

# Lachlan Park Hospital

1937 – 1968

## Details

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Lachlan Park Hospital, run by the government, replaced the Mental Diseases Hospital in 1937. It was in New Norfolk. Lachlan Park was a secure mental asylum which, in addition to adults, held children and adolescents, including wards of State. In 1968, it became part of the Royal Derwent Hospital.

Lachlan Park was on the western side of the Lachlan River in New Norfolk surrounded by a high wall and locked gates with security guards.

In 1940, Bronte House became the Boys' Cottage and the former Boys' Cottage, L Ward, became M Ward for women and girls. Children housed in these wards were adolescents. Lachlan Park also had a children's ward known as Alcheringa or Myrtle Ward. In 1941, instead of abandoning the Gentleman's Cottage, built in 1859, as planned, it became an institution for men and boys with intellectual disabilities. St John's Park, where they lived, was overcrowded. The Cottage was demolished in 1964.

Most parents placed their children at Lachlan Park on the advice of doctors because of an intellectual or severe physical disability. These conditions carried a social stigma and parents who attempted to raise the children themselves received no government or community support. Other children were wards of state or had been under the guardianship of the Mental Deficiency Board. The Hospital assumed guardianship of them once they were transferred.

In a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, a former ward of state described her time at Lachlan Park during the 1950s. The Sisters at the Magdalen Home had arranged her transferral to the Children's Ward there because they found her behaviour difficult to manage. She helped look after the younger children on the ward. In her submission, she recalled the distressing lack of care and abuse that the children received. When the young woman tried to escape, after attempts to sedate her, she was transferred to another ward where she was put in a cell with a 'small peephole' in the door.

Margaret Reynolds, who was a teacher before she became a senator, taught at Lachlan Park Special School, located in the grounds of Lachlan Park, in 1963. In her autobiography, she writes that the asylum was a 'dumping ground'. Reynolds remembers her first visit to the Children's Ward. She too describes the disturbing situation of the children and the lack of any meaningful stimulation. Several children with paralysis or an intellectual disability were tied to their beds.

Later Reynolds discovered that there were other children in the asylum. Girls over 10 were scattered throughout the adult wards. Even J Ward, a maximum security ward for disabled adult women, occasionally held girls with 'behaviour problems'. These wards lacked basic hygiene and the children witnessed the upsetting behaviour of some of the adult patients.

About 40 boys lived in a separate secure ward close to the school. Reynolds often heard the sound of boys being beaten. They had few activities to engage them. Some of them did not have intellectual disabilities but were juvenile offenders, placed at Lachlan Park because it was the only secure unit available, apart from Risdon Prison.

Plans to close Lachlan Park go back to 1944 when Dr Catarinich, Victoria's Director of Mental Health, condemned the buildings as too crowded, out-of-date, unhygienic, and structurally unsound. He suggested that it be replaced with a new hospital. In 1949, following a Parliamentary Standing Committee recommendation, the government decided to build a new mental hospital on the eastern side of the Lachlan River. It opened in 1968 as the Royal Derwent Hospital. However, Lachlan Park was not abandoned. Instead as part of the new hospital, it was used exclusively for people with intellectual disabilities.

The Ombudsman received 10 claims in the lead up to the *Review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children: Final Report – Phase 2* of 2006.

## Gallery



### New Norfolk - Royal Derwent Hospital (Lachlan Park) - Male Asylum

**Description:** This is an image of the male asylum at Lachlan Park Hospital, also known as the Royal Derwent Hospital.



### Lachlan Park Hospital, New Norfolk, identification stamp

## More info

### Chronology

- Mental Diseases Hospital, New Norfolk (1915 - 1937)
  - **Lachlan Park Hospital (1937 – 1968)**
  - Royal Derwent Hospital (1968 - 2000)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Public Health Department, State of Tasmania \(1904 - 1956\)](#)
- [Department of Health Services, State of Tasmania \(1956 - 1989\)](#)
- [Division of Psychiatric Services \(1963 - 1968\)](#)

#### Related Events

- [Select Committee Inquiry into Ashley Home for Boys, Tasmania \(1962 - 1963\)](#)
- [Listen to the children: review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children, Ombudsman Tasmania \(2003 - 2006\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Magdalen Home \(1893 - 1974\)](#)

If the Sisters at the Magdalen Home found a girl or young woman difficult to manage they could transfer them to Lachlan Park.

- [Mental Deficiency Board \(1922 - 1964\)](#)  
The Mental Deficiency Board referred potential patients to Lachlan Park Hospital.
- [Ashley Home for Boys \(1926 - 1999\)](#)  
Adolescents that could not be managed at Ashley, might be sent to Lachlan Park.
- [St John's Park \(1936 - 1994\)](#)
- [Division of Mental Hygiene \(1945 - 1956\)](#)  
The Division of Mental Hygiene, was the section of the Public Health Department that managed Lachlan Park.
- [Division of Mental Health \(1956 - 1963\)](#)  
The Division of Mental Health, was the section of the Health Department that managed Lachlan Park.
- [Lachlan Park Special School \(1959 - 1968\)](#)  
Lachlan Park Special School was at Lachlan Park Hospital.

### Related Legislation

- [Disability Services Act, Tasmania \(2011 - current\)](#)  
The *Disability Services Act* was intended to prevent the future use of institutions such as Lachlan Park for the care of people with disabilities.

## Resources

- [Royal Derwent Hospital records](#), Libraries Tasmania, No date
- Reynolds, Margaret and Hols, Monica, *Remember the children: stories about the lives of young people in Tasmania's last mental institution, 1950-2000*, December 2011
- Gowlland, RW, *Troubled asylum: the history of the Invalid Barracks, New Norfolk Colonial Hospital, New Norfolk Madhouse, New Norfolk Her Majesty's Lunatic Asylum, New Norfolk Mental Diseases Hospital, New Norfolk Lachlan Park, New Norfolk Royal Derwent Hospital*, 1996
- Hawkins, Leanne, [New CD Release "If I Had Wings-Imagine": Bio The Forgotten Australians](#), No date
- Tooth, John, [Royal Derwent Hospital](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- Tooth, John, [Treatment of Mental Illness](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- [Willow Court History Group](#), 30 April 2014
- [Tasmanian government declares never again to institution days](#), Institution watch: international edition, November 2008

## Records

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

### Records held by other organisations

- [History of Lachlan Park Hospital \(Now Royal Derwent Hospital\). By Dr G.M. Crabbe \(1950 - 1950\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)  
Item B585 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Lachlan Park Hospital
- [Patient Records-Alphabetical Register of Patients, Royal Derwent Hospital \(1888 - 1974\)](#)
- [General Correspondence, Department of Public Health \(1920 - 1956\)](#)
- [General Correspondence-Hospital and Health Administration \(1932 - 1987\)](#)
- [Patient Records-Admission Register, Lunatic Asylum, Hospital for the Insane, Mental Diseases Hospital, and Lachlan Park Hospital \(1830 - 1954\)](#)
- [Patient Files, Lunatic Asylum, Hospital for the Insane, Mental Diseases Hospital, Lachlan Park Hospital, and the Royal Derwent Hospital \(1857 - 1993\)](#)
- [Patient Records Removed from Case Books, Millbrook Rise Psychopathic and Royal Derwent Hospitals \(1894 - 1979\)](#)
- [Patient Files, Millbrook Rise Psychopathic Hospital \(1934 - 1968\)](#)

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You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/lachlan-park-hospital/>