

# Boys' Town

1945 – 1956

**Other Names:**

- St John Bosco
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## Details

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Boys' Town opened in Glenorchy in 1945. It was run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and, after 1946, by the Salesians of Don Bosco, who opened a school on the premises. Boys' Town was for boys aged between five and 16 years. Thirty-nine British child migrants lived there between 1952 and 1956 when it became Savio College.

Boys' Town, initially run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, was opened by Archbishop Tweedy on 13 May 1945 as an orphanage. In January 1947, a school opened on the site. It provided an education to boys from low income Tasmanian families, some of whom boarded at Boys' Town.

When the Salesians of Don Bosco took over in 1946, they transferred a small number of younger children to the Sisters of St Joseph in Surrey Hills, Victoria.

In August 1948, the Home made an application to receive British child migrants which the State and Federal governments approved. On the strength of the approval, both governments made payments towards the cost of new buildings to accommodate the boys. Work on them began. The British government then refused the application. There are a number of possible reasons. In 'Good British stock: child migration to Tasmania after 1945?', Laura Williams says that the lack of women associated with Boys' Town and rumours of sexual abuse in West Australian homes lay behind the refusal. Another possibility, as a National Archives of Australia document shows, was the preventive system at Boys' Town, which meant close supervision. This led British authorities to fear that the boys would not mix with the community. Finally, *Veritas*, the magazine of Dominic Old Scholars Association, points out that the British government had become opposed to institutional care. It was: 'reluctant to send "orphans" across the world to another country if they were to be isolated and regimented'.

Boys' Town was now under considerable financial pressure because the State and Federal governments withheld further funding for the new buildings. Bureaucrats from both suggested that Boys' Town apply for Maltese child migrants. Instead the Superior, Father Brennan, employed a matron. This may be why the British government changed its mind. Boys' Town received its funding and the buildings were ready just before their official opening on 4 November 1951.

The first 10 boys arrived in June 1952. Two more who had been quarantined in Melbourne followed shortly afterwards. Another 27 boys came on 26 September. Boys' Town was now one boy short of its full capacity and so did not apply for the Maltese children.

In February 1953, a controversy began that, according to Williams, damaged the reputation of Boys' Town and meant that no more child migrants were sent there. The new Superior, the Very Reverend WJ Cole, told the Tasmanian government that he was not satisfied with some of the boys and asked that they be repatriated, arguing that they 'would be better off in their own country'. State and Federal governments as well as the Catholic

hierarchy opposed Cole's position but he clung to it stubbornly. In 1955, as a concession to him, the Church transferred eight boys to Tardun Farm School in West Australia.

In September 1953, British authorities again raised concerns about the lack of women involved in Boys' Town. Cole acted on the criticism. By December 1953, each migrant boy had a 'big sister'. Boys began having weekend and holiday visits to local Catholic families. Cole encouraged parishioners to come into Boys' Town and mix with the boys. By July 1954, there were a number of women working part time and two married couples living at the home.

In July 1955, to increase the numbers of child migrants at Boys' Town, the Federal government asked if it would like to take part in the 'parent following scheme'. Under this scheme, the child migrated to Australia first and the parent or parents came later. Cole did not say no but imposed so many restrictions that it was too impractical for the home to participate.

Cole resisted attempts by the Social Services Department to visit more often, threatening that, if it insisted, the Church might remove all the state wards from Catholic homes in Tasmania.

In 1956, John Ross led a British fact finding mission into Australian homes receiving child migrants. This was the first attempt by the British government to assess the child migrant scheme. The mission was highly critical of Boys' Town and, in a confidential report, blacklisted it. The report apparently led representatives of the British High Commission in Canberra and the Federal Department of Immigration to make a couple of visits to the home. Once again, they expressed concern about the lack of women. They also criticised the 'Preventive System' which they described as a type of education which meant boys had to be continually supervised so that they were in a 'moral impossibility of doing wrong'. Cole rejected these criticisms forcefully. Australian bureaucrats thought the boys looked healthy and happy so they decided that the mission's complaints had no foundation.

Even so, Boys' Town had caused so many problems for the Catholic hierarchy that they did not want to send any more boys there, especially since by now there was a shortage of child migrants. No more ever arrived. By 1956, Boys' Town had become Savio College and only two child migrants remained. They stayed on at the College with the last one leaving in 1959. Savio College amalgamated with other Catholic schools in the Glenorchy area to become Dominic College in 1973. It stopped taking boarders in 1994.

This Home was an approved children's home under the terms of the *Child Welfare Act* 1960.

In separate interviews with the National Library, two Former Child Migrants recall the strong bond between the 'English boys' that grew out of the shared experience of migrating to Australia and of being identified as a distinct 'ethnic' group by the Australian boarders at Boys' Town and the Irish brothers.

Their memories of what was good about Boys' Town vary. One thoroughly enjoyed the sports program, especially learning to play Australian rules, while the other disliked the game. He particularly liked working on the farm, bringing in the hay, milking the cows, and feeding the pigs. Both enjoyed walks in the bush at weekends.

Some brothers were kind, but both men remember the harsh punishments they received. One of the Fathers carried an electric cord known as 'Doctor Black' which he used to beat the boys. They received corporal punishment for whistling at the wrong time, being cheeky, and for waving good-bye to the boys that were sent to West Australia.

The men described the routine as:

- 6-6:30 am – get up and dress in school uniform, which included short pants, followed by Mass, breakfast, and a play in the playground.
- 9 am – lessons with a break for morning tea with bottles of milk and, later on, a pie. Classes also broke for a midday meal.
- 3:00 – school finished. The boys changed and went to the playing field for sports. They did homework in the evenings. The Prefect of Studies was strict about this.

On Sunday evenings, after the Benediction, one of the priests read out behaviour reports. Boys who had been 'good' were able to have cake. Boys who had not been 'good' were sent to detention where they wrote out lines with words such as: 'I must not speak back to the teacher'. The other boys watched movies, carefully selected by the priests who also censored reading materials.

Outings included the football at Glenorchy, movies in Hobart, the Hobart Show, and the Regatta.

Another Former Child Migrant who could not read and write worked in the kitchen. He told an interviewer for *Veritas* that:

*I got to Grade 6. Because I was a slow learner and they couldn't teach me I got put in the kitchen. That means I'd do the washing up. I'd take all the dishes off the table on a trolley and took them into the kitchen. We had a dishwasher with a big handle, rotary racks...Mrs Rezek did the peeling and the cooking. I did the toast. Put the butter on a dish on top of the toaster and it would melt, and you'd get a paintbrush and paint the butter on the toast.*

According to the *Listen to the Children* report, the Ombudsman's inquiry received nine claims of physical, emotional or sexual abuse at Boys' Town. In the lead up to the second report of 2006, the inquiry received ten.

In 1999, the Salesian order apologised to the former child migrants. A group of the migrants dedicated a plaque to their memory in the school chapel. One of them told the *Lost Innocents* inquiry that the plaque was: 'an acknowledgement and recognition of the child migrants at Boys' Town who through hardship and trying times were part of the history of the school'. A fire in the chapel destroyed the plaque on 25 May 2003.

On 12 and 13 October 2012, Dominic College held a commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the arrival of the first child migrants to Boys' Town. The plaque destroyed in the fire was rededicated and a new one put up to recognise that first group. The Principal, Beth Gilligan, made a speech to a special assembly. The following is an extract:

*Our school history...and the way we were able to start a school was because of these British Child Migrants. We were able to extend our orphanage into a school because 39 child migrants (who were considered abandoned) came and brought with them government funding to build our school. That's part of our story, part of our history.*

Ten former child migrants attended the anniversary. In 2013, a number of them play an important role in Dominic Old Scholars Association.

## Gallery

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**Boys Town**

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Group photo of Boys' Town boys

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## More info

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### Chronology

- **Boys' Town (1945 – 1956)**
  - Savio College (1956 - 1973)
  - Dominic College (1973 - current)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Missionaries of the Sacred Heart \(1885 - current\)](#)  
Date: 1945 - 1946
- [Salesians of Don Bosco \(1922 - current\)](#)  
Date: 1946 - 1956?

#### Related Events

- [Visit of John Moss \(1951\)](#)  
John Moss inspected this home as part of his 1951 tour and report
- [Listen to the children: review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children, Ombudsman Tasmania \(2003 - 2006\)](#)
- [Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration \(1956\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [St Joseph's Home for Boys \(1925 - c. 1967\)](#)
- [St Joseph's Home for Children, Sisters of St Joseph \(1967 - 1991\)](#)

## Resources

- Immigration Museum, [Stolen childhoods](#), 2012
- [Michael Harvey interviewed by Caroline Evans for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 11 May 2012. *Relevance*: Michael Harvey talks about his time at Boys' Town
- [Maurice Crawford-Raby interviewed by Rob Willis in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 12 August 2010. *Relevance*: Maurice Crawford-Raby was at Boys' Town
- [Heather Crawford-Raby interviewed by Rob Willis for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 12 August 2010
- Rimon, Wendy, [Children's homes](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- [Wants families to aid child migrants](#), The Mercury, 26 September 1951
- [The church protected Father Frank Klep, despite his criminal conviction](#), Broken Rites, No date
- [Veritas; the magazine of the the Dominic Old Scholars Association](#), May 2013
- [Veritas: the magazine of the Dominic Old Scholars Association](#), July 2014. *Relevance*: Fr Denis Allen: Boys' Town, 1947-1950, pp.8-9.; Peter Hillebrand: Boys' Town 1952-1954, pp.10-11
- Hanson, Dallas, *Why are they in children's homes: report of the ACOSS children's home intake survey*, 1979

# Records

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

## Records

- [Records held by CatholicCare Tasmania \(1959 - 1979\)](#)
  - [Dominic College Records \(1945 - 1959\)](#)
  - [M3793 Fact Finding Mission on Child Migration \(1955 - 1956\)](#)
  - [St John Bosco Boys Town, Glenorchy, Tasmania - Governmental assistance toward costs of building operations for accommodation of British child migrants \(1948 - 1953\)](#)
  - [M1283 \[1\] St John Bosco Boys Town \(1953 - 1962\)](#)
  - [M1283 \[2\] St John Bosco Boys Town \(1948 - 1958\)](#)
  - [M3157 John Moss \(Child Welfare Expert of U.K\) \(1951 - 1952\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, multiple number series \(policy matters\) \(1922 - 1968\)](#)
  - [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
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