

QUEEN VICTORIA MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

CHS 78

LAUNCESTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETY COLLECTION

Social Services, Launceston

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INTRODUCTION

The Launceston Benevolent Society was formed in 1834 to relieve the distress of those in need. The Colonial Government took care of the convict population, however free emigrants and those free by servitude were left to fall back on their own resources. Some churches helped those in need within their congregations, but for others and those without relatives to help them, it was necessary to rely on the charity of individuals.

The Launceston Benevolent Society was funded by voluntary subscriptions, donations and legacies. Committee members visited those requiring help and provided food and clothing. In 1836 an Asylum, known as the Benevolent Society's House, was established. A large number of recipients of the Society's aid required medical assistance. Doctors offered their services gratuitously, but the Society had to pay for medicines and hospital expenses. The last mention of the Society's House was in the *Launceston Advertiser* on 1 February 1838, about when the Society ceased to operate.

The Launceston Benevolent Society was formed a second time in 1845, with all relief to take the form of goods and services unless otherwise authorised by the managing committee at its weekly meetings. Limited resources meant that only the most urgent cases could be helped. After St John's Hospital opened in 1845, the secretary was authorised to subscribe to the hospital from time to time. Early in 1852 permission was given to send all pauper patients to the Colonial Hospital, but by 1857/58 the Society had once again ceased to operate.

The Society reformed in 1858 and in 1861 received a grant from the Government. That year a paid officer was appointed to ensure that relief was only given to those in genuine need.

In 1895 the Society took control of the Launceston Invalid Depot from the Government and the Depot's name was changed to the Launceston Benevolent Asylum. The Depot, in the former military barracks, had been established 1868 to house aged and destitute males. Due to lack of accommodation, females were housed in the nearby goal. The Society relinquished control of the Asylum in 1904, but its office remained at the Paterson Street site. In November 1912 the City Council requested that the office be removed to enable improvements to be carried out at Royal Park. Land in King's Way was purchased the following year, plans were prepared by architect Thomas Tandy and the new office, built by F W Patterson, was completed in 1914. An additional storey was added to the office in 1928, to provide accommodation for the Visiting Sister employed by the Society. Mr Tandy was again the architect and Mr Patterson the builder. A Lady Visitor had been appointed in November 1924, her title changed to Visiting Sister some two months later. The position of Sister was last mentioned in the 30th June 1966 annual report.

The Society administered the Launceston Alms Houses Trust and the Trust's records were stored separately in a metal box when the records were received. The Trust was established in 1879 to erect *sufficient Buildings and accommodation for the aged poor of the higher class, in Northern Tasmania, who are in reduced circumstances...* Henry Reed donated land in Upper High Street, and although there was space for twelve alms houses, only two were built. In 1900, according to the *Cyclopedia of Tasmania*, these housed four aged occupants. The buildings became

dilapidated, the elevated site found to be unsuitable for elderly people, and in 1908 Court permission was obtained to sell the property. It was intended to acquire a more suitable site in the lower part of the city, however this did not eventuate and interest accrued on the invested proceeds. Over the years financial aid was granted to a small number of deserving cases. By 1970 the Launceston Benevolent Society, the custodian of the Trust, saw the necessity for the provision of homes for the aged and felt the Trust money should be used for this purpose. In 1978 a Court order allowed the Trust's funds to be handed over to the United Protestant Association of Tasmania Inc. which erected two units at their Homes for the Aged on the Bass Highway at Prospect, thus fulfilling the original aim of the Trust.

The Launceston Benevolent Society, with premises still at 4 Kingsway in 2004, is the oldest welfare agency in Australia. The Society, a beneficiary of the *Examiner* newspaper Empty Stocking and Winter Relief appeals, continues to help alleviate the material hardship suffered by those in need in Launceston and surrounding districts.

The collection was donated to the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in March 2003.

1.Minutes of Meetings

1/1	Launceston Invalid Depot/ Launceston Benevolent Asylum, minutes of meetings of Board of Management (name changed to Launceston Benevolent Asylum 15 July 1895, Board wound up 26 April 1904)	1895-1904
1/2	Launceston Benevolent Society, minutes of meetings of Board of Management	1909-1918
1/3	Minutes of meetings of Board of Management	1918-1931
1/4	Minutes of meetings of Board of Management	1931-1958
1/5	Minutes of meetings of Board of Management	1958-1983
1/6	Minutes of meetings of Committee of Management	1983-1992
1/7	Minutes of meetings of Ladies Auxiliary Committee	1934-1940
1/8	Agenda papers Sept, Oct, Nov.1968, June 1969, August 1974-May 1982, July 1987-Nov. 1988	1968-1988

2.Annual Reports

2/1	Annual reports 1976, 1978, 1979, 1987, 1988, 1995	1976-1995
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3.Financial Records

3/1	Launceston Invalid Depot/Benevolent Asylum, cash book	1895-1904
3/2	Launceston Benevolent Society, cash book	1925-1966
3/3	Cash book	1929-1969
3/4	Cash payments book	1969-1991

4.Correspondence

4/1	Launceston Benevolent Society, letterbook	1894-1909
4/2	Letterbook	1909-1919
4/3	Inward correspondence	1967-1969
4/4	Outward correspondence	1967-1969

4/5	Inward correspondence	1974-1977
4/6	Outward correspondence	1974-1977
4/7	Inward correspondence	1978-1979
4/8	Outward correspondence	1978-1979
4/9	Inward correspondence	1980-1982
4/10	Outward correspondence	1980-1982
4/11	Inward correspondence	1987-1988
4/12	Outward correspondence	1987-1989

5. Miscellaneous Records

5/1	Launceston Benevolent Society, relief book (gives names of recipients)	1897-1924
5/2	Record of receipts book	1924-1944
5/3	Fuel supply book	1921-1934
5/4	Record of interviews book	1971-1986
5/5	Launceston Benevolent Society, list of people assisted	1968
5/6	Copies of legal documents relating to the will of Marjorie Alice Tyson	1976
5/7	Confidential letter to Committee members	1980

6. Launceston Alms Houses Trust

6/1	Launceston Alms Houses, extract from Trust Deed, pasted on cardboard	1879
6/2	Minutes of meetings of Trustees, includes Declaration of Trust, 5/6/1879	1921-1941
6/3	Alms Houses Trust, minutes of meetings of Trustees	1942-1972
6/4	Launceston Alms Houses Trust, annual reports	1957-1961

6/5	Balance sheets	1924-1980
6/6	Launceston Alms Houses Fund, cash book (gives names of recipients)	1930-1967
6/7	Launceston Alms Houses Trust, correspondence (includes copies of legal documents etc)	1908-1978
6/8	Correspondence	1922-1968
6/9	Applications for relief	1955-1963

OTHER SOURCES

Joan Brown, *'Poverty is not a crime': social services in Tasmania 1803-1900*, Hobart, 1972

Shayne Breen, 'Outdoor poor relief in Launceston 1860-1880', Tasmanian Historical Research Association, *Papers and Proceedings* vol. 38, no. 1, March 1991

Anne Bartlett, 'John Tevelein and the Benevolent Society', Launceston Historical Society, *Papers and Proceedings* vol. 14, 2002

Walch's *Tasmanian Almanac*, entries for the Launceston Benevolent Society from 1863, also entries for Alms Houses, Launceston, from 1880 for some years,

Cyclopedia of Tasmania (Hobart, 1900) vol. 2, p. 47, entries for Benevolent Society and Alms Houses