

Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children

1858 – 1915

Other Names:

- Randwick Asylum
- Destitute Children's Asylum

Details

The Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children began in 1858, when the Asylum for Destitute Children relocated from Ormond House in Paddington to Randwick. It was run by the Society for the Relief of Destitute Children and housed up to 800 children at a time in large dormitories that are often called 'barracks'. Most of the children were aged between three and 10. After 1888 the New South Wales Government withdrew funding for the Asylum, but it continued to house children until it was resumed for use as a military hospital and closed in 1915.

After the Asylum for Destitute Children moved in 1858 a substantial sandstone building that accommodated 400 children was constructed on the new site. Once completed, the Asylum held up to 800 children in large dormitories. By the 1870s it was condemned by reformers for keeping children in 'barracks'.

The children in the Asylum were normally between the ages of three and ten years and not eligible for admission to the government-funded Orphan Schools. Every child admitted (including voluntary admissions) was to remain the responsibility of the Institution until aged 19 or, in the case of a female marrying earlier, until her marriage. However, parents could and did reclaim their children. Like the Protestant and Roman Catholic Orphanages, Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children received funding from the New South Wales Government to provide care for children.

Life for children at Randwick was often described as monotonous and reliant on routine and drudgery. The site included a farm where the boys learnt farming skills. Many of the boys and girls became apprenticed to the Institution when they reached 12. The children received a basic education and from 1877 were given a state education from teachers from the Council of Education.

With such large numbers massed together, epidemic diseases were inevitable. The worst was in 1867, when an outbreak of whooping cough killed 77 children. The Catherine Hayes Hospital was built on the site as a result. In all, 217 children died in the care of the Asylum, which is a small but significant proportion of the many thousands of children who passed through its doors.

The size and scale of the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children provoked the ire of reformers who condemned the dehumanisation of 'barrack-life'. They wanted destitute and neglected children to experience something that approached family life so advocated boarding out, or fostering. The 1873 Royal Commission into Public Charities, led by Justice William Windeyer, attacked Randwick. In 1880 the New South Wales Government allowed the Boarding Out Society, a group of ladies led by the President of the Benevolent Society, Dr Arthur Renwick, to trial boarding out and, effectively, established the State Children's Relief Board.

In 1881 the *State Children Relief Act* created the State Children's Relief Board and authorised it to remove any child under the age of 12 from any government-funded Asylum and place it in a boarding-out home. Children were removed from the home for boarding out from 1883. This policy resulted in the closure of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Orphanages and numbers dropped at Randwick. The Government ceased funding the

home after 1888.

The Society for the Relief of Destitute Children was determined to keep the Asylum open, arguing they provided a valuable service. The difference between the Asylum and the boarding out system was that families could use the Asylum for temporary care, and, so long as they paid maintenance, retain influence over their children and keep their visiting rights. The State Children's Relief Board made children wards of the state and considered boarding out to be a permanent arrangement. It generally prevented boarded out children from seeing their families.

Nevertheless, Asylum numbers continued to decline. The Asylum was taken over by the Commonwealth Government during World War I as a military hospital for wounded and disabled returned servicemen. In April 1915 the children remaining at the Asylum were sent to cottage-style institutions or boarded out. Since the 1960s the Prince of Wales Hospital has occupied the site.

Over the time of the Asylum's operation 217 children died at the site and many were buried in the grounds. In the mid-1990s, while the Prince of Wales Hospital was expanding, an archaeological investigation was conducted and retrieved the remains of 174 children who died and were buried on site. Seventy bodies were excavated and 35 of the children were identified by name. A memorial garden and commemorative signage is located at the Barker Street entrance to the Prince of Wales Hospital.

There is an online index to the inmates of Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children.

Gallery



Children of the Most Children's Asylum

Description: The description included in the catalogue reads: 'children of the Most Children's Asylum, Avoca street, Randwick [n.d. c.1909]. The photo is captioned: 'entertainment Of children on the occasion of Mr Coulter 's (superintendent) 42nd Year of office'. Coulter is in the photo.'



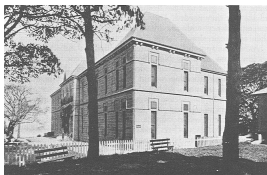
Girls working in the laundry at the Randwick Destitute Children's Asylum

Description: The description included in the catalogue reads: "Girls working in the laundry at the Randwick Destitute Children's Asylum [date is unknown, probably c.1909]"



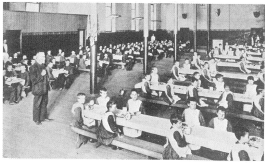
The Main Building, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick

Description: This image is a copy taken from John Ramsland's *Children of the back lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales*. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



Catherine Hayes Hospital, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick

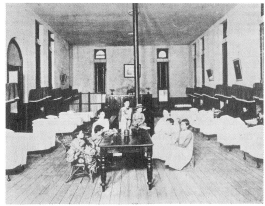
Description: The Catherine Hayes Hospital was the hospital built within the grounds of Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children. It was opened in 1870. This image is a copy taken from John Ramsland's *Children of the back lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales*. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



The Main Dining Hall, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick.
J. Coulter Randwick Asylum Govt Printer, 1916.

The Main Dining Hall, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick

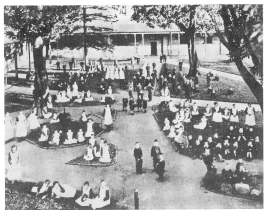
Description: This photograph shows children inside the large dining hall at the Randwick Asylum. The children are seated at long trestle tables arranged in rows down either side of the hall. The children appear to have been divided into two groups, probably by gender, each sitting on one side of the hall. All children on one side (presumably the girls' side) are wearing white aprons. All children appear to have shaved heads. This image was published in *Children of the Back Lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales* in 1986. The original image is held by the State Archives of New South Wales. This image has been dated as 1916, however as the asylum had closed by this date it is assumed that this image was taken slightly earlier than 1916.



The Girls' Ward at the Catherine Hayees Hospital, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick.
J. Coulter Randwick Asylum Govt Printer, 1916.

The Girls' Ward at the Catherine Hayees Hospital, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick

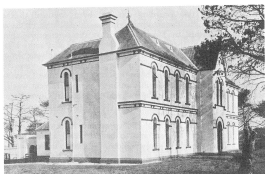
Description: This photograph shows a small group of girls seated around a table in the centre of the Girls' Ward of the Randwick Asylum Hospital. Rows of beds, some occupied by children, are arranged along both sides of the ward. This image was published in *Children of the Back Lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales* in 1986. The original image is held by the State Archives of New South Wales. This image has been dated as 1916, however as the asylum had closed by this date it is assumed that this image was taken slightly earlier than 1916.



Children in the Quadrangle, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick.
J. Coulter Randwick Asylum Govt Printer, 1916.

Children in the Quadrangle, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick

Description: This photograph shows the children of the Randwick Asylum assembled in the quadrangle in the grounds of the home. This image was published in *Children of the Back Lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales* in 1986. The original image is held by the State Archives of New South Wales. This image has been dated as 1916, however as the asylum had closed by this date it is assumed that this image was taken slightly earlier than 1916.



The Receiving House, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick.
J. Coulter Randwick Asylum Govt Printer, 1916.

The Receiving House, Asylum for Destitute Children, Randwick

Description: This photograph shows the receiving house at the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children. This building would have been the first one entered by children who were newly admitted to the asylum. This image was published in *Children of the Back Lanes: destitute and neglected children in colonial New South Wales* in 1986. The original image is held by the State Archives of New South Wales. This image has been dated as 1916, however as the asylum had closed by this date it is assumed that this image was taken slightly earlier than 1916.

More info

Chronology

- Asylum for Destitute Children (1852 - 1858)
 - **Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children (1858 – 1915)**

Related Entries

Run by

- [Society for the Relief of Destitute Children \(1852 - c. 1915\)](#)

Related Legislation

- [Deserted Wives and Children Act 1840, New South Wales \(1840 - 1901\)](#)
- [Deserted Wives and Children Act of 1840 as amended by the Act of 1858, New South Wales \(1858 - 1901\)](#)
- [State Children Relief Act 1881, New South Wales \(1881 - 1901\)](#)

The *State Children's Relief Act* gave the State Children's Relief Board the power to take children from the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children and board them out.

Related Organisations

- [State Children's Relief Board \(1881 - 1923\)](#)
The State Children's Relief Board was created to remove children from large institutions like Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children and place them into the boarding out system.
- [Hillside Home for Mothers and Babies \(1913 - 1920\)](#)
Hillside Home for Mothers and Babies was located at Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children until it moved to Ormond House in 1915.
Date: 1913 - 1915
- [Prince of Wales Hospital \(1953 - current\)](#)
The Prince of Wales Hospital stands on the former grounds of the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children. A memorial to the children who died while they were inmates of the Asylum has been placed at the Barker Street entrance to the Hospital.

Resources

- Dickey, Brian, *No Charity There: a short history of social welfare in Australia*, 1988
- Van Krieken, Robert, *Children and the state: social control and the formation of Australian child welfare*, 1992
- Museums of History NSW, [Child Care and Protection Index 1817-1942](#), No date
- Bluett, Ros, [Charity and Justice: The early days of the Benevolent Society in Sydney](#), 24 March 2013
- Department of Justice, [History](#), Children's Court of New South Wales, 2012
- Cape Banks Family History Society Inc, [Randwick Destitute Children's Asylum Deaths and Burials 1853-1916](#), No date
- Murray, John, [Children's mass grave in Sydney](#), Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions blog, 1 November 2010
- O'Brien, Anne, *Poverty's Prison: the poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, 1988
- Australian Heritage Council, [A thematic heritage study on Australia's benevolent and other care institutions](#), 2016

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records held by other organisations

- [School Files \(1876 - 1979\)](#)
- [Registers of Inmates, Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children \(June 1852 - August 1915\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/randwick-asylum-for-destitute-children/>