

St Joseph's, Aston

St Joseph's was built around 1910 as part of the complex that was known as the Aston Training School which had been set up in 1888 by a Mrs. Clarke, a local philanthropist, to train young girls, many of them orphans, as laundresses and for domestic service. In addition to vocational training, the girls received a rudimentary education there. When Mrs. Clarke died in 1918, the Waifs and Strays Society took over the running of the school.

It was made available for the Basque children refugees at the end of June 1937. A local committee of the Basque Children's Committee was set up to manage the venture, with Patrick Early as its Chairman. He was prospective Independent Progressive parliamentary candidate for North Oxon and a member of the well-known Early family from Witney who owned several blanket mills in the town and who were staunch Methodists. Each new arrival among the refugees was given a scarlet woollen blanket from the Early mill. Annie Wheeler, who for a time was the cook at St Josephs, reported that the children did not like English food as they found it insipid. She said that when they first arrived they were petrified by the sound of planes and took a long time to settle down. In June 1939, several older boys arrived from the Shipton colony which had closed down. By the end of 1939, the younger Basque children had been gradually repatriated to Spain; only seven older children were left at Aston and they were moved to a house of their own in Witney, the first to be built on the new estate at Schofield Avenue.

St Josephs is now a private nursery school called Westfield House.