

Home of Mercy

1890 – c. 1953

Other Names:

- House of Mercy
- Good Shepherd Home of Mercy
- Home of Mercy and Babies' Home
- Diocesan House of Mercy
- Home of Mercy including Hope Cottage

Details

The Home of Mercy, run by the Anglican Church, opened in 1890. It was a rescue and maternity home for single mothers, some of whose babies were adopted from the Home. After a number of sites, the Home moved to New Town in 1905 where there was a small babies' and children's Home attached. The children's Home at Home of Mercy eventually became Clarendon Children's Home for children aged 3 and over. Some wards of state lived there. Clarendon moved to Mount Royal at Kingston Beach in 1945. In 1953, the rest of the children at the Home of Mercy also moved to Mount Royal and the Home closed.

Maud Montgomery, the wife of the Bishop of Tasmania, was the main impetus behind the establishment of the Home of Mercy in 1890.

As a rescue Home, its purpose was to reform women that the Church and other authorities considered to be promiscuous. One article from 1890 described the Home of Mercy as a 'penitentiary' (*The Colonist*, 1890).

The original site of the Home was in Fitzroy Crescent. In 1891 it moved to the Female Factory at Cascades, probably into the former Superintendent's cottage at 3 Apsley Street. That year, the average age of the women was 17.6 years. The oldest was 22 years old and the youngest, 11.

The Home had a laundry to provide employment for and to encourage a work ethic in the women and to finance its operations. In 1904, the management ran a competition in washing and ironing. The women also cut willow along the creek that ran through the former Female Factory to mend baskets.

The role of Matron at the Home of Mercy was difficult to fill because the pay was so small. The work also appears to have been stressful. In 1893, the Matron, a Miss Dromedary, 'broke down'.

In 1895, the committee of the Home of Mercy briefly took over the management of the Lying-in Hospital. That same year, in conjunction with the representatives of some other institutions, they also took over the Contagious Diseases Hospital, established in 1879 to treat sexually transmitted diseases in women. Some women from the Hospital went to the Home of Mercy after their discharge.

In 1896, the house's unsuitability for classifying women and its poor condition led to a move within the complex to Number Four Yard near the Hospital.

The same year, the Home acquired 31 Apsley Street, South Hobart which became known as Hope Cottage Ward. Earlier in 1896, the Church of England's rescue home in Launceston, Hope Cottage, had been closed. In November 1896, the Church approved a decision by the committee of the Diocesan House of Mercy to continue

the work of Hope Cottage, Launceston, at the institution in Hobart.

Hope Cottage in Launceston had been a rescue home for 'first cases' only (single mothers pregnant with their first child). After it was moved to Hobart, the Hope Cottage Ward continued as a home for first cases. It was run separately from the Home of Mercy, but governed by the same board of management (*Daily Telegraph*, 5 September 1896).

Inmates classified as capable of taking a degree of responsibility lived at Hope Cottage in Hobart. The management committee was apparently determined to 'severely limit the number' of these girls, only receiving those who were judged as likely 'to effect a reformation of character'. The 'proper work amongst the more hardened of our sisters, who have never experienced the softening influences of motherhood' was to continue at the Home of Mercy (*The Mercury*, 13 November 1896).

For a time (from at least 1911 until 1919) the annual reports for the Home of Mercy were titled 'Home of Mercy including Hope Cottage'. At some point, it would seem that the two institutions were amalgamated under the name of the Home of Mercy.

In 1904, the Tasmanian government decided to sell the Female Factory. The following year, the Home of Mercy moved to Midwood Street, New Town. The street address later became known as 2-4 Midwood Street, New Town. This site was part of Bishop's Glebe, a 33 acre plot of land the Crown had granted to the Church of England as an endowment for the See (*The Mercury*, 1903).

At this time the Home was apparently known interchangeably as the Good Shepherd Home of Mercy (as reflected in a stone engraving on the building at Midwood Street) and the Home of Mercy and Babies' Home. The latter name reflected a growing emphasis on the care of babies and children, usually born to single mothers.

Initially at New Town, there was a small home for the children and babies slept at night in an enclosed balcony area of the Home of Mercy. From 1915, a 4 room cottage on the grounds was used as a 'day care centre' for the children of mothers working in service, or at the Home of Mercy laundry.

From 1920 the annual reports for Home of Mercy were titled, 'Home of Mercy and including the Children's Home'.

In 1923, following a donation from Mrs JF Walker of Clarendon at Gretna, the management built a small orphanage on the site to take children aged over three years. This purpose-built orphanage became known as Clarendon Children's Home. Clarendon Children's Home had its own separate constitution to the Home of Mercy.

In the 1930s, the babies and children in the Home were orphans and wards of state or they had working mothers. The Home also took in young women who were single mothers or without a 'suitable home'. Some were considered to be unmanageable, or 'feeble-minded' according to the definition in the *Mental Deficiency Act 1920*. All the women worked in the laundry at the new premises.

An article from 1939 stated that the 'Home of Mercy and Babies' Home at New Town has accommodation for 30 babies and children up to the age of 3 years ... It is the only home for babies in the State' (*The Mercury*, 4 August 1939).

The article went on to provide more information about the Home of Mercy (and its predecessor in Launceston, Hope Cottage):

Children from all parts of the State are taken into the home. Frequently parents leave their children there, and, when they are able, take them back into their homes. Sometimes a mother who is going to have another children leaves her other small children at the home until she is well again. During the past year seven children have been most satisfactorily adopted, and have given great happiness to their new parents

...

The Home originated in Launceston when it was known as Hope Cottage. It was moved to the South and located in the old women's prison building at the Cascades and the work went on under the auspices of Bishop Montgomery's wife. It in the beginning it was confined more or less to rescue work among women, but gradually the character of it has changed until now the institution has become practically a babies' home. There is accommodation for only 12 women.

In 1941, the Elizabeth Rose wing opened in the orphanage. In 1945, the children at Home of Mercy aged 3 and above moved to the new Clarendon Children's Home at Kingston Beach.

The Home of Mercy arranged adoptions for infants. However, some single mothers did return home with their babies. For instance, in July 1938, the Anglican *Church News* reported that: 'One of the girls is returning to her parents at the end of the week, and is overjoyed at the thought of taking her baby daughter with her'. By 1952, the Home had a committee that investigated prospective parents.

By the 1950s, the number of single mothers coming into the home had declined. This meant that there was not enough staff for the laundry, the Home's most important source of income. By then most of its work consisted of caring for babies boarded there by their mothers. The loss of the laundry, as well as increases in salaries and the cost of living created financial difficulties.

In 1953, management decided to stop caring for babies and to take the two and three year old children to Clarendon Children's Home at Mount Royal, Kingston Beach, where it had been since 1945. By April 1953, the move was complete.

Gallery



Home of Mercy, Midwood Street, New Town

Description: *Church News*, March 1953, p. 6 The *Church News* is published by the Anglican Church in Tasmania.



Stone Engraving - Home of Mercy and Good Shepherd Home, Midwood Street

Description: The engraving reads: 'AMDC: The Good Shepherd Home of Mercy', indicating an alternative name for the Home of Mercy.



Yard Four at the Female Factory, Cascades



Home of Mercy Midwood Street

Description: This is a copy of a slide showing the Home of Mercy in Midwood Street, Newtown.



Home of Mercy Midwood Street

Description: This is a copy of a slide showing the Home of Mercy in Midwood Street, Newtown.

More info

Chronology

- Hope Cottage (1887 - 1896)
 - **Home of Mercy (1890 – c. 1953)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Anglican Diocese of Tasmania \(1842 - 1981\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Female Factory, Cascades \(1827 - 1853\)](#)
The Home of Mercy was located at the Female Factory, Cascades between 1890 and 1905.
- [Contagious Diseases Hospital \(1879 - 1900\)](#)
The same committee ran the Home of Mercy and the Contagious Diseases Hospital between 1895 and 1900.
- [Lying-in Home, Cascades \(1888 - 1900\)](#)
The same committee ran the Home of Mercy and the Lying-in Hospital for a brief period in 1895.
- [Anchorage Home \(1889 - 1920\)](#)
By 1920, the Anchorage Home was not needed, in part, because of the Home of Mercy.
- [Clarendon Children's Home \(1922 - 2004\)](#)
For many years, Clarendon Children's Home and the Home of Mercy were on the same site at New Town. A committee from the Anglican Diocese of Tasmania jointly ran the two Homes. Children aged 3 and over usually lived at the Clarendon Children's Home, and babies and toddlers lived at the Home of Mercy.

Resources

- Henningham, Nikki, [Deaconess Orders](#), The Australian Women's Register, 2009
- Alexander, Alison, *The public role of women in Tasmania, 1803 - 1914*, 1989
- [Violet Day in Hobart](#), The Mercury, 21 August 1920
- Daniels, Kay, *Prostitution in Tasmania*, So much hard work: women and prostitution in Australian history, 1984
- [Treat to children of the charitable institutions](#), 22 May 1900
- [Hope Cottage](#), The Tasmanian, 29 June 1895
- National Archives of Australia, [Forced Adoptions History Project](#), 2013

Records

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

Records

- [Clarendon Children's Home Records \(1905 - 2006\)](#)
- [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)

- [Building Applications, Hobart City Council \(1919 - 1990\)](#)
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