

Janefield Colony

1937 – 1996

Other Names:

- Janefield Colony for the Treatment of Mental Defectives
- Janefield Training Centre
- Janefield Special School

Details

The Janefield Colony was established in 1937 by the Department of Mental Hygiene. It provided accommodation and educational instruction to children of all ages who were classified as 'mentally deficient'. It initially admitted girls only, but from 1967 boys of school age were also admitted to Janefield. Janefield closed in 1996.

The site of the Janefield Colony was formerly the site of the Janefield Sanatorium, a training farm for tuberculosis patients, run by the Australian Red Cross Society from 1920 to 1933. It was located on a 960 acre property at Bundoora, extending from Plenty Road to the Plenty River.

The first children were transferred to Janefield from [Kew Cottages](#) in 1937. Children were frequently transferred between Janefield and a number of other Mental Health institutions in Victoria. Some children over the age of 14 were transferred from the institution at [Travancore](#) to Janefield, including 41 boys who were transferred in 1967/68. Other children were transferred to or from the Mont Park Mental Hospital, Beechworth Mental Hospital, Sunbury Mental Hospital, and the Mental Hospital Receiving House at Royal Park. Some children as young as five years old are known to have been transferred to Janefield from children's Homes.

In 1940, the Director of Mental Hygiene, Dr Catarinich, stated that he envisaged Janefield as a farm colony for 1,000 patients (at that time, it only had accommodation for 150, and only accommodated girls). He was convinced that the proclamation of the [Mental Deficiency Act 1939](#) would see Janefield swamped with numbers once the Colony was sufficiently developed and the public knew its facilities were available.

A heritage study from 1990 described the originally accommodation at the Janefield Colony:

In 1937 the total accommodation available in the existing buildings – Ward A (later the painters and carpenters shops) and Wards B and C amounted to 100 beds. The two storeyed administrative building, including a flat for the chief nurse and quarters for nurses, and brick ward were occupied in 1939. By 1940 there were 126 patients.

Construction of a ward for boys commenced in 1940 but was not completed until 1945. By 1955, there were 7 wards at Janefield, and the Colony housed 274 patients. Demand on Janefield steadily increased, and by the late 1960s it was necessary to expand again. By 1969 another four mixed-gender wards had been added, each holding 48 boys and girls. These new wards, alongside the practice of placing beds closer together, had increased to total capacity at Janefield to just shy of 500.

Children at Janefield received several different types of education and training. Nurses provided training in basic skills such as eating, toileting, mobility and motor skills, washing, dressing, and grooming. More formal education was provided by teachers at the Janefield Special School, teaching the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic alongside art and music. A small number of children attended special schools in the local community, and student interchange days were frequently arranged with local schools. There was a physical education and out-door activity program utilising the on-site swimming pool, recreation hall, bush-walking trails, and bike track, as well as external facilities such as the Northcote City Baths. Excursions to local shopping centres or on public transport were arranged for the children to learn how to do things like catch the bus or buy food. Overnight excursions and camps to places like Queenscliff and Blackwood were also sometimes arranged.

Occupational Therapy training was provided to the older children at Janefield once they had left the school. Children over the age of 16 were given training in industrial work, craftwork, art, music, self-help, basic cookery, gardening, and recreational activities, and older boys received training in the milking sheds, and from the mid-1970s were also involved in mustering a herd of beef cattle and managing pastures. From 1978, residents between the ages of 16 and 21 could attend the on-site Continuing Education Centre if they were deemed to be more suited to ongoing schooling rather than the hands-on industrial workshop and agricultural training. The Janefield Special School did not employ a cleaner until 1955, and instead senior girls were paid a small allowance for sweeping, dusting, and polishing the floors in the school buildings. Once the school had expanded a cleaner was employed, but the girls continued to perform some of the work, which was treated as a reward for good behaviour.

Betty Bennell spent approximately 10 years at Janefield, from the age of 18. In her memoir, *My Story* (2013), she reflected on her time at Janefield, remembering it as a “horrible place” that didn’t assist her with her education or development:

Janefield helped physical and mental disabled people do the right thing so they could get out into the world and make something of themselves. I thought it was a horrible place. The staff were hard on the patients. We had to polish big bedrooms and clean bathrooms. We had tea at five and supper at eight. Bedtime was eight-thirty and lights out at nine. We were locked in so we wouldn’t run away. But I did – five times. I’d get out through the back door and run across the paddock. I didn’t know where I was going. Each time the police found me and brought me back. I was really naughty. I really was. For punishment the other girls were told not to talk to me. Life wasn’t easy.

I did like the nurses taking us for walks across the paddocks to pick mushrooms and I loved working in the nursery. I would feed and bath the babies. My favourite was Donna. She called everybody Daddy. It was me who got her to walk.

I can’t remember how long I lived in Janefield. Maybe ten years, maybe longer. I can’t remember. I didn’t have many visitors. I blamed my sisters for putting me there.

When I lived with Dot and at Janefield, everyone thought I couldn’t learn. I couldn’t because no one helped me or gave me a chance to learn more. I would get frustrated because I had nothing to do. No one gave me a chance to do anything. Now, I’m always busy. I love shopping for clothes and going to movies, musicals and live shows at the RSL.

In 1962, Janefield was proclaimed a Training Centre under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1959, and its name was changed from Janefield Colony to Janefield Training Centre.

By the 1960s Janefield was treating adults as well as children, most of whom had lived at Janefield since childhood but couldn’t be found suitable alternative residential placements as they became adults. This caused the average age of residents at Janefield to rise to 23 by 1982. In 1970 six adults were moved from the wards to a house on the Janefield site. Here they were given training in self-help and independence in preparation for them to live in the community. Through the 1970s and 1980s several other similar houses and hostels, both on the Janefield site and in local suburbs, were established to give the older patients greater independence. These

smaller residential units were also intended to provide a more home-like atmosphere to patients, compared to the large institutional wards. By 1993 bed space at Janefield had reduced to 300, and several of the old large wards had closed.

The Janefield Special School closed in 1993 due to the reduction in the number of school-aged residents at Janefield. In 1996, Janefield closed, and its residents were transferred to other services for intellectually disabled people.

Gallery



Janefield Wards

Description: This image appeared in the Department of Mental Hygiene's annual report for 1953.



Janefield Training Centre

Description: This is a copy of a photograph of Janefield Training Centre, taken from a publication by the Mental Health Authority.



Janefield Mental Hospital

Description: This is a photographic negative of the Janefield Colony, also known as the Janefield Training Centre or Janefield Mental Hospital. It shows a long two-storey brick building with white windows, and a wide brick verandah. Several young girls all wearing dresses with white peter-pan collars can be seen standing on the verandah. The building is located at the top of a slope. Deck-chairs have been placed along the front of the verandah looking down the slope. There is another two-storey brick building visible in the background. This photo negative is one of a collection of 13 negatives of Janefield held by the Public Record Office of Victoria. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



Janefield Mental Hospital

Description: This is a photographic negative of the Janefield Colony, also known as the Janefield Training Centre or Janefield Mental Hospital. It shows a long two-storey brick building with three front doorways with white render and brick surrounds. Two cars can be seen parked in front of the building, and there is a dog sitting in the driveway. There is another two-storey brick building that looks to be under construction visible in the background. This photo negative is one of a collection of 13 negatives of Janefield held by the Public Record Office of Victoria. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



Janefield Mental Hospital

Description: This is a photographic negative of the Janefield Colony, also known as the Janefield Training Centre or Janefield Mental Hospital. It shows a long single-storey brick building with windows extending all along the front wall. Several metal-framed cots or beds can be seen in the windows, suggesting that this is possibly a nursery building. There is a smaller octagonal room off to one side of the building. This photo negative is one of a collection of 13 negatives of Janefield held by the Public Record Office of Victoria. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



Janefield: display cupboard in art and craft room 1970

Description: This is a photo of a display cupboard in the art and craft room at Janefield Training Centre. It shows a double-width cupboard with items such as dolls, animals, windmills, and magazine racks displayed - presumably all items made by children at Janefield. This photograph is part of the collection of the Greensborough Historical Society, which includes other photographs and items (such as newsletters and school curriculum) from Janefield.



Janefield Boys' Home

Description: This is a photo negative of one of the boys' residential blocks at Janefield Training Centre. It shows a single-storey brick building with white windows and brick chimneys. The building is surrounded by lawn, and there are several large trees in the background. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



Sheds & Horse Stables - Horse drawn carts to the left - on right are Milking stalls - Janefield Training Centre

Description: This is a photo of the milking shed and stables at Janefield Training Centre. It shows a range of sheds and stables arranged around a central brick courtyard, where there are trailers and buggies parked. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



Junior classroom, Janefield 1970

Description: This is a photo of girls in the junior classroom at Janefield Training Centre. It shows two young girls standing in a large, bright room stacking blocks on top of each other. Another girl is sitting behind them in a row of tables and chairs lined up by the windows. The girls are all wearing the same uniform of a plain coloured jumper and a plaid skirt, and all have the same short haircut. This photograph is part of the collection of the Greensborough Historical Society, which includes other photographs and items (such as newsletters and school curriculum) from Janefield.



Janefield Special School: boys' woodwork class 1970

Description: This is a photo of boys in the woodworking classroom at Janefield Training Centre. It shows three boys standing around a table working on their woodwork projects, and another boy carrying a piece of timber behind them. The projects on the table look to include wooden boxes, and a small simple model of an animal. The boys are all wearing the same plain-coloured jumper, but have different shirts. This photograph is part of the collection of the Greensborough Historical Society, which includes other photographs and items (such as newsletters and school curriculum) from Janefield.



Mental Hospitals (around Victoria designed by Percy Everett)

Description: This is a poster created by the Victorian Department of Public Works to show buildings at Mental Hospitals around Victoria that had been designed and built by the department. It includes images of ward blocks, administration offices, and staff residences at Ballarat Mental Hospital, Sunbury Mental Hospital, Mont Park, Janefield, Larundel, and Brierley Hospital Warrnambool.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Health Commission of Victoria \(1978 - 1985\)](#)
- [Health and Community Services, State Government of Victoria \(1992 - 1995\)](#)
- [Community Services Victoria, State Government of Victoria \(1985 - 1992\)](#)
- [Department of Mental Hygiene \(1934 - 1944\)](#)
- [Mental Hygiene Branch \(1944 - 1959\)](#)
- [Mental Health Authority, State of Victoria \(1962 - 1978\)](#)
- [Department of Health, State Government of Victoria \(1985 - 1992\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Kew Children's Cottages \(1887 - 2008\)](#)
Some children were transferred from Kew to Janefield when it opened in 1937.
- [Beechworth Mental Hospital \(1867 - c.1996\)](#)
Children were transferred from Janefield Colony to Beechworth Mental Hospital

Resources

- Department of Human Services, *Remembering Janefield [videorecording]*, 1996
- Jones, Mary Lucille, *Colony to community: the Janefield and Kingsbury training centres*, 1997
- [Janefield \(Colony 1937-62; Training Centre 1962-96\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance*: See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Janefield Colony

Records

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

Records

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
- [Mental Health Photograph Collection \(1850? - 2002\)](#)
- [General Correspondence Files \(c. 1920 - c. 1981\)](#)
- [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/janefield-colony/>