

# Big Brother Movement

1925 –

**Other Names:**

- BBM Youth Support
- BBM
- Big Brother Club

**URL:** <http://www.bbm.asn.au/>

## Details

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The Big Brother Movement (BBM) was established in 1925 by Richard Linton, a Melbourne businessman, to sponsor youth migration from Britain to Australia. It was one of several non-government organisations involved in immigration to Australia in the 1920s. The Big Brother Movement was originally conceived as a form of sponsorship, by which each youth migrant, known as 'Little Brothers', would be guided by a 'Big Brother', often an affluent urban professional man in Australia, who would be a mentor and guide to the Little Brother. The average age of Little Brothers from the 1920s until the 1960s was 16 – some were as young as 14 when they migrated. Later arrivals brought to Australia by BBM were around 20 years old. The Little Brothers were predominantly employed in rural areas. In addition to employment placements on farms, in New South Wales, BBM established its own farm school after World War Two. BBM also ran a hostel in Homebush, New South Wales, called Gunning House which accommodated up to 30 young men at a time. The Movement had networks in many Australian states. From its establishment until 1982, BBM sponsored over 12,000 youth migrants to come to Australia. In the 1980s, the organisation became known as BBM Youth Support.

Youth migrants (also known as juvenile migrants) constituted about 10% of assisted British migration to Australia in the 1920s. These migrants were males aged between 14 and 18. The Big Brother Movement distinguished itself from other youth migration schemes by its promise of care and concern for the young people (Sherington, 2002).

The first group of more than 200 boys sailed from England on the *Jervis Bay*, arriving in Melbourne, via Fremantle, on 14 December 1925. By 1927 over 300 'Little Brothers' had arrived in New South Wales. Between 1925 and 1929 almost 2,000 young males arrived in Australia with the Big Brother Movement.

Once in Australia, the Little Brother was expected to follow the advice of his Big Brother until he reached the age of 21. The Big Brother undertook to be 'morally responsible' for the welfare of the young man. While most of the Big Brothers were located in Australian cities and large country towns, the boys were sent to rural areas to work on farms.

Boys were recruited by Linton and his associates from London. Historian Geoffrey Sherington has described how the scheme began:

*All potential Little Brothers were required to produce a formal school leaving certificate, credentials from their school and references from such organisations as the Public Schools' Association, the English Speaking Union, the Navy League and the Young Men's Christian Association, or the churches. Each*

*young immigrant had to sign an agreement binding him to accept the instructions of his Big Brother and not to leave any employment without his permission. He was to work hard, not drink or gamble, 'avoid bad company', write to his parents once a month and visit church occasionally. He was also required to open a bank account and try to save a regular sum each week.*

BBM migrants who arrived in Victoria often came from English public (elite) schools, which was considered a positive, although not all the arrivals met the expectations of the Australian Big Brothers, either in terms of behaviour or education. In the early years of the Big Brother Movement, many of the Little Brothers who came to New South Wales were recruited via the Dreadnought Scheme, which was longer established.

The 1931 Depression halted migration from Britain, and left British migrants (adult and youth) stranded in a new country without much support. Few of the young men who came in the 1920s via BBM had had a chance to establish themselves as farmers – in fact, few of them received formal training in agriculture, according to Sherington. The BBM at least tried to keep in contact with the Little Brothers during the years of the Depression. By the mid-1930s, a number of youth migrants had returned home to the UK.

The BBM migration scheme started up again in the late 1930s, with 5 ships sailing to Australia in 1939, but the outbreak of World War Two forced the scheme to be deferred once more. The Victorian movement wound down and had transferred its resources to the Scouts by 1941 but the New South Wales scheme continued. Migration to New South Wales started again in 1947, with more than 12,000 boys and young men arriving in Australia until the sponsorship scheme stopped in 1983.

In the years before 1947 Little Brothers who arrived in New South Wales were placed on farms, after receiving training at various government run training farms, including Scheyville, near Windsor. In April 1947 the Movement purchased a 600 acre property known as "Karmsley Hills" at Bossley Park near Liverpool, New South Wales for £15,000 – the farm was dedicated as a memorial to the Little Brothers who had lost their lives in World War Two. Between 1947 and 1971 nearly 4,000 young British migrants passed through this establishment.

The organisation had been expanded in 1946 by the appointment of three district superintendents whose task it was to secure honorary welfare officers in country areas, find suitable positions for the boys and to visit them at their jobs, to raise funds and generally promote the movement.

By the late 1950s city work was becoming more common for boys than farming. In 1951, the BBM had established a hostel in Holmbush in suburban Sydney, Gunning House, to provide initial accommodation for young men wishing to work in skilled trades and in commerce.

A small branch of BBM opened in Tasmania, taking young men only for rural employment. Its first meeting was held in 1948 with the first 10 boys arriving in 1949. On arrival, a number of Little Brothers stayed at Beaufront in Ross for a few days before going to their placements. Beaufront belonged to Sir Donald von Bibra, the Acting-President of the Big Brother Movement in 1951. The last group of Little Brothers in Tasmania arrived in 1964. BBM brought a total of 161 youth migrants to Tasmania.

In Tasmania, some placements went well with the employer accepting the young man as a part of his family. Some Little Brothers became interested in the work and when they applied for a transfer it was not out of dissatisfaction but so that they could specialise.

John Moss, a British child welfare expert, also made a positive report about the progress of the Big Brother Movement when he visited Tasmania in 1951.

Even so, there were many problems. The leaders of the movement in Tasmania did not let the Director of Social Services, who was the legal guardian of the youth migrants, know when they moved to different employers. They did not try to trace Little Brothers who absconded from their placements. Although some 'Big Brothers' provided the support that 'Little Brothers' needed, others did not, often because they lived great distances apart. Some migrants did not know that they had 'Big Brothers'. A number were not well matched to their employers. This led to transfers that could have been avoided. In addition, employers expected a lot from their apprentices, many of

whom had been raised in big cities and so had no experience of rural work. The shortage of labour in rural areas of Tasmania meant that the youth migrants could be exploited. In some cases, those with a different religion to their employer suffered from religious bigotry.

In March 1951, HR Read, the Director of the Social Services Department, told the Director of the Tasmanian Government Tourist and Immigration Department, that he would not recommend any further migration until some of these problems were fixed.

In 1955, in order to ensure that 'Little Brothers' coming to Tasmania were suited to rural life, the Tasmanian Big Brother Movement resolved that they go to New South Wales first. There they would spend four to six weeks on the Movement's Karmsley Hills property at Bossley Park (near Liverpool) where they could learn how to farm in Australia. It would give them an opportunity to find urban employment in New South Wales if they disliked the work. This was less of an option in Tasmania. The scheme was meant to ensure that once boys arrived in Tasmania, they stayed. The records held at the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office do not mention whether this plan was ever put in place.

Little Brothers occasionally transferred to the mainland if they wanted employment that was not available in Tasmania. For instance, one went to New South Wales so that he could work on a big cattle station.

The average age of BBM arrivals in Australia, up to the 1960s, was 16 years. Later arrivals tended to be up to 20 years old. As Barry Coldrey has pointed out, since the Big Brother Movement did not recruit school-age underprivileged children, it was not 'plagued by the controversy over child migration' which began to emerge in the 1990s, culminating in Australia with the Senate Inquiry into Child Migration (2000-2001).

In 1983 the sponsorship scheme terminated and the farm was sold and the funds invested. These funds allowed the Big Brother Movement, now known as BBM Youth Support to initiate a youth support program, providing development opportunities to young people to change their lives and strengthen their communities.

## Gallery

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**Immigration - Child migration schemes - Big Brother Movement farm near Liverpool, New South Wales**

**Description:** This image shows boys near the lake at Karmsley Hills.

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**Gunning House**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image of Gunning House published on the website of BBM Youth Support.

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**Little Brothers (from Britain)**

**Description:** This is a copy of a photograph from the National Archives of Australia. On the 'Destination Australia' website, the image has this caption: 'Mr John Fraser, himself from England but settled in Australia, briefs new arrivals before they board the charter bus which will take them to the farm [Karmsley Hills].'

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## Little brothers from UK begin new life AKA Barnardos Boys to Australia

**Description:** This is footage from a voiceovered newsreel from 1948 about a group of child migrants from the United Kingdom to Australia, sponsored by the Big Brother Movement. It shows a ship that had 580 'new settlers' on board, and states that 250 of them were under 12 years old. It mentions that some of the young people would be undergoing a period of training at the Big Brother Movement's farm school in Liverpool (Karmsley Hills).

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Ran

- [Karmsley Hills \(1947 - 1971\)](#)  
Big Brother Movement provided temporary accommodation at Karmsley Park before youth migrants went to work placements on farms.
- [Gunning House \(1951 - c. 1982\)](#)  
Big Brother Movement provided initial accommodation at Gunning House for youth migrants who wished to work in skilled trades or in commerce.

#### Related Events

- [Visit of John Moss \(1951\)](#)
- [Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration \(1956\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [The Children's Society, United Kingdom \(1881 - current\)](#)  
Children from The Children's Society homes emigrated to Australia under The Big Brother Movement's child migration scheme.
- [Dreadnought Trust \(1909 - 1930?\)](#)  
In the early years of the Big Brother Movement, many of the 'Little Brothers' were recruited via the Dreadnought Scheme.
- [Millions Club \(1912 - current\)](#)
- [Tasmanian Government Tourist and Immigration Department, State of Tasmania \(1946 - 1982\)](#)
- [Beaufront \(c. 1949 - c. 1958\)](#)

#### Related Legislation

- [Empire Settlement Act 1922, Parliament of the United Kingdom \(1922 - 1976\)](#)

#### Related Concepts

- [Youth Migration \(1850s - 1980s\)](#)

## Resources

- Doherty, Vicki, [SS Asturias: 1925-1957](#), 2012
- Big Brother Movement Ltd Youth Support, [BBM Forum](#), 2007
- Spearritt, Peter, [Rickard, Sir Arthur \(1868-1948\)](#), Australian Dictionary of Biography Online, 1988
- National Archives of Australia, [Destination: Australia - sharing our post-war migrant stories](#), No date
- Coldrey, Barry, [Good British stock: child and youth migration to Australia](#), 1999
- ["Big Brother Movement" farm defended](#), Northern Star (Lismore), 14 August 1948
- [Big Brother Movement](#), The Biz (Fairfield), 9 April 1958
- [With new friends](#), Examiner, 1 July 1953
- [Good progress by little brothers](#), The Mercury, 22 August 1951

- [Little brothers arrive](#), The Mercury, 9 November 1949
- [\[Untitled photograph\]](#), Advocate, 9 November 1949
- [Gaining first impressions](#), The Mercury, 1 January 1970
- [Migrants to work on farms](#), The Mercury, 4 August 1950
- [To work on the land](#), Advocate, 26 March 1952
- [To go on the land](#), Mercury, 26 March 1952

## Other Resources

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**Title:** Cover of *The New Australian*, the magazine of the Big Brother Movement

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 1929

[Details](#)

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## Records

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### Records held by other organisations

- [Big Brother Movement Records \(1925 - 2015\)](#)
  - [Commonwealth Records relating to Child and Youth Migration \(c. 1911 - 1983?\)](#)
  - [M903 \[2\] Big Brother Movement of Tasmania \(1952 - 1960\)](#)
  - [M3157 John Moss \(Child Welfare Expert of U.K\) \(1951 - 1952\)](#)
  - [M3793 Fact Finding Mission on Child Migration \(1955 - 1956\)](#)
  - [M903 \[3\] Big Brother Movement of Tasmania \(1955 - 1969\)](#)
  - [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
  - [Immigrant Children's Registers \[School Attendance/Licensing Branch, Department of Community Services, NSW\] \(1967 - 1970\)](#)
  - [Immigration Files \[Child and Youth Migrants, NSW\] \(1946 - 1974\)](#)
  - [Card Indexes \[NSW Immigration Division\] \(1919 - 1949\)](#)
  - [Files Concerning The Arrival Of Immigrant Children Sponsored By The Big Brother Scheme \[School Attendance/Licensing Branch, Department of Community Services, NSW\] \(1965 - 1973\)](#)
  - [Miscellaneous Correspondence Files Relating To Immigrant Children \[School Attendance/Licensing Branch, Department of Community Services, NSW\] \(1971 - 1974\)](#)
  - [Registers Of The Arrival And Discharge Of Immigrant Children \[School Attendance/Licensing Branch, Department of Community Services, NSW\] \(1953 - 1964\)](#)
  - [Immigration Photographic Archive 1946 - today \(1946 - current\)](#)
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