

# Mittagong Farm Home for Boys

1906 – 1947

**Other Names:**

- Mittagong State Home
- Mittagong Children's Farm
- Industrial Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong
- Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys
- Farm Home for Boys
- Industrial Farm Home for Boys
- State Home, Mittagong

## Details

---

Mittagong Farm Home for Boys was established at Mittagong in 1906. In accordance with the provisions of the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act, 1905 it was proclaimed as an Industrial School and Probationary Training Home for boys aged 8 to 17 on 5 June 1906. 'Delinquent' boys were sent to Mittagong from the Children's Courts, after being convicted of offences such as truancy, being uncontrollable, being neglected and wandering, breaching probation, stealing, and breaking and entering. The Farm Home was situated on the same site as the Mittagong Cottage Homes, but 'at a considerable distance'. In 1947, it became the Mittagong Training School for Boys.

Mittagong Farm Home for Boys was officially established in 1906. It was located on the same site as Mittagong Cottage Homes, established in 1885 by the State Children's Relief Board, to house 'delicate and invalid' state wards. The histories of the Farm Home and the Mittagong Cottage Homes are closely intertwined, with buildings on the site being used for different purposes and to house different types of children over time. In annual reports, the government departments that ran the Farm Home and the Cottages provided reports of each institution under separate headings.

On 5 June 1906 in accordance with the provisions of the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act, 1905 the Farm Home for Boys at Mittagong was proclaimed an Industrial School and a Probationary Training Home for delinquent boys aged 8 to 17. These were boys convicted in the Children's Courts of less serious offences, including 81 boys admitted in the first six months of the institution's operation.

Hassel Cottage was opened as a 'Probationary Training Home' in 1906, and the ten years that followed saw the building of more cottages, which were originally known by numbers, and later given names: Haydon, Goodlet, Renwick, Mackellar and De Lauret Cottages. A superintendent's cottage was constructed in 1910 and remained in use until 1966, when it was extended to allow accommodation for boys.

The President of the State Children's Relief Board wrote about the Farm Home in his annual report for 1908:

*It is not of crime and the criminal that I think when I see these juvenile delinquents, but of buoyant, healthy nature running wild and needing training – seedlings in the garden of humanity which must not be destroyed, but, rather, carefully nurtured and judiciously trained for the good that is in them. And so we place them on the soil.*

In 1908, the Industrial School comprised 2 cottages, No 4 and No 8. These 2 cottages were close together, but 'at considerable distance from the other cottages', which were for invalid and sick children. The SCRB President wrote that the numbers at the Farm Home had grown considerably: in 1907 it had 35 boys, and in 1908, there were 99 boys. It had been necessary to establish another cottage 'to provide more accommodation, and at the same time properly safeguard the religion of the boys committed'.

When Gosford Farm Home opened in 1912 Mittagong Farm Home was reserved for younger boys. By 1914, the Farm Home comprised 5 cottages, No's 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10. In November of that year, the President of the State Children's Relief Board wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, to defend the Farm Home against criticisms made in the same paper by the Catholic Archbishop Dr Kelly of Mittagong's 'prison conditions'. Mackellar's letter gives an overview of the approach of the State Children's Relief Board to the discipline, care and religious instruction of the children at the home:

*The discipline of the institution was referred to by the Archbishop as being in effect little different to that of a prison. Now, if there is one attribute making for successful reformation which the department has ever striven after in its treatment of children in these [state] institutions it is that the whole system shall be as unlike the old method in its attempts at reformation as it is possible to have it. Barrack like buildings have been superseded by cottages, bright with their own gardens and replete with every comfort suggesting "home." The officials approach the home idea altogether, in that a man and wife ("mother" and "father") are in charge of each cottage. No uniforms are worn by officials or children, no bolts bars, or locks are visible or allowed, and the children are given the greatest amount of liberty compatible with proper order and discipline. They go to the public school from their respective homes to their various avocations at the farm, workshops, etc ... Where, then, is the semblance even of prison discipline? (Sydney Morning Herald, 5 November 1914)*

However, a 1918 report by GM Allard of the Royal Commission to inquire into the Public Service of New South Wales Concerning the Administration of the Acts Relating to State Children was less glowing in its description of Mittagong Farm Home. At Mittagong, Allard found 'considerable looseness' and was extremely critical of what he described as 'shocking' arrangements for the classification of children. There had been 'indiscriminate grouping' of juvenile offenders with state wards and other children on the Mittagong site. He also found that boys had been returned to detention without due process of law, and that trade training provided was unsatisfactory (Quinn, p.134).

In 1918, there were 6 cottages, the boys were separated according to age and to religion. That year, the annual report of the Board described the Farm Home at Mittagong.

*In the Farm Home are committed by the Children's Courts the neglected and wayward boys guilty of truancy, petty stealing and similar offences- boys without homes, or with homes unworthy of the name, or boys who, through the indifference or the incompetence of parents, have become uncontrollable.*

*Six homes, primarily classified on the basis of religion, and secondly on the basis of age (to separate the elder from the younger boys). Four homes are for Protestant and two for Roman Catholic boys, and the officers in charge are of the same religion as the inmates, to ensure the due observance of religious practices. Realising the importance of religious training in the reformation of the boys, every facility is afforded for religious instruction by the ministers of religion, the Anglican rector and the Salvation Army ministering to the Protestant boys, and the parish priest and the members of the community of Marist Brothers to the Roman Catholic.*

*Formerly, the policy of dealing with the delinquent children of the State was to keep the children in an institution for a term of years, but enlightened opinion now argues a shorter period, and the boys are generally kept at Mittagong for only a term of months, usually four.*

In addition to working in the farm, the dairy and the orchard, the boys also received training in bootmaking, tailoring and carpentry.

The annual report for the years 1921-1925 stated that Mittagong Farm Home was for boys up to the age of 13. It stated that when boys were discharged from the institution, they were on probation which lasted until they turned 18.

In 1934, there was a major commission of inquiry into the Child Welfare Department that found widespread abuses at government-run institutions, including shelters, reformatories, hostels for mothers and babies and children's homes and depots. At hearings of the commission, the Superintendent of the Mittagong Farm Home admitted that corporal punishment had been in force at the institution. Superintendent Mitchell stated that previously, the use of corporal punishment had gone unrecorded. He also said that 'he had never known a boy to resist corporal punishment, which did not exceed six cuts on the buttocks' (Daily Examiner, 2 May 1934).

The report from the commission of inquiry contained several recommendations relating to the Mittagong Farm Home, including:

*That the practice of closely cropping the hair of inmates be discontinued*  
*That the practice of placing 'second timers' of a tender age on the wood heap with a cross-cut saw over a period of months, on Saturday afternoons, be discontinued*  
*That, in view of the climatic conditions, inexpensive slippers or sandals, be provided for use of inmates (at present they are barefooted after 5pm).*

According to the Department's annual report for 1932 to 1935, all of these recommendations were adopted.

In his thesis, Peter Quinn describes incidents at Mittagong that came to the attention of the New South Wales government, including a report of 2 boys being brought together to fight, watched by the Superintendent (p.203) and an allegation by Mittagong's Acting Superintendent of 'mob rule, mutiny or rebellion' led by a group of a dozen inmates (p.223). Quinn writes that the absconding rate from Mittagong was high, at 32 per month, out of the 190 boys who lived at the institution.

From 1938 until 1946, the Farm Home included the Turner Cottage Special School for Truants. This school was under the administration of the Superintendent of the Farm Home. When Anglewood opened, boys were transferred there from the Truant School, and the school building and cottage became part of Mittagong Cottages.

There was a school on site for boys from the Farm Home, known as the Lower Mittagong School (it was later renamed Toombong).

The Child Welfare Department's annual report for 1937 to 1939 stated that the cottages at Mittagong, 'almost without exception ... are obsolete by present standards. Draft plans for extensive repairs, admissions and remodelling are under consideration'. It also said that parents were permitted to visit their boys at the Farm Home 'by arrangement'.

By 1941, 10 cottages were in use for boys from the Farm Home. In 1943, a new 'cottage', No 12, opened. It was later renamed Challoner. This building was of a more institutional style, it was a two-storey structure containing 3 dormitories upstairs, and downstairs were a dining room, common room and locker room. Challoner was built to replace Cottage no 8, which was in poor condition.

The Renwick Association, a group formed to protect the heritage of the former institutions at Mittagong after the site was sold by the State Government, campaigned for Challoner to be heritage-protected. Part of Challoner's significance, the Renwick Association argued in a letter to members of parliament in 2013, was that 'all bricks and timber came from the Mittagong Farm Home for Boy. Each brick was made by the residents of the Farm Home

and Timber was from the Farm Home own Timber Mill. Resident boys helped lay bricks and put up timber frames for this cottage and others as a way of learning a trade’.

In 1946, the Farm Home comprised 10 cottages, a nursing home and an. administrative building

In 1947 the institution became known as Mittagong Training School for Boys.

## Gallery

---



**Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong - poultry farm**



**Heffernan [Mittagong Homes]**

**Description:** This is a digital copy of a photograph from an album collected by Child Welfare Department officers in the late 1940s. From the collection of Leonie Knapman.



**Mittagong Cottage Home Farm**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image that appeared in the State Children Relief Board Report of year ending 5 April, 1907.



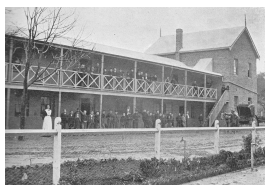
**Mittagong the Farm Home for Boys**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image that appeared in the State Children Relief Board Report of year ending 5 April, 1907.



**Extension of apple orchard, Mittagong Farm Home**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image that appeared in the State Children Relief Board Report of year ending 5 April, 1908.



**No 4 Boys Home, Mittagong**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image that appeared in the State Children Relief Board Report of year ending 5 April, 1908.



**Rowe Cottage**

**Description:** This image shows a building that was part of the Mittagong Training School Group.

---



**Goodlet Cottage: Mittagong Training Centre Group**



**Challoner Cottage viewed from Bong Bong Road**

**Description:** This image shows Mittagong Farm Home, Cottage No.12, Old Dormitory Building, Renwick Child Welfare House, Mittagong Training School for Boys, Renwick Farm Home, Renwick State Ward Home.



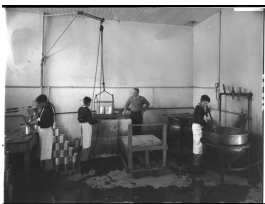
**Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong: garden of No. 8 & 11**

**Description:** This is a photograph of boys working in the gardens in front of the No. 8 and No. 11 cottages at Mittagong Farm Home.



**Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong, dormitory**

**Description:** This is a photograph of one of the dormitories at Mittagong Farm Home. It shows a bedroom with 9 beds arranged against the walls, and a single dresser between two of the beds.



**Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong, jam making**

**Description:** This is a photograph of boys making jam at the Mittagong Farm Home. It shows three boys mixing, weighing, and canning large quantities of jam under the supervision of a staff member.



**Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong, manual room**

**Description:** This is a photograph of boys in a workshop at the Mittagong Farm Home. It shows approximately a dozen boys working on a variety of craft and woodwork projects under the supervision of a staff member. The workshop is filled with finished and in-progress projects, including woven baskets, a chess board, tables, and model ferris-wheels.



**Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong, classroom**

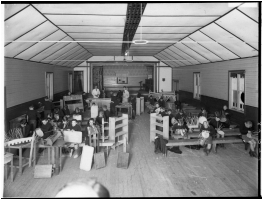
**Description:** This is a photograph of a classroom at the Mittagong Farm Home. It shows 15 boys and three staff members in the classroom. Most of the boys are seated at their desks, and one is standing on a set of scales. "Vocational Guidance Officers at Work" is written on a blackboard at the back of the room.



**Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong - laundry**

**Description:** This is a photograph of the laundry at the Mittagong Farm Home. It shows three boys and a staff member operating equipment and hanging up clothes.





### Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong - night class

**Description:** This is a photograph showing boys attending a night class at Mittagong Farm Home. It shows approximately 35 boys seated in the farm hall weaving baskets.

---



### Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong - evening meal

**Description:** This is a photograph showing boys having dinner at Mittagong Farm Home.

---



### Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong - the hospital

**Description:** This is a photograph of the hospital ward at Mittagong Farm Home. It shows four boys in beds in a sparse room being attended to by a nurse.

---



### Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Mittagong - the boot trade

**Description:** This is a photograph of the cobblers workshop at Mittagong Farm Home. It shows four boys working at various stations alongside two older men making or repairing boots in a small workshop. The workbenches are busy with various materials, and newly made boots are lined up on the floor.

---

## More info

---

### Chronology

- **Mittagong Farm Home for Boys (1906 – 1947)**
  - Mittagong Training School For Boys (1947 - 1976)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [State Children's Relief Board \(1881 - 1923\)](#)  
Date: 1906 - 1923
- [Child Welfare Department, State Government of New South Wales \(1923 - 1970\)](#)  
Date: 1923 - 1947

#### Related Organisations

- [Marist Brothers \(1872 - current\)](#)  
The Marist Brothers had a community next door to the Mittagong Cottages and the Mittagong Farm Home, and brothers provided religious instruction to Catholic state wards.
- [Anglewood \(1943 - 1994\)](#)  
Mittagong Farm Home for Boys administered Anglewood from 1943 to 1945, and boys from Turner and Sutor

Cottages were transferred there in that period.

Date: 1943 - 1945

- [Berry Training Farm \(1934 - 1977\)](#)

Boys from Turner and Suttor Cottages at Mittagong Farm Home for Boys were sent to Berry Training Farm when they reached the age of 14.

- [Sobraon Training Ship \(1892 - 1911\)](#)

The 'Sobraon' Training Ship was used until 1911 when the remaining boys were sent to the Mittagong Farm Home for Boys and the Brush Farm Reformatory.

- [Gosford Training School \(1923 - 1945\)](#)

Boys were sometimes transferred from Mittagong Farm Home to Gosford Training School if they offended at the Farm Home, or the Farm Home was overcrowded.

- [Renwick Association Inc \(15 September 2011 - current\)](#)

- [Mittagong Cottage Homes \(1885 - 1976\)](#)

Mittagong Farm Home for Boys was located on the same site as the Mittagong Cottage Homes.

Date: 1906 - 1947

- [Turner Cottage Special School for Truants \(1938 - 1946\)](#)

Turner Cottage Special School for Truants was situated at the Mittagong Farm Home for Boys.

## Resources

- State Records Authority of New South Wales, [Mittagong Training School For Boys](#), No date
- Anson, Bill, [Renwick \(Mittagong Farm Home for Boys\) web site](#), No date
- McLean, Donald, *Children In Need: An account of the administration and functions of the Child Welfare Department, New South Wales, Australia: with an examination of the principles involved in helping deprived and wayward children*, 1955
- Matthews, Bernie, [Reap as you sow](#), Griffith Review: Unintended Consequences, May 2007
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Guide](#), No date
- [They'll All Enjoy Christmas Parties](#), The Australian Women's Weekly, 9 December 1933
- Quinn, Peter E, [Unenlightened efficiency: the administration of the juvenile correction system in New South Wales 1905-1988](#), 27 March 2006
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Index 1817-1942](#), No date
- Knapman, Leonie, [Mittagong Farm Homes: Renwick Mittagong NSW: Caring for disadvantaged and delinquent children 1885-1994](#), No date
- Downie, Leeallison, [Challoner Cottage - Mittagong](#), Heritage Watch NSW, 2013
- [Hassall and Jefferis Cottages \[Cutler's Inn, Government or Mittagong Farm Home, Kangaroo Inn\]](#), State Heritage Inventory, 2022
- [Rowe Cottage \[Mittagong Training School Group\]](#), State Heritage Inventory, No date
- [Goodlet Cottage: Mittagong Training Centre Group](#), State Heritage Inventory, 2013
- [Renwick Group](#), State Heritage Inventory, No date
- [Suttor Cottage](#), State Heritage Inventory, No date
- [Challoner Cottage, Mittagong Farm Home \[Other names: Cottage No.12, Old Dormitory Building, Renwick Child Welfare House, Mittagong Training School for Boys, Renwick Farm Home, Renwick State Ward Home\]](#), State Heritage Inventory, 2022
- [No More Yancos](#), Truth, 29 April 1934
- [Fifth Sectional Report Covering the Administration of the Acts relating to State Children](#), Royal Commission to Inquire into the Public Service of New South Wales, August 1920

## Records

---

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

## Records

- [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)
- [Registers Of Committals \(1907 - 1921\)](#)

---

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/mittagong-farm-home-for-boys/>