



MENTAL HEALTH MUSEUM  
OF WA INC

## Researching Your Family History in Western Australia through Mental Health Records

Many people are now tracing their family history and finding relatives who were at one time patients in a mental hospital in Western Australia, or who worked there as staff. It can be surprising or even traumatic to discover this, especially if the relative was not discussed in the family for decades.

It's important to remember that many admissions to mental facilities, especially in the early twentieth century, were not what we would consider today to be 'mentally ill'. Instead, they were often people suffering from a physical illness (such as tertiary syphilis, epilepsy or chronic infections) which could make their behaviour problematic. Many were aged and experiencing dementia, or were children with congenital developmental disabilities of various kinds. Some people were certified because they were homosexual, and others were simply very poor and had no other family to care for them when they became ill.

Our ways of thinking about mental illness have changed a great deal, and many of these physical illnesses are now treatable. Many other mental health problems can now be managed by different services. There are many resources available to people who want to find out more about their relatives' diagnosis and their time in the mental health system.

### **Tracing former patients**

#### **State Records Office of Western Australia**

The SRO is located on the ground floor of the Alexander Library building, Perth (near the Art Gallery). It holds many records for Fremantle Lunatic Asylum (1865-1909), Claremont Hospital for the Insane/Claremont Mental Hospital (1909-1972), Heathcote (1929-1997) and other WA mental institutions like Whitby Falls, Lemnos and Green Place.

Many of these records are restricted, especially those less than 100 years old, and you need to obtain permission from the WA Department of Health to see them. See the websites below for more information, or contact the Office directly via [sro@sro.wa.gov.au](mailto:sro@sro.wa.gov.au) or (08) 9427 3360, or by post at: State Records Office, Perth Cultural Centre, Perth WA 6000.

*Accessing Restricted Records at SRO:*

<http://www.sro.wa.gov.au/community/restrictedaccess.asp>

SRO AEON database:

<http://aeon.sro.wa.gov.au/Investigator/investigator.htm>

**Please collect as much information as possible about your relative before you contact SROWA.**

**Please also note that due to extensive destruction of old patient records in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, individual case notes may no longer be extant.**

### **WA Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages**

Under 'Family History', this website offers searchable indexes of WA births, deaths and marriages, which can be very helpful – this can give you a date of birth and full name of a relative, and also tell you if they married or not. Deaths at Claremont Hospital were registered in the Claremont district.

<http://www.bdm.dotag.wa.gov.au/default.aspx>

If your relative was born interstate: there are online resources that can help you at:

<http://australia.gov.au/topics/law-and-justice/births-deaths-and-marriages-registries>

### **WA Metropolitan Cemeteries Board, 1899 - present**

This site can help you to find out a person's full name and approximate age when they died. Many destitute patients, or those with no family, were buried directly at Karrakatta Cemetery, close to Claremont Hospital. Those with a family able to provide for them were sometimes buried in other cemeteries such as Fremantle.

Not all graves are still marked, but it is possible to find a gravesite by using the interactive website. The colour maps of each cemetery will help you to locate the final resting place of a relative.

<http://www.mcb.wa.gov.au/ResearchAndGenealogy/Search.aspx>

### **WA Post Office Directories, 1893-1949**

These invaluable resources have recently been digitised, and can be searched by year. If you want to find where a specific person lived, look in the Alphabetical Directory for each year, which will often give their address and sometimes their occupation.

[http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/find/guides/wa\\_history/post\\_office\\_directories](http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/find/guides/wa_history/post_office_directories)

### **Graylands Hospital**

Graylands holds records for patients admitted to Claremont Mental Hospital from 1903. Many earlier records have been destroyed, but in most cases the admissions papers for the patients have survived and are preserved on microfilm. Case notes for patients at Claremont were very scanty, and it is not unusual to find up to 25 years' observations on only one or two pages.

If you are a relative of a patient, you may be able to access some of these under the Freedom of Information Act 1992 by following the process set in place for this. You are

welcome to contact the Area Freedom of Information Coordinator, North Metropolitan Area Health Service Mental Health, to make further inquiries.

**Please collect as much information as possible about your relative before you contact the Hospital.**

**Please also note that due to extensive destruction of old patient records in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, individual case notes may no longer be extant.**

**Contact:** Graylands Switchboard (08) 9347 6600.

FOI application forms are also available for collection at Fitzroy House, Graylands Hospital.

### **Tracing Former Staff**

It is more difficult to find information on former staff members, especially male nursing staff. Before 1906, WA's *Blue Books* and *Public Service Lists* (you can find these at the **State Library of Western Australia**, Alexander Library building, Perth) listed all public service employees, including nurses and attendants, but after 1906 nursing staff in WA's hospitals were not listed due to the specialised nature of their work. Only senior medical and nursing staff are listed after 1906.

#### **Mental Health Museum of WA Inc**

The Mental Health Museum of WA, Inc, is located in Shaw House, Graylands Hospital. It has a collection of archival material which includes the following registers:

- *Claremont Female Staff Movements* 1901-1953
- *Register of Mental Nursing Certificates*, 1905-1960s – male and female staff

These may help you to trace a relative who was a staff member at Claremont. If you wish to access these registers, please contact the Museum.

**Contact:** Sarah Howell, (08) 9347 6411,

[Sarah.Howell@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:Sarah.Howell@health.wa.gov.au)

See above also for the **State Records Office of Western Australia** and **WA Post Office Directories, 1893-1949**.

### **More general resources**

#### **National Archives of Australia**

These records may contain information on Repatriation Commission patients (former servicemen and women invalided with mental problems), and also on overseas-born mental patients who were later deported from Australia.

<http://www.naa.gov.au/> - go to 'Search the Collection'

#### **National Library of Australia TROVE**

The Digitised Newspapers collection is particularly helpful in finding information about individuals. You can restrict your search to Western Australian newspapers if you wish.

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

### **Police Gazette of Western Australia, 1876-1900**

This resource often mentions 'lunatics' and can be useful for other family history research.

[http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/find/wa\\_resources/police\\_gazettes](http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/find/wa_resources/police_gazettes)

### **State Library of Western Australia**

This library has extensive genealogical resources and an online catalogue: try searching for 'Graylands' and 'Claremont Mental Hospital'. The J S Battye Library, on the 3rd floor, is devoted exclusively to Western Australian history.

<http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/>

### **Find and Connect Project**

This national project has been set up to help former institutionalised children to trace their records and to find out more about the institutions in which they lived. It is also a useful resource for everyone with an interests in the history of out-of-home care in Australia.

<http://www.findandconnect.gov.au>

### **Tuart Place**

This is a Lotterywest-funded pilot project, based at 24 High Street Fremantle, to provide assistance to people who experienced out-of-home care during childhood.

24 High Street  
Fremantle WA 6160  
Phone (08) 6140 2380  
Email [admin@tuartplace.org](mailto:admin@tuartplace.org)

The **Mental Health Museum of WA Inc** was established by volunteer retired nurses in 1991.

At the Mental Health Museum, you will find memorabilia relating to many Western Australians who lived and worked in mental health settings. Our photographs, records and artefacts provide a fascinating glimpse of the past as well as a potential source of information for professional researchers. Visits from school groups, interested individuals and those wanting to learn more about family history are all welcome.

**Location:** Shaw House, Graylands Hospital campus, Brockway Road, Mount Claremont WA 6010

**Public Transport:** Perth: Bus route **27** or **28**

Train Station: **Karrakatta** (1km - down Quintilian St to Camellia Ave entrance) or **Loch St** (1.5km down Brockway Road).

***Display Room opening hours in 2012:***

**First Wednesday** of every month

**10.00am – 12 noon.**

Visits for groups of more than 10 people must be pre-booked, and can be arranged for other times.

Admission is by **gold coin donation**.

**Display Room tours: Philippa Martyr**

**(08) 9347 6705**

[Philippa.Martyr@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:Philippa.Martyr@health.wa.gov.au)

For more information about the Museum please contact:

**Sarah Howell, Chair, Museum Committee**

(08) 9347 6411

[Sarah.Howell@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:Sarah.Howell@health.wa.gov.au)

**Mrs P Redfern, Treasurer (08) 9339 4578**

**Mr Cyril Urlings (08) 9388 3331**