

# Destitute Asylum

1851 – c. 1917

## Details

---

The Destitute Asylum was established in Adelaide by the Destitute Board in 1851. It provided accommodation for the destitute, including children and a separate lying-in Home for pregnant girls. In 1849, with the setting up of the new Destitute Board, the government took on more responsibility for the care of poor and neglected colonists. Initially a number of temporary shelters were established in Emigration Square in the west parklands of Adelaide. However, the temporary huts were soon found to be inadequate and in 1851 the government granted the Destitute Board access to part of the barracks complex on Kintore Avenue, next to Government House. The first residents moved into their new quarters on 10th May 1851.

The Destitute Asylum was the first institution of its kind in Australia. Its role was to provide supervised “indoor relief”, meaning shelter and food, for the destitute poor. This included men, women and children, pregnant women, the elderly, people with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, people with alcohol problems or who were suffering from chronic illnesses such as leprosy. Aboriginal people were also eligible for sheltered relief at the Asylum but were housed separately from other residents.

In the mid 1850s a number of buildings of various types were erected on the grounds of the Destitute Asylum to accommodate increasing numbers. By 1856 the Asylum was providing shelter for 65 women, 30 men and 43 children. Living conditions in the Asylum were basic and crowded and the institution was often criticised in the press for being unclean and unhealthy.

In the mid 1850s the children accommodated in the Asylum attended a free school. However, as numbers of children increased, so did concern about whether the Asylum, with its aged, ill and sometimes disturbed inmates, was the right place for them. The Destitute Persons Relief Act 1866- 67 introduced two new ways of dealing with children charged as being neglected. They could either be boarded out – meaning sent into foster care and/or service with families who were regarded as respectable – or they could be moved into the yet to be built Industrial School, an institution specifically designated for children.

As a result of the passing of the Act, the vast majority of the children in the overcrowded Destitute Asylum had to be moved out. Unfortunately, no permanent Industrial School yet existed. In addition, the military barracks section of the Asylum where the children were housed needed to be vacated in order for the British Army to reoccupy the barracks. The arrival of the XIVth Regiment made the removal of the children from the Destitute Asylum urgent so the government had to make temporary arrangements.

In November 1866, a group of approximately 60 children from the Asylum were sent to makeshift accommodation in the Exhibition Building on North Terrace. This building was considered extremely unsuitable and in February 1867 the majority of the children were moved to again to a former Hotel in Brighton, the Grace Darling. When the Grace Darling Hotel quickly became overcrowded other children from the Destitute Asylum were sent to the [St Vincent de Paul Orphanage](#), run by the Catholic Church, and [the Orphan Home](#), run by the Church of England. Once the new [Magill Industrial School](#) was completed in 1869, 157 children from these temporary homes were sent there.

A separate Lying-in Home for pregnant girls was created at the Destitute Asylum grounds in the mid 1860s. Also girls who had committed an offence or had behavioural problems continued to be accommodated within the

buildings that made up the Destitute Asylum until they were moved out to the [Girls' Reformatory, Magill](#) in 1881. From that year the Destitute Asylum ceased to be an institution for children. However, the Lying-in Home continued to operate at the site until 1919.

## Gallery

---



### Destitute Asylum and Police Barracks

**Description:** The library description states: A family poses for the photographer in front of the Mounted Police Barracks Armoury (on the right) and the Colonial Store (or Destitute Asylum), on the left. (For site see map of Adelaide in 1871 Almanack.) These buildings face south and are about 120 yards north of North Terrace. The extreme left is 70 yards east of Kintore Avenue. The near side of the building on the extreme right is 158 yards east of Kintore Avenue. The open space is the site of the Parade Ground.



### Group of 'Barwell Boys'

**Description:** The library description states: Large group of 'Barwell Boys' in front of the Destitute Asylum buildings. This photograph was published in The Observer newspaper 30 September 1922 page 29.



### Destitute Asylum, Adelaide

**Description:** The library description states: [On back of photograph] April 1918 / Portion of Destitute Asylum, Adelaide.



### Grace Darling Hotel

**Description:** This image was published in the Annual Report of the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board 1960.



### Schoolroom at the Destitute Asylum

**Description:** This image is of 82 Kintore Avenue, Adelaide which is where the schoolroom of the Destitute Asylum was located. It has since become part of the Migration Museum, Adelaide.

## More info

---

## Related Entries

### Run by

- [Destitute Board, South Australian Government \(1849 - 1927\)](#)

## Related Events

- [Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Destitute Poor, South Australia \(1867\)](#)
- [Way Commission, Province of South Australia \(1883 - 1885\)](#)

## Related Organisations

- [St Mary's Mission of Hope \(1904 - 1953\)](#)  
St Mary's Mission of Hope took in many girls from the Destitute Asylum.
- [St Vincent de Paul Orphanage \(1866 - 1975\)](#)  
Following the Destitute Persons Relief Act 1867, some children were moved from the Destitute Asylum to St Vincent de Paul Orphanage.
- [The Orphan Home \(1860 - 1935\)](#)  
Following the Destitute Persons Relief Act 1867, some children were moved from the Destitute Asylum to The Orphan Home.
- [Girls Reformatory, Magill \(1881 - 1891\)](#)  
In 1881 girls from Girls' Reformatory section of the Destitute Asylum were moved to the Girls' Reformatory, Magill
- [Brighton Industrial School \(1867 - 1869\)](#)  
Children formerly living at the Destitute Asylum were moved into the Brighton Industrial School in 1867.
- [Magill Industrial School \(1869 - 1898\)](#)

## Related Legislation

- [Destitute Asylum Act 1863, South Australia \(1863 - 1867\)](#)
- [Destitute Persons Relief Act 1866, South Australia \(1867 - 1872\)](#)

## Resources

- Australian Heritage Council, [A thematic heritage study on Australia's benevolent and other care institutions](#), 2016
- Barbalet, Margaret, *Far from a low gutter girl: the forgotten world of state wards: South Australia 1887-1940*, 1983
- Dickey, Brian, *Rations, Residence, Resources: A history of social welfare in South Australia since 1836*, 1986
- *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Destitute Poor*, 1867

## Records

---

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

## Records

- [Child Welfare Records of the Social Welfare Department and predecessors, South Australia \(1862 - 2000\)](#)
  - [Records of the Destitute Board and Destitute Asylum, State Records of South Australia \(c. 1845 - 1927\)](#)
  - [Records of the Aborigines' Office and Successor Agencies \(1866 - 2003\)](#)
  - [Government Child and Social Welfare Client Files, State Records of South Australia \(1900 - 2014\)](#)
  - [Indexes to letters received - Destitute Poor Department, Destitute Persons' Department and Children's Welfare and Public Relief Department \(1867 - 1955\)](#)
- 

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/destitute-asylum/>