

# Church of England Boys' Society Training Farm

1937 – 1950

**Other Names:**

- St Hubert's Training Farm
- Lysterfield Boys' Farm
- Sweet Hills Training Farm

## Details

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The Church of England Boys' Society Training Farm was established in 1937 in Lysterfield. It was first managed by The Rev. R.G. Nichols, and in 1942 was taken over by the Church of England Boys' Society (Cebs). In 1945, the Farm moved to Yering. At this time, the institution was known as St Hubert's. In 1950, the Training Farm was transferred to Burton Hall at Tatura, and the Yering property was sold.

The Church of England Boys' Society Training Farm was originally situated at Lysterfield. The land was purchased in 1935 by The Rev. R.G. Nichols who was organiser and honorary secretary of the farm from 1937. In 1937, Nichols said that 'boys are trained for eight months in all departments of mixed farming. They are then placed in employment at 15 shillings a week and keep' (*The Argus*, 6 July 1937).

Nichols handed over management of the Training Farm to the Church of England Boys' Society (Cebs) in 1942. When Cebs took over the Farm, there were 40 boys in residence there. At the farm the boys were taught skills necessary for farm life, including raising poultry and cows, dairy-work, vegetable gardening, ploughing of fields and harvesting of crops, and meal preparation. The training farm also had a school attached, Lysterfield Boys' Home No. 4601, to educate the younger boys and operated from June 1942 until 1950.

Cebs saw the Farm as a social service 'through which the privileged boys of the Church helped their brothers to find a worthy and useful niche in life'. At a meeting in 1944, the Society decided on the following objects for the Lysterfield Farm:

- To provide a Christian home for boys
- To train such boys under our care in Christian citizenship and to help them find their vocation in life
- To give a scientific training in mixed farming to those whose vocation will be on the land

An internal historical document produced for the 75th anniversary of Cebs in 1988 records details of staff movements at the Farm. Mr JR Senior was appointed Commissioner of the Farm in 1943. In 1944, Mr AE Walker who had managed the Farm for some years resigned, and the Farm's welfare officer, Mr SJ Clough, became Acting Principal. Clough became Vice Principal with the appointment of Mr WA Glover (who had been the Chief Commissioner of Cebs).

On 3 June 1944, there was a fire at Lysterfield, destroying the main barn and farm equipment. As the Society was planning the redevelopment of the site, it was announced that the land was to become a catchment area for water supply. The government took over the site in around 1945 to build Lysterfield Lake.

On 4 December 1945, the Farm was officially transferred from Lysterfield to Yering, 'a lovely property of 523 acres called St Hubert's'. Mr RE Parsons was appointed the new Farm Commissioner.

The *Age* reported on the move to St Hubert's, describing its 'ecclesiastical-looking building, with spire and clock' which had been originally been used to store wine vats, later becoming a milking shed, and now expected to be converted into a chapel for the boys of the farm (17 August 1945).

When the new farm at Yering opened in December 1945, the *Argus* reported that the 500 acre farm 'will give many boys a chance to find their niche in life and it is intended to erect a model home for up to 80 boys'.

The boys moved from Lysterfield to Yering in April 1946. While the equipment was moved from the old farm to the new, the boys stayed for 8 days at the Cebbs camp in Frankston (The *Argus*, 9 April 1946).

In May 1946, the new farm at Yering was hallowed by the Archbishop. An article about the event stated:

*... The farm, which covers 523 acres (211.8ha) of fertile pastures along the banks of the Yarra, accommodates 24 boys in temporary dormitories, but when plans are completed the settlement will house 80 boys. Opportunities for boys who wish to learn farming will be unlimited on occupation. 110 cows have been put to this beautiful estate. ... and of these the boys are milking 80, using modern milking machine equipment. Later, mixed farming will be undertaken, giving the boys an opportunity to learn varied types of agriculture (Watts, 2012, p.2).*

According to an article by Barry Watts about 'the Yering boys':

*On a weekly roster basis the St Hubert's lads aged fourteen and over helped maintain a vegetable garden, assisted with the preparation of meals, served in the dining room, rounded up the cows, did the milking, and collected the eggs. They raised poultry, ploughed the fields, fed the calves and generally participated fully in farm life. The younger lads attended an onsite school and on Sundays travelled in the farm truck to Lilydale for a morning Church service (Watts, p.2).*

There was primary school education provided on the site by Department of Education staff. "Boys under the age of fourteen were regarded as the 'junior boys'; they attended the single on-site classroom. Boys over fourteen, the 'senior boys', received farm training from the CEBS. The two groups occupied separate dormitories and were firmly discouraged from interacting." A Cebbs publication stated that boys with outstanding scholastic ability were given the opportunity to continue their education, and to study for trades and professions other than farming, should they wish. Boys from the Farm spent at least ten days' holiday a year at the Cebbs permanent seaside camp in Frankston (Watts, p.3).

In 1947, Mr J Kemp was appointed to assist Parsons as Farm Commissioner.

A fundraising drive to develop the Yering farm was launched in 1948, by the Lord Mayor. The official opening of this appeal entailed a relay from Yering to Melbourne, with members of Cebbs carrying a message to the Lord Mayor. An advertisement in the *Argus* for the fundraising campaign used the slogan "A boy trained is a man gained", and mentioned that St Hubert's was "being developed to accept British boys as well as our own" (The *Argus*, 2 February 1948). The appeal involved selling "special St Hubert's rubber bricks" for a shilling each (they apparently made excellent pencil erasers).

In the post-war period, the Society was planning to receive child migrants from Britain. The initial idea was for child migrants to be accommodated at the Training Farm at Yering, with an adjunct at [Burton Hall](#), a 330-acre farm at Tatura which was donated to Cebbs in 1948 by Mr AG Maskell (*Church of England Messenger*, March 1948). In February 1949 the Victorian government announced that it was making 90,000 pounds available to

assist in financing building work at Church institutions, as a practical contribution to the child migration program. Cebs reported that it would use its share on erecting the first section of new buildings at St Hubert's. The new buildings would include a dormitory and dining and service blocks. This would make it possible to house 75 migrant boys aged between 10 and 16 (*The Argus*, 5 February 1949).

However, these plans for the farm school at Yering did not come to fruition. A few months after the announcement of the building grant from the government, the farm at Yering was experiencing difficulties. On 16 April 1949 the *Truth* newspaper had a front page story: DEPT. PROBE INTO CHURCH SCHOOL FOR BOYS. The recently-departed farm manager, Robin Humphrys claimed that boys at St Hubert's were brutally treated by staff. The article quoted a letter to the Cebs committee from recently-dismissed dairy manager Allan Edyvane, stating that the principal, Mr RB Wilson had victimised him when he took a stand about "the shocking way certain boys are treated and the tyrannical methods and oppression meted out to them" (*The Truth*, 16 April 1949, pp.1-2 quoted in Watts, p.4). The Cebs publication *Fifty years on* (1988) referred to "problems arising at the farm" during this period which led to the resignation of the Farm Principal. Mr AL Browne was appointed Acting Principal at Yering.

Coupled with these internal issues at St Hubert's, the anticipated supply of migrant boys for farm training in Australia was not materialising. Due to the small number of child migrants, the Victorian government was not prepared to fund the building grants it had announced in February 1949. The Society decided to sell the Yering property and transfer its farming activities to Burton Hall at Tatura.

In 1950, the Society placed an advertisement in the *Argus* reporting on its changed provision of farm training for boys. The ad referred to the lack of child migrants and the withdrawn government funds, as well as the fact that there was a shortage of local boys needing farm training (partly due to the low wages offered for farm work at that time). For these reasons, the Society had decided to close the farm at Yering, and concentrate its farm training at Burton Hall, using a less institutional model. The farm at Tatura, Cebs stated, "revealed the advantages of the small family unit type of farm training, often referred to as the cottage system". The scheme at Burton Hall was to be conducted under the name 'The CEBS Farm Training Scheme for Boys'. (*The Argus*, 28 July 1950).

Watts observes that the ad in the *Argus* did not refer to the Yering farm at St Hubert's, and speculates that the articles in the *Truth* newspaper had perhaps "tainted the St Hubert's name in CEBS's judgement" (p.5). He also writes that although the claims made by the *Truth* (a publication known to be sensationalist) had not been proven, the memoirs of a former "St Hubert's boy", Peter Graeme Emberson were "broadly consistent" with the article.

'The life and times of Peter Graeme Emberson' is an unpublished manuscript from 2000 (a copy is held by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne Archives in Box 421). Emberson was a junior boy at St Hubert's until his widowed mother withdrew him following the public allegations in 1949. He writes about boys being slapped and punched by a staff member and recalls that the Principal Mr RB Wilson was called 'Rotten Bastard Wilson' behind his back. Emberson writes that when some boys had an illness, they were ordered to leave the dormitory and stay at Wilson's residence. "I remember a senior boy saying, 'if you get sick, never tell Wilson and never stay overnight at his residence'. I believe he was interfering with the boys and they were too scared to say" (extracts from Emberson's autobiography are quoted on p.6 of the Barry Watts article published in the *Yarra Glen & District Historical Society Newsletter*, no 43, June 2012).

The farm training scheme at Burton Hall, Tatura, continued until 1967.

The Lysterfield location which was the site of the farm from 1937 to 1945 has since become part of Lysterfield Park & Churchill National Park and has a Boys Farm Heritage Walk. The walk takes you through the former Boys Farm site, with interpretative signs explaining the remains including house foundations, cistern, a fireplace base marking the dormitory and remnants of a dairy.

## Gallery



### Church of England Boys Training Farm

**Description:** This is an image of the Church of England Boys Training Farm at Lysterfield. This image is provided on the Yarra Ranges Heritage Database for the Church of England Boys Training Farm page.

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### St. Huberts Clock Tower, c1950

**Description:** This is a photograph of the clock tower at St. Huberts Vineyard, Coldstream, taken around 1950. It shows the clock tower. It had previously been part of the Church of England Boys Society Training Farm at Yering, also known as St. Huberts Training Farm. According to the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum this clock tower was demolished in 1951.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Church of England Boys' Society \(1914 - current\)](#)

Date: 1942 - 1950

#### Related Organisations

- [Burton Hall Training Farm \(c. 1947 - 1967?\)](#)

In 1950, the Training Farm at Yering was sold, and boys were transferred to Burton Hall at Tatura.

Date: 1950 -

## Resources

- Pear, David, [Nichols, Reginald Gordon Clement \(1888 - 1960\)](#), Australian Dictionary of Biography Online Edition, No date
- Church of England Boys' Society, [St Hubert's Church of England Boys' Society Training Farm, Yering, Vic.](#), 1948
- [Churches care for migrant orphans](#), The Argus, 5 February 1949
- Boyce, James, *For the record : background information on the work of the Anglican Church with Aboriginal children and directory of Anglican agencies providing residential care to children from 1830 to 1980*, 2003
- [Church of England Boys' Society Training Farm \(1937-50\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Church of England Boy's Society Training Farm
- *Fifty years on: a history of Ceba in Melbourne - 1939-1988 - a companion volume to "The Surge of Youth"*, 1988

## Other Resources



**Title:** Photographs from the Lysterfield Boys' Farm site

**Type:** Image

**Date:** June 2020

[Details](#)

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## Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

### Records

- [Records of Church of England Boys' Society Farms \(1943 - 1977\)](#)
- [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, Class 5 \(British Migrants\) \(1920 - 1957\)](#)

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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/church-of-england-boys-society-training-farm/>