

Catholic Girls' Reformatory, Kapunda

1897 – 1909

Other Names:

- Kapunda Girls' Reformatory
- St John's Reformatory, Kapunda

Details

The Catholic Girls' Reformatory at Kapunda was established in 1897 to house Catholic girls from the Girls' Reformatory at Edwardstown. It was run by the Sisters of St Joseph. The Reformatory was closed in 1909 and the remaining girls were transferred to the Redruth Girls' Reformatory at Burra.

During the 1870s and early 1880s Sister Mechtilde Woods and a colleague from the St Joseph's convent made regular visits to Catholic children in the Girls' Reformatory at Magill. During these visits they became concerned that Catholic girls in the institution were being discouraged from practicing their faith. In addition they learned that several girls had been boarded out with non-Catholic families. Two particular girls had even been compelled to give up their faith. Over the next decade, the Catholic Church lobbied the government to do something about this situation. It was not until 1895 that a new Act was proclaimed allowing the State Children's Council to send State Children of particular religious denominations to private reformatories subsidised by the government. This allowed the Catholic Church to establish a separate reformatory for Catholic girls. The State Children's Council requested that the reformatory be set up away from the City. An old chapel and house, five kilometres from the town of Kapunda, were renovated and the new reformatory was gazetted as an Industrial School under the State Children's Act of 1895. Sister Helena O'Brien was appointed matron and she, along with four other sisters, moved to Kapunda to prepare the residence. The first group of ten Catholic girls arrived from the Girls' Reformatory at Edwardstown in June 1897. Protestant girls from Edwardstown were sent to the Redruth Girls' Reformatory in Burra.

During the first two years a large number of the girls made escape attempts. Some were successful. In 1899 a second class dormitory and a number of cells were added to accommodate escapees and other girls whose conduct was considered unsatisfactory. A number of girls 'whose behaviour improved' were placed in service with Catholic families. Due to a lack of government funding to keep the reformatory operating, as well as problems associated with the appointment of a resident chaplain, it was closed in 1909 by Archbishop O'Reily. The eleven girls resident at that time were transferred to the Redruth Girls Reformatory at Burra. During the twelve years of its existence a total of 85 girls were accommodated at the Reformatory, 59 of those were readmitted for a second term. After the reformatory closed the buildings were dismantled and the contents sold at auction. Today nothing remains of the reformatory or the chapel, only several original trees still exist.

Gallery



Catholic Girls Reformatory, Kapunda

More info

Chronology

- Girls' Reformatory, Edwardstown (1891 - 1898)
 - **Catholic Girls' Reformatory, Kapunda (1897 – 1909)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart \(1866 - current\)](#)
- [State Children's Council \(1886 - 1927\)](#)

Sisters of St Joseph ran the Catholic Girls Reformatory Kapunda under the control of the State Children's Council

Related Organisations

- [Redruth Girls' Reformatory \(1897 - 1922\)](#)

When the Girls' Reformatory, Edwardstown, closed Protestant girls were sent to Redruth Girls' Reformatory and Catholic girls to the Catholic Girls' Reformatory, Kapunda. Upon its closure in 1909 girls from the Catholic Girls' Reformatory, Kapunda, were transferred to the Redruth Girls' Reformatory.

Date: 1897 - 1909
- [Girls' Probationary School \(1901 - 1945\)](#)

Some girls from the Catholic Girls' Reformatory at Kapunda were sent to the Girls' Probationary School

Related Legislation

- [State Children Act 1895, South Australia \(1895 - 1927\)](#)

Resources

- Foale, Marie Therese, *Think of the Ravens: The Sisters of St Joseph in Social Welfare*, 2001
- Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, [A piece of the story : national directory of records of Catholic organisations caring for children separated from families](#), November 1999

Records

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

Records

- [Records held by the Sisters of St Joseph Archives, Adelaide \(1866? - current\)](#)
- [Former Residents' Folders \(1900s - current\)](#)

The Former residents' folders, held by the Professional Standards Office, may contain information relating to the Catholic Girls' Reformatory, Kapunda.
- [Minutes - State Children's Council, later the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board \(1886 - 1965\)](#)

Held by State Records of SA. These large minute books contain some details about the Catholic Girls Reformatory, Kapunda and often include information about State children admitted to the home.
- [Annual Reports of the State Children's Council and the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Department \(1887 - 1960\)](#)

Held by State Records of SA. These yearly reports contain updates on developments at homes under the control of the State Children's Council including the Catholic Girls' Reformatory at Kapunda.

- [Correspondence files \('SCD' files\) - State Children's Department \(1887 - 1927\)](#)
Held by State Records of SA. These correspondence dockets include correspondence related to homes run by the Catholic Church under the control of the Department.
 - [Reformatory, St John's via Kapunda, 1897-1909 \[Correspondence\], Catholic Girls Reformatory Kapunda \(1909 - 1909\)](#)
Held at the Professional Standards Office Records Service of the Catholic Church. This manilla folder contains correspondence relating to the closure of the reformatory and the removal of children to other institutions.
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