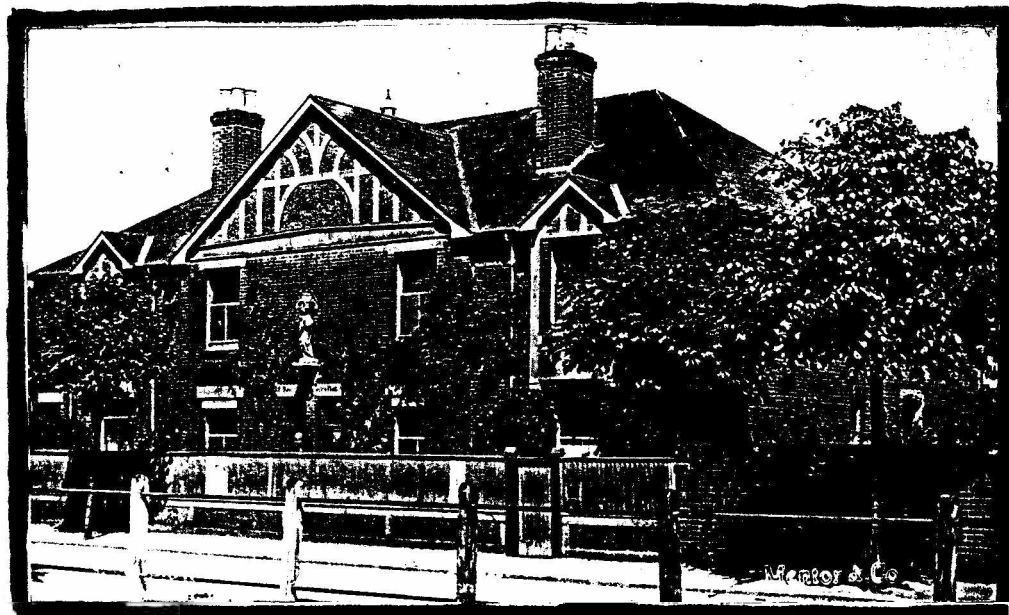
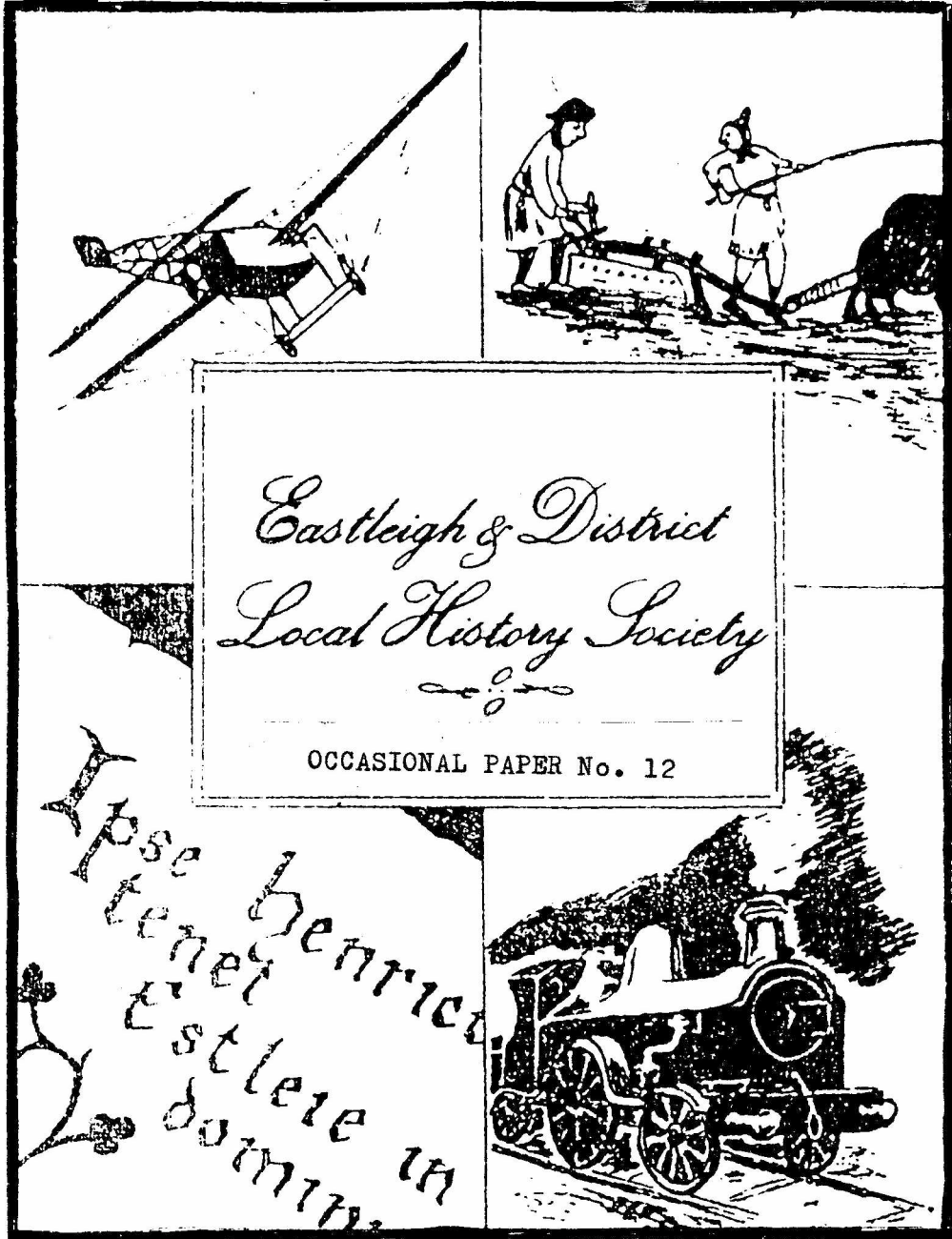


St Mary's Home, Eastleigh.



ST. MARY'S HOME, EASTLEIGH, 1884 - 1924.

This Home for destitute Catholic girls stood in the part of Upper Market Street which was then known as "Park View", opposite what is now Safeways Store and the Bus Terminus. Despite the destruction of all the other buildings in the road, St. Mary's Home (number 18) is still there, although in a very much altered form.

The principle written description of the beginnings of the Home is contained in the "Memorandum on the establishment of the Eastleigh Mission" by the Rev. John Doran. This appears as a postscript to the "Catholic Registers of the Brambridge (afterwards Highbridge) Mission in Hampshire 1766 – 1869" by R.C. Baigent, printed in Vol. 27 (about 1927) of the Catholic Record Society Publications. I have described the connection between Brambridge, Highbridge and Eastleigh in a booklet entitled "Swithun Wells and the Brambridge Story" which tells of the Catholic continuity in this area from the 1570s to the present day. St. Mary's Home occupies a small niche in this history, recorded in a water colour of the Highbridge Chapel, dated 1897, and on which is written "*The Catholic Chapel at Highbridge near Eastleigh ceased to be used in 1884, when the Rev. L. Gunning began to say Mass at St. Mary's Home, Eastleigh, which home was founded by Miss Simeon*".

The Memorandum says that Miss Jane Simeon (1845- 1905), second daughter of Sir J.B. Simeon, M.P., had expressed a wish to devote her life and means to the care of neglected children in bad moral surroundings. The Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth asked her to found an institution in Eastleigh, where she first rented a house, No. 28 Market Street, in February, 1884, and in the summer of the same year a few cottages farther up the street were converted into St. Mary's Home. With the impending removal of the Carriage and Locomotive Works from Nine Elms, the Bishop saw that Eastleigh would soon become an industrial centre and so bought a piece of land in Leigh Road. A chaplain was sent to St. Mary's Home in 1887 and a "school chapel" for the local Catholics was built in 1888. I think this was the "tin church" or "old school" on the Leigh Road site, where Holy Cross Church now stands (built 1902), and where Holy Cross School (built 1904) stood until it was demolished and replaced, in 1972, by the Swithun Wells School in Hillcrest Avenue, Chandlers Ford. It would seem then that it was only for these three years, 1884 - 1887, that the Chapel at the Home was in public use, but it continued to serve the inmates and the staff.

In 1891, the Southampton Observer reported, on 12th September:

“St. Mary's Home, Eastleigh. This institution, situated in Park View, overlooking the Park, was erected 8 years ago, for the reception and provision of destitute girls from all parts of the country. The Home is now being considerably enlarged, by the addition of a large dining room, two dormitories and a playground. The work is being carried out by Messrs. Crook & Sons of Northam, Mr. Charles Cooksey of Eastleigh being the architect and surveyor. Since the establishment of the institution a great work has been done for the benefit of destitute and outcast girls, who have not only had a religious training, but have had situations provided for them and have been placed in respectable positions in life. It is under the superintendence of Miss Simeon, a lady who not only devotes the whole of her time to the work, but is the main pecuniary support of the institution. There are at present resident there about 60 - 70 girls Rev. Fr. Molloy is in charge of the private chapel at the Home, and also of the new church at Eastleigh.”

We hear of the Chapel being used on the occasion of Miss Simeon's funeral, as reported in the Hampshire Chronicle of 15th April 1905 when *“the body was taken into the chapel adjoining the Home on Tuesday evening, and on Wednesday morning at 8 o'clock the Rev. Fr. Hickey performed the first part of the funeral ceremony. The interment took place in the afternoon, the cortege starting from the Home at 2.30 p.m. and the service at the cemetery being conducted by the V. Rev. Canon Gunning of Winchester.”* (Fr. T. Hickey was Parish Priest of Eastleigh Holy Cross from 1903 - 1916). In the Log Book of Holy Cross school for 12th April 1905, it is recorded: *“Mistress left school at 2.20 p.m. to attend the funeral of Miss Simeon. 3 boys also withdrawn to attend same. School in charge of 2 supplementary teachers”*. Miss Simeon was buried in Plot E19 among the Catholics in Eastleigh cemetery.

Before describing the other contacts between the Home and the School, here are some accounts of the actual buildings used for the Home in 1884.

From the C.E. James Papers: *“St. Mary's Home. These four houses were erected in 1880 by Mr. John Searle, a bricklayer of Bishopstoke, who leased the site of the houses from the Chamberlayne Estate on 3rd February 1880, at £10 per annum. In 1884, the premises were leased by Miss Simeon and used as a Home for Catholic girls. Also in 1884, Albert Charles Blake, a builder of Eastleigh, erected the chapel on the ground adjoining.”*

In the Southampton Times of 25th October 1884, there is a report of the opening ceremonies for the Mission Hall at Eastleigh. This, too, had been built by Mr. Blake “*who also erected the Roman Catholic chapel, recently constructed here in lieu of the one at Highbridge, and that at the sole expense of Miss Simeon of Eastleigh.*” (Mr. Blake was often in the news about this time and deserves a paper to himself.) Kelly's Directory for Southampton, 1887, has an entry for St. Mary's Catholic Industrial Home for destitute children, built in 1884 by Miss Simeon of Eastleigh: “*a commanding structure of brick with stone dressings, facing the Park, and has a chapel adjoining, served by the priests from Winchester.*”

Leaving bricks and mortar for the more interesting subject of the people who lived in the Home, at first I could find no information on the girl inmates. The memorandum of Fr. Doran said that the work of the Home had been transferred to the nuns at Cold Ash in Berkshire in 1924, when Miss Mary Anne Ward, who had succeeded her friend Miss Simeon as Superintendent, had retired in failing health.

I wrote to Cold Ash and was invited to come and see the “Register of St. Mary's” which had been preserved there. As it was some time before I could do this, I tried meanwhile to investigate the lives of the two ladies and the reasons for the setting up of these “rescue” homes in the Victorian era. Mary Jane Simeon, though I have not contacted her family, was easy enough to put in her setting, since she is identified in the Memorandum as the 2nd daughter of Sir John Simeon, M.P. She was a sister of the next Sir John, of Swainston in the Isle of Wight, descended through the Salisbury and Montagu families from Lady Margaret Pole. The house at Swainston was destroyed by a bomb in the last war, but it was a place of great beauty. Its gardens were beloved by the poet Tennyson, who is reputed to have written “*Maud*” with Swainston in mind. This was the background of wealth, elegance and good living that Mary Jane left for the raw new town of Eastleigh.

Mary Anne Ward, the friend who joined Mary Simeon in 1899, came from an equally privileged sphere and not only contributed to the work of the Home, but also used her fortune to pay for the building of Holy Cross Church. There is at present still some mystery as to who she was, for the Memorandum says that, like Miss Simeon, she was the daughter of a convert of the “Oxford Movement”, the upheaval in the Church of England in the early 19th century. This movement produced churchmen like Keble, who remained High Anglican, and Newman, who became a Roman Catholic, as did also its most famous layman, William George Ward. He too inherited an estate on the Isle of Wight, and the Wards and the Simeons were close friends and connected by marriage.

Unfortunately, our Mary Anne cannot be identified as a daughter of William George, for all his family are well documented and his daughters are all accounted for, without any Mary Anne of St. Mary's Home. From circumstantial evidence, I think she must have been connected with this family and I am still looking for the missing link to prove her relationship.

When I finally visited the Convent at Cold Ash, now a Retreat Centre with a small day school attached, the sight of the St. Mary's Register was worth the journey. This remarkable document is a cloth-covered volume, foolscap size, but written across lengthways, and in it each girl is given a number followed by her name, age, date of entry, date of leaving, followed by "general remarks". On the fly-leaf is written: *"In an envelope marked with the same number as the one against the child's name will be found letters received about her."* Below this is written: *"The School at St. Mary's Home, Eastleigh, Hants, was transferred to St. Finian's, Cold Ash, Berks. in 1924."*

Unfortunately, the envelopes and correspondence have been lost, so we have only the general remarks to go upon, but these are quite startling sometimes. Unlike a "School Log" this was a private record and the Lady Superintendents could write as they pleased. Although there were matrons and staff to do the domestic work, the Register seems to have been kept by the Ladies themselves. There are, however, no signatures, so one can only judge this from the decisions given in the "Remarks" column.

The ages of the girls varied from 2 years to middle teens on arrival. What kind of schooling, apart from the domestic training, they had is not indicated, but there is the occasional comment on an older girl being unable to read or write on arrival. They did not go out to school. Old residents of Eastleigh remember them walking "in crocodile" round the town, with a matron in charge. Some attended a Concert at Holy Cross School. In Miss Simeon's last years, the girls used to wheel her out in a Bath-chair.

According to the Log of Holy Cross School, Miss Simeon and Miss Ward were frequent visitors, sometimes hearing the children sing or read, and at festive times bringing sweets and attending tea-parties and concerts, but the girls from the home are not mentioned. This does not mean that they were not included in any treats, but there is no written evidence to confirm it. After all, they were remembered as attending a Concert.

One of their own "treats" came from a returning "old girl", Anne French, who entered aged 11 in 1904, and in 1911 went as houseparlourmaid to Mrs. Radcliffe at Burgate. "*Came to see us and stayed 3 nights. Getting on well in every way and most grateful, sends sweets for the children and 3 times given £5*" comments the Register. Jane Marshall also went to Mrs. Radcliffe as laundrymaid in 1912, was doing well in 1916, and in 1921 was married with one child; "*often see her*" says the "Remarks" column. Nellie Pye left to go into service at Wimbledon in 1904, then to Switzerland as nursemaid in 1905. Edith Fidge, who left in 1907, was "*doing well in a situation at Clapham, 1916, when she came here for her holiday*".

The girls were not all orphans. Brief comments such as "*Sent back to father*", "*Mother took her*" or "*Grandmother sent for her*" indicate some family connections. Kate Horan came at 12 in 1892 and left in 1897 "*gone to Boston, U.S.A. with her mother*". Did some of the parents use the Home as a place of safe-keeping, perhaps while they were working, and claim their daughters when their circumstances improved? Louisa Ryan, who came as a seven year old, left at 14. "*The Southwark Rescue Society sent for her to go to Canada to her mother.*"

Others were less fortunate. One 15 year old could neither read nor write. She had "*spent her life organ-grinding*" and was sent back immediately as she was in "*a very suspicious state of health*". A further note alongside says that she died about 6 months later.

St. Mary's Home seems to have been very sensible in not trying to cope with physical or mental problems beyond its capacity. Because the girls were intended for domestic service, any who good care and attention could not improve - such as a child with Ophthalmia - were sent home or to hospital or to one of the specialist homes. I am only beginning to read up the history of these rescue societies, charitable orders of nuns, etc., which expanded in the later 19th century alongside Dr. Barnados and the National Children's Homes. Some of these mentioned in the Register are Arnos Vale Convent, the Southwark Rescue Society, the Good Shepherd Convents, Nazareth House, Convents of Mercy, occasionally only named by place, Finchley, Hammersmith, Southsea, Bitterne, Westbury-on-Trym, etc.

One girl who was sent to Hammersmith "*as she needed a change*", was Teresa Barton, aged 9, described as "*a Pantomime waif, and very pretty*" but "*too naughty to be kept at Nazareth House*". I wonder what was meant by "a Pantomime waif"? This is only one of the puzzles which make me feel that the St. Mary's Register would provide much material for study.

One most interesting aspect would be to trace descendants of the girls. The only one known locally was Ethel Mary Hall, who entered as a baby of 2 in 1887, and after a year in service in 1911, returned to the Home, helping with the children, under the Matron, and later as Laundress. "*Could not be happy away*" says the Register, adding that she married in 1917 and returned to work in the Laundry. Many people will remember Mrs. Coward, who died some years ago, a very cheerful lady, in Eastleigh.

The days of "vocational training only" for orphans have passed, and everyone now has the opportunity of further education. In an age when many children were sent out to work at 10 or 11, St. Mary's deserves an honourable mention for keeping its girls to 16 or 17 before sending them out to face the world. It was the only Catholic Home run entirely by lay-women, and perhaps for this reason, its history has not been recorded as it would have been if the two Ladies had been founders of a religious order. As two interesting Victorian characters, they seem to me to deserve to be remembered.

Kay Downs

May, 1985

Acknowledgements

The Sisters at Cold Ash for kindly lending the Register of St. Mary's.

Eastleigh Borough Council for photocopying the Register.

Rev. N. Fisher for allowing sight of Church Register and School Log.

Sisters at Fair Oak for transport to Cold Ash.

Mrs. Blanch (Eileen Fellows) who remembers girls from the Home at Holy Cross.

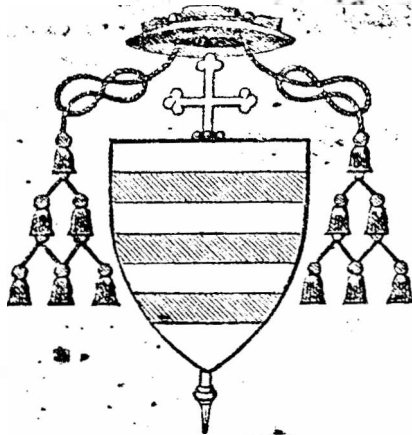
Mrs. R. Middleton & Mr. W. Ward for information about their ancestor.

References

Catholic Record Society, Miscellanea, Vol. 27.

The C.E. James Collection of extracts from newspapers

N.B. A copy of the Register, together with a typed transcript, may be seen in the Eastleigh Library.



JOANNES, DEI ET APOSTOLICAE SEDIS GRATIA,
EPISCOPUS PORTSMOUTHENSIS,
SSMI. DNI. NOSTRI PRAELATUS DOMESTICUS.

In order to increase the devotion of the Faithful to
the ever Blessed Mother of God, we hereby grant an
Indulgence of Forty Days as often as anyone shall devoutly
write in Latin or English the Ave Maria or Hail Mary
and the invocation "Agnus Dei pro peccatis" —
"I beseech thee, O Lamb of God, before the statue of Our
Blessed Lady in the Chapel of St. James's Home Exorcists

Given at Portsmouth
the 5th day of May 1852

John Bishop of
Portsmouth

