

Wybra Hall

1956 – 1988

Details

Wybra Hall, run by the government, opened in 1956. It was a training institution in Mangalore that housed boys aged between 9 and 14. From 1979, Wybra Hall also accommodated girls. It closed in 1988.

In October 1952, the Tasmanian government sought parliamentary approval to purchase Wybra Hall, built in 1860, to be used for boys who were 'juvenile delinquents without criminal tendencies'. For some time, the government had been considering ways to separate different 'classes' of juvenile offenders, who were all at Ashley Homes for Boys. When Wybra Hall opened in 1956, the Annual Report of the Social Services Department described its purpose as to 'provide care and training for older wards who because of maladjustment and delinquency require special institutional control'.

The Superintendent, the Headmaster of Brighton Area School, and a visiting psychologist assessed boys when they first entered Wybra Hall. After that, Child Welfare Officers found most of them another placement. If one could not be found or the assessors agreed that a boy needed further 'training' they kept him at Wybra Hall. The home was also used for the temporary accommodation of older boys from southern Tasmania.

In the 1970s, staff frequently worked 13 hours a day.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the boys attended the local Brighton Area School. A few who qualified went on to Ogilvie High School. Some claimants to the Ombudsman's enquiry, *Listen to the Children*, recalled how 'Wybra Boys' were 'easily picked out from the rest of the school population by their "bowl" haircuts, regulation short sleeved shirts, short pants, and hob nailed boots. This attire was worn year round'.

According to *Listen to the Children*:

Claimants report that they were frequently kept home from school if they had been particularly naughty and if a boy was punished at school, the Superintendent was told and the boy was punished again. Many of the claimants related how they had been given the cane at school for a misdemeanour and how, when they returned to Wybra Hall, they were caned with double the amount of cuts they got at school.

Claimants also described the daily chores required of residents of Wybra Hall. These included gathering grass to feed animals, including a cage of Tasmanian devils. Several former residents spoke of their fear at having to clean out the devil cage. One boy had to keep the animals at bay while another cleaned the cage. Others chores, performed before and/or after school, were weeding, milking, and general cleaning. The fact that, in 1963, the Home was self-sufficient in vegetables and milk suggests that the children worked hard.

Retribution was swift if any boy was found not to have finished his chores properly. One punishment was scrubbing the floors of Wybra Hall with a toothbrush.

A number of claimants described 'the boob', a room in the tower that was six to eight feet long with unbreakable windows all around it, very cold in the winter and hot in the summer. It had a bench along one side but no beds. According to some claimants, staff placed boys there as punishment. The boy had a thin mattress, one blanket, and a milo tin for a toilet. Before being placed there boys were 'severely beaten' and stripped down to their underwear. They were not allowed to shower. For meals they received bread, jam, and water. The boys stayed there about a week and attended school as usual.

Former staff at Wybra told the inquiry that 'the boob' was not in the tower but on the first floor, facing north. It was a long, narrow room measuring 14 by 8 feet with one window .

For recreation, boys watched television and played pool. They competed in boxing tournaments, and in Agricultural, Poultry and Cage-Bird Shows. Staff took them to Tasmanian Football League matches, the Regatta, and shows in Hobart and the Mangalore area. The staff held a Christmas Party and Commonwealth Day bonfire every year. Boys went to camps in the summer holidays.

Boys also used the swimming pool. The Ombudsman heard claims that boys, who were unable to swim, would be pushed into the pool by staff. It was reported by some claimants that there were several occasions where boys came close to drowning.

The 1963 Annual Report stated that the staff encouraged the boys to 'plan, provide and develop' the recreational facilities. That year, an 'Emoleum' tennis court had been laid.

Following the closure of Weeroona Girls' Training Centre in 1979, Wybra Hall accommodated both boys and girls. Boys were aged between 10 and 14 and girls between 10 and 16. Most of the children there had broken the law although some had also been committed because of neglect as defined by the 1960 *Child Welfare Act*. At the time of the transfer, the Annual Report of the Social Welfare Department said that:

for all those placed at Wybra Hall, the emphasis is on a caring relationship. Each child is and has a right to be treated as an individual. It is not our role to punish or to modify behaviour, but to care for each person in an understanding and positive manner. To provide for each the opportunity to begin to explore their own potential, away from the pressures that have caused their problems.

In 1984, the Department opened a medium security closed section. According to the Annual Report of 1984, it was to improve the care of children who were 'experiencing severe difficulties' and to reduce the level of absconding.

In the 1980s, the Education Department ran a special school inside Wybra Hall for those children who could not attend local schools.

According to the Department for Community Welfare's Annual Report of 1988, the purpose of Wybra Hall had become: 'to re-integrate young people into their community and where possible return them to the care of their parents'. Children stayed for an average of nine weeks before they went back to their parents, or somewhere else such as foster care or a family group home.

When Wybra Hall closed in 1988, only 12 teenagers lived there. The government sold the building and used the funds to provide accommodation for girls at Ashley Home for Boys and to improve its facilities. Wybra Hall staff were transferred to Ashley.

In 2013, Wybra Hall is a private residence.

Gallery



A Home For Danny

Description: The film "A Home For Danny" was produced for the Tasmanian Department of Social Welfare in 1966. The aim of the film was to encourage people to become foster parents. The film shows the story of a young boy, "Danny", who is a ward of the state living at Malmesbury Receiving Home in Hobart. It speculates on Danny's possible futures as a state ward, and emphasises the importance of the role of foster parents in the out of home care system. It also features Wybra Hall, showing boys working on the farm there. A copy of this film has been digitised and made available by Tasmanian Archives. The film runs for 10minutes 22seconds.



Wybra Hall, Mangalore, boys home, gardens and outhouses



Wybra Hall, Mangalore, boys home



Wybra Hall



Wybra Hall, Mangalore, boys home, gardens and outhouses



Wybra Hall, Mangalore, boys home



Wybra Hall, Mangalore, boys home

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Child Welfare Division \(c. 1953 - 1980\)](#)
The Child Welfare Division managed Wybra Hall.
- [Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania \(1961 - 1983\)](#)
Date: 1961 - 1983
- [Department for Community Welfare, State Government of Tasmania \(1983 - 1989\)](#)
Date: 1983 - 1988

Related Events

- [Inquiry into the Control and Management of Ashley Boys' Home, State of Tasmania \(1951 - 1953\)](#)
The Inquiry recommended the establishment of Wybra Hall in order to remove boys under 14 from Ashley Boys' Home.
- [Ashley Home for Boys Rebuilding Proposals, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Tasmania \(1952\)](#)
- [Listen to the children: review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children, Ombudsman Tasmania \(2003 - 2006\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Ashley Home for Boys \(1926 - 1999\)](#)
Wybra Hall was established to accommodate certain some boys formerly living at Ashley Home for Boys.
- [Weeroona Girls' Training Centre \(1959 - 1979\)](#)
Following the closure of Weerona in 1979, girls were placed at Wybra Hall.

Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)

Resources

- Rimon, Wendy, [Children's homes](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- [Favours separation of certain types of boys at Ashley](#), Examiner, 3 October 1952
- [Government neglect: how foster care ruined a young boy's life](#), Stateline Tasmania, 2003
- Denholm, Matthew, *Children's official an 'abuser'*, The Australian, 11 November 2006
- Paine, Michelle, *Child abuse fighter dies*, The Mercury, 4 November 2009
- [More calls for abused ward compensation clemency](#), ABC news, 11 December 2007
- Bennett, Alice and Warner, Georgia, *Living in history: Tasmania's historic homes, the people who built them, and those who live in them now*, 2011
- Maher, Mary & Brown, Patricia, [Submission No 495 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2004

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Wybra Hall Records \(1981 - 1985\)](#)
- [Films and Videos Produced and Acquired by the Agency \(1950 - 1985\)](#)
- [General Correspondence, Public Service Board \(1973 - 1985\)](#)

- [General Correspondence-Hospital and Health Administration \(1932 - 1987\)](#)
 - [Correspondence Files, Public Health Department \(1940 - 1989\)](#)
 - [Wybra Hall Admissions and Discharges Register \(1956 - 1988\)](#)
 - [Collection of Photographs \(1860 - 2006\)](#)
 - [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
 - [Correspondence and Associated Papers Relating to Building for Government Departments Arranged Alphabetically by Department \(1929 - 1980\)](#)
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