

# Roman Catholic Orphan School

8 March 1844 – 1886

**Other Names:** • Institution for Destitute Roman Catholic Children Parramatta

## Details

---

The Roman Catholic Orphan School at Parramatta was established on the 8 March 1844 and run by a committee. On the 31 March 1859, it was taken over by the Good Shepherd Sisters, later known as Sisters of the Good Samaritan. It was Australia's first purpose built orphanage for Catholic children and was funded by the New South Wales Government. It housed about 320 children at time. At first they were aged 3 to 9 years, but in later years the Orphanage admitted infants and children up to the age of 14. In 1886 the Roman Catholic Orphan School was relocated to Manly Industrial School, and the site became the Parramatta Industrial School for Girls.

Building work commenced in early 1840 and the orphan School was formally occupied on the 8 March 1844 with the transfer of 114 children from temporary accommodation at Waverley. A state-funded institution with staff employed by the government, the institution was managed by a board or committee with a matron responsible for day to day operations.

On the 31 March 1859 the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (also known as the Good Samaritans) took over management of the institution, although it remained owned by the New South Wales Government. Children considered eligible for admission were either orphans of one or both parents; or considered 'at risk' under circumstances such as 'living with vicious and immoral parents or guardians' or were removed to relieve the distress of a large family.

Initially the Orphan School would only accept children between the ages of 3 and 9 years but these rules were relaxed to admit infants and children up to the age of 14. The number of children in the institution averaged 320.

In 1881 the State Children's Relief Act authorised the State Children's Relief Board to remove children from institutions and board them out. Numbers in the Catholic and Protestant Orphanages declined dramatically. In 1884 the New South Wales Government ordered the Orphan School not to accept any further children and on the 13 August 1886 ordered the Good Samaritans to vacate the site.

In August 1886 the remaining children and staff relocated to Manly (Manly Industrial School) and in April 1887 the site was proclaimed Parramatta Industrial School for Girls.

The Roman Catholic Orphan School buildings are still standing, having become part of Parramatta Girls Industrial School in 1887 and remaining in use as a remand home until the 1980s. Since 2006 Parragirls has been lobbying for the buildings, and others on the site of the former Female Factory, to be recognised and preserved in redevelopment plans for the site. Currently, the organisation is campaigning for site to become an international Site of Conscience.

Over Christmas 2012 the Orphan School building was damaged by fire. Though gutted, it is still standing.

The site of the Roman Catholic Orphan School is part of the Parramatta Female Factories and Institutions Precinct. In November 2017, the Precinct was added to the National Heritage List. The inscription notes that "the Precinct is outstanding in its capacity to tell the stories of women and children in institutions over the course of

Australian history". It has also been listed on the Register of the National Estate since 21 March 1978.

## Gallery

---



### Roman Catholic Orphanage, Parramatta

**Description:** This is a photograph of the Roman Catholic Orphan School at Parramatta. It shows the children and staff assembled outside one of the school buildings. State Archives NSW have given this photograph a date of 1900, however as the Roman Catholic Orphan School was not in operation by that date it is assumed that this photograph is earlier. The date included here is an estimate.

---



### Roman Catholic Orphanage, Parramatta

**Description:** This is a photograph of the Roman Catholic Orphan School at Parramatta. It shows the children and staff assembled outside one of the school buildings. State Archives NSW have given this photograph a date of 1900, however as the Roman Catholic Orphan School was not in operation by that date it is assumed that this photograph is earlier. The date included here is an estimate.

---

## More info

---

### Chronology

- **Roman Catholic Orphan School (8 March 1844 – 1886)**
  - Manly Industrial School and Orphanage (1881 - 1910)

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Sisters of the Good Samaritan \(1857 - current\)](#)  
Date: 1859 - 1886

#### Related Legislation

- [State Children Relief Act 1881, New South Wales \(1881 - 1901\)](#)  
The *State Children's Relief Act* gave the State Children's Relief Board the power to take children from the Roman Catholic Orphan School and board them out.
- [Apprenticeship Act 1851, New South Wales \(1851 - 1901\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Parramatta Girls Industrial School \(1887 - 1912\)](#)  
The Parramatta Girls Industrial School was established in the buildings vacated by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan in 1886.  
Date: 1887 - 1975
- [Parragirls \(2006 - 2023\)](#)  
Parragirls is lobbying for the preservation of the Roman Catholic Orphan School buildings, part of the former Parramatta Girls Industrial School and now part of the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct.

## Resources

- Ramsland, John, *Children of the back lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales*, 1986
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Guide](#), No date
- State Library of New South Wales, [Orphan schools](#), 2012
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Index 1817-1942](#), No date
- Department of Justice, [History](#), Children's Court of New South Wales, 2012
- Australian Heritage Council, [A thematic heritage study on Australia's benevolent and other care institutions](#), 2016

## Records

---

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

### Records

- [Records held by the Good Samaritan Archives relating to Children's Homes \(1877 - current\)](#)
- 

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/roman-catholic-orphan-school/>