

Launceston Gaol

1827 – 1917

Other Names: • Launceston Prison

Details

Launceston Gaol, run by the government, opened in 1827. Although the Gaol was for adults, it housed quite a few children, some as young as eight or nine. It closed in 1917.

Launceston Gaol, located in Patterson Street, opened in 1827. By 1900, it was mostly used as temporary accommodation for offenders waiting to go to court in North and North-West Tasmania. Launceston Gaol became the subject of a number of government inquiries, including Royal Commissions.

Children's presence in gaol was widely accepted by nineteenth century society because of the belief that they could be held responsible for their own actions. This accounts for the numbers of children placed in Launceston Gaol.

By the 1860s, the idea that children were responsible for their actions was changing. In 1867, the *Training Schools Act* provided for the establishment of training schools so that children were not sent to prison, although they might serve a 10 day sentence there first.

Despite the establishment of a Boys' Reformatory in 1869, which closed in 1879, and later, a Girls' Training School (1881) and a Boys' Training School (1884), children continued to be sent to Launceston Gaol for either the 10 day preliminary sentence or longer. For instance, in 1882, 36 boys under the age of 16 were there. Girls could also be sent to the Gaol but magistrates tended to dismiss charges against them to prevent that from happening.

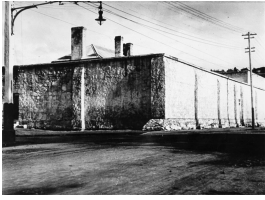
Children were supposed to be kept apart from the other prisoners but because of the state of the buildings, the Superintendent was unable to enforce it.

In May 1913, the *Launceston Examiner* wrote about the plight of a girl kept in the prison overnight for larceny:

The wretched condition into which Launceston gaol has fallen was strongly in evidence in the Police Court yesterday when Mr. Shields made some scathing remarks on the accommodation provided for a girl who was arrested on a charge of larceny: There was a large ventilator in the small cell, and two out of the four panes of glass in the window were broken. Nothing in the shape of a bedstead seems to have been provided, but although blankets were forthcoming, the occupant had to lie on the floor. As the night was cold and frosty, the girl was almost in a state of collapse.

When Launceston Gaol closed in 1917, the Police Watch House took over its functions.

Gallery



Launceston Gaol

More info

Chronology

- **Launceston Gaol (1827 – 1917)**
 - Launceston Police Watch House (1917 - 1976)
 - Launceston Reception Prison (1976 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sherriff and Gaols Department, Colony of Tasmania \(1824 - 1901\)](#)
- [Law Officers' Establishment, Colony of Tasmania \(1823 - 1856\)](#)
- [Sherriff and Gaols Department, State of Tasmania \(1901 - 1924\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Boys' Training School \(1884 - 1926\)](#)
Boys could be sent to the Boys' Training School as an alternative to prison.
- [Hobart Girls' Training School \(1881 - 1905\)](#)
Girls could be sent to Hobart Girls' Training School as an alternative to prison.
- [Boys' Reformatory \(1869 - 1876\)](#)
Boys could be sent to the Boys' Reformatory as an alternative to prison.

Related Legislation

- [The Training Schools Act 1867, Tasmania \(1867 - 1896\)](#)
The Training Schools Act provided for children to serve a 10 day prison sentence before being sent to a training school.

Resources

- [Launceston gaol](#), Examiner, 9 August 1862

Records

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

Records

- [Registers of Prisoners Received into and Discharged from Gaol, Launceston \(1867 - 1910\)](#)
- [Return of Prisoners in the Gaol, Launceston, Awaiting Trial with the Results of the Trial in Various Courts \(1871 - 1880\)](#)

- [Register of Prisoners Received into and Discharged from Gaols other than at Hobart \(1910 - 1937\)](#)
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