

# Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration

1956 – 1956

**Other Names:**

- Home Office Fact-Finding Committee
- Ross Mission
- Ross Committee

## Details

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The Fact-Finding Mission on Child Migration was a 1956 visit by a British team of inspectors to Australian institutions where British child migrants were living. One of its purposes was to decide whether Britain would continue to support migrant children after May 1957, when the British *Empire Settlement Act*, which provided for their maintenance, ceased to operate. It reported to the British government on the systems in place for the care of British child migrants in Australia.

The Fact-Finding Mission was led by British Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, John Ross, and the final report was known as the Ross Report. Ross was joined by CM Wansborough-Jones, Children's Officer at Essex County Council, WG Garnett, the former Deputy-High Commissioner in Australia, and RH Johnson, who acted as secretary.

The Fact-Finding Mission visited all states and many institutions where child migrants were living, and also had meetings with state welfare department officials and additional meetings in Canberra. The Committee visited approximately two-thirds of the approved institutions for child migrants, inspecting the buildings and conditions, and speaking to staff and the child migrants there. Statistical information was compiled for all institutions approved to receive child migrants (not only the ones they visited).

The Fact-Finding Mission investigated the general conditions at the institutions it visited; the ability for the children to integrate into the local communities; the training provided to staff at the institutions; how education was provided to the children; what holiday arrangements were made (holiday placements with families were preferred); what pocket money or wages the children received; institutions' attitudes toward fostering; and employment prospects and after-care provided once the children left the institution.

It was clear even while in Australia and conducting inspections that Ross and his fellow committee members were critical of the very concept of child migration. They worked to dispel many myths about British child migrants (for example, that there were thousands of "war orphans" needing to come to Australia – this was not the case), and discussed new British attitudes to child welfare, which had begun to favour smaller cottage homes and foster care over the large institutions still common in Australia. Comments were made about the isolated nature of many of the institutions they visited, and criticisms were made about the nature of institutional care in Australia (*Lost Innocents*, p. 40). The Committee was also concerned about the lack of education and training of staff at the institutions.

The final report, known as the Ross Report, was highly critical of the child migration scheme as a whole, and of specific institutions. Five institutions came in for particular criticism: Dhurringile (Victoria), Bindoon (Western Australia), St John Bosco Boys' Town (Tasmania), Riverview Training Farm (Queensland) and the Methodist Children's Homes (South Australia), although Ross had also privately noted that "others could have easily be condemned" (*Lost Innocents*, p.40). The final report discussed the conversations they had with some of the child

migrants, which made it clear that the children were not as “settled” as Australian authorities had represented, and many of them “were disturbed by reason of separation from their parents” (*Child Migration to Australia: Report of a Fact-Finding Mission*, or the Ross Report, p.6).

The Australian government was so shocked at the contents of the Ross Report it would not agree to its publication until Australian officials conducted their own inspections. This happened in July 1956. While the Australian officials found minor issues to be corrected at Bindoon and Dhurringile, they were much more relaxed about what they found. There were also many comments that the perceptions of isolation were due to the Committee’s lack of understanding about distances in Australia – failing to appreciate the point being made about the closed nature of many of the institutions and the lack of agency from the children there to leave if they wished.

The *Empire Settlement Act* subsidy provisions were renewed for 1957, however this seems to have been done for diplomatic relations primarily, rather than the British Government signalling agreement with continuation of the child migration schemes. Coldry notes that after the Fact-Finding Mission, “almost immediately, the British Catholic ‘Rescue Societies’ terminated all plans to place their children in Australia. Other societies sent a few children each year until 1967 but essentially, child migration was over.” (*Good British Stock*, p.23).

While the Fact-Finding Mission did not officially determine the end of British child migration to Australia, it highlighted the large differences in thinking about child welfare between British and Australian government, and signalled the end of any large-scale child migration to Australia.

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Related Events

- [Visit of John Moss \(1951\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Castledare \(1934 - 1983\)](#)  
The Ross Fact-Finding Mission reported on conditions at Castledare to the British and Australian authorities.
- [Clontarf \(8 September 1901 - 1983\)](#)  
Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of British child migrants sent to Clontarf.
- [Tardun Farm School \(1928 - 2008\)](#)  
The Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of British child migrants sent to Tardun Farm School.  
Date: 1956 -
- [Seaside House, Coogee \(1931 - 1968\)](#)  
Seaside House at Coogee was one of the facilities of interest to the Ross Fact-Finding Mission.  
Date: 1956 -
- [Orana, the Peace Memorial Homes for Children \(1953 - 1988\)](#)
- [St John's Home for Boys \(c. 1924 - 1958\)](#)
- [Northcote Farm School \(1937 - 1979\)](#)
- [Fairbridge Farm School, Pinjarra \(1913 - 1981\)](#)  
The Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of British child migrants sent to Fairbridge Farm School, Pinjarra.
- [Nazareth House, Camberwell \(1929 - 1975\)](#)
- [Burton Hall Training Farm \(c. 1947 - 1967?\)](#)
- [Dhurringile Rural Training Farm \(1951 - 1964\)](#)
- [Murray-Dwyer Boys' Home \(1933 - 1970\)](#)
- [St Joseph's Girls' Home \(1900 - 1979\)](#)
- [Green Wood \(1951 - 1966\)](#)

- [Melrose \(1952 - 1982\)](#)
- [Methodist Children's Home \(1922 - 1959\)](#)
- [Big Brother Movement \(1925 - current\)](#)
- [Dr Barnardos Girls' Home, Burwood \(1938 - 1957\)](#)
- [Fairbridge Farm School, Molong \(1938 - 1973\)](#)
- [Riverview Training Farm \(1926 - 1956\)](#)
- [St Joseph's Home, Neerkol \(1885 - 1978\)](#)
- [St Vincent de Paul Orphanage \(1866 - 1975\)](#)
- [Methodist Children's Homes \(1924 - 1960\)](#)
- [Clarendon Children's Home \(1922 - 2004\)](#)
- [Boys' Town \(1945 - 1956\)](#)
- [Hagley Farm School \(1936 - 1976?\)](#)
- [Nazareth House, Geraldton \(1941 - 1979?\)](#)

Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] The Ross Fact-Finding Mission was interested in the welfare of British child migrants sent to Nazareth House.

- [Bindoon \(1936 - 1966\)](#)  
Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of British child migrants sent to Bindoon.
- [St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage \(1901 - 1971\)](#)
- [St Joseph's Preventorium \(1929 - 1976\)](#)
- [St Vincent's Foundling Home \(1914 - 1971\)](#)  
Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of children at St Vincent's Foundling Home.  
Date: 1956 -
- [Swan Homes \(1943 - 1959\)](#)  
Ross Fact-Finding Mission [British child migration] was interested in the welfare of children at Swan Homes.  
Date: 1956 -

#### Related Archival Items

- [Child Migration - General UK fact finding Delegation to visit Australia from 8/2/1956, National Archives of Australia \(1955 - 1957\)](#)
- [Child migration - visit to Australia by U.K. fact finding mission Feb 1956 re upbringing in Australia of migrant children unaccompanied by their parents, National Archives of Australia \(1955 - 1957\)](#)
- [UK fact finding mission 1956 part 2, National Archives of Australia \(1955 - 1956\)](#)
- [M3793 Fact Finding Mission on Child Migration \(1955 - 1956\)](#)

#### Related Legislation

- [Empire Settlement Act 1922, Parliament of the United Kingdom \(1922 - 1976\)](#)

#### Related Concepts

- [Child Migration \(1800s - 1970s\)](#)

## Resources

- Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, [Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report](#), March 2018

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