

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>**Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children, New South Wales 1852-1915**

The Society for the Relief of Destitute Children established in Sydney in 1852 was a charitable organisation formed to manage an Asylum for Destitute Children to house the offspring of parents who had abandoned them or were unable to care for them.

A small group of children was initially housed in Ormond House, Paddington from 1852 until 1858 when construction of the Asylum for Destitute Children at Randwick was completed. The new building had a capacity of 400 which was increased to 800 with a new wing constructed in 1863. The building and ongoing funding of the asylum was financed by the New South Wales government, supplemented by charitable fundraising.

In the 1880s a new fostering system and the withdrawal of government funding resulted in a decline in inmates, but the Randwick Asylum continued to function as a private charity until its closure in 1915.

This dataset contains records of 5,723 children from the asylum's registers. They record details of children admitted into Ormond House and the Randwick Asylum 1852-1915. The registers generally record the name and age of child, date of admission, religion of parents, reason for admission, details of discharge including date, child's age, and to whom discharged (to parent, relative or employer) or death. Entries after about 1900 note the child's vaccination status.

The reasons for admission often contain biographical data and commentary on the parents and the nature of their behaviours, death, illness or unfortunate circumstances that led to the child being taken into the asylum. On the original registers many parents are described but not named. Some children were returned to parents (or to aunts, uncles or grandparents) after a stay in the Asylum.

Others were discharged to an employer. The names of 663 additional persons, mostly parents and employers, have been added in this dataset. These include many of those named in the original registers, or whose names have been

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>

ascertained through editorial research. As yet, not all these names have been added, but they will be included in the future. BDA users or subscribers are invited to contribute details of any close family members or employers of the children not yet included in the dataset.

This dataset was compiled by Jan Worthington who transcribed the registers and researched the biographies of the children and their parents, assisted by Dr Perry McIntyre.

Jan Worthington initiated the research project in 2006, based on her former role as a research consultant in the 1990s assisting with the identification of the remains of 174 children buried in the asylum grounds.

Each child's dataset item includes transcripts of the content of the register entries as well as biographical notes, references and comments incorporating the Worthington/McIntyre research.

Some reference to NSW birth, death and marriage certificates are included in an abbreviated form (in the case of birth and death entries including name of person born/died and their parents' names with date and register entry number from the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages index).

An archive of research papers associated with the project, including many birth, death and marriage certificates, is held in the BDA library.

Background

In 1813 the Benevolent Society of New South Wales was formed as a charitable organisation, with some government funding. From 1821 its Benevolent Asylum in Sydney's Pitt Street had housed impoverished men, women and children.

In 1852 members of the society formed the Society for the Relief of Destitute Children as a separate organisation catering exclusively for poor children whose parents had abandoned them or were incapable of caring for them. Existing orphanages (mainly church-run) were at capacity or would not take the children who had living parents).

The Society's committee was made up of prominent businessmen, professionals and clerics. It served as a charitable fundraising organisation whose funds would be matched by government grants. Ormond House in Oxford Street Paddington

was acquired and by September 1852 it housed 55 children under the care of a Master John Edhouse and his wife Mary Ann, as matron. They were assisted by a gardener, laundress, cook, housemaid and nurse.

In 1857 the Parliament of New South Wales passed an Act incorporating the society and voted funds towards the constructing of a building at Randwick to house 400 children which opened in 1858. A new wing constructed in 1863 increased the Asylum's capacity to 800 children. Ormond House in Paddington continued to serve as an adjunct to the main asylum.

At Randwick the children received schooling and were taught trade skills, including gardening and farming on land included in the site. From 1883 new legislation established a new boarding out system which encouraged the boarding out of very young children to foster families. Government funding for the asylum ceased in 1888 and the number of children declined. It continued to house a smaller number of children till it was closed in 1915 and converted into a military hospital. At least 174 children who died there were buried in a cemetery in the grounds.

The site in High Street Randwick now serves as the Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, adjacent to Prince of Wales Hospital.

News reports on the new Asylum for Destitute Children, 1852

'ASYLUM FOR DESTITUTE CHILDREN PROSPECTUS.

IN consequence of the number of destitute and deserted children of all ages who crowd the streets and alleys of this city, it becomes a matter of pressing necessity that some measures be adopted for their reclamation from the state of wretchedness and vice in which they are now living, before they attain an age when reformation is more difficult. With this view, it is proposed to establish an Asylum for the reception of destitute and abandoned children who may be classed as follows:

1. Children found by the police or others, without protection, whose parents cannot be discovered, or whose parents have been convicted as vagrants, drunkards, or disorderly characters, unfit to have the care of their children.
2. Children abandoned by their parents, and left without friends or protection.
3. Children, either of whose parents is an abandoned or dissolute character, and who may be placed by the other parent in the proposed Asylum, on payment of a fixed sum for their maintenance.

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>

It is proposed to give these children a sound and useful education, and to train them in available habits of industry, until they reach an age when they may be disposed of in the manner which may be most conducive to their individual interests and the general good of society. In aid of these objects, application will, if necessary, be made to the Legislature, for specific enactments calculated to secure the ends proposed. There seems no reason for doubting that such powers will be accorded, and that, considering the importance of the undertaking, a portion of the expenses will be met by a vote of the Legislature. A large sum, however, must be raised from private sources. An appeal is, therefore, now made to the public, with the confident expectation that such an institution will be most liberally supported. To urge the necessity of its speedy establishment, by a narrative of facts, however pathetic seems needless, as only an occasional glance at the police reports, or even a single walk through the streets of the city, will be sufficient powerfully to enlist the sympathies of the benevolent on behalf of the proposed Institution, and to induce them to subscribe to its funds.

A Provisional Committee has been formed, consisting of the following gentlemen, any of whom will be happy to receive the names of intending subscribers:

Allen, George, Esq.

Elliott, Gilbert, Esq.

Barker, Thomas, Esq.

Holden, G. K., Esq.

Boyce, Rev. W. B.

McEncroe, Archdeacon

Cowlishaw, A., Esq.

McLerie, John. Esq.

Douglass, Dr.

Owen, A. C. G.

Dowling, J. S., Esq.

Ross, Rev. Dr.

Druitt, Rev. Thomas

Treasurer, James Comrie, Esq., Miller's Point,
Secretary, Rev. A. H. Stephen, (Christ Church).

Further information may be obtained by reference to the Treasurer, or the Secretary.

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>

GEORGE ALLEN, Chairman.

ALFRED A.H. STEPHEN, Hon Secretary.'

Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954) 26 March 1852: 1.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12935399>

'DESTITUTE CHILDREN. We yesterday had the privilege - for we count it a privilege - of inspecting the Asylum for Destitute Children, recently founded by a number of benevolent gentlemen in this city. The building selected by the Committee is Ormond House, Paddington, the former residence of Mr Robert Cooper, which, from its elevated situation, and the extensive gardens attached to it, seems to us admirably suited to the purposes of the institution. We arrived at the Asylum about half-past three o'clock, when we found the older children, some five-and-twenty in number, under the charge of the matron in the school-room; the little girls were mostly employed in some simple sewing, and were all very clean and even neat in their dress and appearance and seemed contented and happy; the boys showed more of the marks of the desolate streets from the miseries and vices of which they had been so lately rescued, but were also quiet, and modestly behaved. Mr Edhouse, the master, now sang several hymns, in which the children all joined in a manner so meek and fervid as to be deeply interesting. The school-room is spacious, and the walls of it are well supplied with text and lesson tablets. In another room were ten or twelve infants from eighteen months to two years and a half old, not one of whom seemed fretful or unhappy. The Rev. J. Beazley, who accompanied us, addressed the older children in a few beautiful and simple words, on their duty to their Creator and to their fellow creatures, and was listened to with the closest attention. Some of the boys, we were informed by the master, are employed in the garden, and it is in contemplation to employ others in the rearing of silk worms, &c. We passed through the bed rooms, kitchen, storeroom, &c, and found the greatest order and cleanliness everywhere, for which we think Mr and Mrs Edhouse are deserving of much credit. The number of children in the institution is thirty-six.'

The Empire (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875) 3 August 1852: 2.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article60134715>

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>

Sources:

Joseph Coulter, 'An historical review of the Society for the Relief of Destitute Children: from the year 1852 up to the time of requisitioning of the Society's buildings and lands, in 1915, by the federal authorities for military hospital purposes', [Randwick, N.S.W.] : The Society, 1916.

Frank Doyle & Joy Storey (editor Ellen Waugh), *Destitute children's asylum, Randwick, 1852-1916*, [Randwick, N.S.W.] : Randwick & District Historical Society, c1991

John Ramsland, 'An anatomy of a nineteenth century child saving institution: the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, v.70, no.3, Dec 1984: 194-209.

John Ramsland, *Children of the back lanes*, New South Wales University Press, 1986.

'Inquiry into alleged ill-treatment at the Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick: minutes of evidence, &c., and Sub-committee's report thereon'. Sydney: [Society for the Relief of Destitute Children, Randwick, 1879?].

Evidence of John Edhouse, 3 Sep 1852, Select Committee on Destitute Children's Bill, New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council, Votes & Proceedings, Volume 2, 1855.

State Archives New South Wales:

<https://mhns.w.au/guides/randwick-asylum-destitute-children/>

<https://mhns.w.au/guides/child-care-and-protection-guide/>

<https://mhns.w.au/indexes/child-care-and-protection/child-care-and-protection-index/>

Find and Connect:

<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/nsw/biogs/NE01378b.htm>

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>

Source description page written by Michael Flynn, February 2023.

For other school and institution datasets included in the BDA see:

<https://www.bda-online.org.au/sources/schools/>

These Information pages are copyright.
Any request to reproduce them should be directed to BDA.