

Wandin Yallock Reformatory School

1886 – 1905

Other Names:

- Fernydale
- Fernydale Reformatory
- Mr Wiseman's Far

Details

Wandin Yallock Reformatory School, or 'Fernydale', was opened in 1886 as a private reformatory for boys. Fernydale was established to reform 'juvenile offenders' by providing them with farm training. In 1893 Fernydale was proclaimed a reformatory under the [Juvenile Offenders Act 1887](#) and received boys from the government reformatory which closed in April of that year. The institution received both Protestant and Catholic residents. It closed in 1905, with the remaining boys being sent to [Heathfield Homes Reformatory School](#) in Apollo Bay.

Wandin Yallock Reformatory School, also known as Fernydale, was a privately owned reformatory opened in 1886 by merchant and philanthropist Albert Wiseman. Murdock McAskell, who was "previously evinced in work amongst the youth of Brunswick", was employed as the superintendent of Fernydale. In September 1886 McAskell brought the first two boys to Fernydale from [The Try Society's](#) Try Excelsior Class. The number of boys in residence at the farm gradually increased over the following years. Generally there were 12 boys at Fernydale, aged between 10 and 17 years old, however at times there were up to 20 boys in residence with ages ranging up to 20 years old. An 1897 newspaper article stated that, at the time of its opening, Fernydale was the first farm Reformatory of its kind.

Fernydale was located on a 320 acre property at Wandin Yallock, in the Yarra Valley, east of Melbourne. The grounds of the property included 60 acres of arable farmland, a large homestead including dormitories for "a score of persons" and the superintendents quarters, an annex containing the kitchen, dining room and wash-house, a schoolhouse, farm buildings, paddocks, grassland, and forest. Livestock kept on the farm included horses, dairy cows, pigs, sheep, and fowl. As well as the superintendent the Reformatory also employed a farm assistant, a school teacher, and a cook.

The boys at Wandin Yallock Reformatory School were trained in farmwork at Fernydale, and were also placed into service on other properties "when they are ready". A newspaper article from 1897 describes the daily routines of the boys and the kinds of work they undertook:

"At 6 a.m. punctually the boys are roused by clang of bell and commence the duties of the day, each having his allotted tasks. The cow boys for the day bring the kine [cows] in and milk them under the direction of the assistant. Others attend to the feeding of the pigs and horses; and then there is a spare half hour for play before the bell rings for breakfast. The morning meal is followed by prayers, conducted by the school teacher, and at 8 o'clock the boys are taken out for field work of all kinds, according to the season. At present, for instance, the bigger boys may be digging potatoes and the smaller ones are gathering, or cutting maize for chaff; and all the year round some of the older lads are taking part in felling, cutting or burning timber. From 12 till 1 o'clock is the dinner hour, and outdoor work is resumed and continued till 4 o'clock. Cricket or football follows until 6 o'clock, when tea is served. Then there is an

adjournment to the schoolroom for lessons in the three R's and geography. After that, prayers again, and finally, at 9 p.m., promptly up to the dormitory, where strict silence is enforced, and Morpheus soon reigns supreme."

The article also describes 'treats' arranged for the boys, including excursions, sports, camping in summer, 'indoor entertainments', and unsupervised picnics within the grounds of the farm.

Wages were paid to the boys in the reformatory according to tasks completed and ability. These were paid out to the boys upon leaving the reformatory. In 1904 it was reported that each boy could earn up to 2s 6d per week. The boys could also earn money through the sale of fruit and vegetables grown in their own individual garden plots. Fines were given for misconduct, with the sum deducted from their wages.

Fernydale had two other affiliated farm reformatories which were also under the supervision of Mr McAskell; Olinda Farm Reformatory at Olinda Creek (now Silvan, about 3 miles from Fernydale), and another at Hillside. The Olinda Creek and Hillside farms were both smaller than Fernydale, and were used to prevent the number of boys at Fernydale from becoming too numerous and a "barrack like" atmosphere developing. The smaller numbers also allowed for closer individual supervision of the boys by the superintendent.

In 1893 Fernydale was declared to be a private reformatory. Boys began to be placed at Wandin Yallock from other Government-run reformatories, with the first two transferred there from [Ballarat Boys' Reformatory](#) in January 1893. The department's annual report for 1893 stated that the institution operated under the family system:

the manager, Mr McAskill, and his wife treating the lads more as sons than reformatory wards. Their sleeping rooms are inside the farm-house, and immediately over the manager's own apartments, and the only extra precaution against absconding found necessary so far is having the place connected by telephone with the nearest police station. This was carried out some three or four months ago, since which period running away has nearly, if not entirely, ceased.

In early 1905 it was stated that Fernydale was still successfully operating, and that some of the former residents, who were now employers, were requesting to employ boys from the Reformatory. Despite this reported success Fernydale was closed in early July, and the remaining boys were transferred to [Heathfield Homes Reformatory School for Protestant Boys](#) in Apollo Bay.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Department for Neglected Children, Colony of Victoria \(1887 - 1900\)](#)

In 1893 the Department for Neglected Children took over supervision of Wandin Yallock Reformatory School.
Date: 1893 - 1900

- [Department for Neglected Children, State Government of Victoria \(1901 - 1924\)](#)

Date: 1901 - 1905

Related Organisations

- [Gordon Institute \(1886 - 1951\)](#)

Some boys from the Gordon Institute were transferred to Wandin Yallock Reformatory School

- [The Try Society \(c. 1883 - current\)](#)

The first boys to arrive at Wandin Yallock Reformatory School had come from The Try Society's Try Excelsior Class.

- [Heathfield Homes Reformatory School for Protestant Boys \(1905 - 1915\)](#)
Boys were sent to Heathfield Homes Reformatory School for Protestant Boys from Wandin Yallock Reformatory School when it closed in 1905.
- [Olinda Farm Reformatory \(1893 - c. 1900\)](#)
Olinda Farm Reformatory was affiliated with Wandin Yallock Reformatory School and operated under the guidance of the Wandin Yallock superintendent, Mr McAskell.

Resources

- Victoria. Children's Welfare Department and Reformatory Schools, [Report of the Secretary / Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools](#), 1887 - 1895. *Relevance:* Mentioned in reports dated 1893-1896
 - Maunders, David, *Two different worlds: cultural and political conflict in a 19th century boys reformatory*, 1987
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