

The *Deborah*

1864 – 1873

Details

The *Deborah*, was a hulk (ship) anchored in Hobsons Bay. In July 1864 it became the colony of Victoria's first Reformatory for Boys from the Industrial schools. By 1865, it accommodated 108 boys sentenced under the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act* of 1864.

The *Deborah* was one of four ships used as reformatories or industrial schools for children in Hobsons Bay: the *Sir Harry Smith*, the *Nelson*, the *Deborah* and the *Success*, eventually housed approximately 500 boys.

An article published in July 1864 in *The Argus* referred to the success attained in England with 'wild boys', by sending them to a government training ship on the Mersey. The transformation of the *Deborah*, a former convict hulk in Hobsons Bay, into a juvenile reformatory ship was an experiment to 'reclaim' the colony's 'juvenile criminals', and 'to remove them from the scene of their temptation'. The paper described these 'lads' as a 'class, unfortunately, numerous, active, and precocious' (22 July 1864, p.7). The *Herald* reported that "what a few months ago was little better than a floating wreck is now a first-class reformatory", housing 30 to 40 lads (*The Herald*, 22 September 1864).

The *Deborah* was used as a means of removing boys from adult prisons. An article in *The Argus* stated, "we have hitherto not done much for the stray little waifs floating about colonial society. We have sent them to prison, where bad has been made worse. We have lodged them in Pentridge, where they have certainly been better treated – instructed both in letters and in work until their sentence terminated. After then, however, we have cared nothing for them" (22 July 1864).

In December 1864 the *Deborah* held 35 boys. During 1865 its numbers increased to 108.

A newspaper article described a day in the life of the boys on The *Deborah* in 1864:

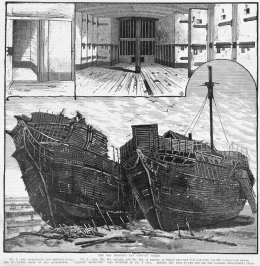
The boys rise early in the morning, stow away their hammocks, and wash down the decks. This over, they go down to a breakfast of hominy; and afterwards they are inspected, to ascertain whether they have washed and cleaned themselves properly for the day. They are then handed over to the naval instructor, who keeps them employed during the morning holystoning the decks, polishing brasswork, and in the general cleaning operations sailors are put to. At twelve o'clock they are mustered for dinner — soup, the soup-meat, potatoes, and bread — and the meal over, they are allowed half-an-hour's play-time. At one o'clock they go to school, where they remain until half-past three. They can all read, more or less, it may be remarked, and many of them write very fair hands. School over, another half-hour's play is given, and then comes supper, When the meal has been partaken of hymns are sung, and word is passed to trice-up hammocks. The next half hour or so the lads are allowed to converse freely; but after the ringing of the sleep bell silence is strictly enjoined.

In 1867, the newspaper reported that 4 boys had escaped from the *Deborah*, during a visit to the Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia in Melbourne (*Ballarat Star*, 28 January 1867).

A former shoemaking instructor on the *Deborah* stated that the ship had had a badge system, to reward good behaviour by the boys. He said that some boys were granted permission to go on shore, and even to accompany him home on Sundays (*Herald*, 4 April 1878).

In 1873, the government opened the new Jika Reformatory for Boys in Coburg, and occupants of the *Deborah* were transferred to the new institution.

Gallery



The old Hobson's Bay convict hulks

Description: This print of a wood engraving was published in the *Australasian Sketcher* with Pen and Pencil showing *The Deborah* on the left.

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 \(1864 - 1888\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [The Nelson \(1868 - 1876\)](#)

Resources

- Guillaume, George; Connor, Edward C., [The Development and Working of the Reformatory and Preventive Systems in the Colony of Victoria, Australia, 1864-1890](#), 1891
- Jaggs, Donella, *Neglected and criminal: foundations of child welfare legislation in Victoria*, 1986

Records

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

Records

- [Victorian Government Wardship and/or Out of Home Care Records \(1864 - current\)](#)
 - [Victorian Naval Logs \(1865 - 1876\)](#)
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