

More than 60 years & 6,000 records of Australia's early Destitute Children now online

Handwritten registers from major Australian 'asylum' for destitute children from NSW and surrounds

Ancestry.com.au, Australia's number one family history website[1], today launched the Registers for the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children, 1852-1915 – a collection of more than 6,000 handwritten entries documenting the admission and departure of children in the asylum's care.

Previously the Society for the Relief of Destitute Children, the Randwick Asylum was first occupied in 1858. Its purpose was to care for abandoned children or children whose parents were considered 'dissolute characters'.

It could house 800 and generally accepted children between the ages of three and ten who weren't eligible for the orphan schools or whose parents weren't capable of caring for them. Once admitted, the children stayed in the asylum until they turned 19, were boarded out, or in the case of females - married off.

Built to be self-sustaining, the asylum grounds included a farm where boys were taught farming skills. Many of the children were also offered an apprenticeship with the institution after the age of 12.

George Wilson Hanna, ancestor of Emily Hanna, archivist at State Records NSW, narrowly escaped being committed to Randwick Asylum at the lucky age of 13. His parents emigrated from Ireland to Australia. His father soon became 'addicted to tippling' and lost his job on the Police Force. His mother presumably suffered from post-natal depression; both parents were finally admitted to the Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum where they eventually passed away.

George Hanna was just old enough to be apprenticed out, while his three little brothers were committed to the asylum. The records show that the youngest brother, aged three, died within five months of his arrival there. The other two brothers eventually gained an apprenticeship. George and his second youngest brother eventually reconnected according to family stories.

The Hanna brothers' story was not uncommon for children committed to the Randwick Asylum. Many children from 'troubled' families were split up, and over 216 children died at the Asylum, many from whooping cough.

With families seemingly so easily broken up once upon a time, the Randwick records are a potentially valuable resource for helping to connect distant relations and paint a picture of a time of significant hardship for many young Australians.

In 1915, the last of the children at the asylum were boarded out or sent to cottage style institutions. During World War I, the building was taken over by the Federal Government as a military hospital for wounded and disabled returned servicemen. The Prince of Wales Hospital now stands in its place.

Ancestry.com.au Content Director Brad Argent comments: "Although the asylum was based in Sydney, NSW, it housed children from all over the state and possibly from other locations within Australia."

"For people who are trying to find ancestors who seemed to have disappeared from the records or whose origin is difficult to locate, these registers might provide the missing link."

These records are available to UK Heritage Plus and World Deluxe members. To find out more about your family's heritage, please visit www.ancestry.com.au

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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.

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

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