



Miss Dibden and two of her children

Miss Dibden's Home to move to England

By JILL DOGGETT

Miss Dibden's Home in Hongkong is to close.

The Shatin Children's Home is moving in the early autumn, trunk, crate and drum, to England. Miss Mildred Dibden, a missionary, who dedicated her life many years ago to the care of Chinese children is taking 21 girls with her to a new home on the South Coast. These are the last of the 300 abandoned infants she has brought up and cared for during the past 30 years.

Against all predictions to the contrary, Miss Dibden has quietly overcome all obstacles to the transfer to England of her present family—the Yip family of Hongkong. (She adopted this name so that all her babies would have the same surname and an added sense of family unity).

The Immigration Department could not see any possible way of helping the mass emigration. But Miss Dibden flew to London and saw the Under-Secretary of State. He gave the necessary authority and the Hongkong officials are now empowered to release the necessary documents.

Next she had to find a new home in England in a very short space of time. This she did. A house and garden at 25 Wilberforce Road, Southsea, near Portsmouth, is now being got ready for occupation.

Education

Education was another vital problem. The County Authority in the area was approached. Permission has been given for the necessary schooling for each child. They have all worked so hard for the necessary levels in English and other subjects that now their industry is rewarded.

Secondary schooling and training as nurses or teachers is visualised for the older girls. Miss Dibden hopes that one day her girls will return to Hongkong to work for the good of their own people in teaching and alleviating sickness and suffering.

Then the Public Health authorities had to approve the prospective new Home. (It will bear the name "The Shatin Children's Home"). They approved the house even while imposing stringent regulations applying to children's homes in the United Kingdom. Although accustomed for many years to sleeping in bunk beds, the girls have now to have single beds. Bunk beds are precluded by law and the numbers in each bedroom are carefully controlled.

The far greater hardship of having to send four or five of the girls to sleep out on cold, dark nights and reporting back each morning at the Home, does not seem to worry the authorities. Bunk beds are out.

Main aim

Nevertheless, this is a pinprick compared with the main aim of getting the girls to England in quiet rural surroundings and higher education. Near to the new house is St. Jude's Church with a congregation and youth club already keen to help the little girls from Hongkong.

Mr L. C. Millington, who has looked after Miss Dibden's books for many years, said yesterday that the appeal babies had in attracting donations was lost when the Shatin Babies' Home ceased to take in abandoned infants.

Government legislation had ruled that all abandoned babies should automatically become the wards of the Social Welfare Department. He said that Miss Dibden had always had fantastic faith that the Lord would

provide. She had never at any time allowed a public appeal to be made on her behalf.

He pointed out that schooling in Hongkong had become an expensive business, with school fees, uniforms, books and transport. The Home in Shatin was later changed to the "High Rock Christian Home and School" after it ceased to be a babies' home. The primary school attached which also serves village children in the area will continue to be run and will absorb the home premises which are the original old police station in the Shatin Valley below High Rock. Miss Frances Hollingworth and Miss Ruth Whitehead, missionaries, will continue to supervise the school after Miss Dibden and her girls leave.

It was in 1934 that Miss Dibden came out to Hongkong with slender resources and a great deal of faith. She had dedicated her life to the care of Hongkong's homeless and unwanted infants. Some were found hanging in baskets on trees in the New Territories to die of exposure and thus prevent ill-fortune besetting their families.

She founded the Fanling Babies' Home where she spent the years of Japanese occupation suffering savage assault and years of malnutrition in attempts to keep her babies alive. She had walked from Fanling to Tsimshatsui, pushing a pram to beg for rice for her children — once a fortnight — at one stage.

On her return from rehabilitation, that Home at Fanling

had been taken over by a missionary group working under a committee. She worked on her own, directly under God's guidance, and started again with one baby brought by a policeman to her bungalow at Ping Shan. Later the police allowed her to take over the old police station, which she is now leaving after long years in residence. Nearly 100 babies came to her at High Rock. Some of the smallest ones were recently allowed to go to Christian families, carefully vetted and longing for a child to adopt.

Miss Dibden feels she is leaving a piece of her heart behind in Hongkong to which she has given her years of strength and courage. Sometimes she re-lives the nightmare experiences of wartime molesta-

In England friends are working on her behalf: Mrs Charlotte Bird, Honorary Secretary of the Home, Miss Patricia Best, Honorary Treasurer, and Mrs Bonnie Penny, a friend of many years, now retired in England.

The immediate problem is to secure help for the air flights which BOAC will offer at the lowest possible rate for students. Mr Millington will be glad to hear from anyone wishing to pay tribute to the work of Mildred Dibden. Toc H members are helping with the packing and freight. Mothers are offering to teach a few hours daily during the holidays while the departure preparations continue. The woman who has worked in silent devotion for years, will now have helping hands in her last days here.