

Women and work at the Hyde Park Barracks Destitute Asylum, Sydney

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Colonial authorities built numerous institutions in Australia during the nineteenth century to accommodate paupers, orphans, the sick, elderly and other 'deserving poor'. Lurking in the background was the shadow of the workhouses of England and Ireland, which by the 1840s had earned an infamous reputation for harsh discipline and poor treatment of inmates. How did conditions in Australian destitute asylums compare with those in Britain during this period? A recent Australian Research Council-funded project between the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and the Archaeology Program at La Trobe University has begun to address this problem, using a unique collection of artefacts from the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney to explore the roles of labour and refuge in Australian destitute asylums. This material includes a diverse array of textiles and sewing equipment, leather fragments, paper documents and many other objects. Analysis of the artefacts reveals that the pauper women who occupied the Asylum between 1862 and 1886 worked hard at the daily routines of the institution, but in an environment which recognised their very human needs, strengths and frailties.

INTRODUCTION

In spite of Australia's reputation as a workingman's paradise in the later nineteenth century, poverty was a persistent and widespread problem (Cage 1992; Garton 1990; O'Brien 1988; Twomey 2002). Colonial governments and private charities responded to the growing numbers of poor, sick, elderly and disabled by constructing a range of hospitals, homes, asylums and other institutions. The asylums in particular were modelled in part on the workhouses of England and Ireland, where poor relief was provided for many thousands of impoverished individuals and families. These workhouses (or poorhouses) were characterised by harsh discipline and hard labour, where the inmates were expected to work in return for the support they received. Historians have argued that conditions in Australian benevolent asylums were similar to if not worse than those in the United Kingdom (e.g. Jalland 2002:206; O'Brien 1988:52).

This paper uses material from the Hyde Park Barracks (HPB) Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women in Sydney to examine the extent to which conditions in Australian institutions reflected those in Britain and elsewhere, and how attitudes to poverty and moral redemption were expressed in the organisation and labour regimes of Australian colonial benevolent asylums. The paper also questions the archaeological model of domination and resistance often applied to institutions such as prisons, poorhouses and factories. Instead of a 'total institution' structured in terms of surveillance, discipline and punishment, the HPB Asylum emerges as a place of work tempered with compassion, a place of refuge rather than reform and correction. Analysis of an extensive collection of material discarded in the underfloor spaces of the building is used here to examine the daily lives and work practices of the female inmates who occupied the asylum between 1862 and 1886. This material includes thousands of sewing items, clothing and textiles scraps, leather-working debris and many other items. The artefacts are used to explore the nature and location of work within the asylum, and to examine the ways in which the institution functioned as a workhouse on the earlier British model, and how it provided refuge and relief to the most vulnerable members of society in colonial New South Wales.

Modifications made to the building over the years had important implications for the formation of archaeological

deposits. Ceiling boards, for example, had been installed in most parts of the building on Level 1 and Level 2 by the late 1840s, forming cavity spaces beneath the floor on Levels 2 and 3 (Crook and Murray 2006:27). Items that fell through the floorboards were trapped in these underfloor spaces, resulting in the accumulation of large quantities of debris over the years. In the late 1880s, following the departure of the Asylum and Immigration Depot women, the floors of the Barracks were covered with linoleum. This effectively sealed the artefacts under the floors, and creates a firm association between the material in the underfloor collection with the Asylum and Depot women. This material was salvaged in bulk bags in the early 1980s and has been the subject of various studies in the years since (Crook et al. 2003). More recently the assemblage has been the subject of an Australian Research Council-funded project between the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and the Archaeology Program at La Trobe University, designed to improve understanding of this unique material and the new light it sheds on pauper women and institutional confinement in the colonial period.

The paper begins with an outline of poverty, charity and welfare in nineteenth-century Australia, and then briefly reviews the archaeology of destitute/benevolent asylums in Australia, and in Britain and the United States. The HPB Destitute Asylum is then examined against this background, with a particular focus on the many artefacts which reveal the scale and diversity of the tasks performed by the inmates. The role of the influential and long-serving Matron of the Asylum, Lucy Applewhaite-Hicks, is also considered. The paper concludes that the institution demonstrated features of *both* a traditional workhouse and a place of refuge for impoverished women, serving as a surrogate home for those who had no other means of support.

POVERTY AND WELFARE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The long economic boom of 1860 to 1890 created the reputation of the Australian colonies as a paradise for workers. Men in skilled trades with secure employment enjoyed higher wages and shorter hours compared to those in Britain. Historians have documented, however, the prevalence and persistence of poverty in colonial Australia and its impacts on

the living conditions, health and mortality of marginal social groups (e.g. Cage 1992; Dickey 1986, 1992; Garton 1990; Jackson 2005; O'Brien 1988; Ramsland 1986; Swain 1985; Twomey 2002). Those with fewer skills often subsisted on casual labour and were vulnerable to limited available work, sudden strikes and industrial accidents. Unemployed workers, along with women, children, the aged and the ill, could all experience economic hardship even in times of prosperity (Fitzgerald 1987:201-222; O'Brien 1988:11). Poverty was frequent in a land of plenty and remained a fact of life for at least one in five Australians in the nineteenth century (Stannage 1998:522).

The Australian colonies generally resisted poor laws on the English and Irish models. The latter had been in place for centuries, but in the 1830s the laws were amended and replaced with a much crueller and more repressive regime. The local poorhouses which had long served as receptacles for the helpless, poor and aged were replaced with hundreds of large, purpose-built institutions (Driver 1993; Finnegan 2004; Howson 2008; O'Connor 1995). These were intended not only to relieve distress, but also to encourage thrift and temperance, reduce crime and generally improve the moral tone of society. Similar institutions, often called almshouses, were also established in the United States (e.g. De Cunzo 1995, 2001; Rothman 1990; Spencer-Wood 2001, 2009; Whiteaker 1997)

Conditions in English and Irish workhouses were made deliberately harsh as a deterrent to prospective inmates and to ensure that only 'deserving' cases were accepted, although normally only the most desperate sought entry. Families were separated upon admission, their clothing was removed and replaced with a workhouse uniform, and an oppressive regime of hygiene was imposed to instil discipline. Able-bodied men were set to work breaking stones, grinding corn or picking oakum (strands of old rope for caulking ships). Women cleaned, washed, mended and looked after children and the sick. Overcrowding was rife and rates of sickness and death were high. In Ireland, the workhouse was the most feared and hated institution ever established in the country (O'Connor 1995:13). Hundreds of Magdalen Asylums were also established in England and Ireland during this period to reform 'fallen women' (i.e. prostitutes), who were confined and put to work in laundries without pay (Finnegan 2004). In later years, as economic conditions slowly improved, conditions in the workhouses eased, and their role changed to one of providing for the aged and sick, and less like that of virtual prisons for able-bodied paupers.

Colonial Australians were well aware of the workhouses, by reputation and from reports in newspapers and novels like Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. Not only were workhouses brutal, and often lethal, to inmates, but colonial authorities feared that they legitimised the claims of the poor for public money and support which could lead to a pauper class, idleness and a general decay in the moral climate of society. In addition, given the generally high demand for labour in the Australian colonies, it was believed that there was too much work available to justify workhouses (Dickey 1992:119). Australian landowners also resisted the English system of funding workhouses, which was based on taxing the occupiers of land (Hirst 1984:87). The presence of workhouses, it was feared, would undermine the reputation of the colonies as a place of opportunity and prosperity.

Nevertheless, numerous institutions were created in the colonies to provide for individuals unable to support themselves. As early as 1796, Philip Gidley King, Commandant of the Norfolk Island penal station, founded two day schools, one for boys and one for girls, as well as a home for female orphans, while a Female Orphan School was opened in Sydney in 1801 (Ramsland 1986:1-3). The

Benevolent Society of New South Wales was formed in 1818 to relieve the poor, aged and infirm, by providing outdoor relief (help to those in their homes) in the form of cash, provisions or clothing on a weekly basis to the 'deserving poor' (Cummins 1971:3). The need for some kind of lodging was soon evident however, and Governor Macquarie agreed to the construction of an asylum, which opened in 1821, at the corner of Pitt and Devonshire Streets, where the Central Railway Station now stands. The Benevolent Asylum provided food and shelter to paupers and able-bodied inmates worked at picking oakum, making clothes and shoes, baking bread and growing vegetables. Like most welfare institutions in this period, it operated on a combination of private charitable subscriptions and annual government grants, a system which provided for the needy largely out of the public purse but obviated the need for governments to take direct responsibility. A range of other charitable societies emerged in New South Wales in this period as well, including the Sydney Infirmary (1845), the Catholic Female Refuge (1848) and the Destitute Children's Asylum (1852), while similar institutions were also established in the other Australian colonies in this period (e.g. Geyer 1994; Kehoe 2006; Piddock 2001a). Extensions to the Sydney Benevolent Asylum in the 1830s meant that the complex increasingly served as a hospital as well, and by the late 1840s there were almost 500 inmates in the asylum, half of whom were sick or infirm and in need of special treatment (Cummins 1971:7). Relief from overcrowding came in 1851 when the male inmates were transferred to the Liverpool Hospital and in 1862 when the aged women were sent to the Hyde Park Barracks Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women.

The New South Wales government also enacted a *Workhouse Act* in 1866. The legislation was intended to control 'irreclaimable drunkards' and vagrants, who could be incarcerated in a workhouse on the order of two Justices of the Peace. The Act neglected to define, however, the nature and conditions of a 'workhouse' and made no reference to benevolent asylums. The Act was never put into force and was repealed in 1869.

Several historians have argued that even though colonial governments created no poor laws, conditions in the Australian benevolent asylums were akin to and in some cases worse than the British workhouses, especially in their treatment of the infirm, invalids and the dying (e.g. Jalland 2002:206; O'Brien 1988:52; Ramsland 1986:159-160). While Anne O'Brien (1988:22) claims that such places denied 'the last vestiges of liberty' to their elderly inmates, Pat Jalland acknowledges that little has been written by historians about New South Wales asylums due to the limited scope of available asylum records (Jalland 2002:219; see Hughes 2004:8). Historian Christina Twomey argues, however, that conditions in nineteenth-century benevolent asylums were in fact highly contested, with inmates and authorities constantly negotiating the charity process (Twomey 2002). In this case the archaeological remains from the HPB Destitute Asylum clearly have a vital role to play in helping to evaluate the conditions enjoyed or endured by inmates, as a basis for comparing the treatment of institutional paupers in New South Wales with conditions in other colonies and countries.

ARCHAEOLOGY OF WORKHOUSES

Archaeologists in Australia have examined a range of institutions relating to the control and management of paupers, lunatics, orphans, migrants, lepers and others. Convicts and convict places, however, have been a special focus of attention (Casella and Fredericksen 2001:4), an emphasis which has reinforced the notion of institutions as places of exile,

confinement and punishment. The Ross Female Factory in Tasmania, for example, has been understood in terms of domination and resistance, where the convict women struggled to assert their identities in defiance of a punishing colonial authority (Casella 2001). Elsewhere, Prangnell (1999) has interpreted the Peel Island Lazaret in Queensland as a place of isolation, paternalism and surveillance, while notions of separation, discipline and correction have also been employed at the Randwick Destitute Children's Asylum in Sydney (Austral/Godden Mackay 1997), and the Adelaide Lunatic Asylum (Piddock 2001b, 2007). Sutton's (2003) analysis of Aboriginal missions and reserves in Queensland applied Goffman's (1961) notion of the total institution to examine surveillance and social control exercised over the Aboriginal inmates, while notions of power and segregation have also informed several other archaeological studies of Aboriginal missions in Australia (e.g. Birmingham 2000; Griffin 2010). Recent archaeological work at the Hyde Park Barracks by Penny Crook and Tim Murray (2006), however, has emphasised the role of the asylum as providing a place of refuge and relief for elderly impoverished women, rather than discipline and punishment. The present study elaborates this perspective by analysing the material evidence for labour and its role in the daily routine of the institution. Several archaeological studies of institutions are described below, to provide a comparative basis for conditions in the HPB Asylum.

Work was an important structuring principle at the Ross Female Factory, which operated from 1847 to 1855. Like other female factories in the convict era, it served as a prison, workhouse, hospital and labour bureau. Productive labour was a central aspect of life for inmates, and Casella's work at the site has revealed a hierarchy of work practices among the women according to their behaviour (Casella 2001:49). Recalcitrant inmates in the 'punishment class' were kept in solitary confinement and did no work while undergoing punishment. Those in the 'crime class' worked in the prison laundry and at sewing task work contracted by local selectors and colonial businesses. After a period of good behaviour, women earned promotion to the 'hiring class', where they worked as nursery or hospital assistants prior to assignment in domestic service on a local property.

The closest archaeological parallel to the HPB Asylum is the Destitute Asylum in Adelaide. Remains of the site were subject to salvage excavation in 1983, which revealed the furnace room associated with the laundry (Megaw 1986). Most of the artefacts recovered, however, were later discarded, but subsequent work by Susan Piddock (2001a) reinvestigated plans, photos and documents relating to the Asylum and its layout. She applied a model of English workhouses, based on the notion of work and segregation, to understand the arrangement of one of Australia's largest complexes of buildings devoted to public welfare. The Asylum was established in 1849 and by the time it closed in 1917 it housed more than 600 adults and children (Dickey 1986:27). The 4-acre complex became filled with various small buildings divided into four main quadrangles, with a separate women's department, men's department, a lying-in home, and a men's infirmary and administration block. The arrangement of the Asylum, however, was always problematic because while authorities were notionally trying to run the institution as a reformatory workhouse for the deserving poor, it also had to accommodate other groups, including orphans, the sick and the aged, whose needs were not necessarily compatible with the structure of the space and buildings available (Piddock 2001:88; see Geyer 1994:28). The complex represented an adaptation of the principles of the English workhouse to local colonial circumstances, in terms of work and the segregation of groups, where shelter was provided for a diverse range of people in need.

Archaeologists in Britain and the United States have also paid considerable attention to workhouses in recent years, as part of a much wider concern with institutions of confinement and reform (e.g. Beisaw and Gibb 2009; Casella 2007; De Cunzo 1995, 2001, 2006; Divers 2004; Elia and Wesolowsky 1991; Huey 2001; Peña 2001; Oleksy 2008; Spencer-Wood and Baugher 2001). This focus builds on earlier historical and sociological studies into discipline, penalty and the reform of deviancy (e.g. Foucault 1977; Goffman 1961; Ignatieff 1978; Markus 1993). Goffman's notion of the 'total institution' has also been influential, where inmates in asylums, prisons, workhouses etc, were often subject to a regime of discipline, segregation, regimentation and correction, as part of the process of behavioural and moral reform (e.g. Casella 2007; De Cunzo 1995). Archaeology has been used to interpret not only how power was exerted over those confined, but also how inmates exploited their material world to challenge the power relations of confinement. Archaeological approaches have explored the continual tension between the free and unfree, and how inmates co-opted elements of their material world to fashion new forms of coping, compromise, disobedience, exchange and survival (Casella 2007:2-7). The idea of the total institution has thus also been widely challenged by archaeologists to explore the many ways inmates found to overcome such ideal regimes.

Nevertheless, an emphasis on the control and discipline exerted over inmates also promotes a distinctly *antagonistic* set of power relations which often ignores more complex and subtle exchanges between inmates and authorities. While institutions typically sought to control inmates, their actual success in achieving their goals of punishment and reform is much less certain. Evidence for resistance may also be read as evidence for collusion, corruption, negligence, or simple incompetence (Crook and Murray 2006:106). A more nuanced understanding is needed of the relationships between inmates, authority, the institution itself and the wider world. Most archaeological analyses have focused on buildings and architectural designs (e.g. Piddock 2007; Sutton 2003), and while these may reflect the disciplinary intentions of institutional authorities, the limited availability and scope of associated archaeological deposits means that direct analysis of conditions for inmates is often very difficult to achieve.

Workhouses had their origins in England about 1000 years ago. They emerged from medieval hospitals which were part of the monastic system, and grew into almshouses at the local, parish level that provided charitable relief for the destitute elderly. In the United States, poor relief drew on English and European traditions, with a variety of almshouses established for the poor, elderly, sick and insane (the 'deserving' poor), along with harsher workhouses for the able-bodied 'undeserving' poor, such as vagrants and runaway servants.

In England, the *Poor Law Amendment Act* of 1834 provided for workhouses which segregated men from women and young from old. Classification and surveillance of inmates in workhouses was held to be desirable to prevent the corruption of the worthy by the dissolute. In practice, however, the 'mixed' workhouse became standard (Markus 1993:141-142; O'Connor 1995:45). Archaeologist Gavin Lucas (1999) explored these notions of separation and discipline in a group of workhouse buildings in Southampton. Children were separated from adults, with girls occupying an old townhouse and boys housed in a purpose-built school next door. Across the way, in a new workhouse building dating from the 1860s, the adult inmates were classified first by sex, and then by their ability to work. The able-bodied were held in different building blocks from the aged and mad, from the infirm and from the infectious sick. This axis of work/debility was oriented so that the further an inmate penetrated the complex the less likely he or she was ever to get out again.

Lucas integrates these ideas of separation and work with the notion of the productive human body and how this took on increasing economic value in the nineteenth century (Gallagher 1987:91). The unproductive body, however, was the source of uncertainty and ambivalence, as to whether it represented a parasite or a victim of wider society. The workhouse was one material response to this dilemma, where classification by age, sex and health was intended to enclose and control the inmates, and grade them according to their capacity for productive labour. In practice, however, the frequent mixing of men, women, children, the sick and others in the workhouses tended to muddy these principles and undermined the ethics of productivity.

Thomas Fewer (2000) has drawn attention to the role that archaeology might play in understanding Irish workhouses and the experiences of inmates during the Great Famine of the 1840s. He notes that a range of site types, including mass graves, fever hospitals, soup kitchens and abandoned villages, along with the many workhouses built as a result of the *Irish Poor Law Act* of 1838 could shed new light on an appalling chapter of Ireland's past. The workhouses were intended to be uniform, cheap, durable and unattractive, to limit their appeal only to the most destitute. Variations in design, however, reveal an uneven response by authorities to institutional poverty. The Waterford workhouse, for example, included special wards to accommodate extra-marital children and their mothers, and wards for women with venereal disease. Modifications elsewhere suggest a more flexible response to the growing demand for workhouse shelter as the Famine deepened in the late 1840s, while a range of buildings were also bought or rented to serve as auxiliary workhouses.

THE HYDE PARK BARRACKS

The Hyde Park Barracks Asylum was part of a growing commitment on the part of colonial governments in Australia

to support public welfare for the very needy. The building was constructed between 1817 and 1819 on the orders of Governor Macquarie, originally to provide accommodation for male convicts working on government projects in and around Sydney. The three-storey Georgian brick building was set in a walled compound and initially housed about 600 convicts, although this eventually increased to more than 1000. A series of small buildings around the edges of the compound served as storerooms, mess rooms, shelter sheds and offices and quarters for the Deputy Superintendent of Convicts, along with two sets of solitary cells in the north-west and north-east corners of the perimeter wall. The interior plan of the Barracks itself was based on a simple cruciform design repeated on each level, with two larger rooms to the east and two smaller rooms to the west (Figure 1). No effective separation of the convicts by age or crime was possible, although juvenile convicts were removed for their own safety in 1822.

Convict transportation to New South Wales ended in 1840 and by 1848 the remaining convicts in the Barracks were transferred to Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour (Crook and Murray 2006:18). In the same year the Barracks began to accommodate a number of new functions, including the Government Printing Office, a depot for Irish female orphans and the Female Immigration Depot. Shiploads of single young women recruited from towns and villages throughout the United Kingdom were brought to the Immigration Depot at the Barracks to wash themselves and their clothes and to recover briefly from the voyage. Special 'Hiring Days' were held to present the young women to prospective employers, when contracts were signed and the women left to their new lives in the colony. Typically the immigrant women spent only a few days in the Depot before securing a position (Historic Houses Trust 2006:26).

In 1862 the top floor of the Barracks building was given over to the use of the Government Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women, with over 150 inmates transferred from the

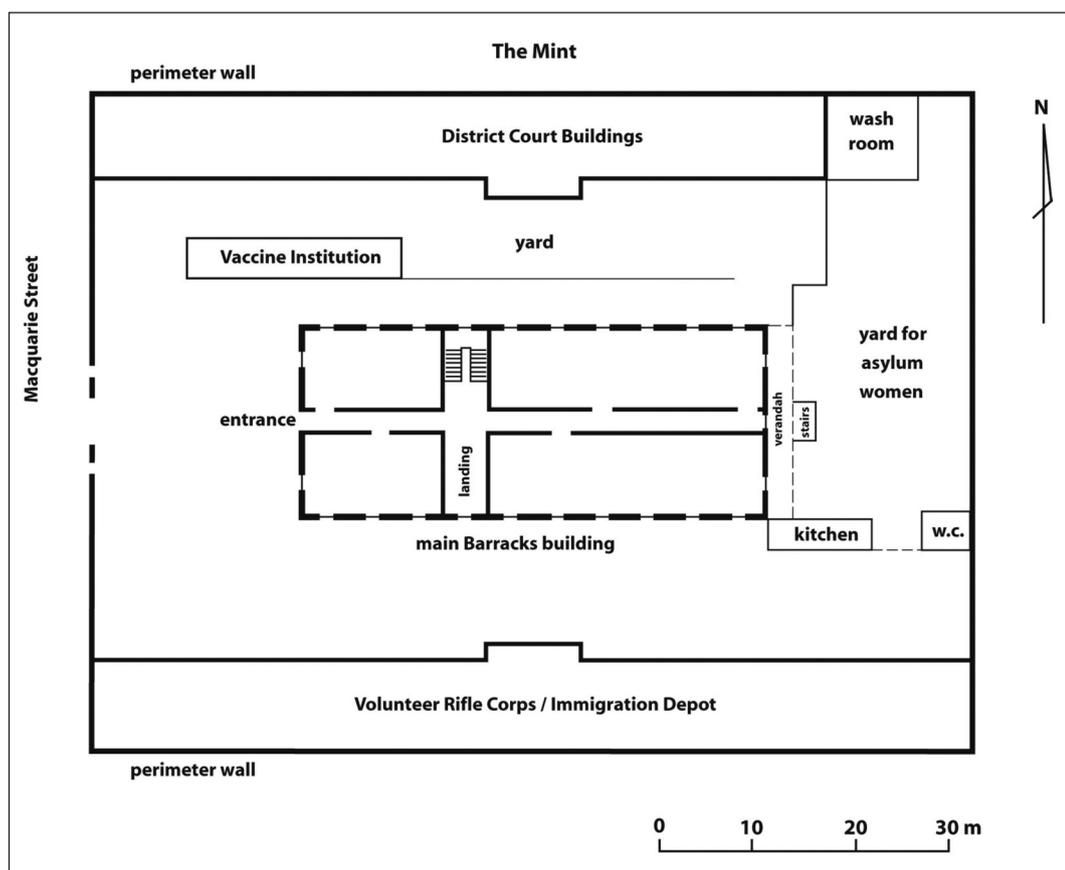


Figure 1: Simplified plan of Hyde Park Barracks, around 1870 (after Varman 1993).

Sydney Benevolent Asylum. The women ranged in age from 18 to 92 years, with almost half this initial intake having originally arrived in Australia as convicts (Hughes 2004:59). As a government institution the HPB Asylum accommodated both Protestant and Catholic inmates, along with several Jewish women. There is no record, however, of any Aboriginal women ever being admitted. The Matron of the Immigration Depot, Lucy Applewhaite, became Matron of the Destitute Asylum as well. She remained in the role for the next 24 years, through the death of her husband John Applewhaite in 1869, her remarriage to William Hicks in 1870, and the birth of her 14 children. Several thousand women entered the Asylum between 1862 and 1886, when the institution was moved to Newington near Parramatta, but we know the names of only a few dozen inmates. The Asylum generally accommodated more than 200 women at a time, but by the mid-1880s there were more than 300 inmates (Hughes 2004:218). Overcrowding was always a problem. Many women stayed for only a week or two when injury or illness struck, but others stayed for years or even decades and the Asylum became their last home on earth.

The Immigration Depot and Destitute Asylum were administered separately and efforts were made to keep the two groups of women apart, with separate entry ways, dining rooms and dormitories. Nevertheless, the dual management under Matron Hicks meant that effective segregation on a daily basis may not always have been clear-cut. Furniture and utensils were often shared and the lines of management between the two institutions were sometimes vague. Although we have no preserved plans of the layout of the Asylum, hints in several sources suggest that the two large rooms on Level 3 served as wards or dormitories and work spaces for the inmates, while the smaller rooms were used as wards for the sick and for ‘idiots’ (Public Charities Commission 1874:74). At times when there were no immigrant women in the Depot on Level 2, the Matron used the rooms to accommodate women from the Asylum. This resulted in the mixing of items discarded beneath the floor of Level 2 by the two groups of women. Meals were taken by the Asylum women in a separate ground floor mess-room, with food brought in from an external kitchen. The rear yard of the Barracks compound was enclosed in the 1860s to separate the Asylum women from the immigrant women and the increasingly public functions of the HPB complex (Thorpe 1980). The yard contained a washroom and toilets, with access provided from an external stairway built onto the eastern side of the building. Following the departure of the Asylum women in 1886, the complex accommodated various courts and offices of the NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice. The Barracks continued to be used mainly for judicial purposes until 1979, when the complex began to be converted into a museum. The Barracks came under the management of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in 1990, as a museum depicting its own history.

WOMEN AND WORK

The female inmates did all the work of the Asylum, including cooking and serving meals, cleaning, laundry, sewing and nursing. The institution was largely self-supporting in terms of its labour requirements. The only paid employee, apart from the Matron and the medical officer, Dr George Walker, was the head laundress, Nancy Bell, who for many years received 12 shillings per week, or £31 4s per annum (Government Asylums Inquiry Board 1887:448). In 1873, however, more than 20 inmates were also earning small daily gratuities in return for the work they performed. Those in more responsible positions, including Ann Bertha (the head cook) and Margaret

Haggarty (the head wardswoman), each received one shilling per day, while assistant cooks, wardswomen and nurses received from twopence to sixpence per day (Public Charities Commission 1874 Special Appendix 4). The heads of each mess-group of eight women, referred to as ‘the Captain women’, brought a soup tureen and a large teapot to each table and ensured that a soup dish or plate, a pannikin for tea and cutlery and salt were provided. These women were entitled to an extra allowance of either tea, sugar, butter, tobacco or an article of clothing each week for their labour (Public Charities Commission 1874:75; Rolleston 1862). In this way the Matron retained and rewarded a number of strong and hard-working women to run the messes and ensure the heavy work was carried out. The paradox at the heart of this self-sufficiency model, however, was not easily resolved: strong, healthy women who would have been capable of securing a living outside the Asylum were needed to keep it running. Hard-working inmates were much cheaper than hired labour. The Asylum thus retained inmates whose personal need for charitable refuge was fairly minimal, but who, for their own reasons, elected to remain inside (Government Asylums Inquiry Board 1887:427).

Archaeological evidence reveals the scale and diversity of the work carried out by the women. Boots, shoes and slippers, for example, were supplied by contract to the institution, but the archaeological remains indicate that leather working and shoe repair were also carried out by some of the women in the Destitute Asylum. Although no tools for these activities have been identified, at least 181 leather offcuts were recovered from the underfloor spaces in the dormitory rooms on Level 3. There were also 194 pieces from the landing at the top of the stairs, and 109 offcuts from the dormitories on Level 2 (Table 1). There was very little evidence, however, for leather work in the sick wards on Level 3 or from the Matron’s rooms on Level 2. Most fragments are slender, curved pieces left over from cutting out shoe components. These include heel and sole pieces, uppers, and welts (strips to join uppers to soles). An intact roll of leather bound with a thong was also recovered from the northern dormitory on Level 3 (Figure 2). The leather is 1.5 mm thick and 139 mm (5½ inches) in width, and was found in association with more than 50 shoe leather offcuts. A simple leather finger guard was also found which may have been used for hand protection when using awls and heavy needles.

The numerous offcuts and shoe components, and their distribution in the underfloor spaces, indicate that shoe repair was reasonably common among the Asylum women. The landing at the top of the stairs on Level 3 appears to have been a popular place for the women to gather, not only to smoke and gossip, as indicated by the numerous clay pipes discarded

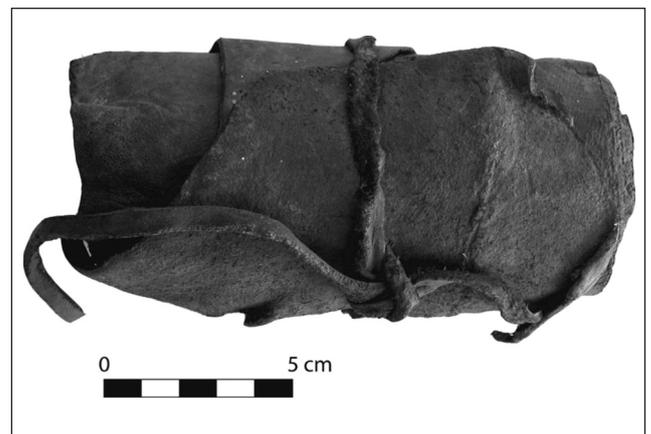


Figure 2: Bound strip of leather (UF7559) from the northern dormitory of the HPB Destitute Asylum.

Table 1: Artefact fragment counts relating to the work of women in the HPB Destitute Asylum and Immigration Depot.

	Immigration Depot Level 2				Destitute Asylum Level 3					Totals
	Hicks quarters north	Hicks quarters south	North dormitory	South dormitory	Sick ward	Idiots' ward	North dormitory	South dormitory	Stair Landing	
Leather offcuts	–	10	14	95	2	6	123	58	194	502
Shoe parts	2	–	2	6	–	–	3	8	18	39
Straw	–	–	–	21	–	1	33	17	7	79
Pins	195	305	293	1082	479	316	941	522	140	4273
Needles	4	4	2	1	3	1	2	3	–	20
Cotton reels	2	1	6	9	1	5	17	37	11	89
Fine sewing tools	2	2	6	3	2	1	2	2	–	20
Thimbles	–	–	2	–	–	2	2	4	2	12

in this area (Crook and Murray 2006:98; Davies 2011), but also to cut and stitch footwear. The shoe industry at this time was largely a male-dominated industry (e.g. *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 October 1878:6), but evidence from the HPB Asylum indicates that, where necessary, at least some inmates took on the role of leather worker and cobbler.

Another task performed at times by the women was hat-making. There is no historical record of this work and the only evidence available derives from the archaeological material. At least 79 strands of plaited straw have been identified in the underfloor assemblage, including 21 fragments in the southern dormitory on Level 2 and 50 fragments from the Asylum dormitories on Level 3 (Table 1). A palm leaf shredding tool was also found beneath the floor on Level 3. It features eight small metal teeth inserted into a wooden handle, and was used to slice fibre into strips which were woven into plaits for hat or basket-making. Four roughly whittled wooden sticks with a point at one end were also recovered from beneath the Asylum floor. These varied from 140 to 220 mm in length, and may have been used for splitting thicker palm fronds into workable pieces.

Hat-making from the leaves of the cabbage-tree palm *Livistonia australis* probably began among convicts in the early settlement of Sydney (Ritchie 1971[1]:16). By the mid-nineteenth century the hats had become very popular among both men and women, especially in urban areas, and fine examples could cost up to 10 shillings each (Maynard 1994:170; Ollif and Crosthwaite 1977:35). The work was fairly simple and required few tools and inexpensive materials, and it became a cottage industry as well as a common form of institutional labour in the nineteenth century (Crook and Murray 2006:76; Rathbone 1994:33). There is no evidence that the hats were made for sale outside the Asylum



Figure 3: Hand-sewn bodice in calico and printed cotton with hook and eye fastenings and HPB laundry stamp on rear (UF52).

and it appears from the location of the remains on Levels 2 and 3 that the work provided hats (and repairs to hats) for women in both the Asylum and the Immigration Depot.

It was sewing, however, that occupied the time and energy of most Asylum inmates. Able-bodied inmates were responsible for making and repairing the Asylum's bed linen and their own clothing, which included caps and bonnets, skirts and bodices, shawls, aprons and shifts (Figure 3). Even for women with limited mobility, simple stitching and darning provided useful work to perform. This work is represented abundantly in the archaeological record, with large quantities of sewing items, including pins, needles, thimbles and cotton reels, along with several thousand textile pieces.

More than 4000 pins, for example, were recovered from the underfloor spaces on Levels 2 and 3, with all the rooms represented by large quantities of these easy-to-lose items (Table 1). Most pins ranged in length from 21 to 40 mm and were probably used for general-purpose sewing (see Beaudry 2006:25). Five hundred pins were lost beneath the floor of the rooms occupied by the Matron's family, suggesting that Lucy Hicks' daughters were frequently occupied with sewing as well, while more than 1000 pins were recovered from the southern dormitory of the immigrant women. The dormitories of the Asylum inmates had more than 1300 pins in the underfloor spaces, with some of the women clearly spending their time sewing while sitting in or beside their beds. A makeshift pin-pocket was also identified in the collection, consisting of a rectangle of paper carefully torn and scissored into shape, with rust stains from the pins originally folded inside (Figure 4). The packet may have been tucked into an apron pocket as one woman's response to keeping her sewing tools safely to hand.

Other sewing equipment in the underfloor collection includes 12 thimbles, which were mostly simple shapes of ferrous metal or copper-alloy with a dimpled top. Needles were also found in small quantities and included a paper

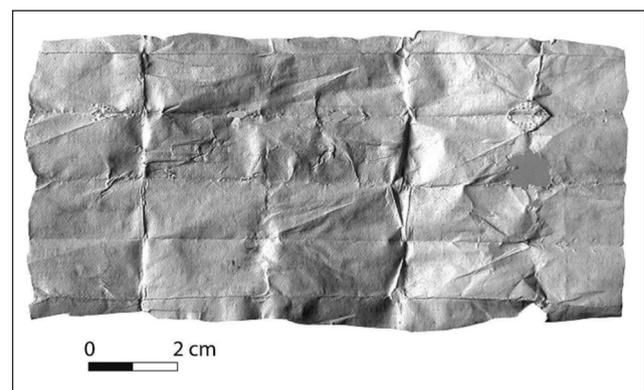


Figure 4: Makeshift paper pin packet (UF4398).

packet of 'Egg Eyed Sharps No.7' from Level 2 that contained 22 needles manufactured by Henry Milward & Sons of Redditch in England (UF75). Another needle packet (UF17782) labelled 'Super Darning Needles No.6' was found in the northern dormitory on Level 2. A hand-sewn circular pin cushion (UF10763) from the Asylum was made from scraps of textile (Figure 5). There is very little evidence for knitting in the assemblage, however, with only three knitting needles recovered from Lucy Hicks' quarters on Level 2.



Figure 5: Hand-sewn pin cushion from the southern dormitory of the Asylum (UF10763).

Wooden cotton reels were common at the Barracks, with 60 recovered from the Asylum and 18 from the Immigration Depot. The reels are often hour-glass in shape, with a deep waist and a conical flare at each end. Others have a straight barrel with only a small flare to hold the thread (Figure 6). Surviving paper labels indicate that the most common thread manufacturer represented in the Barracks material is J. Brook and Brothers of Meltham Mills in Yorkshire. Other makers include I. and W. Taylor of Leicester, Griffith and Son of London and Clark and Co of Paisley/Glasgow. Mass-production of cotton reels began in the 1840s, with cotton replacing linen as the most common sewing thread. The mechanisation of cotton spinning, spool production and thread winding was just in time for the appearance of self-acting treadle sewing machines, including Isaac Singer's, in the 1850s (Knox 1995:77-78). There are also four examples of makeshift reels, or spools, including cotton thread wrapped around a fragment of bone, and thread wound around a piece of rolled up cardboard, while a bone lid from a cotton barrel was also recovered from Level 3.

In addition to the pins, needles and reels associated with everyday sewing, there were also at least 20 items in the underfloor collection which demonstrate more specialised needlework. These included two crochet hooks, 10 elements from bobbins for lace-making, two tatting shuttles and six

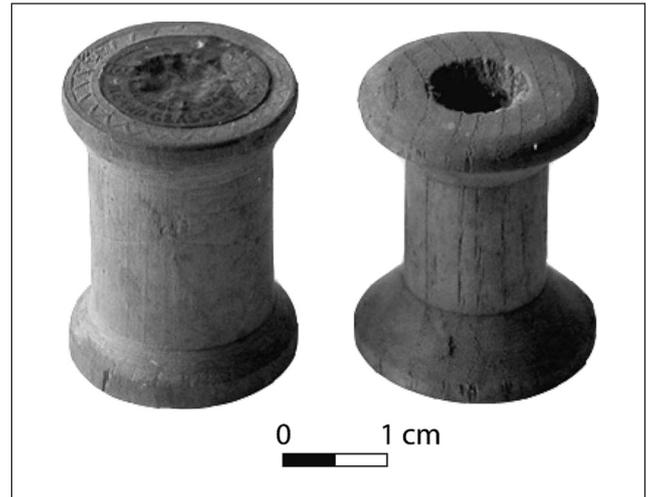


Figure 6: Wooden cotton reels, including example from Clark and Co. of Glasgow (UF17839).

other unidentified bone tools probably related to needlework. Most of this material came from Level 2 and is likely to be from the Depot-women. They were equipped with sewing materials on board ship, both as training and to keep their hands busy, work which continued at the Barracks if they remained for short periods of time. This needlework is likely to have been much finer, and more decorative, than the practical sewing of the Asylum women (Figure 7; see Griggs 2001:85-86).

Matron Hicks received about 1000 yards of calico at a time and cut out the fabric herself for sewing into bed sheets and other items by the inmates. The fabric was supplied by contract from local merchants but it was manufactured in overseas mills. One fragment from a bolt of cotton was stamped 'Thos Hoyle & Sons / Manchester / British Cambric', a company that operated from the late-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Textile scraps in the assemblage were dominated by cotton but also included linen, silk and wool. Large windows on all three levels of the building admitted good natural light, which allowed for inside work during daylight hours (see Casey 2004:35). A second-hand treadle sewing machine was purchased for the Asylum in 1878 and another was acquired in 1880, but most of the women continued to stitch and sew by hand (Hughes 2004:84). Hundreds of textile scraps in the collection still have the hand-sewn stitches of the inmates, while only a few dozen show evidence of machine sewing. The 'uniform' the women sewed for their clothing was plaid (a twilled woollen cloth) until 1873 when Matron Hicks changed to a brown wincey (a wool and cotton blend), a decision she admitted was a mistake, as

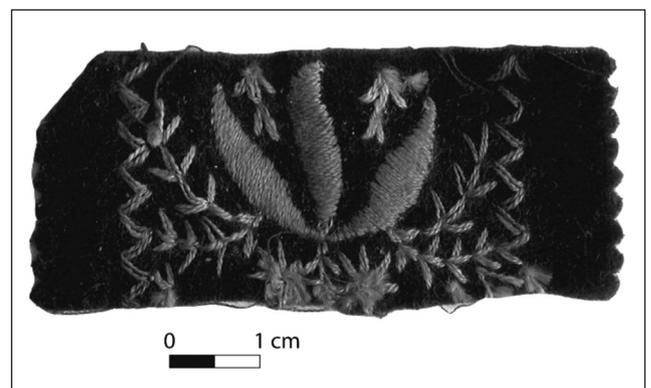


Figure 7: Piece of embroidered brown velvet (UF978) from the Immigration Depot.

plaid dresses did not need such frequent washing (Public Charities Commission 1874:76; Government Asylums Inquiry Board 1887:499). Textile offcuts suggest that summer garments for the women were later made from mauve-coloured floral-printed cotton. The archaeological evidence also supports Matron Hicks' claim that 'the old women are celebrated for patching' (Public Charities Commission 1874:76). Rips and frayed edges in garments were carefully patched, while several examples of woollen stockings have been darned with varying degrees of skill. Thriftiness extended to the reuse of worn out clothing, with textile pieces cut along the seams to maximise the amount of unstitched fabric to use in a new garment or item. Some of the old clothes were taken away by rag-men for use in the local paper industry (Linge 1979:425), but large quantities were also swept beneath the floor.

The Asylum women thus did all the housework and other chores of the institution themselves. The aim was to make the complex as self-sufficient as possible and to keep the women fully occupied so as to prevent idleness. In-house work also minimised the financial cost to the government of supporting the inmates. This was achieved, in 1873, at an average cost of around £10 16 shillings per inmate per annum, a figure regarded as very economical by the Public Charities Commission (1873-74:109). While food, textiles and other necessities were supplied in bulk by outside suppliers, the inmates laboured to transform these goods into the basic commodities needed for the daily functioning of the institution. In the same period, inmates at the Magdalen Asylum in Melbourne 'cost' almost £25 each per annum, although they experienced similar living and work conditions (James 1969:242-243).

The labour of the inmates at the HPB Asylum was focused inward. Their cleaning, cooking, nursing, sewing etc, was mutually self-supporting – all the inmates benefitted from the work each woman performed. While much of the labour was undoubtedly tedious, tiring and unpleasant, it was also necessary, economical, and beneficial to the individuals who performed it. The tasks were familiar and respectable labour, and were identical to what the women would have been doing in private homes as servants or in their own homes as wives and mothers. The women were expected to conform to the feminine domestic ideal, but performed their work in an institutional context. In contrast, work in the poorhouses of England and Ireland in this period was not only arduous but also intended as a deterrent, and even a punishment, for the 'crime' of destitution. Labour regimes were directed not only towards self-sufficiency but also profitability (Markus 1993:104). The work of picking oakum and grinding corn was directed *outwards*, with products sent away from the inmates who had created them.

Much of the work and daily routine at the Barracks was a product of the long tenure of Matron Lucy Hicks. Lucy Hannah Langdon was born in the Rocks in Sydney in 1833 and at the age of 16 she married John Applewhaite, a ship's master. The couple spent much of the next five years at sea and eventually had nine children together, before John died in 1869. A year later she married William Hicks, a journalist, and with him she had five more children. She was 46 when her last child was born in 1879 (Hughes 2004:148-171). Lucy Hicks gave evidence to two Parliamentary inquiries, one in 1873 and another in 1886, and from her responses we can gauge something of her character and the way she ran both the Immigration Depot and the Destitute Asylum. She was hard-working, well-meaning, self-assured and practical, with clear ideas about roles and responsibilities. She managed all the needs of two separate institutions with careful economy and dealt with the demands of her own growing family. Earning around £200 a year, she was also the family breadwinner and

one of the most highly paid female public servants in New South Wales. For most of the time she was Matron, her babies and young children were a constant presence in the building, and as her daughters grew older they helped with the running of the institutions. Four of her children died at very young ages, however, along with Mary, her eldest daughter and greatest helper, who died in 1885 at the age of 34.

Lucy Hicks was no rigid moralist. She had experienced and understood the pain of great personal loss. The evidence indicates that she tempered firmness with kindness in her treatment of the many inmates under her charge over the years. She was no doubt aware of the workhouses of England and elsewhere by reputation, but most of her life was spent in the colony, where she worked firsthand with those afflicted by illness, debility, old age and poverty. Her response to what she called 'the poor old creatures' was brisk and unsentimental, while laced with compassion. She knew well that many more women were turned back at the door of the Asylum than could be admitted, and she was glad it was members of the Board of Government Asylums, rather than herself, who decided the merits of applicants (Public Charities Commission 1874:77).

By 1886, however, after almost a quarter of a century running the Asylum, her competence was beginning to unravel, and the tight ship she had established and run for so long at the Barracks was sinking. The premature death of her daughter Mary deeply affected Lucy Hicks' confidence, and in the abrupt move to Newington it proved too difficult to re-establish the routines and practices that had sustained the HPB Asylum for so long. After the move Hicks (and several wardswomen under her supervision) was accused of withholding food from sick inmates, of being drunk, and of general neglect of her duties. Testimonials from several inmates helped counter these reports, but it was clear that her time in charge was coming to an end, as her formerly dependable conduct was replaced with a 'hard-hearted indifference' (Government Asylums Inquiry Board 1887:433). She was dismissed from her position in 1888, and died in 1909, survived by only five of her 14 children.

CONCLUSION

The Hyde Park Barracks Destitute Asylum demonstrated features of both a workhouse and a place of refuge. With several hundred inmates crammed into an ageing and inadequate building, the many tasks needed to keep the institution functioning were carried out by the women themselves. This was a practical necessity, but also a regime with important moral and ideological dimensions. Nineteenth-century charity and welfare organisations recognised that various groups, including the sick, elderly, frail and 'deserving' poor needed food, clothing and shelter just to survive. Able-bodied paupers granted refuge in benevolent asylums like the Barracks were expected to work in return for the support they received. The moral imperative of redemption through productive labour was thus expressed via the institutional work of various pauper groups and individuals. The able-bodied poor supported themselves, the weak, and the asylum itself, in return for material sustenance in the form of food, shelter and clothing.

Archaeological evidence from the HPB Asylum provides clear evidence of the kinds of labour the inmates performed. This included leather-working, hat-weaving and a great deal of hand-sewing, along with cleaning, laundry, cooking and nursing. Thrift was also apparent in the use of makeshift tools, in patching and darning, and in the careful saving of textile scraps by cutting along seams from old garments. The institutional discipline of their lives was expressed in the uniforms they wore, and in their segregation from the Immi-

gration Depot and other functions of the Hyde Park Barracks complex. Group accommodation in large wards meant that personal privacy was minimal, even non-existent. Inmates could be punished by expulsion from the institution, or by deprivation of gratuities or medical comforts. Young mothers who entered the Asylum were separated from their children, who were sent away to orphanages (Hughes 2004:60).

There is little evidence, however, of the worst excesses of contemporary industrial workhouses in Britain and the United States. The architecture of the building, its many public functions, and the simple lack of space, meant that punishing labour on an industrial scale for several hundred inmates was not feasible. The women at the Barracks received monotonous but adequate food and those who received gratuities for their work could get extras like butter and sugar. Tobacco was dispensed as part of the ration to all the women who wanted it and more than 1300 clay tobacco pipe fragments from the underfloor spaces indicate that smoking was very popular (Davies 2011). Occasional feasts and dinners were also provided for the Asylum inmates by colonial dignitaries, providing a break from the daily routine.

Regimentation is a key element of the 'total institution' and although formal regulations spelt out the duties and responsibilities of the inmates (Rolleston 1862), Matron Hicks admitted in later years that these had rarely ever been followed, and that she had exercised her own discretion in managing the needs of the Asylum women, especially the elderly (Government Asylums Inquiry Board 1887:528). Daily and weekly routines were established and followed, but these were generally humane and were flexible enough to accommodate changing circumstances. Segregation of inmates was also minimal, based on infirmity or illness rather than behaviour and morality, and limited by the open architecture of the building. Surveillance in the crowded, open wards and dormitories was necessarily limited, with the able-bodied women undertaking and supervising the work rather than disciplining the other women. Regular bathing was part of the routine, with hot and cold water provided to ensure sanitation and to reduce cross-infection, rather than as a punishment in itself. Relatives and friends could visit on any afternoon except Sunday, while the inmates themselves could spend a day out of the institution once a month. Even the uniform was sometimes resisted and some women in mourning wore black dresses (Public Charities Commission 1874:76). The spiritual welfare of the women was supported by frequent visits from clergy and missionaries and the provision of bibles, prayer books, rosaries and other religious items, while books and periodicals were available from the asylum library for those who could read (Hughes 2004:82). Medical support was provided by a visiting medical officer and an Asylum dispensary, while inmates who died were carefully laid out, washed and dressed in an old but clean chemise and cap.

For almost a quarter of a century, several thousand female paupers found a home in the Hyde Park Barracks Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women. The items they lost, discarded and hid in the floor cavities provide a unique opportunity to examine the work and living conditions of this most marginal group of people. The sewing tools, leather pieces, textile offcuts and other items come from the hands of the women themselves and often bear direct evidence of their daily labour. In the distribution of this material we can read their lives from the inside out, where they exercised at least some control over their work and how they related to each other and to the institution as a whole. The Asylum was oriented not towards discipline, surveillance and oppression, but to productive labour and support for the vulnerable. It was a permanent home for some of the inmates, temporary for most, but a vital refuge for all.

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