

Cootamundra Training Home

1911 – 1969

Other Names:

- Cootamundra Home for Orphan and Neglected Children
- Cootamundra Girls' Home
- Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Girls

Details

Cootamundra Training Home was established in a disused hospital building by the Aborigines Protection Board in 1911. It housed only Aboriginal girls, and was designed to train girls for domestic service. In 1940 its management passed to the Aborigines Protection Board. It continued as a girls' home for Aboriginal girls until it was closed in 1969, although in its last years a few non-Aboriginal girls were sent there.

The Cootamundra Girls Home was fundamental to the process of removing Aboriginal girls. When removed, Aboriginal girls were trained to become domestic servants and farm hands in wealthy non-Aboriginal households. Girls in the homes were referred to as 'inmates' and parents were unable to regain access to their children until they turned 18yrs, and in many cases never again ... The Girls experienced systematic racial discrimination to remove their Aboriginal identity and alienate them from their families (Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation website).

Cootamundra Training Home was established in 1911, in the disused Cootamundra District Hospital, which had been built in 1889 and occupied a prominent position on a hill near the town.

The home was unique, as it was the only government-run home designed to train girls for domestic service. It was only for Aboriginal girls and has a significant place in the history of the stolen generations in New South Wales.

The Aborigines Protection Board told the government Cootamundra Home provided educational opportunities for orphan and neglected children, but the true purpose of was as a training school to change the behaviour of girls who had grown up on Aboriginal reserves, and make them acceptable for 'apprenticeship' to white employers. This was part of the Board's goal to get young Aboriginal people away from their families and communities and make them live as white people. Most of the girls who went to Cootamundra had living parents and were aged 13 or older. Few went to school. Cootamundra continued to train girls for domestic service long after the practice had been abandoned for non-Aboriginal girls.

The organisation of the home reflected its former use as a hospital, and the values of its founder, George Edward Ardill, Vice-President of the Aborigines Protection Board and the head of the Sydney Rescue Work Society and proprietor of the Home of Hope for Friendless and Fallen Women. The first staff members appointed at the home had worked for Ardill in the Home of Hope, or had worked at Warangesda Dormitory. These staff carried his values into the daily routine. These included the idea that work redeemed the soul of fallen women.

At Cootamundra girls slept in two dormitories, holding up to 25 girls each, and did all the cleaning, laundry and gardening work in the home. The regime at the home was hard, and former residents report being terrified at the

thought they might be punished by being locked in a store room that they believed had been a morgue.

The first girls transferred to the Home had been in the Warangesda Dormitory. Girls were removed from stations and reserves and taken to the home after being reported to the Aborigines Protection Board by station managers or police, or spotted by the Home-Finder, Miss Alice Lowe. Lowe's role was to persuade parents that their daughter would benefit by being 'trained' at Cootamundra and 'apprenticed'. However, if the parents refused to send their daughter away, Protection Board inspectors, police or State Children's Relief Department staff would remove the child, sometimes after taking her to the Children's Court to be prosecuted. Girls were described on Board records as 'of an age to be apprenticed' or taken 'for training' or, if their parents resisted, as 'neglected.'

There was a school on site, but most girls were at or near school-leaving age when they were taken to the home and spent just a few months there being 'trained' before they were sent out to employment as 'apprentices' in homes in Sydney or rural New South Wales. These placements were arranged by Miss Lowe, who would also inspect the girls. Miss Lowe was, in the 1930s, replaced by Mrs Inspector English.

In 1940 the Aborigines Protection Board was replaced by the Aborigines Welfare Board. The regime at the home became slightly more liberal, although it must be said the Aborigines Welfare Board instigated these changes to provide opportunities for Aboriginal girls to assimilate with white mainstream culture. Cootamundra girls began to attend the local high school, and enter their produce and craft in the Cootamundra Show. The longstanding Matron in this period was Ella Hiscocks. Cootamundra townspeople became more involved in fundraising for the home, and girls began to attend dances and socials. They also had more training and employment opportunities, although domestic service remained a priority.

When the Aborigines Welfare Board was abolished in 1969 the site was taken over by the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Services and run as a girls home. In 1975 the buildings were sold to the Young Aboriginal Land Council and renamed Bimbadeen. In 2014 Bimbadeen was still in use as an Aboriginal-run Christian training centre.

Cootamundra Girls' Home was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families.

Gallery



Cootamundra Training Home for Girls - front view

Description: This is a photograph of girls at the Cootamundra Training Home. It shows a group of approximately 25 girls sitting and standing in front of the home. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



Existing driveway and entry showing western wing

Description: This image shows the existing driveway and entry showing the western wing to what was the Cootamundra Training Home and laterly the Bimbadeen Girls Home.



Back to Cootamundra

Description: [This description was taken from the caption published on the SBS Living Black channel on YouTube. This episode aired on 9 June 2012] Its been a long journey of healing for former residents of the Cootamundra Girls Home in southern New South Wales. But nearly a hundred years after it opened members of the stolen generation still find the memories as fresh as they are painful.



[Cootamundra Training Home for Girls - Dormitory]

Description: This is a photograph of a dormitory at Cootamundra Training Home. It shows 14 metal framed beds in three rows in a large high-ceilinged room. The only other furnishings visible in the room are two small chairs next to the fireplace.



[Cootamundra Training Home for Girls - back view]

Description: This is a photograph of children at the back of the Cootamundra Training Home for Girls. It shows approximately 25 girls sitting and standing beside water tanks in a gravel yard behind the Training Home.



[Cootamundra Training Home for Girls - school]

Description: This is a photograph of children besides the school house at the Cootamundra Training Home for Girls. It shows approximately 25 girls sitting and standing beside a tree behind the school-house at the Training Home. The girls appear to be wearing a uniform of patterned long-sleeved dresses. A barbed wire fence sits between the girls and the training home buildings.

More info

Chronology

- **Cootamundra Training Home (1911 – 1969)**
 - Bimbadeen Girls Home (1969 - 1974)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Aborigines Protection Board, State Government of New South Wales \(1883 - 1940\)](#)
- [Aborigines Welfare Board \(1940 - 1969\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Homefinder \(1890 - 1920s\)](#)

Related Legislation

- [Aborigines Protection Act 1909, New South Wales \(1909 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection Amending Act 1915, New South Wales \(1915 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection \(Amendment\) Act 1936, New South Wales \(1936 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection \(Amendment\) Act 1940, New South Wales \(1940 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection \(Amendment\) Act 1963, New South Wales \(1963 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Act 1969, New South Wales \(1969 - 1983\)](#)

The management of the Cootamundra Training Home was transferred to the Child Welfare Department by the *Aborigines Welfare Act 1969*.

Related Organisations

- [Warangesda Dormitory \(1893 - 1912\)](#)
When Warangesda Dormitory was closed, girls were transferred to Cootamundra Training Home.
Date: 1911 - 1912
- [Brewarrina Aboriginal Station Dormitory \(c. 1897 - c. 1940\)](#)
Girls were transferred between the Brewarrina Dormitory and Cootamundra Training Home

- [Singleton Home \(1905 - 1910\)](#)
Children were moved between the Singleton Home and Cootamundra Home
- [Bomaderry Aboriginal Children's Home \(1908 - 1988\)](#)
Children from Bomaderry Home were sent to Cootamundra once they were old enough for 'training'.
- [Singleton Boys' Home \(1920 - 1923\)](#)
- [Kinchela Training Home for Aboriginal Boys \(1923 - 1970\)](#)
Aboriginal children who were removed from their families were sent either to Kinchela or Cootamundra, depending on their gender. This meant siblings were separated.
Date: 1923 - 1969

Resources

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#), 1997. *Relevance:* Cootamundra Girls' Home was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families
- Museums of History NSW, [Aboriginal Resources: A Guide to NSW State archives](#), No date
- Stolen Generations' Testimonies Foundation, [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#), 2009. *Relevance:* See testimonies of Rita Wenberg, Lester Maher, Marjorie Woodrow and Val Linnow
- Lauder, Joanna, [Bomaderry Aboriginal Children's Home listed on heritage register](#), 15 February 2013
- University of Sydney, [A history of Aboriginal Sydney](#), 2020
- Tucker, Margaret, *If everyone cared*, 1977
- Atkinson-Phillips, Alison, [Not a Celebration](#), 2017
- Purtille, James, [80 years ago, Violet was stolen and forced into unpaid work. She says the PM is wrong: It was slavery](#), 2020
- [Patrick Sephton interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 2001
- Kabaila, Peter Rimas, *Cootamundra: the Aboriginal Girls Home*, 1994

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)
Community Services holds records relating to Aboriginal children who were taken into state care, including some who were at Cootamundra Training Home
 - [Record Cards of Aboriginal Children \(1953 - 1966\)](#)
Some of these cards relate to children who may have spent time at Cootamundra Training Home
 - [School Files \(1876 - 1979\)](#)
 - [Aborigines Welfare Board Photographs \(c. 1916 - c. 1961\)](#)
Some photographs of girls at Cootamundra are included in this series of photographs.
 - [Special Bundles \(1920 - 1958\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/cootamundra-training-home/>