

Bethany Boys' Home

1947 – 1978

Other Names:

- Bethany Boys' Hostel
- Bethany Children's Home

Details

Bethany Boys' Home, run by the Churches of Christ, opened in Dover in 1947 and moved to Lindisfarne in 1956. Up to 18 boys, mostly wards of state aged between 2 and 18, lived there. From 1971 onwards, the Home also accepted girls. It closed in 1978.

The gift of a house and land at Dover by Mrs W Harper Knight provided the impetus to establish Bethany Boys' Home, originally intended to be a hostel for 'underprivileged' boys. The Committee chose the name Bethany because it was a place that Christ was supposed to have loved. The house was dilapidated with rats in the roof and needed a considerable amount of work to make it acceptable to the Social Services Department. Volunteers within the Church carried out most of it. Others made donations to set the Home up. One of these was a hand crafted wooden sign with Bethany written on it that hung over the front verandah. In combination with another sign warning motorists to slow down as they approached Bethany Boys' Hostel, it seems to have embarrassed many of the boys who disliked being identified in this way.

The Home was opened by the Minister for Health, AJ White, on 14 June 1947. The first boys arrived in the following September.

The Superintendent and Matron, a married couple, organised the day to day life of the Home. As a cost saving measure, the first Superintendent doubled as the Pastor of the Dover and Geeveston Churches of Christ with his wife taking up the position of Matron. They lasted a little less than a year. None of the Superintendents and Matrons who came afterwards stayed long and at times there were no permanent staff at all. Most of the problem was probably the remote location of Dover. In addition, the requirement that applicants be members of the Church of Christ limited the Committee's choices. In 1955, Ray and Gwen Morffew, a qualified nurse, became Superintendent and Matron. They stayed at the Home until the end of 1974.

The Committee decided to leave Dover because its isolation meant that there were no special schools or employment opportunities for the boys. They purchased 'Orana' in Lowelly Avenue, Lindisfarne, a suburb of Hobart, in 1955 with the assistance of the state government and with funds from the sale of the house in Dover. The move took place on 8 January 1956.

Most of the children at Bethany Boys' Home were wards of state who had already been with two or three foster carers. A few had single fathers who placed them privately and paid their board. In April 1971, the Home took two girls in order to keep them with their brother. After that, it accepted other girls.

The Committee was assisted by their offshoot, the Friends of Bethany, who were mostly fundraisers. They also helped with working bees, mended children's clothes, bottled fruit and vegetables, donated money, and provided their professional expertise without charging for it.

This Home was an approved children's home under the terms of the *Child Welfare Act* 1960.

In her 1967 thesis, 'The correctional agencies of Tasmania', Mary Daunton-Fear wrote that the Morffews ran the Home 'like a large family' with their own sons, who also lived there, treated in the same way as the boys. In 1956, the Committee appointed the first live-in assistant, known as 'Auntie'. Staff punished boys by withdrawing privileges or, if they were younger, by slapping them.

According to Daunton-Fear, the routine, which was not rigid, was as follows:

6:30 am – Boys, got up, showered and dressed.

6:45 – The older boys carried out household jobs.

7:10 – Daily devotions.

7:30 – Breakfast time.

8:00 – High school boys left for Rose Bay High School.

9:00 – Primary School boys left for Lindisfarne Primary School or, if they had an intellectual disability, a special school.

3:15 – Boys began returning from school. They did their homework before or after tea. Some older boys had an after school job outside the Home.

5:30 – Tea time.

6:00 – Recreation time. This consisted of ping-pong, darts or television in the play room.

7:00 – Boys began going to bed.

At the weekends the routine was much looser. The Morffews encouraged the older boys to work in the garden on Saturday mornings. Some found Saturday jobs outside the Home. Boys played football. The staff or members of the public organised outings. Relatives could visit on Saturdays. On Sundays, the boys attended a Church of Christ service. They spent holidays in the homes of church members.

On birthdays each boy received a present, chose the evening meal, and could invite two friends. There was also a boiled fruit cake with a candle in it.

The younger boys received two shillings a week pocket money and the older ones, three shillings and sixpence.

An honorary doctor and chemist provided medical treatment. The boys attended school dental clinics.

The 1968 Churches of Christ Conference considered closing Bethany because of lack of staff and plans to run an aged care home. They did not believe that they had the capacity to do both. The minutes recorded that:

Mr Cooke said that in his earlier days he questioned the work of Bethany, but no longer. He said he believed the church was in the community to serve the community, and asked if we took Bethany out, what real link have we in social service work in Tasmania. If this motion was carried, it would be the worst thing that could happen to our work in this State.

The motion to close Bethany was lost and plans to use the Home for elderly people shelved.

Bethany closed on 31 December 1978 because of financial difficulties and the need to upgrade the house. The children still living there moved elsewhere under a private arrangement with Norm and Margaret Carter, who were the Matron and Superintendent at the time. Colony 47 leased the property until the Churches of Christ sold it a couple of years later. The Churches used the proceeds from the sale to purchase a house in Baragon Street, Howrah so that Shirley Byard, a long term assistant at Bethany Boys' Home, could run the Bethany Playcentre and care for one foster child. When the Centre closed, the Churches used the house to run Bethany Family Homes, a shelter for women and children, including older boys, who were escaping domestic violence.

The annual report of the Home, published in the *Social Services Department: report for the year 1949-50*, gives news of some boys by name.

Gallery



Bethany Boys' Home, previously known as 'Orana', in Lowelly Road, Lindisfarne



Bethany Boys' Home when it was in Dover, southern Tasmania

Description: The sign on the side of the house reads: 'MOTORISTS! CARE PLEASE! CHURCHES OF CHRIST BETHANY BOYS HOSTEL THANK-YOU'

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- [Churches of Christ in Tasmania \(1865 - current\)](#)
The Churches of Christ ran Bethany Boys' Home.

Related Events

- [Listen to the children: review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children, Ombudsman Tasmania \(2003 - 2006\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Colony 47 \(1973 - current\)](#)

Resources

- *[no title]*, Mercury, 7 July 1972
- Hanson, Dallas, *Why are they in children's homes: report of the ACOSS children's home intake survey*, 1979

Records

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

Records

- [Bethany Boys' Home Records \(1947 - 1978\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
- [Reports to the Minister, Child Welfare Advisory Council \(1967 - 1971\)](#)
- [Churches of Christ Records \(1943 - 1989\)](#)
- [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
- [Correspondence and Associated Papers Relating to Building for Government Departments Arranged Alphabetically by Department \(1929 - 1980\)](#)
- [General Correspondence-Hospital and Health Administration \(1932 - 1987\)](#)

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