

# Apprenticeship

1860s – 1960s

## Details

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Apprenticeship was the practice of sending children in institutions or foster care into placements with employers once they were too old to attend school. It was not a trade apprenticeship as such, and generally meant children were sent to live in a private home to work as a farm labourer (for boys) or a domestic servant (for girls). The employer agreed to provide accommodation, food, and medical attention, if required. Apprenticed wards earned wages, a proportion of which was usually banked in trust and a proportion of which covered the cost of their clothing, and were supervised by their employers and inspected by welfare authorities.

In Tasmania, the earliest child apprentices came from the Queen's Asylum. According to the Queen's Asylum Act 1861, children could be apprenticed between the ages of 12 and 18 to an employer who was a 'fit and proper person'. The employer had to provide adequate food, accommodation, clothing, and medical care. Apprentices who did not work as the employer wished could be brought before two Justices of the Peace who, in extreme cases, could send the apprentice to a house of correction or gaol.

After 1896, when the Tasmanian government established the Neglected Children's Department, the Secretary of that Department and its successors signed an agreement with the apprentice's employer. The agreement stated that, in exchange for the apprentice's labour, the employer would provide clothing, accommodation, food, and medical attention, if required, as well as a small wage. The Department banked half of the wage and gave it to the apprentice at the age of 21. Most children's Homes also followed this procedure. Apprentices who absconded or misbehaved in other ways might be sent to the Boys' Training School, if boys, or the Magdalen Home, if girls, but gaol was no longer an option.

In South Australia during the mid-nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century the government and many voluntary organisations arranged for children under their care who had reached school leaving age to be apprenticed. This was regarded as a cheaper alternative to boarding out because no subsidy was paid to the carer. The practice however was open to great exploitation by the employer.

In New South Wales, after World War One the State Children's Relief Department preferred to place its wards in trade apprenticeships, and few children were apprenticed as domestic servants. Aboriginal wards, however, were apprenticed until the 1960s, usually for less pay than white children.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Related Events

- [Royal Commission into Charitable Institutions, Tasmania \(1871\)](#)

#### Related Glossary Terms

- [Homefinder \(1890 - 1920s\)](#)

### Related Legislation

- [Apprenticeship Act 1828, New South Wales \(1828 - 1844\)](#)
- [Apprentices and Servants 1837, Tasmania \(1837 - 1958\)](#)
- [Apprenticing of the Children of the Queen's Orphan Schools 1838, Tasmania \(1838 - 1861\)](#)
- [Apprentices and Servants 1840, Tasmania \(1840 - 1852\)](#)
- [Apprenticeship Act 1844, New South Wales \(1844 - 1894\)](#)
- [Apprenticeship Act 1851, New South Wales \(1851 - 1901\)](#)
- [Servants and Apprentices' Act 1852, Tasmania \(1852 - 1854\)](#)
- [The Master and Servant Act 1854, Tasmania \(1854 - 1856\)](#)
- [The Master and Servant Act 1856, Tasmania \(1856 - 1986\)](#)
- [Queen's Asylum Act 1861, Tasmania \(1861 - 1934\)](#)
- [Destitute Children Act 1866, New South Wales \(1866 - 1901\)](#)
- [The Master and Servant Act 1882, Tasmania \(1882 - 1938\)](#)
- [The Master and Servant Act 1884, Tasmania \(1884 - 1938\)](#)
- [The Master and Servant Act 1887, Tasmania \(1887 - 1938\)](#)
- [Apprentices Act 1894, New South Wales \(1894 - 1901\)](#)
- [State Children Relief Act 1896, New South Wales \(1896 - 1901\)](#)
- [Apprentices Act 1901, New South Wales \(1901 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection Act 1909, New South Wales \(1909 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection Amending Act 1915, New South Wales \(1915 - 1969\)](#)
- [Juvenile Migrants Apprenticeship Act 1923, New South Wales \(1923 - 1926\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection \(Amendment\) Act 1936, New South Wales \(1936 - 1969\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection \(Amendment\) Act 1940, New South Wales \(1940 - 1969\)](#)
- [The Master and Servant Act 1942, Tasmania \(1942 - 1958\)](#)
- [Child Welfare \(Amendment\) Act 1966, New South Wales \(1966 - 1987\)](#)

### Related Organisations

- [Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1833 - 1879\)](#)
- [State Children's Relief Board \(1881 - 1923\)](#)
- [Our Boys' Home \(1890 - 1945\)](#)
- [Warangesda Dormitory \(1893 - 1912\)](#)
- [Brewarrina Aboriginal Station Dormitory \(c. 1897 - c. 1940\)](#)

### Related Archival Series

- [Register of Children Apprenticed from the Asylum, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1860 - 1886\)](#)
- [Register of Masters of Children Apprenticed, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1860 - 1884\)](#)
- [Indentures of Apprenticeships between the Board and Employees, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1870 - 1880\)](#)

## Resources

- Stolen Generations' Testimonies Foundation, [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#), 2009
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Index 1817-1942](#), No date
- Department of Justice, [History](#), Children's Court of New South Wales, 2012
- Evans, Caroline, *State girls: their lives as apprentices*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association: papers and proceedings, 1994
- [Charitable Institutions](#), Launceston Examiner, 9 December 1871
- Tasmania: Royal Commission on Charitable Institutions, *Report of the Commissioners : together with the evidence taken, and various returns*, December 1871

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