

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF DEATH IN DARLINGHURST
GAOL 1867-1914 AND THE FATE OF THE HOMELESS IN
NINETEENTH CENTURY SYDNEY

BY

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Mr Harley Roberts and Mr John Seedsman.

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Dr P A Norrie

DR. PHILIP NORRIE – MA THESIS

“An Analysis of the Causes of Death in Darlinghurst Goal 1867-1914
and the fate of the homeless in nineteenth century Sydney”

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a ledger which listed all the causes of death in Darlinghurst Gaol, Sydney's main gaol, from 1867 to 1914 when the gaol was closed and all the prisoners were transferred to the new Long Bay Gaol at Maroubra. The ledger lists the name of the deceased prisoner, the date of their death, the age of the prisoner at the time of their death and the cause of death along with any special comments relevant to the death where necessary.

This ledger was analysed in depth and the death rates and diseases causing the deaths were compared to the general population in New South Wales and Australia as well as to another similar institution namely Auburn Prison, the oldest existing prison in New York State and the general population of the United States of America (where possible).

Auburn Prison was chosen because it was the only other prison in the English speaking world (British Empire and United States of America) that had a similar complete list of deaths of prisoners in the same time frame – in this case beginning in 1888.

The comparison showed that the highest death rates were in the general population of the United States of America (statistics on New York State alone could not be found) followed by Auburn Prison followed by the general population of Australia then the general population of New South Wales (the latter two were very similar) and the lowest death rates were in Darlinghurst Gaol.

The analysis showed that individuals were less likely to die in the main prison, compared to the relevant general population in New South Wales and New York State despite the fact that

8 – 9% of these prison deaths were due to executions, a cause of death not encountered in the general population. This thesis explores the reasons why mortality rates were lower in prison despite the popular perception was that Victorian era gaols were places of harshness, cruelty and death (think of the writings of Charles Dickens, the great moralist writer who was the conscience of the era) compared to the general free population.