

Clontarf

8 September 1901 - 1983

- Other Names: St Vincent's Orphanage, Clontarf
 - Clontarf Boys' Town
 - St Joseph's Orphanage
 - Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Junior Roman Catholic Boys
 - Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School
 - Clontarf Orphanage for Roman Catholic Boys, near Victoria Park

Details

Clontarf was established in Manning by the Christian Brothers from 1901, with boys from the Subiaco Boys' Orphanage as the first residents. Clontarf later took in boys aged around 12 to 16 years from various backgrounds including Australian-born boys who were wards of the State and those who had been admitted privately, orphans, and (from 1947 to 1966) child migrants from Britain and Malta. Clontarf closed in 1983 and the site later became the Clontarf Aboriginal College.

The Christian Brothers moved to a site along the Canning River in what was later known as the suburb of Manning, in 1901. The foundation stone for Clontarf was laid on 3 January 1901. The Christian Brothers had previously been running the Subiaco Boys' Orphanage and the first residents of Clontarf were the boys and brothers from the Subiaco Boys' Orphanage.

When Clontarf opened in 1901, it was known to the child welfare authorities as the Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Junior Roman Catholic Boys, near Victoria Park. By the end of that year, there were 70 boys on government subsidy living at Clontarf, aged younger than 6 years to over 12 years. There were also possibly boys who had been admitted privately. By 1907, there were 78 boys subsidised by the government, of whom 52 boys were under 12 years and 26 over 12 years old. In 1918, there were 116 'Government children' and 53 'private children'. From statistics that are available from government reports and research conducted by Barry Coldrey (The Scheme 1993), it seems that Clontarf accommodated around 100-150 boys until after World War II, when child migrants were sent to Clontarf. During the time that boys who were sent from Britain and Malta lived at Clontarf, up to 280 boys could be accommodated there. In the 1960s, Clontarf housed around 150 boys and in the 1970s the number of boys fell to 60 or fewer. Some boys stayed at Clontarf for short periods, while others remained there for years at a time. From 1962, the number of boys who were privately placed exceeded the number of boys who were wards of the State.

The Christian Brothers' institutions Bindoon, Clontarf, Castledare and Tardun first received widespread publicity about child abuse in the early 1990s. In 1993, the Christian Brothers in Western Australia issued an apology and from 1995 have funded independent services to help with family tracing, counselling and remedial education for men who had suffered in their institutions. Many former residents of these institutions have shared their experiences and memories (bad and good) at government inquiries, in books and in oral histories. Many of these recollections relate to the post-World War II period, but earlier incidents of abuse have been cited. For example, Coldrey reported (1993, pp.32, 34) that a gardener was dismissed in 1915 for 'immorality with some of the boys' and in 1918 boys reported sexual assaults by a Christian Brother, who was convicted.

When Clontarf was established in 1901, there was no electricity. Coldrey writes (p.30) that electric lights were installed and operated for the first time in August 1905. In 1906, toilets, urinals and septic tanks were installed and an inspection by the Health Department in 1917 (p.32) led to other improvements in facilities. Hot water showers were installed by 1927 (p.42).

While the Clontarf site became part of a very busy suburb, in the early days it was quite isolated. A letter of appreciation of the *The Daily News* Orphans' Christmas Cheer Fund in 1915 gives an insight into life at Clontarf, where the boys lived mostly within the grounds of the institution, with few treats. The letter shows that donations from the public enabled the children to occasionally go on outings and have other experiences:

Owing to your kindess and the generosity of the subscribers...our little boys at Clontarf have had a good time during the holidays. On December 23 we took them for a picnic to the Zoo. A large motor launch was hired for the occasion. On Christmas Day they had at all meals an abundant supply of good things, and toys were distributed, each one receiving a toy of his own choosing. On Thursday (Christmas week) another picnic was organised for them. This time they went by motor launch to Point Walter and Fremantle. New Year's Eve was another festive day with them. They were supplied with good things, the same as on Christmas Day, except that no toys were distributed. Letter, 4 January 1916 published in The Daily News 2 December 1916, p.10

It was common for all institutions to try and raise their public profile and to encourage donations from the public. In 1918 the Clontarf Brass Band was established, reportedly (Coldrey, p.33) due to funding from the Catholic Archbishop of Perth. The Clontarf boys' bands featured regularly on the Perth social scene thereafter.

Around 1919, a manual trades workshop was built at Clontarf. Half of this space was set aside for carpentry and the remainder was a bootmaker's workshop. The sale of goods, on which the boys worked, was a source of income for the institution.

A road from Clontarf to Albany Highway, paid for jointly by government and public donations, was officially opened on 10 April 1927. This gave Clontarf a much better access to the city and other parts of Perth.

Between 1926 and 1946, government reports give the number of boys who were placed 'at service'. Boys could be sent to work with employers in a variety of trades, or to farms as labourers. Some boys would have stayed at Clontarf, or worked in the other Christian Brothers institutions. Formal 'service agreements' were lodged with child welfare authorities. Coldrey (p.43) writes that the Child Welfare Department had been dissatisfied with the administration of service agreements at Clontarf during the inter-war years. Apparently, there were a number of 'handshake' agreements, and while some employers 'did the right thing by the orphanage lads' and paid their wages diligently, other employers 'were remiss' and some employers were 'hard and exploitative towards the boys'.

Government reports (*Signposts* 2004, pp.163-165) in some years show 'abscondings' or the number of children who ran away.

Coldrey (pp.39-41, 45, 462) writes that Br Paul Keaney, who is usually associated with Bindoon, also worked at Clontarf, possibly beginning in the role of Director in 1927. Keaney had a background in the Irish Constabulary and the Queensland Police Force before joining the Christian Brothers in 1915. Keaney had worked at St Vincent's Boys' Home in South Melbourne in 1918 and came to Clontarf in 1919. In 1929, Keaney moved to the wheatbelt parish of Mullewa to help establish the Tardun Farm School. In 1930 (p.95), Keaney was transferred from Tardun to the Christian Brother College, Fremantle (a day-school). By 1936, Keaney was again the 'Superior' at Clontarf and Coldrey (p.49) says that during the 1939-1941 period 'Keaney's relations with the Child Welfare soured because of his casual attitude to rules and regulations (other than those of his own making) and his excessive punishment of certain inmates which resulted in a long-running dispute with the department'. In 1941, Keaney apparently had what Coldrey (p.50) describes as the 'first of his nervous breakdowns'.

A new dormitory was opened on 8 September 1935 and in 1937 there were what Coldrey described (p.48) as major refurbishments, including painting and refurnishing areas including the boys' dormitories.

Between 1940 and 1941, a chapel was constructed by the boys at Clontarf, under what Coldrey (p.50) described as an 'apprenticeship scheme' where 'little boys, many of whom are in their bare feet' laboured on the task. Br Keaney was Superior of Clontarf during this period. The chapel was consecrated on 20 December 1941 and during the ceremony the catholic Archbishop of Perth announced that Clontarf would thereafter be known as 'Clontarf Boys' Town' resulting in what Coldrey (p.140) described as 'tumultuous and prolonged applause' from an audience who 'had all seen the Spencer Tracy movie' of a similar name. This account suggests that there was an element of sentimentality that influenced public perceptions of children's homes in that era.

Coldrey (p.51) has described the period up to World War II at Clontarf at being on the one hand, an environment where boys could enjoy freedoms of living in a bush environment along the river-banks, a place where they could go swimming and enjoy a lot of recreational activities as well as gaining schooling and work-related skills. On the other hand, he describes an 'underside' where the 'manual work could be too hard', the 'sunny days could become the scorching heat of mid-summer which could make the toll even harder'; the 'no-nonsense discipline could weigh heavily' on boys who were 'rebellious' or just behaving as adolescent boys do. Incidents of severe punishments were related in Coldrey's book and have been verified by men who were residents at Clontarf in submissions to government Inquiries and in oral histories.

Clontarf was requisitioned by the defence forces with 'unseemly haste' in 1942 according to Coldrey (p.141), and the boys were evacuated to either Tardun (school-age boys) or Bindoon (boys over 14 years of age) on 1 March 1942.

It seems (Coldrey, pp.141-143) that the boys and staff returned to Clontarf in February 1945 and that a difficult period of readjustment followed. In 1943 the Clontarf authorities became aware of what Coldrey (p.143) described as 'unpleasant sexual habits', and other deprivations including a lack of clothing and inadequate facilities and numbers of staff to look after an increasing number of boys.

However, there were also some positive initiatives to report. The Clontarf Brass Band was re-established in March 1945 and the public again rallied to support Clontarf and other children's homes with a 'Children's Victory Celebration' at the Cannington showgrounds in December of that year and other donations were received to purchase essentials.

In early 1947, Clontarf was inspected by child welfare authorities with a view to admitting child migrants from Britain. The inspection report is quoted in part by Coldrey (pp.146-147) and shows that Clontarf was poorly fitted out in almost every aspect. Diningroom, kitchen, dormitories, laundry, bathroom, classrooms, gymnasium and library were substandard. As the church was keen to be involved in child migration, the Archbishop made a large donation to improve the condition of facilities at Clontarf.

In 1947, Clontaf's ranks were swelled by the admission of boys who had been sent from Britain as unaccompanied child migrants. Coldrey reports (p.149) that there were 191 boys in September 1947, including 47 British child migrants. By 1953, the Child Welfare Department (*Signposts* 2004, pp.164-166) reported that Clontarf could accommodate 280 boys and until 1967, the number of boys at Clontarf rarely fell below 150.

Boys were expected to work at Clontarf, and this included collecting wood. In October 1950, this had a serious outcome when 19 boys were involved in a truck roll-over in the Collier pine plantation in Como. *The West Australian* newspaper reported (6 October 1950, p.2) that seventeen boys were hospitalised.

In evidence to the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, later known as the 'Forgotten Australians' inquiry, a man described (*Forgotten Australians* 2004, p.42), a life in Clontarf that has left a deep impression on him: 'In 1954, aged 11, I was sent to Clontarf Boys Town...where Hell continued for the rest of my childhood'.

Published, official, reports generally present a brighter picture. The annual report of the Child Welfare Department (*Signposts* 2004, p.165) described some of the facilities at Clontarf: 'A new Science Laboratory is being provided and, too, a trade training centre, containing most modern and varied equipment, is used to provide technical training. Dormitories have been repainted in attractive pastel colourings and renovations to the large recreation hall are under way. New hand-ball courts are nearing completion and thus another outdoor activity can be added to the boys' recreational activities'.

On 15 December 1955 (Coldrey, pp.157-159), fifty three boys were being transported to families in the southwest to be boarded out for the Christmas holidays. On the way, the bus collided with a truck on a narrow bridge at Mundijong. This serious incident resulted in the death of 11-year-old Michael Bowman, with three other boys having either one or both legs amputated in the crash. Nineteen boys had physical injuries that required hospitalisation and ongoing treatment and it is likely that the crash left a lasting psychological impact on many of the survivors. Michael Bowman's short life and the cause of his death are memorialised in the Michael Bowman Park in Serpentine where annual gatherings are held.

After 1970, the child welfare authorities stopped reporting on the number of boys at Clontarf who were child migrants.

By 1975, Clontarf provided short or long-term accommodation for 59 boys in the 12-15 age group, with another 50 attending school daily on the Clontarf campus. 1982, government reports (*Signposts* 2004, p.167) show that Clontarf was no longer providing a 'full "substitute care" program' and in December 1983 it closed.

The site was later used for the Clontarf Aboriginal College, which remained open in 2014.

The Clontarf Old Boys Heritage Committee continued to be active in 2014, preserving the history of the site's period as a Home for boys. A Heritage Trail was opened in September 2012, the Clock Tower has been refurbished, and the Memorial Hall at Clontarf has had Br Keaney's name removed.

Clontarf was investigated by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Case Study 11: Christian Brothers.

Gallery



Clontarf Slideshow, Part 1

Description: This is a Part 1 of a slideshow of photographs from the archives of the Christian Brothers Oceania Province. It was created by 'old boys' Peter Bent and Michael Hogan, with assistance from Ed Butler, using images from 'Institution Albums 1 and 2'. There are all sorts of scenes from life at Clontarf from the 1940s to 1970s. Many people assisted with the identification of boys, brothers and staff to create captions for the images in this slideshow. DVD copies of this slideshow are available from Tuart Place. The Find & Connect website has split the slideshow into two parts so that it could be uploaded onto youtube. Please click on the photo, which will take you to youtube.



Clontarf Slideshow, Part 2

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Dormitory - Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906

Description: 'Dormitory - Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906' is an image included (before p.21) in the *Report by the Superintendent of Public Charities and Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools* for the year ending 31 December 1906. This image shows a long dormitory filled with four rows of metal-framed beds topped with white blankets. Next to each bed is a small wooden chair. The only other furniture in the room is a side-board at the end of the room, with a statue of a person standing on top of it. Five paintings can be seen hanging on the walls.



Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906

Description: 'Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School for Roman Catholic Boys, 1906' is an image included (before p.21) in the *Report by the Superintendent of Public Charities and Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools* for the year ending 31 December 1906. This image shows approximately 80 boys and four adults sitting or standing on the lawn in front of a long, two-storey stone building. The boys range in age from approximately five to 12 years old.



Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School, Generator, 1906

Description: 'Clontarf Orphanage Industrial School, Generator, 1906' is an image included (before p.21) in the *Report by the Superintendent of Public Charities and Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools* for the year ending 31 December 1906. This image shows the generator used to produce electricity at Clontarf.



The Band, Clontarf Boys' Orphanage, 1927

Description: 'The Band, Clontarf Boys' Orphanage, 1927' is an image included (after p.4) in the *Annual Report of the State Children Department, 1927*. This image shows 22 boys in marching band uniforms posed for a photo while holding brass instruments, including trumpets, trombones, and tubas. Two boys at the front of the group are sitting next to a bass drum and snare drum.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- Australasian Province of the Christian Brothers (1885 1953)
 Date: 1901 1953
- St Patrick's Province of the Christian Brothers (1953 1967)
- Holy Spirit Province of the Christian Brothers (1967 2007)

Related Events

- Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration (1956)
 - Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of British child migrants sent to Clontarf.
- Case Study 11: Christian Brothers, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2014)

Related Organisations

• Subiaco Boys' Orphanage (1872 - 1901)

In 1901 the Christian Brothers moved from the Subiaco Boys' Orphanage (1872 - 1901 to Clontarf.

Date: 1901 -

• St Kevin's Industrial School (1897 - 1922)

Sixteen boys from St Kevin's Industrial School were transferred to Clontarf when St Kevin's closed.

Date: 1921 - 1922

• Father Hudson's Society, United Kingdom (1902 - current)

Father Hudson's Society was one of the Homes in Britain that sent child migrants to Clontarf.

Date: 1947 - 1957

• Tardun Farm School (1928 - 2008)

It was not unusual for boys to be transferred between Tardun Farm School and Clontarf. In 1942, boys were evacuated to Tardun from Clontarf, at the request of the defence forces.

Date: 1928 - 1983

• Catholic Child Welfare Council, United Kingdom (1929 - 2003)

Castledare Special School (1929 - 1934)

When Castledare Special School closed, seven of the resident boys were placed in Clontarf.

Date: 1934 -

• Castledare (1934 - 1983)

Boys often went to Clontarf from Castledare.

Date: 1929 - 1983

• Bindoon (1936 - 1966)

Bindoon (1936-1966) was established with one Christian Brother and two older boys from Clontarf. Some boys were returned to Clontarf in October 1941, when Bindoon began to admit boys who were wards of the State. Boys from Clontarf were also sent to Bindoon during its first years as labourers on the early buildings.

• Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association (1947? - 1970)

The Catholic Episcopal Migration and Welfare Association [CEMWA] coordinated the placement of child migrants to Clontarf.

Date: 1947? - 1966

• Keaney House (1955 - 1965)

Some older boys from Clontarf were placed at Keaney House in North Perth after they started work.

Date: 1955 - 1965

• Catholic Family Welfare Bureau (Perth) (1970 - 1977)

It has been claimed in a history of Clontarf that the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau was a factor in a decline of country boarders and day students being enrolled at Clontarf.

Related Legislation

• State Children Act 1907, Western Australia (1907 - 1948)

Clontarf was classed as an orphanage within the meaning of the State Children Act 1907.

Resources

- Community Affairs References Committee, <u>Lost Innocents: Righting the record Report on child migration</u>, 30
 August 2001
- Immigration Museum, Stolen childhoods, 2012
- Coldrey, Barry, Good British stock: child and youth migration to Australia, 1999
- On their own: Britain's child migrants, Australian National Maritime Museum website, 2010
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, <u>Report of Case Study No. 11:</u>
 Congregation of Christian Brothers in Western Australia response to child sexual abuse at Castledare Junior
 Orphanage, St Vincent's Orphanage Clontarf, St Mary's Agricultural School Tardun and Bindoon Farm School,
 December 2014
- John Walsh interviewed by Hamish Sewell in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, 28 March 2011
- David Plowman interviewed by John Bannister in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, 18 February 2010 - 25 February 2010
- Peter Bidwell interviewed by Virginia Macleod in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, 19 September 2011

- Jasmine Bidwell interviewed by Virginia Macleod in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, 19 September 2011
- Bert McGregor interviewed by Caroline Evans in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, 1 October 2010
- Ivor Knight interviewed by Christine Choo in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, 14 June 2011 28 June 2011
- Anthony Brennan interviewed by Christine Choo for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, February 2012
- Oliver Cosgrove interviewed by Christine Choo for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, February 2012
- Robert Francis Allan Isaacs interviewed by John Bannister in the Bringing them home oral history project (2000), 2 March 2000
- Catholic Church schools and homes with the most child abuse claims revealed, ABC News, 17 February 2017
- Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report, March 2018
- Child Migration, National Archives of Australia, No date
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, <u>A piece of the story: national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children</u> separated from families, November 1999
- Child Migrants Trust [website], 2011
- Battye, JS, The Cyclopedia of Western Australia (1912), 1912. Relevance: p.505-506
- McGregor, James Albert, <u>Submission No. 34 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care</u>, 5 July 2003
- Knight, Ivor Alan, Submission No 11 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 2005
- Knight, Ivor Alan, Out of darkness: growing up with the Christian brothers, 1998
- Pinnell, Barry George, Submission No 25 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 23 May 2003
- Coldrey, Barry, Submission No 40 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 19 April 2003
- Walsh, John, Submission No 41 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 23 July 2003
- Cosgrove, Oliver Manuscript Note, State Library of Western Australia website, 1998
- Department for Community Development, State of Western Australia, <u>Submission No 55 to the Senate Inquiry</u> into Children in Institutional Care, July 2003
- Congregation of the Christian Brothers WA and SA, <u>Submission No. 65 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in</u> Institutional Care, July 2003
- Bradshaw, Paul, Submission No 85 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 1 July 2003
- Haenow, Ted, Submission No 251 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 2005
- House of Commons Health Committee, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 4 June 1998 (Health Third Report)*, 4 June 1998
- House of Commons Health Committee, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 11 June* 1998 (Health Third Report), 11 June 1998
- The International Association of Former Child Migrants and Their Families, <u>Submission No 129 to the Senate</u> Inquiry into Child Migration, 2001
- Family Care Society, <u>Memorandum by the Family Care Society</u>, Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Health Committee on 11 June 1998, 11 June 1998
- Bent, Peter, Submission No 365 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 25 March 2004
- Matheson, Max, Submission No 441 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 12 August 2004
- Thomas, Ivy, Submission No 483 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 1 November 2004
- Tulloh, Ernie, Submission No 496 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, 24 November 2004
- Coldrey, Barry, Submission No 15 to the Senate Inquiry into Child Migration, 2001
- Bill Mental Deficiency. Third Reading [Hansard p1242], Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 30 October 1929
- Heritage Council of Western Australia, *Clontarf*, inHerit: our heritage places, 8 February 2015
- <u>Motion youthful delinquents, detention conditions</u>, Hansard Archive 1870 to 1995, 2 March 1943. Relevance: p.2609

Other Resources



Title: The Christian Brothers' Agricultural School, Tardun, Western Australia

Type: Image Date: c. 1936

Details

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- Records of Christian Brothers Children's Institutions in Western Australia (1888 1983)
- Catholic Archdiocese of Perth CEMWA and CMC Files [Former Child Migrants], Catholic Archdiocese of Perth (c. 1928 - 2008)
- Picture South Perth Photograph Collection (1870s 2000s)
- Tuart Place Historical Photos Collection
- Records of child migration to Western Australia, National Archives of Australia (1947 1959)
- Father Hudson's Society, Records (1902 current)
- UK fact finding mission 1956 part 2, National Archives of Australia (1955 1956)
- John Moss C.B.E. U.K. Child Welfare Expert. Visit to Australia. Part II, National Archives of Australia (1951 1952)

There is information about Clontarf in the John Moss Visit to Australia file Part II, please see pp.28, 106, 116, 121, 128-129, 137

- PHIND Personal History Index (1938 1965)
- Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' [Child Endowment] prefix (1904 1974) Item B189 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Clontarf
- Bindoon boys town [videorecording] [with scenes from Clontarf], State Library of Western Australia (1941 1941)
- Files Community Welfare ("A" Series), State Records Office of Western Australia (25 August 1908 23 December 1990)
- Files Child Welfare, State Records Office of Western Australia (1 January 1917 16 June 1972)
- Files Departmental [Education Department] (1 January 1885 31 December 2000)
- Indentures (Guardianship) (1947 1960)
- Former Child Migrants Referral Index (1913 1968)
- Former Child Migrants Blue Index Cards (1947 1968)
- Papers, 1948-1997 [manuscript] [Cosgrove] (1948 1997)

You can view this page online by visiting https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/clontarf/