An Archaeology of Institutional Confinement
The Hyde Park Barracks, 1848–1886

Peter Davies, Penny Crook and Tim Murray

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<td>JG</td>
<td>Joist Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>Joist Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNV</td>
<td>Minimum Number of Vessels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMH</td>
<td><em>Sydney Morning Herald</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>UF</td>
<td>Underflooror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UG</td>
<td>Underground</td>
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<td>SRNSW</td>
<td>State Records NSW</td>
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This book is the result of two collaborative projects between the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and Professor Tim Murray of the Archaeology Program at La Trobe University in Melbourne, that were supported by two Australian Research Council grants. We gratefully acknowledge the help of various people and institutions during the life of this project. In the first place we thank senior executives of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, including Peter Watts, Helen Temple, Sue Hunt and Kate Clark, who recognised the importance of the Hyde Park Barracks archaeological collection and have offered unstinting support over the years. Caroline Lorentz, Mark Viner and Dayn Cooper provided invaluable administrative support. Gary Crockett, curator of the Hyde Park Barracks Museum, has been untiring in his management of the artefact database, preparing boxes of artefacts for despatch to La Trobe University, and patiently answering endless questions about the collection. Our work has built on the previous efforts of many archaeologists, historians and other specialists, including the original excavators and cataloguers at the Hyde Park Barracks led by Patricia Burritt, Wendy Thorp and Dana Mider during multiple phases of work. We also acknowledge the more recent work that has contributed substantially to the preparation of this volume, including substantive research by Bridget Berry and Joy Hughes; Laila Ellmoos (Project Historian, Exploring the Archaeology of the Modern City project who prepared a history of the Barracks building which was adapted for this book); and Sophie Pullar, who catalogued many thousands of artefacts from the Barracks collection in 2003–2004.

Graham Connah kindly donated copies of early archaeological reports on the Hyde Park Barracks, and Annika Korsgaard provided scans of Barracks-related material. Daniel Percival made available a copy of his thesis on the Supreme Court site in Sydney and Jon Prangnell dug out his thesis on the Peel Island Lazaret. Alex Thorn assisted with the collection of archival material. Librarians at the Caroline Simpson Research Library, Historic Houses Trust of NSW, provided access to obscure materials and helped with research queries. The State Library of NSW provided permission to publish images from their collections. Staff and students in the Archaeology Program at La Trobe University, and the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sydney offered valuable feedback and ideas at different stages of the project. Specialist artefact advice came from various individuals, including Jerry Bell, Richard Coogrove, Kris Courtney, Gary Crockett, Ian Evans, Jillian Garvey, Denis Gojak, Susan Lawrence and Linda Young. Susan Bridekirk did a splendid subeditorial job on the text.

We also appreciate the support of the Australasian Society of Historical Archaeology for agreeing to publish this book in the Society’s Monograph Series.
This is a book about an extraordinary archaeological collection that represents a globally significant testimony to the lives of convicts, and women both immigrant and destitute, who came to Australia during the 19th century. The collection was excavated in 1980 and 1981 at the site of Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks. Of the 113,606 individual items found, 70% (80,037) were retrieved from under the floorboards of the second and third floors of the main Barracks building, and this book presents the analysis of this larger proportion of the total assemblage. It is the largest, most comprehensive, and best-preserved archaeological assemblage derived from any 19th-century institution in the world.

Concealed for up to 160 years in the cavities between floorboards and ceilings, this underfloor assemblage is of world significance because it is a unique archaeological record of institutional confinement, especially of women. Of course there are other prisons and asylums scattered around the globe, but none have the richness, variety and scale of the Hyde Park Barracks assemblage. The dry conditions preserved a wide range of fragile materials, such as paper, textiles and other organic products that rarely occur in regular subsurface archaeological contexts.

This book demonstrates one of the great strengths of historical archaeology and the fundamentals of its fascination — we know when this underfloor assemblage was created and who made it. And we can link the artefacts to the occupants of the buildings.

The underfloor assemblage dates specifically to the 40 year period, 1848–1886, during which a female Immigration Depot and a Government Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women occupied the second and third floors of the Barracks. While this means that there were thousands of women who lived on these floors at one time or another, for different periods of time, from days to years, there was also one woman, and her family, who lived there the longest of them all. And for 24 years she had a significant impact on the residents — the one time matron of both of these government institutions — Lucy Applewhaite-Hicks.

Most of the items in the collection from under the floorboards were used by and belonged to working-class women: young female migrants, Irish orphans, sick and old destitute women, many of whose names we will never know, and women for whom we have few, or no historical records. Some of the women can be identified, some are described in newspapers and government reports, and by evangelical visitors and doctors. So while there are accounts of their public lives, the assemblage gives us some evidence of their private lives in the depot and asylum. In some cases the analysis of the assemblage provides us with evidence for an alternative view of the dire Dickensian institution — and one that was more humane. This makes the collection even more special — for here is in many cases the only record we have of their lives at the Barracks. Many of these women were the ancestors of modern Australians.

Some of them had been convicts, some migrated to Australia as prospective wives and mothers — as the new colony’s ‘life blood’. But all of them, in some way or another, participated in the founding of a new nation. Others became outsiders — the old and sick who had nowhere else to go and no one else to care for them, but they had the colonial government’s alternative to the Victorian institution or workhouse — the Asylum.

As an employee, a government appointment and a middle-class woman there are many descriptions of Matron Lucy Applewhaite-Hicks, and many historical records in which she appears. In some her opinions are recorded verbatim, in others she is described by others and castigated. She was a public person. But as with the working-class women from the depot and asylum, analysis of the underfloor assemblage, and the documentary records, provides us with evidence for an alternative view of her, and with new evidence of her private and family life.