

# Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh

1883 – 1981

**Other Names:**

- Oakleigh Convent Juvenile School
- St Margaret's
- Private Reformatory for Roman Catholic Girls

## Details

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The Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh, was established in 1883. It was also known as the Private Reformatory for Roman Catholic Girls. The Convent first received girls and women from about 14 years, but in later years it accommodated girls from the age of 11. The Convent of the Good Shepherd was demolished in 1986, and the site became part of the Chadstone Shopping Centre.

The Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh was established in 1883 due to overcrowding at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Abbotsford.

It was initially established as a Reformatory School for adolescent girls. The Reformatory initially received girls aged approximately fourteen years and women. In later years young girls from the age of eleven were accommodated.

Writing about the Reformatory in 1891, the Secretary of the Department described the institution as an 'assisted' school, 'the authorities of the convent being subsidised by the Government to the extent of five shillings per week, paid quarterly, with an allowance for service outfit on going to a situation'.

Girls at the Reformatory were trained for domestic service, working at sewing and laundry, and also assisting in gardening and dairy-work.

An article from 1908 published in the Catholic newspaper the *Advocate*, was an opportunity for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to showcase the 'extensive additions and improvements' which had recently been completed at Oakleigh. This article purported to give readers some idea of the Home at Oakleigh and 'the benefits it confers on the community at large'. It pointed out that the Oakleigh institution differed from the other homes run by the Good Shepherd Sisters, in that

*its chief aim is to train girls for domestic service, the Government sending them there to be fitted for household and dairying duties. Perhaps a young girl has already got off the track, and, coming under the benign and maternal influence of these truly 'ministering angels', is placed in the way of earning an honest living and, it may be, of rearing a family ... Whilst, of course, the girls are engaged for the greater part of the day in laundry work, dairying, etc, the nuns take care to cultivate a taste for reading and self improvement ... A scene of activity and quiet content was to be met with on all sides, and one could not help congratulating the nuns on the wonderful order and discipline to be met with at every turn. Little wonder is it that the largest houses are customers of the institution, as good value is there obtained.*

*Indeed, as regards frocking (children's clothes), some of the largest Melbourne firms deal exclusively with the Oakleigh institution, so satisfactorily are their orders executed there.*

The article went on to describe the sleeping accommodation at Oakleigh:

*A visit to the dormitories reveals the fact that the health and comfort of the inmates has been carefully provided for. There are spring mattresses, scrupulously clean counterpanes, sheets, blankets and pillows on iron bedsteads, and so polished are the floors that one could not help letting fall the remark that it would be convenient to take meals thereon.*

Jeanette Barnacle, who came to the Oakleigh Convent in 1950, worked ironing linen in the commercial laundry. She told her story to a journalist from *The Age* in 2003. He wrote:

*Mrs Barnacle can all but hear the bells that woke the women for prayers at 6am. She gestures to show you the awkward fit of rough calico underwear and screws her face at the memory of lumpy porridge for breakfast. Toil at the gas iron was interrupted each midday 'to do stations of the cross and then bread and dripping and back to work'.*

In response to Barnacle's story, the Good Shepherd Provincialate issued a statement, that the Sisters 'acknowledge and regret instances of injustice and harm ... in our former institutions'; and that they were committed to promoting healing and reconciliation, as well as ongoing contact with former residents of their institutions.

In April 1956, St Margaret's Juvenile School at Oakleigh was declared an approved juvenile school under the Children's Welfare Act 1954.

In March 1960, the 'Villa Mareta' section of the Convent was declared an approved children's home under the Children's Welfare Act 1958.

In 1960, the newly established Social Welfare Department designated the Good Shepherd Convents at Abbotsford and Oakleigh as Youth Training Centres to receive young offenders. These Youth Training Centres, or Juvenile Schools, run by the Sisters were the only institutions of their type in Victoria to receive 'voluntary placements'. Merritt reported in 1958 that of the 300 girls housed in the Good Shepherd schools, only 18 were wards of state. The rest had been sent to the Sisters by their families, on account of their 'unmanageable, unsatisfactory moral behaviour'. In Merritt's report, the school is referred to as St Margaret's Juvenile School.

The Convent of the Good Shepherd was demolished in 1986, and the site became part of the Chadstone Shopping Centre.

## Gallery



**Oakleigh Convent and Church**

**Description:** Photo of the opening of the chapel at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh.



### Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh: Chapel and Orchard

**Description:** The postcard shows the view towards the Chapel and Orchard of the Convent of the Good Shepherd on Castlebar Road, Chadstone.

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### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Copy of a view of the chapel and the convent at the Convent of the Good Shepherd Oakleigh.

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### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Photo of the chapel and the convent at the Convent of the Good Shepherd Oakleigh.

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### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Photo of the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh, taken from across Dandenong Road. The caption reads "Oakleigh Convent. View taken from a tree across Dandenong Rd. 1931. (White advertisement Board taken down later)"

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### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Photo of the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh.

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### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Photo of the Convent of the Good Shepherd Oakleigh.

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### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Photo of the Priest's house at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh.

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### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Photo of the interior of the chapel at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh.



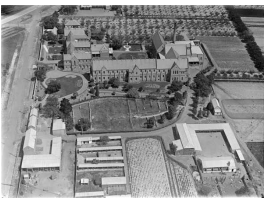
### Oakleigh Convent and Church

**Description:** Photo of the interior of the chapel at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh.



### Dairy Herd: Convent of the Good Shepherd Oakleigh

**Description:** View of the dairy herd at the Convent of the Good Shepherd Oakleigh, with the convent buildings in the background.



### Oakleigh Convent

**Description:** Aerial photograph



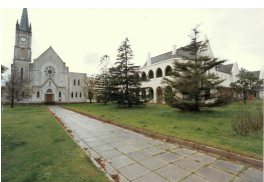
### Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh

**Description:** One of a collection of photos taken in December 1985 by the Gandel Group, prior to the demolition of the Convent buildings at Chadstone. The photos were presented in an album and given to Malvern Council as a permanent record of this historic site.



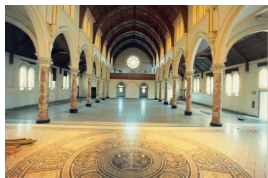
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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Sisters of the Good Shepherd \(1863 - current\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Convent of the Good Shepherd, Abbotsford \(1863 - 1974\)](#)  
The Convent at Oakleigh was established due to overcrowding at the Reformatory and Convent at Abbotsford.
- [Government Reformatory for Protestant Girls \(1864? - 1893\)](#)

#### Related Legislation

- [The Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864, Victoria \(1864 - 1888\)](#)  
The Reformatory at the Convent of the Good Shepherd in Oakleigh was established under the provisions of the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864.

## Resources

- Kovesi, Catherine, [Pitch Your Tents on Distant Shores: a history of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Tahiti](#), 2006
- Wilson, Pearl M., *Broadway and beyond: the story of Sacred Heart Parish, Oakleigh 1888-1988*, 1988
- Davis, Donna with Amy Willesee, *Sins of the mothers: a memoir of abandonment, love and redemption*, 2006
- Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools, [Report of the Secretary and Inspector for the year ... / Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools.](#), 1896 - 1924. *Relevance:* Mentioned in reports dated 1896-1924
- Campbell, Sandra, [Submission no 423 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2004
- [Proposed New Convent at Oakleigh](#), The Argus, 4 March 1882
- Victoria. Children's Welfare Department and Reformatory Schools, [Report of the Secretary / Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools](#), 1887 - 1895. *Relevance:* Mentioned in reports dated 1888-1895
- [Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh \(1883-1981\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh

## Records

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

### Records held by other organisations

- [Good Shepherd Archive collection of records of provision of residential care in Victoria \(1863 - c. 1981\)](#)
- [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)

- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)

Item B535 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Convent of the Good Shepherd, Oakleigh

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You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/convent-of-the-good-shepherd-oakleigh-5/>