

Holy Child Orphanage

1941 – 1962

Other Names: • HCO

Details

The Holy Child Orphanage was established in Broome by the Sisters of St John of God in 1941. It was a Home for school-aged Aboriginal girls and young women up to 20 years of age placed by relatives or the Department of Native Affairs. Holy Child closed in December 1962.

The Holy Child Orphanage was established by the Sisters of St John of God in 1941, in Broome. School-aged Aboriginal girls and young women who were working were accommodated there. Girls and young women were placed by their families and by the Department of Native Affairs.

From 1942 to 1945, during World War II, Holy Child Orphanage moved to Beagle Bay, as Broome had been declared a military town and women and children were not permitted to live there.

School children attended St Mary's School in Broome. They wore blue uniforms and were known as the 'blue army' by people seeing them march to and from school.

Patricia Jones, who lived at Holy Child Orphanage around the 1950s, shared her experiences at the institution in a newspaper article in 2023:

We'd be deprived of food as punishment a lot of the time. Although, a meal was usually pretty basic – sometimes onion soup, which was just raw onion in hot water.

One day, a few of us were sent to the home of a pearl farmer's wife in town to clean up her garden. When we were done, she gave us a penny each. As kids, we were thrilled.

We went to the shop and bought chocolates. When we got back, we were all given a good flogging – made to lift up our skirts and bend over so the nun could whack us with a bamboo stick.

That's just one of many examples. It was a horrible place (Molloy, 2023).

The Holy Child Orphanage closed in December 1962.

Gallery



Sisters and Working Girls with their young charges in front of the newly opened orphanage building, 1941

Description: 'Sisters and Working Girls with their young charges in front of the newly opened orphanage building' is a digital copy of an image published in the *Kimberley Community Profile* magazine's article about the Holy Child Orphanage, Broome.

A big photo album: the archive of the Sisters of St John of God

Description: 'A big photo album: the archive of the Sisters of St John of God' is an online news item from *ABC Kimberley*. It shows pictures of Aboriginal children and adults, and is about the collection of 34,000 photographs held by the Sisters of St John of God at the Heritage Centre in Broome, Western Australia.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of St John of God \(1895 - current\)](#)

Date: 1941 - 1962

Related Organisations

- [Beagle Bay Mission \(1895 - 1976\)](#)

Girls, young women and Sisters from the Holy Child Orphanage at Broome were evacuated to Beagle Bay Mission during World War II.

Date: 1942 - 1945

- [Catholic Diocese of Broome \(1897? - current\)](#)

Holy Child Orphanage was part of the Catholic Diocese of Broome.

Date: 1941 - 1962

- [Maria Goretti Home \(1968 - 1974\)](#)

The Maria Goretti Home was built on the site of the Holy Child Orphanage.

Date: 1968 -

Resources

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#), 1997
- Western Australia. Child Welfare Department, [Annual Report of the Child Welfare Department](#), 1928 - 1972
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, [A piece of the story : national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families](#), November 1999
- Choo, Christine, *Mission girls : Aboriginal women on Catholic missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900-1950*, 2001. *Relevance:* Vivid memories of life at Holy Child Orphanage are included at pp.138-140, and there is general historical information on pp.136-137
- [Native Orphan Sends Her Thanks](#), The Daily News, 28 October 1944
- [Holy Child Orphanage and Ida Kelly](#), Australian Broadcasting Corporation Compass, 14 December 2010
- Heritage Council of Western Australia, [St John of God Convent \(fmr\), Broome](#), inHerit: our heritage places, 8 February 2015. *Relevance:* There is some history of the Sisters of St John of God's activities in the Kimberleys in the 'Register of Heritage Places' (pp.4-10) including work at Beagle Bay, Bidyadanga and Wirrumanu Missions and the Holy Child Orphanage
- Lockyer, Betty (Elizabeth), *Last Truck Out*, 2009
- Batty, David & McMahon, Jeni, [Sisters, Pearls and Mission Girls](#), 2004

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Sisters of St John of God, Kimberley, Records \(1895 - current\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
Item B216 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Holy Child Orphanage
- [Administration Files - Northern District Office \[N.D.G Sequence\] \(1950 - 1974\)](#)
- [Files - Aborigines Departments \(1 January 1926 - 16 June 1972\)](#)
- [Files \(Aboriginal Matters\) - Department of the North West \[1\] \(1915 - 1949\)](#)

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