



## Army Museum of Tasmania

Anglesea Barracks  
HOBART

Information Sheet No 14

### *The Hobart Girls Reformatory (1881-1905)*

### *The Hobart Industrial Girls School (located at the Barracks from 1873-1892)*

The Hobart Girls Reformatory was established by the Ladies Christian Association who were concerned with “rescue” work in the community. There was a fear that delinquent girls were being sent to ordinary prisons to be further contaminated by mixing with hardened criminals. Whilst the Reformatory was established for girls just entering upon a ‘vicious career’, the Hobart Industrial School provided for girls who had not been charged with any criminal offence. It was managed by a committee of ladies elected by subscribers, usually under the patronage of the Governor’s wife. Some ladies from the Industrial School Committee objected to the Reformatory being established opposite their school. They were concerned that the prestige of the industrial school would be lowered and worried there would be a taint in the atmosphere.

The ladies appeared to be very keen to keep their school’s reputation entirely separate from the ‘bad and vicious’ girls of the Reformatory, and there was a sense of relief from the Committee when the Industrial School relocated in 1892.

In many ways though, the institutions were very similar. Like the Reformatory, the primary aim of the Industrial School was to train the girls to be good domestic servants and the sewing, washing, mangling and domestic work of the girls was made a source of income.

Both institutions attempted to make a homely atmosphere for the girls. The Reformatory girls used the cells as private bedrooms, ‘each inmate seeming to vie with her neighbour in making her apartment look pleasant and pretty’ by decorating walls with pictorial illustrations and arranging bunches of flowers. Whilst the Reformatory had no educational inspection, two members of the Ladies Christian Association examined the girls weekly. It was reported that many of the girls were very ignorant on admission, some having to be taught their alphabet by the matron and her assistants. There is evidence that both institutions attempted to ensure the girls

were treated with a degree of warmth and sympathy. However, the girls were subject to a regime of domestic work and laundry with only a rudimentary education, and placed in domestic service after their committal period was over.

Within its 24 year history the Reformatory had seen the admission of approximately 70 girls. These were girls caught in a time where the Reformatory system popular across Europe and mainland Australia was adopted through the reforming zeal of the Tasmanian middle class, resulting in long incarcerations of young girls for petty crimes.



**Hobart Girls Industrial School(University of Tasmania)**