

East Arm Leprosarium

1955 – 1982

Other Names:

- East Arm Settlement
- Darwin Leprosarium
- East Arm Leprosy Hospital

Details

The East Arm Leprosarium opened in 1955 and replaced the Channel Island Leprosarium. Situated several kilometres south east of Darwin, it was run by the Northern Territory Administration and was staffed by nursing Sisters from the Catholic order, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Patients isolated at the Leprosarium included children as young as four years of age. Improvements in treatment and changing attitudes towards the disease led to the closing of East Arm Leprosarium in 1982, after which patients were treated in regular hospitals.

Plans for the building of a mainland based leprosarium to replace the unsuitable site on Channel Island were under consideration from as early as the 1930s. The possibility of building a new leprosarium on Melville Island was investigated and rejected in September 1950. In May 1951 the Deputy Director of Health, Dr S. Watford, officially announced the proposal for a new 'model institution' costing £100,000 to be located at East Arm on the mainland.

The new leprosarium at East Arm opened in 1955, with the first patients transferred from Channel Island on 1 August 1955. By September of that year 180 patients and staff had been moved.

Conditions at East Arm were a great improvement on Channel Island, with ready access to town water and electricity and telephone services. Increased numbers of staff, a doctor in regular attendance and improved leprosy treatments gave East Arm a more hopeful air than its predecessors.

One of the Sisters who worked at East Arm later described the conditions, saying that after a rough start in a settlement resembling a building site, the new location later became well set up:

In the end, however, thanks to the enlightened planning of the Commonwealth Health Department, a really beautiful settlement had come to life in the bushland. A big hospital block, a comfortable convent, chaplain's quarters, modern kitchen, brightly-painted cottages for non-hospitalised patients, fine school rooms for about thirty or so children, recreational facilities – nothing was forgotten. Lawns, flowers and tropical shrubs – the patients themselves were responsible for these.

The compulsory isolation and segregation of leprosy sufferers, however, remained government policy. In a 1957 administrative letter, Director of Health for Northern Territory Divisional Office, Dr Humphry stated that two healthy children born at East Arm to a married couple suffering from leprosy, were sent away to Garden Point Mission as 'Healthy infants were not permitted to remain' at the leprosarium.

Newspaper reports from the time revealed community attitudes to the disease had not improved, with one article in the NT News complaining that the leprosarium was 'too near' to Darwin and that leprosy patients had been seen attending the local theatre.

Dr John Hargrave, who was associated with the treatment of leprosy in the NT from the mid 1950s, became the Medical Superintendent of East Arm in 1959. At this time there were 153 patients at East Arm.

It is clear from newspaper reports of the time that children were still being sent to East Arm if they were discovered to have the disease. In 1963 a four year old boy from Batchelor was admitted to East Arm and the year before a schoolgirl from the same area had been admitted.

Other reports in papers from 1963 discussed the imprisonment of a young man from East Arm after he had attempted to sexually assault girls and boys at the settlement.

The Family Missionary Magazine *The Australian Evangel* from March 1963 reported that approximately 200 patients were living at East Arm and that 24 children attended the school there.

Notes from a Treasury Conference held in February 1965 show that there were 112 patients at East Arm and that this number was declining. Only a small number of patients lived permanently at the settlement and the average stay for others was 2 years.

Not much is known about life in the leprosarium, but in early 1969 a touring group of pop/rock music entertainers did a small afternoon charity show at the leprosarium before their Sunday evening performance in Darwin.

New treatments, curative Sulphone drugs and surgical reconstruction procedures to repair injuries caused by the disease, helped to inform new attitudes to, and understanding of, leprosy. During the 1970s the isolation policy was gradually phased out and patients at East Arm were allowed contact with friends and family from outside of the settlement.

In 1982 East Arm leprosarium was closed. From that time, patients with the disease were treated in regular hospitals.

Gallery



Buildings at the East Arm Leprosarium [altered from original title]

Description: This image shows various buildings at the East Arm Leprosarium.



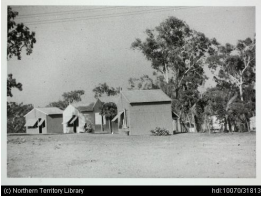
Leprosarium

Description: This image shows the Leprosarium at East Arm, the Catholic Church is on the right.



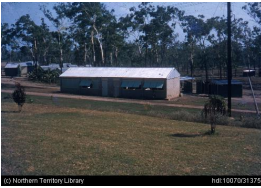
Leprosarium

Description: The description reads: Leprosarium, Darwin, opened August, 1955.



Houses

Description: This description states: Patients' houses at the leprosarium.



East Arm Leprosarium

Description: The description reads: East Arm Leprosarium. View of buildings.



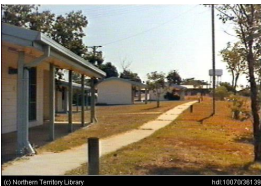
East Arm Leprosarium

Description: The description reads: East Arm Leprosarium. View of buildings.



East Arm Leprosarium

Description: This description reads: East Arm. Living quarters at the Leprosarium.



East Arm Leprosarium

Description: This description reads: East Arm Leprosarium. Living quarters, East Arm. This image was taken two years after its closure.



East Arm Leprosarium

Description: This description reads: East Arm Leprosarium. Older living quarters, East Arm. This image was taken two years after its closure.

More info

Chronology

- Mud Island Lazaret (1889 - 1931)
 - Channel Island Leprosarium (1931 - 1955)
- **East Arm Leprosarium (1955 – 1982)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Department of Health, Northern Territory Divisional Office, Australian Government \(1939 - 1978\)](#)
Date: 1955 - 1978
- [Department of Health, Northern Territory Government \(1978 - 1987\)](#)
Date: 1978 - 1982

Related Organisations

- [Garden Point Mission \(1940 - 1969\)](#)
Some healthy children of patients at the East Arm Leprosarium were transferred to the Garden Point Mission
- [Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart \(1885 - current\)](#)
The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred heart provided nursing Sisters who staffed the East Arm Leprosarium.
- [Department of Health, Australian Government \(1921 - 1987\)](#)
The Commonwealth Department of Health oversaw the management of leprosy in Australia.

Resources

- [Darwin Leprosarium](#), Monument Australia, No date
- Kettle, Ellen, *Health Services in the Northern Territory - a History 1824-1970 Volume 1*, 1991

Other Resources



Title: Northern Territory - Channel Island, Station for People with Leprosy- East Arm Settlement - Staff (1961 - 1966) [altered from original title]

Type: Image

Date: 1961 - 1966

[Details](#)

Records

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

Records

- [Northern Territory - East Arm settlement - General PART 1 \(1949 - 1960\)](#)
- [Leprosy - East Arm Settlement - admissions discharges births and deaths \(1950 - 1963\)](#)
- [Leprosy East Arm Settlement - Admissions Births and Deaths PART 2 \(1959 - 1962\)](#)
- [Leprosy - East Arm Settlement Admissions Births & Deaths \(1964 - 1965\)](#)
- [Northern Territory - Channel Island, Leper Station - East Arm Settlement - Staff \(1961 - 1966\)](#)
- [Leprosarium, East Arm Darwin \(1937 - 1967\)](#)
- [Leprosarium at East Arm, Darwin \(Formerly of Channell \[sic\] Island\) - Entitlements of inmates to pensions and allowances \(1944 - 1969\)](#)
- [Northern Territory - East Arm settlement - General PART 2 \(1959 - 1965\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/east-arm-leprosarium-6/>