

Woodlands Home

1886 – 1889

Other Names: • Woodland

Details

Woodlands Home opened in 1886 in South Preston as a domestic training school for selected girls from the Government Reformatory for Protestant Girls at Pentridge in Coburg. Woodlands, described as a “cottage”, had capacity for eight or nine girls. The objective of Woodlands was for the “better conducted girls” of the Reformatory to spend a few months there undergoing domestic training before the ends of their sentences.

A very commodious cottage, “Woodlands,” has been obtained on lease at South Preston, within a mile of the Girls’ Reformatory, and placed under the supervision of the Matron of that school for the reception of the better conducted girls, where, as the time approaches for their being sent to service, special training may, for a few months, be imparted, and the inmates be gradually prepared for the freedom of life in service (Annual report, Department of Industrial Schools and Reformatories, 1884, p.9)

In December 1885, a deputation from the South Preston Shire complained to the Chief Secretary about the proposed new reformatory. They expressed their concerns that the institution would lower property prices, “be disagreeable to the inhabitants, and otherwise objectionable”. The Chief Secretary attempted to allay the fears of the residents, promising that the new reformatory would only house 4 or 5 young women, and that they would be “of the better class” (*The Herald*, 1 December 1885). At a ratepayers’ meeting in March 1886, community members expressed more unhappiness with the location of the girls’ reformatory. It was said that “it was notorious that the first batch that had been sent to the institution came from the Pentridge Stockade”. A motion was passed that the reformatory at Woodlands “would materially injure the prospects of the districts”. One attendee claimed that the “storm” over the reformatory was not warranted, because “it was well known that the institution was intended not so much for a reformatory as for a home where the elder deserted children and orphans could be trained to be useful domestic helps” (*Mercury and Weekly Courier*, 26 March 1886).

The 1887 annual report for the Department stated that the school “shows a satisfactory progress, and the ‘Woodlands’ cottage, which now accommodates nine of the children most nearly eligible by age and conduct for service, is still proving a valuable adjunct” to the operations of the Girls’ Reformatory School at Coburg.

The Home was in the news again in December 1887 after 3 of its residents escaped. A newspaper article described the institution as being for inmates “chosen for their good behaviour whilst undergoing the more rigorous discipline of the reformatory. The 3 runaways, aged 14 and 15, while “dressed very neatly”, took advantage of the attendants being busy, “scaled the fence surrounding the home and bolted”. Searches for the girls had so far been unsuccessful and the article said that “it is feared that they are being harboured by some of the criminal class of women in the city”. This news article also stated that “experienced officials of the Reformatory” looked upon the Preston home as a “useless and expensive establishment”, housing only 8 or 9 girls at a time (*The Herald*, 6 December 1887).

In the 1888 annual report, the Inspector stated that Woodlands, described as a “sub-reformatory” was going to be transferred back to Coburg. It said that the Woodlands experiment, offering its girls extra freedom and privileges, had “has laboured under decided disadvantages in being not sufficiently in the country, and in its too near proximity to the inmates of the head reformatory and the Pentridge penal establishment”. With the prospect of numbers at Coburg reducing when girls were transferred to private reformatories (such as [Brookside](#)), the decision was made that any girls at Woodlands who couldn’t be “safely placed in service” would be transferred back to the reformatory at Coburg (p.50).

The 1889 report stated that Woodlands had been closed in June, with its last 7 girls returning to Coburg (p.26).

More info

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- [Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Colony of Victoria \(1864 - 1887\)](#)
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Related Organisations

- [Government Reformatory for Girls, Coburg \(1875 - 1893\)](#)

Woodlands Home was a training school for selected inmates of the Government Reformatory for Girls, Coburg.

Resources

- 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

Records

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- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)

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