

# Queen's Orphan Asylum

1833 – 1879

**Other Names:**

- Queen's Asylum for Destitute Children
- Queen's Orphan Schools
- King's Orphan Schools
- Queen's Orphanage
- Orphan School

## Details

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The Queen's Orphan Asylum opened as the King's Orphan Asylum in New Town in 1833. It was the first purpose built institution for orphaned, destitute and neglected children in Van Diemen's Land, later Tasmania. It closed in 1879.

The Orphan School was the first purpose built institution for accommodating children in Van Diemen's Land. Before the Orphan School opened in 1833, boys were housed in a disused distillery in New Town, and some girls placed in a private home in Davey Street, Hobart.

The Orphan School, designed by John Lee Archer, was situated in St John's Avenue, New Town. The parish church of St John's stood between the buildings for boys and for girls. In *God's own country*, Boyce describes this as a 'parish partnership' between the Church and government with the church designed specifically for the needs of the Asylum, convicts and free settlers. The children sat in one gallery and the convicts in the other with the settlers in the main body. Barriers and separate entrances prevented the children from seeing the convicts. Church of England clergy dominated the committee that managed the Asylum.

From the beginning, the Orphan School seems to have been a bleak place. In 1839 the *Colonial Times* reported:

*Everyone knows how pleasing an appearance the exterior of the building exhibits; we wish we could say as much of the interior; but we cannot do, as the majority of the apartments allotted to the use of the children are cold comfortless, and ill arranged upon a most mistaken system of parsimonious economy...the prevalence of stone pavement, throughout the lower apartments of the building is, in our humble opinion, highly detrimental to the health of the inmates, in one room we saw five little fellows blue and shivering with cold, there was it is true a fireplace in the room, but no fire...We have seen many assemblages of children in our time...but never did we see two hundred human beings, that exhibited so squalid an appearance, as did the majority of the Queen's Orphans.*

In its early years of operation, the majority of children at the Orphan School were born to convict women under sentence. A newspaper article from 1853 described the Orphan School as an institution for:

*the reception of orphan children, children deserted by their parents, or the offspring of objects of charity who are unable to provide for them; the above classes are paid for by the Colonial Government. The other class and principally as regards numerical strength, being about six-sevenths, are those of convict parents undergoing probation or sentence, or illegitimate children of convict parents unprovided for, these are maintained at the expense of the Government, and may be said on average to cost £16 2s 3d per annum for each child (including all expenses), which charge includes the keeping of the buildings in repair.*

The Asylum also housed some Aboriginal children. Boyce believes that although life there caused them 'distress and suffering', it also provided them with a knowledge of British culture and a level of education that assisted them in their struggle for justice.

According to Joyce Purtscher: 'Like the convict system, large doses of religion were handed out [at the Orphans School]. The orphanage was under the management of the Convict Department and was managed like a prison, with walls surrounding it and discipline to match'.

Pearce also draws parallels between the Orphan School and the convict system in Tasmania:

*The Orphan Schools were an integral component of the convict system, with the same mechanisms – regimentation, discipline, punishment and control. Religion and education would transform and socialise children into 'respectable' industrious adults. If nothing else, the Orphan Schools would remove from public view children who, for one reason or another, were defined as destitute.*

The governance of the institution is described in an article published in the *Hobart Town Courier* on 31 January 1853:

*Until the year 1837 a committee of ladies and gentlemen, nominated by the Lieutenant-Governor, directed the management of the schools. In 1837 the full management and responsibility were vested in a head master, a clergyman of the Church of England, and the whole body of children were brought up in that religion irrespective of the creed of their parents. In April 1841 the establishment was transferred from the Colonial to the Convict Department, and the charge placed in the hands of a Lay head master (or superintendent); the children were separated, as to their religious denominations, and visiting chaplains appointed, Protestant and Roman Catholic, for religious instruction and the performance of divine worship.*

From 1861, with the passage of the *Queens Asylum Act*, the institution became known as the Queen's Orphan Asylum, or the Queen's Orphanage.

The Infant Orphan School, constructed in 1862 became the Female Charitable Institution in 1874, operating as a lying-in hospital and home for girls considered to be 'mentally defective' as well as providing accommodation for women who were destitute.

After the cessation of transportation, numbers dropped at the orphanage. The boarding out system was introduced in Tasmania in 1873. From 1864, children could also be placed in industrial schools, or girls at the St Joseph's Orphanage, which opened in 1879.

The cessation of transportation, the boarding-out system, and new institutions like industrial schools contributed to numbers dropping at the Queen's Orphan Asylum in the 1870s. The Orphan School was closed in 1879. After this time, the buildings were operated for some years as the Male Division of the New Town Charitable Institution.

# Gallery

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**Infant Orphan School**



**Orphan School, South Wing**



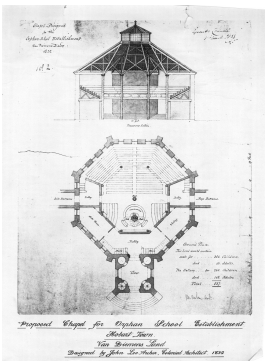
**Orphan School, North Wing**



**Queens Orphan Asylum New Town**



**Front view of the New Church and King's Male and Female Orphan Schools now in progress of building at New Town, January 1831**



**Proposed chapel for the orphan school**

**Description:** This chapel, designed by John Lee Archer, was never built.

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## More info

### Chronology

- **Queen's Orphan Asylum (1833 – 1879)**
  - New Town Charitable Institution (1879 - 1912)
  - New Town Infirmary (1912 - 1934)
  - New Town Rest Home (1934 - 1936)
  - St John's Park (1936 - 1994)

# Related Entries

## Run by

- [Board of Guardians Queens Asylum \(1862 - 1879\)](#)  
Date: 1861 - 1879
- [Convict Department \(1818 - 1877\)](#)  
Date: 1841 - 1861

## Related Events

- [Royal Commission into Queen's Asylum, Tasmania \(1867\)](#)
- [Royal Commission into Charitable Institutions, Tasmania \(1871\)](#)

## Related Organisations

- [Cascades House of Correction \(1856 - c. 1877\)](#)  
Some of the children at the Cascades House of Correction awaited transfer to the Queen's Orphan Asylum.
- [Wingfield House \(1938 - 1971\)](#)  
Wingfield House was at St John's Park on the site of the former Queen's Orphan Asylum.
- [Anglican Diocese of Tasmania \(1842 - 1981\)](#)  
The Church of England was deeply involved in the management of the Queen's Orphan Asylum.
- [St Joseph's Orphanage \(1879 - 1970\)](#)  
Some of the first girls to enter St Joseph's Orphanage came from the Queen's Orphan Asylum.
- [Charitable Grants Department, Colony of Tasmania \(1873 - 1901\)](#)

## Related Legislation

- [Queen's Asylum Act 1861, Tasmania \(1861 - 1934\)](#)
- [Apprenticing of the Children of the Queen's Orphan Schools 1838, Tasmania \(1838 - 1861\)](#)
- [Apprenticing the Children of the Queen's Orphan Schools Amendment 1840, Tasmania \(1840 - 1861\)](#)
- [Apprenticing the Children of the Queen's Orphan School Amendment - amendment 1841, Tasmania \(1841 - 1861\)](#)
- [Queen's Asylum Act No.2 1870, Tasmania \(1870 - 1934\)](#)

## Related Concepts

- [Stolen Generations](#)  
Aboriginal children were removed from Flinders Island in the 1840s and placed in the Queen's Orphan Asylum.

# Resources

- Australian Heritage Council, [A thematic heritage study on Australia's benevolent and other care institutions](#), 2016
- Rimon, Wendy, [Children's homes](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- Purtscher, Joyce, [Queen's Orphanage Hobart Town 1828-1879](#), 2007
- [Queen's Orphan Schools, New Town](#), Female Factory Research Group website, No date
- Daniels, Dennis, [Social welfare](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, No date
- Pearce, Kim, *The Queen's Orphan Asylum - New Town*, Hobart's history: the first two hundred years. Papers and proceedings of the conference held by the Professional Historians Association of Tasmania on 4 October 1997, 1998
- Purtscher, Joyce, *Children in Queen's Orphanage, Hobart Town, 1828-1863*, 1993
- Purtscher, Joyce, *Infants at Queen's Orphanage Hobart 1851-1863*, 1993
- Purtscher, Joyce, *Applications for Queen's Orphanage, Hobart Town 1858-1878*, 1993
- Purtscher, Joyce, *Unnamed Irish boys on convict ships 1841-1843, sent to Queen's Orphanage, Hobart, Van Diemen's Land*, 1993
- Brown, Joan C., *'Poverty is not a crime': the development of social services in Tasmania, 1803-1900*, 1972
- Kippen, Rebecca, ['A most shocking tissue of barbarous cruelty': scandal and death in the Queen's Orphan Schools](#), Chainletter: News from the Founders & Survivors project at the Universities of Tasmania, Melbourne, Flinders, New South Wales, and the Australian National University, August 2010
- Pearce, Kim and Doyle, Susan, *New Town: a social history*, 2002

- Committee of the Royal Commission into Queen's Asylum, [\*Queen's Asylum: Report of the Royal Commission\*](#), 1867
- [\*Charitable Institutions\*](#), Launceston Examiner, 9 December 1871
- Tasmania: Royal Commission on Charitable Institutions, *Report of the Commissioners : together with the evidence taken, and various returns*, December 1871

## Records

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

### Records

- [Register of Children Apprenticed from the Asylum, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1860 - 1886\)](#)
  - [Register of Masters of Children Apprenticed, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1860 - 1884\)](#)
  - [Applications for Admission and associated Papers \(1859 - 1879\)](#)
  - [Collection of Photographs \(1860 - 2006\)](#)
  - [Daily Journal of Admissions and Discharges to Queens Orphan Schools \(1841 - 1851\)](#)
  - [Register of Children Admitted and Discharged from the Male and Female Orphan School \(1828 - 1863\)](#)
  - [Register of Children Admitted and Discharged from the Infant School \(1851 - 1863\)](#)
  - [Register of Applications for Admission, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1858 - 1879\)](#)
  - [Chronological Return of Cases Where Weekly Payments Were Made for the Maintenance of Children \(1862 - 1879\)](#)
  - [Alphabetical List of Children Admitted for Whom Maintenance and Weekly Payments Were Made \(1862 - 1867\)](#)
  - [Indentures of Apprenticeships between the Board and Employees, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1870 - 1880\)](#)
  - [Inward Correspondence and Associated Papers Dealt with at Meetings of the Board, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1871 - 1883\)](#)
  - [Minutes of Meetings of the Board, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1872 - 1875\)](#)
  - [Secretary's Register of Matters Dealt with at the Meetings of the Board, Queen's Orphan Asylum \(1874 - 1877\)](#)
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