

Girls Reformatory, Magill

1881 – 1891

Details

The Girls' Reformatory, Magill was established in a wing of the Magill Industrial School in 1881. It was run by the government for girls who had committed offences or were deemed to have behavioural problems. Girls from the Reformatory in the Destitute Asylum were moved there. The Girls' Reformatory, Magill closed in 1891 and girls moved to the Girls' Reformatory, Edwardstown.

In 1881 girls who had committed offences and those who were deemed to have behavioural problems were moved from the Girls' Reformatory at the Destitute Asylum to a wing of the Magill Industrial School. From 1880 to 1891 this section became known as the Girls' Reformatory, Magill and was operated under the control of the government.

From the beginning the Magill building was regarded as 'unsuitable' for use as a reformatory. The Way Commission, a government Inquiry into the affairs of the Destitute Board, raised concerns about the Reformatory in its 1885 report. One of the main concerns was that the Reformatory and the Industrial School shared a staircase and that boys from the school were unavoidably coming into contact with girls from the Reformatory.

In 1887 the 16 girls in the Reformatory were under the charge of a matron, an assistant matron and four wards-women. The State Children's Council believed that this ratio of staff to girls was necessary because many of the girls were older and due to their 'previous character' required 'more constant supervision'.

While committed to the Reformatory the girls were trained in domestic duties such as cooking, housework and sewing. 'First class girls', whose conduct afforded them special privileges, prepared some meals for the institution under the supervision of a staff member. Others took it in turn to act as the matron's house servant, a role which the State Children's Council felt allowed them to put their domestic training into practice. The majority of girls discharged from the home were placed in domestic service.

In 1888, after an unoccupied room previously used by the Industrial School was handed over to the Reformatory for use as a dormitory for the first class girls, the premises was still regarded as inappropriate.

From 1887 when the matron of the Reformatory took responsibility for the laundry at the Magill Industrial School, many girls spent time in the dark, damp basement washing clothes and linen for both institutions. When not working, the girls attended classes in reading, writing and arithmetic which were held each evening except on Sunday.

In 1890 the State Children's Council Annual Report informed its readers that a marks system had been instituted at the Reformatory. Under this system, girls received marks for what was regarded as good conduct and lost marks for what was deemed poor behaviour. On the first day of each month all were brought together and each girl was 'either exalted to a higher or disgraced to a lower class'. The matron considered that these ceremonies gave 'the opportunity of publicly praising the good and causing the evil to feel ashamed of their position.'

In 1891 conditions at the Reformatory led to all the girls being moved to a new purpose-built Girls' Reformatory at Edwardstown. The Industrial School was moved into the former Girls' Reformatory wing and the boys, who had been isolated on the Reformatory Hulk, moved into the former Industrial School wing after it was renovated.

Gallery



[Magill Industrial School, Adelaide]

Description: This photo is incorrectly labelled by the National Library of Australia as St Vincent de Paul Orphanage, Adelaide.



Premises of the old reformatory at Magill

Description: This image shows the building where the Girls Reformatory, Magill, Magill Industrial School and the Boys' Reformatory, Magill had operated. At the time of the photo the Boys Reformatory, Magill was run in the building.

More info

Chronology

- **Girls Reformatory, Magill (1881 – 1891)**
 - Girls' Reformatory, Edwardstown (1891 - 1898)

Related Entries

Run by

- [State Children's Council \(1886 - 1927\)](#)
Date: 1881 - 1891

Related Events

- [Way Commission, Province of South Australia \(1883 - 1885\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Destitute Asylum \(1851 - c. 1917\)](#)
In 1881 girls from Girls' Reformatory section of the Destitute Asylum were moved to the Girls' Reformatory, Magill
- [Magill Industrial School \(1869 - 1898\)](#)
The Girls' Reformatory, Magill, occupied one wing of the Magill Industrial School.

Resources

- Barbalet, Margaret, *Far from a low gutter girl: the forgotten world of state wards: South Australia 1887-1940*, 1983
- Dickey, Brian, *Rations, Residence, Resources: A history of social welfare in South Australia since 1836*, 1986

Records

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

Records

- [Records of the Social Welfare Department and predecessors \(1849 - c. 1987\)](#)
 - [Records created by the Destitute Board \(c. 1845 - 1927\)](#)
 - [Minutes - State Children's Council, later the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board \(1886 - 1965\)](#)
Held by State Records of SA. These minutes include some entries related to the Girls Reformatory. Entries include details on admissions and discharges, transfers, cases of particular children and their parents as well as comments regarding the general running of the Reformatory and its move to Edwardstown in 1891.
 - [Correspondence files \('SCD' files\) - State Children's Department \(1887 - 1927\)](#)
Held by State Records of SA. These correspondence files cover all aspects of the business of the State Children's Department and include information relating to Homes under the Department's control.
 - [Register of Admissions - Industrial School, Boys Reformatory School, and Girls Reformatory School \(1862 - 1882\)](#)
Held by State Records of SA. This register contains details of admissions to and discharges from the Girls' Reformatory, Magill from 1871-1882. It also contains details of admissions prior to the reformatory moving to Magill.
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