

Mount Penang Training School for Boys

1946 – 1987

Other Names:

- Gosford Training School
- Mt Penang
- Mount Penang
- Mount Penang Training Centre

Details

Mount Penang Training School for Boys, or Mt Penang Training Centre, was established by the Child Welfare Department in 1946 at Kariong, near Gosford. It replaced the Gosford Training School which had been on the same site. It was a reformatory for boys convicted of offences or had been difficult to manage in other Child Welfare Department institutions. Some children were transferred from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and placed in this Home. Mount Penang was predominately for older boys, aged 14 to 16 years of age. In 1959 it held 380 boys. It was officially renamed the Mount Penang Detention Centre in 1988.

In the 1950s Mount Penang was divided into the Main Institution, which had dormitory-style accommodation, and the Privilege Cottage, which had separate bedrooms, dining and recreation rooms. The site reused the buildings of the former Gosford Training Home.

In the 1950s, there was large-scale landscaping of the site, with the boys carrying out stonemasonry and land clearing. According to the 1962 Child Welfare Department Annual Report:

The grounds of the institution have been landscaped on a large scale, involving the removal of a sizeable hill. Stone won in the process has been used to face the terraces and build walls and rock gardens, this work being carried out by the boys under trained supervision. The lads take great pride in their stonework, a number of them becoming remarkably expert in stonemasonry, a craft which is something of a dying art in the outside community.

A video on YouTube features former residents describing the labour and harsh conditions which created the landscape at Mount Penang. The young men worked in a row, turning over the soil in a whole paddock with only shovels, digging one by one. One man recalled boys collapsing in the hot sun and being left there or moved under a tree, and not receiving any water. Another man commented: 'During the day we were made to either dig stones with a pickaxe from the paddock for a new oval, dig tree stumps out with pick axes.... chain gang shit really' ('In honour of those who endured ...', 2013)

Each day was deliberately long and exhausting, and like similar regimes in girls' homes like Parramatta, was designed to effect personality changes. The 1964 Child Welfare Department described the policy:

An inmate of Mt. Penang is exposed to a regulated, demanding programme from 6 a.m. until 9 p.m. In the course of each day therefore, he is brought into contact with varying influences, depending on his location, which have a decided impact on his attitude, behaviour, and character.

Boys who did not comply with this regime, or committed offences within Mount Penang, were sent to an annexe, Tamworth Institution for Boys, which was opened in 1948. In 1976 that institution was renamed Endeavour House. Both have been described by former inmates as a 'school for killers', as the boys sent there often headed into lives of violent crime. Although Mount Penang was not quite as brutal as Tamworth, it too has a reputation for creating, rather than reforming, criminals.

Those who tried to escape from Mount Penang were known by the boys as 'dingoes', and escaping was 'going dingo'. Punishment for acts as simple as speaking out of turn or looking sideways at another person was known as a 'bounce', and could be anything from losing privileges or meals for a period of time, to more violent punishments (McInnes, p.50). One former resident spoke in 2014 about the violent physical and sexual assaults he received from officers at Mount Penang, and said that the institution 'was more like a jail than a home, the boys who lived there referred to it as "the Pound"' (Statement to Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 11 March 2014).

A report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody about the death of a former inmate of Mount Penang included a description of the institution around 1970:

It was based on very strict discipline and requirement of hard work. It brought serious and repeat criminal offenders together with first offenders ... and did not distinguish between them. The atmosphere was one of absolute regimentation with very strict practices and procedures that applied throughout the centre. The focus was on security and the maintenance of discipline and there was limited opportunity for other than very organised activity under very close control and very closely supervised. There were four dormitory houses, each containing up to 80 boys, with one staff member to supervise them during each eight hour shift. They had no privacy of any kind. The staff relied upon the implementation of a very strict code of rules and had a script written for them to cover the various routine situations of each day. There was only a limited period each day during which the boys were allowed to talk.

Young people who had been committed to a juvenile justice institution in the Australian Capital Territory could be sent to Mount Penang, in NSW, particularly before the establishment of Quamby Youth Detention Centre in Canberra in 1962.

In 1960, the NSW government established a new institution called Daruk, described as an annexe of Mount Penang. Daruk's first residents were transferred there from Mount Penang. The Child Welfare Department regarded Daruk as an institution halfway between the Mittagong Training School and Mount Penang, which was a more serious facility for 'delinquents' (Annual report, 1960).

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017) heard many accounts of sexual assaults on children at Daruk and consequently the New South Wales Police established Strike Force Eckersley in 2016 to investigate. In 2021, 9 people had been charged as a result of this investigation, including former superintendent of Mount Penang, Laurie Maher (ABC News, 21 April 2020).

In 1988, the institution was officially renamed the Mount Penang Detention Centre.

The site of Mount Penang Training School for Boys is, in 2021, part of the Mount Penang Parklands precinct, 'a Central Coast destination for tourism, events, business and education'. Two juvenile justice facilities are located in the precinct.

Gallery



Mt Penang Training School for Boys - Mechanics Class

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph from an album collected by Child Welfare Department officers in the late 1940s. From the collection of Leonie Knapman.



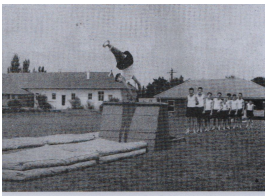
Carpentry class (Mt Penang)

Description: This is a digital copy of a photograph from an album collected by Child Welfare Department officers in the late 1940s. From the collection of Leonie Knapman.



Boys at Mount Penang demonstrate their skill in the gymnasium

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1961.



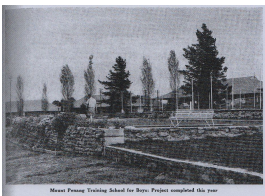
Gymnastics practice, Mount Penang

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1959.



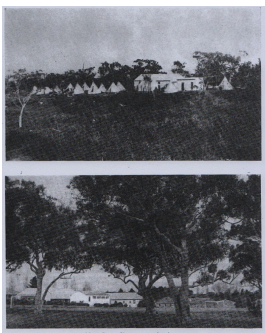
Landscape Gardening at Mount Penang

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1959.



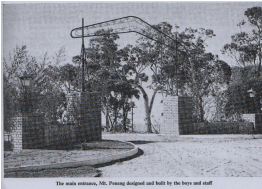
Mount Penang Training School for Boys: Project completed this year

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1958.



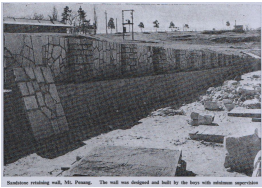
Mount Penang 50 years ago and to-day

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1962.



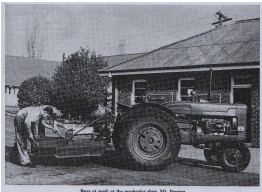
The main entrance, Mt. Penang designed and built by the boys and staff

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1964.



Sandstone retaining wall, Mt. Penang. The wall was designed and built by the boys with minimal supervision

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1964.



Boys at work at the mechanics shop, Mt. Penang

Description: This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1964.



Mt Penang Training Centre



Mt Penang Training Centre

In honor of those who endured Mt Penang Boys Training School Forgotten Australians Institution

Description: This is a video on YouTube with a former resident of Mount Penang walking around the site and sharing his memories of abuse he endured at the institution. Other former residents of Mount Penang have left comments on this video.



Dormitory: Gosford Boys Home

Description: This is a photograph of the boys dormitory at Gosford Training School. It shows three rows of steel-framed beds and bed-side dressers in a long, high-ceilinged hall.



Child Welfare Farm Home for Boys, Gosford - the home

Description: This is a photograph of Gosford Training School. It shows the farmyard and farm buildings in the foreground, with training school buildings behind them. The school is surrounded by bushland.



School class, Gosford Boys' Home

Description: This is a photograph of a school lesson at Mount Penang Training School. It shows a class of twelve boys seated at desks in a small classroom, with a teacher at the front pointing to an anatomy diagram. The classroom has been decorated with woven baskets, maps, and landscape paintings.



Weaving class, Gosford Boys' Home

Description: This is a photograph of a weaving class at Mount Penang Training School. It shows six boys weaving on table-loom, under the instruction of a staff member. Finished rugs, blankets and pillows in various designs are displayed on tables in the foreground.



Sleeping dormitory, privileged block, Gosford Boys' Home

Description: This is a photograph of the dormitory in the "priveleged block" at Mount Penang Training School. It shows a long hall with metal framed beds against the walls, with more beds and small tables and chairs in the centre of the room. There is no other furniture or decorations in the room.

More info

Chronology

- Gosford Training School (1923 - 1945)
 - **Mount Penang Training School for Boys (1946 – 1987)**
 - Mount Penang Detention Centre (1988 - 1991)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Child Welfare Department, State Government of New South Wales \(1923 - 1970\)](#)
Date: 1946 - 1970
- [Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, State Government of New South Wales \(1970 - 1973\)](#)
- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1973 - 1975\)](#)
- [Department of Youth, Ethnic and Community Affairs, State Government of New South Wales \(1975 - 1976\)](#)
- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1976 - 1988\)](#)

Related Events

- [Transfer of children from Australian Capital Territory \(ACT\) and Norfolk Island to New South Wales \(NSW\) \(1941 - 1986\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Institution for Boys, Tamworth \(1948 - 1976\)](#)
Boys convicted by a Children's Court were, in the first instance, sent to Mount Penang. Boys who reoffended or absconded were sent to Tamworth.
- [Daruk \(1960 - 1985\)](#)
Daruk was an annexe of Mount Penang Training School for Boys.
Date: 1960 - 1981?
- [Quamby Youth Detention Centre \(1962 - 2008\)](#)

- [Endeavour House \(1976 - 1990\)](#)

Boys who reoffended while they were in Mount Penang Training School for Boys were sent to its annexe, Endeavour House

- [Phillip Cottage \(1977 - 1988\)](#)

Phillip Cottage was located at Mount Penang Training School for Boys

Resources

- Matthews, Bernie, [Reap as you sow](#), Griffith Review: Unintended Consequences, May 2007
- Van Aanholt, Jacqueline, [Former boys' home inmate says ... I was sent to hell](#), The Northern Daily Leader, 7 June 2009
- Quinn, Peter E, [Unenlightened efficiency: the administration of the juvenile correction system in New South Wales 1905-1988](#), 27 March 2006
- Olsson, Kristina, *All the lost children*, The Weekend Australian Magazine, 30 March 2013
- Matthews, Bernie, *Unintended Consequences for State Raised Children*, No date
- Carden, Clarissa, *From Reformatory to Farm Home: Developments in Twentieth-Century Juvenile Justice*, Cultural and Social History, 2019
- [Ken Buttrum interviewed by Gail Winkworth in the National Library of Australia's Children and the State oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 15 October 2009

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 \(1918 - current\)](#)
 - [Mount Penang Training School for Boys records, State Archives NSW \(1946 - 1950\)](#)
 - [Children's Court information, Department of Juvenile Justice \(c. 1980 - current\)](#)
 - [Detainee files, Department of Juvenile Justice \(1985 - 1992\)](#)
 - [School Files \(1876 - 1979\)](#)
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