

St Augustine's Boys' Orphanage

c. 1855 – 1939

Details

St Augustine's Orphanage was established in Newtown in around 1855. First run by the Friendly Brothers, the Christian Brothers took over the management of the Orphanage in 1878. In 1939, the Orphanage moved to a new location on a larger farming property in Highton, Geelong.

The foundation stone for St Augustine's Orphanage in Geelong was laid in 1856. The Geelong Friendly Brothers' Society had established a temporary orphanage in 1855, in a temperance hotel in Malop Street, Geelong. St. Augustine's Orphanage was built opposite St. Augustine's school in August 1857. It was situated on the present site of St. Joseph's College. The original bluestone Orphanage building is now known as the Br. Tom Howe Creative Arts Building.

Five residents were admitted to the orphanage on 19 August 1857. Soon the institution was experiencing overcrowding. Barnard writes of how the growth of St Augustine's impacted on its residents:

New facilities did not necessarily improve the amount of space allotted to each child, for as soon as extra space was provided, more children arrived to fill it. A new wing added to St Augustine's Orphanage in the 1860s included a dining-room on the ground floor, while the upper storey was entirely taken up by a dormitory 'sixty feet by twenty-five feet' (18 metres x 7.5 metres). Thirty beds were arranged around the walls of this dormitory, with thirty 'block tin hand basins' occupying the centre of the room.

The Sisters of Mercy arrived at St Augustine's Boys' Orphanage to care for girls in 1859 until a separate girls' orphanage (Our Lady's Orphanage) was opened in 1862.

The Christian Brothers took over the management of St Augustine's Boy's Orphanage from the Friendly Brothers in 1878.

In 1899 St Augustine's agreed to accept Catholic wards of the state from the Department for Neglected Children, with the first 40 wards arriving at the orphanage in 1900.

In 1924, past and present St Augustine's boys erected a monument over the graves of boys who had died at the Orphanage.

In his autobiography, Patrick Wheatley-Kenyon describes his impression of St Augustine's when he arrived there as a nine year old in 1934:

It was enormous and consisted of a number of buildings. There were several dormitories each with row upon row of neatly made beds. The bathroom was extensive with long troughs with taps two feet apart and

a large open area for about 50 showers in several rows. This allowed 100 boys to shower and tub together. The next stop was the change and clothes room, which housed some 300 medium-sized steel cabinets — one for each boy. This was where we would hang our Sunday suits, best shirts and ties. Soft clothing was kept on the shelf and shoes were kept on the bottom. Everything had to be strictly neat at all times. Each cabinet had a boy's name fitted into a small frame on the front. Then there was the Assembly Hall, which took up the whole ground floor of one of the buildings, and an enclosed area of approximately two acres that was our playground. The noise was deafening when all the boys were released to play each day (pp. 16-17).

Wheatley-Kenyon also wrote about the daily routine at St Augustine's:

Each morning we would wash ourselves spotless ready for Mass. Several Brothers controlled the movement of boys to the toilets and bathroom. The Brother supervising the cleaning of teeth kept a strict eye on our behaviour, walking up and down the long row of taps. Woe-betide any boy caught playing up, swearing or not brushing his teeth properly. Such behaviour brought a lightning flick of the Brother's hand in which a shiny black strap was held fast. This was especially painful on cold mornings.

... After mass and morning prayers we were marched into the Refectory for breakfast, which usually consisted of porridge, two slices of bread and honey (three for those on the farm-work roster) and a mug of tea. The boys loved stirring the porridge in the huge copper cooker ... Grace was always said before and after each meal and one boy would read a chapter from a book on etiquette. Each boy was given an opportunity to read throughout the year. There was to be no talking at these moments. In fact, silence was expected for the duration of each meal to prevent skylarking and other misdemeanours ... After breakfast, beds were made, belongings neatly put away, and cabinets tidied. Then it was playtime until assembly and classes (p. 18).

He was a member of the St Augustine's band, which won many trophies at contests around Victoria. These prizes helped to pay for a new bus for the Orphanage. The boys also participated in boxing and wrestling. Wheatley-Kenyon recalls a boxing contest at the Fitzroy Stadium in Melbourne between St Augustine's and boys from St Vincent's Orphanage in South Melbourne. The audience threw coins into the ring after each fight. One of the Brothers arranged for professional wrestlers to come to the orphanage once a month, for the boys to watch practice bouts leading up to public contests.

Farming and gardening were an important activity at St Augustine's in Newtown, providing training opportunities for the boys as well as producing food for the orphanage's consumption and sale. In 1888, needing more land, St Augustine's began to rent farm land near the orphanage. In 1900 a 53 acre farming property between the Barwon river and Fyan's Street, Newtown, was purchased. The farm was used for the cultivation of vegetables, hay, and, from 1910, millet for the manufacture of brooms, as well as the rearing of dairy cattle, horses, poultry and pigs.

The Newtown property was sold in 1931 to fund the purchase of a larger property on South Valley Road, Highton. Construction began on the new St Augustine's Orphanage on this site in 1936, and in January 1939 the first boys were moved into the new buildings. From this time (until another name change in 1966) it was known as St Augustine's Orphanage.

In 1997, records of the Sisters of Mercy and the Christian Brothers were transferred to MacKillop Family Services. These included records of the various orphanages, homes and other residences run by these Orders. While custodianship of the records about people in 'care' became the responsibility of MacKillop Family Services at this point, it was formally agreed that the intellectual property in these records would not change hands.

Gallery



St Augustine's Orphanage Band, Geelong



Old St Augustine's Orphanage, Geelong

Description: This image shows some of the buildings on the St Augustine's site, seen from Aphrasia Street. According to the St Joseph's College archivist, the buildings seen here were not used as accommodation for St Augustine's, but instead were used as the boarding section for the college.



Boys at St Augustine's



St Augustine's Geelong, Roll Call 1932



Negative - Geelong, Victoria, circa 1920

Description: Orphans being trained as tailors at St Augustine's Orphanage.

More info

Chronology

- **St Augustine's Boys' Orphanage (c. 1855 – 1939)**
 - St Augustine's Orphanage (1939 - 1966)
 - St Augustine's Boys' Home (1966 - 1988)
 - St Augustine's Adolescent and Family Services (1988 - 1997)
 - MacKillop Family Services (1997 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Christian Brothers \(1868 - 1885\)](#)

In 1878, the Christian Brothers took over management of St Augustine's Boys' Orphanage from the Geelong Friendly Brothers' Society.

Date: 1878 - 1939

- [Friendly Brothers' Society \(1845 - c. 1880\)](#)
Date: 1855 - 1878
- [Australasian Province of the Christian Brothers \(1885 - 1953\)](#)

Related Events

- [Royal Commission into Charitable Institutions, Victoria \(18 March 1890 - 12 August 1895\)](#)
- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Our Lady's Orphanage \(c. 1862 - 1912\)](#)
The Sisters of Mercy cared for girls at St Augustine's until Our Lady's Orphanage was established in 1862.
Date: 1859 - 1862
- [Sisters of Mercy, Geelong Congregation \(1859 - 1907\)](#)
The Sisters of Mercy, Geelong Congregation cared for girls at St Augustine's from 1859 to 1862.
Date: 1859 - 1862

Resources

- Australian Heritage Council, [A thematic heritage study on Australia's benevolent and other care institutions](#), 2016
- Chapman, Peter, C.B.C., *St. Augustine's and the Christian Brothers: an archival history*, 1993
- 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 1900-1924
- *Children's Welfare Department and Reformatory Schools. Report of the Secretary and Inspector.*, 1924 - 1954
- *Annual reports: St Augustine's Orphanage*, 1924 - 1933
- Anonymous, [Submission no 354 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2003
- Zada, Susie, [Geelong & District and Bellarine Peninsula History Site: St Augustine's Orphanage](#), 2011
- Victoria. Children's Welfare Department and Reformatory Schools, [Report of the Secretary / Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools](#), 1887 - 1895
- [Heritage Display](#), MacKillop Family Services website, 2013
- Care Leavers Australia Network, [Geelong and District Orphanages](#), No date
- [Appeal For Catholic Orphans](#), Geelong Advertiser and Intelligence, 5 December 1855
- [Orphanage Removal: St Augustine's Geelong](#), The Age, 1 May 1936
- [St Augustine's Orphanage](#), Geelong and District ... covering local and family history in the greater Barwon region, No date
- Delaney, Helen Mary, [Great Talent for Management: Mother Xavier Maguire c1819-1879](#), 2017

Records

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

Records

- [MacKillop Family Services Records, Victorian institutions \(1857 - current\)](#)
- [St. Augustine's Orphanage, Geelong, Victoria \[microform\] \(1857 - 1878\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/st-augustines-boys-orphanage/>