

Ashley Home for Boys

1926 – 1999

Details

Ashley Home for Boys, in Deloraine, replaced the Boys' Training School in 1926. It was a government run reformatory which took in boys aged eight to 18, until the 1950s when it only took in boys over 14. From 1988, Ashley also accommodated girls. The Home operated on a privilege system, with boys working under a strict regime which reviewed their conduct and work. Ashley was subject to multiple government inquiries into its operations. In 1999, it became the Ashley Youth Detention Centre.

Ashley Home for Boys was previously known as the Boys' Training School, a government owned farm near Deloraine on 89 acres. Ashley Home for Boys provided accommodation for boys aged about eight to 18. All of them were wards of state. They were sent to Ashley through the children's court after committing an offence or were considered difficult in a foster or children's home.

Ashley was supposed to offer rehabilitation through encouragement rather than strict discipline. A 1925 Committee of Inquiry into the State Farm and School for Boys called for rehabilitation through kindly management rather than harsh treatment. The Committee considered segregation and classification of the boys with a system of rewards and withdrawal of privileges preferable to the cane.

In the late 1920s, the Mental Deficiency Board and State Psychological Clinic conducted intelligence tests on boys at the Ashley Home for Boys. Boys diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability (often wrongly) were placed under the dual management of the Board and the Children of the State Department. In the first few years of the Board's existence, a greater proportion of boys at the School came under its auspices than from any other sources. This reflected a widely held belief that 'delinquency' and intellectual disability were connected. The perception that boys at Ashley were likely to have an intellectual disability persisted well into the twentieth century.

Naomi Parry's thesis on child welfare in NSW and Tasmania discusses Ashley and how it operated including that in the 1920s boys were sent for circumcisions and tonsillectomies at Launceston General Hospital, with masturbation given as a reason for circumcision. Parry also cites records of a number of allegations that younger boys were abused by older ones, and that victims went on to be perpetrators upon leaving Ashley.

In 1940, the Superintendent called for a cottage system that would enable more effective segregation. The government approved funds to build a cottage for younger and 'less delinquent' boys, but later withdrew them.

The Superintendent reported in a Social Services Department Annual Report:

In...stepping in and undertaking guardianship of these boys, the State assumes the responsibility of providing a remedy for their handicaps that have previously prevented their having a fair chance of developing as normal citizens, and that...involves a comprehensive scheme of training and character-building rather than a merely negative system of punishment for offences which are often the inevitable results of early environment and circumstances.

Discipline appears to have softened during the 1940s. In the Annual Report of 1942, the Acting-Superintendent claimed that behaviour was better and absconding had been reduced because of some changes in approach. The boys were now shown how to do their work and then allowed to do it with less supervision and were being paid for their work.

In 1943, a system of leave was introduced so that two boys at a time could visit Deloraine. It was reported that no one had returned late or absconded.

The system of relaxed discipline continued, apparently with good results. The Acting-Superintendent claimed in 1944 that punishment was rare. Instead there was 'friendliness and good will among all'. In an article for *The Mercury* the same year it highlighted improvements in the dining room, where they had changed from using tin plates and mugs on bare tables, to china and tablecloths.

Annual holidays at Port Sorrell began about this time using the land owned by the Department of Social Services. In the 1960s it was reported these trips were still going with boys taken there in small groups for weekend trips.

In 1950, a fire destroyed 18 of the 24 rooms in the main dormitory block. This, and concerns that the boys did badly after their release, led the government to establish the Inquiry into the Control and Management of Ashley Boys' Home in 1951.

The Inquiry produced a number of recommendations, some of which the government actioned. These included:

- That the government establish a new Home for boys up to the age of 14 – Wybra Hall opened in 1956 for younger boys.
- That boys with intellectual disabilities should be separated from the others – West Winds Boys Home, established in Woodbridge in 1967, eventually followed this recommendation.
- That a new Privileges Cottage and Secure Unit be built, and the main dormitory block be rebuilt – a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works was established in 1952 to consider these plans.
- That recreational activities be improved and that a Recreation Officer be appointed – the government appointed a Recreation Officer, James Klein, in April 1951.

Klein resigned from Ashley on 16 September 1951 so that he could make allegations against the Home. As a public servant, he had been unable to do this. Klein made seven allegations, claiming that boys were held in solitary confinement in unfurnished cells, there was little effective rehabilitation, no case files were kept which made it difficult to help the boys, and there was no time limit on sentences. If there was nowhere else for boys to go, they just stayed at Ashley.

In his article for the Launceston *Examiner* Klein described that in the six months he had been at Ashley, 13 of the 50 boys, aged 10 to 18, had absconded. He wrote: "If even little children run away on dark, cold nights, without overcoats, without food, without money, they cannot be too happy!"

Mr JE Pedley, a resident of Deloraine, wrote a letter to the Launceston *Examiner* in support of Klein. Pedley made an additional allegation against the Home, that the Chief Secretary allowed 'floggings', as long as another official witnessed them.

In October 1951, the Public Service Commissioner conducted an inquiry into the allegations around 'floggings' and solitary confinement. His report noted boys were caned as a last resort, after an investigation by the Superintendent, and in front of another officer. He also reported that boys were placed in 'cubicles' not 'cells'. He also noted that there was no furniture in case the boys broke it or hurt themselves, and they left the cubicles to wash, attend parade, work, go to school, and wash their clothes but were placed in them for meals and leisure time.

In 1952 a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works considered the building recommendations made by the Inquiry into the Control and Management of Ashley Boys' Home. The Committee recommended that:

- To allow for better segregation, a new building be erected at Ashley.
- That staff at Ashley receive training.
- That negotiations start with the New South Wales government so that 'incorrigible' boys could be sent to an institution in New South Wales at the Tasmanian government's expense.

Following this, plans were outlined for a new dormitory block and cottages where 'better' boys could live away from the main building in the care of cottage parents. By 1953, work on the new dormitory, bathroom and lavatory in the main building was nearly complete. A Privilege Cottage for seven or eight boys opened in 1958 and was staffed by a Housemaster and Matron.

Boys that the staff at Ashley could not manage continued to be sent to Campbell Street Gaol in Hobart, and later, Risdon Prison. Others were sent to Lachlan Park, the mental hospital in New Norfolk, which had a secure area.

In 1956, Wybra Hall opened and younger boys were transferred to the new Home.

In 1963, after concerns in the media about the numbers of boys absconding from Ashley, a Select Committee inquired into the discipline, rehabilitation, work, and leisure activities of the boys.

According to the Select Committee's report the boys now aged from 15 to 18 were segregated into three groups:

- The Intermediate Dormitory Block – the Committee described these boys as: "reasonably normal boys whose offences can be classed as mischief. They respond well to training and can ultimately be placed in employment".
- The Privilege Cottage which contained up to six boys who, according to the Committee, "have responded to Ashley training in a satisfactory way".
- The Secure Unit which contained up to six boys. According to the Committee they were "kept under rigid control for short term disciplinary treatment".

Boys in the Privilege Cottage were allowed more freedom and could go home at the weekends, while the classes below were more controlled. They still had privileges but could lose them for misbehaviour. The Secure Unit accommodated boys that the staff found difficult to manage. The Committee emphasised that corporal punishment was uncommon:

In conformity with modern trends corporal punishment is rarely used. It does not often achieve anything and has been known to have a bad effect, not only on the boy but the one who administers it.

According to the Report, the Police believed that the boys were "left idle too much, and tend to gather together, talk and quarrel". The Committee disapproved of the boys being given cigarettes, and suggested that there should be plenty of work and play provided to keep the boys occupied.

Mary Daunton-Fear's 1965 thesis on correctional agencies in Tasmania included a lot of detail on the running of Ashley. On education she outlined that:

Most of the boys do not attend school though a few go to the Deloraine High School to continue their formal education...In some cases the boys do correspondence courses at the Home...However most boys have a history of irregular school attendance and poor academic records and are only too pleased to discontinue their studies.

On training, Daunton-Fear discussed how newly arrived boys were assigned general duties that included:

...domestic work, gardening some building and painting and odd jobs. After a period of 2 – 3 weeks, he is selected for a special job which may be either on the farm, in the trade section, maintenance work or in the kitchen...About 6 boys are employed on the farm and the Home owns 40 milking cows. A dairy was built by the boys and members of the staff in 1962 and is equipped with a milking machine which was assembled by the boys from spare parts.

Other training mentioned included carpentry, maintenance – welding and general repairs, and kitchen work. Dauntton-Fear also described that “boys in the secure unit are responsible for doing all the laundry for the Home...[they] also cut firewood, make concrete blocks and cultivate a small plot of ground enclosed in a quadrangle within the unit.”

The amount of pocket money boys received depended on their duties and their conduct. Life in Ashley was regimented with a daily routine from 7am to 8:30pm, with recreation time prescribed in the evening including reading and listening to the radio, while sports included gym, tennis, table tennis and swimming. Additional privileges such as watching tv depended on which level of class the boy was in.

On release, the boys were placed in employment, often farm or kitchen work. Welfare officers were supposed to supervise them until they were 18 but pressure of work meant that this did not always happen. The officers were also supposed to work with the boys’ families.

In 1988, Wybra Hall closed and the remaining twelve children, boys and girls, were transferred to Ashley. With the money made by the sale of Wybra Hall and saved by its closure, the government build new buildings at Ashley to provide accommodation for girls. It also set up better facilities for education, including arts and crafts.

In 1999, Ashley Youth Detention Centre replaced Ashley Home for Boys.

Ashley Home for Boys became a significant feature of the 2006 Tasmanian Ombudsman’s Listen to the Children report, which stated:

Claimants repeatedly described the management regime as harsh and rigid and in many respects the environment appears to have been similar to that of a prison, with a strong culture of bullying and intimidation.

In all, the Ombudsman received 149 complaints about Ashley.

In February 2008, the Report of the Stolen Generations Assessor reported they had received ten applications from people previously at Ashley.

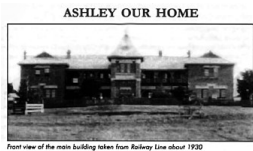
In the early 2020s, a class action of over 150 former residents from 1970s to 2010s alleging physical and/or sexual abuse at the Ashley Boys Home was being prepared against the Tasmanian Government.

Gallery



Ashley Home for Boys, main block

Description: This is an image of the main block of the Ashley Home for Boys. It was published with an article about a fire at the home in *The Mercury* on 23 May 1950. The description published with the photo reads "Ashley Home for Boys, Deloraine, the main block of which was gutted by fire yesterday. Damage is estimated at £30,000."



Front view of the main building taken from railway line about 1930

Description: This webpage is no longer in operation. This URL was taken from the Wayback Machine and is dated 20 April 2019.

More info

Chronology

- Boys' Reformatory (1869 - 1876)
 - Boys' Training School (1884 - 1926)
- **Ashley Home for Boys (1926 – 1999)**
 - Ashley Youth Detention Centre (1999 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Child Welfare Division \(c. 1953 - 1980\)](#)
The Child Welfare Division managed Ashley Home for Boys.
- [Children of the State Department, State of Tasmania \(1918 - 1934\)](#)
Date: 1922 - 1936
- [Children of the State Branch \(1936 - c. 1953\)](#)
- [Social Services Department, State of Tasmania \(1934 - 1961\)](#)
Date: 1934 - 1961
- [Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania \(1961 - 1983\)](#)
Date: 1961 - 1983
- [Department of Community Services, State of Tasmania \(1989 - 1993\)](#)
Date: 1989 - 1993
- [Department of Community and Health Services, State of Tasmania \(1993 - 1998\)](#)
Date: 1993 - 1998
- [Department of Health and Human Services, State of Tasmania \(1998 - 2018\)](#)
Date: 1998 -
- [Department for Community Welfare, State Government of Tasmania \(1983 - 1989\)](#)
Date: 1983 - 1989

Related Events

- [Investigation into Ashley Home for Boys, Public Service Commissioner, Tasmania \(1951\)](#)
- [Select Committee Inquiry into Ashley Home for Boys, Tasmania \(1962 - 1963\)](#)
- [Listen to the children: review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children, Ombudsman Tasmania \(2003 - 2006\)](#)
- [Inquiry into the Control and Management of Ashley Boys' Home, State of Tasmania \(1951 - 1953\)](#)
- [Ashley Home for Boys Rebuilding Proposals, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Tasmania \(1952\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Juvenile Delinquency \(1850s - 1990s\)](#)
Ashley Home for Boys was for boys considered to be delinquent.

Related Organisations

- [Kennerley Boys' Home \(1869 - 1969\)](#)
If staff at Kennerley Boys' Home could not manage a boy, they might send him to Ashley Home for Boys.

- [St John's Park \(1936 - 1994\)](#)
Ashley Home for Boys sometimes sent children to St John's Park.
- [Wybra Hall \(1956 - 1988\)](#)
Wybra Hall was established to accommodate certain some boys formerly living at Ashley Home for Boys.
- [Risdon Prison \(1960 - current\)](#)
Adolescents that could not be managed at Ashley, might be sent to Risdon Prison.
- [Omaru Receiving Home \(1910? - 1968\)](#)
Boys living at Ashley Home for Boys stayed at Omaru Receiving Home while they had treatment at the Launceston General Hospital.
- [Lachlan Park Hospital \(1937 - 1968\)](#)
Adolescents that could not be managed at Ashley, might be sent to Lachlan Park.
- [Campbell Street Gaol \(1821 - 1960\)](#)
Adolescents that could not be managed at Ashley, might be sent to Campbell Street Gaol.
- [Children's Psychiatric Service Launceston \(1971 - 1990?\)](#)
Staff from the Children's Psychiatric Service visited Ashley Home for Boys.

Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

Resources

- Atkinson, Lynn, [An overview of juvenile detention in Australia](#), National Conference on Juvenile Detention: Proceedings of a conference held 10-13 August 1993, 1994
- [Tony Young interviewed by Caroline Evans in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 18 February 2011. *Relevance*: Tony Young was in Ashley Home for Boys. He discusses it in his interview
- Fazal, Mahmood, [The kids who broke out of detention](#), 2022
- Canen, Chas J, *Memories of Ashley Boys Home and other ramblings*, 2004
- Canen, Chas J, *Walk in my shoes: from Ashley boy to altar boy*, 2001
- Rimon, Wendy, [Children's homes](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- Ashley Home for Boys, *Twenty cents' worth: words and images*, 1988
- [Fire guts Ashley Home for Boys](#), The Mercury, 23 May 1950
- [Ashley Home for Boys](#), Examiner, 18 August 1930
- [Empty shell only](#), Examiner, 24 May 1950
- [Building youth](#), The Mercury, 10 February 1944
- [Ashley at home](#), The Mercury, 24 February 1944
- [Ashley at play](#), The Mercury, 9 March 1944
- [Ashley Boys' Home plans](#), The Mercury, 4 July 1951
- [Ashley Boys' Home reforms](#), The Mercury, 17 October 1951
- [Reforms at Ashley Boys' Home urged by State Liberal Party Council](#), The Mercury, 3 August 1953
- [Ashley Homes critic holds to statements](#), Examiner, 10 October 1951
- [Recommends new Ashley Home](#), Examiner, 30 October 1952
- [Forgotten Australians: Tony's Story](#), Forgotten Australians: life stories, 2011
- [Letters to the Editor: Ashley Home](#), The Mercury, 6 October 1951

Records

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

Records

- [Children and Youth Services Records \(1926? - current\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
- [Record of Admissions and Discharges, Ashley Home for Boys \(1984 - 2010\)](#)
- [Health Registers, Ashley Home for Boys \(1951 - 1998\)](#)

- [Duty Diaries, Ashley Home for Boys \(1954 - 1985\)](#)
 - [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
 - [Correspondence and Associated Papers Relating to Building for Government Departments Arranged Alphabetically by Department \(1929 - 1980\)](#)
 - [General Correspondence, Department of Public Health \(1920 - 1956\)](#)
 - [General Correspondence, Public Service Board \(1973 - 1985\)](#)
 - [General Correspondence \(4\), Education Department \(1906 - 2010\)](#)
 - [General Correspondence-Hospital and Health Administration \(1932 - 1987\)](#)
 - [Reports to the Minister, Child Welfare Advisory Council \(1967 - 1971\)](#)
 - [Register of the Admission of 'Mental Defectives', New Town Infirmary \(1926 - 1965\)](#)
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