

The archaeology of institutions: exploring the Abbotsford Convent site through legislation

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Institutions of confinement have played a significant role in Australian society. This paper explores the value of using legislation to understand a site of institutional confinement in Melbourne. The former Convent of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford was a large institutional complex, made up of several distinct institutions operating simultaneously at the site. With a Magdalen Asylum, reformatory, industrial school for girls, and a day school, the convent was home to thousands of women and children between 1863 and 1975. The buildings of the convent are treated here as material culture, and are examined in relation to child welfare and education legislation in nineteenth-century Victoria. This approach has the potential to provide important insights into the changing role of institutions of confinement in society.

INTRODUCTION

The former Convent of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford, Melbourne, known as Abbotsford Convent, is a massive institutional complex that was home to thousands of women and girls between 1863 and 1975. It contained a Magdalen Asylum, a reformatory, an industrial school, and a day school, all established and operated by the Catholic religious Order of the Good Shepherd. This paper aims to explore the value of using legislation as a framework to understand the history and development of the Abbotsford Convent site. Child reform and education legislation in nineteenth-century Victoria had a direct and lasting impact on the convent, with the nuns establishing new classes of inmates and constructing new buildings following the passing of several Acts. This paper focuses on the buildings occupied by children at the convent in the second half of the nineteenth century, using historic plans and descriptions of the convent, as well as the buildings themselves as evidence for the development of the convent. Some of the buildings were constructed in accordance with the legislation and with the support of the government, while others were built in opposition to the legislative changes.

The Order of the Good Shepherd is a Catholic religious order of women established in 1835 in France. The order expanded rapidly around the world in the nineteenth century, establishing Magdalen Asylums for 'fallen women', and taking in girls to 'preserve' them from moral danger (Clarke 1895:80; Finnegan 2001:21; Smith 2007:29-30) and was one of many organisations around the world, both religious and lay, that operated Magdalen Asylums for women in the nineteenth century. These institutions aimed to rescue women from a life of immorality, and reform them through a daily regime of work and prayer (Luddy 1990:64-65; Mahood 1990:77; McCarthy 2010:182). The Good Shepherd Sisters established their convent at Abbotsford in 1863, at a bend in the Yarra River, four kilometres from the Melbourne Central Business District (Figure 1). The Sisters revised their model of welfare provision in the 1970s, and now provide community-based welfare services, as well as social advocacy on behalf of marginalised women and girls.

The convent precinct today is on the Victorian Heritage Register and consists of numerous buildings and extensive gardens over approximately fourteen hectares. It is operated by

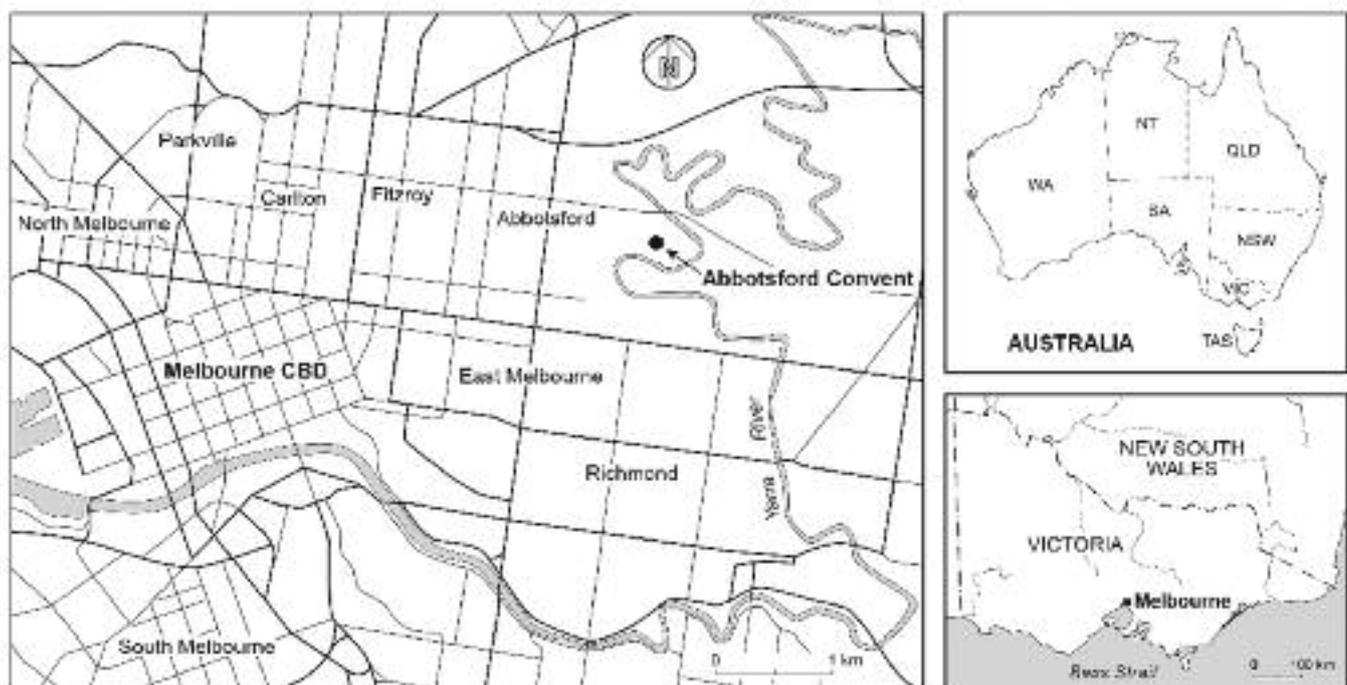


Figure 1: Location of Abbotsford Convent.

the Abbotsford Convent Foundation as a community and arts space, while the former convent farm is now the Collingwood Children's Farm. Most of the larger convent buildings are still standing, while the smaller farm and service buildings were demolished after the Good Shepherd Sisters sold the site. The extant buildings of the convent, together with the demolished buildings, as seen in maps, plans and photographs, are treated as archaeological evidence, following Sutton (2003) and Piddock's (2001; 2007; 2011) studies of institutional sites in Australia. This methodology is particularly appropriate for large institutional sites, because of the ideology imbued in the institutional buildings and landscape. These buildings are not simply structures, but are the material manifestation of social ideas about the intended inmates and represent an attempt to transform their behaviour (Foucault 1979:233). Through a focus on the buildings of Abbotsford Convent that were occupied by children, this paper discusses the relationship between legislation and the built environment of the institution.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Abbotsford Convent was established in the context of the population increase and social disruption that followed the Victorian gold rush of the 1850s. The main work of the Good Shepherd Sisters was the operation of Magdalen Asylums for 'fallen' women, who worked in industrial scale laundries at the convents. The women were known as 'penitents', and ranged from young women to the elderly. 'Fallen' could include women who engaged in sex work, but it was a term also applied to women who "had been deserted by their husbands, or were of drunken or dissolute habits" (*The Argus* 18 April 1891:12), unmarried mothers, 'feeble-minded' and disabled women (Kovesi 2010:50). Some of the women stayed only a short time, others chose to remain at the convent for life (*Kilmore Free Press* 9 May 1878:3).

The Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, James Goold, believed there was a particular need for a religious organisation of women to care for the 'stray sheep' (Knowles:1913:17; Kovesi 2010:49-51), and in 1859, at the suggestion of Mother Ursula Frayne of the Sisters of Mercy, he requested the Mother Superior of the Good Shepherd in Angers, France to establish an institution for women in Melbourne. The Sisters of Mercy, an Irish order, had been running an institution in Melbourne since 1857 that provided accommodation for 'respectable' women who found themselves out of work, but there was no Catholic institution for women who were not 'respectable'. Mother Ursula suggested to Bishop Goold that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd would be an appropriate order to establish an institution to provide moral reformation and practical training for these women (Kovesi 2010: 49-51; MacGinley 2002:113-114). This was a particularly suitable choice of religious order to conduct this work, because of their vow to labour with 'zeal for the salvation of souls', namely the souls of 'fallen' women (Finnegan 2001:21; Kovesi 2010:22).

After some negotiation between Bishop Goold and Mary Euphrasia, the Mother Superior of the Angers convent, four Irish Good Shepherd Sisters were sent from France in 1863 to establish an Australian branch of the order. A few months after their arrival they purchased the Abbotsford House estate on the Yarra River, which consisted of a large single-storey house, substantial brick outbuildings, and established gardens and orchards. They received their first penitent woman in September 1863, with more following soon after (Knowles 1913:17). The location was important – it was close enough to the city to make the commercial laundry operated by the women in the Magdalen Asylum viable, yet still in a relatively rural setting. The extensive grounds allowed the convent to produce much of its own food, with the distance from the city

"promising rest and refuge from the turmoil of the world outside" (Knowles 1913:17). The Sisters and inmates of the convent grew crops, fruit and vegetables, raised animals, made their own shoes and clothing, and operated a large industrial laundry.

Although the convent was intended as a refuge for women, they were actually outnumbered by children for most of the nineteenth century. The Order of the Good Shepherd had a tradition of caring for homeless children, known as 'preservates', as well as the penitent women who were their main focus (Kovesi 2010:38). In Victoria however, the passing of legislation regarding child welfare and education in the 1860s and 1870s led to significant changes at the convent. The Sisters established several more institutions at Abbotsford Convent in addition to the Magdalen Asylum: an industrial school for neglected girls, a reformatory for criminal girls, and a day school for local children.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF INSTITUTIONS

Goffman's (1961) concept of the 'total institution', in which the normal barriers between the places in which individuals work, sleep and play, and Foucault's (1979) discussion of the relationship between the physical structure of the institution and its ideological aims provide a useful structure for conceptualising institutions. Institutions of confinement can be seen as a physical representation of an attempt to control a group of people (Casella 2007), and archaeology is well positioned to assist in understanding the role of material culture and the built environment in implementing this particular form of social control (Piddock 2007). 'Institutional archaeology' refers to the archaeology of prisons, missions, mental hospitals, benevolent asylums, leprosariums, orphanages and communes. There have been a number of archaeological studies at institutional sites in Australia (see e.g. Crook and Murray 2006; Piddock 2011; Starr 2001 and Lydon 2009). Jackman's (2001) study of the Point Puer convict boys' reformatory near Port Arthur, for example, examined the relationship between the ideology of reform and the buildings and layout of the site and in America. De Cunzio's (1995; 2001) study of the Magdalen Asylum in Philadelphia provides an example of the use of archaeology to understand the relationship between an institution and society. However, none of these sites are similar to Abbotsford Convent, with its several distinct institutions operating at the one site.

AN INSTITUTION OF CONFINEMENT

Confinement is not limited to prisons, and institutions in which the freedom of the inmate was restricted play a significant role in Australian history (Casella 2005). The concept of 'confinement' is important for this paper, even though Abbotsford Convent historically is positioned as a place of charity rather than a place of detention. The Magdalen Asylum was seen as a refuge for 'friendless' women, and was regarded as a charitable institution by the government. However, the women were expected to remain in the asylum for at least two years, were required to work in the large industrial laundry, and were not paid for their labour. The combination of unpaid labour, a high degree of surveillance and restriction of their freedom created an environment that was essentially a place of confinement. The reformatory and industrial school at the convent are similarly seen as institutions of confinement. These children were convicted for having committed a crime, or of being neglected, and were required to serve court-imposed sentences within the institution, and hence were not free to leave. While the women at Abbotsford Convent were not necessarily forcibly detained, the neglected and criminal children were legally detained for the duration of their sentences. The Sisters themselves were also confined,

although voluntarily, as the order was enclosed in the nineteenth century. Framing the convent as a site of confinement is useful for an examination of the relationship between the convent and society. It is an example of an institution that saw the removal of particular groups of women and children from society as a solution to social problems. The buildings of the convent are certainly suggestive of a site of confinement – walls surrounded the complex, the windows were barred, and the buildings did not have direct access to the streets, but opened onto enclosed courtyards.

Seeing the convent as a site of confinement does not suggest the experience of all inmates at Abbotsford Convent was negative. It provided a home for children in need, and some women used the institution on their own terms, leaving and later re-entering the asylum (Kovesi 2010:169). However, the concept of confinement is useful for understanding the physical world of Abbotsford Convent, which was part of broader system of institution-based reform and welfare.

LEGISLATION IN VICTORIA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Overview

Five Acts of Parliament concerning children were passed in Victoria in the second half of the nineteenth century that had a direct impact on the built environment of the convent. This legislation reflected broader social changes in colonial Victoria and attitudes towards the poor, specifically destitute and criminal children. The Good Shepherd Sisters responded to the legislation by establishing an industrial school, a reformatory school and a day school for local children at Abbotsford Convent, with separate buildings constructed to accommodate the hundreds of children in the different schools. The convent landscape is not a straightforward reflection of these social and legislative changes, but a complex product of the sometimes differing views of the Order of the Good Shepherd, the Catholic Church, and wider society. The legislation provides a framework to assist in understanding the different forces that shaped the physical environment of the convent. Table 1 provides an overview of the major developments.

Table 1: Overview

Year	Significant developments
1863	Good Shepherd Sisters arrived in Melbourne and purchased Abbotsford House estate and opened their Magdalen Asylum.
1864	The <i>Neglected and Criminal Children's Act</i> was passed. A Reformatory School for girls was established at Abbotsford Convent.
1865	The Sisters purchased an adjoining property, St Heliers. An Industrial School for girls was established at Abbotsford Convent.
1867	The Industrial School building was constructed next to the former St Heliers House.
1872	The Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline condemned the Industrial School system. The <i>Education Act</i> was passed, introducing a system of free, compulsory and secular education in Victoria.
1874	The <i>Neglected and Criminal Children's Amendment Act</i> was passed, introducing the boarding-out or foster care system. The Sisters constructed St Joseph's, a substantial building for the Industrial School children.
1879	The Sisters opened St Euphrasia's, a new building for a school to provide a Catholic education to local children.
1887	The <i>Neglected Children's Act</i> and the <i>Juvenile Offender's Act</i> were passed, separating the child welfare system from the juvenile justice system in Victoria.

After establishing the Magdalen Asylum at Abbotsford, and in response to the passing of the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864*, the Good Shepherd Sisters established an industrial school for 'neglected' girls and a reformatory for 'criminal' girls. The convent received funds from the government for each girl serving a court-imposed sentence. In addition to these two classes, there were 'preservation' girls admitted on a voluntary basis by their parents or guardians, "children who, if in the outer world, would be surrounded by danger and bad example" (*The Argus* 18 April 1891:12). There was also a day school for girls and junior boys. The preservation class and the day class did not receive any government funding. These different 'classes' (as they were called) at the convent were largely kept apart, a practice that was made possible by providing separate buildings, fences, and internal divisions within the chapel they all shared.

The Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864

The *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864* was the first legislation to deal with destitute children in Victoria. Destitute children had previously been dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis by police, magistrates, and ladies' benevolent societies, whose campaign for the government to support these children led to the creation of the legislation (Twomey 2002:109, 114-116). Similar legislation was also passed in the 1860s in the colonies of New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania, and was based on the English *Industrial Schools Act 1857* (Jaggs 1986:23-26; Krieken 1991:68-69; Ramsland 1986). In Victoria, the legislation was passed in the context of upper and middle-class fears that the growing number of 'uncontrolled' working-class children, mainly the children of single mothers, would become a large, urbanised, unemployed criminal class in the future (Jaggs 1986:2-6; Krieken 1991:62-66; Twomey 2002:116).

The *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864* allowed for the establishment of both government and non-government industrial and reformatory schools to house neglected and criminal children respectively. Neglected children could be sentenced by the courts to an industrial school, and criminal children to a reformatory for between one and seven years as an alternative to being sent to prison. This system was still closely linked to the penal system, and treated being neglected as a crime. The Chief Secretary was responsible for the administration of the Industrial Schools Department, which was run by the Inspector-General of the Penal Department (Jaggs 1986:29). The Act defined 'neglected' children as those aged up to sixteen found begging, wandering, homeless, being in association with a prostitute, thief, drunkard or a person convicted of vagrancy, or a child whose parents said they were uncontrollable. However, in practice, most children convicted of being neglected were victims of poverty. The most common descriptions of the parents of 'neglected' children as recorded in the annual departmental reports were 'father dead, mother unable to support', and 'father deserted, mother unable to support' (Jaggs 1986:108-109).

The Good Shepherd response to the 1864 Act

In 1864, one year after the Magdalen Asylum was established, a reformatory school for criminal Catholic girls was founded at Abbotsford Convent, at the request of Bishop Goold (Kovesi 2010:70-71; *Victorian Government Gazette* 30 August 1864:1879). An industrial school for neglected Catholic girls was established the following year (*Victorian Government Gazette* 5 December 1865:2818). Most of the other reformatories and industrial schools in Victoria were government run, and stand alone, rather than situated within the same institution. In the 1860s, the government established the Government Reformatory for Protestant Girls at Sunbury and

the Reformatory for Boys on the training ship *Sir Harry Smith*, previously a prison hulk. Separate boys' and girls' reformatories were also established at Pentridge Gaol in the 1870s. The government-run Sunbury, Ballarat and Geelong industrial schools, the *Nelson* training ship, the Protestant Sandhurst Industrial School, and the Catholic St Joseph's Industrial School in Geelong were also established in the 1860s (Guillaume 1891).

At Abbotsford Convent, the Sisters, penitent women and neglected and criminal girls initially occupied the large house and associated outbuildings formerly known as Abbotsford House (Figure 2). These buildings were quickly outgrown, and the Sisters purchased the adjoining property, St Heliers, in 1865 (Figure 3). St Heliers consisted of a large house, numerous outbuildings, established ornamental gardens, an orchard and fields (*The Argus* 10 December 1864:2). The original buildings of these two estates are no longer extant, having been replaced by larger buildings by the Sisters over the years, as the number of women and children in their care increased and the buildings proved insufficient. By 1867, only four years after the convent was established, there were over 130 women and girls living at the convent, with 70 penitent women in the Magdalen Asylum, 14 girls in the preservation class, 24 criminal girls in the reformatory, and 23 neglected girls in the industrial school (*The Argus* 8 January 1867: 5).

The Industrial School was one of the first purpose-built structures at the convent. The government provided the Sisters with a grant of £1000 to build the Industrial School in 1867 (Knowles 1913:16). It was aligned with St Heliers house, and abutted one of the outbuildings that was used as a laundry. The building is still extant, and was extended on four sides as the convent population grew. The L-shaped building, "a fine brick building, which at a distance looks like a factory or a mill" (*Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers* 13 June 1868: 4), had a classroom downstairs and a dormitory upstairs. Although known as the Industrial School, it was actually occupied by girls in the reformatory, industrial and preservation classes. The Sisters occupied the former Abbotsford House building on the other side of the convent grounds, and the women in the Magdalen Asylum occupied the former St Heliers house near the Industrial School. This building was soon out-grown, and a significantly larger building was built for the children in 1874.

The substantial new brick building, known as St Joseph's, was built on the northwestern side of the convent to accommodate the growing number of girls in the industrial and reformatory classes (Figure 4). It was demolished in the 1970s and replaced with a nursing home operated by the Good Shepherd. St Joseph's contained more specialised facilities for the girls than the initial Industrial School building provided.



Figure 2: Portion of 'Plan shewing [sic] the streets and buildings in existence in East Collingwood on 1st January 1858', showing the Abbotsford House and St Heliers estates, with their ornamental and productive gardens (Maps Collection, State Library of Victoria).



Figure 3: St Heliers Estate, pre-1865. The Industrial School was built on the site of the whitewashed building on the far right of this photograph (Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria).

There was an infirmary and a nursery downstairs, shown in an 1877 plan (Figure 5). A 'Sketch Plan' from 1891 showing emergency exits indicates there were five separate dormitories upstairs (PROV VA 1007, VPRS 7882/ P1, Unit 593, 4066). The women and children at the convent were observed day and night by the Sisters, and the new purpose-built St Joseph's allowed the Sisters to incorporate surveillance mechanisms into the built environment of the convent. The 1891 plan depicts small cells adjacent to the dormitories labelled 'Sisters', which allowed them to watch over the children at night. Similar cells are still present today in the Rosina building at the convent, which was occupied by women in the Magdalen Asylum. In Rosina the cells contain a little window between the cell and the dormitory, which allowed the Sisters to look into the dormitory at night.

The plans of the building and the documentary sources provide information about the spaces provided for the girls who lived in St Joseph's and the activities in which they were



Figure 4: The Magdalen Asylum courtyard. The former Industrial School building is at the far end of the courtyard, with the 1871 extension on the right.

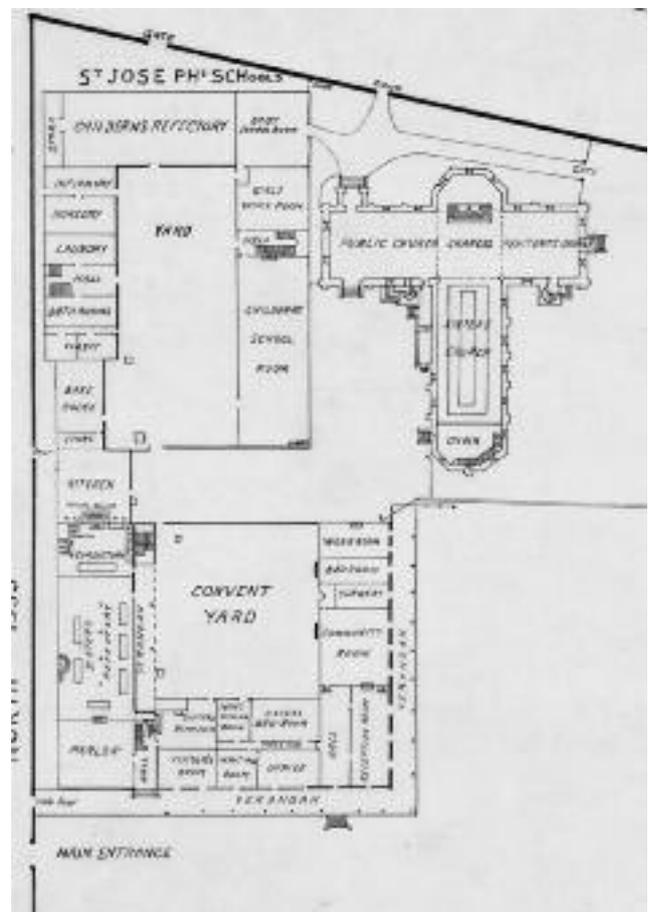


Figure 5: Portion of 'Plan of Convent of the Good Shepherd', 1877, showing St Joseph's, the Convent (formerly Abbotsford House) and the Chapel (Bates, Smart and McCutcheon Collection, University of Melbourne Archives).

engaged. In addition to a 'childrens schoolroom' [sic] and a 'baby schoolroom', there was a girls' work room and a laundry. The plans show laundry facilities were also present in St Mary's, the building that accommodated the girls in the reformatory school (discussed further below). The presence of laundries in the buildings constructed for the neglected and criminal girls is significant, given the presence of the large industrial laundry at the Magdalen Asylum on the site. The reports of the Department of Industrial Schools and other contemporary accounts emphasise the important role of the industrial schools in training girls for a future in domestic service. The buildings constructed specifically for the girls contained their own laundries so the children could be kept separate from the women in the Magdalen Asylum while being trained in laundry work. It also meant the women in the Magdalen Asylum could wash laundry that generated income for the institution, rather than items that could be washed at no cost by the children. The girls were also taught how to sew, possibly in the 'girls work room'. A 1904 plan indicates that a specific 'knitting room' was later added to St Joseph's (PROV VA 1007, VPRS 8600/P1, Unit 14, 258).

The *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864* had a significant impact on the landscape of the convent. Ten years after the legislation was passed, there were more than two hundred girls in the industrial and reformatory classes at the convent, and substantial new buildings had been constructed to accommodate them (Knowles 1913:17). In contrast to these specially constructed buildings at the convent, the government struggled to provide appropriate accommodation for the children in the State industrial schools during this time. Children in the government schools were housed in a former prison hulk, military barracks, gaol, and a quarantine station, among other inappropriate places (Industrial and Reformatory Schools 1879:3). The government did construct a substantial new industrial school at Sunbury, out of Melbourne, but it was soon overcrowded and seen as unsuitable for the children (Industrial and Reformatory Schools 1879:3; Jaggs 1986:28).

The Neglected and Criminal Children's Amendment Act 1874

In 1872, only eight years after the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864* was passed, William Stawell's Royal Commission on Industrial and Reformatory Schools condemned the system. Overcrowding and monotony in the government industrial schools created an unfavourable environment for children, leading to a complete revision of the system (Royal Commission on Penal and Prison Discipline 1872). The annual reports on the government industrial schools in the 1860s and 1870s described the children as 'puny', 'sickly', 'weak', 'languid', 'downcast' and 'spiritless' (Jaggs 1986:28-36). The Royal Commission proposed 'boarding-out' the industrial school children to respectable people as a solution to the problems plaguing the industrial school system (Guillaume 1891:24-27).

The boarding-out system was enacted via the *Neglected and Criminal Children's Amendment Act 1874*. The number of children in the government industrial schools declined as they were sent from the industrial schools to foster homes. All the government industrial schools were closed down, apart from a 'receiving depot' at Royal Park, where children were sent temporarily while a foster home was organised for them. The industrial school at Abbotsford Convent was an anomaly, and remained open, taking in girls who were difficult to place in foster homes (*The Argus* 31 May 1884:5). The Catholic Church was strongly opposed to the boarding-out system, and feared

Catholic children would be placed with Protestant families. The Church believed the Sisters were better able to instil Catholic faith and morals in the girls than a foster family, Catholic or otherwise (Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools 1885:92-93). The Department itself admitted difficulty in finding "suitable foster homes for of a good class for the whole of the Roman Catholic girls in the hands of the department" (*The Argus* 31 May 1884:5). Although the industrial school system in Victoria was seen as unworkable, Abbotsford Convent was a successful institution, and continued to grow when the other schools were being closed. The system of boarding-out was initiated in 1874, the same year as the substantial St Joseph's building was constructed, however the number of neglected girls sent to Abbotsford Convent by the courts did not start to decline until 1884.

Although the Good Shepherd Sisters were opposed to the boarding-out system, they were responsive to other recommendations of the government. Increased concern about the amount of contact between the different classes of girls at the convent in the 1880s had significant impact on the convent landscape. In 1867, the Chief Secretary of the Reformatory and Industrial Schools had reported he was not worried about the contact between the girls in the industrial and reformatory classes, because they were supervised by the Sisters day and night (*The Argus* 2 July 1867:6). By 1880 the department was more concerned, with Mr Neal, the Acting Inspector, reporting:

[t]he Reformatory girls, Industrial School children, and girls belonging to what is called the preservation section, I found mixing together, and infants were in the school whose mothers were in another part of the convent. When I drew the Reverend Mother's attention to the matter, the increase of numbers was provided for by additional accommodation being made available, and the Reformatory girls as well as the members of the preservation class were separated from the Industrial School children (Industrial Schools and Reformatory Schools 1880:5)

Although the Sisters denied the accusation of overcrowding, Neal's recommendations led to the establishment of a new convent at Oakleigh (a rural suburb in the south-east of Melbourne) for the reformatory girls (Kovesi 2010:178). Construction at Oakleigh started in 1880, but was not completed until the end of 1883, so a temporary measure saw the construction of St Mary's in 1881, on the eastern side of Abbotsford convent (Figure 6), to allow for the separation of the reformatory girls from the industrial school girls. After the



Figure 6: Portion of MMBW plan No. 38, Collingwood and Kew, 1897 (Maps Collection, State Library of Victoria).

reformatory girls had moved to Oakleigh, St Mary's provided accommodation for the older girls in the preservation class (Kovesi 2010:87).

St Mary's was a single-storey wooden building that abutted the cowsheds. Sketches in Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Survey Field Books from the 1890s indicate it contained dormitories, bathrooms and laundry facilities, enclosing an asphalt yard (PROV VA 1007, VPRS 8600/P1, Unit 55, 963; VPRS 8600/P1, Unit 58, 1009). St Mary's is no longer extant, having been replaced by a more substantial two-storey brick building, also called St Mary's. Built in 1911, it is now occupied by a Steiner school. Further east of the cowsheds was a piggery, and there was also a fowl house and duck pond at the convent (PROV VA 1007, VPRS 8601, P1, Unit 26, Detail Plan No. 1285; VPRS 8601/P4, Unit 119, Detail Plan No. 1287 ERB).

The proximity of St Mary's to the farm buildings is significant. The work conducted by the girls in St Mary's on the farm and in domestic work contributed to the daily functioning of the convent, but was also part of their education, providing training for a future in domestic service (Vagabond 1877:4). Employing girls in farm work was particular to the industrial school at Abbotsford Convent – the other industrial schools for girls in Victoria trained them only in domestic work (Guillaume 1891:22). Industrial schools aimed to make 'slum' children employable citizens, rather than to provide them with a comprehensive formal education (Gaunt 1894:13; Industrial Schools 1868:4; Jaggs 1986:42-43). Slums were seen as promoting criminality, so the legislation aimed to remove children from this harmful environment before they were 'contaminated', and train them to be useful members of society (Twomey 2002:122-127). The colony needed a supply of domestic servants, and the female wards of the state provided a suitable source of working-class girls (Fox 1991:66-69; Krieken 1991:54-55). The combination of farm and laundry work at Abbotsford Convent was seen as "affording ample means of training the girls for future service homes in the country districts" (Knowles 1913:17), away from the perceived depravation of the city slums.

The *Neglected and Criminal Children's Amendment Act 1874* had a surprisingly limited impact on the convent. Although it enacted a policy of boarding-out children to foster homes rather than placing them in institutional care, the number of girls at the convent did not decline. However, the Department's concern about the contact between the different groups of girls led to an increased level of segregation at the convent, and the construction of a new building and a new convent. Segregation of these different groups of children was central to the legislation passed in 1887, and to all subsequent legislation concerning child welfare in Victoria.

The Neglected Children's Act 1887 and the Juvenile Offenders Act 1887

The 1874 legislation was replaced by the *Neglected Children's Act 1887* and the *Juvenile Offenders Act 1887*, which furthered the changes to the system made by the 1874 amendment. Significantly, it separated the legislation relating to neglected children from the legislation concerning criminal children and represents the beginning of the separation of the Victorian child welfare and penal systems. The total number of children in State care did not change significantly after the legislation was introduced; however with the vast majority in foster homes, providing for these children was more economical for the government after boarding-out was introduced.

In 1872 all neglected children were in institutions, however by 1889 only 4 per cent were in institutional care (Guillaume 1891:29). The number of girls in the industrial school at Abbotsford Convent began to decline in 1884, and continued

declining following the passing of the *Neglected Children's Act 1887*, with only 47 girls remaining in the industrial school in 1891 (Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools 1892:9). However, the total number of girls at St Joseph's did not decline, with the preservation class increasing in size as the industrial class declined (Figure 7). Impoverished parents had previously used the industrial school system to provide for their children temporarily when they were unable to do so themselves (Jaggs 1986:40-41). In contrast, the boarding-out system often meant children were permanently lost to their parents, as foster carers were encouraged by the State to adopt their wards (Guillaume 1891:39). The department saw this separation of parents and children as beneficial, stating: "parents have been deterred from needlessly throwing their responsibilities upon the State, because the boarding-out regulations deprive them not only of access to their children but of all knowledge where such are located" (Guillaume 1891:28).

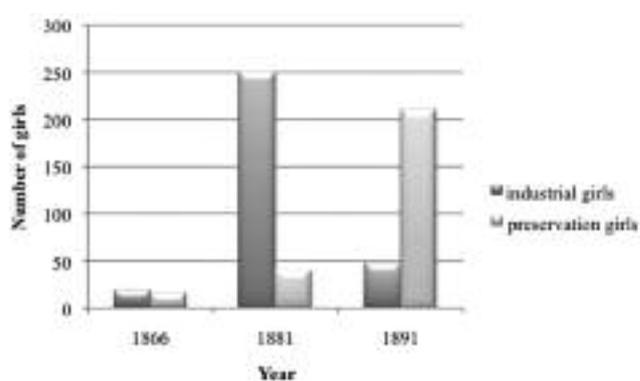


Figure 7: The number of industrial and preservation girls at the convent.

This legislative change led to an increase in the size of the preservation class at the convent, when the "distressed parents, oftentimes widowed mothers, failing to see any advantages from that [boarding-out] system, [appealed] to the nuns to give shelter to their destitute offspring" (*The Mercury* 6 November 1895:3). Children could be recovered more easily from the convent than from a foster home when the financial situation of their parents improved. The Catholic response to the legislative changes was to continue the practice of placing children in institutional care, in direct contrast to the changing view of the State, which increasingly saw institutions as damaging places for children. The response of the convent to the legislative changes meant their substantial buildings continued to be filled with destitute girls.

The Education Act 1872

The other significant legislation regarding children in the nineteenth century was the *Education Act 1872*. This Act established a system of free, secular and compulsory education in Victoria. Government funding of teachers' salaries at religious schools ceased when this legislation was passed (Kovesi 2010:79). Bishop Goold was strongly opposed to the *Education Act 1872* and accused the government of persecuting Catholics, saying "they threaten the Catholics of this colony ... with religious persecution in the shape of a godless and compulsory system of education" (*The Argus* 24 June 1872:5). In response to the act, the Catholic Church opened affordable day schools run by religious orders, including St Euphrasia's at Abbotsford Convent, to encourage parents to provide their children with a Catholic education (Cummings 2008:70; Kovesi 2010:79-80). St Euphrasia's Day School was built at the convent in 1878, opening in 1879 (Knowles 1913:18) and within two years it had 260 students.

The school did charge fees, but was free if parents could not afford to pay (*Kilmore Free Press* 13 October 1881:4).

St Euphrasia's was largely for local girls, although boys were admitted in the infants class – the only boys in any class at the convent (Cumplings 2008:71; Kovesi 2010:79-80). The day school at the convent was separate to the industrial school. It operated in a separate two-storey building, and was the only building at the convent with a door opening directly to the outside world (Figure 8 and Figure 9). The building is still extant, today housing a community radio station.

Unlike the industrial and reformatory schools at the convent, which were built in accordance with the State legislation, the day school was created in opposition to legislation. However, there is continuity in the purpose of the different schools and the Magdalen Asylum at the convent – they were established with the aim of providing facilities for Catholic girls and women, indicating a belief on behalf of the Church and the Order of the Good Shepherd that the State was not sufficiently meeting their needs.

The different classes of inmates at the convent were kept separate by the provision of different buildings and fences within the convent grounds. The entire convent was walled, aside from the parts bounded by the Yarra River. Apart from St Euphrasia's, the buildings were accessible only from within the convent complex, which was entered via a gate near the convent building (the Sister's quarters) or a gate near the Magdalen Asylum. Historic maps of the convent demonstrate there were divisions within the convent that have now been removed. The yard at St Joseph's Industrial School, created by the U-shape of the building, was fenced on the southern end. St Euphrasia's was separated from the rest of the convent by a fence. The yard of the Magdalen Asylum is now enclosed on four sides by the asylum buildings, with a gate at the entrance. In the nineteenth century, before the construction of St Anne's on the western side, the yard was enclosed by a tall brick wall.

The divisions between the different groups of women and children are clearly expressed in the convent chapel. The design of the chapel allowed the different classes to be kept

separate while worshipping (*Kilmore Free Press* 13 October 1881:4). The 1877 plan of the convent (Figure 5) shows separate transepts for the Sisters, the women in the Magdalen Asylum, and for the public, which were all entered via different doors. A gallery in the western transept was accessible from the upper floor of St Joseph's, which kept the children separate from the women.

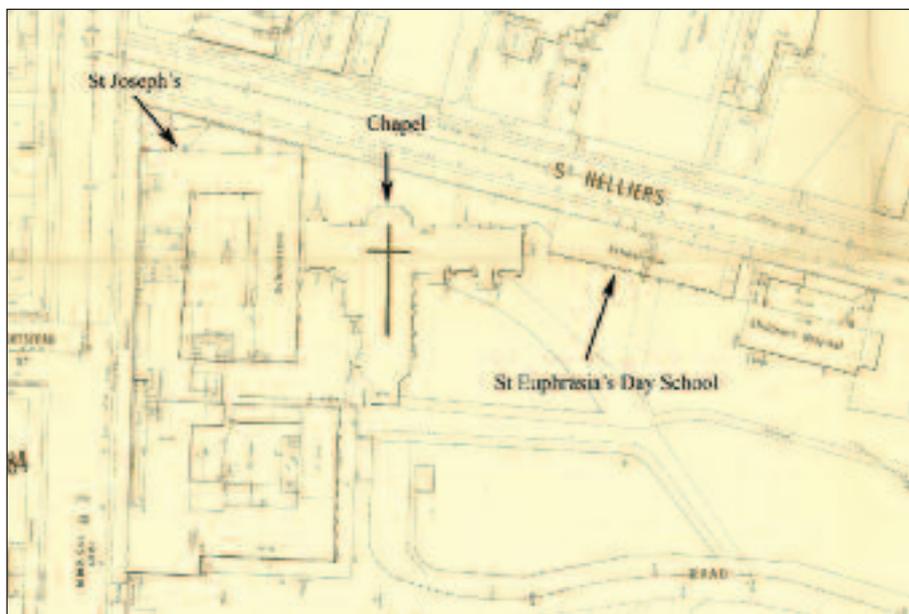


Figure 8: Portion of MMBW 'Collingwood and Kew Detail Plan No. 1285', 1901 (Maps Collection, State Library of Victoria).

DISCUSSION

The use of the legislation as a framework for the analysis of Abbotsford Convent provides a structure for understanding changes that took place in Victoria in the nineteenth century in regard to children and institutional care. The legislation discussed above had a significant effect on the composition and numbers of children at the convent. The Sisters established separate schools and built substantial buildings to accommodate hundreds of children in response to the different Acts. Motivated by a desire to save souls, the Sisters provided accommodation and education for the girls in their care as part of a system of welfare/reform that separated particular groups of children from their families and broader society and confined them within institutions.

Social changes in Victoria influenced ideas about how children should be treated, the role of the State in providing for criminal and destitute children, and the best way to shape these children into useful citizens for the colony. The legislation discussed above reflected these changing social ideas. The Catholic Church and the Order of the Good Shepherd were also concerned about the welfare of these children, and established new institutions at Abbotsford Convent to accommodate and educate them. The Industrial School building, St Joseph's, St Mary's and St Euphrasia's were all constructed following the passing of legislation concerning children in Victoria. Although most of the buildings were constructed in accordance with the legislation, the day school, St Euphrasia's, was established in opposition to the legislation. The continuation of the industrial school long after the government established a system of boarding-out marks a divergence in the attitudes of the Church and State regarding institutional care.

The physical spaces occupied by children reflect the differential treatment and segregation of the different classes of inmates at the convent. The increasing segregation of



Figure 9: St Euphrasia's Day School on St Heliers Street, the only building with a door opening directly onto the street.

different groups of children is demonstrated by the separation of the legislation dealing with neglected and criminal children with the *Neglected Children's Act 1887* and the *Juvenile Offenders Act 1887*. The buildings also reflect this segregation, with the construction of St Mary's to separate the criminal girls from the other girls, and the divisions within the chapel to keep the different classes of inmates separate. A high level of surveillance of the children is also apparent in the buildings of the convent, as is the importance of practical training for a future in domestic service. The majority of the girls at the convent were not criminals, but victims of poverty. The convent is significant for it demonstrates a time when the Church and State saw the confinement of these girls within the convent as beneficial for both society and the girls themselves.

The Sisters constructed substantial buildings to house, train and educate the children. This contrasts starkly with the government industrial and reformatory schools which were notoriously problematic, and often housed in ill-suited existing buildings. The convent buildings represent an enormous investment on behalf of the Order of the Good Shepherd, and highlight the importance to the Catholic Church of the provision of practical and religious education to neglected or under-privileged Catholic girls. The Sisters continued to provide accommodation, education and training for girls in need, even when not obliged to do so by the courts. This was based on the belief on behalf of the Church that the Sisters could better provide for the girls in terms of their material welfare, happiness, moral and formal education than a foster home could (Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools 1885:92-93).

CONCLUSION

Institutions of confinement have played a significant role in the management of specific groups of people in Australian society, both historically and today. The physical institutions themselves can be treated as material culture to better understand this form of social control/welfare and how it changed over time. Abbotsford Convent was part of a system that removed women and girls from society for a period of time to reform, educate and/or punish them. The legislation provides a succinct representation of the attitudes towards some social issues regarding children in the nineteenth century. Using legislation as a framework provides a way of understanding the buildings and landscape of the convent and how they changed over time in relation to these broader issues. The focus on the relationship between the legislation and the buildings allows an examination of the sometimes conflicting views of the Good Shepherd Sisters, the Melbourne Catholic Church, and the Victorian government about the best way to provide for and educate particular groups of Catholic women and girls. The convent is not a clear reflection of the social ideas and legislation in Victoria, but a representation of the complex and sometimes divergent views of the Order of the Good Shepherd, the Catholic Church and the State.

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