The Tasmanian community has a long connection to Willow Court. The Derwent Valley Council, with community and our many partners, are committed to seeing Willow Court evolve as a premier heritage experience and destination.

As the site continues to progress, further visitor experiences will develop too.

Access

The Barracks Courtyard area is open most days to members of the public with the exception of special events. Some sections of Willow Court may be closed to the public and are not accessible while awaiting restoration and development. Other sections are privately operated.

For information on public access, including tours, events and opening hours, please scan the QR code below:

Further information:
derwentvalley.tas.gov.au/willow-court
phone: 03 6261 8500
email: dvcouncil@dvc.tas.gov.au

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the development of this Guide.

UNQUESTIONABLY
Derwent Valley
TASMANIA

WILLOW COURT HERITAGE PRECINCT



VISITOR GUIDE

DV

Derwent Valley Council acknowledges and pays respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as the traditional, original owners and continuing custodians of this land.

We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders, past and present.

Council acknowledges the sensitive history of Willow Court that has impacted people's lived experience of the site.

Note to readers:
The Willow Court Visitor Guide provides readers with a brief introduction to the unique history of Willow Court. For further information, readers are encouraged to explore the Derwent Valley Council's website.

Willow Court was established as a depot for chronically ill, or 'invalid' convicts, in 1827. One of the oldest continually run asylums in Australia, the institution was commissioned by Governor George Arthur and designed by renowned Colonial Engineer, John Lee Archer.

From its establishment in the 1820s to its closure in 2000, Willow Court was shaped by the evolution of ideas and practices relating to the treatment of mental health and disability. Over time, the facility provided services for adults and children living with disability and/or mental illness, those experiencing alcoholism, people deemed 'morally delinquent', including young unmarried mothers, the 'criminally insane', and members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Through various stages of construction and demolition, operational changes, technological advancements, and name changes, this precinct has been in a constant state of flux. By the late twentieth century, as new ways of care were introduced, patients were gradually removed from the institutional setting of Willow Court into supported accommodation across the State.

Today, this assemblage of heritage buildings, yards, gardens and streetscapes reveals a complex and multi-layered story of a public health institution which has left an indelible mark on the Tasmania community.

Why is it called Willow Court?

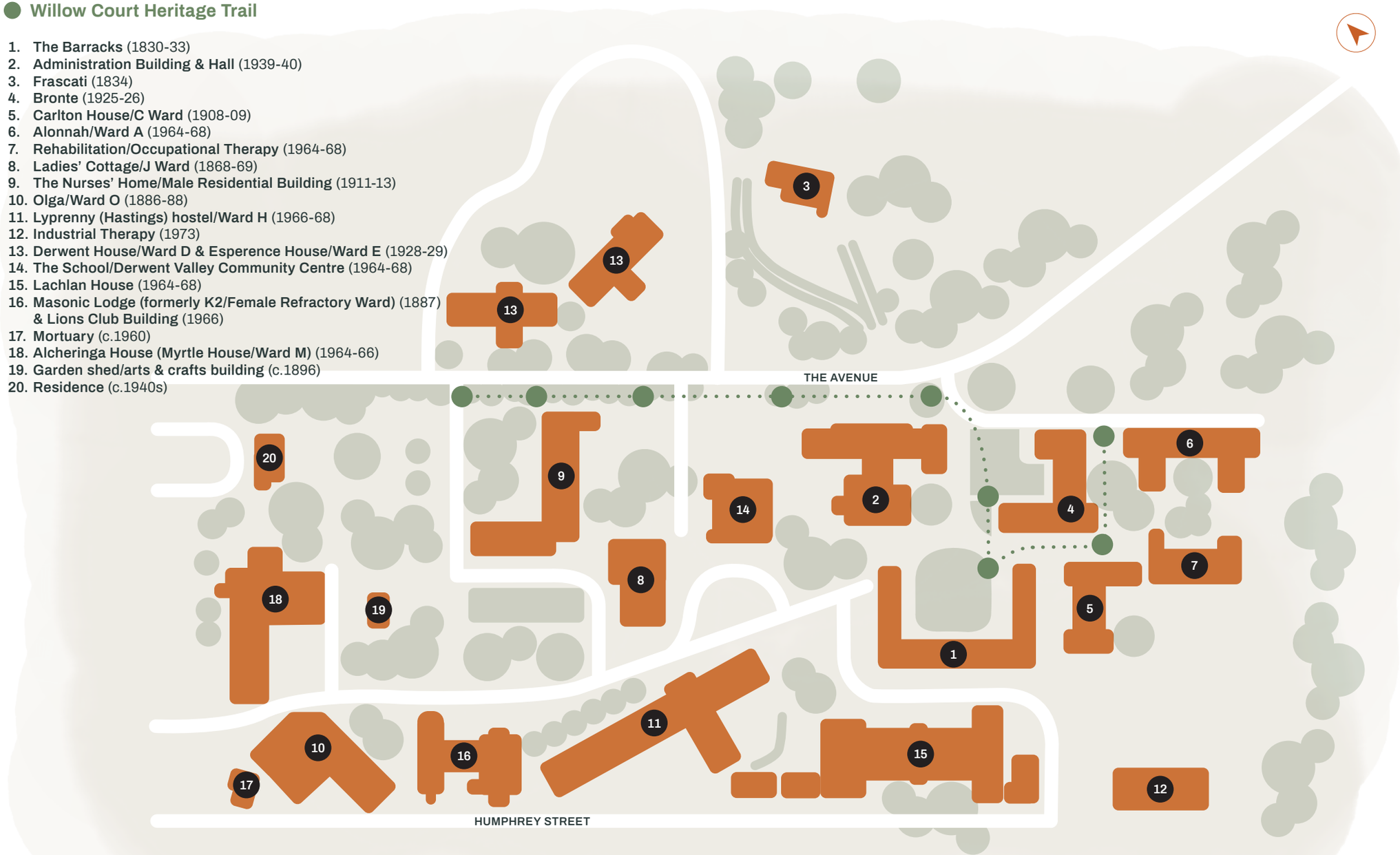
Willow Court takes its name from the willow trees believed to have been planted by Lady Jane Franklin in the forecourt of the Barracks during the mid-nineteenth century. The trees were said to be grown from cuttings taken from the grave of Napoleon on the island, Saint Helena. Both trees were removed in the 1960s.

While different names have been applied to the buildings and functions of this precinct over its many years of operation, the name Willow Court has endured and today is used to refer to the historic precinct on the western side of the Lachlan River.



Willow Court Heritage Trail

1. **The Barracks** (1830-33)
2. **Administration Building & Hall** (1939-40)
3. **Frascati** (1834)
4. **Bronte** (1925-26)
5. **Carlton House/C Ward** (1908-09)
6. **Alonnah/Ward A** (1964-68)
7. **Rehabilitation/Occupational Therapy** (1964-68)
8. **Ladies' Cottage/J Ward** (1868-69)
9. **The Nurses' Home/Male Residential Building** (1911-13)
10. **Olga/Ward O** (1886-88)
11. **Lyprenny (Hastings) hostel/Ward H** (1966-68)
12. **Industrial Therapy** (1973)
13. **Derwent House/Ward D & Esperence House/Ward E** (1928-29)
14. **The School/Derwent Valley Community Centre** (1964-68)
15. **Lachlan House** (1964-68)
16. **Masonic Lodge (formerly K2/Female Refractory Ward)** (1887) **& Lions Club Building** (1966)
17. **Mortuary** (c.1960)
18. **Alcheringa House (Myrtle House/Ward M)** (1964-66)
19. **Garden shed/arts & crafts building** (c.1896)
20. **Residence** (c.1940s)



Please note that this map depicts the collection of buildings that make up the Willow Court Heritage Precinct. These buildings are under various forms of ownership and use, and many are not accessible to the public. This Guide also references buildings which have been demolished. Buildings 1-13 are described in this guide.

The Barracks

Established 1830–1833

The Barracks was constructed between 1830 – 1833 to replace the existing Invalid Depot, established in the 1820s. The term ‘Barracks’ refers to the architectural structure consisting of a sizeable building, or series of buildings, capable of housing large groups of people.

As the oldest building in the entire complex, the Barracks has undergone many changes over time. In the late-1840s, when the Asylum solely housed mental health patients, those categorised as ‘quiet’ were placed in the front of the Barracks and those categorised as ‘troublesome’ were placed in the back (now demolished).

Nearly 100 years later, by the 1930s, the Barracks was being used to accommodate medical and administrative staff and those with chronic illness. In 1952 the building was reserved for occupational therapy and later that decade the ground floor front and back walls were opened to allow for vehicular access, evidenced by the mis-matched red bricks used to restore the gaps in 1980.

Today the external heritage fabric of the Barracks remains mostly intact and stands as a stark reminder of the colonial origins of the Willow Court complex.



Source: Libraries Tasmania, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office AA193/1/2320



Source: Curio Projects 2024

Frascati House (Frescati/Frascatti)

Established 1834

Frascati was originally constructed as a country retreat for Colonial Secretary, John Burnett, his wife, and their nine children. Almost 10 years after it was built, he offered the house for lease and it became a residence for the Medical Superintendent of the then Lunatic Asylum, thereby beginning Frascati’s long association with Willow Court. Realising the need to create a permanent living situation for executive staff, the institution purchased the house for approximately 1000 pounds in 1859 and it continued to be used as staff quarters until 1972.

From the early 1970s the house was used for various therapies, including speech therapy and arts and craft sessions, until it was abandoned by the institution in 1980.



Source: Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office AA193-1-253_1970

Administration Building

Established c1938–1940

The Administration Building was essential to the day-to-day operations of the institution. It was initially recommended in the Inquiry of the Royal Commission in 1883 and finally constructed over 50 years later, sometime between 1938-1940.

Far from being just an administrative centre, the hall at the rear of the building was used as an entertainment space, and hosted films, concerts, dances, and church services for patients and the wider community.





Bronte (Ward G/B)

Established 1925–26

Bronte, or as it was first called, Ward G, was constructed next to the main entrance way of Willow Court and originally used as the Sick Ward. Accommodation included ten single rooms and two open-plan wards, with the overall capacity to house 40 patients. It was purportedly in this ward that Electro Convulsive Therapy was used, as well as malaria treatment and insulin therapy.

When a further four wards were constructed in the 1930s, adult male patients were relocated and the building was used to house young boys, thereafter referred to as the ‘boys’ cottage’. Following renovations in the 1950s, Bronte became a ward for women in 1965.

Carlton House (Ward C)

Established 1908–1909

Carlton Ward was built as a high security block to house criminally insane male patients. In the 1960s Carlton Ward underwent significant renovations and the demolition of buildings at the far corner of the complex made way for a large, enclosed exercise yard on the eastern side of the building. This, and a smaller yard on the western side provided recreation space for patients.

Carlton Ward was the site of several high-profile escapes. In March 1968, 10 to 12 men reportedly escaped after assaulting staff and stealing a nurse’s car to assist their getaway. It was only two years earlier that a siren had been installed to alert people when an escape had occurred.

The ward closed in the early 1980s when a new psychiatric facility was built at Risdon Prison on the outskirts of Hobart.





Alonnah (Ward A)

Established 1964

Alonnah was constructed during the Willow Court building boom of the 1960s. It operated as the maximum security ward for women and had a prison-like design, with small rooms similar to cells, metal-paned windows, and open-plan bathrooms. A wall made of besser blocks was constructed on the outskirts of the building, most likely to provide privacy to the patients within.

By the early 1990s the building had closed to live-in patients and was being used as part of the occupational therapy program.

Occupational Therapy Building

Established 1964–1968

The Occupational Therapy Building was constructed for maximum-security patients living in Carlton and Alonnah wards to take part in therapeutic activities. The building was reserved for light work, such as packing pegs for the local Pioneer Woodware Company, and doubled as a space for entertainment and social activities. Among its workrooms it housed a stage, changerooms, toilets, lockers and storage rooms.

When Carlton and Allonah shut down, it was reserved as a recreational space for patients living with disabilities.

All images:
Curio Projects 2024



Source: Curio Projects 2024

Ladies' Cottage (J Ward)

Established 1868–1869

Mirroring the Gentleman's Cottage constructed in 1859 (since demolished), the Ladies' Cottage was built for the purpose of housing women who had the financial security or familial connections to pay their own fees for their care and accommodation.

The Cottage was built away from the main Barracks and conditions were markedly better than the wards that housed non-fee-paying patients. Bedrooms contained anywhere from one to four beds and the Cottage had its own garden, dining room, bathrooms and kitchen. Contrary to the hard work performed in other wards, women housed in the Ladies' Cottage participated in gentle tasks, including needlework, reading, walking, as well as social activities such as picnics, dances and music sessions.

A collection of 400 items were retrieved from beneath the floorboards of the veranda after being discovered by private owners in 2013. The items include bonnets, aprons, letters, sweet wrappers, cards, magazines, and small vials, all thought to be dated from 1908 to 1979, giving us unique insight into everyday life as a patient.



Source: National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142963679-1. Photograph Mike Key

Nurses' Home

Established 1911–1913

Motivated by the need to provide housing for female staff away from the main treatment centres, the Nurses' Home was built on the far western side of the Barracks, and took almost three years to complete.

It was fitted with comfortable furnishings and contained enough bedrooms to accommodate up to 30 nurses. However, by the mid-1920s it was reported that the number of staff greatly outnumbered available accommodation, leaving some nurses to find housing elsewhere on the grounds, often in very close proximity to the patients.

When a new nurses' home was built on the eastern side of the Lachlan River in 1961, the old Nurses' Home was used to house the men whose newly built hostel burnt down in 1962.



Source: National Library of Australia, nla.obj-142963070-1. Photograph Mike Key

Olga/Ward O

Established 1886–1888

A striking building designed in the gothic style of architecture, Olga, or 'O Ward', was constructed in 1888 for male patients living with disabilities. Similar to many wards across Willow Court, Olga's function changed many times, becoming a female hospital in 1904 and later, a ward for women with disabilities. Accommodation was made up of dormitories and large dayrooms, and some patients took part in occupational therapy or assisted in the daily running of the institution.

To the rear of Olga/O Ward, the facility's third morgue was constructed in the 1960s, the first being located in the South East corner of the Barracks, the second at the rear of B Ward.



Source: Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
AA193-1-259

Lyprenny (Hastings) Hostel/ Ward H

Established 1966–1968

Lyprenny was one building split into three parts: a medical clinic on the lower floor, Hastings Hostel upstairs, and Lyprenny downstairs. The building was designed to capture sunlight through its large north facing windows, naturally warming the building and creating a homely environment for its high-needs patients. Reflecting the arrival of more inclusive technologies and improved accessibility, Lyprenny was the only building that included an elevator. The use of concrete blocks is a typical architectural feature of the time, earning it a review in the journal, “Tasmanian Architect”, and inclusion in a Royal Australian Institute of Architects National Conference exhibition.



Source: Johnston, Strating, Morris and Small 2006

Industrial Therapy Building

Established 1973

The Industrial Therapy building was designed to be a place of work for patients. Metalwork and woodwork were some of the most common activities, each under the supervision of a qualified tradesman. The items were for the use of the hospital and people in the community, with some being sold to the public to raise funds for further materials and even exhibited at the Royal Hobart Show.



Source: Derwent Valley Council 2024

Derwent/Ward D and Esperance House/Ward E

Established 1935–1937

Four new wards were constructed to accommodate male patients relocated from the older sections of the hospital.

‘Wards D (Derwent), E (Esperance), F (Franklin) and G (Glenora) were called the Oval Wards as they faced onto the yet to be constructed oval and cycle track. Wards D and E were built between 1935 and 1937 to relieve overcrowding in the Male division of the Hospital and are still standing today.

Two further wards, F and G were constructed in 1939 though not immediately occupied due to staff shortages and the commencement of WW2. F and G Wards were both destroyed by fire in 2012 and 2018 respectively.

Timeline of major events

Pre 1807

Before invasion and colonisation, wulawali (New Norfolk) and the place where Willow Court now stands were part of the traditional country of the Linawina people

1807

First settlers arrive

1827

Establishment of the Invalid Depot

1829

A ‘Lunatics Ward’ is added

1833

The Barracks is constructed

1834

Frascati completed

1840–41

New wing to house female lunatic patients is completed

1841

The first lunacy legislation in Van Diemen’s Land is passed, called the Lunacy Act

1859

Institutional name changed to the ‘Hospital for the Insane, New Norfolk’

1869

Ladies’ Cottage completed

1888

Olga/O Ward completed

1890

The Hospital becomes the sole asylum in Tasmania

1909

Carlton building completed

1913

Nurses home completed

1915

Name changed to the ‘Mental Diseases Hospital, New Norfolk’

1926

Bronte building completed

1937

Institutional name changed to ‘Lachlan Park’

1937-39

Derwent, Esperance, Franklin, and Glenora wards completed

1940

Administration block completed

1964–68

Allonah, Alcheringa, Lachlan, Lyprenny, the School, and the Occupational Therapy Building completed

1968

Institutional name changed to the ‘Royal Derwent Hospital’

1973

Industrial Therapy Building constructed

1990s

Institutional name changed to Willow Court

1997

Willow Court has 70 patients remaining

Nov 2000

Willow Court officially closes