

# Goulburn Island Mission

1916 – 1973

## Details

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The Goulburn Island Mission was established in 1916 by the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, later known as the Methodist Overseas Mission. It was located on South Goulburn Island. Dormitories for children operated until the mid-1930s and children attended a Mission school. Control of the Mission was handed to the local Aboriginal Community in 1973.

The Goulburn Island Mission was established in 1916 by the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. This organisation changed its name to the Methodist Overseas Mission in the mid-1930s. The site was chosen by Reverend James Watson after he inspected the region for possible locations. He became the Mission's first superintendent and an Honorary Protector of Aborigines for the islands.

The Goulburn Islands lie off the coast of Arnhem Land. The Mission Station was located on South Goulburn Island approximately 320 kilometres east of Darwin. The Mission received a subsidy from the government to assist with its operation. In 1923, 43 children were reported to be under the direct charge of Miss Matthews, the Missionary Sister who provided both religious and school education.

A December 1927 report reveals that four dormitories were operating at the site one each for boys, girls, unmarried women and youths. Forty nine children were living at the Mission and of these, 34 attended school. The Missionary in Charge and the Dormitory Matron were responsible for teaching. The report described the education of children and its purpose:

*Every boy and girl upon leaving school must enter upon some employment. The girls until marriage remain under care of the matron in Dormitory acquiring domestic knowledge. The boys are taught the use of all the tools and with surprising quickness very soon adapt themselves. A boy's job is constantly changed, by this means he gains knowledge of all works in hand. All school children are taught light duties pertaining to their dormitory needs. The school curriculum consists of:- reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, tables, light mental work, little history, poetry, singing, moral lessons (girls sewing). The new church building (cool, light and airy) is used as a school room.*

By 1931 the original boys' dormitory and several cottages were demolished as the Mission worked towards a larger more spacious layout. Two years later only two dormitories remained and a number of smaller cottages for families had been erected. By 1935, no dormitories appear to have been maintained. Numbers of children at the Mission however increased to 60-70 during the later 1940s and throughout the 1950s with a significant number of those attending the Mission school.

A 1960 report from the Mission recorded an average attendance of 42 children at the school. Sister Hinch ran both the school and the dispensary with the help of two Aboriginal assistants at the school. The school building was described as follows:

*the present building is only a temporary building for the School being half workshop and half School. The building is of iron and again very hot. It is far too small and can only house a little over half the children. The surplus have to meet outside. Most of the school equipment, except the furniture, has to be held in a smaller building elsewhere and cannot be adequately used until a new building is built.*

By 1964, 89 children were resident at the Mission. The Mission received a subsidy and child endowment payments from the government, and income from sales of crafts made by the residents. In 1973 the Methodist Overseas Mission handed responsibility for the Mission to a local Council.

## Gallery



**Mission house**

**Description:** This image shows the Mission house at Goulburn Island Methodist Mission. It is not certain whether or not this building would have housed children in care on the Mission. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



**Goulburn Island**

**Description:** This image shows a view of Goulburn Island.



**Goulburn Island Mission**



**Service at the Goulburn Island Mission Station**

**Description:** This image is also available in the State Library of New South Wales Library. The description in from the State Library of NSW states: First service held at Goulburn Island, Arnhem Land, 1916. Image shows 4 missionaries giving a service to Indigenous Australians on Jesus walking on the sea.

## More info

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia \(1916 - 1930s\)](#)

The Goulburn Island Mission was run by the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia until the mid 1930s when the organisation changed its name to the Methodist Overseas Mission.

Date: 1916 - 1930s

- [Methodist Overseas Mission \(c. 1930 - 1980\)](#)

The Methodist Overseas Mission ran the Goulburn Island Mission from the mid 1930s.

Date: 1930s - 1973

## Related Organisations

- [Kormilda College \(1967 - 2017\)](#)

Some of the first students to enrol at Kormilda College came from the Goulburn Island Mission.

Date: 1967 -

## Other Resources

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**Title:** Goulburn & Elcho Island Mission Review Reports - Northern Territory (1923-1952)

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 1923 - 1952

[Details](#)



**Title:** Goulburn Island Mission - policy and development (1958 - 1977)

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 1958 - 1977

[Details](#)

## Records

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

### Records held by other organisations

- [Records of the Uniting Church in Australia, Northern Synod \(1940 - 1986\)](#)
  - [Records of the Methodist Church of Australasia, Department of Overseas Missions \(1830 - 1980\)](#)
  - [Goulburn & Elcho Island Mission Review Reports - Northern Territory \(1923 - 1952\)](#)
  - [Goulburn Island Mission - policy and development \(1958 - 1977\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/goulburn-island-mission-2/>