

Sydney Female Refuge

c. 1870 – 1926

Details

The Sydney Female Refuge dates from around 1870. It was run by the Sydney Female Refuge Society, a Protestant organisation established in 1848, and mostly administered by a committee of women. The Refuge was located in Pitt Street, Sydney, next door to the Catholic refuge, the House of the Good Shepherd. Originally, it was established as a refuge for 'fallen women' (women working in prostitution) to be 'rescued'. It housed women of all ages. Around 1903 the Refuge moved to new premises in Glebe Point Road, Glebe. In 1926, the Refuge became a home for elderly women, known as Rosebank, which operated until 1938.

In the Australian Women's Register entry about the Sydney Female Refuge Society, Francis and Carter write that the Ladies' Committee which ran the Refuge 'enforced strict moral codes coupled with religious instruction to rehabilitate the Refuge inmates'.

According to Godden, although the Sydney Female Refuge was run by a committee of Protestant women, the institution accepted women of the 'other' faith (that is, Catholic). She writes that sectarianism similarly had little impact on the management of its next-door neighbour, the Catholic House of the Good Shepherd, and that the two institutions often co-operated.

The minimum period of stay at the Sydney Female Refuge was officially 18 months, although in actuality this varied from resident to resident. Godden writes that the Refuge expected its 'inmates' to shed their past lives as completely as possible. The women wore new clothing provided for them by the Refuge.

The Refuge had a commercial laundry where the women worked, which contributed to the cost of running the institution.

The Refuge was not often successful in its aim to reform and redeem its inmates. The annual report of the Sydney Female Refuge Society for 1870 conceded that its failure rate was 72%. A resident who was placed in domestic service and remained there for 3 years was cited as a 'rare success'.

Around 1903, the Refuge moved into new premises on Glebe Point Road, Glebe. According to Cooper, the move from Sydney was possibly due to the State Government's decision to reclaim the Pitt Street building for the railways. The new building in Glebe was known as Rosebank, and described as 'palatial building, standing in extensive grounds'.

In 1926, the Sydney Female Refuge at Glebe closed, and Rosebank became a 'twilight home' for elderly women, which operated until 1938.

Gallery



Rosebank, the Sydney Female Refuge from 1903

Description: This is a copy of an image published to illustrate a post written by Paul F. Cooper about the history of the Sydney Female Refuge Society.



Convent of Good Samaritan and Female Refuge

Description: This is an image of the Sydney Female Refuge on Pitt Street, Sydney. It shows the refuge in the foreground as a large building with two simple, two-storey wings on each side of a single-storey gated entrance. The Good Samaritan Convent is visible further along the street. This image was published in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* on 20 July 1901. The title was provided by the newspaper.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sydney Female Refuge Society \(1848 - 1926?\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [House of the Good Shepherd \(1848 - 1901\)](#)
The Sydney Female Refuge was situated next door to the House of the Good Shepherd from c.1870, in Pitt Street, Sydney.
- [State Children's Relief Board \(1881 - 1923\)](#)
The annual reports of the State Children's Relief Board record that it sent some girls to the Sydney Female Refuge.
- [Aborigines Protection Board, State Government of New South Wales \(1883 - 1940\)](#)
The annual reports and other records of the Aborigines Protection Board report that it sent some Aboriginal girls to the Sydney Female Refuge.

Resources

- Godden, Judith, *Sectarianism and purity within the woman's sphere: Sydney refuges during the late nineteenth century*, Journal of Religious History, 1987
 - [Women's Conference at Sydney: Fifty-Two Societies Represented, Record of Great Social Work](#), The Mercury, 10 August 1911
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