

Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook

30 October 1919 – 26 May 1966

Other Names: • Westbrook Farm Home for Boys

Details

The Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook was situated 15 kilometres south west of Toowoomba. It was a state-run reformatory for boys under the age of 18 who were confined by a court order. Until 1919, the institution was known as the Westbrook Reformatory for Boys. In 1966 it became known as Westbrook Training Centre.

According to the report of the Forde Inquiry (1999), Westbrook stood at the apex of Queensland's correctional system for boys and was without doubt its most feared institution. 'The Inquiry heard many stories of the threat of being sent to Westbrook being used to great effect by orphanage and industrial school staff' (p.124).

Boys under the age of 18 years were sentenced by various courts to a term of confinement at the Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook. The Home was under the supervision of a Superintendent who reported to the Home Secretary, and later to the heads of the relevant department.

The boys received training in farm skills while learning to work the Home's farmland. They learned how to farm, garden and keep stock. Stock was often exhibited at the annual Toowoomba Show. Produce from the farm was sold, and the boys were allowed to keep the profits from their individual gardens.

Regular maintenance work of the buildings at the Home was also undertaken by the boys.

As part of their education and rehabilitation, trustworthy boys could be put out to service in trades, for which they were paid a wage.

In 1961, there was an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the escape of a number of Westbrook inmates on Sunday 14 May 1961. The Commission of Inquiry into the Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook (also known as the Schwarten Inquiry), also investigated other matters relating to the conduct of the institution and the welfare of inmates generally. This inquiry resulted in Roy Gollidge, Superintendent since 1952, being replaced by Kevin Sullivan, a former prison warder. This event also resulted in the transfer of all primary school aged boys from Westbrook to the newly opened Wilson Youth Hospital on 5 July, 1961.

In 1998-1999, the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions heard evidence from several former residents of the Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook. The major criticism of most witnesses was the institution's excessive discipline and physical abuse.

The Commission's report (1999) also discussed the practice at Westbrook of certain boys being appointed as 'sergeants' to assist in the maintenance of discipline among the other boys. 'In particular, it seems that when boys escaped it was the role of the sergeants to bring them back' (p.130).

Gallery



Manager's residence surrounded by hedges at the Westbrook State Farm

Description: The library catalogue includes this description: Westbrook State Farm situated west of Toowoomba.



Westbrook Farm Home

Description: This is a clip from *Eventide and Westbrook Farm Home: Brisbane City Mission*, a film made to promote the social and charitable work of Brisbane City Mission in 1950. The description for this clip is: "The boys at Westbrook Farm Home for Boys in Queensland's southeast sleep in open wards. The dormitories are connected to a main dining room where they gather for meals. The superintendent and his wife keep watch over the Home's inhabitants. The boys are encouraged to participate in outside sports to maintain contact with the community and are responsible for their own garden plot, from which they sell vegetables and flowers. The boys are also taught agricultural skills and dairy farming in this self-sufficient farm home."



Dormitory Buildings - Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook

Description: This is a photograph of the dormitories at the Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook, taken in 1963. The photo, taken from above, shows a range of single-storey buildings at right-angles to each other, surrounding a central courtyard with an oval garden bed in the middle. Several boys are visible on the balcony of one of the buildings.



Superintendent's House, Westbrook, 1960s

Description: This image shows the Superintendent's House at Farm House for Boys, Westbrook and later, Westbrook Training Centre.



The Westbrook Home for Boy's

Description: This photo was contributed to the article on abuse at Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook and Westbrook Reformatory for Boys. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.

More info

Chronology

- Westbrook Reformatory for Boys (5 May 1900 - 30 October 1919)
 - **Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook (30 October 1919 – 26 May 1966)**
 - Westbrook Training Centre (26 May 1966 - 1987)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Home Secretary's Office, State Children Department, State Government of Queensland \(1 December 1911 - 5 December 1935\)](#)

- [Health and Home Affairs Department, State Children Department, State Government of Queensland \(5 December 1935 - 26 December 1963\)](#)
- [Labour and Industry Department, State Children Department, State Government of Queensland \(26 September 1963 - 1 August 1966\)](#)
- [Children's Services Department, State Government of Queensland \(1 August 1966 - 6 June 1987\)](#)

Related Events

- [Commission of Inquiry into the Farm Home for Boys Westbrook, Queensland \(16 May 1961 - 27 September 1961\)](#)
The Commission of Inquiry into the Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook, was established in 1961 to investigate circumstances surrounding the escape of a number of inmates on Sunday 14 May 1961. It also investigated other matters relating to the conduct of the institution and the welfare of inmates generally.
Date: 1961 -
- [Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions \(1998 - 1999\)](#)
- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)
Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook was mentioned in Submissions 141 and 217 to the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care
- [Case Study 26: St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2015\)](#)
Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook, was briefly mentioned in Case Study 26: St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol, but was not the primary focus of the study.

Related Organisations

- [Wilson Youth Hospital \(1961 - 1983\)](#)
In July 1961 all primary school aged boys were transferred from Westbrook to Wilson Youth Hospital
- [Department of Justice and Attorney General \(2012 - current\)](#)
The Department of Justice and Attorney General controls access to the records of the Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook.

Resources

- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, [Report of Case Study No. 26: The response of the Sisters of Mercy, the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton and the Queensland Government to allegations of child sexual abuse at St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol](#), March 2016. *Relevance:* Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook was briefly mentioned in Case Study 26: St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol, but was not the primary focus of the study
- Carden, Clarissa, *Grief and Youth Remembered: Accessing Experiences of Historical Youth Justice through Memoir*, Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth, 2021
- Carden, Clarissa, *A breakdown of reformatory education: remembering Westbrook*, History of Education Review, 2018
- Carden, Clarissa, *From Reformatory to Farm Home: Developments in Twentieth-Century Juvenile Justice*, Cultural and Social History, 2019
- Stokes, William, *Westbrook: Surviving Australia's Most Sadistic Reformatory*, 2010
- Fletcher, Al, *Brutal: surviving Westbrook Boys' Home/ Al 'Crow' Fletcher's story as told to Cheryl Jorgensen*, 2006
- *Inquiry into mass breakout: Home finally closed in 1994*, Toowoomba's Mail, 9 March 2006
- *Westbrook/ History of the centre*, Chronicle, 6 July 1994
- Schwartan, Alfred Edward, [Westbrook Farm Home for Boys Inquiry](#), 27 September 1961
- Porter, Warren and Scott, Glyn (editor), *A Tormented Life*, 2010
- Porter, Warren, [Living a Tormented Life \[excerpts\]](#), 28 April 2010
- [A Busy Year: State Children's Department](#), Brisbane Courier, 6 August 1924
- [Research Guide to orphanage and children's home records at Queensland State Archives](#), Queensland State Archives website, February 2022
- Social Work Staff, Faculty of Education, University of Queensland, [Directory of Social Services Queensland](#), 1958
- Fletcher, Al "The Crow", [Schwarten Inquiry into Westbrook](#), Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions blog, 15 August 2011

- Chynoweth, Adele, [Life inside Westbrook Boys Home](#), Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions blog, 27 October 2011
- Murray, Rachel, [Westbrook survivors share stories of brutality](#), The Chronicle, 4 September 2014

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Forgotten Australians : Micah Pilot Oral History and Digital Story Project \[sound and video recording\] \(March 2011 - April 2011\)](#)
Bob Cox's audio interview discusses his time at Westbrook in the early 1960's.
- [Institution Files, Queensland Government-run Institutions \(c. 1871 - c. 2001\)](#)
- [Administrative Records, Queensland Government-run Institutions \(c. 1865 - 2001\)](#)
- [Jones Family Cutting Book \(6 September 1916 - 10 July 1947\)](#)
- [Commission of Inquiry Papers \(9 February 1961 - 5 December 1961\)](#)
- [Commission of Inquiry Transcripts of Proceedings, Farm Home for Boys Westbrook \(22 May 1961 - 14 July 1961\)](#)
- [Visiting Medical Officers' Journals - Westbrook \(18 February 1873 - 19 April 1990\)](#)
- [Commission of Inquiry Exhibits, Farm Home for Boys Westbrook \(c. 1915 - c. 1961\)](#)
- [Case Files, Reformatory School for Boys - Reformatory School for Boys, Lytton, Diamantina Reformatory School for Boys, Westbrook Reformatory for Boys, and Farm Home for Boys \(1 March 1890 - 20 August 1953\)](#)
- [School Inspectors' Reports \(1874 - 1991\)](#)
- [Heritage photographs of Queensland children's homes, buildings and people \(1848 - 1979\)](#)
- [Admission Registers - Wilson Youth Hospital School \(Westbrook Farm Home School\) \(1919 - 1961\)](#)
- [Letters and Parcels Registers - Westbrook \(1960 - 1964\)](#)
- [Visitors' Books - Westbrook \(18 February 1873 - 9 July 1984\)](#)
- [Corporal Punishment Registers \[Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook\] \(1928 - 1961\)](#)
- [Special Batches \[Correspondence Files of the Colonial Secretary's Office and Health Departments\] \(1852 - 1975\)](#)
- [General Correspondence, Reformatory School for Boys, Lytton, Diamantina Reformatory School for Boys, Westbrook Reformatory for Boys and Farm Home for Boys, Westbrook \(26 June 1885 - 29 November 1941\)](#)
- [History Papers - Westbrook \(22 February 1892 - 31 December 1992\)](#)
- [Case History Cards \(Westbrook Reformatory\) \(5 May 1900 - 30 June 1994\)](#)
- [Superintendent's Punishment Registers - Westbrook \(14 January 1924 - 17 June 1988\)](#)
- [Administration Files, Westbrook \(1 January 1959 - 31 October 1994\)](#)
- [Visiting Psychiatrist's Journals - Westbrook \(3 July 1962 - 25 August 1966\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/farm-home-for-boys-westbrook-2/>