Willow Court

DOCUMENTATION (FACTS, DATES, ETC)

COLOUR (TESTIMONIES, ATMOSPHERES)

TIMELINE (HISTORIC (PRE 2000) REDEVELOPMENT (POST 2000)

SOURCES:

1. Willow Court Historic Group
2. Facebook Group – contact (03) 6261 5050
3. Newnorfolk.org –

“ 'Willow Court' is a superb old stone building which was built as a military hospital in 1830-31 by Major Roger Kelsall. Only one room wide, with wide verandahs and gabled two storey sections at the corners and in the centre, Willow Court was originally conceived by Governor Arthur as a location where invalid convicts could be housed.  
  
It was named 'Willow Court' because Lady Franklin planted a willow in the courtyard. Willow Court is part of the former Royal Derwent Hospital and is the oldest mental hospital in Australia on its original site. It is a remarkable and simple building of great elegance and character. “

OLGA - The first photo was taken around 1900 and is described as the Boys Cottage Hospital.    The second photo shows Olga as she appears today.   She is currently being refurbished as a 300 hundred seat restaurant as part of the Willow Court restoration.

NURSES HOME - Now neglected and overgrown, this building will soon be completely refurbished and opened as 5 star accommodation.

LYPRENNY - I have been told that Lyprenny was built in the 1970s and was revolutionary for its time, in its use of glass to take advantage of the winter sun.   This building will be converted into 1 bedroom holiday units.

LACHLAN - Lachlan has now been converted into luxury retirement units.  
  
ALCHARINGA - the building which is now Willow Court Budget Accommodation and the Nosh Pit  
  
BARRACKS AND C WARD - to be made into a museum?

1. Meanjin Quarterly (<https://meanjin.com.au/memoir/willow-court/>)

“Willow Court” by Tracey Clark

“In the heart of the sleepy Tasmanian town of New Norfolk, half an hour’s drive out of Hobart, lies the Willow Court Precinct. As you wander down the tree-lined streets of the township, the crumbling buildings of Willow Court come slowly into view. On the banks of the Lachlan River, right next door to the new supermarket complex with its perfectly rendered frontage, shiny signs and sparkling clean windows, sit three of the saddest, loneliest-looking buildings you’re ever likely to see. Not a single shard of glass can be found in any of the windows of the multistorey structures. The tallest of the three, Derwent House, sits at the front, facing the road, with an enormous gaping hole in its side, revealing a glimpse of the emptiness that lies within. Graffiti covers the internal and external walls. It looks like something from a horror movie, a scene from the apocalypse. These particular buildings are fenced off, but this is only a small part of an incredible complex that holds so much of Tasmania’s history.

On the other side of the road a sign on the gate that blocks the driveway proclaims ‘Willow Court: Gate opens 10–4’. Inside, the sense of abandonment and despair increases, despite the handful of people who walk through the courtyard. The gardens are overgrown and covered in rotting leaf litter. The carcasses of old vehicles clutter the yard haphazardly, their original paint colours peeking through the burnt orange rust to form a patchwork of colour. The buildings that surround the circular driveway are in only slightly better condition than those across the road. At least these do still have their windows, mostly. Some have been converted into antique shops and one advertises itself as a café. The rest are closed off, inaccessible to the public, hiding the secrets of the past behind locked doors. At the back of a cluster of tired-looking buildings a woman kneels in a garden bed in the centre of a small roundabout, trying her best to resurrect what was once maybe a nice space and is now just barren dirt. Through a dusty window a lonely figure can be seen sleeping on the dirt-covered floor of an empty room.

… the Tasmanian Government closed this place in 2000, after 173 years of operation as the Royal Derwent Hospital, the state’s primary facility for the treatment of the mentally ill and insane.

The Royal Derwent Hospital began its long and sad life in 1827 as the New Norfolk Lunatic Asylum, an invalid barracks for convicts and the insane in Van Diemen’s Land. Only 35 kilometres from Hobart Town, tucked away in the town of New Norfolk, it was perfectly located for keeping the unsavoury characters away from the free settlers. The first invalid was admitted to the barracks in June 1827. A dedicated ward was built for ‘lunatics’ two years later, and began receiving admissions in April 1829. It was a further nine months before the first female patient was admitted to the lunatic ward, when Irish woman Judith Chambers arrived in January 1830.

In 1832, Lieutenant-Governor Arthur ordered the removal of invalids from the facility, and concentrated the facility’s services on the treatment of the mentally ill and insane. He commissioned a new set of buildings, which were completed in 1834, and increased the capacity of the facility to 310 inmates. In 1855 the facility was transferred from imperial to colonial ownership and, due to the closure of many of the penal institutions around Van Diemen’s Land, the number of patients rose dramatically. By the end of the nineteenth century, almost 400 patients were housed in the facility that was built to hold only 310.

By the time Annie Amos arrived in 1913, not a lot had changed. For many years the hospital was very different to what we think of as a healthcare facility today, and was staffed mostly by convicts and ex-convicts. The only free staff were the medical officer and the matron. There was very little understanding in the nineteenth century of mental illness or what caused it, and doctors relied on their moral conclusions and social norms to diagnose the symptoms they were presented with. Behaviour was often referred to as ‘sinful’, and the blanket term ‘lunatic’ featured in many of the patient files. Specialist training for the staff didn’t begin until 1919, and medical officers commonly brought with them their own prejudices

In the asylum, patients were classified according to the severity of their insanity, and were then allocated tasks that would occupy and, more importantly, discipline their minds. Those who behaved were granted time in the gardens for leisure and reflection, but for those who failed to comply with the instructions of the matron or the medical staff the treatment was harsh, and confinement in their dark, squalid cells was inevitable. This was a time before anti-depressants or antipsychotics had been developed, and the goal of treatment was either to subdue the patient enough to integrate them back into society or keep them locked up and out of harm’s way. Restraints were a popular measure, and the use of handcuffs and straightjackets was common practice. For those patients who required even more restraint, there were barred crib beds, torturous coffin-like wooden boxes with bars on all four sides that were just large enough for the patient to fit inside without allowing any movement towards convicts and the poor, allowing these to influence the care their patients received.

Many have spoken out in recent years to say that there was a gross disempowerment of the patients as well as the nurses, who were doing the best they could with a horribly outdated facility and barbaric policies. Today mental health advocates are calling for a formal apology to former patients for the conditions they lived under and the abuse they received. This call has so far gone unanswered.

In the 1980s a global push began to investigate the need to deinstitutionalise mental health patients.

As this model gained popularity around the world, facilities such as the Royal Derwent Hospital began to close their doors. During the 1990s a number of wards were closed as treatments were transferred from inpatient to outpatient facilities, and dedicated short-term psychiatric wards were established in the Launceston General and Royal Hobart hospitals. In Australia, Tasmania led the way and became the first state to deinstitutionalise all of the patients at the Royal Derwent Hospital in November 2000.”

1. Willow Court Project

Newspaper snippets as well as paranormal videos of the complex at night

19th Jan 2021 – [LEASED- Barracks Building finally leased to Salamanca Arts Centre](https://willowcourtproject.com/2021/01/19/leased-barracks-building-finally-leased-to-salamanca-arts/)

1. Derwent Valley Council
   1. Documents (<https://www.derwentvalley.tas.gov.au/council-documents/willow-court-documents>)

TIMELINE

In January 2021, Derwent Valley Arts in partnership with Salamanca Arts Centre, were successful at obtaining a lease from the Derwent Valley Council for the Barracks building in Willow Court. We are now thrilled to be in the process of transforming the building into an Arts Centre for the community. (derwentvalley.arts)

PUBLICATIONS

Troubled Asylum by Ralph W Gowlland

Renovating Madness  by Liz McQuilkin and Karen Knight

A Space of Their Own by Susan Piddock (Chapter 8)

COLOUR

https://www.tendays.org.au/intimate-epics/