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Archaeology and Religion at the Hyde Park Barracks Destitute Asylum, Sydney

ABSTRACT

Religion and spirituality have often been neglected by historical archaeologists, in spite of the importance of religious devotion in public and private life. Recent investigation of artifacts from the Hyde Park Barracks Destitute Asylum in Sydney, Australia, however, has begun to shed new light on the role of spirituality in an institutional context. An extensive underfloor collection from the asylum includes many paper fragments from the Bible and from religious tracts, along with rosaries and devotional medals. This material suggests that while visiting clergymen and missionaries distributed large quantities of "improving" literature, the inmates expressed their own religious feelings in more personal, private ways. The archaeological and historical evidence also indicates that Catholic inmates were separated from Anglicans and others, mirroring the wider sectarian division in 19th-century Australia.

Introduction: Religion in Colonial Australia

Australian colonists brought religious traditions with them from Britain during the 19th century and developed them afresh in the new settler society. Unlike the American colonies, Australia was not born out of religious dissent but was instead a "neo-Britain" in the Antipodes. Mainstream Christian traditions, including Church of England, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Roman Catholic, all became firmly established in Australia, but distance from Britain meant a high degree of independence for the colonial churches.

The impact of religion on the private, spiritual lives of Australian colonists, however, is much harder to gauge. It has been argued that while a large minority of Australians expressed at least a nominal adherence to religious faith during the 19th century, most were completely indifferent and lacked any religious conviction (Carey 1996:2). A rich collection of archaeological material from the Hyde Park Barracks (HPB) Destitute Asylum in Sydney is used here to examine the spiritual life of elderly female inmates during the 1860s to 1880s. Religious

artifacts found in underfloor cavities include the remains of Bibles, prayer books, and numerous tracts and pamphlets, many of them produced by evangelical organizations, along with rosaries and devotional medals. These and other items reveal how the women, with their own private beliefs and need for spiritual solace, negotiated formal Christian doctrine imposed on them by authorities and missionary visitors. The artifacts provide a rare opportunity to examine the material expression of religious faith in an institutional setting, beyond the building plans and clergymen's reports to which archaeological analysis is sometimes limited. The archaeological and historical evidence suggests that the Protestant/ Catholic sectarian schism that dominated Australian religious life from the 1860s to the 1920s was also expressed in the segregation of inmates within the asylum. Evaluation of all these sources reveals aspects of religious life in an institutional setting in colonial Australia, and how the poorest and most vulnerable members of colonial society confronted religion in their daily lives.

Religion played an important role in institutions of reform during the 19th century. Evangelical Christianity in particular promoted redemption and salvation of the sick and needy through such notions as temperance, chastity, modesty, and duty. The establishment of orphanages, hospitals, and asylums by mission groups and benevolent societies, as well as by government authorities, provided institutions in which Christian morality intersected with material and social improvement (De Cunzo 1995; Tarlow 2007). Archaeologists have explored these relationships between institutions and religion in a range of contexts. De Cunzo's (1995, 2001, 2006) study of the Magdalen Asylum in Philadelphia, for example, used the concept of religious ritual to examine how inmates and authorities negotiated the tensions between poverty and prostitution, and the secular and the sacred. Casella describes the emergence of post-Reformation asylums in Europe and America, where the poor and others could be rehabilitated into economically useful subjects in accordance with Protestant ideals of virtuous labor and self-improvement (Casella 2007:8–9). These principles were enacted at the Point Puer settlement for convict boys, established in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1833, where the evangelical ideals of salvation and reform influenced construction of a large wooden building used for both schooling and daily prayers, in the belief that secular and religious training would overcome the criminal tendencies of the young (Jackman 2001). Peña's (2001) analysis of wampum production at the Albany Almshouse explored how the traditional role of the Dutch Reformed Church in poor relief was transplanted to a New World context in the 18th century, and how a sacred responsibility was gradually transferred to the secular realm.

Tarlow (2007) uses the notion of "improvement" to explore the processes of personal and social reform that occurred in Britain during the later 18th and early 19th century. In the case of marginal social groups such as paupers, orphans, the sick, and insane, authorities established a range of institutions to control and correct the behavior of individuals who did not conform to expected standards. These institutions were often regarded as part of a broader attempt to reshape society and improve its moral and economic foundations. Asylums established in the Australian colonies in the 19th century often had similar "improving" goals, expressed through such regimes as the "moral treatment" of lunatic inmates in South Australia and Tasmania (Piddock 2001, 2007, 2009). Material from the HPB Asylum, especially in the form of religious tracts, provides artifactual and textual evidence for attempts by clergymen, missionaries, and other middle-class reformers to enhance the moral, material, and spiritual condition of a particular group of institutional inmates.

Christian religion was first represented in Australia by the Reverend Richard Johnson, who arrived with the First Fleet in 1788 and served as Anglican chaplain to New South Wales. Johnson departed in 1800 and was succeeded by the Reverend Samuel Marsden. James Dixon was one of three Catholic priests transported from Ireland for sedition in 1798, and he gained permission to serve as the colony's first Catholic chaplain when he was emancipated in 1803. Lastly, John Dunmore Lang arrived in 1823 to establish the Presbyterian Church in Australia (Baker 1998). Religious provision in the early years of settlement, however, was always limited, with

few churches and chapels built. Historians have argued that while the middle and upper classes in this era were deeply influenced by Christianity and moral ideals, the working masses, and by extension most convicts, had little religion among them (O'Farrell 1984:5; Karskens 1997:44–45). While colonial authorities supported the clergy in trying to moderate the widespread drunkenness, violence, and immorality that often characterized convict society, rapidly expanding settlement meant that most people were beyond the reach of religious services.

The year 1836 was a watershed in the development of formal religious structures in Australia. Until that time both the New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land colonies were formally part of the Anglican Diocese of Calcutta, a situation that tended to dilute ecclesiastical support from England. In June 1836, however, William Grant Broughton arrived in Sydney as the founding Church of England bishop of Australia, following the first Catholic bishop, John Bede Polding, who had arrived the year before (Barrett 1966:13). The New South Wales Church Act was also proclaimed in 1836, providing parliamentary grants of land and money to a number of churches and thereby establishing the principle of denominational equality, placing Catholics, Methodists, and Presbyterians on an equal footing with the Church of England. The state thus supported the main Christian denominations but resisted the creation of an established (Anglican) church. Anglican bishops were also appointed to Melbourne and Adelaide in the late 1840s (de Quinsey Robin 1966). Churches were built rapidly in the following years and numerous clergymen were appointed, so that by 1850 church services were widely and regularly available to the majority of colonists. The winding back of state aid to the churches in the second half of the 19th century, combined with official promotion of secular education, led Catholics to build their own churches, hospitals, and school system, a process which exacerbated anti-Catholic feeling for decades to come.

The evangelical movement also had a significant impact on the formation of colonial society (Piggin 1996). Evangelicalism was a religious movement that grew out of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and the Methodist revivals of the 1730s and 1740s. The evangelical doctrine promoted salvation through faith in Jesus

Christ, a Puritan morality, and commitment to a life of holiness through prayer and Bible reading. Evangelicals stressed the primacy of the Gospels and sought the reformation of society as well as individuals. A common belief among evangelical reformers was that poverty was the result of personal moral failing, and that development of one's character and inner life went hand in hand with improvement in material wealth. In Australia, evangelical mission activity was commonly undertaken among convicts, free settlers, the urban poor, and Aboriginal people. Wesleyan Methodists were one of the most influential evangelical churches in Australia, establishing a firm foothold during the gold rushes of the 1850s with the use of lay preachers who could minister to the ephemeral settlements of miners (Quirk 2007:158). The evangelical movement united Protestants in the Religious Tract Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society, which used innovations in printing technology to produce large quantities of prayer books and religious pamphlets to promote their vision of a moral society. For the inmates of the HPB Asylum, this resulted in both frequent visits from evangelical clergy and the dissemination of numerous religious tracts.

Evangelicalism was defined in part by its opposition to the Catholic faith. This contributed to the sectarian schism in Australia that lasted well into the 20th century. Catholic/Protestant hostilities extended back to the wars of the Reformation, but they also related to the Irish character of Catholicism in Australia (O'Farrell 1987). In the 19th century, most Catholic priests in the colonies were Irish, and most convicts and settlers from Ireland were themselves Catholic. They comprised about one quarter of all migrants to Australia in this period (Fitzpatrick 2001:451; Reece 2001:448). Catholicism in Australia thus became associated with all the perceived faults of the Irish, including drinking and gambling, dirt and disease, and ethnic clannishness. Moreover, the social policy of the Catholic Church in Australia, which opposed convict transportation and strongly supported the rights of working people, often brought the church into conflict with colonial authorities and reinforced the Otherness of the Catholic tradition. Archaeological and historical evidence from the Hyde Park Barracks suggests that this division was also expressed in the confines of the HPB Destitute Asylum.

In spite of the profound role that religion has played in Australian history, archaeologists have paid relatively little attention to the religious and spiritual dimensions of life among European settlers. Appeals by Lu Ann De Cunzo (1995:133) and Carol Nickolai (2003:146-149) to make religion as central to historical archaeology as class, gender, and ethnicity have not resonated widely in Australia, although a recent review has documented more interest among archaeologists in the United States (Veit et al. 2009). Salvage excavations of human burials in Australia have generally focused on skeletal morphology and grave furniture, rather than on the religious aspects of interment. Religious artifacts, however, have been encountered during excavations of domestic structures, especially in the form of rosaries and moralizing china. The greater attachment of Catholics to the iconography of saints and the Virgin Mary means there is a greater chance for the archaeological recovery of physical objects associated with the Catholic faith and traditions. In contrast, the Protestant emphasis on the written word of the Bible as the focus of spirituality, and the explicit rejection of iconographic representations as a focus for devotion, would tend to produce fewer artifacts. Similarly, moralizing china, often with messages of good behavior directed to children ("For a good girl"), may reflect Methodist concerns about morality and correct behavior (Fitts 2001:127).

Archaeological examples of religious artifacts include fragments of ceramic religious plaques found in several households in the Rocks in Sydney (Karskens 1999:51). These were intended for hanging on a wall or setting over a mantelpiece. While convicts and ex-convicts who lived in the neighborhood were noted for their lack of interest in religion, the plaques suggest that some families valued and displayed familiar Christian imagery in their homes. In addition, a variety of religious medals and rosaries were recovered that once belonged to the many Catholics who lived on the site. The medals were inscribed with prayers for protection, while a wooden cross was intricately carved from Irish bog oak (Karskens 1999:129). In Melbourne, a black glass crucifix and a set of rosary beads were recovered from the Casselden Place site (Porter and Ferrier 2004:315), while at Moran's Farm in South Australia,

excavations yielded fragments of at least two rosaries with beads made of ivory and milk glass (Lawrence 2001:5–7).

The remains of a Methodist mission were investigated at the late-19th-century mining township of Paradise in Queensland (Prangnell et al. 2005:41-48; Quirk 2007:207-225). The mission was the only formal religious institution in the settlement of around 700 people, and it included a large hall and a small parsonage. Although little of either building survived, survey and excavation yielded large quantities of domestic debris associated with the family of James and Jane Kirke, who served at the mission from 1892 to 1896. The high-quality ceramics identified from the site and the absence of alcohol- and tobacco-related items have been interpreted as evidence for genteel domestic culture and the middle-class morality of evangelical Methodism (Quirk 2007:223). The archaeology of the Te Puna Mission household in New Zealand has also been explored in terms of domestic economy and the wider, global impact of missionary activity in the 19th century (Middleton 2008). Elsewhere, excavations at St. Philip's Anglican Church in Melbourne identified the footings of a church hall built in 1915 and destroyed by fire in 1984, but no artifacts securely associated with the church were recovered (Lawrence et al. 2006).

Archaeology and religion have also intersected in Australia with the investigation of various Christian missions to Aboriginal groups. These include the Moravian mission at Ebeneezer in Victoria (Lydon 2009a, 2009b; Lydon and Burns 2010), George Augustus Robinson's Wybalenna Mission for Tasmanian Aborigines on Flinders Island in Bass Strait (Birmingham 1992), the Coranderrk station near Melbourne (Lydon 2003, 2005), and the Killalpaninna Mission in South Australia (Birmingham 2000; Birmingham and Wilson 2010). In such cases, however, interpretations of archaeological evidence have tended to focus more on the dynamics of cross-cultural exchange and the negotiation of indigenous identities, and less on the specific influences of institutional religion (Lydon and Ash 2010).

Recent work by Rebecca Parkes (2009) has begun to explore the archaeological expression of Islam among the Afghan cameleers in Australia, with particular reference to the principle of *qibla*, the direction of Mecca. This focus has helped to identify the often ephemeral religious structures

of the camel men, which included simple mosques, wells, graves, and trees that served as "bush mosques." Such work shows how archaeology can reveal important elements of religious life, especially in the case of marginal social groups, who, like the HPB Asylum inmates, left so few written records of their lives.

The Hyde Park Barracks

The Hyde Park Barracks (HPB) is located in Macquarie Street in central Sydney. It was built in 1817–1819, on the orders of Governor Lachlan Macquarie, to provide accommodation for male convicts working on government projects in and around the town. It consists of a three-story Georgian brick building set in a walled compound (Figure 1). Around the perimeter were various outbuildings, including a kitchen, stores, and messes, along with two sets of isolation cells in the northeast and northwest corners. The initial population of around 600 convicts later increased to more than 1,000, and by the 1830s the building had come to function more as a prison for refractory convicts than as simple accommodation. Transportation of convicts to New South Wales ceased in 1840, and by 1848 the remaining convicts were transferred to Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbor.

The barracks then began to take on a more open, semipublic character, with a range of civil functions taking place in the complex. These included the government printer, the Vaccine Institute, the Sydney District Court, a depot for Irish female orphans, and a Female Immigration Depot. Shiploads of young unmarried women recruited from towns and villages throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland arrived in Sydney and were brought to the barracks for a short time to wash themselves and their clothes, and recover from the voyage. Special "Hiring Days" were announced in the local press, where the women presented themselves to prospective employers, contracts were signed, and the women departed to their new lives in the colony. Typically the immigrant women spent only a few days in the barracks, mostly occupying the rooms on Level 2 as dormitories.

In 1862 the top floor (Level 3) of the barracks was given over to the Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women, when over 150 inmates were transferred from the overcrowded

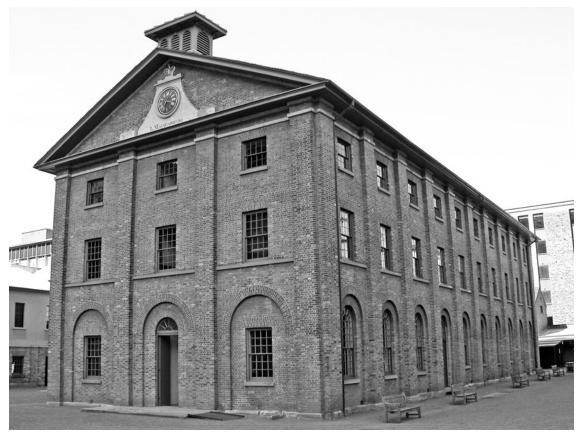


FIGURE 1. Hyde Park Barracks, main building. (Photo by author, 2009.)

Sydney Benevolent Asylum. The initial group admitted included women who ranged in age from 18 to 92 years, with almost half having originally arrived in Australia as convicts (Hughes 2004:59). The asylum was a government institution and it accommodated both Protestants and Catholics, along with several Jewish women. There is no record, however, of any Aboriginal women ever being admitted. The complex was not a punitive "poorhouse" on the British model, but provided refuge for the infirm and those unable to support themselves (Government Asylums Board 1877:2). The matron of the Female Immigration Depot, Lucy Applewhaite, became the matron of the HPB Destitute Asylum as well. She remained in the role for the following 24 years, through the death in 1869 of her first husband, John Applewhaite, her remarriage to William Hicks in 1870, and the births of her 14 children. The asylum generally accommodated more than 200

women at a time, but by the mid-1880s there were more than 300 inmates. Overcrowding was a chronic problem. Many women stayed for only a few days or weeks when illness struck, but others stayed for years or even decades, and for them the asylum was the last home they ever knew.

The Immigration Depot and the Destitute Asylum were separate institutions, and strenuous efforts were made to keep the two groups of women apart, with separate entranceways, dining rooms, and dormitories. Although there are no preserved plans of the layout of the asylum, historical sources suggest that the two large rooms on Level 3 served as dormitories and work spaces for the inmates, while the two smaller rooms were used as wards for the acutely sick and for "idiots" (Figure 2) (Public Charities Commission 1874:74). During quiet periods, when no immigrant women were occupying Level 2, Mrs. Hicks used the rooms

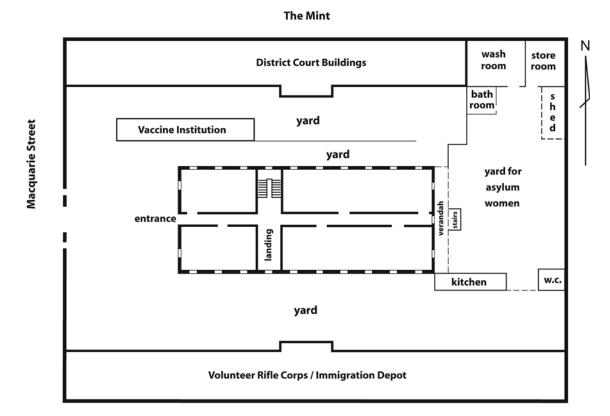


FIGURE 2. Simplified plan of Hyde Park Barracks, around 1870. (Drawing by author, 2008.)

to accommodate women from the asylum. This resulted in some mixing of items discarded beneath the floor of Level 2 by the two groups of women. The asylum was essentially selfsufficient, with the inmates performing all the necessary labor, including cooking, cleaning, washing, nursing, and sewing. The asylum women took their meals in a separate mess room on Level 1 with food brought in from an external kitchen. The yard at the rear of the barracks was enclosed in the 1860s to separate the asylum women from other users of the complex. This space contained a washroom, store, shelter shed, and toilets, with access provided from an external stairway built onto the eastern side of the building.

In 1886 the asylum women were transferred to new accommodation near Parramatta, about 20 km to the west, and the barracks became home to various courts and offices of the New

South Wales Department of the Attorney General and Justice. The complex continued to be used for judicial purposes until 1979, when work began to convert it into a museum. A range of architectural modifications made to the building during the 19th century had important implications for understanding the formation of archaeological deposits revealed during this process. Ceiling boards had been installed throughout most of the building on Levels 1 and 2 in 1848, forming cavity spaces beneath the floor on Levels 2 and 3. Material that was swept beneath the floorboards was trapped in these underfloor spaces, resulting in the accumulation of large quantities of debris over the years (Crook et al. 2003).

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In the late 1880s, following the departure of the depot and asylum women, the floors of the barracks were covered with linoleum. This sealed the artifacts under the floors and created

a close association between the material in the underfloor cavities and the immigrant women on Level 2 and the asylum women on Level 3. The structure of narrow joist spaces below the floors also means that the spatial location of this material has been closely mapped (Crook and Murray 2006). The material includes large quantities of clay tobacco pipes, textile off cuts, sewing equipment, and paper fragments. Following a range of earlier studies, this material has recently been the focus of an Australian Research Council-funded linkage project between La Trobe University and the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, to improve understanding of this rich and unique collection, and the insights it provides into the lives of institutionalized women in colonial Australia.

Underfloor Artifacts from the Destitute Asylum

The underfloor collection from the HPB yielded more than 230 pages, books, and paper fragments from religious and moral texts, along with fragments from newspapers, novels, and accounts of world events. The great majority of the religious items (n=216) were recovered from the Destitute Asylum on Level 3, while a smaller quantity (n=18) came from the Immigration Depot on Level 2. Many of the pages were from the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, while others were from prayer books, hymnbooks, and unidentified religious periodicals. Much of this output was a result of the evangelical movement of the period, which, combined with technical transformation of the book trades in the early to mid-19th century, produced a flood of pamphlets, books, and periodicals (Howsam 1991). Many of the pages from the barracks were from religious books with incomplete or single leaves, giving no indication of whether they were bound in a book or pinned or folded into a pamphlet. Most, however, were small, about 4½ in. in height, reflecting their function as "pocket companions."

There were also numerous examples of pamphlets and short books, with 19 identifiable titles relating to religion and moral improvement. Several were published by the Religious Tract Society (RTS), an organization founded in London in 1799 to print and distribute pamphlets and short books stating the principles and importance of Christian faith (Fyfe 2006).

In addition, several unidentified titles were published by the Dublin branch of the RTS and by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Tracts were generally short documents that expressed religious truths, with a clear message of salvation through faith, often using narrative and dialogue to get the message across (Tarn 1873). They were deliberately nondenominational to appeal to a broad range of Christian sentiment and ranged in length from pamphlets of 4 or 8 pages to bound volumes of up to 200 pages. Stories for children with a moral or religious message were also produced in large numbers (Butts and Garrett 2006:3), but only one of these was identified in the HPB collection. Tracts were also read on the migrant ships to Australia to maintain the spiritual health of those on board (Haines 2006:95-96). Titles identified at the barracks included:

Advice to the Dejected (RTS) Are You Afraid to Die? The Economy of Human Life (by P. D. Stanhope) James Gibbons (RTS) *Matt the Idiot Boy* (RTS) Old Dinah Prayers for Morning Prayers of St. Bridget Richard Weaver's Leaflets Self Help Strange Tales, from Humble Life (by John Ashworth) Sunday Rest Litany for the Sick The Believer's Pocket Companion (by William Mason) The Levites The Life of Havelock (by Rev. Thomas Smith) The Portuguese Convert (Gosse's Gospel Tracts) The Prison Death-Bed The Prodigal Son (from *The British Workman*)

The RTS was one of several evangelical organizations, with the aim of spreading the message of salvation, to emerge in this period. The British and Foreign Bible Society was represented in Australia by the Auxiliary Bible Society of New South Wales, founded in 1817, while the Sydney

Diocesan Committee was the local branch of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. The latter had a book depository at St. James's Anglican Church, directly across the road from the HPB. The Australian Religious Tract Society was established in Sydney in 1823 as an auxiliary of the English organization. Its objective was to "inculcate evangelic sentiments" by providing the means of "cheap, useful, and pious Reading; that the poorer Classes of the Community, and the young People more especially, who may be able to read, may obtain some of the most instructive and important Lessons of Life at a very small Expence" (Sydney Gazette 1823:3). Evangelical mission societies placed a major emphasis on religious feeling, encouraging penitence and acceptance in the poor, and hope for redemption in the next life rather than this one (Russell 1994:176).

The Religious Tract and Book Society Depot was located only a few blocks from the barracks in the late 1860s, on the corner of King and Pitt streets (Figure 3). There was also a Wesleyan Book and Tract Depot nearby at 95 King Street in the early 1870s. The scale of operations of such organizations was substantial. The Australian

RTS alone distributed more than 600,000 publications locally between 1823 and 1851 (Australian Religious Tract Society 1852:8). It is easy to imagine clergymen and visitors from the Ladies Evangelical Association picking up a bundle of cheap tracts for distribution among the asylum inmates from one of the four religious book depots only a short walk away. A likely source of tracts was Stephen Robins, from the Sydney City Mission. The mission was founded in 1862 and included Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians on its ruling committee, but no Catholics (Owen 1987:20). The work of Robins and other missionaries involved making house-to-house visits to spread the message of the Gospel, and visiting hospitals, jails, and the Destitute Asylum to conduct religious services and distribute tracts. The mission had a bookstall nearby at the head of Sussex Street. Robins was a regular visitor to the barracks and often brought "a few tracts" with him when he came to hold services for the women (Public Charities Commission 1874:83).

Another likely source of tracts entering the barracks was William Hicks, husband of the matron. Although he worked in Sydney as a journalist, in a former life in England he had served as a

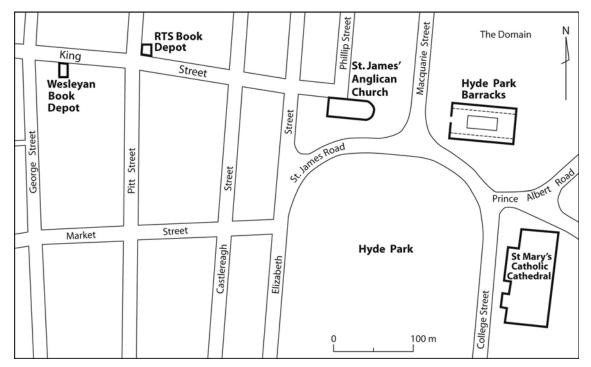


FIGURE 3. Locality of Hyde Park Barracks in relation to neighboring churches and religious book depots. (Drawing by author, 2010.)

school examiner and had been ordained as an Anglican priest in 1851 (Venn 1947:360). He served as curate of Ramsbury in Wiltshire from 1853 to 1855 and was then vicar of Watton in Norfolk until 1864. Hicks was the author of *A Concise View of the Doctrine of the Baptismal Regeneration*, published in London in 1856, and he published numerous tracts as well.

Some of the tracts at the barracks, including The Prison Death-Bed, Litany for the Sick, and Advice to the Dejected, must have been confronting subjects for the elderly, ill, and destitute inmates, although they were probably the target audience for such titles. One of the documents is a scrap of paper with the title: Are You Afraid to Die? carefully torn from the original page (Figure 4). This item came from the underfloor of the asylum's northern dormitory, and appears to have been important enough to one of the inmates to tear out and save. Other titles, such as Self Help and Sunday Rest, stressed personal morality and faith as keys to self-improvement. Another title, Are You Hired? was found beneath the stair landing and was probably brought to the barracks by a young woman from the Female Immigration Depot.

A page from the tract, *Old Dinah*, relates to the Old Testament story of Dinah, daughter of Leah and Jacob (Genesis 34). Dinah was "degraded" (raped?) by Shechem the Hivite, leading her brothers to make war as vengeance for her disgrace. The affair highlights the importance of chastity and family honor, and the relationships

between personal morality, household control, and involvement with outside groups (Frymer-Kensky 2002:179–198).

An intact book of moral instruction was also found in the northern dormitory on Level 3, The Economy of Human Life, purporting to be "translated from an Indian Manuscript, written by an Indian Brahmin" (Figure 5). The book, in fact, was written by Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield (1694–1773). Chesterfield is best remembered for his witty and shrewd letters to his illegitimate son Phillip Stanhope. The "Oeconomy" was originally published in 1751 and went through dozens of editions. It was translated into Hebrew (1778) and German (1814), and the asylum edition was published in 1796. It is a book of moral instruction, advising the reader on such topics as modesty, prudence, temperance, and chastity. It describes the moral duties of men and women, of masters and servants, and prescribes proper conduct with reference to a range of human conditions. As such, it is an example of the kind of reforming literature given to the asylum women over the years for their moral improvement and functioned alongside Bibles and religious tracts as a guide to appropriate behavior.

A fragment from the Scottish Gaelic *Book of Common Prayer* was found beneath the floor of the landing on Level 3. Scottish Gaelic (or Erse) was widely spoken in the western Highlands of Scotland and the Hebrides, and many women from the region migrating to Australia in the 19th century spoke little or no English. Gaelic

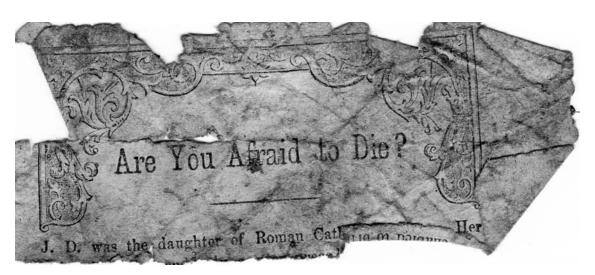


FIGURE 4. Tract title from the northern dormitory of the Hyde Park Barracks Destitute Asylum. (Photo by author, 2009.)

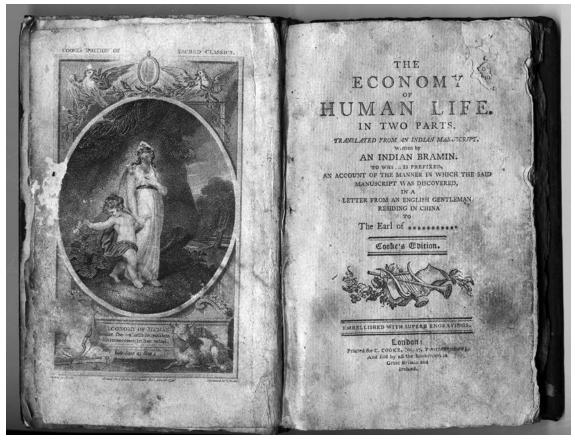


FIGURE 5. The Economy of Human Life was first published in 1751, and went through numerous editions in the 19th century. (Photo by author, 2009.)

Bibles and psalm books were often provided on migrant ships to sustain faith and give comfort in the difficult conditions (Watson 1984:59–60). It is possible that this book was kept by one of the inmates as a personal relic of her homeland and religious identity, or possibly because she could not read English.

Most of these religious and moral texts were brought into the asylum from the outside and expressed an evangelical response to the perceived needs of the inmates. As such, they represent an external spirituality that sought to bring salvation to the needy and destitute. There were also numerous items, however, that embody a more private religious identity, one that the inmates brought with them upon entering the institution and that sustained them in old age and infirmity. Many of these items derive from the Catholic tradition and represent not only a personal religious sentiment among some of the women, but also

the institutional expression of the sectarian divide.

All the Catholic items were located in underfloor cavities in the southern rooms of Level 3. The items included a complete rosary with crucifix, six large beads painted red, and decades (sets of 10) of smaller beads. There were also two Sacred Heart medals with tripoint attachments for use as the centerpiece of rosaries, and a decade of blue glass beads separated by clear beads. In addition to the rosaries were seven devotional medals with inscriptions in English, French, and Spanish (Figure 6). The images and inscriptions on the five legible examples were:

- 1. Mary: *Mere De Dieu Priez Pour Nous* (Mother of God pray for us).
- Mary: Mere De Dieu Priez Pour Nous (Mother of God pray for us); Crucifixion (reverse): Christ Ayez Pitie de Nous (Christ have mercy on us).



FIGURE 6. Obverse and reverse of a religious medal dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Christ. (Photo by author, 2009.)

- 3. Miraculous: Maria Concevid / Sin Pecado Pnega / Por Nos / Que / Recurrimos A Vos (Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you).
- 4. Marie Conçur Sans Peche Priez Pour Nous / Qui Avons Recours A Vous (Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you).
- 5. Saint reading a book: Saint Bernard ...

Other probable Catholic items included holy cards and pages from two Catholic prayer books. In addition, two small page fragments with a few words of English on one side and Latin on the reverse were preserved. While these probably derive from a Catholic missal, or prayer book, publications in Latin and English continued to be used in the Anglican tradition in the 19th century as well (Maskall 1846).

A large collection of clay tobacco pipes was also recovered from the barracks, including 1,013 fragments from the asylum on Level 3. These were evenly distributed across both the main Catholic (n=182) and Protestant (n=180) wards. Smoking was very popular among the women, were issued a small tobacco ration each month. While tobacco was often linked with alcohol as a moral hazard and thus banned in some institutional settings (De Cunzo 1995:92–94), at the barracks it was provided as a simple comfort to women beset with old age and infirmity (Davies 2011). Very few of the pipes, however, were marked with explicit Irish motifs linking Irish identities with Roman Catholicism. While this paucity may reflect a broader anti-Irish/Catholic sentiment, it may also relate to the nature of colonial imports and the limited range of pipes available from pubs and shops in Sydney at the time.

Discussion

The archaeological and historical evidence from the HPB Asylum reveals important aspects of the spiritual lives of the asylum inmates in terms of their denominational separation, the treatment they received from outsiders, and their personal religious responses. It is likely that one of the main ways of segregating the inmates was by religion, with Catholic women in the two south-side dormitories and Anglicans, Methodists, etc., on the north side. St. James's Anglican Church stood directly across Macquarie Street from the barracks, and although the inmates were allowed out only rarely, visiting clergymen and missionaries from the church had ready access to the women. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral stood about 200 m southeast of the barracks, and its location, within sight of the southern dormitories, may have given comfort to the Catholic inmates. The cathedral was destroyed by fire in 1865, but a temporary wooden structure was quickly erected for church services until the northern section was rebuilt in 1882 (Moran 1896:474). Although Sunday was formally a day of rest, and attendance at church services was feasible for some inmates, many were either bedridden or had very limited mobility, and this may have been as close to a church of their faith as they could get. A concentration of rosaries and devotional medals in the southern sick room also suggests the recitation of prayers, including the rosary, for sick and dying inmates.

This separation is also apparent from Protestant missionary Stephen Robins's testimony to the Public Charities Commission in 1873. As a frequent visitor to the HPB Asylum over the previous 11 years, he observed that the inmates "are divided there—the Protestants from the Roman Catholics." He also claimed that the women on the Protestant side received not only more visitors but extra material privileges as well, including tea and sugar, and that "the rules of the institution, and the priests" limited the aid that the Catholic women could receive (Public Charities Commission 1874:83). Robins was reluctant to elaborate on the partiality he perceived in the treatment of inmates at the asylum. He was perhaps fearful of the response from the powerful matron, Lucy Hicks, if she were to be attacked in a parliamentary inquiry, and how this would jeopardize the work of the Sydney City Mission and other organizations like it, including the Flower Mission Ladies and the (Catholic) Sisters of Mercy. He acknowledged, however, that "a great many ladies" visited the Protestant inmates to talk with them and give them material comforts, a degree of support much less in evidence for the Catholic inmates.

The evangelical impulse for "good works" and salvation manifested itself in frequent visits to the institution by well-meaning and wellconnected members of the Ladies Evangelical Association. These women came from leading colonial families and were effective political agitators, using the newspapers to challenge the management of the asylum during a smallpox outbreak in 1881 (Crook and Murray 2006:65). They did not approve of Lucy Hicks and how she ran the asylum, and in an 1886 inquiry they accused her of drunkenness, mismanagement, and using asylum produce for the benefit of her own family (Government Asylums Inquiry Board 1887:489-492). By this stage Hicks had been in charge of the Destitute Asylum for almost a quarter of a century, and the criticisms she received from such high-ranking evangelical visitors resulted in her forced retirement in 1888.

Expressions of private religious feeling, especially Catholic devotions, are also apparent from the archaeological evidence. Catholics have traditionally engaged in a wide range of extraliturgical devotions, related especially to the belief that the Virgin Mary and the saints can intercede with God on behalf of the faithful. The rosary has long been the single most popular of all Catholic devotions, having achieved widespread popularity among Catholics in Europe by the 14th century (Lysaght 1989:10). Both as a prayer and a set of beads, the rosary is an example of a "sacramental" that can be used by the faithful for their spiritual benefit. Other popular sacramentals include crucifixes, holy cards, scapulars, and religious medals with images of Christ, Mary, or a saint.

The rosary is a form of prayer or a set of devotions consisting of the recitation of 15 decades of "Hail Marys," each preceded by an "Our Father" and followed by a "Gloria," concluding with a "Hail Holy Queen." Each decade is associated with a "mystery" on a certain aspect of the lives of Christ and Mary. This form is known as the "Greater Rosary," while the more familiar "Lesser Rosary" consists of five decades and five mysteries. The beads provide a simple means of counting while reciting the prayers, leaving the mind free to meditate upon the mysteries (Miller 2002). In the 19th century beads were commonly made from bone, wood, or fruit stones. Conventionally the rosary is recited communally, providing a

powerful medium of group bonding, but private recitation is also common.

Evidence from the HPB Asylum suggests that rosaries and medals belonged to inmates as examples of personal Catholic devotion, although it is unclear the extent to which the rosary was recited privately by individuals or by small groups. With constant overcrowding, lack of privacy, and limited opportunities to attend Mass, especially by elderly and frail inmates, these objects may have had significant personal value, providing the opportunity to pray for intercession and a degree of spiritual solace. In these institutional circumstances, it is even possible that such devotions were more important to the Catholic inmates than the practices associated with the official liturgy, including the Mass and the sacraments. The rosary was also useful as a form of prayer for those who could not read. Rosary beads were small and were probably kept in a pocket, although Irish women in the 19th century often wore the rosary around their necks (Lysaght 1989:57). The beads could also be blessed by a priest or bishop, adding to their sacred value for the individual. The breakage and loss of these objects under the floor may have been distressing, especially if they were among the few personal items the women could bring with them upon entering the asylum. Damage to rosaries, including the loss of beads, may also have lessened or eliminated spiritual indulgences associated with them, including the forgiveness of sins (Carroll 1989:16). Alternatively, hiding old and broken beads in a wall or cavity avoided the need to discard a blessed object.

Books and tracts, however, were the most frequent religious items recovered from the underfloor spaces in the barracks. The impact of such material on the spiritual lives of inmates depended in part on the ability of the women to read the pages. Literacy levels among British migrants to Australia in the 19th century was generally high, between 70% and 80%, fostered by mass education and the increasing association between literacy and respectability (Hassam 1995:xvi; Karskens 1999:162). There were also many people who could read but not write, meaning that newspapers, letters, and even labels on bottles were accessible to them. One indication that literacy in the HPB Asylum was reasonably common is that there had been a small library in the institution since it opened in

1862. Fat skimmed off the soup and cartloads of bones from the kitchen were sold, and the proceeds used to buy books and periodicals for the inmates. After the installation of gaslight in the 1860s, one of the women's "greatest comforts" was to have the newspapers read aloud at night (Hughes 2004:82). This mirrored the idealized female parlor scene of one person reading the Bible aloud while others listened and sewed. The abundance of newspapers from local (Sydney), regional, and European sources, along with books of history and advice manuals recovered from under the floors, also suggests that reading, both private and aloud, was common among the women. While poor eyesight and even blindness restricted access to written material for some, a tract with a large, widely spaced typeface was clearly intended for the aged and poorly sighted. Large quantities of printed materials from below the landing on Level 3, along with more than 500 clay-pipe fragments, indicate that this was a popular place for the women to gather to smoke, gossip, read, and exchange news.

In spite of the abundance of religious items from the HPB Destitute Asylum, it remains difficult to determine the impact of religious literature and other items on the spiritual lives of the inmates. All of the archaeological examples were, at some point, discarded or lost beneath the floorboards, no longer needed or wanted. The archaeological evidence also reveals, however, items of personal religious devotion, most obviously among the Catholic inmates. Rosaries and medals were items of clear personal value and would have tended to be held close by the women until they broke or were lost. They may also have been emotionally significant items if originally received as gifts or blessed by a priest. The relatively small quantities of these items may reflect the personal value they had. Clergymen and visitors from benevolent societies were also frequent visitors to the institution, attending the Protestant women especially, bringing conversation, material comforts, and spiritual support. While this represented a paternalistic response to sustaining and reforming the moral character of the inmates, the generally humane atmosphere of the asylum supports the view that the visitors sought to offer genuine spiritual comfort to the destitute women in their time of need, which was part of a broader tradition of ministering to the sick.

Conclusion

Several thousand women passed through the doors of the HPB Asylum during its 24 years of operation. The religious experiences of individuals varied considerably within the wider, overwhelmingly Christian context of 19th-century Australian society. Some inmates may have been ignorant, others apathetic or disdainful, but many retained some sense of religious conviction as a result of early upbringing and their exposure to books, tracts, and other items available to them in the asylum. The orderly structure of organized religion provided by prayers and visits from clergymen and missionaries may also have offered a sense of security in a world where the women had little else to call their own. Religious and morally improving literature, along with newspapers and other everyday reading material, was readily available for private reading or sharing aloud. The women took what they needed from this external, institutional religious offering and interpreted it on their own terms with whatever personal faith they professed. In their material lives the inmates were poor, but spiritually they need not have been destitute.

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