

# Royal Park Depot

c. 1880 – 1955

- Other Names:**
- Royal Park Receiving Depot
  - Children's Welfare Department Receiving Depot
  - Royal Park Depots and Receiving Homes
  - The Depot
  - Boys' Receiving Depot, Royal Park
  - Girls' Receiving Depot, Royal Park
  - Receiving Depots, Royal Park
  - Neglected Children's Depot, Royal Park

## Details

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The Royal Park Depot in Parkville was the sole reception centre for children committed to State care in Victoria from about 1880 to 1961. The Depot was a 'clearing house' for boys and girls, before they were boarded out, sent out to service or committed to a reformatory school. In 1955 it became Turana.

The Royal Park Depot was located at 900 Park Street in Parkville. It was the state-run reception centre for children committed to 'care', whether they were entering the welfare or justice system.

Swain writes about the Depot's early days:

*A series of cottages, with an adjoining farm, the Depot was designed to provide short-term care for up to 60 children. Ideally, infants were dispatched to local wet nurses within a day, and older children moved on within one week, but over time the numbers in the Depot grew, with 'hard-to-place' adolescents, children with intellectual disabilities and syphilitic infants forming a core of long-term residents, some of whom stayed on as workers when their wardship came to an end (Swain, 2008).*

The Depot evolved from the government-run Industrial Schools for girls and boys, situated in Royal Park. The Girls' Industrial School was at Royal Park from 1875 to 1880. In 1879, boys were transferred to Royal Park from the industrial school at Sunbury. The Victorian government started to phase out industrial schools from 1872, following scathing reports from the [Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline](#). The government introduced a boarding out system in response to the Royal Commission, however, some children remained in industrial schools until the late 1880s. The boys' and girls' depots at Royal Park were still referred to as industrial schools in the 1880s, until industrial schools were abolished altogether in 1887 with the passage of new child welfare legislation.

In 1879, departmental reports referred to the 'Melbourne Industrial School and Receiving House'. The Receiving House, situated on Flemington Road, was a predecessor to what became known as the Royal Park Depot.

In 1879, the government Boys' Industrial School was transferred from [Sunbury](#) to Royal Park. The 1879 annual report described the boys' industrial school at Royal Park as a "good substantial building ... having upwards of 100 acres of land attached". It could accommodate up to 300 children, at the time of the 1879 annual report it

held 268.

In 1883, the Boys' Depot was placed under the supervision of J.S. Greig, formerly of the Immigrants' Aid Society. By October 1883, Royal Park was the sole receiving depot for the colony of Victoria.

The Girls' Depot was originally situated in an old powder magazine, a building that was acknowledged by the government as unsuitable. Apart from problems with the structure itself, the Department sought additional accommodation for 'the girls' moral and sanitary isolation'. In 1887, plans were approved for a new Girls' Depot. The Boys' Depot was to be altered as well, to make the classification of boys could an easier task.

The new Girls' and Infants' Depot was finally occupied by 1890. Around this time, both the girls' and boys' depots were put under the 'experienced management' of a Miss Wilson.

Further changes were made to the buildings at Royal Park in 1892, including the opening of two new separate depots for male and female juvenile offenders. The children were placed in the reformatories at Royal Park before they were transferred to private reformatories. The 1893 annual report stated that having separate buildings for children who had offended meant that there was "little difficulty in keeping this class distinct from the other children during the short period they are inmates, pending their transfer to the Private Reformatories most suitable for them".

At that time, the site at Royal Park comprised separate boys' and girls' depots for receiving Industrial and Reformatory children, as well as a Probationary school for boys (1892 annual report). All were under the management of Miss Wilson.

The Department reported on further changes at Royal Park in 1898, with the completion of a new building for 'isolation and recreation purposes'. Despite the new buildings and the renovations, the structures were still less than ideal. At the turn of the century, the Department raised concerns about the inflammability of the wooden buildings in which older boys were housed. By 1907, plans were finally being prepared for a brick dormitory for older boys at Royal Park.

A newspaper article from 1912 described Royal Park as a place that 'served the purpose of a reformatory, a home for children, a hospital for children afflicted with disease, a training school and a receiving house'. A Methodist minister who visited Royal Park said 'the whole place had the atmosphere of a gaol'. He described how girls aged 14 and 15 'stood from morning till night over the wash-tubs, doing the washing of the institution' (The Argus 24 June 1912)..

In 1909, after the passage of the Infant Life Protection Act, the Secretary reported a large influx of infants at Royal Park. The nursery was totally inadequate for their 'care'. New facilities for very young children were not completed until November 1913.

Overcrowding was nearly always a problem at the Royal Park Depot. The average daily occupancy at Royal Park had risen to 100 by 1910, and had doubled by 1920. During the Depression, with the collapse of boarding-out, the overcrowding at Royal Park intensified, despite arrangements to place some children in non-government orphanages and children's homes.

In 1922, the Medical Officer and Superintendent of Royal Park, Dr Derham, described the Depot's 'varied and numerous' functions. He stated that its residents ranged in age from one day up to seventeen years. Derham outlined the different circumstances in which children might come to the Depot. As well as children first admitted to state 'care':

*The Depot is also used a temporary Home for boys and girls waiting to go on service or returned therefrom as unsatisfactory. Further it is used a temporary Home for children suffering from defects of various kinds which need skilled medical attention. While at the Depot these sufferers are treated by specialists at the*

*different hospitals and clinics. Another use to which this Depot is put is that of a place of detention for remand cases from various courts. In some cases these 'Remand' children are kept at the depot for more than a month. We do not detain reformatory cases at this Depot except for special reasons, such cases being sent to other suitable institutions or to situations as soon as possible. In addition to the above functions, this Depot has become a permanent or semi-permanent home for mentally and physically defective children including congenitally syphilitic children who are unfit for 'boarding out' or 'service' ... The varied types of inmates necessitate a good deal of division and segregation if the best is to be done for them ...*

Derham's reports provide a stark example of the language used at that time to describe children with intellectual and physical disabilities and the approach taken to their 'care'. He wrote in 1923: 'It is very wrong for normal children to be associated with defective children whose immoral tendencies are as marked as their mental backwardness.'

Throughout the 1920s, concern was regularly expressed about the conditions at Royal Park, with newspaper reports frequently commenting on the poor conditions and overcrowding, the ill treatment of children, and inadequate staffing levels. Calls for governmental inquiries were frequent however rarely resulted in full investigations or change. A 1922 letter from former nursing staff of the Depot detailed high turnover of staff and unjust punishment of children. In 1927, an inquiry was held to determine if the 'flogging' of a 14 year old boy at the Depot had been suitable, after the boy's mother raised the extent of his injuries.

In 1928, the *Argus* newspaper denounced conditions at Royal Park, describing the Depot as a 'clumsy institution that necessitates the mixing of boys on remand awaiting trial with convicted boys of strong criminal tendencies, mental deficient, and sometimes, moral perverts'. In the article, experts called for the establishment of a 'colony' for the treatment of 'defectives' to improve conditions at the Depot.

The Children's Welfare Department's annual report for the years 1939-1943 stated that the Depot at Royal Park 'functions primarily as a clearing house for wards of the Children's Welfare Department and the Department for Reformatory Schools in their various movements to and from institutions, foster homes and employment.' The Depot was also still being used to hold children on remand from the courts.

The 1939-43 report stated that: 'To a large extent the Depot is a hospital and much skilled attention and prolonged treatment is frequently necessary, particularly in those cases where the children are suffering from disease and malnutrition as the result of parental neglect, before they can be made acceptable propositions for transfer to private homes or institutions.'

Dr Phyllis Tewsley held the position of Medical Superintendent of the Royal Park Depot (and at Turana from 1955 until retirement in 1959). Tewsley pioneered the small family group idea for children as an alternative to the established system of caring for them in large institutions.

The Department's annual report for 1951-52 stated that the Receiving Depot at Royal Park was intended to function as an 'observation, classification and treatment centre for new committals prior to transfer elsewhere, and also as a place of remand for the retention of children pending their appearance at Children's Courts'. However, it went on to acknowledge that the Depot has for many children become a permanent residence,' specifically for children with health problems, and 'mentally and physically handicapped children' who couldn't be placed in children's homes, or the institutions run by the Mental Hygiene Department.

Finding placements for female 'delinquents' at Royal Park Depot was a significant issue during the 1950s. In 1952, the Chief Secretary Mr Dodgshun promised that a new security remand depot for delinquent girls would be built at Royal Park. His statement was in response to a series of articles and letters in Melbourne newspapers ('Victoria's unwanted children'), about the plight of young women (some as young as 13) being placed in Pentridge Prison.

[Lawrence Turner](#) reported on the conditions for girls "kept at Royal Park because the state has no reformatory prison for girls where they could be segregated and given proper care". He described alterations made to the

girls' buildings at Royal Park as a result of property damage and absconding. To prevent broken windows, the authorities bricked them in, "shutting out light but saving glass". They spread rough cast over the walls to combat graffiti and barricaded the doors which were being smashed. Girls were only allowed to eat with spoons, so they couldn't steal knives and forks and potentially use them as weapons. Barbed wire was added to the top of the walls in the girls' exercise yard to stop them jumping the fence (*The Herald*, 25 October 1952, p.13).

A group of residents of Melbourne's wealthier suburbs sent a letter to the *Argus* in September 1952:

*It is a disgrace to our present child welfare institutions that such girls should leave their care labelled incorrigible, and be forced, through lack of decent homes where they can be given proper guidance and training in becoming potentially good citizens, to be sent to Pentridge and forced to mix with hardened criminals. ... we demand that you give the people of Victoria ... and especially the mothers, the opportunity of rectifying what is surely a blot upon our social system.*

The authors called for a public appeal to raise funds for a suitable establishment for these girls and young women. Attached to this letter were a number of cheques. The letter ended: 'Perhaps when the people of Victoria have built this establishment and proved not to be lacking in social responsibility, the Government may condescend to provide the funds for its maintenance'.

The annual report for 1954 referred to the Department's difficulty placing 'problem Protestant girls' – the only institution for them being the Elizabeth Fry Retreat in South Yarra. Consequently, the Girls' Remand and Reformatory Sections at Royal Park were experiencing severe overcrowding. The government planned to establish a state-run facility for girls ([Winlaton](#), in Nunawading) to overcome this problem.

In late 1954, the first 'experimental cottages' were established at Royal Park. A block known as the Hostel was divided into two self-contained flats, in which up to six children lived with a Housemother. The 11 children placed in the new cottages were described by the Department were reported to show a 'most remarkable improvement' as a result of their new conditions.

In 1955, the new Chief Secretary, Arthur Rylah, changed the name of Royal Park to 'Turana', said to be an Aboriginal word meaning rainbow. By this time, most of the children were housed in cottages on the site, and the original buildings were used exclusively for adolescent boys. Turana was the main government reception centre until Allambie was established in 1961.

In the year following the name change to Turana, the Royal Park Depot was progressively stripped of its functions with the original buildings used exclusively for adolescent boys.

## More info

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### Chronology

- Royal Park Industrial School [Girls] (1875 - c.1879)
  - **Royal Park Depot (c. 1880 – 1955)**
    - Turana (1955 - 1993)
    - Melbourne Youth Justice Centre (1993 - current)

### Related Entries

Run by

- [Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Colony of Victoria \(1864 - 1887\)](#)  
Date: 1880 - 1887
- [Department for Neglected Children, Colony of Victoria \(1887 - 1900\)](#)  
Date: 1887 - 1900
- [Children's Welfare Department, State Government of Victoria \(1924 - 1960\)](#)  
Date: 1924 - 1955
- [Department for Neglected Children, State Government of Victoria \(1901 - 1924\)](#)  
Date: 1901 - 1924

## Related Organisations

- [Elizabeth Fry Retreat \(1884 - 1957\)](#)  
By the 1950s, the Elizabeth Fry Retreat was the only institution for offending Protestant girls and young women. As a result, such girls were difficult to place, and there was significant overcrowding at Royal Park Depot.
- [Department of Mental Hygiene \(1934 - 1944\)](#)  
The Department of Mental Hygiene ran institutions for children with intellectual disabilities. Many of these children spent long periods at Royal Park Depot, awaiting a suitable placement.  
Date: 1934 - 1944
- [Mental Hygiene Branch \(1944 - 1959\)](#)  
The Mental Hygiene Branch ran institutions for children with intellectual disabilities. Many of these children spent long periods at Royal Park Depot, awaiting a suitable placement.  
Date: 1944 - 1959

## Resources

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## Records

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

### Records

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
  - [Records of Teresa Wardell \(1866 - 1984\)](#)
  - [Child Information and Departmental Administration records, Turana, Baltara Reception Centre, Langi Kal Kal and Malmsbury Youth Training Centres, Melbourne Youth Justice Centre \(c. 1950 - c. 2005\)](#)
  - [Children's Court of Victoria records \(1933 - 1964\)](#)
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