

# Mont Park

1912 – c.1997

**Other Names:**

- Mont Park Hospital for the Insane
- Mont Park Mental Hospital
- Mont Park Psychiatric Hospital

## Details

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Mont Park Hospital for the Insane was opened by the Victorian State Government in April 1912 . It provided short and long term residential treatment for patients with mental illness and intellectual disability. While Mont Park was primarily a facility for adult patients, it is known to have also treated children. At its peak in the late 1950s Mont Park held over 1700 patients.

Mont Park was established with the purpose of replacing the Yarra Bend Hospital for the Insane, which had been in operation since 1848 and was struggling with overcrowding and out-dated facilities. It was located on a 1200 acre site at Bundoora (sometimes also described as at Macleod). The site was chosen due to its distance from populated areas and its good farming land, which could be used to produce food for the hospital as well as providing farm work for some of the patients. Construction of the hospital began in 1910, consisting of the first patient wards, staff accommodation, and a railway siding for the transport of people and goods to the hospital.

Mont Park began taking patients in July 1912, with the first admissions being men (and one 17 year old boy) transferred from the Hospitals for the Insane at Yarra Bend, Kew, and Sunbury. The first female patients were admitted in May 1913 – like the first male patients, they were also transferred from Yarra Bend Hospital. These first patients, and those that came after them, were used as labor for the hospital – establishing the vegetable gardens and orchards, working with the farm animals (pigs, poultry, and dairy cows), working in the laundry and the kitchens, helping to construct new buildings, build fences, doing landscaping work, and performing many other tasks required in the running of Mont Park.

Admission registers for Mont Park show that from 1915 teenagers, and very occasionally children under 13, started to be admitted to Mont Park with more regularity. They were never admitted in large numbers (between 1915 and 1944 the highest number of teenagers admitted in a single year was 10), which was likely why asylum administration never saw the need to designate a children's ward for them. Instead, they were placed on adult wards with adult patients. Teenagers and children were most commonly transferred to Mont Park from other mental health institutions in Victoria such as the [Kew Children's Cottages](#), and the mental health institutions at Royal Park, Kew, Yarra Bend, Ballarat, Beechworth, and Sunbury. However, some young people were admitted by their family, by representatives from the Child Welfare Department, and a small number were transferred to Mont Park from children's Homes. Some of these young people were discharged only a few months after their admission, others were transferred to Kew Children's Cottages or to other adult mental health institutions in Victoria, and others lived at Mont Park well into adult-hood, and sometimes for the rest of their lives.

Placement of young people at Mont Park, including those who were under state 'care', continued at least into the 1950s and 1960s. An article published in *The Herald* in 1954 ('Escapee is boy they can't hold', 22 June 1954) reported on the many escape attempts of a 16 year old boy who had been sent to Mont Park seemingly as punishment for housebreaking. Tony Danis, in an interview with Wayne Chamley published on the *Inside Blog* ('He Was Living in a Horse Stable', 2011), recalled being sent to Mont Park after multiple escapes from several

*After my third escape I was sent away from [the Home] by the brothers and I was placed into a receiving house at Mount Park Asylum. This was a terrifying experience. I was first placed in unit M10 which was like a prison. During the day I was allowed to move around within large communal rooms and I could watch TV. As I was fairly small and only a young teenager (13 years old), I was sometimes physically attacked by some of the older patients with mental illnesses. I was not allowed out of the unit unless I was accompanied by a member of staff.*

*During the night I was locked up in a small cell that had bars on a window and a solid door with a small, barred, glass window in it.*

*I spent about two years at Mont Park until one day a Dr R. had a long talk to me. I recall this doctor made an assessment of me and then told me that I should not be in such a place. I was 14 years of age.*

Mont Park was seen as a leader in mental health treatment in Victoria during the 1930s and 1940s. New experimental treatments were tested on patients at Mont Park, including the use of UltraViolet light to treat 'melancholia', treating schizophrenia/dementia praecox with either sedatives or 'insulin shock' (inducing coma or seizures in the patient through insulin injection), and injecting malarial blood into patients with General Paralysis of the Insane (caused by late-stage syphilis), also to induce 'shock' and seizures. While some treatments such as the use of UV light proved successful, others, like the injections of malarial blood, resulted in patient deaths. Trials of new drugs were also commonly conducted on patients at Mont Park. By the mid 1940s electro-convulsive therapies had been introduced and were replacing the 'shock' therapies, and penicillin was introduced to treat syphilis and its accompanying neurological symptoms. In 1952 surgical wards were opened at Mont Park, and the use of leucotomy operations (also known as lobotomy) was introduced. In 1958 leucotomy operations were performed on 100 patients, however just two years later the number of operations performed was only 23, due to the lack of success of leucotomy as treatment, and the resulting permanent personality changes in the patients.

Patients at Mont Park were also treated with non-medical therapies. In the late 1950s abreaction therapy, or the expression of repressed emotions and re-living of traumatic events, often under hypnosis, was introduced. At the same time the concept of industrial therapy or occupational therapy was formally adopted at Mont Park, which involved occupying patients in handcrafts or menial labor tasks – something many of the patients had already been doing throughout Mont Park's history. Occupational therapy in particular became a focus of Mont Park during the 1960s, alongside socialisation and rehabilitation as opposed to long-term incarceration.

The book *Glimpses of the Past: Mont Park, Larundel, Plenty* provides a description of the day in the life of a nurse at Mont Park on a typical male ward, where the patient population would have been about 60. The book describes how trusted patients were selected to assist the staff in their duties, particularly for things like running messages, getting supplies (e.g. tobacco) from the kiosk, calling other patients in for meals, cleaning tables, putting out bins, patrolling the perimeter of the yard, taking head-counts, and taking note of any changes in routine or patients not eating their meals. Baths/showers were taken by patients once a week, or twice a week from the late 1960s, and male patients were shaved every alternate day. Patients would eat in the dining room at 11am for lunch and 4.30pm for dinner – meals were placed on tables before the patients were allowed in to the dining room. Evening entertainment usually consisted of card games, and television viewing in later years. Patients were in bed by 7.30pm. There were regular film nights, and once a month a dance was held, with music provided by a small orchestra. Daytime activities would include work on the farm, in the laundry, in the grounds and gardens, or cutting wood, for which residents received a small payment. Occupational Therapy patients would participate in various activities like crafts and woodwork.

Construction of new buildings was an ongoing feature at Mont Park for much of its history. Patients were separated into different wards: e.g. male, female, elderly, violent, rehabilitating from drug or alcohol use, or quarantined due to infectious diseases. Mont Park was frequently over capacity, with overcrowding resulting in patients sleeping on the floor at many points in the hospital's history. As a result of this over-crowding and expansion three new facilities were constructed and opened on the Mont Park site – Larundel in 1953, Plenty

Mental Hospital in 1963, and the Kingsbury Training Centre, which opened in 1971 in buildings that had previously been used to house the patients who worked on Mont Park's farms.

From the late 1960s numbers of patients at Mont Park began to decline, dropping below 1000 for the first time in 1969. This was in part due to the development of community services providing care for people with mental illness and intellectual disabilities; partly due to the introduction of new drugs that enabled illnesses to be managed in a non-custodial setting; and also partly due to changing societal attitudes towards large institutions. As numbers at Mont Park, Larundel, Plenty Mental Hospital, and Kingsbury Training Centre continued to decline through the 1970s and 1980s the Victorian Health Commission made the decision to amalgamate these facilities back into one organisation. This amalgamation occurred in 1991, with the formation of the North Eastern Metropolitan Psychiatric Services.

From 1991 patient numbers at the site continued to drop, as patients were transferred to community-based in-patient facilities where appropriate. By 1995 the total number of patients across the site was 373 – the lowest it had been since 1918. Mont Park closed in the mid to late 1990s, though the exact close date is not clear. The site was divided up, and a large portion of it was sold to La Trobe University, which had been established on the Mont Park farm land in 1965. Many of the Mont Park buildings still exist as part of the La Trobe campus.

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Lunacy Department \(1905 - 1934\)](#)
- [Department of Mental Hygiene \(1934 - 1944\)](#)
- [Mental Hygiene Branch \(1944 - 1959\)](#)
- [Mental Health Authority, State of Victoria \(1962 - 1978\)](#)
- [Health Commission of Victoria \(1978 - 1985\)](#)
- [Department of Health, State Government of Victoria \(2021 - current\)](#)
- [Health and Community Services, State Government of Victoria \(1992 - 1995\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Kew Children's Cottages \(1887 - 2008\)](#)  
Children were transferred between Kew Children's Cottages and Mont Park

#### Related Concepts

- [Medical experiments \(1803 - 1970s\)](#)

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