

Late 19th / early 20th Century NSW Prison Records Now Online Paint Grim Photographic Picture of Early Prison Life (and Inmates)

[Online Gaol record books enable families to search ancestors who served time in NSW prisons](#)

Collection includes records from 19th Century NSW gaols Images and descriptions of more than 25,000 prisonersIndex links to original documents Ancestry.com.au, Australia's number one family history website[1] today launched online for the first time the New South Wales, Australia, Gaol Description and Entrance Books, 1818-1930. Just in time for Christmas, this collection reveals details of more than 25,000 prisoners from New South Wales prisons, many of which have now closed and are being used as museums or schools. The collection also contains an estimated 34,572 images from 1875 onwards, providing a detailed description and photograph of each inmate – as well as a record of their crimes and sentences.

With recent research [2] by Ancestry.com.au showing the majority of Australians (81 per cent) feel Christmas is the time to get together as a family and to reminisce and share stories across generations, there has never been a better time to start looking into the stories that make up your family's history. Interestingly, the research highlights that almost three quarters of the population consider passing on family history as important.

With over half of Australians surveyed identifying that they have at least three generations present at Christmas, Aussies, especially those with a convict past, can use the New South Wales, Australia, Gaol Description and Entrance Books to gain unique insights into the physical characteristics and make up of their ancestors.

Details about the inmates include each prisoners' number, their name, aliases, date when portrait was taken, native place and year of birth, details of arrival in the colony – including ship and year of arrival, trade or occupation, religion, standard of education, height, weight (on committal and on discharge), colour of hair, colour of eyes, marks or special features, portrait, where and when tried, offence, sentence, remarks and details of previous convictions (where, when, offence, sentence).

Upon reviewing the stories buried within the collection, Ancestry.com.au has uncovered some interesting stories in the collection, including that of Ethel Herringe.

Herringe was just 22 years old when she was incarcerated as the result of an unconventional shotgun wedding in 1902. Maurice John Lee, who was the licensee of the Clubhouse Hotel at Cowra and Herringe's boss, had promised to marry her until he discovered she was carrying his twins. Herringe arranged for a clergyman and witness to be present one night after the bar closed and then attempted to ambush Lee into wedlock. When Lee reneged on his promise, Herringe drew a pistol and shot and fatally wounded him. Lying in the hospital, Lee made something of a death bed confession, suggesting to others that perhaps he got what he deserved.

There was a significant community support for Herringe, including a petition for leniency, which attracted more than 5000 signatures. As a result, the crime was reduced to manslaughter and she was released from prison two years later.

The collection was created in accordance with the 'Gaol regulation' proclaimed in the New South Wales Government Gazette, dated 19 February, 1867. The collection's starting year of 1818 pre dates the end of transportation, which was officially abolished by the Government in 1868 therefore a significant number of inmates recorded in NSW prisons would have previously been transported.

Combining these records with others in Ancestry.com.au's Australian Convict collection, the New South Wales, Queensland, Victorian and Western Australian Passenger Lists, the England and Wales Criminal Registers and the UK Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books indexes, family historians are presented with a rich tapestry of information into their ancestors.

Ancestry.com.au Content Director, Brad Argent, comments: "The records in this collection contain a unique insight into the who's who of NSW prisons in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century.

"This collection will be helpful for family and social historians in the lead up to Christmas, giving them the opportunity to uncover details about their ancestors who served time in some well-known prisons around the state. These will be good stories to share with family members over the Christmas period."

The new collection, the originals for which are held on microfilm by the State Records Authority of New South Wales, provides searchable indexes linked to images of the original records. It is available to UK Heritage Plus and World Heritage subscribers.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION / IMAGES/ INTERVIEWS:

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ABOUT ANCESTRY.COM.AU Australia's leading family history website, Ancestry.com.au contains more than 930 million records in its Australian and UK collections, including the Australia Birth, Marriage and Death Index, Australian Convict Transportation Registers, Australian Free Settlers, Australian Electoral Rolls, New South Wales SANDS Directories, as well as the most complete online collection of England, Wales and Scotland Censuses and the England and Wales Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes.

Ancestry.com.au was launched in May 2006 and belongs to the global network of Ancestry websites (wholly owned by Ancestry.com Operations Inc.), which contains six billion records. To date more than 20 million family trees have been created and 2 billion profiles and 45 million photographs and stories uploaded. (Figures current as of 28 October 2010)

The Ancestry global network of family history websites: www.ancestry.com in the US, www.ancestry.co.uk in the UK, www.ancestry.ca in Canada, www.ancestry.com.au in Australia, www.ancestry.de in Germany, www.ancestry.it in Italy, www.ancestry.fr in France, www.ancestry.se in Sweden and www.jiapu.com in China.

[1] comScore, 2009, based on genealogy related websites selected from the Family and Parenting sub-category under the Community category

[2] The Australians' attitudes towards family history survey was commissioned by Ancestry.com.au in September 2010 and was conducted by The Online Research Unit (ORU) who polled a nationally representative sample of a 1000 people across Australia aged 18 and over.