Lunatic Asylums in Tasmania – Buildings


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A Convict Establishment - The Invalid Hospital

The New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane was not a purpose built lunatic asylum in the same way as the South Australian asylums rather it was to grow out of the need to provide for the insane among the convict invalids. The town of New Norfolk was located 22 miles from what was to become the capital of Tasmania, Hobart Town. Situated on the river Derwent, the town was accessible by boat and by road. In 1827 it was decided to use the invalid barracks at New Norfolk for all the colony’s invalids (Gowlland 1981: 1; Tas. C.S.O. Letters 2/4/1827 pg 1-3). Due to poor conditions in the two room building, Dr. Robert Officer, the District Surgeon in charge of the establishment requested a new building (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 25/11/1828 pg. 3). A positive reply was received and Officer and the Police Magistrate of New Norfolk, W. H. Hamilton sought a site and prepared a plan of the proposed Hospital. The hospital plan appears from a surviving map sent by Hamilton to Governor Arthur to be a u-shaped building (Fig 1) designed to house sixty convict invalids and importantly ten lunatics (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 17th Dec 1828 pg. 21-3, Feb 4th 1829 pg 37). The hospital included accommodation for the Medical Superintendent and occasional patients (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 17th Dec 1828 pg. 21-3). Arthur approved the proposal and the Colonial Engineer John Lee Archer was asked to prepare a final plan which was ready by 1829 (Gowlland 1981: 7). Hamilton indicated in his letter of Feb. 5th 1829 that there was an area of 4 acres behind the intended building that could be made into vegetable gardens, and he recommended its inclusion in the purchase (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 5/2/1829 pg. 37).
A letter from Arthur to the Engineers indicated that, by late 1829, the Hospital was now to accommodate 100 men with two rooms for the Superintendent’s use (Tas. C.S.O. Letters Nov 23rd 1829 pg. 47). But the Colonial Secretary noted that this plan did not have any dining rooms or the lunatic ward of Officer’s plan. Arthur thought that one of the invalid wards could serve this purpose. Hamilton and Officer by this time had selected a new location across Burnett Street from the first location, which had been near the parsonage and closer to the Lachlan Creek (Fig. 2) (C.S.O. 29th Jan. 1830 pg 51-53).

Arthur ordered work to begin on the Invalid Establishment which the Colonial Engineer Archer did not believe could be completed by the end of summer (C.S.O. 29th Jan 1830 pg. 54). Delays in obtaining materials appear to have slowed work in March (Gowlland 1981: 10). There is no indication of when the Hospital was actually opened. From mid to late 1830 Dr. Officer was seeking an overseer and matron for the hospital so it may have opened some time around late 1830 or early 1831.

By June 1831, possibly in response to a request by Governor Arthur, Dr. Officer had prepared a plan of a building suitable for housing insane persons at New Norfolk. Archer approved of the plan with the only suggested change being a change from small windows to small skylights or trunks in the ceiling to ventilate and light the cells (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 18th June 1831 pg. 111). In August Archer informed the Colonial Secretary that additions to New Norfolk would cost £604 0s. 2d. (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 9th August 1831 pg. 124-5). Along with asking Officer for a plan, Governor Arthur had also appointed a Board of three military officers, J. Logan, J. Briggs and J. Russell to consider the best means of providing medical assistance to insane persons or sick paupers – the Board defined these as free rather than convict. They found that insane individuals were being accommodated in the Colonial Hospital at Hobart town which was small, confined and not secure, while others roamed the street. The Board supported the erection of a suitable building for the insane adjoining the Invalid Hospital: “The building should be sufficiently large and well-enclosed to allow of the lunatics being kept under that restraint and moral discipline which can alone (sic) their comfort and security, or hold out a prospect of their being ultimately cured.” (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 21st Nov 1831 pg. 137-8).

The Colonial Surgeon, J. Scott offered a different view in believing that any accommodation for the insane should be close to the greatest number of people and
removal to the asylum should be as easy as possible: “the early placing of such patients under proper treatment with as little harassment as possible to both body and mind increases the chance of recovery.” (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 7th Feb 1832 pg. 141-2). It was decided to go with the Board’s recommendation and work was begun in 1832. The design chosen saw the lunatic buildings being arranged around a courtyard with the rear of the hospital forming one wall.

The New Norfolk Invalid Hospital and Lunatic Asylum was funded by the Imperial Government because the establishment was intended for convicts for whom they were responsible. Free persons could only be admitted to Colonial Hospitals in cases of extreme poverty and by written permission of the Colonial Secretary (Letter quoted Gowlland 1981: 25). It is unclear whether the same restriction was placed on the admission of the insane, possibly the numbers involved did not make the matter so urgent. As in late 1833 there was only 20 lunatics compared to 89 invalids. In 1834 the number had risen to 136 and 300 in early 1836 (including 3 children) (Gowlland 1981: 24, 25, 26). Officer in a letter to the Colonial Surgeon dated 27th June 1836 indicated the need for additional buildings, particularly as it was impossible to achieve any classification among the lunatics based on their malady or constitution of mind: “under such circumstances, the chance of recovery is greatly lessened and their domestic comforts (a most necessary part in their treatment), sadly diminished” (Tas. C.S.O. Letters 1/811/17340).

There is very little evidence about the conditions under which the insane were being kept at New Norfolk for these early years. Concerns about the management of New Norfolk and its closed nature found vent in the Colonial Times and Tasmanian of December 10th 1847. The Editorial clearly indicates that New Norfolk was a convict establishment in the eyes of its inmates who did not welcome free people who paid heavy fees to be there. The Editor also expressed the belief that no cure was being attempted rather inmates were imprisoned, a factor that had led to mental derangement in the first place for some. Visitors were not welcome at New Norfolk, which was viewed as an attempt to hide what went on behind the walls. A view echoed by John Morgan of Hobart who in a letter in The Hobart Town Courier of June 7th 1855 indicated that no records were kept nor inquests conducted, and in fact a secret Bastille system was still being
practised in Tasmania with no regulation of the administration of New Norfolk or public monitoring of the asylum (Gowlland 1981: 49). This latter factor the Editor of the Courier believed was a consequence of the financial control of the institution by England and a lack of legislative power among Tasmanians (Gowlland 1981: 50). This was to change with the handing over of the New Norfolk establishment to the Colony on October 18th 1855.

**From An Imperial to A Colonial Establishment**

With the change in responsibility came the establishment of a Board of Commissioners who were given charge of the New Norfolk Hospital and the first snapshot of conditions within the Hospital. The Commissioners were to find much wrong with the Hospital as indicated in their initial report to the Governor:

> ... its condition very far behind that of similar institutions in the Mother Country. The internal accommodation of the several buildings were small, badly constructed, ill ventilated, dark dismal, while the day rooms, so called, afforded very inadequate convenience for the purpose intended. The yards and grounds were subdivided by high walls, and the spaces allotted for exercise and outdoor recreation were of the most limited character (Quoted in Gowlland 1981: 50).

The 100 women resident in the Hospital had the use of two small yards of less than a quarter acre each. The adjoining three acre paddock was forbidden to them. The Male division had a walled garden of a quarter acre. Two small enclosed yards of a quarter acre each were in use for unquiet inmates and a small area in front of the hospital was used by quiet and convalescent inmates. There was no classification of the inmates in the wards.

In response to these conditions the Commissioners were to begin what was to be a cycle of requests that sought to reshape the New Norfolk Hospital. The first priority was
the replacement of the cells, particularly the wooden ones. The second priority was the provision of separate accommodation for those of a superior rank, 12 of each sex, in a secluded part of the grounds. The Commissioners further recommended that an area be enclosed to allow the separation of the “worst” females from the quiet, and that verandahs be built to offer shade and exercise areas in wet weather (Quoted in Gowlland 1981: 50-51). The New Norfolk Correspondence book indicates an almost immediate response by the Colonial Government to the problems at New Norfolk as extensive repairs were undertaken in January 1856 to the value of £1,209 8s.; while a verandah for the female yard was being built.

In 1856 the Commissioners indicated that they wished for a residence for the underkeepers, a chapel, suitable accommodation for 6 males and 6 females of the inferior rank of life, a lodge at the front gate, a further house in the female division and a new kitchen (Tas. N. N. Corresp. 14/1/1856, 12/5/1856). While Tasmania was facing bankruptcy in 1857 work was begun on building the cottage for superior male patients in 1858 and the female additions were in plan form in early 1859 (Townsley 1991: 98-100; Tas. N. N. Corresp. 14/9/1858, 2/2/1859, 1/2/1859). The Correspondence book indicates that plans had been drawn up for the proposed additions to the Male Division cells and to improve ventilation and heating. A new laundry and store in the Female ward was also planned (Tas. N. N. Corresp. 8/12/1859, 21/12/1859). Most of these planned changes were completed by 1861.

The role of the Commissioners as the managers of the Hospital was given legal status in 1858 under Act 22 Victoria No. 23. No less than five Commissioners were to be appointed; two always had to be Medical Practitioners with one serving as President. Under the Act the duties of the Commissioners included the superintendence, management, direction, and regulation of all matters concerning the Hospital. The Commissioners were required to inspect the Hospital and all the inmates every three months. Under the direction of the Commissioners were the Superintendent and the Medical Officer of the Hospital, who could be one and the same person (Act 22 Victoria No. 23 c. 3, 5, 7, 10, 11). This was to be a significantly different management system from South Australia and allowed for a more extensive range of experience to be called
upon in the treatment and care of the insane. It was to be this pool of knowledge that led to the call for a new purpose-built lunatic asylum for the colony.

**Bishop Willson and the New Norfolk Hospital for the Insane**

In 1858 the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Hobart, Robert William Willson was appointed to the Board of Commissioners placed in charge of New Norfolk and he began the task of seeking major improvements to the Hospital through a series of letters to the Colonial Secretary. Bishop Willson was an experienced reformer with a particular concern for the insane. For seven years he had served on the board of management of the Nottinghamshire County Lunatic Asylum in England (1830-1842) at a time when there were major changes in the treatment and accommodation being provided for the insane, and had a license to care privately for lunatics (Southwood 1973: 140). This provided him with the experience to suggest specific reforms to the built environment of the Hospital.

In a letter to the Colonial Secretary dated October 22\textsuperscript{nd} 1858 the Bishop made the suggestion that a site should be reserved on land currently held by the Government around Hobart for the future erection of a new Hospital for the Insane. This he hoped would be erected sooner rather than later. New Norfolk he considered: “far removed, ill-constructed, and very imperfect” (Tas. P.P. 1859 No. 10). The new institution should be for all classes, no more than two miles from Hobart and on a site of not less than 50 acres.

He firmly believed that public subscriptions would pour in from every part of the colony if a new Hospital was to be built and the Government would have little to contribute. This would seem to be a little over optimistic for a small colony and may have been based on his experience in England.

Willson wrote to the Colonial Secretary again on March 8\textsuperscript{th} 1859 having spent some time at New Norfolk. He felt that New Norfolk failed as: “a ‘Curative Hospital’ or one at all suitable for affording that comfort even the incurable have a right to receive.” (Tas. P.P. 1859 No. 10). Having experienced the humane and successful change in the treatment of the insane in England he felt that much could be done to improve conditions at New Norfolk.
New Norfolk resembled nothing more than a prison. Gloomy ill-ventilated dark cells, prison walled yards, swarms of vermin in the wooden buildings, no classification at all with the noisy and offensive mixed with the delicate and tranquil, the congenital idiot with the recently admitted, and the imbecile with the neat in habits. Conditions were so bad that even Dr. Conolly or Mr. Gardiner Hill, who instituted reforms in England, could do little with the place he believed. The front part was imperfectly arranged and 70 cells to the rear were unfit for use and reconstruction was out of the question. Willson believed the only solution was to erect a new asylum near Hobart based on the best English principles. In the strongest terms Willson stated that as this place was as far as possible from the curative establishments of England that not one penny should be spent on New Norfolk if it led to its retention (8/3/1859). Instead a new institution should be erected offering: “those advantages and comforts of a well-conducted establishment with airing grounds, garden, &c.” (8/3/1859). An establishment closer to Hobart would be visited more frequently and proper supervision would occur. With an eye to the economic advantages the Bishop believed a ‘proper Hospital for the Insane’ would attract upper class patients (presumably paying) to the asylum.

In reply to Bishop Willson’s letter, E. S. P. Bedford, President of the Board of Commissioners at New Norfolk while admitting that the cells were gloomy and ill-ventilated, that classification of the patients was impossible, and the buildings a patchwork, argued they were not prison-like and the yards not gloomy (Tas. P.P. 1859 No. 10 6/7/1859). In defence Bedford indicated that:

A place of confinement for Lunatics, including many of a dangerous character, must from the necessity of security, ever partake to some extent of the nature of a prison-house. (6/7/1859).

Bedford did agree with Willson that there were ongoing problems with the buildings, and importantly noted that even when improved to their uttermost: “the inherent defects in their construction will probably preclude the possibility of arriving at that perfection which is to be desired.” (6/7/1859). They rejoiced at the possibility of a new purpose-
built asylum based on the best English models. But the cost at probably some £65,000 seemed to preclude such a possibility considering the finances of the colony (6/7/1859). Much needed to be done to improve the existing buildings as the Commissioners had ceaselessly urged on the Government.

They noted that a house had been erected for the more refined male patients and a vote of money had been obtained for a female house and alterations to some of the cells and work would begin soon. The Commissioners were to hope that the Government would continue to unhesitatingly vote moderate sums to improve New Norfolk. They felt judicious internal arrangements would go a long way to improving the institution.

The site of New Norfolk the Commissioners felt was healthy, with a good supply of water, sufficiently far from Hobart to prevent idle visitors from disturbing the patients and surrounded by cheerful scenery (6/7/1859).

In reply to the Commissioners’ letter Bishop Willson again highlighted the failings of the buildings in his letter of August 6th 1859. The problem lay not with the humane feeling for the inmates but with the defective buildings. He further highlighted that there was not a problem with the management of the Hospital so the public need not feel anxious on this aspect. Rather his concern lay with the ‘construction of the buildings’ which were unsuitable as a curative hospital or an asylum for the permanently infirm (Tas. P.P. 1859 No. 10 6/8/1859). While acknowledging that gloomy cells and confined cells may be necessary for the depraved and guilty among the insane, those innocent individuals incapable of living outside of the asylum and those capable of being cured should not have to endure these conditions.

The back section of the Hospital he felt had been built for convicts and designed by those more familiar with cell design than of places for the insane. Interestingly despite Bishop Willson’s powerful desire to help the lunatics this feeling did not extend to the convicts. It was more important that the free and those without moral taint should not be housed in these gloomy cells like prisoners, which would affect their minds more familiar with comfortable homes, families and friends (6/8/1859). He felt the scenery had little to offer in the way of cheerfulness, being prey to winter fogs and only a little could be seen over the walls. While the women’s division was severely infested with vermin, and had
11 cells opening on to a corridor less then 7 feet wide, which was used as living space (6/8/1859 point 8).

Willson went on in his letter to contest that the new asylum would cost in the vicinity of £65,000. An asylum would not be needed for more than 200 as the convict class who were filling the asylum were on the diminish (6/8/1859 point 11). Giving the Essex County Asylum for 450 patients as an example of what could be built for £65,000, he believed an asylum for the colony would cost no more than £35,000 and a loan could be raised for this. Willson appears to have been considering a pavilion block asylum as he indicates that the money needed not all be spent at once (6/8/1859 point 12). Willson in particular noted that a trip to New Norfolk from Hobart and back was some 40 miles, taking the best part of a day and this reduced inspection which was so important: “to secure for a continuance of those benefits so devoutly to be desired.” (6/8/1859). In Hobart the asylum would be visited by: relations, friends, medical men, clergymen, magistrates and informed individuals who could ensure that patients were treated kindly and properly. Willson continues with an emotional plea for a new asylum which people would not shrink from sending family members to, and called on the Members of Parliament to read some of the recent books on the treatment of the insane produced in England. No more buildings should be added to New Norfolk and money should be spent in ameliorating conditions while a new asylum was erected (6/8/1859). In a further letter on August 17th Willson indicated the cost of some English asylums in which he notes that the price of land greatly affected the cost, Willson believed that a new hospital would cost about £150 per patient (Tas. P.P. 1859 No. 10 17/8/1859).

Southwood in his article on Bishop Willson indicates that not all Tasmanians welcomed his suggestion of a new asylum. The Launceston Cornwall Chronicle charged that Launceston was being taxed for the benefit of Hobart where it would provide employment. The Chronicle further noted that such expenditure would raise the colony’s public debt considerable and the anticipated cost would likely to blow out to £100,000 (Southwood 1973: 143).

A further possibility was offered by the President of the Commissioners in a letter to his fellow Commissioners: a new Hospital for the Insane could be operated as a curative institution with the New Norfolk Hospital becoming a home for the incurable.
The patients being moved from one institution to the other after three years of treatment. The latter institution would be less costly to run (Tas. P.P. 1860 No. 12: 4). Presumably the poor conditions at New Norfolk would be more acceptable for the care of the incurable. A similar dual role for asylums had been proposed in England and later in South Australia.

**The Joint Committee of 1859**

In response to Bishop Willson’s letters and general concerns about New Norfolk a Joint Committee was appointed in mid 1859 to take into consideration the Correspondence which has passed between the Government and Certain Individuals regarding the Accommodation and Site of the Hospital for the Insane at New Norfolk. This combined with the New Norfolk Commissioners first Annual Report for the same year, gives a unique insight into the buildings of the Hospital, and what was seen as the role of the Hospital in the management of the insane at New Norfolk.

The question being addressed by the Joint Committee was whether the present Hospital should be added to or an entirely new building erected on a site closer to Hobart Town incorporating all the improvements the recent experience of the cure of the insane indicated were needed (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 3). The Joint Committee found a great many deficiencies that: “have been allowed to exist for too long” on examining the position of the asylum, the extant of the grounds, and the accommodation provided especially with regard to the health, classification, occupation and recreation of the inmates (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 3). Unfortunately the Minutes of Evidence, which would have been an invaluable source of information about where the ideas about the asylum environment came from, have been destroyed by fire (Pers. Comm. State Library of Tasmania 2000).

The site of the Hospital (also referred to as an asylum in the Report) they considered healthy and cheerful, but distant from Hobart Town (22 miles), although this was slightly offset by access by steamer via the Derwent River. The site had ready access to water and overall covered 10 acres, 1 rod, 34 perches. Parts of the site were given over
to gardens and a cow paddock. The Hospital was bounded by roads and the Lachlan Creek. Across the road from the Hospital was a Government owned paddock of 5 acres, 3 rods, 31 perches, which the Committee believed could be put to the use of the Hospital if the road was closed. Exhibiting a knowledge of English asylum practices which appears to have been common among medical practitioners and some lay people in the colony, the Committee noted that this 17 acres would be less than the recommended one acre per four patients (New Norfolk housed 205 inmates at the time) which allowed land for field work and gardening among the patients (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 3). Consequently they also recommended the purchase of a further 9 acres between the eastern boundary and the Lachlan Creek. They went on to recommend the purchase of the rented house occupied by the Medical Superintendent opposite the main entrance to the Hospital which would add a further 4 acres.

The growth from an Infirmary for Incurables into a Hospital for the Insane had resulted in a range of buildings that were unsuited to their purpose, particularly as the insane required totally different accommodation than that of wards for sick convicts. In 1859 the men had been divided into 3 classes each with their own yard. The First class had the use of an area of ground flanking the main entrance; they appear to have been using the original hospital buildings which formed a U shape. They had the use of a verandah and an eating room but no day room for indoor activities. The dormitories they were using were designed to hold 6 inmates but were housing between 10 and 15 men. These rooms were ill-lit and without proper ventilation. They required re-building in the eyes of the witnesses.

The Second class were housed in an enclosed inner quadrangle behind the original buildings. This had a veranda along one side and cells for accommodation, which were considered worse than those at Hobart Gaol (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 4). The Committee recommended that the interior be stripped and rebuilt as a corridor ward with improved light and ventilation. The inmates were restricted to this small gravelled yard with occasional access to the front yard. This the Committee felt was “antagonistic to any curative process” (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 4).

The location of the Third class yard was not precisely indicated although the Committee Report indicates that it led out of the Second class one. As with the First class
there was a verandah for day time use but exercising space was limited to the enclosed yard for these violent and excited inmates, with a few working outside. The cells were the same as those of the Second class.

While the New Norfolk Commissioners intended to re-arrange these cells and money had been voted for this purpose by Parliament in 1858, the Committee seemed to think before this went ahead some thought should be given to a replacement of the buildings. Drs. Officer and Benson had testified that the yards needed walks and plantations to enliven the mood of patients and to allow them to exercise comfortably. This the Committee did not think could be done due to the crowded placement of the central buildings that allowed no room for expansion and re-organisation might be the best option (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 4).

A detached building for men of “refined habits and education” had been recently built against the east wall of “the Male side”. This prevented persons of a higher rank from mixing with pauper patients, having to use the same quality of utensils and tables, and from sharing the prison diet (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 4). In their own building they could have the comforts of a home. It is interesting that the Victorians associated the ability to appreciate a home environment with social class, and seems more a way to reinforce the sense of social superiority than having any basis in reality. The Committee felt this building should have its own kitchen to provide these patients with a better quality of cooking. Even this new building had faults: the grounds were too restricted and the wall prevented a view out. The Committee recommended the replacing of part of the wall with an iron railing and the expanding of the recreation ground in front and behind the building.

New Norfolk required an ample day room for activities to take place in. There was some employment of a handful of men in the wood-yard, garden, and tailor’s and shoemaker’s shop. Unfortunately the plans do not indicate where these were; they may have been temporary wooden structures. The Committee felt there was definitely a need for a larger workshop and more gardening needed to be undertaken, as exercise in the open air invigorated the mind and body (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 5). Interestingly this option was not available to women who worked inside all the time, reflecting interesting gender perceptions in terms of activities. The kitchen was deficient, and the male
department needed baths. The keepers did not live in the asylum and the accommodation on offer the Committee felt would put off possible applicants along with the low rates of pay.

If the male department was defective, the women’s department was far worse. Only two grades of classification were possible, and the buildings needed reconstructing. The Committee noted that money had been voted for a new women’s building but the plans did not allow space for exercise and recreation, and needed reviewing (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 5). The sole day room was wretched and small. It seems likely this might have been one of the rooms originally marked as a ward or again some form of wooden building. Again a spacious day room was needed. In terms of occupations the women sewed and washed clothes. A new and large washhouse, laundry, drying room and baths were all required. It was felt that the dairy paddock could be used for additional recreation space for the women (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 5). The women of the Second class, who were violent and excitable, had the use of a narrow corridor on to which their 12 cells opened and which acted as day room and dining room. Great change was necessary with more space for occupation and exercise, the buildings needed to be better arranged and much larger.

The Committee was to be divided in their recommendations. Five Committee members recommended the erection of a new asylum, while four others considered the question of alterations to New Norfolk and the erection of a new asylum needed further consideration.

The five Committee members argued that New Norfolk was too remote from Hobart. This prevented the visits of friends of the patients, and from interested individuals as defined by Bishop Willson. Aside from pecuniary considerations, great curative results could only be achieved in a newly constructed building: “one supplied with the modern and necessary appliances of quiet dormitories”, single cells which should be: “wholesome, well-lighted, and cleanly, with day-rooms affording liberty for inmates to pursue undisturbed their different tastes in the enjoyment of attractive in-door recreations, where out-door pursuits could always be followed,” (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 6). Classification could also be achieved. The Committee had received advice from the architect Mr. Hunter that an asylum for 200 could be built for £30,000 using the Lunatic
Asylum for Counties of Cumberland and Westmoreland as described in *The Builder* as a model (Fig. 6.21-22). Hunter believed the plans presence in this authoritative journal indicated that it would feature those modern improvements expected in every newly constructed institution and making it an ideal model.

Further the five Commissioners argued the relocation of the asylum would have financial benefits (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 7). A new building would promote more cures, which would be further supported by employing more wardsmen, while the old hospital could be again used for invalids. If a new building was not to be considered then a whole range of alterations were required. The estimated cost of these changes was around £10,000. The five Commissioners felt that no time should be lost in investigating the two options (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 8).

The dissenting four Commissioners felt that the treatment regime at New Norfolk was being undermined by the living conditions. They felt more consideration was needed of the costs of reconstructing New Norfolk to bring it closer to the English model, and the actual costs of building a new asylum. A new asylum would take time to erect and money had to be spent on New Norfolk to make partial remedies to the problems. This had to be considered in any comparison of the costs. Thus the Commissioners were recommending further research before a decision was made (Tas. J.C. Report 1859: 9). There seems to have been little direct response to the Joint Committee’s Report and changing any aspect of the buildings at New Norfolk was an ongoing process where the New Norfolk Commissioners each year sought to transform aspects of the Hospital.

**Provisions for the Insane: 1859-1882**

The New Norfolk Commissioners in their Annual Reports to the Colonial Secretary reveal quite a bit of detail about the buildings and the sought after improvements to the Hospital, while reflecting the realities of trying to achieve the changes recommended by the Joint Committee and by themselves. It is possible through these reports to trace the modifications to the Hospital infrastructure.
In their first Report, dated December 31st 1859, the Commissioners found the grounds too small in extant. The whole space within the walls was 12 acres, while a six acre field across the road from the Asylum was cultivated by the patients. The Commissioners felt this should be included within the walls. To extend the grounds the Commissioners recommended the purchase of several private properties containing 20 acres in the immediate vicinity of the Hospital. This would link the Hospital to 64 acres of Crown Land. The buildings were in many parts defective both in capacity and construction.

The Commissioners felt that the Imperial Authorities were concerned with the possibility of escape in surrounding the establishment with high brick walls. A considerable portion of these had been removed. Some of the female cells were being converted into comfortable rooms. Hoping that this cost had been approved by the Parliament, they wished to continue the transformation of the female cells then the male division. However these alterations would reduce accommodation (Tas. Annual Report (A.R.) P.P. 1860).

In their Report of December 31st 1860 the Commissioners indicated that alterations and improvements had been completed in the Female Division. These included improved lighting and ventilation to the detached refractory building. While the provision of a separate kitchen and store room for the women had been approved. A contract had been undertaken to extend the central building and work had begun. The extension included a spacious day room, large dormitory and several smaller sleeping apartments. When this extension was complete the original day room, which appears to have been a separate building in the front of the main building, was to be torn down along with “useless walls and fences” opening up the airing court (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1861). Major changes had occurred transforming the range of cells along the north side of the back yard used by the men. These had been converted into a series of sleeping rooms opening on to a corridor 150 ft. long and 12ft. wide. A verandah ran the length of the block. This provided a major increase in day space for the men, reminiscent of the corridor wards of English asylums. The wall, which had divided the airing court in front of this building, was to be removed creating one yard that limited classification but made them more
liveable. These alterations and the planned purchase of extra land had absorbed the £6,000 provided for in the Estimates.

The southern range of buildings that helped form the backyard similarly consisted of gloomy cells and the Commissioners wished to transform these as well. A new airing court opening off the South East corner of the front of the building and extending out to the fence and the detached cottage, giving a cheerful view of the scenery, was also planned for the patients of this building. This space was currently being used as a farm yard, and a new site for this would be required (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1861).

The Commissioners believed that the planned improvements would bring New Norfolk up to the standard of similar institutions in other colonies. Presumably they were including the recommendations of the Joint Committee in this comment. The physical changes to the Hospital had had a direct effect on the patients who were improved in conduct and demeanour and mechanical restraint was abolished (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1861).

Eighteen sixty one saw the continuation of efforts to transform New Norfolk into a curative and workable institution. The “detached and inconvenient Day Room” in the Female Division had been removed and the northern end of the main building had been extended out. This provided a new Day Room of 60 ft. in length and 32 ft. wide, a dormitory of 60 ft. by 19 ft., and six small sleeping rooms (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1862). A Matron’s cottage had been erected and the Correspondence gives an interesting insight into the provision of building materials. George Green was given permission to use all materials that were fit to be of use from the former mess room (day room), engine house and lumber yard. The material appears to have included brick, and the chosen site was the North West corner of the Female Division (Tas. N.N. Corresp. 9/8/1861, 24/9/1861).

The separate kitchen in the Female Division had been built, along with a wash-house, laundry, drying, and store rooms. A lodge for the gate keeper had been built in the Male Division. While the old day room in the front had been removed and gravelled walks added. An area that had been a garden (vegetable?) had been opened up as an airing court by the removal of dividing brick walls, giving a new open area of four acres for the patients to use, and in the words of Commissioners: “has improved and enlivened this, the most conspicuous, part of the Establishment.” But much more work was still needed, problems with the detached refractory building continued, it was unskilfully
constructed, confined and the windows offered no view except that of a brick wall. This was having an irritating effect on the women and was to be the next priority. As there was insufficient room on the Hospital grounds to build a Superintendent’s Residence, the Commissioners had purchased the leased house currently being used by the Superintendent for £1,000, which included 3 acres of land.

To perfect the Hospital as a curative institution, the Commissioners requested funding for:

. . . (1st) A large Room or Hall to be erected adjoining, and in architectural harmony with, the north wing of the original main Building, for the purposes of Divine Worship, as well as for musical and other entertainments, and for the use of both sexes.

(2nd) A new Kitchen and Bakehouse to be built in like manner, adjoining the south wing; the present Kitchen then being converted into a Bath Room. (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1862).

The Commissioners sought the relocation of the water closets, the removal of the farm yard, and the alterations to the buildings mentioned in their last report. More land was also needed. The estimate cost of these recommendations was £4,500. The Commissioners hastened to add that the improvements were entirely necessary for the comfort, health and cure of the patients and all additions were plain and economical in style (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1862).

Over December 1861 - January 1862 the Commissioners purchased 9 acres, 1 rod, 27 perches of Colonel Bell’s land which was near the Hospital and across Lachlan Rd from an existing paddock (Tas. N.N. Corresp. 19/12/1861, 8/1/1862). It seems likely the land was intended for agricultural uses to supply the Hospital.

The Commissioners’ Report for 1862 indicted that further alterations to the buildings of the Hospital: a verandah 202 ft. long and 10 ft. wide had been added to the main building in the Female Division increasing living space; a day room 49 ft. long, 23 ft. wide and 22 ft. high had been added to the women’s refractory building and a large
airing court was to be attached to it, much improving conditions for the women. The Head Keeper’s quarters had been converted for the use of the Idiot Boys. The narrow street dividing the Hospital grounds on the north side had been closed and a day room was being planned for the space.

Eighteen sixty-two was to see the transfer of twenty-two Imperial patients to Port Arthur’s Lunatic Depot at the Governor’s order, although no reason is given (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1863). These moves had first been proposed in April of 1859 (Tas. N.N. Corresp. 14/4/1859, 30/4/1859). Port Arthur had been established as a penal settlement in 1827 and accommodated a number of invalids and some criminal lunatics, the latter from 1852 (Brand 1998: 106).

Despite the Commissioners requests for further funding for building works in 1863 no money was forthcoming beyond a sum of £400 left over from the Public Buildings budget. This they used it to reconstruct the last of the wooden cells in the Female Division into ventilated, spacious and well-lit apartments (Tas. N.N. Corresp. 14/5/1863; Tas. A. R. P.P. 1864). Much work remained to be done and in 1864 the Commissioners required funds for a separate cottage for the treatment of a better class of female patient; and a new kitchen and bakehouse; and the conversion of the existing one into a male bathhouse. The south side of the Male Yard still had wooden cells that needed transforming into apartments. The latrines needed re-arrangement and more land was needed for vegetable growing.

In support of the provision of a ladies cottage for paying patients, the Commissioners were able to report that the fees charged for the men were sufficient to cover costs, wear and tear, and still provide a profit of £150. The baths were so bad that many men could not be bathed regularly. The male patients labour was being used to the economic advantage of the colonial authorities in that they undertook all repairs, painting and colouring of the buildings. The farm and cow-sheds were abutting the Hospital wards and the Commissioners felt this area could be turned into another airing ground if a contiguous piece of land complete with a cottage (to house an underkeeper) was purchased (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1864).

The Commissioners faced real problems in bringing New Norfolk up to European standards as the existing Hospital provided very limited opportunities due to the design
and layout of the hospital, and its basic deficiencies such as a workable bath house. The Hospital lacked the apparatus for hot and cold water as well as shower baths; there was not proper accommodation for the keepers and female attendants, and only basic storage space for supplies. The new day rooms had provided some space for activities and the removal of interior walls which opened the grounds up must have had a significant effect of removing the prison-like qualities of the Hospital. The complete rebuilding of the Hospital would require the relocation of all the inmates, which seems to be not given any real consideration despite the recommendations of some of the Joint Committee Members in 1859. Obviously the most economical option was to re-organise the Hospital as an ongoing project. Though in 1865 the Commissioners indicated that funds were very insufficient and the money they thought had been given to build a new kitchen and convert the old one to a bathroom was not in fact sufficient causing further delays.

The Report for 1865 indicates that the new kitchen was finally underway, the old one was to be converted into a bathroom and lavatory, and the Commissioners again expressed the need for a ladies cottage. The need again bought home the fact that there was no other place for the treatment of the insane in Tasmania, public or private. While friends and relatives knew the patients at New Norfolk would be treated with all care and kindness they were: “aware of the utter want of accommodation suitable to their tastes and habits.” (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1866). The cottage (£1,200) was finally approved in 1867, as was the purchase of a cottage with 10 acres of land for the Assistant Medical Officer. The new land allowed the removal of the barn yard and cow house to outside of the Hospital walls (Tas. N.N. Corresp. 7/1/1867; A.R. P.P. 1867).

Work on the ladies cottage to be located near the north angle of the Hospital grounds, giving both privacy and a view, commenced in 1868 and was completed by the end of 1869. The farm buildings and dairy were moved to their new site on the south bank of the Lachlan Rivulet (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1868). The next priority for the Commissioners was separate accommodation for idiot boys who were incurable and not suitable for a Hospital for the Insane. A separate building was required for them in the grounds. This would also ease overcrowding in some of the wards. Major repairs were required to the original buildings and were awaiting approval. Economic conditions over 1871 saw the Assistant Medical Officer’s services dispensed with, and by default his
cottage became the Idiot Boys Cottage. Through the labour of the male patients a new female bathroom had finally been built. Something the Commissioners had long pressed on the attention of the Government (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1872).

Meanwhile at Port Arthur plans had been drawn up for a separate lunatic asylum to accommodate 100 patients and the foundations were laid in 1864 next to the Invalid or Pauper Depot (Brand 1998: 160). It was completed in 1868. The design for the asylum was cruciform with four arms of two storeys with a raised roof over the central space to allow light in. Complete with verandahs and a clock tower, the asylum’s cells only had small windows. While no plans exist, there is a brief description by a newspaper reporter who visited Port Arthur in March 1870. The asylum was a model structure with every care being taken to provide comfortable accommodation: “The buildings comprise a centre hall, used as a dinner room, 40 feet in diameter. With this hall four sleeping dormitories are connected; the dimensions are: two of 60 by 25 feet each, and two of 40 by 25 feet. Besides these apartments there is another wing attached 100 feet by 25 feet wide. This contains 24 cells, one of which is a padded room for refractory patients. This branch is also furnished with excellent baths, with every convenience, cook house, laundry, clothing stores, etc.” (quoted in Brand 1998: 185, 187). From the site plan included in Weidenhofer’s book on Port Arthur it appears that this wing was placed in line with the main building with the service buildings placed on either side of the cross. The cruciform design would have certainly suited a high level of observation of the inmates by attendants using the central space, and the corridors could have been used as living space. As with New Norfolk it is likely that the inmates did the cooking and washing for the asylum.

In 1873 the New Norfolk Commissioners believed that the Hospital had now reached its utmost capacity to accommodate the insane but interestingly they did not ask for any additional buildings (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1873). It was not until 1877 that efforts were made to ease the overcrowded conditions at the Hospital.

In 1877 the Hospital for the Insane, Cascades was duly proclaimed. It had been decided to close Port Arthur and now a part of the Female Factory at the Cascades, near Hobart was to accommodate some of the remaining convict insane. The last of the lunatics at Port Arthur left on April 17th 1878 (Brand 1998: 200). As with New Norfolk
existing buildings were modified to house the men who were split into two classes: the more refractory (22) who were housed separately, and the remainder (57) who were housed in the main wards. As with New Norfolk five Commissioners were appointed to manage the establishment. They had ordered the fencing off of a recreation ground with a wooden fence and the provision of a shelter shed. The Commissioners appear to have had some concern about staff quarters but they do not specify the problems (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1878). The plan of the Cascade Factory shows that the insane patients were to be kept in separate parts of the Factory. In one yard they had four wards and the stairs suggest that the building was two storied with further wards upstairs. There was a lavatory for washing and water closets at one end of the building and a cookhouse at the other. A mess room and day room were located across the yard. The Head Keeper had his own quarters in a separate building in the corner of the yard. The second lunatic section was three exercise yards across from this, near the male invalid buildings. This consisted of 10 single cells in a block. Interestingly an undated plan for additions to the Lunatic Establishment at the Cascades shows that these rooms were quite literally cells complete with bars for doors suggesting an emphasis on the inmates convict origins than modern ideas of treatment. In contrast the addition includes a large bathroom, something which the New Norfolk Commissioners were hard pressed to achieve. The Cascades Report for 1880 indicates that all but one of the lunatics had been at Port Arthur, and were transferred to the Cascades on the closure of Port Arthur in 1877 (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1881).

The New Norfolk Commissioners Annual Reports for the late 1870s contain few requests for the building changes. In 1878 they noted the need for increased accommodation of the Gentleman patients, and while plans had been prepared for a new dormitory in the female refractory ward and tenders called for, it had proceeded no further (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1878, 1879). A new female dormitory had been completed by July 1880, along with the installation of a new ventilation system (Tobin’s) in 16 rooms of the Male Division. Despite recommendations the additional six rooms had not been added to the Gentleman’s Cottage (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1880). The funds were finally supplied in 1880 (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1881).

In 1881-1882 the Commissioners were considering the addition of padded rooms for refractory and violent patients, and had received plans and descriptions of those in use
at Colney Hatch Asylum. Another need was an appropriate store room as the current six rooms were separate rooms throughout the Hospital and thoroughly inconvenient. A new store was needed and the old rooms could be converted into an additional ward which was urgently required. It had been determined to convert the external garden into a pleasure ground for games such as cricket, croquet, lawn tennis and the similar. Dr. Macfarlane, the Superintendent of New Norfolk, felt that the gardens were too limited for the number of patients as much of the ground was used for forage cultivation. The Gentlemen’s Cottage additions had been completed in December 1880 and consisted of six bedrooms and two sitting rooms, along with a new bathroom and lavatory. At this time the Hospital included a wardsmen’s mess room in the front division. The Commissioners’ Report of 1882-1883 indicates a growing pressure on accommodation which saw less separation of violent and quiet patients. Additional buildings were now needed urgently (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1883).

A New Lunatic Asylum or Adaptation of New Norfolk?

In 1882 a Royal Commission was appointed to consider the state of the lunatic asylums in Tasmania. The Commission was to consider the character of the buildings and surrounding grounds, the classification of patients, and the mode of treatment adopted; and to enquire into the means in use for the safe keeping of the insane and their successful treatment in Great Britain, Europe and the neighbouring colonies. The Commissioners interviewed 19 medical gentlemen, but found most knew little of the system of treatment in other places and the Commissioners were forced to rely on reports from overseas institutions and Dr. F. Norton Manning’s Report on Lunatic Asylums made to the Government of New South Wales, which included information gathered on his tour of overseas institutions. The Minutes of Evidence provide another snapshot of New Norfolk as it was seen by those directly involved in its management.

The Site and Buildings of New Norfolk

Dr. Macfarlane, the current Superintendent of New Norfolk, thought that overall the New Norfolk site was best and would not recommended its movement closer to Hobart as this would allow greater public intrusion and disturbance of the patients. A
view supported by Dr. Coutie, the Assistant Medical Officer, who believed the site was healthy, with a good view, abundant water, and the grounds could be expanded (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 47-48, 87-87). While Rev. W. Murray who gave services at New Norfolk, thought that patients were more excited after the visits of friends and relatives so some distance from the main town was advisable if it would decrease visits (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 158). Dr. Huston, the former Superintendent, echoed this view indicating the site was the best and a new asylum was not required. If placed near Hobart he believed the patients would be less able to go outside the walls due to a natural dread of the insane by people (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 206-7). Miss Laland, the Matron, offered a different view believing the asylum should be near Hobart. More entertainments would be accessible, there would be more intercourse with friends, and patients could go out to church and on outings (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 250).

Dr. Macfarlane found the buildings currently ill-arranged, he preferred the pavilion system. On the question of cottages he felt that the addition of cottages to a pavilion system would be advantageous of the treatment for the sick and infirm, and for paying patients, providing comfort advantageous to their recoveries. But accommodation in cottages was expensive compared to the block system as more attendants were required. At the present time he thought about 70 patients could be better accommodated in cottages (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 17, 18, 19).

Dr. Macfarlane went on to described the Hospital as follows: “This asylum is located on an eminence. It is almost entirely surrounded by a brick wall, the exception being an airing court in the refractory division on the female side, which is partly surrounded by wooden walls. The buildings are brick”; “There are day rooms in both the male and female divisions of the Hospital. In the Male Division there is a tailor’s shop, a shoemaker’s shop, a painter’s shop, a blacksmith’s shop and a carpenter’s shop. On the female side there is a large workroom which is also used as a dormitory.” (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 27). This doubling up indicates the limitations of space and the more restricted day spaces available to the women. In terms of cubic feet per patient in the dormitories it was 500 c. ft, and in the hospital wards about 700 c. ft. (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 14).

Of the present buildings Dr. Macfarlane thought that the Ladies Cottage could be retained but required thorough renovation, the Gentlemen’s Cottage too with some
alterations. Of the main buildings, with considerable alterations and repairs, the corridor and single rooms on the male side and the refractory division on the female side could be kept. The New Norfolk Commissioners had asked for £1344 to be put on the 1883 Parliamentary Estimates for repairs, but this had not occurred (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 22, 25).

On being asked what he desired in a Pavilion asylum, Dr. Macfarlane indicated that there should be a central or administrative block consisting on the ground floor of the Superintendent’s office, Assistant Medical Officer’s office, the Storekeeper’s office, the Dispensary, a small room for the messenger, and two waiting rooms for males and females visitors. The rooms above could be used for the quarters of the Assistant Medical Officer, behind these, and on either side, but attached to them would be two long buildings, one to be used as a female workroom, and the other for stores, with cellars beneath. The fourth side of the quadrangle would have a central hall to be used as a recreation room, with two dining rooms, one on either side of the hall for men and women respectively. The quadrangle could be laid out as a flower garden with a fountain. Behind the hall would be the kitchen, with a scullery and two brick ovens. The patient’s pavilion blocks should be connected by verandahs, with each block having good bathing and lavatory provisions. The male and female blocks would be separated by the central block. In terms of the blocks themselves the ground floor should consist of a day room with the dormitory above. Each should have its own airing court. The sick should be provided with cottages, and there should be a small contagious ward on each side, lined with glazed bricks for easy cleaning.

The asylum overall should be of brick or stone with a slate roof, and fireproof throughout. The laundry should consist of a foul laundry, a washing room, drying room, ironing and issuing rooms. He felt the male workshops could be moved to the farm and the idiot’s cottage enlarged. The airing courts should be planted with flowers and shrubs, and provided with seats and sun shades (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 38). Clearly Macfarlane was envisaging a new asylum on the New Norfolk site as he shifts from the ideal to direct changes within the one answer. He then indicates that this could be done economically by building a new block, and then pulling down an old one transferring the patients as needs be (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 40). He believed each dormitory should have its own bath. The water closets consisted of wooden tubs which were emptied every morning (Tas. R.C.
1883 Q. 51-2). There were no separate provisions for Queen’s pleasure patients or for the female idiots. While there was a male Idiot’s Cottage, there were more male idiots kept in the Asylum in the front division (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 55, 57).

Dr. Coutie was to give further evidence about the New Norfolk buildings. The Ladies and Gentlemen’s Cottages, he felt, offered excellent accommodation. They were of brick with shingle roofs, and verandahs around three sides: “In these buildings the rooms opened off a wide passage or hall on each side, and are lofty, well lighted, and ventilated. The bedrooms contain one to four beds. The two front rooms in each cottage are used, one as a dining room, the other as a sitting room. There is also a bath-room, store-room, and a kitchen, in which all the cooking is done, connected with each building.” Each had a garden. The male patient’s building was divided into the Front and Back Divisions. “These are of one storey, on the block principle, and are built of brick with shingle roofs. The Front Division, irrespective of offices and stores, &c., contains seven dormitories, a day or dining-room, a bath-room, and a boiler-room. The general kitchen is also situated here. The closets and urinals are placed to the south apart from the main buildings. The dormitories are of a convenient size, containing about ten patients each, well lighted and fairly ventilated. The windows open only a fixed distance; opposite to them on the outside there is a lamp, which is kept burning during the night, thus lighting up the wards.” The baths were being put in proper order. The stores were really bad: “the kitchen is badly in want of repairs, and is poorly furnished with cooking appliances. The offices are inconvenient and badly furnished, and there are no waiting or reception rooms. In the Back Division the sleeping accommodation consists of dormitories and single rooms. The dormitories are of a moderate size, containing on average nine patients each.” They were not in such good repair or suited to their purpose as those in the Front Division. “The single rooms in the corridor are large and well lighted, and are ventilated each by a window and Tobin’s ventilators. The corridor is used as a dining-room.” Repairs were needed to the closets and urinals. Coutie adds a glazier’s and plumber’s workshop to Macfarlane’s list but notes they are all small. The Idiot’s Cottage contained five rooms, of which 3 were sleeping rooms, one day room and a kitchen. The Female Division consisted of a main building, two storied, built of brick with a slate roof: “The upper flat contains dormitories of various sizes, a large one being
also used as a needle-room. On the ground floor there are dormitories and single rooms, and a large day-room, which is used as a dining and recreation hall and chapel. A stage will be fitted up in this hall for theatrical performances, &c. All these rooms are lofty and fairly well ventilated.” The Refractory Division was of one storey, consisted of a large dormitory, single rooms, and a day room. “The buildings are so arranged that a proper classification is impossible throughout the building. There are no proper conveniences connected with each ward, such as lavatories, closets, compartments for clothing, stores, &c., and the bath-rooms are neither sufficient nor complete.”; “The laundries are also very deficient, there being a great want of suitable rooms and modern machinery, as well as proper drying-rooms and grounds.”; “The sick wards, both on the male and female sides are contiguous to the dormitories,” (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 66). The Male Division had two airing courts, one formed by the back division; this was supplied with sun shades and seats. The second was formed by the grounds not occupied by the buildings and the gentlemen’s ground. It was predominantly grass with several large trees. The Female Division had two airing courts, a large one laid with grass and with several large trees. Part of this was used for croquet and tennis. The other court was much smaller and had seats, two swings and sunshades, and a raised mound allowing a view of the surrounding country. The Ladies Cottage had a garden. A new recreation ground of about 5½ acres was being formed to the north of the Hospital (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 67).

In terms of improvements Dr. Coutie followed Dr. Macfarlane in recommending a mixture of pavilions and cottages. Pavilions could be made more homely, were well ventilated and easily extendable. Along with curtains for the ward windows, pictures for the walls, and ordinary house furniture, along with cutlery, and crockery in place of tinware and the use of fingers to eat food. A post mortem room and a library were needed (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 80, 82, 235). Miss Laland, the Matron, indicated that there were no lavatories for the women to wash in; the toilet was a wooden tub. There were no wardrobes, and the patients worked and slept in the same rooms. There were no spaces for nurses who slept, ate and lived with the patients day and night. Miss Laland believed there should be a separate dining room and bedrooms for nurses, and proper work rooms. She favoured the erection of a new asylum for these reasons along with the pavilion design with separate day rooms and dormitories (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 238, 251).
Mrs Bland, the Lady Superintendent, agreed with the doctors on the deficiencies of the building. New Norfolk was old and unsuited to its purpose; the building should be modern and suitable for the classification of the patients (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 115-6). Dr. Huston, who had been the Superintendent for 25 years, outlined the same problems as Drs. Macfarlane and Coutie. The buildings were defective and classification was impossible to any degree and his recommendations as to what could be preserved followed their views (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 202, 220). Interestingly Dr. Huston indicates that while a comprehensive plan had been drawn up of improvements in 1859, these and the suggestions of the New Norfolk Commissioners over the years had often not been followed with the only reason given by the Government was a want of funds, no further explanations were given (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 224).

The Cascades Asylum
Dr. John Coverdale, who had charge of the Cascades asylum had no experience of the treatment of the insane, but had worked at a variety of institutions within the colony (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 258). All these cases were considered chronic and treatment was palliative only. Coverdale had experienced problems with having any repairs made to the buildings, and there was often uncertainty about the future of the asylum each year to make things worse (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 269-70). Seclusion was occasionally used along with general employment in gardening and housekeeping. Apathy among the patients meant only draughts and dominoes interested the patients (Tas. R.C. 1883 Q. 277).

The Findings of the Royal of Commissioners
The Commissioners found that the site of the New Norfolk Asylum was in many respects admirably suitable. It was healthy, had an excellent water supply, the drainage was good, and the surrounding scenery cheerful. But the Asylum was wanting. The Asylum: “enclosure itself is neither so attractive and pleasing in appearance as it should be, nor is it so extensive as it requires to be to afford scope for those amusements, recreations, and occupations which the medical faculty regard as desirable, if not necessary, for the mental improvement and recovery of the Insane.” (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: viii). The Female Refractory yard was surrounded by a high boarded fence, which
a patient had scaled. The dreariest place was the backyard surrounded by buildings and more like a prison yard. The grounds consisted of about 48 acres: “Viz., 10½ acres on which the buildings stood, 5½ acres for recreation grounds, and about 31½ devoted to farm and grazing ground.” (Tas. R.C. Report 1883: viii). The cottage for 9 male idiots was located on the farm, separate from the Hospital. The farm provided some daily occupation for the patients.

The Royal Commissioners found the buildings at New Norfolk, with some exceptions, were of a very unsatisfactory character: “being in many respects ill-adapted for the purposes for which they are used.” (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: viii). The faults found by the Joint Committee of 1859 they felt continued and were intensified by the fact there were now 300 patients. The two cottages for paying patients were creditable buildings but required some more internal furnishings to make them homely. The Female Refractory Division was fairly suited to its purpose but required better lighting, alterations and repairs. The main building for females was less than could be desired but contained: “very good dayrooms and associated and single dormitories,” but required painting and repairs (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: viii-ix). On the male side the corridor and single rooms could be regarded as offering fair accommodation:

. . . which, however, could be improved by an extension and elevation of the corridor. All the rest of the accommodation for males is so inferior and unsuitable in character as to compel the assertion that the sooner the inmates are provided with other accommodation the better (R. C. Report 1883: ix).

The dormitories were overcrowded and ill-ventilated. The laundry and kitchen arrangements needed work. There was a deficiency of proper store accommodation. There was no waiting and reception rooms which ought to be remedied. The Matron’s Cottage was inconveniently situated, and may be utilised for a few patients or removed to make way for an extension of the refractory ward. No provision exists among the buildings for the residence of a Medical Officer. Both the Superintendent and the
Assistant Medical Officer lived away from the Asylum. It was eminently desirable that one should live on the premises (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: ix).

The Cascades buildings were ill adapted to the purpose of a Hospital for the Insane. The site was situated in a hole at the base of the hills, and became swampy, damp, cold and gloomy in winter. There was no cheerful scenery; the yards were surrounded by walls so high: “that the whole of the winter time the sun is excluded, except when at its greatest altitude for about two hours of the day.” Dr. Turnley indicated the whole place had such a depressing influence that it induced mental illness rather than cured it. While Dr. Coverdale, the Medical Superintendent of the Establishment, felt it was a suitable place for criminal lunatics (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: ix).

Most important the Royal Commissioners felt a strong conviction that the success of the treatment adopted at New Norfolk was very much hindered and lessened by the impossibility of properly classifying the patients:

> It is vain to hope for either the necessary amount of comfort, or the speedy cure of the Insane unless the buildings are so arranged that the different forms and stages of insanity, and to some extent also the different classes of patients, can be separately treated. (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: x).

The Royal Commissioners recommended the provision of at least two padded rooms as well.

At the Cascades Asylum there was a great difficulty in getting the inmates to either employ or amuse themselves or exercise. The Commissioners felt the long prison careers of some had deprived them of a desire for pleasure or change (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: xi). At New Norfolk further amusements could be added and more opportunities for employment. The criminal lunatics still at New Norfolk, they thought could be transferred to Cascades despite its unhealthy aspects as they should not be associated with free patients (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: xi).
Another need was the provision of Reception Houses at Hobart and Launceston where cases could be admitted for observation and treatment before full committal at New Norfolk. This option would be useful in cases of temporary insanity and less stressful for relatives. A possible site would be on general hospital grounds (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: xi).

The Royal Commissioners having weighed the evidence for and against the retention of the site at New Norfolk, desired it should be retained but with the provision of considerably increased grounds. Quoting the overseas reports which recommended the minimum grounds should be at least 150 acres, they thought the grounds should be increased to no less than 100 acres. Accommodation for 100 further patients should be erected to offer both accommodation and classification. These additions should take the form of a mixture of pavilions and cottages as this offered the best classification and comfort for the patients. While the cottage system was more expensive it offered greater comfort and speedier cures. These should be taken into consideration before cost on the grounds of humanity. Less costly accommodation could be undertaken for chronic and incurable cases.

The Royal Commissioners recommended the construction of pavilions to accommodate about twenty patients each, having a day-room on the ground floor and dormitory above, plus some cottages for six to twelve patients each. The new buildings should include administrative offices, waiting rooms and store accommodation (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: xii).

As to the causes of insanity, inheritance and intemperance and tainted liquors were the primary causes, and an Inebriate Asylum was definitely required to treat the latter cases (Tas. R. C. Report 1883: xiii).

**New Norfolk 1883-1890**

The Board of Commissioners of New Norfolk had asked for the sum of £1423, 5s. to be added to the Estimates for 1883 for the urgent repairs that were needed to the buildings and fences at New Norfolk. Sadly in their Report for 1883 the Commissioners noted that the Royal Commissions Report had not been taken up and no funding provided for improving the accommodation at the Asylum. There were 16 male criminal lunatics at
New Norfolk who they felt should be sent to the Cascades where there was room for them, and this would ease overcrowding at New Norfolk. The Commissioners again in their Annual Report for 1883 reinforced the poor condition of the buildings and the inappropriateness of the space available. The Idiots Cottage was unsuited to its purpose and was overcrowded (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1884).

During 1883 a further Select Committee had been held into the management of New Norfolk. Dr. William L. Crowther had accused the Royal Commissioners of doing a very poor and incomplete investigation, and his agitation led to the appointment of a new Select Committee. The Committee reporting to Parliament on Dec 14th 1883 found: “the management of the insane at New Norfolk is and has been devoid of system, tact, or administrative ability, and that in every department of the institution, as will be seen by the evidence, with some few exceptions, humanity, kindness, and consideration of the helpless insane have not found place, and that knowledge, even of the most elementary character, applicable to the treatment of the demented, has not been possessed by the majority of those to whose care and supervision the State has entrusted their keeping.” (Gowlland 1981: 75). The accusations were of mistreatment of patients, of the wrongful dismissal of Matron Laland and of the retention of sane people in the Asylum (for details see Gowlland 1981: 76-81). In response the Commissioners called for an investigation by Dr. Manning of New South Wales, Dr. Patterson of South Australia and Dr. Dick of Melbourne as eminent authorities to provide their own response to the charges (Tas. A.R. P.P. 1884).

The three doctors were called upon to cover all the issues raised before the Parliamentary inquiries and submitted a report of their own in 1884. They found no wrongfully detained patients, but found the buildings unsuitable for their purpose along with a considerable number of unfit attendants and nurses. The buildings did not allow classification, and the presence of a public road so close to the Asylum meant that the airing courts could not be used by noisy or demonstrative patients who were confined to the inner court. The poor condition of the buildings and the lack of sanitary provisions: "induces us to think that an unwise parsimony has for some time been exercised in the control of the Institution.” The staff were inexperienced, often infirm or elderly and of the lowest class. The Doctors recommended increased wages, separate accommodation for
ward staff and increased leave and the employment of no one over thirty years of age. On the question of ill-treatment they found a lack of reliable evidence (Gowlland 1981: 87). More importantly they found the role of the Board of Commissioners problematic, they lacked the power to make improvements and alterations to the buildings, or even execute repairs. Their recommendations about the buildings and wages had fell on deaf ears with regard to the Government (Gowlland 1981: 87). They advised the Board of Commissioners be replaced by Official Visitors, five in number with a minimum of two medical practitioners. This recommendation was embodied in Act. 49, Vic. No 35 “The Insane Persons Hospital Act Amendment Act” passed in 1885. On the question of a site, the Doctors recommended beginning afresh. New Norfolk was too far from Hobart and the buildings so badly arranged and requiring such extensive alteration there was little possibility of bring it up to the modern standards. The Cascades Asylum should also be closed and a new asylum built for at least 375 patients. They preferred two sites at Glenorchy on the Derwent River and in the immediate neighbourhood of Hobart (Gowlland 1981: 88-9). Considering possible economic concerns they had drawn up with Mr. Elridge, the Colonial Architect, plans for remodelling New Norfolk which included Medical Officer’s Quarters, visiting rooms, dining rooms for staff, separate staff bedrooms, new bathrooms, new laundry, kitchen, workshops, stores, and a general assembly room; a hot and cold water service and an increase in the grounds (Gowlland 1981: 91).

The New Norfolk Commissioners Minute Book indicates that the Government agreed with the change to the Official Visitors who would have enlarged powers. These powers would include the ability to appoint and dismiss of all officers including the Superintendent; that they should have the ability to spend sums voted by Parliament for the maintenance of the institution, and the general control of the whole establishment. On the question of the site they considered a new asylum with its requisite land purchase would involve a considerable expense and that the reasons given for moving from New Norfolk were not sufficient in this case. The new railroad would shortly bring New Norfolk into ready contact with Hobart. They favoured the improvements of the buildings as recommended instead (July 28th 1884). The Board of Education offered the Asylum an adjoining piece of land for their use in 1884. The Commissioners accepted the offer and
indicated they intended to build a cottage for 25 males and 10 female idiots on the land and to increase the recreation areas (Tas. Comm. Min. Book 6/11/1884, 17/1/1885). A minute of October 1885 indicates that the anticipated new buildings for New Norfolk would cost £20,000. The most urgent was the extension of the male and female refractory wards as proposed, followed by the idiot’s cottage (Tas. Comm. Min. Book 3/10/1885).

In 1886 the new Official Visitors published their first interim report offering their recommendations with regard to bringing New Norfolk up to modern standards. The Visitors were of the belief that those buildings: “condemned by the Experts as unfit for further use shall be removed (Tas. Official Visitors Report 1886). The Visitors requested the closure of Grey Street which ran to the south of the Asylum. One chain wide and two hundred feet in length this would provide new airing court for the new building No. 1. This was intended to accommodate sixty to seventy patients in twenty separate rooms, dormitories and day rooms, plus several airing courts - allowing classification to occur. They planned a separate and distinct enclosure to house all the workshops, lumber stores, wood-sheds, engine-house &c. Adjoining this and separated only by a brick wall would be the steam laundry, drying house and drying-yard &c. The wall would prevent contact between the men and women. The mess and day room for male attendants would be centrally placed and distinct in itself, allowing them to quickly access all the male division. A new kitchen was planned along with a bakery and scullery, with the adjoining bathhouse sharing the water heating apparatus. The present kitchen would become a provision store. An administrative building would be located near the front entrance. The Assistant Medical Officer’s quarters would be above the offices.

With regard to the original buildings, which formed the centre quadrangle of the Asylum, it was proposed to raise the walls and verandah three feet to improve light and ventilation. The walls were to be resurfaced inside and out. The present offices and workshops, boiler house and bathroom would be abolished allowing the space to be turned into associated dormitories of convenient size for fifty patients, with enough space for a receiving ward. The back yard buildings would be partly demolished, a new dayroom and mess room for fifty patients built, and the yard made into a garden. The 16 separate apartments along one side would be retained as they had few faults, with one
wall being demolished to make two rooms into a dormitory. A day room and attendant’s room would be added along with baths (Tas. Official Visitors Report 1886).

The “new store” recently erected in the female division, which was inconveniently situated, they planned to turn into workrooms. The new store would be central to both divisions and would include a dispensary. The former drying room located adjacent to Humphrey-street would become the morgue and post-mortem room.

The refractory division for women being most imperfect and inadequate, they decided to erect a new building capable of accommodating 44 patients, with full means of classification and separation. It would be a smaller version of the new male block. Of the refractory block it was decided to improve and retain the separate apartments for more feeble and helpless patients.

A new distinct and separate home for idiots was planned and a design already chosen. The original location at the farm was greatly inconvenient and required separate cooking and dining rooms. The new location on the grounds did away with this need.

The present Matron’s Quarters was most secluded and in a cheerless place, where it was constantly exposed to the noise of patients. Hence they were to be relocated to a quieter area that offered a full view of the grounds for observation. The present quarters would become a nurse’s home giving them a break from the patients.

The main and all other buildings required repair and were defective in their design and placement but were considered too valuable to remove. The inferior and imperfect laundry would be replaced by a steam laundry. The paying patient’s quarters needed little change. While all the grounds needed to be improved.

While involving a great expense, the goal was all important: “we feel the time has arrived when this institution must either be entirely re-constructed and equipped in accordance with modern views, or for ever abandoned; and bearing this constantly in mind, we have acted and advised up to the required standard, irrespective of cost,” (Tas. Official Visitors Report 1886). Such an institution was to be a permanent institution in the Colony and must be constructed and maintained in accordance with modern dictates of modern philosophy. A new institution would cost far more. The Asylum as redesigned would house 340 to 350 patients.
To provide employment for both men and women, the Visitors recommended the purchase of additional land for farming and gardening. The steam laundry would free some women to work outside.

The Visitor’s in their Report concluded that the Boarding-Out system would not work due to the low numbers of people in the country, outside of centres of population. While the Cottage System offered little beyond what the newly planned re-arrangement of the Asylum would do (Tas. Official Visitors Report 1886).

The available plan for 1886 shows the New Norfolk Hospital as the Official Visitors envisaged it. The Official Visitors planned a number of new buildings and significant modifications of the original back square. The Visitors proposed the erection of two new pavilion buildings to house the male and female chronic/dirty and acute patients. The female building was to be to the north of the Refractory building opposite a large recreation area suitable for sports such as cricket. The male building was to be to the south west of the Gentlemen’s cottage. A new Idiots Cottage was to be placed to the north of the female chronic/dirty and acute building. The existing Matron’s Cottage was to be converted into a nurse’s home, while new quarters for the Matron and administrative offices would be housed in a semi detached building below Willow Court to the west near the Burnett Street entrance. The plan also saw the demolition of the back quadrangle leaving Willow Court and only the northern range of wards still standing. In place of the southern range there would be built a new day and work room, with to the south of this room a new kitchen and bakery. A free standing staff dining room would be located between the kitchen and the Gentlemen’s Cottage. Along Humphrey Street on the eastern boundary of the Hospital would be a new laundry complex and workshops.

This plan appears to have been dictated by the existing placement of buildings and the possibilities of getting funding to erect new buildings. The worst of the male rooms were done away with, with the demolition of the back square’s southern range of rooms that appear to have been the original separate sleeping rooms rather than converted sleeping wards. While classification was achieved by the provision of three new pavilions which were placed on the available land on the male and female sides of the Hospital. The location of the laundry and associated rooms may have been dictated by existing plumbing, gas and sewerage connections. Houses were located on the other side of
Humphrey Street and this area would probably have been unsuitable for exercise areas. The staff dining room was intended for male staff use only; the nurses probably would have the use of a room in the Nurses’ Cottage (formerly the Matron’s Cottage).

The new pavilions for the acute and chronic and dirty patients were particularly interesting in that they reflected ideas current in 1886 about the accommodation of such patients. The pavilions which were intended to be two storied were composed of two mirror halves, one for each class. The downstairs wards were composed of five single rooms each with a very large day room which was located across a wide corridor. The attendant’s had two large rooms on each ward, and each ward had a bath and lavatory room. Each yard had three smaller yards where an individual patient could be exercised. The first floor may have had a similar arrangement or a ward may have replaced the day room. Compared to the other older buildings these pavilions provided increased living space, separate and reasonably sized accommodation for the attendants, proper sanitation, and reduced patient numbers per ward improving the patient/attendant ratio.

The offices appear to be located in a building near the Burnett Street entrance. This building was composed of two blocks of rooms with abutting yards in the middle. The right block was to be Matron’s quarters, while the legend on the left block is unclear; it appears these would be offices and possibly the Assistant Medical Officer’s rooms on the first floor. The detached building to the rear housed the dispensary and a large store.

The Idiots’ Cottage was an interesting building being an open V with the attendant’s block orientated to form a diamond. The left arm of the V was composed of 3 single rooms and attendant’s room and a large dormitory which was matched in the other arm by a day room, attendant’s room and 3 single rooms. The centre rooms are not legible but may have included the bath or additional day space.

The New Norfolk Hospital shown on this plan then is a mixture of the old and new. Buildings that were less than perfect were retained still. Interestingly the plan apparently does not include a large room that could accommodate most of the patients for entertainments or religious services. The new male day room in the back square may have been put to this purpose. Overall the plan sees the Hospital spread over a large area with no real focus.
As before change was to be slow. By 1889 a new female building and the idiot’s cottage had been completed, while the new male building was opened in 1893 (Gowlland 1981: 103, 109). The block plan of 1888 while not indicative of room use does show how little New Norfolk had changed from the original Invalid Hospital and Hospital for the Insane. Despite modifications the original Willow Court and back square were retained intact. The main changes being the addition of a bath house in the back square, a larger kitchen, wash house and workshops off of the two squares. It was not until the twentieth century that significant additions were made to New Norfolk.

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