Claremont Mental Hospital

1903 – 1972

Other Names:
- Graylands Hospital
- Claremont Hospital for the Insane
- Claremont Hospital

Details

Claremont Hospital for the Insane was established in 1903, becoming known as the Claremont Mental Hospital in 1933. It was a government-run facility that accommodated children and young people with intellectual and other disabilities until the hospital closed in 1972.

Claremont Mental Hospital was Western Australia's main mental health institution from 1903 to 1972. Children with intellectual and other disabilities were sent there, often for a lifetime. Even after the juvenile wing was opened it was not uncommon for children and adolescents to be in the same wards as adults.

Claremont Hospital for the Insane ('Claremont') was established by the Government of Western Australia in 1903 as a hospital principally for adults'. Patients were gradually transferred from the Fremantle Asylum until its closure in 1909. Children and young people with disabilities were among those transferred from Fremantle and continued to be admitted to Claremont until its closure.

Building started at Claremont in 1903 and men from the overcrowded Fremantle Asylum were housed in the new workshops and stores buildings as soon as they were habitable. By 1907 the female block was built and women and girls started being transferred from Fremantle. In 1910, a new 'chronics' block, designed to take 250 people, was added. Children with intellectual disabilities were housed in that block.

In its design and location, Claremont demonstrated the medical views of its superintendent, Dr Sydney Montgomery, who believed it should be in the Perth metropolitan area, but not part of the city, and on a hill, so that the fresh breezes could wash away disease-carrying 'miasma', with sufficient land for a farm that provided work and produce. Claremont was to be designed to be large enough to cope with a growing population, with separate male and female wings.

Patients slept in large dormitory wards behind barred windows, and dressed in poor quality, government issued clothing. Communal dining and bathing facilities were impersonal. Men's wards were in the north wing and women's in the south. The part of the institution the patient lived in was based on their perceived behaviour. Nearest to the administration block was the 'quiet and chronic' ward, then 'recent and acute' patients, then the 'sick and infirm' and 'epileptic' wards. Deepest into the institution was the 'violent and noisy' ward. There was a padded single room on each floor.

A Board of Visitors was introduced in 1920 for the independent oversight and protection of patients. The Board system was established following an amendment to the *Lunacy Act 1903* for the protection of patients in psychiatric hospitals. The Board was independent of both the Public Health Department and Claremont, and provided an independent avenue for patients who were concerned about their rights and welfare.

Although Claremont was set up with a medical model of treatment for the 'disease' of insanity, intellectual disabilities were considered hereditary and incurable. Young people with Down Syndrome from around 15 years old were used as menial labour on the farm, and in the kitchen, garden and laundry. There were some brief early periods where this attitude was challenged. A Montessori school for children was established at Claremont in 1919 but closed in 1921, possibly due to lack of funds. A newspaper report in 1924 described the impact of education programs:

> *Two years later she [Edith Cowan] paid another visit and was amazed at the improvement that had been effected through a teacher having been provided for the children. She was sorry that among the economies to be undertaken by the Government the teacher was to be taken from Claremont.* The West Australian 26 September 1924, p.10

The Royal Commission in Lunacy (1921-1922) found that the No.4 Ward at Claremont was used for '…children, together with a certain number of quiet and chronic patients who interest themselves in the younger inmates of the ward.' The Report went on to describe the ward:

> *…the size of the dormitory is objectionably large and the beds are arranged in four rows, and at the present time there are a few patients more than the accommodation originally provided for (Report, p.4).*

It was not until after World War II that the plight of children in Claremont was raised as a serious policy issue. In 1949, there were up to 70 children in Claremont. In 1950 a series of articles in the *Sunday Times* newspaper led to a Royal Commission to inquire into brutality at Claremont. Articles detailing the experience of a journalist who worked as an attendant over December 1949 to January 1950 were published over two weekends in February. His report that a 10 year old boy was housed in a ward with older men was given some publicity during the Royal Commission (*Sunday Times*, 19 February 1950, p.5).

The Royal Commission, although sensational, didn't lead to any significant change for children at Claremont. Doctors were still most likely to refer children with disabilities to Claremont. It was parents working together as the Slow Learning Children's Group to drive change that would eventually deliver more and better alternatives.

From August 1959, some patients at Claremont were employed under the policy of 'industrial rehabilitation'. Patients undertook paid work for the Public Health Laboratories, making glass pipettes and cleaning and re-assembling bottle tops. Trade unions and manufacturers supporting this policy lead to an expansion, leading to many young people with intellectual disabilities being engaged in work until polic change in the 1980s.

In 1952 a group of children with intellectual disabilities were transferred to the Nathaniel Harper Homes at Guildford with support from Claremont psychologists, however, many children remained at Claremont. In 1955, the Commonwealth Government appointed Allan Stoller (the head of Victoria's Mental Hygiene Department) to report on the provision of mental health services in Australia. This resulted in £10 million being granted to States to upgrade facilities. In 1960, a Planning Committee established by the Minister of Health found that Western Australia's share of this money was largely unspent, and recommended that all children be removed from Claremont.

Little had changed by 1962, when the newly appointed Senior Medical Officer described conditions for children:

> *The care was appalling. In the male children's ward, J Block, there were people who lay in bed with bed sores until they died; there were cot cases for whom little but basic nursing was provided; there was no policy of training and the care of 40 people in a ward by two or three rostered staff was inadequate. At meal times, they were seated at arm's length from each other, so that they couldn't grab each other's food,*

which I suspect they did simply because they were hungry. Many who were incontinent were often hosed down outside, even in winter in the so-called airing court. There was no individual care, there was no love, there was no care at all and all bad behaviour was coped with in the medical fashion, using what some used to call 'chemical warfare' against them. This was a medical response to abnormal behaviour; there was little psychological treatment or training. It was the only place in the world that I have found children as young as two years being referred to simply by their surnames…They were receiving worse treatment than animals and most certainly were not being treated as children (Dr Guy Hamilton, in Gillgren pp.78-79).

Girls were 'receiving better care than the boys, but still living in unpleasant conditions' (Stella, p.95).

The Senior Medical Officer was determined to remove children from Claremont. He at first refused new admissions, but at the request of the Slow Learning Children's Group who needed respite care, he developed a transition strategy that saw the youngest children moved to the new Pyrton Training Centre by 1967, followed by younger adults in 1972.

The Claremont Hospital closed in 1972, as part of a restructure that resulted in a psychiatric section (Graylands Hospital) and a section for people with intellectual disabilities (Swanbourne Hospital).

Gallery

Swanbourne Hospital Revival [Claremont Mental Hospital]

Description: 'Swanbourne Hospital Revival [Claremont Mental Hospital]' is a video news item from the *7.30 WA* current affairs program. It has video images of the Claremont Mental Hospital when it was in use, and in its current, neglected condition. The program includes interviews with nurses who worked at the hospital, and outlines plans to renovate the buildings for use as an aged care home. This webpage is no longer in operation. This URL was taken from the wayback machine and is dated 21 February 2019.

Claremont Hospital for the Insane

Description: This is a digitised copy of a glass negative and is part of the group of three images titled 'Claremont Hospital for the Isane [picture]' held at the State Library of Western Australia. The image shows the entrance to Claremont Hospital for the Insane.

More info

Chronology

- Fremantle Asylum (1857 - 1909)
  - **Claremont Mental Hospital (1903 – 1972)**

Related Entries

Run by
- Lunacy Department, State Government of Western Australia (1903 - 1934)
  Date: 1903 - 1934

- Mental Hospitals Department, State Government of Western Australia (1934 - 1954)
  Date: 1934 - 1954
- Mental Health Services, State Government of Western Australia (1954 - 1984)

Related Events
- Royal Commission to inquire into the Heathcote Mental Reception Home and the administration of mental hospitals generally, State of Western Australia (6 September 1938 - 30 November 1938)
- Select Committee to inquire into the management of the Claremont Hospital for the Insane, Western Australia (24 September 1919 - 11 November 1919)
- Royal Commission in Lunacy, State of Western Australia (28 September 1921 - 21 September 1922)
- Royal Commission on Claremont Hospital for the Insane (Custody of Criminally Insane Persons), State of Western Australia (17 November 1936 - 15 December 1936)
- Royal Commission appointed to inquire into alleged cases of brutality at the Claremont Mental Hospital, State of Western Australia (20 March 1950 - 6 April 1950)

Related Organisations
- Fairholme (1952 - 1984)
  Children were transferred from the Claremont Mental Hospital to Fairholme.
- Greenplace (1914 - 1979)
  Greenplace was originally an annexe of the Claremont Hospital for the Insane.
- Heathcote (1929 - 1994)
  When Heathcote was established, it was not only seen as a remedy to the overcrowding at Claremont. Heathcote was intended to admit patients who did not suffer from what were thought in 1929 to be 'incurable' illnesses such as senility, epilepsy or 'mental deficiency'. Those patients would continue to be sent to Claremont.
- Earlsferry (1952 - 1989)
  Girls were transferred from the Claremont Mental Hospital
- Board of Visitors, Claremont Mental Hospital (1921 - 1996)
- Pyrton (1966 - 1997?)
  Children were transferred to Pyrton from the Claremont Hospital.
  Date: 1966 - 1970s

Related Legislation
- Lunacy Act 1903, Western Australia (1903 - 1962)
- Mental Treatment Act 1927, Western Australia (1927 - current)
  The *Mental Treatment Act 1927* allowed voluntary patients to be transferred involuntarily to the Claremont Mental Hospital (Claremont Hospital for the Insane) if they had not 'recovered' after six months.
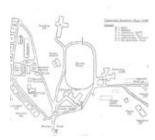
Resources

- Wynne, Emma, *Former Claremont 'Hospital for the Insane' to be Restored as Aged Care Facility*, ABC News, 18 January 2016
- Heritage Council, *Swanbourne Hospital Conservation Area*, inHerit: our heritage places, 2017
- *Interview with Guy Joseph Livingstone Hamilton, by John Bannister*, 18 October 2002 - 8 November 2002
- *Boy mental patient has to live with killer*, The Daily News, 28 March 1950
- *Patients amok at Claremont*, The Daily News, 11 February 1948
- *Fifteen Hundred Mental Patients*, The Daily News, 11 February 1948
- *The Bentley Case*, The West Australian, 23 April 1938
- *Bentley case*, The West Australian, 5 May 1938
- Turner, Laurence Ronald, *Sunday Times Reporter Works for 5 Weeks As Attendant At The Hospital For The Insane And Here Describes*, Sunday Times, 12 February 1950
- Turner, Laurence Ronald, *Sequel To Our Reporter's Story Of Conditions At Aslyum*, Sunday Times, 19 February 1950
- *Asylum Inquiry Worry to Relatives of Patients*, The West Australian, 8 April 1950
- *AU WA A1540 - Board of Visitors - Claremont Mental Hospital*, State Records Office of Western Australia - Organisations & People, 2015
- *Motion - Hospital for Insane, to Inquire [Hansard, p359-361]*, Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 27 August 1919

- *Motion - Hospital for Insane, to Inquire [Hansard, p628-640]*, Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 24 September 1919
- *Motion - Hospital for Insane, Inquiry. Extension of Scope [Hansard p809]*, Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 9 October 1919
- *Condition of Claremont Mental buildings*, The West Australian, 30 June 1950
- *Council Tuesday 16 August 1966 [Hansard p326-327]*, Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 16 August 1966
- *Editorial [intellectual disability]*, The Daily News, 6 November 1950

Other Resources

Title: Swanbourne Hospital, Graylands Hospital Map
Type: Image
Details

Title: Claremont Hospital Plan, 1968
Type: Image
Date: 1968
Details

Records

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

Records

- Records of Whitby Falls Hospital (1897 - 1972)
- Records of Claremont Mental Hospital (1903 - 1969)
- Records of Fremantle Asylum (1857 - 1961)
- Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' [Child Endowment] prefix (1904 - 1974)
- Files (Aboriginal Matters) - Department of the North West [1] (1915 - 1949)
- Files - Community Welfare ("A" Series), State Records Office of Western Australia (25 August 1908 - 23 December 1990)
- Files - Aborigines Departments (1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972)
- Correspondence Files, Colonial Secretary's Office, Chief Secretary's Department (1883 - 1983)
- Files (Aboriginal matters) - Chief Secretary's Department (1916 - 1927)

You can view this page online by visiting https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/claremont-mental-hospital/