

# Royleston

1922 – 1983

- Other Names:**
- Royleston Boys Home
  - Royleston Receiving Home
  - Royleston Depot
  - Roylestone House
  - Roylestone Home for Wayward and Abandoned Boys
  - Royleston Receiving Depot
  - Roylestone Home for Crippled Children
  - Rylstone
  - Royalston
  - Roylestone
  - Royleston Boys' Depot

## Details

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Royleston was established in Glebe by the State Children's Relief Board in 1922. It was a receiving home, or depot, providing temporary dormitory accommodation for school-age boys who were waiting for children's court hearings or were state wards waiting to be placed in foster care or another institution. In 1936, 904 boys passed through its doors. Royleston closed in 1983.

Royleston Depot was established at 270 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, by the Child Welfare Department, in a Federation-style private home. It was gazetted in 1924. Royleston was closely linked with Bidura, the girls' depot further up Glebe Point Road, and families of boys and girls were often divided between the two institutions.

Royleston was a receiving home, or depot, providing temporary dormitory accommodation for wards waiting for children's court hearings or in transit to boarding out (fostering), or other institutions. As such, there was a high turnover in the home. Boys were frequently returned to the home on their way to other placements and were even sent there for 'holidays'.

For many wards, Royleston was their first experience of the state welfare system, and past residents have reported that the regimentation and dormitory-style accommodation came as quite a shock, as did being separated from their sisters, who were placed in Bidura.

According to newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s, Royleston was known as a home for 'crippled boys' but the Child Welfare Department, which ran the home, always referred to it as a depot. At first boys were sent to local schools, but Glebe residents complained and after 1936 a school was established on the premises, with a resident teacher and a visiting manual training teacher.

Christine Kenneally wrote in *The Monthly* in 2012 about the memories of Geoff Meyer, who was taken into care as an infant in 1937:

*Meyer stayed at Bidura until he was four, when he was sent to the Royleston Boys' Depot in Glebe Point Road. Built in the 1880s, the Royleston mansion is a Victorian hybrid of grand and delicate, featuring a graceful verandah and soaring windows. When the heavy iron gate first opened for Meyer, he was terrified by its squeal. Royleston housed 30 to 50 boys at a time until they were fostered, though many were repeatedly fostered, returned, and fostered again. Meyer never learned any other boys' names. "We weren't allowed to talk to each other," he said, "and the staff always said 'Hey you' or used terrible words."*

By 1955 the majority of boys in the home were aged 6 to 10 years, but older boys passed through the home on their way to other institutions. By the 1970s, as fostering became less common, boys stayed longer in Royleston and it became crowded. In 1973 a teamwork approach was introduced, involving psychologists and senior staff from the Department of Community Services. At that stage, Royleston held around 43 boys. The Royleston ballroom, installed by the original owner, served as a children's court for a time. Royleston was closed in 1983, along with Bidura. Royleston then served as offices. It was sold by the government in 1993 by tender to a family who have restored the house to a private home and also run a bed and breakfast establishment.

As the Senate Inquiry into Forgotten Australians noted, Royleston boys' home, like many government institutions, was presented in a positive light, contrary to the memories of care leavers. One government publication said Royleston provided very comfortable, temporary accommodation for boys, in an attractive old house with many interesting features. Yet boys who experienced it remembered:

*Royleston was a terrible place to find yourself, at any age. As a child, under care at Royleston, I felt the heavy hand of adult men, men employed to care for us. When they weren't happy, we suffered. Over time this treatment developed your sense of hopelessness, worthlessness, and aloneness. At times even the good guys had a heavy hand.*

*Each time you entered, you were reduced to a manageable unit, private property was removed and never seen again, Government day clothes were issued and you were given a number, this number was your tooth brush number. (Sub 321)*

More than a few of the submissions, and oral history recorded in the Forgotten Australian Oral History Project, describe sexual abuse, by staff members, occurring at Royleston in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. In one case, in the 1940s, a boy was told by the superintendent that he was not to tell other boys about what had happened. Other former residents recall being shut in a cupboard under the stairs, as punishment, and being frightened with stories of children who had escaped and been murdered nearby. The home was also loveless:

*I was trying to get some caring or love from anyone. I remember talking to the laundry lady and trying to get some caring from her but it seemed that all the adults in the place were totally cold to the children. (Sub 150)*

One care leaver summed up the sense of shock he felt on arriving at Royleston, and the challenges of adjusting to the regimentation and routine:

*I was sent to Royleston Receiving Depot for Boys'. It makes us sound like animals doesn't it? Societies rejects. Children rounded up and herded into depot's where we could be sorted, placed and hidden away and forgotten about. It was the institution where you were first taken until they decided where they would permanently place you. I soon realised that this was no longer a game. I did not like being at Royleston*

*and I wished that I were back in my tent. For some reason the home always felt cold and I was always scared and hungry. I was told that I was sent there for my own good and that I was going to be there for a long time so I had better get used to it. If I was sent there for my own good then why did they treat me so bad?*

*Children's homes were run like prisons. We were even called inmates just as prisoners are. Life was very regimented and our days totally organised. There was a specific time for everything to be done. We were even given a time when we had to go to bed and a time when we had to get out of bed. We even had a specific time that we had to go to the toilet in. We lived by a strict timetable that left us with very little free time. We also had very strict rules that we had to obey. We had to make sure that we washed our face before we brushed our teeth other wise we would be hit across the head. We had to line up at the end of our beds and wait for them to be inspected. There was a special way we had to make them and there was to be absolutely no creases. If they were not made properly the whole bed would be stripped and we would be made to do it again properly. It was usually left to the other children to teach you the rules. I learnt them by carefully observing the other boys and mimicking everything that they did. There was to be no talking at the table or else you would be sent to the corner and not given anything to eat until the next meal time. We had to eat everything on our plates even if we didn't feel well or simply hated the taste of it. We were made to work hard. We were given jobs like polishing the wooden floors, Helping in the kitchens or polishing all of the brass fittings. We all had to wear the same clothes and mine were always way too big on me. [Sub 94]*

In 2012 a former Department of Community Services officer, Morri Young, contacted Find and Connect with his memories of Royleston:

*I was the Departmental officer responsible for supervising the manager and staff at this institution from 1981 to 1983. Royleston was a 'home' for adolescent, male wards. I recall it as a miserable, dark and cold place, with very little good to say about it. I was pleased to have a small part in its closure.*

Royleston was sold by the NSW Government in 1993 and its new owner converted to a bed and breakfast. The house, which had become run down and was divided into office space by the Department of Community Services, has been restored to its original state as a grand private home. This includes the ballroom, which was the space where court hearings were once held.

## Gallery

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**Royleston Boys' Home**

**Description:** This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



**Limited playing area has been used to maximum advantage at "Royleston"**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image that appeared in the Child Welfare Department of New South Wales Annual Report of 1967.

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## Royleston

**Description:** This is an image of Royleston, published to illustrate an article in the Daily Telegraph in November 2017.

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## Royleston, private home

**Description:** This is a photograph of the exterior of the former Royleston institution in Glebe, taken after the building was sold and renovated as a private home. It was published to illustrate an article in the Daily Telegraph in November 2017.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, State Government of New South Wales \(1970 - 1973\)](#)
- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1973 - 1975\)](#)
- [State Children's Relief Board \(1881 - 1923\)](#)
- [Child Welfare Department, State Government of New South Wales \(1923 - 1970\)](#)
- [Department of Youth and Community Services, State Government of New South Wales \(1976 - 1988\)](#)
- [Department of Youth, Ethnic and Community Affairs, State Government of New South Wales \(1975 - 1976\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Metropolitan Children's Court \(1911 - 1983\)](#)
- [Children's Court of New South Wales \(October 1905 - current\)](#)
- [Bidura \(1920 - 1977\)](#)

Boys who were awaiting placement or court hearings were sent to Royleston, while girls were sent to Bidura (siblings were separated).

### Resources

- Mancuso, Diane, [Billy Billy](#), Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions blog, 5 September 2011
- [New Parents for "Nobody's Child"](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 7 August 1939
- Davey, J. Michael, *Journey of Hope: a remarkable true story*, 2011
- Hughes, Dianne, [Submission no 272 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Olsson, Kristina, *All the lost children*, The Weekend Australian Magazine, 30 March 2013
- [Catholic Women's Association: Hospital Visitors' Activities](#), The Catholic Press, 10 September 1936
- Boyle, Brian, *The Child Welfare Schools: Recollections of these unique schools and the men and women who taught in them often under considerable difficulty*, 1996
- Hogan, Nicole, [What really happened at Royleston Home for Boys in Glebe](#), The Daily Telegraph, 13 November 2017
- Parry, Naomi, [Royleston](#), The Dictionary of Sydney, 2015
- [Glebe Care Homes for Children](#), The Glebe Society, 23 June 2013
- [Ronald Arthur interviewed by Jeannine Baker for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), August 2011 - September 2011
- [George Bloomfield interviewed by John Maynard in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 7 April 2001
- [Patrick Sephton interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 2001
- F.E., *Statement in the matter of the Salvation Army Eastern Territory's Handling of Claims of Child Sexual Abuse: Statement and annexures of FE*, 11 March 2014

# Records

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

## Records

- [Departmental Records relating to State Wards, New South Wales \(1918 - current\)](#)
  - [Royleston records, State Archives NSW \(1940 - 1984\)](#)
  - [Records held by Surry Hills Children's Court \(1912 - current\)](#)
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