

Related Organisations

- [Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind \(1866 - 2004\)](#)
Older girls from St Agnes' Girls' Home looked after children from the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind when they were sent to Olinda during World War Two.
- [St Nicholas' Boys' Home \(1926 - c. 1955\)](#)
St Agnes' Girls' Home was located nearby to St Nicholas' Boys' Home in Glenroy.
- [Ramoth Toddlers' Home \(1927 - c. 1932\)](#)
Some children were transferred from Ramoth Toddlers' Home to St Agnes' Girls' Home in Glenroy.
- [Blackburn South Cottages \(1963 - 1988\)](#)
When St Agnes' closed in 1963, girls were transferred to Blackburn South Cottages.

Resources

- Carroll, Steven, *The Art of the Engine Driver*, 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
- [Christmas is party time ...](#), The Argus, 15 December 1952
- Testro, Ron, [He's a man with a mission](#), The Argus, 26 July 1956
- [Ken Pound interviewed by Gwenda Davey in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 29 November 2010 - 13 December 2010

Other Resources



Title: The Blackburn Story

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 \(1886 - current\)](#)

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