

Want to know more?

If you are interested in finding out about the history of St Bridget's in greater detail, or in following up what has been outlined in this leaflet, records are held at the Cheshire Record Office in Chester City Centre - www.cheshire.gov.uk/Recordoffice.

These records include documents such as annual reports, leaflets and photographs.

Alternatively, if you were a birth mother in St Bridget's, you may wish to contact Adoption Matters Northwest at the address below for further information.

Acknowledgement

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St Bridget's, Chester



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Background Information

1884—1950

The three and a half acres of land where the building of St Bridget's stood for nearly a century was a gift given to the Diocese in 1884 by the Duke of Westminster. Building at 15 Lache Lane, Chester, was started in 1885 and the House opened in 1886 under the name 'Diocesan House of Mercy'. It was used as a refuge for young females from throughout the country who were in need of care and protection. Around 1899, the House began to take in the laundry of the local community, which was cleaned and ironed by those staying at the House. This provided a good source of income and helped towards the financial upkeep of the House.

In 1933, when the Sisters from St Mary the Virgin, Wantage, took over the day to day management of the House, the Sister Superior and the Chaplain requested, and the council agreed, that the House should be known as St Bridget's. During this period, St Bridget's became a long stay home for young women in need of accommodation and support due to their unfortunate circumstances.

For the duration of their two year stay at St Bridget's, the women were employed in the laundry service, which provided skills and opportunities to gain work in domestic services once they had left St Bridget's. Those who did not find domestic work returned home.

They also looked after their babies and shared the work in the Home between them. In their spare time they did needlework and handicrafts and the money from the annual sale of this contributed considerably to the cost of running the home. Parents and other relations were allowed to visit every week.

During this period, there was an increase in the number of expectant mothers who sought refuge at St Bridget's. Some mothers placed their babies for fostering or adoption, whilst those mothers who decided to keep their babies received support.

1950—1983

During 1950, St Bridget's was converted into a Mother and Baby Home and the laundry work ceased and the income from this was replaced by Good Friday Collections or donations.

In the early 1900s, the unmarried mother was a social outcast - homeless, friendless and without means of support. Those who helped her provided her with shelter, food and training for work, with which she could support herself and the child. Throughout the 1950s and up to the 1970s the unmarried mother went to St Bridget's as she needed to be away from the tensions of her family circle, from the curiosity of neighbours, or from unsuitable living conditions. She may have felt overwhelmed with guilt and remorse at her condition and in need of support to face the difficult decisions she had to make about the future of her baby.

Upon arrival at St Bridget's, each girl was allocated a room and shortly after the birth of the baby, plans were made to discharge the mother and baby. These plans varied depending on the decision the mother had made about whether to keep her baby or whether to have the baby fostered or adopted.

During the 1960s St Bridget's underwent a period of modernization.

At the end of the 1960s/early 1970s, St Mary the Virgin withdrew from running the Home. Due to changes in societal views, fewer women were seeking sanctuary at St Bridget's. Society was starting to become more accepting towards the unmarried mother, and housing became more readily available. The Home therefore closed down for a short period.

St Bridget's re-opened in 1974 as a day nursery and was occasionally used as a flat-let scheme where a mother and child could stay for a short time.

By 1983, the day nursery was still being well used; there had been little use of the Home however, causing loss of income, which resulted in the closure of St Bridget's.

Present

Although St Bridget's no longer exists as a physical entity, its work still continues via St Bridget's Trust. Since its creation, Trustees have given, and continue to give, a generous annual grant to Adoption Matters Northwest which in so many ways resonates with the work of caring for children that went on for so many years at St Bridget's House.

The Trustees also give grants to organisations working with vulnerable children and families in the Diocese, one of these being the Diocesan Committee for Social Responsibility.