

“Lisieux” Theresian Home for Needy Children in Dilke Road

In 1937, the Theresian Club in the Sisters of Charity acquired 15 acres (6 hectares) in Dilke Street, Padstow. It began through the charity of a childless widow from Bexley, Mrs Margaret Spooner. She had been moved in the Depression years to see poor inner-city children growing up “ill-nourished and ill-clad”, many needing a country holiday to restore them. (Farland 1998 p 59)

Mrs Spooner looked for land between Bowral and Sydney, and found the leafy block. She then spoke to Sister Rosalie, a Sister of Charity from Hurstville, who arranged a meeting with Sister Therese, but unfortunately her superior said that they had no means of raising the money needed to operate the place. When Sister Therese noticed Mrs Spooner’s great disappointment, she put it to the girls. They replied “Sister, don’t turn it down, we’ll take it – Providence will provide.” Mrs Spooner built a cottage to house 12. (Farland 1998 p 59) The home was weatherboard and fibro and on fairly high brick piers. (Farland 1998 p 63).

“Lisieux” Theresian Home for Needy Children, a refuge for children from underprivileged areas of the city was opened on 6th November 1938. The home was later used for children recovering from illness and as a holiday home. Children were also sheltered by the courts and those needing care through a mother’s illness. (BHSJ October 1993 p 8-9) Farland (1998 p 60) said that the children were mainly from congested city areas, who would not otherwise be able to go away for a change and a chance to pick up after illness. It also enabled a mother to enter hospital, who could not otherwise have her children cared for.

Mrs Spooner had also dreamed of building a chapel “so that the children would be able to worship their Creator on their own Australian bush.” Unfortunately, Mrs Spooner died on 25 November 1938. (Farland 1998 p 59-60). A chapel was built about a decade later.

Initially business girls who made up the Theresian Club looked after the girls on a roster system during their spare time. Later, the Theresian Ladies Auxillary, made up of mostly married women, raised funds to employ a paid matron, and enough to support the home. Farland (1998 p 62) writes “There was a constant round of socials, fetes, concerts, cake stalls, theatre parties...and occasional donations from the Darlinghurst Police Social Club.” This not only helped maintain the Home, but allowed them to add swings and a slippery dip.

Over the years, the Home served hundreds of children, but on 21 April 1964 a special meeting of Theresian Groups was held. An inspection of the property revealed heavy expenditure would be required on water, electrical, foundations, fencing and general updating. The roof leaked badly, the Home needed painting and the grounds needed to be levelled. (Farland 1998 p 63)

It was felt that “Padstow was no longer a suitable place for a holiday home (it had become a built-up area with little open space). “Miss E. Hutchison, President of the Theresian Club up until 1958, said that the Home was originally intended as a holiday home, because Padstow was then bush. The home by 1964 could not be used as a hostel in its present state, nor geographically was it suitable either. She advised the best idea would be to sell it.

On 25 November 1964, the Theresian Holiday Home was officially closed. The property was auctioned on 16 August 1966 for \$160, 000. (Farland 1998 p 65)



"Lisieux" Theresian Home for needy children in Dilke Road pictured in 1940. The Home faced west. Photo: "Sisters of the Charity" Chevalier Press (1998).



"Lisieux" pictured later, with the wooden chapel. Photo: (BHSJ October 1993 p 8-9)
[Note: Original photo in Journal was reproduced from a news clipping]



1949 aerial photograph of Villiers Road and Dilke Road.
 Photo: Aerial Survey 1949 Map SVY 549 Frame 5023