

# Shaftesbury Reformatory School

1880 – 1904

**Other Names:** • Shaftesbury Reformatory

## Details

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The Shaftesbury Reformatory School opened in 1880 on a site on Old South Head Road (in the present-day suburb of Vaucluse), as a replacement for the Biloela Reformatory School for Females on Cockatoo Island. It included a series of cottages and three solitary cells surrounded by high fences, and usually housed a total of around 20 girls for one to five years. In 1904, the Shaftesbury Reformatory School was moved to Ormond House in Paddington and the site was returned to the Comptroller of Prisons.

The Shaftesbury Reformatory School was operated under the *Reformatory Schools Act* of 1866 and was controlled by the Comptroller General of Prisons until the 10 April 1893, when it was run by the Charitable Institutions Department.

It was situated on land purchased by the government, between the present-day Laguna Street, Vaucluse and Old South Head Road, and with another 3 acres on the western side of New South Head Road. The Reformatory was sometimes described as being in 'Old South Head' and in Watsons Bay.

The Shaftesbury site was a series of cottages, intended to house up to 50 girls but it usually held 20. It was bleak and entirely enclosed within a 3 meter high corrugated tin fence, with bars to external windows and three punishment (solitary) cells. Girls were sentenced for between one and five years.

In 1901 new legislation for reformatory schools was introduced, the *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act*. The State Children's Relief Board took charge of the institutions for children and the management of Shaftesbury became the responsibility of the Superintendent at Parramatta. From that point, Shaftesbury held female state wards, as well as reformatory girls.

The State Children's Relief Department was uncomfortable with managing Shaftesbury, considering it unsuitable for reforming young women. An outing on Sydney Harbour in 1902 appears to have been one of the attempts to lighten the tone of the establishment:

*On Tuesday last the girls of the Shaftesbury Reformatory School were taken for a harbour trip and picnic by their matron, Mrs Cunynghame assisted by Miss Cunynghame and the staff. The outing proved a most enjoyable one. The Government steam launch Helen, lent by the Minister for Works, conveyed the party from Watson's Bay. Mr Green (Director of Charities) and a few friends also attended, and a trip was made to the Avenue picnic grounds on the Lane Cove River. At the luncheon Mr Green presided, and made congratulatory reference to the work done in the school by the matron and Miss Bruce, teacher.*

*The girls gave an interesting exhibition of dumb-bell drill, and many of them recited and sang. Races and other sports were engaged in during the day.*

In 1904 the Girls Reformatory was moved to a section of Ormond House in Paddington and the Shaftesbury site returned to the Comptroller of Prisons. The State Children's Relief Department Annual Report of 1904 explained the decision to close Shaftesbury Reformatory, and provided a chilling account of what it had been like:

*This institution was closed last month. The buildings are totally unfit for the purposes of a reformatory; they are simply a prison, the windows being barred and the place gloomy. Treatment of the girls in them under modern methods of reformation was impossible; and on the recommendation of the State Children Relief Board the girls were boarded-out in terms of the State Children Relief Act and the institution closed.*

Between around 1907 and 1910 the site was the Shaftesbury Institution for released prisoners and 'inebriate women'.

The building was reused by the State Children's Relief Board, as the Shaftesbury Home for Babies and Mothers from 1910 to 1914.

## Gallery



**"Shaftesbury" South Head Home for mothers and their babies**

**Description:** This is a copy of an image that appeared in the State Children Relief Board Report for the year ended 5 April, 1914. The image shows the back of the building where Shaftesbury Home for Babies and Mothers operated.

## More info

### Chronology

- Newcastle Reformatory School for Females (19 January 1869 - 20 July 1871)
  - Biloela Reformatory School for Females (1871 - 5 February 1880)
- **Shaftesbury Reformatory School (1880 – 1904)**

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [State Children's Relief Board \(1881 - 1923\)](#)  
Date: 1901 - 1904
- [Department of Public Instruction \(1880 - 1915\)](#)  
The Department of Public Instruction ran Shaftesbury Reformatory School.  
Date: 1880 - 1904
- [Department of Charitable Institutions \(1888 - 1911\)](#)  
Date: 1893 - 1901

#### Related Legislation

- [Reformatory Schools Act 1866, New South Wales \(1869 - 1901\)](#)  
Shaftesbury Reformatory School was established under the *Reformatory Schools Act*.
- [Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act 1901, New South Wales \(1901 - 1905\)](#)

## Related Organisations

- [Ormond House \(1884 - 1923\)](#)

In 1904 girls from Shaftesbury Reformatory School were moved to Ormond House.

Date: 1904 -

- [Shaftesbury Home for Babies and Mothers \(c. 1913 - 1915\)](#)

Shaftesbury Home for Babies and Mothers was located in the old Shaftesbury Reformatory School buildings.

## 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
- Quinn, Peter E, [Unenlightened efficiency: the administration of the juvenile correction system in New South Wales 1905-1988](#), 27 March 2006
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Index 1817-1942](#), No date
- Ison, Jane, [The Newcastle Industrial School for Girls: Their infamy is lost to history](#), 2012
- Hanna, Kim, [Shaftesbury Reformatory](#), Dictionary of Sydney, 2018
- [The Shaftesbury Reformatory - A Model Institution](#), The Daily Telegraph, 13 January 1890

## Records

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

### Records

- [Roll of inmates \[Shaftesbury Girls Reformatory, South Head\] \(1888 - 1897\)](#)
  - [Copies of letters sent concerning the administration of public schools \(1880 - 1896\)](#)
  - [School Files \(1876 - 1979\)](#)
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