

Clontarf

8 September 1901 – 1983

Other Names:

- St Vincent's Orphanage, Clontarf
- Clontarf Boys' Town
- St Joseph's Orphanage
- Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Junior Roman Catholic Boys
- Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School
- Clontarf Orphanage for Roman Catholic Boys, near Victoria Park

Details

Clontarf was established in Manning by the Christian Brothers in 1901. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found the Christian Brothers were amongst the worst perpetrators of abuse nationally, that the relevant Christian Brothers Provincial Council was aware of allegations of abuse from the 1930s onwards, and that between 1947 and 1968 they failed to prevent sexual abuse in their institutions. Western Australia's Christian Brothers' institutions were also a subject of the [Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#) for their brutality, physical and sexual abuse. In 2024 they were [called before](#) the parliamentary inquiry into child sexual abuse in WA institutions.

Boys from the [Subiaco Boys' Orphanage](#) were the first residents of Clontarf, followed by boys aged around 12 to 16 years from various backgrounds including state wards, orphans, private admissions, and child migrants from Britain and Malta.

Originally known as the Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Junior Roman Catholic Boys, in its first year 70 boys on government subsidy lived at Clontarf, aged under 6 years to over 12 years. By 1907, there were 78 boys subsidised by the government, 52 of them under 12 years old. Government funding for the boys was withdrawn at the age of fourteen, when they would have to leave. In 1918, 53 of the 169 boys were private admissions. Around 100-150 boys lived there until after World War II, when child migrants from Britain and Malta arrived and up to 280 boys could be accommodated. In the 1960s, Clontarf again housed around 150 boys with the number falling to 60 or fewer in the 1970s. From 1962, there were more boys who were privately placed than state wards.

Electric lights were installed and operated in August 1905, followed by toilets, urinals and septic tanks. Further improvements were made after a Health Department inspection in 1917, and hot water showers were installed by 1927.

In 1918 the Clontarf Brass Band featured regularly on the Perth social scene. A manual trades workshop was built around this time with the space divided into two halves, one used for carpentry, and the other a bootmaker's workshop. Money for the institution was raised through the sale of goods made by the boys.

A road from Clontarf to Albany Highway, paid for jointly by government and public donations, was officially opened on 10 April 1927. This gave the isolated Clontarf better access to Perth.

Between 1926 and 1946, boys were sent to work in a variety of trades, or to farms as labourers. Some stayed at Clontarf, or worked in other Christian Brothers institutions. The Child Welfare Department instituted formal 'service agreements' to be lodged with child welfare authorities after abuse by employers was found to occur

under existing 'handshake agreements' with the institution.

Between 1936-41 Brother Francis Paul Keaney was principal at Clontarf. Keaney was the subject of submissions to the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care and the child sexual abuse royal commission both for his sadistic abuse, and his oversight of sexual abuse of the boys. Boys did not have adequate clothes, footwear or nutrition, and were beaten as they were forced to clear the land and construct buildings at Clontarf, including a chapel and dormitory. In 2001, Senator Andrew Murray raised a [Matter of Public Interest](#) stating that "He (Keaney) was a sadist who indulged in criminal assault and who knowingly protected rings of predatory brothers engaged in systemic long-term sexual assault on defenceless children." Boys who absconded from Clontarf were usually returned by the Child Welfare Department, despite reporting abuse.

Clontarf was requisitioned by the defence forces in 1942, and the boys were evacuated to either Tardun (school-age boys) or Bindoon (boys over 14 years of age) on 1 March 1942, returning in February 1945.

The Clontarf Brass Band was re-established in March 1945 and the public rallied to support Clontarf and other children's homes with a 'Children's Victory Celebration' at the Cannington showgrounds in December of that year. Other donations were received to purchase essentials. In the the 1950's allegations of sexual abuse by the bandmaster were made by the boys.

In early 1947, Clontarf was inspected by child welfare authorities with a view to admitting child migrants from Britain. The inspection report is quoted in part by Coldrey (pp.146-147) and shows that Clontarf was poorly fitted out in almost every aspect. The dining room, kitchen, dormitories, laundry, bathroom, classrooms, gymnasium and library were substandard. As the church was keen to be involved in child migration, the Archbishop made a large donation to improve the condition of facilities at Clontarf.

In 1947, boys sent from Britain as unaccompanied child migrants were placed in Clontarf. Coldrey reports (p.149) that there were 191 boys in September 1947, including 47 British child migrants. By 1953, the Child Welfare Department reported that Clontarf could accommodate 280 boys. Until 1967, the number of boys at Clontarf rarely fell below 150. Boys from Malta were also moved to Clontarf at this time, whose experiences were captured in the National Museum of Australia's ["Inside"](#) project.

"From the first days I witnessed and then personally experienced the harsh discipline and the use of the infamous straps made of several layers of leather and reinforced with metal to make them weightier and more painful. The staff carried these up the sleeves of their cassocks and used them with terrible efficiency. In the absence of their straps staff resorted to sticks, canes and fists even on very young boys and those who were maimed through accidents. The attitude of some staff was sadistic.

There was also this process of depersonalisation at work at Clontarf and a loss of identity. I soon became a number. My Christian name was never used, only my number and surname. My personal belongings were soon taken away from me, my books were burnt, and my mail home was censored. We were forbidden to speak Maltese." [Orphaning Experiences](#) Godfrey Gilmour, 2011

Children were forced into physically hard work at the institution, referred to as 'hard labour' and 'slavery' by the boys in various testimonies to inquiries. In October 1950, 19 boys were involved in a truck roll-over working in the Collier pine plantation in Como. *The West Australian* newspaper reported (6 October 1950, p.2) that seventeen boys were hospitalised.

"There was a time when us boys had to go out on the truck to pick up second-hand bricks which we had to load on the truck and then unload when we got back. All this work was done with bare hands and sandals and I remember being hit on the head with a brick (I still carry the scars) no medical treatment was given – I still had to carry on with the other boys until the job was done." [Submission 251](#), Inquiry into Children in

In evidence to the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, later known as the 'Forgotten Australians' inquiry, a man described (*Forgotten Australians* 2004, p.42), a life in Clontarf that has left a deep impression on him: 'In 1954, aged 11, I was sent to Clontarf Boys Town...where Hell continued for the rest of my childhood'.

On 15 December 1955, 53 boys were being transported to families in the south-west to be boarded out for the Christmas holidays. On the way, the bus collided with a truck on a narrow bridge at Mundijong. This serious incident resulted in the death of 11-year-old Michael Bowman, with three other boys having either one or both legs amputated in the crash. Nineteen boys had physical injuries that required hospitalisation and ongoing treatment and it is likely that the crash left a lasting psychological impact on many of the survivors. Michael Bowman's short life and the cause of his death are memorialised in the Michael Bowman Park in Serpentine where annual gatherings are held.

After 1970, the child welfare authorities stopped reporting on the number of child migrants at Clontarf. By 1975, Clontarf provided short or long-term accommodation for 59 boys in the 12-15 age group, with another 50 attending school daily on the Clontarf campus. In 1982, Clontarf was no longer providing a 'full "substitute care" program,' and in December 1983 it closed.

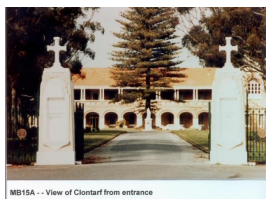
The Clontarf Old Boys Heritage Committee have preserved the history of the site's period as a Home for boys by opening a Heritage Trail in September 2012, refurbishing the Clock Tower, and having Keaney's name removed from the Memorial Hall.

Gallery



Clontarf Slideshow, Part 1

Description: This is a Part 1 of a slideshow of photographs from the archives of the Christian Brothers Oceania Province. It was created by 'old boys' Peter Bent and Michael Hogan, with assistance from Ed Butler, using images from 'Institution Albums 1 and 2'. There are all sorts of scenes from life at Clontarf from the 1940s to 1970s. Many people assisted with the identification of boys, brothers and staff to create captions for the images in this slideshow. DVD copies of this slideshow are available from Tuart Place. The Find & Connect website has split the slideshow into two parts so that it could be uploaded onto youtube. Please click on the photo, which will take you to youtube.



Clontarf Slideshow , Part 2

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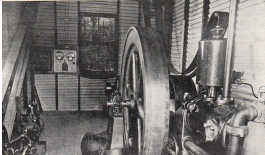
Dormitory - Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906

Description: 'Dormitory - Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906' is an image included (before p.21) in the *Report by the Superintendent of Public Charities and Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools* for the year ending 31 December 1906. This image shows a long dormitory filled with four rows of metal-framed beds topped with white blankets. Next to each bed is a small wooden chair. The only other furniture in the room is a side-board at the end of the room, with a statue of a person standing on top of it. Five paintings can be seen hanging on the walls.



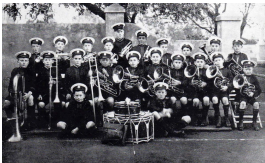
Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906

Description: 'Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906' is an image included (before p.21) in the *Report by the Superintendent of Public Charities and Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools* for the year ending 31 December 1906. This image shows approximately 80 boys and four adults sitting or standing on the lawn in front of a long, two-storey stone building. The boys range in age from approximately five to 12 years old.



Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School, Generator, 1906

Description: 'Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School, Generator, 1906' is an image included (before p.21) in the *Report by the Superintendent of Public Charities and Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools* for the year ending 31 December 1906. This image shows the generator used to produce electricity at Clontarf.



The Band, Clontarf Boys' Orphanage, 1927

Description: 'The Band, Clontarf Boys' Orphanage, 1927' is an image included (after p.4) in the *Annual Report of the State Children Department, 1927*. This image shows 22 boys in marching band uniforms posed for a photo while holding brass instruments, including trumpets, trombones, and tubas. Two boys at the front of the group are sitting next to a bass drum and snare drum.



Building the pool at Clontarf

Description: This picture of Clontarf boys building a swimming pool was taken by Michael O'Donoghue in 1956, when he was a resident at the Home. It shows boys working with picks and shovels barefoot. "They laboured before and after school and at weekends to complete it, using picks and shovels. Boys who did not work hard enough risked being beaten. Michael still suffers the effects of an injury he received from a blow across the chest by one particular Brother." -- [NMA Inside Blog](#)

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [St Patrick's Province of the Christian Brothers \(1953 - 1967\)](#)
- [Holy Spirit Province of the Christian Brothers \(1967 - 2007\)](#)
- [Australasian Province of the Christian Brothers \(1885 - 1953\)](#)

Date: 1901 - 1953

Related Events

- [Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration \(1956\)](#)
Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of British child migrants sent to Clontarf.
- [Case Study 11: Christian Brothers, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)
- [Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, Northern Ireland \(19 January 2013 - 2017\)](#)
- [Child Migration Programmes Investigation, UK Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse \(2017 - 2018\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Castledare \(1934 - 1983\)](#)
Boys often went to Clontarf from Castledare.
Date: 1929 - 1983
- [Subiaco Boys' Orphanage \(1872 - 1901\)](#)
In 1901 the Christian Brothers moved from the Subiaco Boys' Orphanage (1872 - 1901) to Clontarf.
Date: 1901 -
- [Bindoon \(1936 - 1966\)](#)
Bindoon (1936-1966) was established with one Christian Brother and two older boys from Clontarf. Some boys were returned to Clontarf in October 1941, when Bindoon began to admit boys who were wards of the State. Boys from Clontarf were also sent to Bindoon during its first years as labourers on the early buildings.
- [Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association \(1947? - 1970\)](#)
The Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association [CEMWA] coordinated the placement of child migrants to Clontarf.
Date: 1947? - 1966
- [Keaney House \(1955 - 1965\)](#)
Some older boys from Clontarf were placed at Keaney House in North Perth after they started work.
Date: 1955 - 1965
- [Castledare Special School \(1929 - 1934\)](#)
When Castledare Special School closed, seven of the resident boys were placed in Clontarf.
Date: 1934 -
- [St Kevin's Industrial School \(1897 - 1922\)](#)
Sixteen boys from St Kevin's Industrial School were transferred to Clontarf when St Kevin's closed.
Date: 1921 - 1922
- [Tardun Farm School \(1928 - 2008\)](#)
It was not unusual for boys to be transferred between Tardun Farm School and Clontarf. In 1942, boys were evacuated to Tardun from Clontarf, at the request of the defence forces.
Date: 1928 - 1983
- [Catholic Child Welfare Council, United Kingdom \(1929 - 2003\)](#)
- [Catholic Family Welfare Bureau \(Perth\) \(1970 - 1977\)](#)
It has been claimed in a history of Clontarf that the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau was a factor in a decline of country boarders and day students being enrolled at Clontarf.
- [Father Hudson's Society, United Kingdom \(1902 - current\)](#)
Father Hudson's Society was one of the Homes in Britain that sent child migrants to Clontarf.
Date: 1947 - 1957

Related Legislation

- [State Children Act 1907, Western Australia \(1907 - 1948\)](#)
Clontarf was classed as an orphanage within the meaning of the *State Children Act 1907*.

Resources

- Community Affairs References Committee, [Lost Innocents: Righting the record - Report on child migration](#), 30 August 2001
- Immigration Museum, [Stolen childhoods](#), 2012
- Coldrey, Barry, [Good British stock: child and youth migration to Australia](#), 1999
- [On their own: Britain's child migrants](#), Australian National Maritime Museum website, 2010

- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, [*Report of Case Study No. 11: Congregation of Christian Brothers in Western Australia response to child sexual abuse at Castledare Junior Orphanage, St Vincent's Orphanage Clontarf, St Mary's Agricultural School Tardun and Bindoon Farm School*](#), December 2014
- [*John Walsh interviewed by Hamish Sewell in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), 28 March 2011
- [*David Plowman interviewed by John Bannister in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), 18 February 2010 - 25 February 2010
- [*Peter Bidwell interviewed by Virginia Macleod in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), 19 September 2011
- [*Jasmine Bidwell interviewed by Virginia Macleod in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), 19 September 2011
- [*Bert McGregor interviewed by Caroline Evans in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), 1 October 2010
- [*Ivor Knight interviewed by Christine Choo in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), 14 June 2011 - 28 June 2011
- [*Anthony Brennan interviewed by Christine Choo for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), February 2012
- [*Oliver Cosgrove interviewed by Christine Choo for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*](#), February 2012
- [*Robert Francis Allan Isaacs interviewed by John Bannister in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2000\)*](#), 2 March 2000
- [*Catholic Church schools and homes with the most child abuse claims revealed*](#), ABC News, 17 February 2017
- Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, [*Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report*](#), March 2018
- [*Child Migration*](#), National Archives of Australia, No date
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, *A piece of the story : national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families*, November 1999
- [*Child Migrants Trust \[website\]*](#), 2011
- Battye, JS, [*The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia \(1912\)*](#), 1912. Relevance: p.505-506
- McGregor, James Albert, [*Submission no 34 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 5 July 2003
- Knight, Ivor Alan, [*Submission No 11 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 2005
- Knight, Ivor Alan, *Out of darkness : growing up with the Christian brothers*, 1998
- Pinnell, Barry George, [*Submission No 25 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 23 May 2003
- Coldrey, Barry, [*Submission No 40 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 19 April 2003
- Walsh, John, [*Submission No 41 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 23 July 2003
- [*Cosgrove, Oliver Manuscript Note*](#), State Library of Western Australia website, 1998
- Department for Community Development, State of Western Australia, [*Submission No 55 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), July 2003
- Congregation of the Christian Brothers WA and SA, [*Submission no 65 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), July 2003
- Bradshaw, Paul, [*Submission No 85 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 1 July 2003
- Haenow, Ted, [*Submission No 251 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 2005
- House of Commons Health Committee, [*Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 4 June 1998 \(Health - Third Report\)*](#), 4 June 1998
- House of Commons Health Committee, [*Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 11 June 1998 \(Health - Third Report\)*](#), 11 June 1998
- The International Association of Former Child Migrants and Their Families, [*Submission No 129 to the Senate Inquiry into Child Migration*](#), 2001
- Family Care Society, [*Memorandum by the Family Care Society*](#), Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 11 June 1998, 11 June 1998
- Bent, Peter, [*Submission No 365 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 25 March 2004
- Matheson, Max, [*Submission No 441 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 12 August 2004
- Thomas, Ivy, [*Submission No 483 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 1 November 2004
- Tulloh, Ernie, [*Submission No 496 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care*](#), 24 November 2004
- Coldrey, Barry, [*Submission No 15 to the Senate Inquiry into Child Migration*](#), 2001
- Heritage Council of Western Australia, [*Clontarf*](#), inHerit: our heritage places, 8 February 2015

- [Motion - youthful delinquents, detention conditions](#), Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 2 March 1943. *Relevance:* p.2609

Other Resources

Title: The Christian Brothers' Agricultural School, Tardun, Western Australia

Type: Image

Date: c. 1936

[Details](#)

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Records of Christian Brothers Children's Institutions in Western Australia \(1888 - 1983\)](#)
- [Catholic Archdiocese of Perth CEMWA and CMC Files \[Former Child Migrants\], Catholic Archdiocese of Perth \(c. 1928 - 2008\)](#)
- [Picture South Perth Photograph Collection \(1870s - 2000s\)](#)
- [Tuart Place Historical Photos Collection](#)
- [Father Hudson's Society, Records \(1902 - current\)](#)
- [Commonwealth Child and Youth Migration Records \(1901 - 1983\)](#)
- [UK fact finding mission 1956 part 2, National Archives of Australia \(1955 - 1956\)](#)
- [John Moss C.B.E. U.K. Child Welfare Expert. Visit to Australia. Part II, National Archives of Australia \(1951 - 1952\)](#)

There is information about Clontarf in the John Moss Visit to Australia file Part II, please see pp.28, 106, 116, 121, 128-129, 137

- [PHIND Personal History Index \(1938 - 1965\)](#)
 - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
Item B189 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Clontarf
 - [Bindoon boys town \[videorecording\] \[with scenes from Clontarf\], State Library of Western Australia \(1941 - 1941\)](#)
 - [Files - Community Welfare \("A" Series\), State Records Office of Western Australia \(25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990\)](#)
 - [Files - Child Welfare, State Records Office of Western Australia \(1 January 1917 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
 - [Files - Departmental \[Education Department\] \(1 January 1885 - 31 December 2000\)](#)
 - [Indentures \(Guardianship\) \(1947 - 1960\)](#)
 - [Former Child Migrants Referral Index \(1913 - 1968\)](#)
 - [Former Child Migrants Blue Index Cards \(1947 - 1968\)](#)
 - [Papers, 1948-1997 \[manuscript\] \[Cosgrove\] \(1948 - 1997\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/clontarf/>