

# St John's Park

1936 – 1994

## Details

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St John's Park, run by the government, replaced the New Town Rest Home in 1936. St John's Park was in New Town. It provided accommodation to children and adults placed there for many different reasons. It closed in 1994.

St John's Park continued to provide temporary accommodation for wards of state. Wingfield House, which was a home and treatment centre for children with physical disabilities, the Tasmanian Sanatorium, and St John's Home for the Aged, later St John's Park Nursing Home, were also on the site. Adults and children detained under the *Mental Deficiency Act* 1920 also lived at St John's Park.

Children with intellectual disabilities at St John's Park arrived there from a number of different sources. Between 1926 and 1965, these included HM Gaol, Ashley Home, Lachlan Park Hospital, Clarendon Children's Home, the Northern Tasmanian Home for Boys, the Salvation Army Boys Home, the Magdalen Home, and the Royal Hobart Hospital. Others were placed there by the Police Courts or by their families. Many of them were detained under the *Mental Deficiency Act*.

In 1934, men and boys with intellectual disabilities, who had previously been in the men's ward, were transferred to the buildings of the former Boys' Training School. It became known as the Mental Defectives' Home. Women and girls with intellectual disabilities continued to live with the other residents.

The government considered building a home for people with intellectual disabilities on a new site in 1949. St John's Park was now largely for people who were elderly. They were sometimes upset by the behaviour of the young boys, some of whom had apparently broken the law. In 1961, Karingal was built on the boundaries of St John's Park, well away from the accommodation of people requiring aged care.

The girls continued to live in the female division. In the late 1930s, about 20 girls and young women with intellectual disabilities worked in the kitchen and laundry, where they sorted, washed, ironed, folded, and pegged washing out for about four and a half hours a day. In the evening, they listened to the radio and did fancy work before being locked in their dormitories for the night at eight o'clock.

In 1938, two young women aged 16 and 20 escaped. One of them was classified as 'mentally defective' and the other as 'morally defective'. They managed to see the Premier, Albert Ogilvie and asked him to allow them to find a job. Ogilvie said:

*The conclusion I formed was that these girls were intelligent and, by no stretch of the imagination, could they be characterised as mentally deficient...In view of the shortage of domestic servants in Tasmania, and in view of the intelligence and physique of these two girls, I cannot understand why the only request they make – to be given an opportunity of securing work – cannot be acceded to.*

In 1993, Elizabeth Dean carried out a series of interviews with people who lived at St John's Park, by then solely a home for the elderly. The interviews are published in *No more bread and milk*. A few of the people interviewed had been at St John's Park for much of their lives.

Elsie was sent there at the age of 16. She worked in the laundry. She also got up at six in the morning to make toast for the elderly residents. After that, she washed up, set the trolleys and buttered bread. The woman in charge, a Miss Hitchcock, wore a pink uniform. She sometimes beat Elsie with a stick, leaving marks on her back. At weekends, young women went to Miss Hitchcock's house to stack wood without being paid. Sometimes the staff at St John's Park arranged dances. There was also a holiday home at Carlton Beach where the residents were sent 'if they wanted to get us out of the way'. If the young women absconded, there were serious consequences. Elsie recalls that:

*When I was young, I got out of the window at night. A few of us knotted the sheets together and slid down and went to meet the boys. Miss Hitchcock caught us and we got shut in the lock-up, no food and in the dark. Afterwards, we used to get locked in every night at five o'clock in case we might go off to meet the boys.*

Desi Dean gave another of the interviews. He was originally at Wingfield House because he had polio but was sent to the men's ward at the age of sixteen. He remembered that:

*It was awful, not like it is now. Old men and boys all mixed up together. No women at all. We had men to look after us. If we sent our clothes to the laundry, we didn't get them back half the time. It was hard to have clean clothes. Some of the men were bedridden but not all of them. It was a workhouse.*

*It was full of people who couldn't look after themselves. It wasn't pleasant I can tell you. We got our meals brought over from the kitchen. The food wasn't too good.*

Tommy was admitted to the boys' ward after both his parents died. He remembers that his first job was chopping wood: 'They used to bring green wood, all big logs and we had to saw it up and stack it to dry. There were fires in all the wards and in the kitchen'. Later Tommy worked in the kitchen, washing out the coppers after the cooking was finished.

In 2012, Southern Cross Care provides runs a facility for people who are elderly in the old Garden Wards of St John's Park Nursing Home. At the former Karingal, the Department of Health and Human Services offers rehabilitation services and respite care. The Department's offices of the Disability and Mental Health Services are on the site. Child Protection Services (South), also run by the Department, are located in the building of the former Queen's Orphan Asylum. A number of voluntary organisations, including Cerebral Palsy Tasmania, have their headquarters on the site.

## Gallery

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**Infant Orphan School**

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**Orphan School, South Wing**

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**Orphan School, North Wing**

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**Queens Orphan Asylum New Town**

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## More info

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### Chronology

- Queen's Orphan Asylum (1833 - 1879)
  - New Town Charitable Institution (1879 - 1912)
    - New Town Infirmary (1912 - 1934)
    - New Town Rest Home (1934 - 1936)
- **St John's Park (1936 – 1994)**

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Public Health Department, State of Tasmania \(1904 - 1956\)](#)  
St John's Park was run by the Public Health Department.

#### Related Organisations

- [Elim Maternity Hospital \(1897 - c. 1973\)](#)  
Some mothers at Elim Maternity Hospital were sent to St John's Park.
- [Mental Deficiency Board \(1922 - 1964\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board was the guardian of children and adults living at St John's Park.
- [Tasmanian Society for the Care of Crippled Children \(1935 - 1988\)](#)  
Wingfield House, established by the Tasmanian Spastic Association, was on the site of St John's Park.
- [Wingfield House \(1938 - 1971\)](#)  
Wingfield House was at St John's Park.
- [After Care School, New Town \(1942? - 1957?\)](#)  
The After Care School was in St John's Home for the Aged at St John's Park.
- [Wingfield School \(1942? - 1965?\)](#)  
Wingfield School was at St John's Park.
- [Barrington Boys' Home \(1946 - 1981\)](#)  
Barrington Boys' Home sometimes sent children to St John's Park.

- [Clarendon Children's Home \(1922 - 2004\)](#)  
Clarendon Children's Home sometimes sent children to St John's Park.
- [Ashley Home for Boys \(1926 - 1999\)](#)  
Ashley Home for Boys sometimes sent children to St John's Park.
- [Northern Tasmanian Home for Boys \(1921 - 1973\)](#)  
Northern Tasmanian Home for Boys sometimes sent children to St John's Park.
- [Magdalen Home \(1893 - 1974\)](#)  
The Magdalen Home sometimes sent people to St John's Park.
- [Campbell Street Gaol \(1821 - 1960\)](#)  
Campbell Street Gaol sometimes sent people to St John's Park.
- [Risdon Prison \(1960 - current\)](#)  
Risdon Prison may have sent people to St John's Park.
- [State Psychological Clinic \(1922 - 1964\)](#)  
The State Psychological Clinic had classified children and adults living at St John's Park who were considered to be 'mentally defective'.
- [Lachlan Park Hospital \(1937 - 1968\)](#)

#### Related Legislation

- [Mental Deficiency Act 1920, Tasmania \(1920 - 1963\)](#)  
A number of children and adults living at St John's Park were detained there under the *Mental Deficiency Act*.

## Records

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

### Records

- [Register of the Admission of 'Mental Defectives', New Town Infirmary \(1926 - 1965\)](#)
  - [Alphabetical Admission Register, Males and Females \(1914 - 1952\)](#)
  - [General Correspondence, Department of Public Health \(1920 - 1956\)](#)
  - [General Correspondence-Hospital and Health Administration \(1932 - 1987\)](#)
  - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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