

The 'Nelson'

1868 – 1876

Details

The *Nelson* was a hulk (ship) anchored off Williamstown, Hobson Bay. From 1868, it housed boys aged ten who had been sentenced under the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act of 1864. By 1872, the vessel housed 383 boys. It was abandoned in 1876 when the boys were transferred to the Bendigo Benevolent Asylum Industrial School, Sandhurst, and later to Sunbury Industrial School.

The hulk *Nelson* was the site of one of the industrial schools established in Victoria following the passage of the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864. It was designated as a training ship for boys aged ten or over. It was anchored off Williamstown.

The *Nelson* was one of four ships used as industrial schools in Hobson's Bay, Victoria: *Sir Harry Smith*, the *Nelson*, the *Deborah* and the *Success*, eventually housed approximately 500 boys.

The fitting-out of the *Nelson* took place in 1868. By 1872 the vessel housed 383 boys. It was abandoned on 9 August 1876 when it was considered an unsuitable environment for 'either the industrial or moral training of boys who are not expressly designed for a seafaring life'.

The boys were transferred to the Bendigo Benevolent Asylum Industrial School, Sandhurst and later to Sunbury Industrial School.

In 1871, the trainee sailors aboard the *Nelson* played a role in the first trials of the new iron-clad warship, the *Cerberus*, which had entered Port Phillip Bay for the first time in April of that year. The *Cerberus* travelled to Geelong with boys from the *Nelson* joining its crew, as well as the *Nelson's* band who provided entertainment on a number of occasions during the *Cerberus's* three week stay in Geelong.

As The *Nelson* was a training ship, the boys followed naval routine. Their strict daily routine included doing their laundry on Wednesday mornings and Religious Instruction on Thursdays (Anglican in the morning and Catholic in the afternoon). Hours of schooling ranged from between six hours 45 minutes one week to nine hours the next. They sat at desks and had access to maps, blackboards, books and slates.

Their uniform consisted of a white jumper bound in blue with their number on the back, white pants, a flannel shirt and a cloth cap with the letters NTS with their number on it as well. The number was used to identify boys when they absconded or came to the attention of authorities when on shore leave. They slept in hammocks and the older boys had to wake for two duty watches.

The *Nelson* was criticised in the report of the Royal Commission on Industrial and Reformatory Schools in 1872, which called for the 'training ship' to be closed, declaring:

...a ship ... is not ... a fitting place for either the industrial or moral training of boys who are not expressly designed for a sea-faring life. The associations connected with ship life also induce, in the majority of them,

a unsettled and roving disposition, quite at variance with them afterwards betaking themselves to steady industry on shore.

George Oliphant Duncan believed that as only a small number of the boys became sailors, it would be a much better use of public money to instruct them in 'agricultural and other rural avocations' so that they could find employment in country areas after leaving school. They would then add to the productive labour force of the colony.

Gallery



Glass negative - HMVS Nelson, Williamstown, Victoria, Apr 1898

Description: This image shows the bow and figurehead of the training ship HMVS Nelson tied up at the wharf on the day it was auctioned.



HMS Nelson in dry dock, Williamstown, Victoria ca.1884 [picture]

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Colony of Victoria \(1864 - 1887\)](#)

Related Legislation

- [The Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864, Victoria \(1864 - 1888\)](#)
The Nelson was established under the provisions of the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864.

Related Organisations

- [Reformatory for Boys \(1864 - 1893\)](#)
- [The 'Deborah' \(1864 - 1873?\)](#)
- [Sunbury Industrial School \(1865 - 1880?\)](#)
- [The 'Sir Harry Smith' \(1865 - 1873\)](#)
- [Bendigo Benevolent Asylum Industrial School \(1868 - 1885\)](#)
- [The 'Success' \(1868 - 1873?\)](#)

Resources

- Swain, Shurlee, *The Victorian Charity Network in the 1890s*, 1976
- Jaggs, Donella, *Neglected and criminal: foundations of child welfare legislation in Victoria*, 1986

- Victoria. Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline., [*Report \(No.3\) of the Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline: Industrial and Reformatory Schools*](#), 1872
- Golding, Frank, [*Lost & Found: State Children in Victoria*](#), Frank Golding: author, researcher, historian and consultant specialising in child welfare, 27 July 2017
- [*The Sanitary Condition of Industrial Schools*](#), The Argus, 1 April 1872

Records

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

Records held by other organisations

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
 - [Victorian Naval Logs \(1865 - 1876\)](#)
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