

# Institution for Boys, Tamworth

1948 – 1976

**Other Names:**

- Tamworth Boys Home
- Home for Boys, Tamworth
- Tamworth Institution for Boys

## Details

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The Institution for Boys, Tamworth was established by the Child Welfare Department in 1948. It was an annexe to Mount Penang Training School for Boys and a place of secondary punishment for boys aged 15 to 18 who had absconded from Mittagong Training Home or Mount Penang, or had been convicted of offences in those homes. Located in a former adult jail, the institution was one of the harshest child welfare institutions in New South Wales. Institution for Boys became Endeavour House in 1976.

Quinn (2004) states that Tamworth had been built in 1881 as a colonial prison for adults. He writes that when it was proclaimed in 1948, it was unusual in that other corrective institutions were named as 'schools' or 'shelters', as required by legislation: 'Its very name, "The Institution for Boys, Tamworth" was clearly meant to confirm the notion that its purpose was that of punishment and deterrence' (p.244).

The first residents of the Institution for Boys, Tamworth arrived in April 1948, transferred from the Mount Penang Training School for Boys (McInnes, 2015, p.39). Tamworth became known as the strictest juvenile detention centre in New South Wales, a reputation previously held by Mount Penang. Quinn writes that the Tamworth institution:

*had accommodation for twenty boys, held in individual cells, and the institution was surrounded by a 5.5m wall. Absconding was virtually impossible ... The routine was described as being 'similar to meticulous naval standards'. It was a very tough life, arguably more harsh than in an adult gaol. Inmates worked on making sennet mats and brushware. They are allowed only one hour per day recreation, during which talking was permitted. At other times silence was enforced. 'Punctilious observance' to rules was demanded, and all tasks were performed at the double, with boys quick-marching and not permitted to look right or left. Instructions to staff as to the management of inmates described a system characterised by punishment of the slightest infringement of rules and 'permanent observation' (pp.244-245).*

Punishment for acts as simple as speaking out of turn or looking sideways at another person was known as a 'bounce', and could be anything from losing privileges or meals for a period of time, to more violent punishments (McInnes, p.50). One former resident remembered the daily food rations in detail years later when being interviewed:

*Breakfast was six spoons of porridge – I counted them – one slice of bread or toast and half a cup of tea or coffee. Lunch was six to eight spoons of food, a slice of bread and tea or coffee. Tea was similar to lunch*

(McInnes, p.127).

Former inmates of the Institution for Boys have reported, in news stories and autobiographies, that they received dehumanising treatment such as solitary confinement, food deprivation, beatings by staff and isolation from fellow inmates. Notorious criminals, including Neddy Smith and George Freeman, described Tamworth as the worst of the institutions they experienced.

In December 2011 Geoff Thompson of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Investigations Unit reported that more than 35 violent deaths in Australia had been linked to men who attended Tamworth, and fifteen of those deaths led to convictions for either murder or manslaughter. The ABC interviewed six former inmates who, while they did not go on to commit serious offences, all agreed that time spent at the boys' home in Tamworth could turn someone into a killer. These former inmates described Tamworth as a 'concentration camp', 'Alcatraz' and comparable to 'a prisoner of war camp during WWII.

The ABC reported that inmates were not allowed to speak to each other or look at each other, and slept alone in brick-walled cells which were freezing in winter and oppressively hot in summer. They had steel buckets for toilets and the only light came through an iron-barred hole. Alleged punishments included beatings, food deprivation, isolation, pushing heavy sandstone blocks across the floor and inmates being forced to walk around with cardboard boxes on their heads.

The ABC cross-matched information from the Department of Family and Community Services and identified a number of inmates of Tamworth who became infamous killers. One was Sydney underworld figure Arthur 'Neddy' Smith who was charged with eight murders but only convicted of involvement in two. He wrote about the institution in his autobiography:

*Tamworth boys' home was a real concentration camp. They treated the young boys like animals, with daily bashings and starvation ... I've been to the notorious Grafton Jail twice for a period of more than four years all told: I was systematically bashed daily, flogged into unconsciousness several times but, believe me, that was nothing compared with the treatment I got at Tamworth.*

The alleged Sydney crime boss, the late George Freeman, who was dramatised in the Underbelly TV series, was there in 1952 and wrote that his introduction to the place was being king-hit by an official:

*When it came to psychological pressure on young minds, I think the Tamworth boys' home was probably the toughest, most damaging institution I ever saw the inside of ... They could break kids in there. They would torture your mind with the pressure. It was mindless discipline, unproductive and cruel ... I don't know anyone who came out of Tamworth in those days who didn't go on with a life of crime. It was them or us. It had to be to survive. All Tamworth did was ingrain the bitterness. They created the ultimate finishing school for crims.*

The institution was renamed Endeavour House in 1976, to reduce some of the stigma associated with delinquent youths. The Department of Community Services even recorded in its 1978 Annual Report that the South Australian Royal Commission into the Administration of the Juvenile Courts Act assessed Endeavour House as: '... a successful experiment in resident/staff relationships, [that] gave the appearance of openness and normality, despite the very high brick wall'.

However Endeavour House remained a maximum security detention centre for young male offenders aged between 15 and 18 years. After a spate of suicides in the late 1980s Endeavour House was closed. The facility is, once more, an adult jail.

In 2012 a research project was underway through Bond University to trace the effects of the institutionalised routine of Tamworth Institution for Boys on juvenile males, who did not have criminal records and gather historical information.

## Gallery

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**Endeavour House, Tamworth youth corrective institution**



**Boys line up at Endeavour House in Tamworth**

**Description:** Reproduced by ABC Investigations Unit, with permission from Family and Community Services NSW. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



**Mistreatment at Tamworth boys' home revealed**

**Description:** This is a video on YouTube where 4 former residents and 1 former prison officer share their memories about the Institution for Boys, Tamworth.

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## More info

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### Chronology

- **Institution for Boys, Tamworth (1948 – 1976)**
  - Endeavour House (1976 - 1990)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, State Government of New South Wales \(1970 - 1973\)](#)
- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1973 - 1975\)](#)
- [Child Welfare Department, State Government of New South Wales \(1923 - 1970\)](#)
- [Department of Youth, Ethnic and Community Affairs, State Government of New South Wales \(1975 - 1976\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Mount Penang Training School for Boys \(1946 - 1987\)](#)

Boys convicted by a Children's Court were, in the first instance, sent to Mount Penang. Boys who reoffended or absconded were sent to Tamworth.
- [Mittagong Training School For Boys \(1947 - 1976\)](#)

Boys who offended at Mittagong Training School for Boys, or absconded, could be sent to the Institution for Boys.
- [Children's Court of New South Wales \(October 1905 - current\)](#)

### Resources

- Olsson, Kristina, *All the lost children*, The Weekend Australian Magazine, 30 March 2013

- Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, [Report of the Inquiry into the Death of Malcolm Charles Smith](#), 1989
- Matthews, Bernie, *Unintended Consequences for State Raised Children*, No date
- McInnes, Dianne Margaret, [Degraded identities: an analysis of the long-term psychological, physical and criminogenic effects of institutional trauma in a detention centre for adolescent males.](#), 2015
- [Ken Buttrum interviewed by Gail Winkworth in the National Library of Australia's Children and the State oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 15 October 2009

## Other Resources

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**Title:** Tamworth Boys Home, General Order 10: Early Morning Routine

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 1974

[Details](#)

## Records

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

### Records

- [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)
  - [Institution for Boys, Tamworth and Endeavour House records, State Archives NSW \(1948 - 1989\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/institution-for-boys-tamworth/>