

William Thompson Masonic School

c. 1924 – c. 1974

Details

The William Thompson Masonic School was founded in 1922 at Baulkham Hills (in Sydney's north west) for the care and education of the children of deceased Freemasons. It had previously been Masonic Orphan Schools. Different sources give different dates when the school was closed. The site was sold to the Hills Shire Council in December 1973. Following the closure of the Masonic School, around December 1974, the Masons opened family group homes in Baulkham Hills and Castle Hill.

In 2012 Find and Connect staff were advised by the United Grand Lodge of the Masons NSW/ACT that all records relating to the Masonic Orphan Schools, William Thompson Masonic School and related institutions Orana, Boronia and Wybalenna were destroyed by accident in 2002, during construction works. This includes records such as admission registers, which were described in the 1998 publication *Connecting Kin: Guide to Records*.

The William Thompson Masonic School was the brainchild of William Thompson who was the Liberal Party member for Ryde from 1913-20, and Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons from 1914-24.

Thompson's aim was to establish cottage homes for orphans. Land was purchased at Baulkham Hills in 1921 and the first stage of what was originally known as The Masonic Orphan Schools was opened on 11 November 1922. In recognition of Thompson's leadership and service to the project, the school was later renamed William Thompson Masonic Schools.

An article by Pam Wilson in the *aMUSine* website has an account of the daily routine at the William Thomas Masonic School in 1938:

6am: Reveille followed by a cold shower. Get dressed in the school uniform. Make the bed and do special duties in the cottage for half an hour such as clean the bathroom, sweep and polish the floors, dust the furniture.

7am: Do tasks outside the cottage such as sweep the pathway, sweep and polish the front verandah floor, weed the garden.

7.30am: Gong sounds and children march to the dining room for breakfast. Stand beside their chair at the table and sing the grace, then sit down to oatmeal porridge, bread and butter with jam or honey. Finish with a cup of milk from the local dairy and then sing another grace and march back to their cottage.

8am: Bell rings and children gather their books and march in line to the Assembly Hall where a prayer is said by a senior boy or girl who also gives a speech on a subject ie. Early rising, honesty, obedience, sport

or a famous person. Mr Copley then read out the default marks for the previous day and gave a brief address before the children leave the hall and march off to the school rooms accompanied by the boy's band of drums and bugles.

8.45am: School begins under the guidance of 9 teachers. The children study English, History, Maths, Geography, Business Principles, Shorthand, Typing and Needlework.

12noon to 1pm: Lunch break when children march to the dining room for a hot meal of meat, vegetables and sweets.

3pm: Finish school and return to their cottage to do sewing or work in the gardens or play in the paddocks or read library books.

5.15pm: March to dining room for soup, bread and butter with jam, cake, fruit and hot cocoa. The wireless is usually played during tea time.

6.15pm: Return to cottage to do homework

9pm: In bed and lights out.

In 1942, the Home consisted of cottages with names that all began with the letter F: Faithful, Fidelity, Famous, Felicity and Favonian for the girls, and Foremost, Firm, Fortitude, Fearless and Fervent for the boys.

In the 1970s, the Masons began to wind the school down, as changing attitudes to child care took hold. One of the last residents of the Home got in touch with Find & Connect to advise that it closed in December 1974. The site was sold to the Hills Shire Council in December 1973.

Following the Home's closure, the Masons set up family group homes in Castle Hill and Baulkham Hills: Boronia (1976, Orana (1978) and Wybalena (1978). These family group homes closed in the 1980s and 1990s, with the last closing at the end of 1993.

The Hills Shire Council bought the site and it is now known as Balcombe Heights Estate. Council provides a virtual tour on its website, which includes interviews with former residents of the Masonic School.

In 2010 the Hills District Historical Society Museum and Research Centre opened in a former girls' cottage, Building 10. The Museum includes a display about the Masonic School including furniture, honour roll boards, magazines, minute books and photographs.

Gallery



William Thompson Masonic School

Description: This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



William Thompson Masonic School

Description: This is a video published on The Hills Shire Council's YouTube account. It is an excerpt from the film 'My Brother's Keeper (c.1950).

More info

Chronology

- Masonic Orphan Schools (1922 - c. 1924)
 - **William Thompson Masonic School (c. 1924 – c. 1974)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Freemasons NSW & ACT \(1888 - current\)](#)

Resources

- Wilson, Pam, [The William Thomas \[Thompson\] Masonic School](#), aMUSine: A zine for people interested in museums, galleries and collections, No date
- [The Masonian](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September 1925
- William Thompson Masonic School, *The Masonian: the magazine of the William Thompson Masonic School, Baulkham Hills*, 1924 - 1974

Records

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

Records

- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/william-thompson-masonic-school-3/>