

# Jika Reformatory for Boys

1873 – 1879

## Details

---

In 1873 the Boys' Reformatory run by the Victorian government moved from the reformatories on board the [Sir Harry Smith](#) and the [Deborah](#). The new institution at Coburg was known as the Jika Reformatory for Boys. It was located within the grounds of Pentridge prison.

The Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline had stated in 1872: 'a ship is not a fitting place for reformatory purposes if the boys be not expressly designed for a sea-faring life. Experience too clearly proves that immoral practices of the worst kind spring up amongst them, which can never be effectually suppressed'. It recommended that the reformatory on board the ship be abandoned as soon as an appropriate building for the boys could be found.

In 1873 the boys moved from the ships into Jika and were housed in an existing building (Pentridge's F Division). Around 50 boys were moved taken in two police vans from Hobsons Bay to the new reformatory in Coburg (*The Age*, 31 January 1873). The department's annual report stated that the clothing and bedding provided on the ships was unsuitable for onshore, and provided them with new supplies.

In December 1872, *The Argus* newspaper had reported on the planned reformatory at Coburg. It stated that the buildings were south of the Pentridge stockade but on the same area. The boys' reformatory was to be situated between the house of the Inspector General of Penal Establishments and the outer wall which surrounded the Stockade Reserve. The article stressed that the reformatory area would be completely cut off by a high iron fence from the adult prisoners' workshops where men worked during the day. The entrance to the reformatory would be "quite private" and far from the men's prison entrance. The reformatory buildings hadn't been used for a considerable period. They were formerly used as a hospital or to accommodate prisoners.

The reformatory was to be divided into 2 buildings. One was a room large enough to accommodate the *Sir Harry Smith* ship. This would be used as a dining room and schoolroom, and a "place of amusement for wet weather". The other building had one large room below and two long rooms above. Downstairs was a workshop where the boys would be taught indoor trades. "Airy dormitories" for the boys and those in charge of them were located upstairs. *The Argus* stated that outside there would be a green for cricket, and a garden where horticulture and agriculture will be taught.

The article reported that the necessary alterations at Coburg would take no more than a few weeks to complete and at the new reformatory, the boys would be much better looked after than they were on the ship. The new reformatory's "abundance of light in all parts of the premises will keep them out of the mischief which they have tempted into in the darkened 'tween decks of the hulk". The walls meant that the boys would be "granted considerable freedom without fear of them running away (*The Argus*, 23 December 1872).

In May 1873, the media reported on a daring escape by boys from "inside the walls of the Pentridge Stockade". The newspaper accounts contains some more descriptions of the reformatory, "a large blue building formerly used as a prison for convicts". Seven or eight boys scaled the "boundary wall surrounding the paddock" but were spotted while they tried to descend via a gas pipe. All were eventually apprehended.

The superintendent's report for 1878 stated that on 1 January 1879 there were 178 boys at Jika Reformatory, and 128 boys at the end of the year. He reported that they had attempted to divide the boys into classes but it had not been a "fair trial" as they lacked the buildings to keep the different groups separated.

At that time the reformatory also housed 46 girls. It was reported that the girls' conduct had on the whole been good. "Some of them, who were previously taken from the haunts of vice, on being sent out to service in the district, appear to give promise of a future respectable life. It is matter of sincere regret, however, that some who have been discharged to friends are known to have returned to localities and people where, and with whom, it is almost impossible for them to do well" (annual report 1878).

The 1879 annual report said that Jika had accommodation for 80, but only held 25. The department reported that the building was "substantial and suitable", but that it was required by the Penal Department for their adult female prisoners. Besides, the report went on, having the boys' reformatory within the walls of Pentridge Prison was "objectionable". For these reasons, the boys' reformatory was being moved to the former site of the Ballarat Industrial School. The reformatory at Ballarat that opened in 1879 had accommodation for 200.

## More info

---

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Colony of Victoria \(1864 - 1887\)](#)

#### Related Legislation

- [The Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864, Victoria \(1864 - 1888\)](#)  
The Reformatory for Boys was established under the provisions of the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864.
- [The Juvenile Offenders' Act 1887, Victoria \(1888 - 1890\)](#)  
The administration of the Reformatory for Boys was governed by the Juvenile Offenders Act 1887.  
Date: 1887 - ?

#### Related Organisations

- [Ballarat Boys' Reformatory \(1879 - 1893\)](#)  
When Jika Reformatory closed in 1879, boys were moved to the Ballarat Reformatory.

## Resources

- Lynn, Peter, [Pentridge Prison](#), eMelbourne: the city past and present, 2008
- Victoria. Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline., [Report \(No.3\) of the Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline: Industrial and Reformatory Schools](#), 1872
- Victoria. Children's Welfare Department and Reformatory Schools, [Report of the Secretary / Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools](#), 1887 - 1895. *Relevance:* Mentioned in reports dated 1888-1894

## Records

---

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

### Records

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
-

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