

Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys

1923 – 1978

Other Names: • Kilmany Park

Details

The Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys in Sale, Gippsland, was established by the Presbyterian Church in 1924. It operated as a farm for boys aged between 10 and 16. Many boys from Kildonan's homes in North Melbourne and Burwood were sent to Kilmany Park Farm Home, especially in 1933 to 1934. Kilmany Park was closed in 1978.

The Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys in Sale, Gippsland, was purchased by the Presbyterian Church in 1923 and operated as a farm for boys from February 1924. The home catered for Protestant boys; there was a capacity of 45 beds. An adjacent dairy farm of 550 acres helped to support the home.

The goals of Kilmany Park are captured in the *Presbyterian Messenger* of 19 January 1923:

Every week our slum workers and mission preachers have brought before them boys that if they got away from present surroundings, would reform and grow into good citizens, but if left where they are in poverty and in a corrupting atmosphere, will sink from folly and petty delinquencies into utter criminality. They cannot be sent to ordinary farms till they are disciplined and brushed up, and taught enough about farming to make them useful and trustworthy. The idea of not just to provide labour for farms, but to make out of what may become waste human material valuable citizens for the state.

Many boys who had been at Kildonan's homes in North Melbourne and Burwood were sent at the age of 11 to Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys in Sale in regional Victoria for training in farm work. A large number of Kildonan children moved to Kilmany Park in 1933/4.

In his memoirs, *Better off in a home* (1982), Bill Smith describes his experiences as a resident of Kilmany Park between 1929 and 1936. He documents the day-to-day of being in 'care', including the highlights of having an egg once a year on your birthday and butter on Sundays.

An historical guide developed by the Uniting Church in Australia describes Smith's account of Kilmany as 'a mix of real harshness and fear', but also describes the development of strong relationships with other children:

In spite of restrictions and severe punishments, everything became relative, and friendships partly compensated for the pleasures and love that many children enjoyed living in normal circumstances [p. 152]

The book, *Delinquent Angel*, includes an account of when Shelton Lea was sent to Kilmany Park. Driving to Sale from Melbourne:

The country was sparse and long grass stretched level across land without cleavage, no hills, nothing. Off the main road, the driveway into Kilmany Park went through acres of irrigated flat plains, and suddenly, through a bank of trees, opened out into the barren grounds around the austere federation mansion. There were cattle in the paddocks and on one side of the building Shelton could see milking sheds. He could hear the pecking of chooks, and in the distance, he noticed boys riding on the tray of a tractor moving across the flat land (Georgeff, 2007, p.80).

Kilmany Park was run by a religious couple called Edna and Eric Frith. Eric Frith recalled that when they came to Kilmany Park in the 1950s, "it was like a prison. We took over a devastation of kids, poorly fed, poorly clothed and cruelly treated. Our predecessors were terrible. They were born bastards" (Georgeff, p.80). Georgeff writes that the Friths saw their role as "benevolent strict supervision". The book describes Eric as a "military man" who "stood straight with his shoulders square and laid down the law ... He liked the boys to have plenty to do because 'idle hands find mischief'" (p.81). At meals in the dining room, boys sat six to a table, with the Friths at the top table, and they insisted on good table manners and "no skylarking" (p.81).

The book states that boys could be sent off to work on farms at any time once they turned 14. At some of these farms, "the boys were cheap labour and were paid in food and small amounts of money. They could be made to sleep in stables and were so far away that no one checked on them. If they ran away from the farms and were caught, they ended up back in [Turana](#) (Georgeff, p.82)".

One former resident gave evidence to the 'Forgotten Australians' Inquiry about his time at Kilmany Park:

From Baltara I was sent to Kilmany Park in Sale ... When I did go to school and spoke to my family, and the home found out, I was constantly belted ... We showered together and our penises were measured. I was abused by the superintendent's son and, when I told the superintendent, I was constantly pulled out of bed ... probably at about 11 o'clock at night ... for telling lies, made to do a three or four-mile run, made to swim in a freezing cold swimming pool and sent back to bed ... this was a Presbyterian home. We went to church every Sunday and were told of this God of love and understanding who was watching over us. I could not understand, because I thought: 'Jeez, what's happening? He's not watching over me.' I was told my mother was nothing but a drunken slut who had never been any good to me. I was given a foot up the bum and sent back to school ... The abuse, sexual abuse and torture abuse that I suffered at Kilmany Park ... No child should have to go through it. (para 2.128, pages 46-47)

In January 1956, Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys was declared an approved children's home under the Children's Welfare Act 1954.

By the 1960s, Kilmany Park and its farm training program was seen by the State of Victoria as a valuable alternative to Turana in Melbourne.

However by the mid 1970s Kilmany's style of 'care' was not in keeping with government child welfare policies. The home was considered too geographically isolated from the areas where the boys' families resided.

In an oral history interview from 1996, Margaret Calder, a former worker at Kilmany in the 1970s expressed concern that "the boys didn't make their own decisions and they were sent out into the world without much preparation ... They weren't prepared, I don't think, for town living. They were well fed – the food was beautiful, because I used to eat it. They were well clothed, but they didn't make their own decisions" (Australian Association of Social Workers, 1996).

In August 1975 the Department called a meeting of agencies, which had established, or had shown interest in establishing family and children's services in the Gippsland area, particularly Sale. In 1976/77 the admission of boys to the Home by the Social Welfare Department continued to be phased down. At the same time a report *Families and Children in Gippsland* provided a context for a reappraisal of the role of Kilmany.

There was a community campaign to protest against the government's intention to close the Kilmany Home. A 'Save Kilmany Park' petition obtained 6,000 signatures, and people including the Mayor of Sale and the superintendent of the Home made submissions to the Victorian government arguing for Kilmany to remain open (O'Neill, 2018).

In this climate of change, the Uniting Church was actively considering the establishment of family group homes in Sale and Bairnsdale within the framework of the *Families and Children in Gippsland* report. By 1978 properties had been purchased in Sale and Bairnsdale for use as family group homes under the a new agency, Kilmany Family Care.

Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys closed in 1978.

In 2005, the building was turned into 'bed and breakfast' accommodation, and by 2020 it was being used as an events venue.

Gallery



Kilmany Boys Home and typical farm in the Sale area



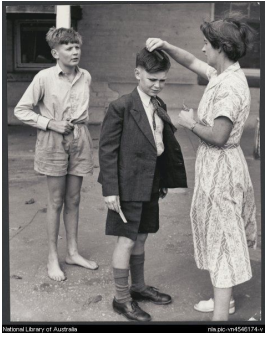
Kilmany, 'Kilmany Park' [interior]



Kilmany, 'Kilmany Park' [exterior]



Seven boys stand beside a covered truck at Kilmany Park Boys Home, Sale, Victoria



A woman combs a boy's hair at Kilmany Park Boys Home, Sale, Victoria

More info

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [Kildonan, North Melbourne \(1890 - c. 1937\)](#)
Some boys were transferred from Kildonan to Kilmany Park Farm Home for Boys, when they reached the age of ten.
- [Kildonan, Burwood \(1937 - c. 1961\)](#)
At the age of eleven, boys were moved from Kildonan in Burwood to Kilmany Park in Sale for training in farm work.
- [Kilmany Family Care \(c. 1978 - 2002\)](#)
After the closure of Kilmany Park, the Uniting Church purchased properties in Gippsland to be family group homes, run by the new agency, Kilmany Family Care.
- [Harrison House \(1960 - 1985\)](#)
Some former residents of Kilmany Park were accommodated at Arthur Harrison Boys' Home when they moved to Melbourne.
Date: 1966 - 1977
- [Turana \(1955 - 1993\)](#)
By the 1960s, Kilmany Park was seen by the State of Victoria as a valuable alternative to Turana in Melbourne.
- [Presbyterian and Methodist Child Care Service \(1971 - 1977?\)](#)

Resources

- Dargavel, Ricki, *Families and Children in Gippsland*, 1976
- Rule, Andrew, [Two sides to the story of orphan care](http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/two-sides-to-the-story-Two-sides-to-the-story-of-orphan-care) *Read more: http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/two-sides-to-the-story-Two-sides-to-the-story-of-orphan-care*, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 November 2009
- McGowan, Hugh, [Transcript of Hugh McGowan's presentation to the Family and Community Development Committee: Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations](#), 4 February 2013
- Halliday, Claire, [Who cares?](#), The Age, 4 July 2004

Records

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

Records

- [Records held by Uniting Church Archives \(1923 - 1994\)](#)
- ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)

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