

FOUNDING BOYS' TOWN



The earliest confirmed image of Boys' Town residents, from 1946.



*Early Boys' Town carers
from the Missionaries of
the Sacred Heart.*



Movie poster for Boys' Town

It has been 70 years in May 2015 since the first boys came to Boys' Town, Glenorchy, soon after the purchase of the property by the Archbishop of Hobart. Why did the Archbishop call it Boys' Town? And how did Boys' Town begin here?

Fr Edward J Flanagan founded the original Boys' Town orphanage in 1917 in Omaha, Nebraska, USA. His story inspired the 1938 MGM film *Boys' Town*, with Spencer Tracy as Fr Flanagan attempting to 'reform' bad boys, through trust and friendship, and setting up a sanctuary, Boys' Town, where the boys had their own government, rules and punishments.

The film was popular, won Spencer Tracy an Academy Award and launched the career of Mickey Rooney. *Boys' Town* was recommended and promoted by the Catholic Church as an inspiring film.

In Sutherland, Sydney, NSW, parish priest Fr Thomas Dunlea was looking after a small number of boys during the Depression. Inspired by the movie, he opened Boys' Town Engadine in August 1939 in a condemned four-bedroom rented cottage, telling the *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter 'This will be the second venture of its kind in the world. In my parish we have the big unemployed camp at Engadine with up to 40 families, and I have seen vividly how necessary it is for the establishment of such a town for boys.'

A year later he had over 30 children in the house and was raising funds by selling from a roadside stall. Sutherland Shire Council threatened closure because of health and sanitation concerns. With the publicity of his eviction fight with the council, donations and public support grew.

After nine weeks in tents at the National Park, a cottage and seven acres were donated for a permanent home.

Fr Dunlea's efforts in Sydney inspired several interstate versions. In the public mind any Catholic boys orphanage could be referred to as a 'boys town.'

The Archdiocese of Hobart had wanted to found a Catholic orphanage for boys for many years. As early as 1930 Archbishop Hayden announced he had decided the legacy of his predecessor, Archbishop Barry, would 'form the nucleus of a fund for the erection of a boy's orphanage.'



In January 1945 the Archbishop announced 'We are to have our own Boys' Town' and continued:

Shattered homes, war tragedies, social diseases of all kinds, have deprived and are depriving many boys of a home, of parents, of reasonable opportunities to make a success of their lives as citizens, as home builders, as Christians. For them we must do something, here and now.

He chose *Grantleigh*, 56 acres on Tolosa Street, Glenorchy, once owned by Alfred Sawyer, orchardist and local politician for 30 years before his death in April 1918. After his widow, Salome Letitia Sawyer, died in 1936 the 'Grantleigh Estate' was advertised for sale:

35 acres orchard with good varieties of fruit bearing about 5000 bushels per year, 10 acres grass paddocks and the balance light bush. Stone and weatherboard homestead of 10 rooms, surrounded by nice gardens and grounds planted... outbuildings large apple-house, stable, garage, cowshed, work shop, blacksmith shop, numerous sheds.

Tranmere orchardist, Robert John Chandler, purchased the estate. His father Robert John Chandler Senior, was also an orchardist, at Bellerive. Robert and his wife Margaret lived at *Grantleigh* until Margaret died 8 November 1943. Soon after, he decided to leave the

business and began negotiations to sell *Grantleigh* to the Trustees of the Property of the Roman Catholic Church in Tasmania.

In late 1944, Archbishop Tweedy felt he was close to securing Grantleigh, and was considering who would manage it. He invited the Franciscan Fathers, but their Provincial Fr Francis Solanus McNamara declined 20 December 1944.

Archbishop Tweedy then extended the invitation to Fr Ciantar, Provincial of the Salesians of Don Bosco at Sunbury, writing on Boxing Day, 1944:

Dear Rev Fr

I have just secured a property which I propose to use for a Home for Senior Orphan and needy Boys from the age of nine and upwards.

At present we have no Home for boys in Tasmania and the need is very pressing. In the near future I hope to establish a Junior House, to control which arrangements have already been made with the Nazareth Sisters.

I would be happy to have your Fathers set up a Foundation here for the purpose of controlling this Senior Home, for I am confident that you create just that spirit which I consider essential for such a Home.

Fr Ciantar replied, on New Year's Day 1945:

I appreciate your regard for our Society and I only wish I had the men to accede to your request. As it is I am afraid I shall have to decline the offer unless you can see your way to give me a little time in which to write to my superiors in Turin to see if they will send us help. In a year or two I shall have a few more Australian confreres ready for action.

Manpower during wartime was scarce throughout the economy, even in religious orders, and transport and communication with Europe difficult.

The Archbishop knew he had to find a short-term solution, at least, and wrote to Fr J M Kerrins MSC, Provincial of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart at Kensington, asking if he would permit the use of Fr Paul Diedrichs in the interim. Fr Kerrins had no objections, but warned 'I have no idea of Father Paul's capabilities in this regard and the thought did come to me that his nationality might be a handicap.'



Fr Paul Gustav Diedrichs was German and part of the Catholic missionaries of the Sacred Heart who evangelised the Sulka people at Guma, Wide Bay, 12 hours by boat from Rabaul, the capital of the island of New Britain (now part of Papua New Guinea).

There had always been suspicion of the loyalties of the German missionaries in New Guinea. In 1937 they were accused by the Anglicans of 'introducing politics with their religious teaching' by saying the British mandate would end and the German government would take over once more.

During the Second World War all German nationals faced examination and possible internment in Australia. January 1942 was a period of panic and disaster, as superior Japanese forces swept through Malaya, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. Bombing raids began at Rabaul 4 January and on 20 January 100 Japanese aircraft bombing Rabaul were faced by only two anti-aircraft guns, and an RAAF squadron of 12 planes, half of which were lost or damaged within ten minutes. The Japanese fleet of two aircraft carriers and a dozen ships and transports captured Rabaul 23 January, and

the remaining Australian forces began a retreat through the jungle.

Fr Diedrichs was taken by the Australian forces at Kiep, 24 January 1942. He was evacuated by flying boat to Townsville 26 January and transferred to the Gaythorne Internment Camp, Brisbane, thence to Liverpool Internment Camp, Sydney where he was processed 2 March 1942 and released to the Coogee Catholic Mission.

He was later sent to Hobart, by March 1944, where he was discovered by Archbishop Tweedy. Two more German Sacred Heart missionaries were enlisted to help with Boys' Town – Bernard Berlemann and John Brand. *The Examiner* later reported 'they were doing supply work in Tasmania... and just beginning to learn English.' Sr Carmel Hall, former Archivist for the Archdiocese of Hobart, called them internee priests: 'For a year or so they were permitted to minister in Tasmania under supervision and had to report to the Police Station each day.'

Settlement between the solicitors for the Archdiocese and those of Robert Chandler was effected 14 March

Grantleigh before the Archdiocese purchased the property.



1946 aerial photograph of Grantleigh and orchards. Tolosa Street is at bottom right.

1945. Although Fr Joseph Lee SDB reports the price as £3159 in his history of Dominic College, the statement of settlement shows the Archdiocese purchased the property for £3350. There had been a £200 deposit and a few pounds adjustment for rates and sundries.

The State Government Department of Agriculture helped the Archdiocese with agricultural advice. J T Gemmell, Senior Agricultural Officer, investigated the productive potential of the property and recommended removal of 'uneconomic apple orchards' from the 24 acres between Tolosa Street and *Grantleigh*.

About half of this land was then reserved for a sports field, cricket practice facilities and pavilion. The balance, adjacent to and watered by the creek from the reservoir was considered to be ideal for cultivation for vegetables, crops and temporary pastures.

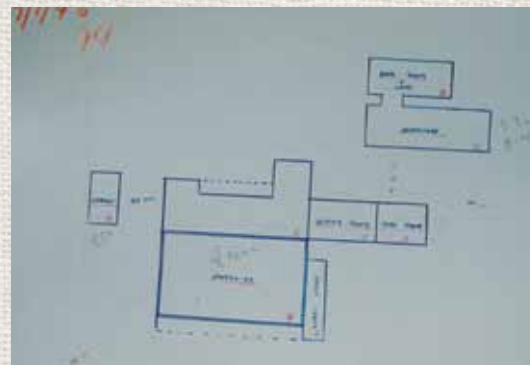
The northwest corner of the property between the drive and Humphreys Rivulet, the lowest land on the site, was recommended for poultry, chickens or turkeys. The western slope between Grantleigh and the Rivulet had been ploughed and was readied for sowing vegetables and fodder crops. An apiary was suggested for the southern end of this area, beginning with an experimental two hives but it was thought 20 hives could be viable. The higher area to the south of Grantleigh was reserved for future building – this is where the new Boys' Town buildings, the dormitory and the chapel would be erected. The rest of the land to the south, about 11 acres, was bush and too steep for any use.

The Home began during May 1945. There are some differences in dates offered. School honorary historian,

Basil Fox, wrote the foundation date was 13 May 1945. Fr Joseph Lee SDB quotes from the first annual report June 1946 which states:

Boys Town opened its doors to needy youth on May 1st 1945. By the conversion of army huts provision for 24 boys was made available. Additions to the residence at a later date provided four extra beds. During the year 27 boys were admitted to the Home; three were discharged, leaving 24 inmates on June 30th 1946.

The Archbishop purchased army huts from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission – one large hut and a 'shower and ablutions shed' from the Sandy Bay rifle range, as well as a canteen hut and a sleeping hut from the Self's Point Australian Army Camp for a total of £380.



Building permission from the Glenorchy Council was applied for 2 May 1945 and some rudimentary sketches (shown above) showed the plans for the dining room to be attached to Grantleigh, and a dormitory and showers



block nearby. These huts were gradually added and fitted into the complex.

The property's original residence had nine rooms and accommodated 12 boys. The additional dormitory and other extensions allowed for 24. There were 16 boys aged from 5 to 15 years at the end of 1945. They attended school outside Boys' Town, the younger at St Therese's Convent School, Moonah, and the older at St Peter's Christian Brothers School in Hobart.

To celebrate Boys' Town's first Christmas in 1945, the Catholic Womens League arranged a tea party.

Journalists complimented the party reporting 'the tables were a picture, the daintiest of cakes, sandwiches,

savories, sweets and fruit being served. The centrepiece was a large, beautifully decorated cake. At each table was a bugle, which the children used to the fullest extent, everyone entering into the real Christmas party spirit.'

Party guests included 'Frs Paul, Joseph, Halpin, Weigal (ex-POW); Brs John and Bernard' reported *The Standard*. These six joined together in a 'sextette' for carols in an evening of music and entertainment by boys, women and religious. As they gathered round a brightly decorated Christmas tree, Father Christmas arrived and handed gifts from the tree to all.

This was the only Christmas the Germans celebrated at Boys' Town. Fr John Brennan and the Salesians arrived November 1946.

Taken from the rear on the foundations of what was to become the Boys' Town building, this image from 1948 shows the three large 'huts' adjacent to Grantleigh.

BOYS FROM THE FOUNDING YEAR OF BOYS' TOWN



Colin Roy Jordan (Boys' Town 1945-1948) with his mother-in-law in 1956.

Three brothers, Lyell, Kenneth and Colin Roy Jordan, arrived at Boys' Town 17 May 1945 and their story is another strand of struggle and heartbreak.

Their mother had left her husband with six children at their place in South Street, Bellerive, but their father, Alfred Jordan was

not up to the task. He asked Rev Fr E P Hanlon of Corpus Christi Parish to intercede with Archbishop Tweedy, to help by taking the boys into Boys' Town. They'd been passed fit by a local doctor, and were accepted, and he promised to pay £1 a month each.

The boys coped for the first few years, but by 1948 they wanted to go home, and began getting into trouble at school.

Mr Jordan was unemployed and on the Public Works and did not pay the fees due for the boys. Fr John Brennan, Boys' Town Rector, believed he was 'fond of drink' and was in dispute with Mr Jordan: 'Up to date

you have paid next to nothing for any of your boys here. That is an injustice that cannot go on.'

The young Colin Roy Jordan felt lonely, and wanted to go home. He complained of pains in his side which the school dismissed - Fr Brennan thought he was making it up: 'he wants to return to hospital where he fell in love with the nurse!' Colin Roy got into a physical confrontation with Fr William Cole, and subsequently absconded in 1948. He returned to Boys' Town, but was rejected. Colin Roy ended up at Ashley Boys Home in Launceston, and was in trouble again there, trying to get home, with escalating consequences.

However, by 1956 he had fallen in love and married and with the support of his wife's family turned the corner. His daughter, Donna Clarke says 'He raised five children, was a hard worker, had a great sense of humour and stayed on the straight and narrow.'

He died a few years ago, and the children are only now putting together the history of their father, who when speaking of his childhood only told them he went to a private school.