

School for Deaf Girls

1886 – c. 1979

Other Names:

- Rosary Convent School for Deaf Girls
- School for Deaf Girls, Waratah
- Waratah Deaf and Dumb Institute
- Waratah School for Deaf Girls

Details

The School for Deaf Girls was founded in 1886 at Waratah, near Newcastle, by the Dominican Sisters. It was located in the Rosary Convent in Alfred Street. It was a residential school for deaf girls and was one of the first institutions of its kind and was founded by Sister M. Gabriel Hogan, deaf herself. In the 1930s it developed innovative approaches to teaching children with hearing impairments. It closed after 1979.

Hellwig writes that the Rosary Convent Waratah was purpose-built in 1888 for the needs of deaf students. M. Gabriel Hogan had come from Ireland to Australia in 1875, she was deaf from the age of 8 due to scarlatina. Hogan was ‘renowned for using sign language’ (Hellwig, 2020).

Anne O’Brien has written that in 1931 Sister Kathleen Egan (Sister Mary Madeleine Thérèse) was appointed to the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, serving as superior from 1933 to 1941. As a trained teacher in mathematics, she made many innovations based on her teaching experience. She believed ‘the deaf child has tastes, dislikes, ambitions similar to those of her unhandicapped sister’ so introduced the State curriculum, drama, art, physical culture, eurhythmics and current affairs. She taught from textbooks where possible, which was unusual at the time.

In 1938 Sister Madeleine invited Father L Page, director of Montreal’s Deaf and Dumb Institute, to teach the nuns the latest ‘oral’ techniques of speech, lip reading and the use of modern equipment to amplify sound.

Sister Madeleine was a leader in the education of children with hearing impairments. She was an honorary foundation fellow of the Australian Association of Teachers of the Deaf, published a *Prayer Book for the Catholic Deaf* and a *History of Deaf Education in Australia, 1927-1950*. She also taught at St Mary’s School for Deaf Children in Portsea, Victoria, which was also run by the Dominican Sisters.

According to a 1955 Combined Charities Festival advertisement in the *Newcastle Sun*, the School for Deaf Girls had a disastrous fire in 1949, but was rebuilt and reopened in 1951. (A photograph in Newcastle Cultural Collections shows the rebuilding). The supplement said girls were trained to cook, sew, type and taught ‘all the usual school subjects’. At that time the school had 75 pupils from all over Australia but also ‘of various creeds and nationalities’, including an Aboriginal girl from Bathurst Island and a girl from Singapore.

The school continued to lead education for hearing-impaired girls in New South Wales into the 1960s. In July 1969 an Eastwood man, Ron Lawless, wrote a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* pointing out there was no special educational treatment for hearing-impaired students at any post-school institution in New South Wales. He said his 13 year old daughter attended the School for Deaf Girls, which was viewed by the New South Wales Government as a ‘private school’ so received only the same financial assistance as mainstream schools. Lawless felt this was unfair, writing that the vast majority of the 88 girls were not Catholic, and were the children of

average working Australian parents who could not afford to pay 'private' school fees. As a result of this policy, he said, the teacher-pupil ratio was high, at 1:11, even though the sisters provided vocational education, as well as specialised teaching.

The School for Deaf Girls was mentioned in a 1979 Commonwealth Government report called *Why are they in children's homes: report of the ACOSS children's home intake survey*. It is assumed to have closed as a residential school shortly afterwards.

Gallery



Pupils: Rosary Convent, Waratah, 1908

Description: This is a copy of a photograph in the archives of the School for Deaf Girls, Waratah (formerly known as Waratah Deaf and Dumb Institute) at the Rosary Convent, Waratah, NSW, Australia, held by Cultural Collections at the University of Newcastle, Australia. The image shows a group of pupils and teachers sitting outside on the steps of the School for Deaf Girls.



A Day at the Beach: 1928

Description: This is a copy of a photograph in the archives of the School for Deaf Girls, Waratah (formerly known as Waratah Deaf and Dumb Institute) at the Rosary Convent, Waratah, NSW, Australia, held by Cultural Collections at the University of Newcastle, Australia. The image shows a group of pupils and teachers sitting on a deck of a boat.



Rosary Convent at Waratah: Rosary Convent (Alfred Street, Waratah) Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (Waratah)

Description: This is a digital copy of an image by Ralph Snowball (1849-1925), held by Newcastle City Council and made by Newcastle Cultural Collections



The new Deaf and Dumb School for girls at Waratah

Description: This is a digital copy of an image that appeared in the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, made by Newcastle Cultural Collections. The original caption reads 'New Deaf and Dumb Hostel, Waratah'.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands \(1867 - current\)](#)
The Dominican Sisters established and ran the School for Deaf Girls.

Resources

- The University of Newcastle Australia, [Rosary Convent, Waratah](#), Cultural Collections, UON Library, University of Newcastle, Australia flickr site, 2015

Records

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

Records

- [Collection of the Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands Archives \(1880s - current\)](#)
 - [Rosary Convent, Waratah - Archives \(1888 - 1975\)](#)
 - [Register of Incapacitated Persons Maintained in Institutions in Other Colonies \(1873 - 1897\)](#)
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