

Parramatta Girls Training School

1946 – 1974

Other Names:

- GTS
- Parramatta GTS
- Parramatta Training School for Girls

Details

The Parramatta Girls Training School was the new name given in 1946 to the former Parramatta Girls Training Home. It accommodated around 160 to 200 older girls at a time who had been charged with crimes, or committed by welfare organisations. Although the Annual Reports of the Child Welfare Department claimed it had made positive changes in the institution, very little changed inside in these years. Some children were transferred from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and placed in this Home. The Parramatta Girls Training School closed in 1974.

The institution at Parramatta has a long history including several name changes from 1887 to 1975. It has been estimated that up to 30,000 girls passed through Parramatta over this time; it is a significant site in Australian women's and child welfare history.

Girls were placed in Parramatta for a variety of reasons: they had been committed by welfare organisations; had been charged with crimes; were on remand or because they had not settled into foster placements or other institutions. Girls from the Australian Capital Territory who had been convicted of juvenile offences or charged under welfare laws were also transferred to Parramatta.

For most of its existence, Parramatta combined the functions of training school, for girls in the welfare stream, and reformatory, for girls on criminal charges. By the early 1950's the youngest girls were at least 10 years of age. In the late 1960s numbers at Parramatta Girls Training School peaked, with 307 girls, including those in its annexes at Ormond and Hay.

Overcrowding within the walls of the complex meant the lines were often blurred between the reformatory and the training school, although various attempts were made to set up specialised institutions within the walls.

Throughout the history of Parramatta Girls' Home the buildings were bleak and run down and there were riots and complaints by girls, which attracted a number of inquiries. These inquiries, held at intervals from 1889 to 1961, reveal persistent problems with overcrowding, discipline and management. They also reveal the complex and intense relationships between the girls. Oral histories of the home confirm the strong bonds that developed within the home, and the girls' awareness of abuse and exploitation.

Parramatta Girls Training Home was investigated in 1945 by the Delinquency Committee of the New South Wales Child Advisory Council, led by Mrs Mary Tenison-Woods. The report was extremely critical of the management of the establishment and of the approaches used to deal with the girls within it. As a result, the institutions' name was changed to Parramatta Girls Training School. However, on the inside, the staff stayed the same and very little changed for girls.

There was a close relationship between Myee Hostel and the Parramatta Girls' Training School in the post-war period. In 1965, the Department Annual Report described how pregnant young women were transferred from Parramatta to Myee around the seventh month of their pregnancy. These admissions of pregnant women took place under Section 21C of the Child Welfare Act. These women had their babies at Crown Street Hospital. A social worker worked full-time with the pregnant young women who went from Parramatta to Myee, providing "support and intensive counselling given to the girls is helping them to become settled, to accept their situation, to be willing to co-operate in making plans for their future and later to carry them out" (1967 Child Welfare Department *Annual Report*, p.13).

Annexes to Parramatta were created, for girls who were preparing to leave, at Ormond in Thornleigh. These functioned as 'privilege homes', and were a middle stage between the outside world and Parramatta. They were used for girls who were due to be discharged. In 1961 however, after a series of dramatic riots at Parramatta, an annexe was created to punish girls. This was at Hay, in a former prison for male offenders. Girls who committed crimes or misdemeanours in Parramatta were sent to Hay for up to three months, during which time they were kept in brutal isolation. They were then returned to Parramatta.

Throughout this period Child Welfare Department Annual Reports contain images of positive activities conducted at the home, including cooking, dressmaking and basketball. It also publicised images of renovations and refurbishments. A 1967 report even described the main building as retaining its 'old world charm'. The words of former residents and historians paint another picture: of an institution that was repressive, regimented and abusive. The existence of Hay was not widely acknowledged.

In 1973, protests outside Parramatta Girls Training School by the Women's Liberation Movement, led by Bessie Guthrie, attracted media and parliamentary attention. A show on the ABC, *This Day Tonight*, exposed the brutality of the institution. This pressure contributed to the government's decision to amend the Child Welfare Act to, as Child Welfare Minister Richard Healey said at the time, "to reflect the most positive attitudes of a modern community towards its minors and get rid of any Dickensian overtones." (Abandon All Hope). In late 1974, the Parramatta Training School was officially closed and the buildings were redeveloped as Kamballa, for girls, and Taldree, for boys. Girls who were at Parramatta were sent to the newly opened Reiby Training School.

There have been multiple investigations into conditions at Parramatta, both while it was open and also after it was closed, via inquiries and royal commissions. It was discussed in the *Bringing Them Home* Report (1997) as an institution where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed from their families were taken to. Both Parramatta and Hay were the subject of multiple submissions and investigations during the Forgotten Australians Senate Inquiry (2004), and Case Study 7 in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2014). All reports concluded both Hay and Parramatta were harsh, places of discipline and control, where abuse of all kinds occurred.

Through the Parragirls organisation, former inmates of Parramatta have conducted a number of reunions, and plays, documentaries and books have been produced about their lives, greatly increasing community awareness about their experiences.

ILWA, which stands for 'I love, worship and adore', was an acronym used by girls in the Parramatta Girls Home, and in other state institutions, to express their feelings for other girls. Girls in Parramatta wrote it into notes, tattooed it onto their bodies and scratched into the walls of the institution. Since 2003 Parragirls has made use of this acronym in textiles and artworks to tell stories of the emotional survival of former residents of the institution.

A fire occurred in the Orphan School building on 21 December 2012, causing significant damage and destroying the historic interior, and much of the remaining graffiti from its time as a girls' home.

The Girls Training School Precinct, 1 Fleet St, Parramatta, NSW, Australia has been listed on the Register of the National Estate since 21 March 1978. In 2017, after significant lobbying by Parragirls and other groups, the Parramatta Female Factory and Institutions Precinct was inscribed on the National Heritage List. The inscription notes that "the Precinct demonstrates how colonial and state governments chose to address the perceived problem of vulnerable women and children, who they regarded as needing protection and control, through the use of institutions as a core element of the welfare system."

The Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Inc works to protect, preserve and promote the history and heritage of the Precinct, and activate it as an International Site of Conscience.

Gallery



Training School for Girls (reformatory), Parramatta



Abandon All Hope - a history of Parramatta Girls Home

Description: Caption taken from YouTube: Abandon All Hope is the first documented history of the Parramatta Girls Home - a project made possible through the Parrastories Heritage and Stories fund, Parramatta City Council. Until now the story of this State operated welfare institution has remained relatively unknown. The document examines the site's archaeological heritage together with an overview of the statutory and societal forces and the individual and collective experiences of the young people who once resided within its walls.



Visit by Mrs May to Girls' Institution, Parramatta

Description: This image shows a group of adults shaking hands at the entrance to the Parramatta Girls Training Home.



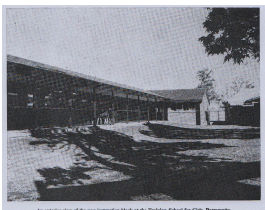
Girls Training School Precinct

Description: This is a picture of the front of what was formerly the Parramatta Girls Training School.



Creative art and craft activities have been expanded following the opening of the new instruction block at the Training School for Girls, Parramatta

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1970.



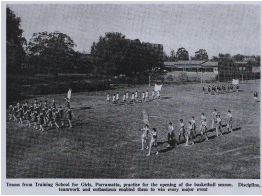
An exterior view of the new instruction block at the Training School for Girls, Parramatta

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1970.



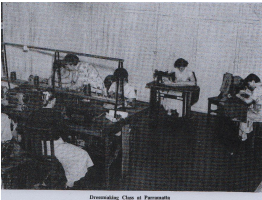
Dormitory, Parramatta Girls Training School

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1958.



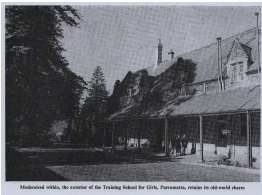
Teams from Training School for Girls, Parramatta, practise for the opening of the basketball season. Discipline, teamwork and enthusiasm enabled them to win every event [original caption].

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1967.



Dressmaking class at Parramatta

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1959.



Modernised within, the exterior of the Training School for Girls, Parramatta, retains its old-world charm [original caption]

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1967.



Redecorated dormitory at "Bethel Cottage" [Parramatta Girls Training School]

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1967.



A cookery class in progress in the new instruction block at the Training School for Girls, Parramatta

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1970.



Training School for Girls (reformatory), Parramatta

Description: This image shows a dormitory inside the Parramatta Girls Training School.

More info

Chronology

- Newcastle Industrial School for Females (6 August 1867 - 20 July 1871)
 - Biloela Industrial School, Cockatoo Island (1871 - 1887)
 - Parramatta Girls Industrial School (1887 - 1912)
 - Parramatta Girls Training Home (1912 - 1946)
- **Parramatta Girls Training School (1946 – 1974)**

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 \(1923 - 1970\)](#)

Related Events

- [Transfer of children from Australian Capital Territory \(ACT\) and Norfolk Island to New South Wales \(NSW\) \(1941 - 1986\)](#)
- [Case Study 07: Parramatta Training School for Girls, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Quamby Youth Detention Centre \(1962 - 2008\)](#)
- [Kamballa \(1974 - 1983\)](#)
- [Minda \(1966 - 1991\)](#)
- [Taldree \(1974 - 1980\)](#)

Taldree was established in the former Parramatta Girls Training School buildings in 1975.

- [Crown Street Women's Hospital \(1893 - 1983\)](#)

Girls who were pregnant while they were in Parramatta Girls Training School were transferred to Myee and gave birth at Crown Street Women's Hospital before returning to Myee and Parramatta

- [Reiby Training School \(1973 - 1991\)](#)

Girls from Parramatta Girls Training School were sent to Reiby when Parramatta closed in 1974

- [Institution for Girls, Hay \(28 July 1961 - 1974\)](#)

Hay Institution for Girls was an annexe of Parramatta Girls Industrial School.

Date: 1961 - 1974

- [Myee \(1926 - 1977\)](#)

Girls from Parramatta Training School were sent to Myee

- [Ormond, Thornleigh \(28 October 1946 - 1962\)](#)

- [Parragirls \(2006 - 2023\)](#)

- [Ormond Training School \(1962 - 1980\)](#)

Ormond Training School was an annexe of Parramatta Girls Training School

Date: 1962 - 1977

Resources

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- O'Neill, Sharon, [State Secrets](#), 4 June 2004
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- [Rees apologises over orphanage abuse](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 19 September 2009
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- Giles, Maree, [Girl 43](#), 2014
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- Matthews, Bernie, [Unintended Consequences for State Raised Children](#), No date
- Parry, Naomi, [The Parramatta Girls Home](#), The Dictionary of Sydney, 2015
- O'Neill, Cate, [The importance of photos](#), Find & Connect web resource blog, 17 June 2015
- [Caroline Carroll interviewed by Karen George in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), June 2010 - August 2010
- [Yoonthalla Close interviewed by Anne Monsour in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 5 July 2011
- [Marie Wood interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 13 May 2010
- [Effie Ray interviewed by Joanna Penglase in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 28 November 2010 - 29 November 2010
- [Wilma Robb interviewed by Susan Marsden in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 27 October 2009
- [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
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- [Child detention centres to close](#), Sydney Morning Herald, 5 July 1974
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Records

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

Records

- [Records of Girls' Industrial and Training Schools, State Archives NSW \(1867 - 1983\)](#)
 - [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)
 - [School Files \(1876 - 1979\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/parramatta-girls-training-school/>