

Finding the Unexpected: Nooks and Crannies at PROV

Shauna Hicks

**Presented at the Victorian Association of Family History Organisations
Conference, Mildura 2004**

Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) is the archival authority of Victoria and holds material dating from 1836 onwards. To start with, *Private Lives Public Records* (PROV, 2003) is the best publication to look at when first approaching PROV for family history research as it will give you all the basic resources. But what happens when you want to find out more about the lives of your ancestors? This paper details a number of not so widely known, or used, resources at PROV in the following areas – pre 1840 records, death related records, aliens, the poor and the sick, military and patriotic sources, and employee records.

Historical Records of Victoria

This is a publication which is available in libraries as well as the Reading Rooms at PROV. The Foundation Series of *Historical Records of Australia*, Volumes 1-7 reproduces every available document that survives from the period 1835-1840. There is a cumulative index to the seven volumes and this is an essential reference tool for anyone with early Victorian ancestors.

For those not familiar with the series the volumes are as follows:

- Vol 1 - Beginnings of Permanent Government
- Vol 2A - The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839
- Vol 2B - Aborigines and Protectors 1838-1839
- Vol 3 - The Early Development of Melbourne 1836-1839
- Vol 4 - Communications, Trade and Transport 1836-1839
- Vol 5 - Surveyors' Problems and Achievements 1836-1839
- Vol 6 - The Crown, the Land and the Squatter 1835-1840
- Vol 7 - Public Finance of Port Phillip 1836-1840
- Vol 8 - Cumulative Index

Death Related Records

Most family historians will be familiar with researching inquests as these have been indexed. The index is in two parts – the first covers 1840-1959 and is on microfiche and the second part 1960–1988 is in hard copy. There is also a CD ROM Index to Inquests 1840-c.1985 available in the Reading Rooms and also at various other libraries and genealogical societies.

Less commonly known is a range of similar sources relating to deceased persons. These records include series such as Body Cards, Post Mortem Registers, and Fire Inquests.

Body Cards

Indexes start in 1959 and are in yearly indexes from then on (VPRS 5524). There are two other indexes to related documents – Melbourne Admission Index 1959–1960 (VPRS

7663) and Register of Deaths Reported to Melbourne Coroner 1970–1983 (VPRS 7658). The indexes only show the name of the deceased and the body card number.

Body cards (VPRS 10010) are an official death record and contain all the relevant supporting documentation that a coroner used when investigating a death. Before June 1986 body cards relate to deceased persons received at the Melbourne Coroner's Court. After June 1986 they apply to every reportable death in Victoria.

The term body card actually refers to the cardboard file which contains the following documents: police report on the death; autopsy report; affidavit and other statements of identification of the deceased; a copy of the Body Admission Sheet; correspondence received from next of kin, solicitors or other interested parties; results of tests for drugs, blood alcohol or carbon monoxide; deposition from hospital doctor; ambulance admission document; and sometimes copies of documents in the inquest file and sometimes photographs. A warning notice may be attached if the photographs are disturbing.

Post Mortem Registers

Post mortem registers 1908–1959 (VPRS 7432) is a series of records of post mortems on inmates from Kew Asylum and Children's Cottages, Kew. They are arranged chronologically by date of post mortem and the names of patients and age at death is recorded. The earlier registers give the recent care history of the patient and a pathology report.

Fire Inquests

Fire inquest deposition files 1858–1940 (VPRS 407) have been indexed by subject and place and this index is available in both the North Melbourne and Ballarat Reading Rooms. Inquests conducted into the causes of fire could be held irrespective of whether or not a death occurred, and damage to or destruction of property could be investigated. All files contain at a minimum level an inquisition form, a number of depositions and a cover sheet noting the subject, date and place of inquest. They may also include items of documentary evidence and exhibits, police reports, payment of any fees and recognizances bonding witnesses to appear at trial in cases of arson.

Aliens, The Poor and The Sick

This section of the paper looks at people who arrived in Victoria from places other than the United Kingdom; at people who fell upon hard financial times and also at those who entered lunatic asylums for whatever reason.

Naturalisation

The card index originally compiled from the Chief Secretary's Office (VPRS 1190) is now on four rolls of microfilm (VPRS 4396) in the Reading Rooms. The index covers the period 1851-1900 and gives the following information: surname, forenames, occupation, age, address, place of birth and date of issue of the certificate. National Archives of Australia now have all the relevant papers and it is simply a matter of requesting the records from them. Typical documents in a file may include certificate of naturalization,

memorial of application, notification, oath of allegiance, referee letter, and statement of reason for application.

Insolvency

Ancestors unable to pay their debts may have been declared bankrupt and it may be possible to trace their insolvency records. Between 1842–1870 insolvency was in the jurisdiction of the Chief Commissioner and Commissioners of Insolvent Estates (Supreme Court). From 1871 it became the responsibility of the Melbourne Court of Insolvency and various district courts of insolvency. In 1924 it became a Commonwealth responsibility.

Card indexes to some insolvency records are available in the Reading Rooms.

- Index to VPRS 815 Geelong Insolvency Court (1853–1928). Each card lists the individual's names, their case number and year.
- Index to VPRS 75 Certificates of Discharge (Melbourne Court of Insolvency) 1848–1875. Each card lists the individual's name, occupation or trade, case number and year.

There is an overall General Index to Melbourne Insolvencies 1842 –1928 (VPRS 758). This provides access into the following series of records:

- VPRS 762 Deeds Under 1871 Insolvency Act 1871–1890. Files may include list and particulars of debts, details of property and a balance sheet.
- VPRS 765 Schedules Under the Insolvency Act 1890–1915. Files may include insolvent's statement, statement of assets and receipts, statement of disbursements and unrealised estate, schedules and order of appointment for certificate of discharge.
- VPRS 10246 Deeds Under 1915 Insolvency Act 1915–1928. Files were created to document the process of declaring a person insolvent in the Melbourne and metropolitan area.

Other useful records include:

VPRS 757 Register of Insolvencies 1871–1915 if the year a person was declared insolvent is known and VPRS 8750 Insolvency Register 1883–1898 (self-indexed).

Lunacy

A useful starting point is VPRS 6768 Alphabetical Register of Lunatics 1875–1906 (microfilm copy of VPRS 1702). Information includes patient's name and registration number, name of asylum (institution), date of admission, rate of payments, date of discharge or death. Males are listed on the left-hand page of the register and females on the right-hand page. From this register you may be able to locate the patient's records from the relevant asylum or institution. Keyword searches of Archives@Victoria using the following terms - lunatic (176 hits), lunatics (69 hits) and lunacy (196 hits) will reveal numerous series that may be of interest.

There is also a typed microfiche index (2 fiche) to the Kew Asylum Case Books 1871-1912 produced by Marion Button in 1997 which is alphabetically arranged by surname of

patient and numerically. References direct the user to the series, unit and page number of these casebooks in VPRS series 7397, 7398, 7419 and 7420.

Military Related Records

This section highlights some interesting records from World War One and records related to patriotic activities in both the First and Second World Wars.

1916 exemptions

Under the Commonwealth Conscription Act 1916 and the War Service Regulations 1916 responsibility was delegated to the State Court of Petty Sessions to hear applications for exemption from military service on allowable grounds.

On 28 October 1916 the conscription referendum was lost by the Commonwealth Government but it was still practice for required persons to serve in the Citizen Forces for service within the Commonwealth.

Automatic exemptions were granted to persons who were reported by medical authorities as unfit for any naval or military service whatsoever; all members and officers of both the Commonwealth and State Parliaments; Judges of Federal and State Courts, the police, stipendiary or special magistrates of both Commonwealth and State; Ministers of religion; persons employed in the police or prison services of either the Commonwealth or State; persons employed in lighthouses; persons employed as medical practitioners or nurses in public hospitals; persons who are not substantially of European origin or descent; persons whose conscientious beliefs do not allow them to bear arms and persons employed by any Regulations or Proclamation.

Exemptions could be granted for a number of other reasons – it is expedient that the man should be engaged in his usual employment; that he be engaged in other work in which he wishes to be engaged; if the man is being educated or trained that he continue to be; that serious hardship would ensue owing to his exceptional domestic financial obligations; that the man is the sole support of aged parents or a widowed mother, or orphan brothers and sisters under the age of 16 years; that he is the sole remaining son or one of the remaining sons of a family whose sons one half at the least have enlisted prior to 2 October 1916; that the man is the only son of a family; or that the man is not a natural born or naturalised British subject. Applications for exemption were forwarded to the Court within the military sub-district in which the applicant lived.

There are two main series of records – Registers of applications for exemption from military service and Applications for exemptions from military service. The records are usually in chronological order. The application files mainly consist of a pro-forma application detailing the name of the applicant, the reason for the application and the decision. Supporting documentation includes statutory declarations and letters. Notices of appeal from the decisions are also attached to some files. Records in the series include the original applications for exemption and the duplicates of Certificates of Exemption granted which give the reason for the decision. Records are held for the following districts – Bright, Corangamite, Corryong, Dromana, Fitzroy, Inglewood, Malvern, Numurkal, Rushworth, St Kilda, and Warburton.

Patriotic Records

A keyword search of Archives@Victoria reveals 6 references to series and 27 references to items in the collection. The series include:

VPRS 7838 Patriotic Fund Files 1940-1946.

The records of the South Melbourne Patriotic Fund which was established in 1939 and under the provisions of the Patriotic Fund Act (1939) it was authorised by the Patriotic Funds Council of Victoria. The series includes inward and outward correspondence, fund schemes and activities, reports, lists and addresses of comfort workers, minutes of meetings of the Patriotic Fund, index of 'Business Employees' Contributory Scheme', receipts and newspaper cuttings. (19 units)

VPRS 7837 Patriotic Fund Correspondence Unit: Nominal Files (RAAF Servicemen) 1940-1946.

These files were created by the City of South Melbourne in relation to the wartime activities of the South Melbourne Patriotic Fund. Files are arranged in alphabetical sequence by surname and contain names and personal details of Australian RAAF servicemen, inwards and outwards correspondence with servicemen and next of kin and newspaper cuttings and newspaper photographs of servicemen. (4 units)

VPRS 7836 Patriotic Fund Correspondence Unit: Nominal Files (Army Servicemen) 1940-1945.

These files were created by the City of South Melbourne in relation to the wartime activities of the South Melbourne Patriotic Fund. Files are arranged in alphabetical sequence by surname and contain names and personal details of Australian Army servicemen, inwards and outwards correspondence with servicemen and next of kin and newspaper cuttings and newspaper photographs of servicemen. (10 units)

VPRS 7915 Minutes of the Essendon River League and Patriotic Funds Committee (Reserialised as VPRS 7916/P1, unit 44).

VPRS 7916 Committee Minutes 1907-1976 - Units 44-45 Charitable and Patriotic 1907-1942.

This series contains, amongst other committee records, minutes of meetings of the Essendon River League Committee, also known as the Patriotic Carnival Committee. The committee organised an annual fete and carnival in Essendon Municipality and the minutes are largely informal and record discussions and decisions on the arrangements made for stalls, amusements and activities. (2 units – 1907-1924 and 1926-1942).

VPRS 9577 Committee Minutes 1881-1940.

This series consists, amongst other committee records, minutes of meetings of the Kerang Patriotic League, 1939-1940 (1 unit). Other committees in this series include Kerang Rabbit Committee (1881-1884); Shire of Swan Hill 1888-1889; Koondrook Tramway Committee (1888-1889); Local Board of Health (1888-

1889); Public Meetings (1888-1889) and Ordinary Meetings (1888-1889) (3 units).

Employee Records

While looking at the patriotic records the following employee records were also noted.

VPRS 7803 Inward Correspondence 1914-1920.

This series consists of the inwards correspondence registers of the Hawthorn Tramway Trust, later absorbed into the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramway Board. Matters found in the correspondence include general inquiries from the public, appointments and resignations, employees, unions and councils, patriotic causes and fund raising, inspector's reports, contracts and tenders, pamphlets from suppliers, matters of procedure and policy. The correspondence is arranged chronologically with an alphabetical index in each volume arranged under correspondent's name (4 units). Related correspondence from the Trust can be found in VPRS 7804 Outward Letter Books 1914-1920 (2 units).

VPRS 9824 Correspondence Files (Flinders Unit Patriotic Society) 1941-1945.

The correspondence arranged in alphabetical order by surname only covers the letters from F to K and was written by members of the armed forces during WWII who were former SEC employees. It is addressed to the Flinders Unit Patriotic Society and extracts were published in *Pals News*, a SECV magazine designed to keep both those on the home front and in the armed forces informed of SEC activities and each other (1 unit).

Ballarat List of Holdings

This is a staff compiled listing of records at the Ballarat Archives Centre giving the agency name and number, series title with series number and consignment number, date range, quantity and access status. This is an interim finding aid to the holdings until all series can be entered into Archives@Victoria. Copies are located in the Ballarat Reading Room and the North Melbourne Reading Room.

Conclusion

This paper gives a brief insight into some lesser-known, but still interesting, records held by Public Record Office Victoria. Keyword searching of Archives@Victoria can throw up similar intriguing references that may be well worth while following up on that rainy day! Remember that Archives@Victoria is still being populated with data and during 2004 there will be an additional focus on data population to increase the amount of material available for research. Updates will be published in *rEsearch* our free online e-mail newsletter, also available on our website <http://www.prov.vic.gov.au>.

Shauna Hicks
VAFHO Conference, Mildura 2004