

St Mary's Home, Rockhampton

1907 – 1917

Other Names:

- St Mary's Anglican Rescue Home
- Walter and Eliza Hall nursery

Details

St Mary's Home, Rockhampton, was opened in 1907 at "The Range", Jessie Street, as a Home for unmarried mothers and their babies. It was run by a committee of the Anglican Diocese of Rockhampton, although the home accepted women of any denomination. Initially women were expected to stay at the home for at least eight months before being discharged, often to domestic service placements or back to their families. Babies were often discharged with their mothers or to their families, although the Home did arrange for some babies to be adopted, boarded out, or sent to an orphanage. By 1913 the Home was also beginning to operate as a nursery, with babies remaining behind after their mothers had been discharged. This practice, along with an increase in the numbers of women admitted to the home, led to serious overcrowding. In 1915 a new building was purchased for the Home on Beserker Street, Rockhampton. In 1917 St Mary's changed its function to focus more on accommodation of children, and was renamed as St George's Orphanage.

At the opening of St Mary's Home in 1907 it was declared that no mother there would be separated from her child. While initially most women did keep custody of their children, in the first annual report of the home it was stated that, of the 12 babies born at the Home that year, three were adopted out, and one was sent to an orphanage. The Matron stated she believed it was best for the babies to remain with their mothers for the first nine months of their lives, and then be boarded out "and reared under careful discipline".

Women who could afford to pay for their stay at St Mary's were asked to do so, however there was no charge for women who could not afford it. Instead, the women paid for their accommodation by performing laundry work, which was a primary source income for the Home. They also took needlework classes, and the items made were sold to supplement the home's income.

After two years the home was running almost at full capacity, with nine women and six babies in residence. The Matron complained that the home was too small, and that the laundry was insufficient for the work being done by the mothers. By the start of 1913 numbers had doubled, with 18 women and 17 babies in the home. Verandahs were converted into sleeping quarters, however the need to further expand was pressing. Despite the Home's initial policy of keeping children with their mothers, the new Matron, Ms Brooks-Ball, believed "the majority of the girls were not capable of looking after them", and that the babies should instead be kept under the care of the Church. The average stay of women at St Mary's was now just one month, down from 8 months when the home first opened, while the number of babies living at the home after their mothers had been discharged continued to increase.

At the same time, the Bishop of the Rockhampton Anglican Diocese was expressing concern about children in the region under the care of the State, who were outside the scope of St Mary's as a Home for mothers and babies. The St Mary's committee began to consider expanding the home to include cottage homes to serve as "small orphanages" for these children. The committee appealed to the Queensland State Government and the Walter and Eliza Hall Trust, who agreed to fund the expansion of the home. In 1915 a new site for St Mary's was purchased at Berserker Street, Rockhampton. This site included a large stable, which was used as a temporary nursery for the increasing number of children at the Home. A new nursery was built the following year, and

named the Walter and Eliza Hall nursery.

In 1917 St George's Orphanage, Rockhampton, was officially opened as a licenced children's home on the St Mary's site. St Mary's continued to operate and take in unmarried mothers, however the primary focus of the institution was now on the accommodation of unaccompanied children. The nursery and maternity section of St George's Orphanage continued to be called St Mary's until at least 1922.

More info

Chronology

- **St Mary's Home, Rockhampton (1907 – 1917)**
 - St George's Orphanage, Rockhampton (26 October 1917 - 17 November 1922)

Records

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

Records

- [St George's Homes, Rockhampton Records \(1917? - 1982\)](#)

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