

Mistress of her Domain: Matron Hicks and the Hyde Park Destitute Asylum, Sydney, Australia

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Abstract Matrons were often powerful figures in the daily workings of benevolent asylums and other institutions of refuge. Responsible for hygiene, subsistence and the moral oversight of inmates, matrons occupied a strategic point in the relationship between institutions and wider society; they embodied notions of institutional care, refuge and reform. Matron Lucy Hicks was typical of this pattern. As matron of the Hyde Park Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women in Sydney, Australia, from 1862 to 1886, she exercised enormous influence over the inmates and the daily operation of the institution. Archaeological and documentary evidence reveals important aspects of the life of Matron Hicks and her family, and her role as intermediary between governing authorities and pauper inmates.

Keywords Benevolent asylums · Matrons · Hyde Park Barracks · Australia

Introduction

Narratives and biographies of individuals and artifacts have emerged as important approaches in historical archaeology in recent years, based in part on Adrian Praetzellis's (1998) notion of archaeologists as storytellers. Archaeological biographies of people provide insight into specific places, associations and events at a scale that links human lives with broader social processes and cultural patterns (Mytum 2010, p. 242). Focusing on an individual reveals not only the boundaries of that character's life but also the connections of the individual to others at a household, community and societal level (Gibbs 2010, p. 606; Prosser et al. 2012, p. 810; White 2009, p. 4; see also Cessford 2014, pp. 557–578). Researchers including Roberta Gilchrist (2000, 2012) and Laurie Wilkie (2003) have demonstrated how the human lifecycle or "life

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course” is an appropriate scale for archaeological study, highlighting the role of age and gender in constructing personal and social identities.

This paper adopts a biographical approach to the material and documentary sources of Matron Lucy Hicks, who managed the Hyde Park Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women in Sydney from 1862 to 1886. She remained in charge of the institution through the death of her first husband and remarriage, and the birth of eight of her 14 children. Understanding Lucy Hicks as an individual, wife, mother and manager offers insights into the role of matrons in benevolent asylums, as well as the dynamics of institutional class and power (Baugher 2010). During this period also, philosophies of refuge and care were transformed from their early colonial origins into more recognizably modern ideals of welfare and support. Lucy Hicks’ reign spanned the gradual shift from philanthropy and private charity to government welfare and professional health care, but in the end it was a transition that she herself struggled to make. Analysis of the documentary and physical evidence helps to reveal the public and private personae of this remarkable woman and her role as matron within the context of Australian colonial institutions.

Matrons and Asylums

Benevolent asylums and homes for the poor were a common feature of social landscapes in nineteenth-century Australia. Despite a reputation for prosperity and opportunity, there was widespread poverty and destitution throughout Australia during the colonial period (Cage 1992; Garton 1990; Murphy 2011; Piddock 2001; Twomey 2002). Government departments, church missions and charity groups responded by providing relief to the poor, infirm, aged, widows, orphans, lunatics and others unable to support themselves (e.g., Kehoe 1998; Kovesi 2006; Piddock 2007). The earlier British model of punitive workhouses was generally avoided, however, in favor of a system that emphasized practical support, where basic needs were provided via outdoor relief and in-house labor. Benevolent asylums were the main focus of this approach, each of which was typically operated by a husband and wife team of master and matron.

Masters and matrons channelled the ideologies and welfare policies of governing boards and implemented rules and regulations under which inmates were expected to behave (see Casella 2001, p. 48). The ideal candidates for the positions, according to *Cassell’s Household Guide* in the 1880s (ca. 1880, p. 173), came from a well educated, middle-class background. Gentlemen masters “of small means, [such as] military and naval officers on half-pay” could take charge of several hundred inmates, and with their wife as matron the post afforded “immense facilities for going good.” While the position of master may in some circumstances have been largely supervisory and administrative, matrons often carried a heavy workload, in addition to their roles as wife and mother. Matrons oversaw kitchens, laundries, dormitories, sick rooms, store-rooms, workrooms and washhouses. They attended to the everyday details of management and surveillance needed to ensure the effective running of a large establishment. They were also expected to be moral role models, setting an example of respectability, sobriety, industry, cleanliness, thrift and piety for the inmates to follow (De Cunzo 1995, p. 25). The matron (literally a “married woman”) was in some respects a mother-figure to the inmates under her care (Wilkie 2003, pp. 1–2).

Masters, matrons, superintendents and governors played a pivotal role in various institutions, but these key figures have at times been overlooked by archaeologists exploring the material residues of inmates consigned to workhouses, almshouses and other institutions of reform. Issues of individuals' power and authority, however, have been explored more widely by archaeologists in relation to mills, missions, factories and plantations. Sherene Baugher's (2010) study of the Sailors' Snug Home in nineteenth-century New York, for example, analyzed the institution in terms of class, status and power dynamics. She focused in particular on the role of the governor, Thomas Melville and his relationships with other staff members and the inmates. This focus on an influential individual helps to reveal how the institution developed and operated through time. The class-based tensions and conflicts Baugher identifies can also be perceived at the Hyde Park Asylum, where Matron Hicks sought to assert the middle-class status of herself and her family.

The Hyde Park Asylum

The Hyde Park Barracks was built in 1817–19 as accommodation for Sydney's male convict workforce. When the last of the convicts were removed in 1848 the complex soon came to be occupied by an ever-changing variety of government and quasi-government offices and functions. This included a Female Immigration Depot, which accommodated shiploads of single young women when they first arrived in Sydney from the United Kingdom, on their way to new lives in the colony as domestic servants. By 1861 the Immigration Depot was under the management of a new matron, Mrs Lucy Applewhaite (later Hicks). She was 27 years old and lived with her husband and, at the time, four children in two rooms on the middle level of the three-storey building. In 1862 another large group of women arrived at the Barracks when Level 3 was quickly converted into a destitute asylum, as a separate institution from the Immigration Depot. One hundred and fifty female inmates were transferred from the over-crowded Sydney Benevolent Asylum a mile or so away (Cummins 2003, p. 53). Lucy Applewhaite became the matron of the Asylum as well as the Depot. The sudden arrival of so many aged and infirm women placed many demands on the old convict barracks and numerous modifications were needed in the following years (Thorpe 1980).

The number of inmates increased steadily over the years and by the 1880s there were up to 300 women in the Hyde Park Asylum. In 1886 the women were moved to a new, purpose-built facility at Newington, 15km to the west and the Immigration Depot was relocated (Fig. 1).

Thereafter the Hyde Park Barracks was occupied by various courts and legal offices until the 1970s, when the complex was converted into a "museum of itself." In 2010, the Barracks gained World Heritage status as part of a serial listing of 11 convict places in Australia (Australian Government 2008).

During the 24 years in which the Asylum occupied the Barracks, the female inmates discarded and swept large quantities of rubbish into sub-floor spaces, creating an unusual and well-preserved archaeological assemblage. This included thousands of textile offcuts and clothing scraps, paper fragments and religious texts, clay tobacco pipes, shoe leather, buttons, matches, pins, and numerous other items, many of which

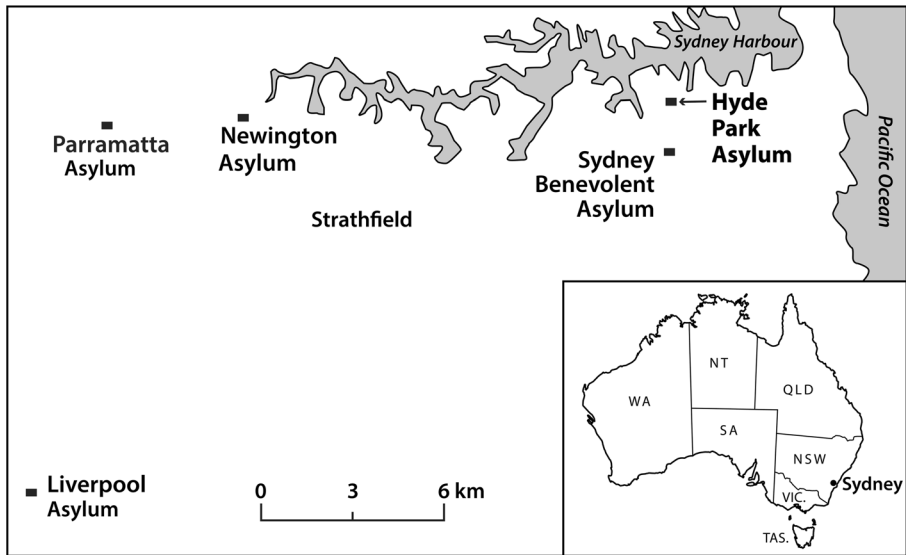


Fig. 1 Sydney with locations of government benevolent asylums during the 1860s (P. Davies).

rarely survive in normal archaeological conditions. The deposits were effectively sealed by the installation of floor coverings in 1886 when the Depot and Asylum were relocated, creating a close association between artifacts and immigrants on Level 2 and with the Asylum inmates on Level 3. Much of this material was recovered during renovations to the building in the early 1980s and has been subject to a range of archaeological analyses in the years since (e.g., Crook et al. 2003; Crook and Murray 2006; Davies et al. 2013). The items have provided a rare opportunity to study the material discard and personal behavior of institutional inmates from the nineteenth century (e.g., Davies 2013a, b). Material from the matron's quarters can also help to reveal important aspects of her life and her relationship with her family, the inmates and colonial officials.

In terms of colonial authority, the governance of the Hyde Park Asylum was very much in the hands of men. The New South Wales government assumed responsibility for care of the colony's aged and poor in 1862, and established a Board of Government Asylums composed entirely of male civil servants. The Board drew up rules of conduct for the control and management of its institutions, and met twice weekly to decide on the admission of inmates. In addition to the Hyde Park Asylum for women the Board also administered asylums for destitute men at Parramatta and Liverpool, while in 1866 another asylum was established for a few years at Port Macquarie on the north coast of NSW (Hughes 2004, p. 94). Although the Board was responsible for deciding the merits of each applicant, it was constantly being over-ruled by the Colonial Secretary, the courts and other government agencies. The asylums, including Hyde Park, became dumping grounds for society's outcasts, including the blind, epileptics, the physically and intellectually disabled, and the chronically and terminally ill—there was nowhere else for them to go (Hughes 2004, p. 96).

The daily management and workings of the Hyde Park Asylum, on the other hand, were very much in the hands of women. The institution was run by Matron Hicks with

the help of a sub-matron and a paid laundress, while in later years her eldest daughter, Mary also provided crucial assistance. Her husband, John Applewhaite, worked in the asylum as a clerk. Cooking, cleaning, washing, and making and repairing all the clothes and bedding was done by the female inmates. This reduced costs and provided useful work for the women to perform. Some received small gratuities or payments of a few pennies per day in return for assisting in the laundry, kitchen or on the wards. They had their meals in groups of eight, with the physically strongest women at each table, known as the “captain women,” doing the serving. Groups of middle-class evangelical ladies were also regular visitors to the Asylum, offering religious support to the inmates and monitoring conditions within the institution.

Matron Lucy Hicks

Lucy Hannah Langdon, later Applewhaite and then Hicks, was born in The Rocks in Sydney on November 5, 1833. Her father, John Langdon, was a prosperous merchant, butcher and farmer who died in 1835. At the age of 16, Lucy married the 30-year old English mariner, John Lithcot Applewhaite. He was master of the William Hyde, a 532-ton barque that carried cargo and passengers between Australia, New Zealand, and England. Lucy thus spent the early years of her married life at sea and in shipping ports. An account of a voyage aboard the William Hyde was written by John Askew, a steerage passenger from Newcastle (NSW) to New Zealand in 1853. Askew described Lucy admiringly as:

a pretty little woman, a native of Sydney, and about 22 years of age. She had in perfection the finely chiselled features so peculiar to the women of Sydney. Her hair was dark brown, and was shaded back in luxuriant tresses, fastened behind with a plain black ribbon. She generally wore a black satin dress, and a small white collar round her neck. Her name was Lucy, and she was as amiable as beautiful (Askew 1857, p. 311; see also Hughes 2004, pp. 148–149).

The Applewhaite family left their seafaring lives soon after and John attempted to establish several businesses, with limited success. Lucy’s appointment as matron of the Immigration Depot in 1861 at an annual salary of £70 was thus very timely, as it helped relieve the family’s financial difficulties. Her appointment appears to have had the support of the Colonial Secretary, Charles Cowper, who was a friend of the family. Several months later John Applewhaite also secured a position as a clerk in the Immigration Agent’s office at a salary of 10 shillings per day, thus bolstering the family’s finances further (Hughes 2004, p. 152).

The position of matron was one of the few “respectable” options available to women of Lucy’s background who wanted or needed to work. Such appointments tended to be reserved for middle-class women of respectable upbringing and credentials, which meant married women or widows were preferred (Alford 1984, p. 184). Although she had no experience as a matron, her years as a ship captain’s wife had confronted her with numerous challenges, including giving birth at sea, coping with extreme weather and emergencies, and living in cramped quarters, with small children, for extended periods. She became familiar with sharing her domestic space with strangers, which

would have been antithetical to many of her middle-class peers (Russell 1994, pp. 59–60). As a frequent visitor to foreign and British ports, she could also empathise with the problems faced by young women migrating around the world to establish new lives in Australia.

The Government Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women was established at the Barracks in February 1862, with John Applewhaite as master of the new institution and Lucy as matron, a position she held in conjunction with her role in the Immigration Depot. The master's duties were mostly clerical, but the matron carried a heavy responsibility. She supervised the preparation of meals, the personal hygiene of inmates, the cleanliness of the premises and utensils, and enforced discipline. In August 1862 Lucy gave birth to her seventh baby, all the while caring for her five surviving children and supervising shiploads of young women as they arrived at the Depot.

The couple's financial position improved with their new appointments. By 1863, John and Lucy Applewhaite each earned £100 as master and matron of the Asylum, while Lucy received a further £100 for her role in the Depot. With a substantial income of £300 per annum they now ostensibly had the income to sustain a middle-class lifestyle for their family, but they appear to have lived beyond their means. John Applewhaite faced a range of debts and financial disputes over the next few years and he filed for insolvency in 1867. Historian Joy Hughes (2004, p. 156) notes that most of the debts reflect a fairly affluent level of consumption, and included several hundred pounds spent on clothing and shoes, private medical attendance and pharmacy items, along with monies owed to grocers and butchers.

While she may have spent more on herself and her family than prudence allowed, Lucy Hicks kept a tight rein on the expenses of the Asylum. She was always aware of the need to contain and cut costs, which she achieved by exploiting the labor of her daughters and the inmates and generally pursuing economical management. Her goal was to make the institution as self-supporting as possible, and this extended to her keeping chickens, a goat and a cow (Commission 1873–74, p. 76; Hughes 2004, p. 155). The average cost per head at Hyde Park in 1885 was £15 3s 2d, only one-third the cost of providing for the sick poor in hospitals (Government Asylums Board 1885, pp. 1–2). The low cost of the institution was also sustained by having only a surgeon (Dr. Ward), a laundress (Nancy Bell) and, at times, a sub-matron on the payroll (Commission 1873–74, p. 109).

John Applewhaite died in May 1869 after almost 20 years of marriage, leaving Lucy with six children aged between 18 years and 11 months. The Government Asylums Board commended the “skill, energy, and tact” displayed by the matron in her duties and abolished the position of Master of the Asylum, entrusting her with sole charge of the institution. Her salary was increased to £150 per annum, the same as the male masters of the Parramatta and Liverpool Asylums. This was offset, however, by a reduction in her wages as matron of the Immigration Depot from £100 to £20, which reflected the decline of immigrant arrivals by this stage. By 1873, however, her gross salary had increased to £220, making her one of the mostly highly paid matrons in the NSW colonial civil service during this period, although it was a substantial reduction from her previous household income with John Applewhaite (Commission 1873–74, p. 73; Hughes 2004, p. 158).

In the following year, Lucy married William Henry Hicks, a friend of the family who had assisted the Applewhaites during their financial problems. He had served as a

curate and vicar in England during the 1850s and had published numerous religious tracts (Venn 1947, p. 360), but after arriving in Australia in 1861 he eventually made a living as a journalist. Lucy was 37 at the time of her marriage to William, and together they had five children, only one of whom survived to old age. She was 46 when she had her 14th and last child, Francis, in 1879. It was around this time that she may have begun employing a governess to care for the children so she could devote more time and energy to the Asylum and Depot (Hughes 2004, p. 208). Several years later, in 1883, the matron's quarters on Level 2 were converted to provide extra accommodation for inmates (Government Asylums Board 1883, p. 2) and the family moved to premises a block or so away in Phillip Street.

Matron Hicks was aided in her supervision of the Asylum by her eldest daughter, Mary. Initially she was an unpaid assistant but in 1875, at the age of 24, Mary was appointed sub-matron of the Asylum with an annual salary of £50. Sadly, however, she died in September 1885, aged 34, from inflammation of the lungs. She had arrived at the Barracks with her family in 1861 as a 10-year-old girl and spent her entire working life in the service of the Asylum and Depot, answering to the needs of her mother as the matron and the needs of the inmates. While Lucy Hicks received high praise at the peak of her career, it is likely that much of the efficient running of the institutions was due to the untiring efforts of Mary Applewhaite. Her younger sister, Clara, took over the position of sub-matron in her place. This pattern of daughters helping their mothers to superintend welfare institutions was repeated elsewhere, including Mary Burnside and her daughter Jane at the Liverpool Asylum, and Catherine Dennis and one of her daughters at Parramatta (Hughes 2004, p. 172).

Hicks Family Quarters

Lucy Hicks and her family occupied two rooms on Level 2 of the Hyde Park Barracks, separated by the western end of the hallway (Crook and Murray 2006, p. 46; Fig. 2). In 1865 the Colonial

Architect installed ceiling boards in the quarters to prevent “leakage” from the hospital wards above, although it is unclear if this came from incontinent inmates, spills or a leaking roof. The next year he agreed to replace the kitchen range, installed in 1848, that was also used by female immigrants when only a few were left in the Depot. The Colonial Architect refused, however, to partition off one of three baths in the new bathhouse for the exclusive use of the matron and her family, as it would have substantially reduced the bathing facilities available for the inmates (Hughes 2004, p. 154).

The artifact assemblage in the underfloor spaces of the family's quarters differs in important ways in quantity and kind from material in the other rooms of the Barracks. Artifact fragments from the two rooms make up only 18.8 % of the total from Level 2. The large quantities of paper and textile offcuts, religious documents and leather pieces that are so common in the Depot and Asylum areas are much less evident in the matron's quarters. The smaller quantities of discarded or lost items in the quarters may relate to there being fewer occupants, or reflect the presence of floor carpets, compared to the bare wooden boards in other parts of the building. In 1867, for example, Lucy Hicks requested a new carpet to be laid in her “parlour” on the chance that she would

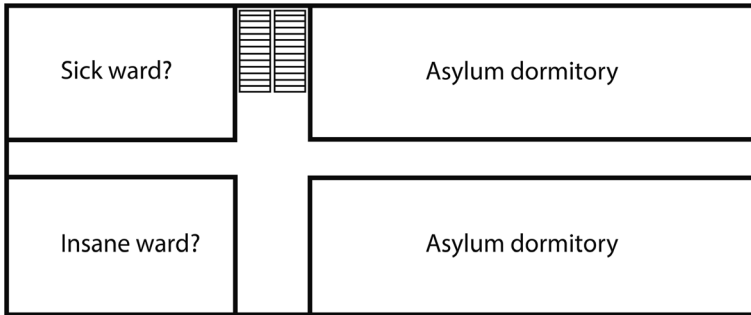
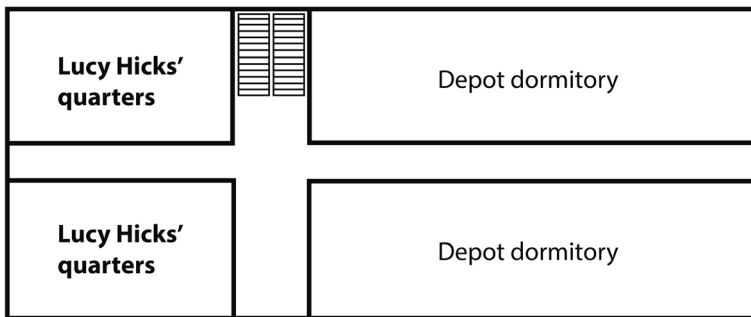
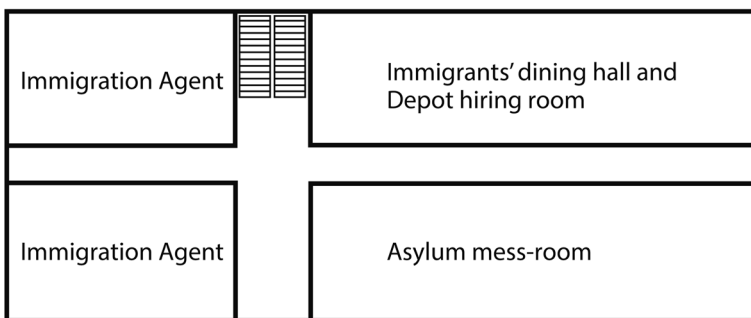
Level 3**Level 2****Level 1**

Fig. 2 Plan of Hyde Park Barracks with likely room functions (P. Davies).

receive a visit from Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, who toured the Australian colonies in 1867–68 (McKinlay 1970). Henry Parkes, the Colonial Secretary, agreed to the request, although he doubted the Duke would visit Mrs Applewhaite's parlour (Hughes 2004, p. 157).

The underfloor assemblage in the matron's quarters included large numbers of small items such as beads, buttons, needles, pins and hooks-and-eyes. These sewing items were present in similar quantities to those in the Asylum and Depot rooms and represent the same range of forms and colors. The presence of 500 metal sewing pins suggests that the Applewhaite-Hicks daughters were frequently busy with sewing and

dressmaking, an activity that mirrored much of the activity of the inmates in wards nearby. Sixty-two buttons and more than 300 small glass beads in various colours were also found, especially in the southern room, which may relate to jewellery or clothing adornment. Some of this material may also relate to the earlier presence of immigrant women who used the rooms from 1848 to 1862.

Matron Hicks also had a direct and substantial impact on the clothing worn by the inmates. She ordered bolts of fabric from local distributors and for several years at least she used a room on Level 1 for cutting the fabric into pieces for the women to sew into dresses and underclothing (Commission 1873–74, p. 76). This meant she had some control over the form and size of garments that the inmates made and wore. When she lost access to the lockable room on Level 1 she may have used the family quarters to continue this aspect of her work.

Only a small number of clay pipe fragments ($n=30$) were found in the family quarters, which may have derived from John Applewhaite or William Hicks. This is in contrast to the large assemblage ($n=1,522$) of bowls, stems, and complete pipes recovered from the Level 3 dormitories and rear yard used by the inmates. Lucy Hicks provided the inmates with a small allowance of tobacco each month as a simple treat. Consumption of tobacco by women in colonial Australia was generally limited to those of the lower classes and as a middle-class woman herself Lucy Hicks is very unlikely to have smoked (Gojak and Stuart 1999, p. 40; Russell 2010, p. 291). Evidence for alcohol consumption, on the other hand, is limited to a few gin or schnapps bottles that were reused to dispense medicines to sick inmates. Alcohol was strictly prohibited in government asylums by formal regulation and Lucy Hicks appears to have supported the ban. Controlling the flow of tobacco and alcohol in the asylum was one way in which Matron Hicks differentiated herself from the inmates and asserted the middle-class status of herself and her family.

Slate pencils were also common, with 26 pencil fragments in the family's quarters and adjacent hallway comprising more than half the Barracks total ($n=46$). These may relate to the education of the Applewhaite-Hicks children and to the administration of the asylum (Davies 2005). Eighteen marbles came from the short corridor between the family's rooms and may have been lost during the children's play. A broken strip of wood, 79mm in length, was found in the floor space at the top of the stairs on Level 2 and is marked with the name of a Hicks family member (Fig. 3). No religious documents, however, were identified in the matron's rooms, suggesting that she and her family were spared the deluge of tracts, prayer books, and other material distributed to the inmates by priests, missionaries, and evangelical visitors (Davies 2013a; Spencer-Wood 2009). A fragment of a hand-written letter appears to derive from Lucy Hicks herself. While the bottom half of the signature has torn away, it resembles other documented examples of her handwriting. The sentences cannot be fully connected but some phrases are identifiable: "...is still up at... /...Stromy's, the Baby.../...[su]ch a dear little.../...and how dear.../...I must conclude.../...love [l... H...ks]." The paper has been folded several times and may have been a note returned to her. It was recovered from the northern ward on Level 2, and while only a few phrases can be made out, it presents a gentler, more personal side to the matron whom we know otherwise only from parliamentary inquiries and third-party accounts.

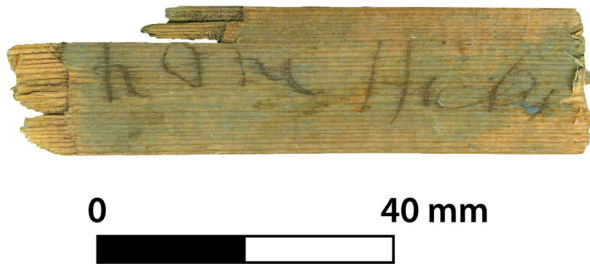


Fig. 3 Strip of wooden marked with the name “...ron[?] Hicks” (P. Davies).

Mistress of Her Domain

Along with the physical evidence from the sub-floor spaces in the family quarters on Level 2, there are two important documentary accounts that help reveal the kind of matron that Lucy Hicks actually was, and each paints a very different picture of her character. The first is a government commission from 1873, appointed to inquire into public charities in New South Wales, including the Hyde Park Asylum. Lucy Hicks gave evidence to the commission, which was recorded and published verbatim (Commission 1873–74, pp. 73–77). In 1886, a few months after the move to Newington, another inquiry was held at which Mrs. Hicks also gave testimony, as did numerous inmates and visitors to the institution (Board 1887). It is significant, however, that relatively little in the way of day books, registers or other documents have been preserved from the Hyde Park Asylum. This may reflect the accidents of preservation or, perhaps, that Lucy Hicks was not as painstaking in keeping the books as she claimed to be (Commission 1873–74, p. 73). Instead she was confident of her ability to run the Asylum and Depot, sometimes literally on the back of an envelope, but such insouciance was eventually to contribute to her downfall.

The 1873 Inquiry presents Mrs. Hicks as a resourceful and prudent matron, competently managing the needs of the growing numbers of inmates and, importantly, keeping costs under tight control. Brisk and unsentimental though she was, Matron Hicks also had some sympathy for “the poor old creatures” under her care, recognizing that elderly and often sick women needed special treatment. When it was suggested that she was “too tender” in her care of the women, she retorted “I think that in a town like Sydney you must have such a place [as the Asylum]” (Commission 1873–74, p. 77). By this stage she had been in the job for over a decade and had the confidence to politely critique the decisions of the Board and push for improvements to the institution. She criticized the daughters of inmates who were prostitutes and boasted about her efforts to prevent drunkards from drinking (Commission 1873–74, p. 75).

Mrs. Hicks did not decide who was admitted to the Asylum. This was the responsibility of the Board and Lucy Hicks was grateful her role did not extend so far (Commission 1873–74, p. 74). Nor could the matron restrain an inmate who wanted to leave. She acknowledged that the women were not prisoners and they were free to depart as they wished. Nevertheless, she kept a close eye on comings and goings, generally only allowing three women out on day leave at a time, and she could discharge those who returned drunk and disorderly.

Lucy Hicks constantly negotiated her class position, despite or perhaps because of being in close daily contact with hundreds of elderly and infirm lower-class inmates. She and her family were free to come and go as they pleased, unlike the Asylum women, and Lucy was willing and able to exploit family contacts with prominent colonial authorities. Hundreds of pins, needles, buttons, and other items lost in the sub-floor spaces suggest that her daughters spent much of their time sewing, although how much of this was plain or fancy work is uncertain. Hicks spent freely on clothes and other items for her family, running up debts at several Sydney retailers, and made various demands to government officials to improve the furnishings of her family's quarters. Lucy Hicks was also very good at delegating onto inmates and her daughters most of the physical labor needed to run the Asylum.

It is also clear from the documentary and archaeological evidence that Lucy Hicks was vigilant about hygiene and cleanliness. This emphasis on sanitation was consistent with the broader notion of "improvement" that prevailed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, where dirt and disease threatened both physical and moral standards of cleanliness (Tarlow 2007, p. 100). When a new inmate was admitted the matron insisted she take a bath, even a sponge bath if arriving late at night. The woman's clothing was soaked and washed and replaced with a complete change of Asylum clothes. Matron Hicks declared that she would "never allow a dirty rag to come into my place" (Commission 1873–74, p. 76). If a new arrival had the "itch" (scabies) or some infectious skin condition, her old clothing was burnt. There is no evidence, however, that the women's hair was cut short, either as a hygienic measure or as part of institutional austerity (Ignatieff 1978, p. 144).

Various items used for personal cleaning by the inmates were identified in the underfloor assemblage as well, many of which may have been provided by Matron Hicks or acquired and used with her approval. These included 14 worn pieces of soap from the Asylum on Level 3 and 13 pieces from the Immigration Depot on Level 2. It is likely that these fragments derive from the bedside sponge bathing of women unable to walk down to the bathhouse outside. The remains of eight lice-combs were found on Level 3 but no toothbrushes were found in this area, suggesting that dental hygiene was less important than bodily and hair cleanliness among the inmates, or that such a new-fangled custom as tooth-brushing was yet to be adopted by this generation of elderly inmates.

Lucy Hicks' concern with hygiene may have owed something to Florence Nightingale's book, *Notes on Hospitals*, first published in 1859. While the book emphasized sanitary reform through better hospital design, a notion unavailable in the ageing premises of the Hyde Park Asylum, it also noted the importance of mundane subjects like plumbing, ventilation and clean linen (Nightingale 1863, pp. 72–88). Matron Hicks took on the management of the Immigration Depot and the Asylum soon after *Notes on Hospitals* appeared and as a young wife, mother and matron she may well have been influenced by Nightingale's growing reputation and her proposals for institutional sanitary and health reform (McDonald 2010, pp. 175–178).

Matron Hicks also took steps to ensure the isolation of the Asylum when infectious diseases swept through Sydney. During an outbreak of smallpox in 1881, for example, she quarantined the Hyde Park Barracks, halting all day leave for inmates and disallowing visits from outsiders for up to 9 months (Curson 1985, pp. 99–100). No serious illness was recorded in the Asylum during this period, and the Board of

Government Asylums acknowledged that the inmates' "detention in the building" contributed substantially to the healthy outcome (Government Asylums Board 1882, p. 1).

By 1886, however, a very different picture of Matron Hicks was emerging. The move to new premises at Newington on the Parramatta River occurred in February and early March of that year, when a total of 306 women were transferred to their new premises. It was clear from evidence given a few months later to the Government Asylums Inquiry Board that all was not well at Newington and standards of care and welfare had slipped significantly. The Board members interviewed inmates, women of the Ladies Board and Lucy Hicks herself, and heard a litany of complaints relating to the poor quality of food, the lack of medical comforts, the unkindness and cruelty of wardswomen, disrespect shown to the deceased, lack of supervision in dispensing medicines and the neglect of the medical officer towards the inmates. Lucy Hicks herself was accused of improper conduct by some of the inmates and members of the Ladies Board. She was alleged to have withheld basic food provisions from sick inmates, and to have operated a store to sell "luxuries" to those women who could afford them. She was also accused of having stolen the pocket change and savings from dead inmates, and, most damagingly of all, of being drunk. The Board was also concerned that Lucy Hicks applied no set of formal rules or regulations to manage the institution, including those drawn up in 1862 to define the duties of asylum staff, and that she was effectively "a law unto herself" (Board 1887, p. 14–17).

Matron Hicks responded defiantly to all the allegations, labeling her accusers "stooges" or "half-wits." She also vehemently denied ever taking drink, in which she was supported by a number of inmates (Board 1887, pp. 87–89). Many of her answers, however, were simply "yes" or "no" and she had frequent memory lapses as though, compared to her confident appearance at the Public Charities Commission 13 years before, she was now much less able to withstand the relentless questioning of board members during the nine examinations she endured over a 2 months period.

Lucy Hicks appears to have been physically and emotionally worn out by the time she arrived at Newington. She was by this stage in her early fifties, had suffered an unknown illness in 1885 that nearly killed her, and in addition to giving birth to 14 children she had endured the sadness of burying six of them, and a husband of 20 years, while at the Hyde Park Barracks. She had also suffered the recent loss of her eldest daughter and greatest helper, Mary Applewhaite. It is likely that while Mrs. Hicks was on the stand answering questions during the first inquiry, it was in fact her daughter or the efforts of all her children who helped maintain the excellent state of the Asylum up to that time and beyond.

The emotional anxiety endured by Mrs. Hicks at the Newington Inquiry was also exacerbated by Supreme Court proceedings in 1885 concerning the distribution of her late stepfather's estate. The following year, after the exhausting relocation to Newington, the last of her siblings, John Langdon, died. At Newington, in addition to six of her children in residence, she often cared for her three grandchildren and the son of her late sister (Hughes 2004, p. 210). The Board members were probably correct in concluding that "family concerns" had indeed distracted the matron from her official duties (Board 1887, p. 43). In addition, while at the Hyde Park Barracks everyone was under the same roof, at least until 1883, and Mrs. Hicks could maintain practical supervision, at

Newington the matron's quarters were too far removed from the wards and dormitories to allow effective oversight.

In 1888, the Colonial Secretary, acting on the findings of the Government Asylums Inquiry Board, forcibly retired Lucy Hicks from her position as matron of the Newington Asylum. She received a substantial pension of £145 per annum in recognition of her long and devoted service. The family moved to Strathfield, a nearby suburb, where her husband, William Hicks, died in 1894 following months of illness. Lucy Hicks died on July 14, 1909, aged 75, survived by just five of her 14 children.

Conclusion

The Hyde Park Asylum did not function as a “powered cultural landscape” where a few exercised domination over the many (Spencer-Wood 2010). Close surveillance was limited by the simple internal architecture and by the lack of staff to monitor the women's activities (Kerr 1984, pp. 40–41). Inmates worked, socialized and rested in various dormitories, hallways, stair landings, in washrooms and the rear yard. Matron Hicks and her daughter-helpers could not, and apparently rarely tried, to keep constant watch over the inmates, and Hicks had long disregarded the need to post formal sets of rules and regulations for the inmates to follow (Board 1887, p. 2). The authority that Lucy Hicks exercised was based more on her personality, skills and the relationships she developed with others than on the structurally legitimated power she derived from her formal position.

The matron was a central figure in the operation of benevolent asylums during the colonial era, especially those devoted to the care of women. She could set the tone of an institution, for better or worse, in terms of hygiene, nursing care and inmate welfare, and act as a buffer (or cipher) between governing boards and the inmates. At the Magdalen Asylum in Philadelphia, De Cunzo (1995, p. 26; 2001, p. 20) argues that officials, including the matron, continually recreated the institution to update the program of reform. It was part of Lucy Hicks' ultimate failure that she neglected to re-position the Hyde Park Asylum in response to changing notions of colonial welfare.

Lucy Hicks' fall from grace came about for a number of reasons, including age, weariness, grief, and lack of effective support. Her testimony to the 1873 inquiry reveals Matron Hicks at the height of her powers. Equally, her evidence to the 1886 inquiry, after the move to Newington, reveals a woman no longer in control of an increasingly complex world of institutional care. She worked through a vital transition in the development of colonial welfare institutions. When she took up the post in 1862, many of the elderly women entering the Asylum were former convicts who had been brought out to Australia in the early part of the nineteenth century. By the 1880s, however, the old model of benevolent asylums as providing basic food and shelter was increasingly inadequate, as the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic medical conditions demanded greater resources and professional training. The Hyde Park Asylum had begun as a benevolent institution and evolved, almost by default, into a convalescent hospital, but without the resources needed to provide for those most in need. Lucy Hicks did her best but she was no longer able to cope, as institutions of welfare began to leave behind their colonial origins, ideology and meaning and look to the higher standards of care that would emerge in the early twentieth century.

In taking a biographical approach to the life of Lucy Hicks, it becomes clear that her position as matron of the Asylum was deeply entangled with her role as wife, mother and middle-class citizen of colonial society. During her quarter-century reign in charge of the Hyde Park Asylum she had become almost synonymous with the institution. All regulations and decisions from the Government Asylums Board were channeled through her, while the daily welfare of the inmates came under her effective control. She was part of a small coterie of powerful female matrons who managed large institutions in the colony during this period. For many years her life experience and social standing, along with the help of her family members, were enough to keep the Asylum functioning smoothly. As the role of the Hyde Park institution changed, however, and its administrative, nursing and medical needs were transformed, she increasingly found that her skills, status and character were no longer sufficient to maintain its good operation and reputation. Weighed down from years of work, childrearing, illness, and grief, her decades of dedicated service ended in ignominy and dismissal, but her lasting achievement was to provide a home for thousands of poor, elderly women who had nowhere else to turn.

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