

ADR12.2 Provenance and biographical research

One of the most important elements of the story of a garment is its provenance — especially information about its original owner. Sometimes it can be illuminating to consider the details of the life of that original wearer, and to try to discover when and where they lived, who was in their family and what they did with their lives.

Sometimes garments have been passed down with excellent documentation and information about the original wearer, but sometimes no more than a name, or the name of a parent or spouse, is known.

Family history research is an excellent way to approach filling in biographical details about the original owners of your garments. This type of research is not restricted to people researching their own ancestors; it can be a very effective mode of research for any historical project.

If you are interested in filling in the details about the lives surrounding your dress register entry, there are some very useful websites and archives that can help you — as well as some family history guides.

Family history guides

The best way to get started with family history research is to have a look at one of the many excellent family history guides available on the internet. Some of these relate to archives based in NSW, and others are general guides for anyone in the country to use. We have listed the ones we think will be most helpful for your Australian Dress Register entry, but it is by no means an exhaustive list.

- State Library of NSW, <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/services/family_history/>
- State Records NSW, <<http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/state-archives/resources-for/historians/family-historians>>
- National Library of Australia, <<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/genelist.html>>
- National Archives of Australia, <<http://www.naa.gov.au/services/family-historians/index.aspx>>
- History Trust of South Australia, <http://www.history.sa.gov.au/chu/programs/museums_grants_help_sheets.html>

Places to go

Once you have looked through a guide to family history research, you will be well equipped to approach family history research. Many guides advise doing initial research on the web, but if you are not comfortable with the using the internet, there are places you can go to begin your search.

There are two major repositories of family history archives for the whole of NSW, the State Library and the State Archives. However, there are also excellent local studies and family history libraries across NSW which also have comprehensive archives and expert librarians who can assist you in accessing other, wider, databases.

Local historical societies can also be extremely helpful, and can often be visited in person or contacted remotely if the history of your garment relates to a region far from you. Societies such as the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society are more than happy to help researchers and often have access to lots of family information about people from their region.

- State Records NSW has two addresses in Sydney:
 - Western Sydney Records Centre (WSRC)
143 O'Connell Street
Kingswood NSW 2747
 - Sydney Records Centre (SRC)
2 Globe Street
The Rocks NSW 2000

State Records' website advises that 'Copied material is the same in both locations. All original (uncopied) records are stored at the WSRC'.

- State Library of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
- Parramatta Local Studies and Family History Library
346A Church Street
Parramatta NSW 2150

Websites with information on family history

If you are comfortable with internet research, there are two websites that will be invaluable tools for your Australian Dress Register entry.

- NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, <<http://www.bdm.nsw.gov.au/familyHistory/familyHistory.htm>>

Even if you cannot make it out to an archive for copies of birth or death certificates, the NSW Births, Death and Marriages website provides a basic level of information for free and is an easy way to order copies of these documents (although this does require a fee).

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, <<http://www.familysearch.org/eng/default.asp>>

The information on this website can be a great deal more detailed than is available on the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages site, and it is all freely available. However, the information must come with the caveat that it has been filled in by individual family historians, and cannot be considered to have a guarantee of total accuracy (although it is accurate the vast majority of the time).

Other resources

The National Library of Australia provides online access to historical issues of Australian newspapers, which can also be a very valuable source of family history information (often through obituaries), if you have already established some firm dates and places of interest.

- <<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au/>>

The Australian Dress Register is an initiative of the Powerhouse Movable Heritage NSW program, which is coordinated through the Museum's Regional Services program to support research and documentation of cultural heritage collections.

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