

Risdon Prison

1960 –

Details

Risdon Prison, run by the government, opened in 1960. Although Risdon is an adult prison, it has always held small numbers of teenagers under the age of eighteen, some of them wards of the state. In 2013, it continues to hold some young people aged 16 or 17.

Risdon Prison, which replaced the convict-built Campbell Street Gaol in the centre of Hobart, opened for men in November 1960. It was self-enclosed, meaning that the boundary was formed by its outside walls. These were made of pink concrete reinforced by steel. There was no perimeter fence. Authorities considered it 'one of the world's best' because it had a number of innovations, including flushing toilets, the only ones in an Australian prison. Risdon Prison's modernity and pink colour led *The Mercury* to dub it the 'Pink Palace', a nickname that stuck.

Women inmates remained at the Campbell Street gaol until 1963, when they moved into a new building at Risdon Prison. It had 23 cells. In the men's prison all the cells opened into an outside quadrangle. However, the indoor areas of the women's prison were enclosed and connected by corridors. Each cell had a flushing toilet and cold running water.

In 1976, Roy Grubb conducted an inquiry into Risdon Prison. During it, he interviewed 200 inmates as well as taking oral and written statements from members of the staff. He was particularly concerned to find that young men of 16 or 17 years of age were there:

Frankly, I was appalled, during the first week of the Inquiry and then again in August to sit face to face with a sixteen year old boy, committed to the maximum security section of the Risdon Prison for a period of six months.

The prison administration tried to keep the young man apart from the other inmates.

Strangely, this lad's complaint to me was that he was kept segregated. He wanted to be treated like the other men. I was at pains to point out to him what this might mean. He remained unconvinced.

In the 1970s, Risdon Prison also accommodated young women under 18 years of age. However, it was apparently unusual for a girl of 16 years to receive a prison sentence.

In the lead up to the *Review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children: Final Report – Phase 2* of 2006, the Ombudsman received five claims of abuse from former wards of state concerning Risdon Prison.

Gallery



Risdon Vale, near the gaol



Risdon Prison

Description: Photograph taken by the *Mercury*. It shows the observation tower and part of the wall of the original complex.



Risdon Prison

Description: Photograph taken by the *Mercury*. It shows the observation tower of the original complex on the right.



Risdon Prison

Description: Photograph taken by the *Mercury*. It shows the new maximum security area completed in 2006.

More info

Chronology

- Campbell Street Gaol (1821 - 1960)
 - **Risdon Prison (1960 –)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Prisons Department \(1959 - 1983\)](#)
- [Tasmania Prison Service \(2000 - current\)](#)
- [Law Department, State of Tasmania \(1983 - c. 1992\)](#)
- [Department of Justice, State of Tasmania \(c. 1992 - 1998\)](#)
- [Department of Justice, State of Tasmania \(c. 2004 - current\)](#)

Related Events

- [Select Committee Inquiry into Ashley Home for Boys, Tasmania \(1962 - 1963\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Ashley Home for Boys \(1926 - 1999\)](#)
Adolescents that could not be managed at Ashley, might be sent to Risdon Prison.
- [Royal Derwent Hospital \(1968 - 2000\)](#)
Like Alonnah Ward at the Royal Derwent Hospital, the women's section at Risdon Prison was built during a period of concern about the behaviour of girls and young women.

- [St John's Park \(1936 - 1994\)](#)
Risdon Prison may have sent people to St John's Park.

Resources

- [Les Batchelor interviewed by Caroline Evans for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 7 February 2012
- Tooth, John, [Treatment of Mental Illness](#), The companion to Tasmanian history, 2005
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Feature article - 100 years of prison service: Tasmania's history has a compelling link with prisons](#), Tasmanian Year Book, 2004

Records

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

Records

- [Tasmania Prison Service Records \(1960 - current\)](#)
 - [Deceased Prisoners Individual Files, Risdon Prison and Campbell Street Gaol \(1918 - 1978\)](#)
 - [General Correspondence \(Classified Sequence\) \(1920 - 1992\)](#)
 - [Collection of Photographs \(1860 - 2006\)](#)
 - [Register of the Admission of 'Mental Defectives', New Town Infirmary \(1926 - 1965\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/risdon-prison-4/>