Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3970

Austin, Elizabeth Phillips

(1821 - 1910)

Born	18210814, Somerset England
Died	19100902, Winchelsea Victoria Australia
Occupation	Pastoralist, Philanthropist

Summary

Elizabeth Austin was the benefactor of Melbourne's Austin Hospital, and 'a pioneer of female benefaction in Victoria'.

Details

Elizabeth was the fourth daughter of Robert Harding, a yeoman farmer, and his wife Mary (née Phillips). She sailed for Australia in 1841 with her brother William, who settled in Winchelsea. In 1945 Elizabeth married her neighbour, Thomas Austin, in Melbourne. She had eleven children, three of whom died in infancy. The Austin's lived at Barwon Park, where they entertained the Duke of Edinburgh in 1867. Embarrassed by their 'undistinguished homestead', Elizabeth persuaded her husband to build a new home, and a bluestone mansion was completed by 1871. Thomas Austin passed away shortly afterwards.

According to historian Paul de Serville, Elizabeth Austin – described by grandchildren as a 'shrewd, determined woman' – had 'quietly begun a second career, as a philanthropist' by 1880. She responded to an appeal to found a hospital for incurables in Melbourne, offering £6,000 (via an intermediary) to launch it. Reputedly, her interest in incurable disease 'derived from a case among her staff'. On her birthday in 1882, the Austin Hospital for Incurables was opened. She continued to give money for maintenance, and paid for the establishment of a children's ward in 1898. Austin visited the hospital once a month, and three of her granddaughters served on its committee until the 1960s.

Another major philanthropic gift went to the Austin Homes for Women at South Geelong, built as part of the Jubilee celebrations for Queen Victoria in 1887. Austin also gave to the Servants' Training Institute, St Thomas's Church (Winchelsea), the Ladies' Benevolent Society and local charities. She was buried in the Geelong cemetery with Anglican rites.

Events

2012 - 2012
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Published resources

Resource Section
Austin, Elizabeth Phillips (1821-1911), Serville, Paul de, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/AS10016b.htm

Thesis
In Her Gift: Activism and Altruism in Australian Women's Philanthropy, 1880-2005, Lemon, Barbara, 2008

Journal Article
Perhaps to Spite her Children: The Philanthropy of Elizabeth Austin, Swain, Shurlee, 1996

Site Exhibition
In Her Gift: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wiph/home.html

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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