



The Salesian Society had taken over Boys' Town Home in November 1946 and under Fr John Brennan's leadership, established a school for the children. Thirty boys lived and studied in *Grantleigh* and its attached huts and amenities block. Fr Brennan wanted to build a modern school and expand the accommodation at Boys' Town.

After the Second World War, the Commonwealth Government planned for a huge increase in immigration, to develop and protect the Australian economy and offered free and assisted passages to approved migrants.

Commonwealth Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell said, 'As a principle, the Government had decided to contribute on a £ for £ basis to any organisation, religious or secular, prepared to do something to help rear British children in Australia.' (*Mercury* 19 July 1946)

Child migration was conducted through voluntary organisations using the existing assisted passage schemes, where children under 14 were offered free passage. The States and Commonwealth agreed to each contribute one third of the capital expenditure required for accommodation and facilities for child migrants.

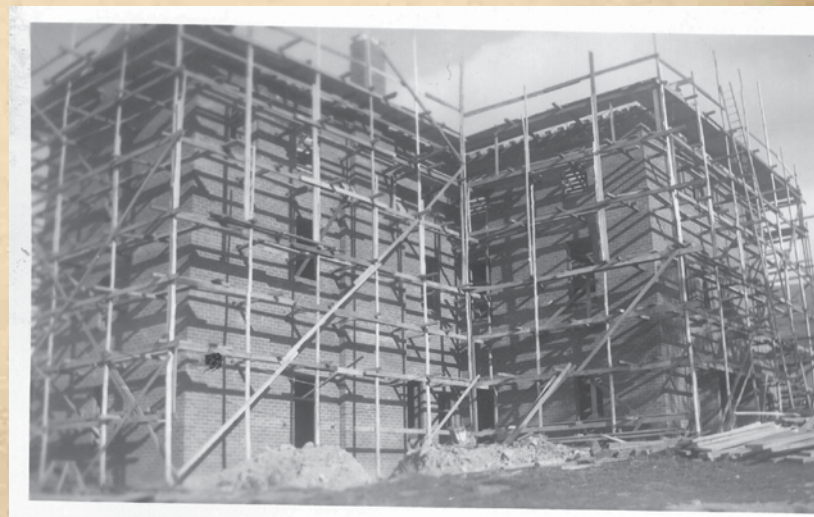
After Fr Brennan met with the Secretary of the Tasmanian Department of Tourist and Immigration, Monday 28 June 1948 for discussion and advice, he wrote to the Tasmanian Government Immigration Officer setting out the Salesian plans:

It is proposed to extend the buildings at Boys' Town, Glenorchy, Tasmania, by building and equipping a block of dormitories, classrooms,

and all conveniences to house fifty boys according to plans and specifications submitted to you, estimated to cost forty thousand pounds (£40,000). We wish to accept 40 British migrant boys, Catholics, between the ages of nine and twelve years. We guarantee them a thorough training, intellectual, physical and moral, and we will have them prepared for and placed in trades at the end of their training.

The Tasmanian Government approved Fr Brennan's plan in December 1948 and advised tentatively that Boys' Town would receive two-thirds of 80% of the cost of the building (since it catered for 40 child migrants out of accommodation for 50 children). Fr Brennan got to work raising additional money from the community, and with progressive payments from the Government increased the size of the building and capacity of accommodation.

The UK Home Office, however, was opposed to barrack-style institutional care for underprivileged children





Above(L-R): Opening
the Boys' Town
Building in 1951;
first photo of the
arrival of child
migrants in 1952;
Boys' Town dining
room; Fr John
Brennan SDB

and preferred to promote family-based foster care. The UK was reluctant to send 'orphans' across the world to another country if they were to be isolated and regimented, and delayed the approval of Boys' Town while child migrant care was discussed.

The Commonwealth Government pointed out that the subsidy was for accommodation of child migrants, not for classrooms and chapels and tried to reduce funds to Boys' Town accordingly.

The Salesians were insulted that they had to justify their plans, were opposed to compromising the 'preventive' system and were angry the Government was breaking its contract by withholding part payment of building construction.

The arguments continued for three years until all parties were exhausted. Eventually Boys' Town was approved by the UK a week before the official opening of the new Boys' Town Building on Sunday 4 November 1951.

Fr William Nicol, Director of the Federal Catholic Immigration Committee, was in charge of Catholic migrant recruitment and his London office organised the parties of Catholic children for Australian Catholic institutions. He had been in direct contact with Fr Brennan at Boys' Town since 1948 and had kept him apprised of the supply of child migrants. Fr Nicol saw each of the boys at some stage and in many cases interviewed them personally before selection.

The British child migrants for Boys' Town arrived in two parties. The first, of 12 boys, sailed on the *Ormonde* in May, disembarked some children in Fremantle and arrived at Melbourne 5 June 1952. The Archbishop of Hobart, Dr Tweedy, welcomed the children – he was en route to Port Pirie for an Episcopal Conference – and Fr Cole looked after them before their departure on the *Taroona* for Devonport and Launceston at 4pm later that day. Two of the children for Boys' Town, Jack Peebles

and John Stevenson, had further quarantine procedures to undergo and were held back.

The first ten boys arrived in Tasmania Friday 6 June 1952. The *Taroona* berthed at Beauty Point early Friday morning and the party was bussed to Launceston where refreshments were supplied by the Catholic Women's League before they boarded the boat train to Hobart. At Glenorchy the boys were met by Fr Brennan. The Australian boys living at Boys' Town formed a guard of honour on the steps and the entire school lined up in front of the doors for their first group photograph.

In the interim Fr Nicol was recruiting more child migrants in England. He interviewed Peter Allsopp, of Nazareth House, Bristol, 29 June 1952 and wrote down 'good type.' He had 27 boys ready in August and they joined a thousand other immigrants on the *Ormonde* for its last voyage to Australia. David Despard recalls

There were hundreds of people at the wharf to see family and friends off. As I approached the gangway I looked back for the last time. There was no one there to say goodbye to us. My friends and I got on the boat and went up on top of the high deck. There were streamers blowing off the boat from top to bottom.

They arrived at Boys' Town, Glenorchy 26 September. There never was a 40th boy. The child migrants were to make up half the school students until 1956 when Boys' Town became Savio College and day students were enrolled.

