

Peat Island

1936 –

Other Names: • Rabbit Island

Details

Peat Island, in the Hawkesbury River near Brooklyn and Mooney Mooney, is an island situated to the north of Sydney. It officially became known as Peat Island in 1934, and was previously called Rabbit Island. The island was selected by the New South Wales government as the site for an asylum for inebriates in the late 1890s. The first male patients aged between 16 and 52 were transferred to the Rabbit Island Hospital for the Insane in March 1911. After that, the facility on the island was known as the Rabbit Island Mental Hospital (1917?-1936), Peat and Milson Islands Mental Hospital (1936 – 1973), Peat Island Hospital (1973-1989), and, Peat Island Centre (1989 – 2010).

Dr Milson Creed, a doctor specialising in the treatment of alcoholism, selected Rabbit Island on behalf of the New South Wales Government in 1901, as a place that could be used to securely detain patients without needing bars or walls. Construction of the first of two intended asylums for women on Rabbit Island began in 1902.

Over 3,000 people lived in the hospital during its century of operation. The first patients, male and aged between 16 and 52, were transferred to the Rabbit Island Hospital for the Insane on 24 March 1911. By 1920 the facilities on Rabbit Island were vastly overcrowded. At its peak in the 1950s there were 610 men and boys living in the facility on Peat Island. Women began living on Peat Island on respite in 1976, and permanently from 1978 onwards.

A 1983 NSW Government report, the Richmond Report, recommended that community care take the place of institutional care, and called for the closure of the facility on Peat Island. A community campaign to save Peat Island Hospital for its residents was organised, led by the families of residents, who emphasised that by this time it was more of a large group home than an institution. In the 1987 State Election, Opposition Leader Peter Collins made a promise to keep it open, but as he did not win the election, this did not happen. The residential facility on Peat Island known as Peat Island Centre was closed in 2010.

Gallery

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Institution for inebriates, Rabbit Island, Hawkesbury River

Description: This photograph shows part of the mental health institution at Peat Island/Rabbit Island. It shows two large brick buildings and a small rotunda at the top of a steep bank leading down to the Hawkesbury River. Four people stand on a path in front of the buildings. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



[View of the Peat Island on the Hawkesbury River (NSW)]

Description: This is a photograph of Peat Island. It shows the entirety of the island sitting within the Hawkesbury River, with institution buildings visible in the centre of the island, and boats moored at the dock. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.

More info

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [Peat and Milson Islands Mental Hospital \(1936 - 1973\)](#)
Peat and Milson Islands Mental Hospital consisted of two buildings, one of which was situated on Peat Island.
 - [Peat Island Hospital \(1973 - 1989\)](#)
Peat Island Hospital was located on Peat Island.
 - [Peat Island Centre \(1989 - 2010\)](#)
Peat Island Centre was located on Peat Island.
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