

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Single Mothers and Their Children

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Studies in Australian History

Series editors:

Alan Gilbert, Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Spearritt

Steven Nicholas (ed.) *Convict Workers*
Pamela Statham (ed.) *The Origins of Australia's Capital Cities*
Jeffrey Grey *A Military History of Australia*
Alastair Davidson *The Invisible State*
James A. Gillespie *The Price of Health*
David Neal *The Rule of Law in a Penal Colony*
Sharon Morgan *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania*
Audrey Oldfield *Woman Suffrage in Australia*
Paula J. Byrne *Criminal Law and Colonial Subject*
Peggy Brock *Outback Ghettos*
Raelene Frances *The Politics of Work*
Luke Trainor *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism*
Margaret Maynard *Fashioned from Penury*
Dawn May *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry*
Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds) *Gender and War*
Michael Roe *Australia, Britain, and Migration, 1915-1940*
John F. Williams *The Quarantined Culture*
Nicholas Brown *Governing Prosperity*
Jan Todd *Colonial Technology*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia

Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Single Mothers and Their Children

Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia

Shurlee Swain

Australian Catholic University and
University of Melbourne

with

Renate Howe

Deakin University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521474436

© Cambridge University Press 1995

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1995

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication Data

Swain, Shurlee.
Single mothers and their children: disposal, punishment
and survival in Australia.
1. Unmarried mothers – Australia – History. 2. Illegitimacy – Australia – History. 3. Illegitimate
children – Australia – History. 4. Australia – Social
conditions – 1851 – 1901. 5. Australia – Social conditions –
20th century. I. Howe, Renate, 1939– . II. Title.
(Series : Studies in Australian history (Cambridge, England)).
306.85'60994

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Swain, Shurlee.
Single mothers and their children : disposal, punishment and
survival in Australia / Shurlee Swain, with Renate Howe.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Single mothers – Australia – History. I. Howe, Renate.
II. Title.
HQ759.915.s9 1995
306.85'6'0994–dc20 95–17996

ISBN 978-0-521-47443-6 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-47968-4 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel
timetables, and other factual information given in this work is correct at
the time of first printing but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee
the accuracy of such information thereafter.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

List of Illustrations	vi
List of Tables	vii
List of Individuals Mentioned More than Once in the Text	viii
Abbreviations	xix
Preface	xx
1 Introduction: To Have an Unlicensed Child	1
2 The Mothers: A Perfectly Nice Girl—An Ordinary Girl, Perhaps Your Own Daughter	12
3 Breaking the News: What Are You Going to Do About It?	32
4 Pregnancy and Confinement: Medicos, Midwives and Morals	60
5 Death: A Very Army of Murderesses within Our Midst	91
6 Separation: Now Put This Thing That Has Happened to You Away, Forget about It, and Get On with Your Life	114
7 Surviving: You Must Maintain Your Own	150
8 Illegitimacy: To Punish the Innocent Child	175
9 Empowerment and Resistance: Speaking Out Publicly	196
Notes	209
Bibliography	251
Index	259

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Illustrations

Seduced: an image from the 1921 Australian film <i>Know Thy Child</i>	13
Betrayed: abandoned by her seducer, the pregnant heroine of <i>Know Thy Child</i> turns to her mother for support	33
Isabella Downey photographed in prison, 1910	45
The Geelong Female Refuge	75
The foyer of the Girls' Memorial Home, Fairfield	78
Maggie Heffernan photographed in prison	99
The <i>Bulletin's</i> view of the babyfarmer	101
The <i>Bulletin's</i> image of a foundling	115
Abandoned baby	117
The <i>Bulletin</i> parodies the Foundling Hospital debate	122
Stigmatised: the child in <i>Know Thy Child</i> is still marked by her illegitimacy	184

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Tables

2.1	Marital status of mothers	16
2.2	Father's relationship to mother	17
2.3	Age difference between mother and father	23
2.4	Birthplace of mother and father	23
2.5	Maternal age	24
2.6	Maternal age by marital status	25
2.7	Maternal occupation	26
2.8	Paternal occupation	27
2.9	Birthplace of mother	29
2.10	Illegitimacy rate by county of birth	30
3.1	Characteristics of women who sought abortion	39
3.2	Characteristics of women seeking to marry	48
4.1	Single mothers' place of confinement	83
4.2	Attendants at confinement	84

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Individuals Mentioned More than Once in the Text

Non-italicised names are people details of whose lives are already in the public domain. Italicised names are pseudonyms.

Angela, pregnant as a 17-year-old in 1972, considered the options of both abortion and marriage but unsuccessful in arranging either. She relinquished her son for adoption and had sought but not been successful in re-establishing contact at time of interview.

Ann, first pregnant as an 18-year-old, initially contemplated marriage but father of child refused. She spent most of her pregnancy in a private family placement, relinquished child and returned to her home. *Ann* fell pregnant for a second time in 1966 but stayed at home during this pregnancy and kept the child. A third pregnancy was resolved by marriage to a man who subsequently adopted her second child. She was reunited with her first child when he was 22.

Armstrong, Jane, 17-year-old single country girl, pregnant in 1875 to a widowed neighbour for whom she had been keeping house. Her family was unaware of her pregnancy until the child was born. They subsequently took action against her employer for seduction and were awarded damages.

Bridget, mother of three children to the same man during the 1960s, the first born when she was 23. The second child was stillborn but *Bridget* kept the other two, supporting them by her own efforts. She was an early member of CSMC and, with the encouragement of other members, returned to study and is now qualified as a social worker.

Bright, Ada Caroline, young single woman who gave birth to three illegitimate children during the 1890s. The eldest died after being put

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Individuals Mentioned in the Text ix

out to nurse by the Infant Asylum but *Ada* supported the younger two with occasional help from charitable agencies.

Britter, Alfred, parliamentary attendant and father of Jessie Gallie's second child born in Melbourne in 1859. His failure to support the child forced Jessie to take action against him for maintenance but the magistrate made only a small award on the basis that it was her second child.

Burn, Emma, mother of a child born in Melbourne in 1875. The child was abandoned after a boarding-out arrangement failed. Emma left the colony but was located and charged with abandonment.

Carol, born to an 18-year-old single mother in Melbourne in 1969, the second adopted child of a couple who six years later had a natural-born daughter. She grew up with knowledge of her adoption and fully accepted by her adoptive family. *Carol* has obtained information about her natural mother but has been unable to locate her.

Carter, Jane, fell pregnant as a 17-year-old in 1971. Her parents disapproved of her plans to marry and arranged instead for her to spend her pregnancy in a maternity home and to relinquish her daughter for adoption. Following an unhappy adoption, her daughter found her in 1988 and they are now in regular contact.

Chitts, Mintie, single woman at service who became pregnant in 1904 to Alexander Harrow who denied paternity. The child died during the course of Mintie's protracted court case against Harrow for maintenance.

Cleveland, Alfred, father of child born to Louisa Cummins in the late 1850s. He disputed maintenance when Cummins married after the birth of the child, but was rebuked by the magistrate who commended Louisa on marrying but said that her new husband should not be expected to take responsibility for her child.

Coventry, Mary, 14-year-old girl who gave birth to her first child in Tasmania in 1862. Her mother passed the child off as her own, and later successfully thwarted Mary's attempts to regain custody after her marriage.

Coxon, Henry, father of several children by Margaret Moorhead, a woman whom he had engaged in the late 1850s as a companion to his invalid wife. Mrs Coxon filed for divorce in 1865 listing Moorhead as co-respondent.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
 and Survival in Australia
 Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

x *Individuals Mentioned in the Text*

Cummins, Louisa, single woman who gave birth to Alfred Cleveland's child in the late 1850s. She subsequently married another man and continued to care for the child.

Curran, Mary Anne, orphaned girl who in 1859 gave birth unexpectedly in the country boarding school in which she had been placed by her brother-in-law. The child died shortly after being placed out to nurse, but the case achieved notoriety when the proprietor of the school took action against Curran's brother-in-law on the grounds that the scandal had destroyed her business.

Dedman, Mary, Koori woman who came to Melbourne during the 1890s, supporting her son, Thomas, for five years. He was taken to the Neglected Children's Depot after her death.

Deirdre, 14-year-old girl, pregnant to her brother-in-law in 1940. Her son was relinquished for adoption at birth. Following the passage of the Adoption Information Act, Deidre has located her son but contact is minimal.

Derbyshire, Thomas, 2-year-old ex-nuptial child, boarded out since birth, murdered by his stepfather in 1870.

Diane, a 16-year-old who fell pregnant to her boyfriend while completing her Higher School Certificate. She arranged her own admission to a maternity home and relinquished the child for adoption. Now married with four children, Diane has taken steps to be reunited with her son but he has been unresponsive.

Eleanor, a 21-year-old who gave birth to her son in 1965 and immediately relinquished him for adoption. She married seven months later and subsequently adopted two sons herself. Her natural son made contact at 24 and has a continuing relationship with the family.

Elizabeth, 31-year-old single woman pregnant in 1975 to a divorced man who was already a father of two. She had had an earlier pregnancy terminated at 27. The father refused to take any responsibility for the child which *Elizabeth* has supported with a mix of social security benefits and casual employment.

Ella, born in 1944 to a single woman from a large Catholic family. She was placed immediately in the care of the sisters of St Joseph and spent her entire childhood in Catholic institutions. Although her grandmother paid for her care, nobody from the family had contact with her and the nuns refused to give her any details of her origins. At 40, married with two children, *Ella* was able to locate her birth family, meeting initially an uncle who had no knowledge of her existence. Through him she

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
 and Survival in Australia
 Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Individuals Mentioned in the Text xi

learned that her mother had suffered acute depression after the birth and had been hospitalised for most of her life. Ella did make contact with her mother who appeared to have been told that her child had died. Although she continued to visit until her mother's death, she remains uncertain as to whether her mother was aware of who she was.

Ellie, mother of *Will*, born 1928. She married his father two years later but agreed to leave the boy with his foster mother in a de facto adoptive situation. *Will* re-established contact in 1978 and continued to visit until his mother's death five years later.

Eve, Elizabeth, single rural woman who died in childbirth in 1875.

Fanny, a 21-year-old who gave birth to her daughter in 1921. She had the child boarded out but agreed to cease contact with her as a condition of her marriage some years later. The child was boarded out by the Child Welfare Department and *Fanny*, finding herself unable to have children within her marriage, adopted another daughter. She re-established contact with her natural child in 1984.

Featherstone, Ellen, 15-year-old single girl, pregnant to the young man with whom she had fled the family home in 1855 in order to avoid a marriage arranged by her father.

Felicity, born in 1959 to *Marion*, a 22-year-old single woman, and adopted at three months of age by a couple whose newborn daughter had died one week earlier. The other children in the family were already adult. *Felicity* began to search for her natural mother following the death of her adoptive parents and met her when she was 27.

Fredericks, Maureen, a 29-year-old married woman who gave birth to *Moirra* in 1943 as a result of a wartime affair. She tried to kill the child and buried her in a public park. Apprehended by the police, she served two years in prison before returning to her husband and family and resuming the marriage. Although her daughter did find her in 1987, there has been only one meeting.

Gail, born in 1950 to a 17-year-old woman who breastfed her for six months before agreeing to her adoption. She was adopted by a childless couple who four years later had a natural daughter. *Gail* felt accepted in this family but became curious about her origins following the birth of her own daughter at 17 but waited many years before attempting to make contact. Her natural mother is angry about contact being made and no ongoing relationship has developed.

Gallie, Jessie, book binder in the Victorian Parliamentary Library, pregnant to Alfred Britter in 1859. This was Gallie's second child, the first having been born some years earlier in Tasmania.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
 and Survival in Australia
 Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xii *Individuals Mentioned in the Text*

Galvin, Annie, single country woman, pregnant to David Simson in 1875. After Simson refused to marry her, Galvin gave birth to the child alone but later took action against Simson for breach of promise.

Gannaway, Alice, daughter of a Congregational clergyman by whom she had seven children prior to his arrest in 1895.

Glyn, Margaret, older woman pregnant to married man, John Black, in 1865.

Harrow, Alexander, father of Mintee Chitts' child, born 1904.

Heffernan, Maggie, single mother who murdered her son, born in 1899, by throwing him in the Yarra.

Hocking, Annie, married woman who left her husband and went to live with a Chinese market gardener by whom she had seven children prior to his death in 1894. She then returned to her husband who insisted that the children be surrendered to the Neglected Children's Department.

Hooper, Edmund, father of the child born in 1860 to Mary Ann Mundy with whom he had 'a business relationship'.

Hooper, Elizabeth, 22-year-old living at home when she became pregnant to John Spry in 1895. Despite threats and promises from Hooper's parents, Spry would not agree to marriage.

Hughes, Lydia, mother of William, born in 1880. The child was put out to nurse shortly after his birth and died shortly after.

Jack, born in 1965 to a 14-year-old girl. Adopted at 5 after several earlier placements had broken down. Felt unloved in his adoptive family and left home at 17. Began to search for his natural mother in 1981 and made contact four years later. His mother was upset by his resemblance to his father and has refused further contact.

Jennifer, pregnant in 1964 to a longstanding boyfriend. She was 16 and her parents took control of the situation, arranging for her admission to a maternity home and for the adoption of her child. She married her boyfriend two years later and they subsequently had three more children. *Jennifer* exchanged letters with her daughter's adoptive parents for two years before being agreeing to a reunion. Her daughter was then 18. Contact between the two families continues.

Jenny, pregnant in 1970 at 18 to a boy she met at a party. She deferred her teacher training and went to stay with relations during her pregnancy, relinquishing the child for adoption after the birth. Jenny later

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Individuals Mentioned in the Text xiii

married and had two more children but sought contact with first child for seven years before receiving a response. At this stage daughter is unwilling to have continuing contact.

Jones, Mary, adolescent ward of the Home of Hope for Destitute Children boarded out in Gippsland and married suddenly to the brother of her foster father when her pregnancy became apparent in 1905.

Josephine, adopted in 1952 as a newborn baby by an older couple with no other children. She married at 21 and has three children. *Josephine* made contact with her natural mother after more than thirty years and has been successful in re-establishing the relationship.

Kane, Anne, 23-year-old pregnant woman rescued from a 'bad house' by charity workers in 1885. She was later charged with the attempted murder of her child.

Kate, after two abortions during her years as a university student in the early 1960s, married at 21 and had her first child twelve months later. After the breakdown of the marriage, *Kate* had a second child in 1972 while studying in America and a third in Australia to her partner of two years standing in 1978. She was involved in the early years of CSMC and later in poverty action programs. *Kate* is now a qualified barrister and at the time of interview was still caring for her two younger children.

Kay, pregnant for the first time in 1962 to a fellow university student who was killed in a car accident shortly after the pregnancy was confirmed. Considering herself a de facto widow, she decided to keep the child in the face of considerable opposition from both her family and her friends. She married after a second pregnancy scare and had two more children. After her marriage, she went on to become one of the founders of CSMC and a prominent activist for the single mother's cause.

Kerren, born in 1970 to a 26-year-old woman and relinquished for adoption at birth. *Kerren* grew up in a secure family with one adopted sister; she became curious about natural mother at 18 and arranged contact. Mother had never married and has welcomed continuing relationship.

Latham, Eve, 21-year-old domestic servant, pregnant in 1884, died as a result of an abortion.

Laura, born in 1923 to a 23-year-old woman who transferred her guardianship to an aunt. This aunt arranged her adoption. *Laura* knew nothing of her adoption until she was 48 by which time her natural mother was dead.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xiv *Individuals Mentioned in the Text*

Linda, pregnant at 19 to an older work associate in 1964. Her father took control, arranging for her to live with a childless couple who planned to adopt the child. She was forbidden to have contact even though she always knew the whereabouts of her child and refrained from doing so until after her daughter had married. Mother and daughter are now in regular contact.

Lonsdale, Emma, 17-year-old country girl pregnant in 1915 whose friends paid for her to be confined in a Carlton private hospital. In desperation as the date of her discharge approached, Emma killed the child and subsequently stood trial for murder.

Lorraine, adopted as an infant in 1960. She learnt about her adoption as a child; she had a turbulent adolescence and left her adoptive home. *Lorraine* married as a result of pregnancy at 18 but later divorced. She decided to search for her natural mother after a second failed marriage but mother died suddenly only five weeks after their reunion.

Louise, adopted in 1947, four months after her birth, by an older childless couple who told her nothing about her adoption. She married at 20 because of pregnancy and began to suspect she might be adopted. *Louise* has begun to search for her mother because she thinks this information will be of value to her own children but had not made contact at the time of the interview.

Lucy, born in Singapore in 1941 and evacuated to Britain with her mother after the Japanese invasion. She came to Australia as a 4-year-old after her mother had married an Australian serviceman. When this marriage ended, they returned to England before settling in Western Australia where her mother married for a second time. *Lucy* married at 18 because of pregnancy and had three children before seeking a divorce. She still has only limited knowledge of the circumstances of her birth.

Lyn, pregnant at 20 to a man whom she had met on a working holiday in 1972. She spent the latter part of her pregnancy in a maternity home and relinquished her son for adoption immediately after his birth. *Lyn* later married and had three more children but has remained curious about her son. The adoption agency has provided some information but there had been no contact at the time of interview.

Marcia, pregnant at 17 to her boyfriend of three years standing. Her daughter was born in 1964 and relinquished for adoption. Eighteen months later, *Marcia* married her boyfriend and together they had two further children. This marriage ended in divorce after twenty years, leading *Marcia* to again be curious about her eldest child. Contact was made in 1989 and has continued regularly since.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
 and Survival in Australia
 Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Individuals Mentioned in the Text xv

McNeigh, Elizabeth, Fitzroy woman supporting two children during the 1890s, initially by dressmaking but later appears to have 'drifted' into prostitution.

Marion, a 22-year-old single woman who gave birth to *Felicity* in 1959. After relinquishing the child, she married and had three other children. *Felicity* contacted her in 1986 and is rebuilding the relationship.

Marni, daughter of *Susan*, a 22-year-old Koori woman who died six weeks after her birth in 1961. *Marni* was placed in foster care and later adopted by an older couple with an adopted son. This couple denied her ethnicity and were abusive towards her as a result of which she began acting out. As an adolescent she spent substantial periods in boarding school before leaving home finally after year twelve. She then met other Kooris while studying and came to recognise her own cultural heritage and to make contact with her extended family.

Marsh, George, Prahran man who fathered six children during the period 1877–89, three to his lawful wife and three to his mistress. Both families were left destitute following his death in 1890.

Mary Ann, daughter of 19-year-old *Paula*. She was born in 1948 and reared by her grandparents as their own child. She discovered her status at 14 but remained in the family home until her first marriage five years later.

Meg, pregnant to boyfriend in 1964, at age 19. Her parents arranged for her to be accommodated in a maternity home and for the subsequent adoption of her child. On her return home, she needed psychiatric treatment and was hospitalised three times before becoming pregnant for a second time. She had intended to keep this baby but it died before she was able to take it home. *Meg* later married and had two more daughters but continued to suffer psychiatric illness until she took steps to re-establish contact with her eldest child in 1984. At the time of interview this contact had not proceeded beyond the letter stage.

Megan, born to an 18-year-old single woman in 1947 and adopted one week later. The adoption was arranged by a private doctor in an effort to compensate another patient for the loss of her baby girl. *Megan* was told of her adoption at 14 but discussion was not encouraged. She married at 17 because of pregnancy and had three children before the marriage ended in divorce eight years later. She began to search for her natural mother at 40 because of need to provide genetic information for her own pregnant daughter. At the time of interview, natural mother had agreed to letter contact only.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
 and Survival in Australia
 Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xvi *Individuals Mentioned in the Text*

Moltine, James, wealthy widower who fathered Frances Titley's child, born 1874.

Moorhead, Margaret, de facto wife of Henry Coxon, employed initially as a companion to his wife, but later went on to bear him several children. She was cited as co-respondent when Mrs Coxon sued for divorce in 1865.

Morgan, Annie, 25-year-old Fitzroy servant, confined in 1874. Depressed after the birth, she committed suicide by throwing herself from the windows of the Women's Hospital.

Morgan, Lavinia, an older woman confined alone in 1870. Morgan had made elaborate plans for her confinement and abandoned what she claimed to have been a stillborn child immediately after the birth.

Mundy, Mary Ann, an older woman living apart from her husband, whom she presumed to be dead; gave birth to a child by Edmund Hooper in 1860.

Murphy, Anastasia, a young servant confined alone and out of doors in 1920. The child was found drowned shortly after its birth.

Nelson, Eliza, 14-year-old Collingwood girl, pregnant to her fiancé in 1860. Sent away to relatives during her pregnancy, she returned with the child to live with her mother after the birth.

Petrie, James, father of the child born to Linda Tuck in 1910.

Proctor, Annie, single mother who in 1885 abandoned her newborn child and fled to Tasmania.

Rock, Annie, domestic servant who twice fell pregnant during the eighteen months she was employed by John Whitehall, 1859-60. Whitehall procured an abortion on both occasions.

Santer, Jenny, country woman who in 1948 sought the assistance of the Infant Life Protection Office in arranging a placement for her unborn child.

Simson, David, father of Annie Galvin's child, born 1875.

Spry, John, father of Elizabeth Hooper's child, born 1895.

Stevens, Mary, country girl confined in 1933. Her son Leslie spent the first eighteen months of his life in the Melbourne City Mission Maternity Home before being collected by his mother on the pretence of having arranged for his adoption. He was found drowned and Mary was charged with his murder.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
 and Survival in Australia
 Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Individuals Mentioned in the Text xvii

Susan, Koori woman and mother of *Marni* born in 1961 when she was 22. The child was placed for adoption following Susan's death.

Tait, Katherine, an amputee seamstress who made arrangements for her own confinement in 1895 and supported her child for seven months before killing the child and taking her own life when the father refused to honour his promise of marriage.

Tim, born to a 20-year-old single woman in 1952, Tim was adopted by a couple who had a natural son just eight months later. He was not told of his adoption but began to suspect it after he had married another adoptee at 27. He confronted his adoptive parents three years later and his suspicions were confirmed. He has since met his birth mother with whom he has continuing contact.

Titely, Frances, a young woman who fell pregnant to her employer, James Moltine, in 1874. When he refused to marry her, she successfully took action for breach of promise.

Tom, born in 1950 to a woman who had spent the latter part of her pregnancy in St Joseph's Home. He was relinquished for adoption at 6 days and placed in a large Catholic family with both adopted and natural-born children. He was driven to search after the birth of his own child in 1983 and has since been reunited with his parents, who had married after his birth, and their seven younger children.

Tuck, Linda, an ex-nuptial child who as a school girl fell pregnant to James Petrie in 1910.

Valda, a country girl who gave birth to *Elaine* in a Melbourne private hospital in 1943. *Elaine* was relinquished for adoption a few days after birth. *Valda* subsequently married a man with two children whom she reared as her own. *Elaine* made contact with *Valda* again in 1978.

Wallace, Sally, pregnant at 16 to her boyfriend of two years and gave birth to a daughter in 1973. The baby was relinquished for adoption at birth but parents continued their relationship and married three years later. Although they have had two further children, they remain curious about the fate of their first child. At the time of the interview they had received non-identifying information about their daughter via the agency which had arranged the adoption but had been asked to wait until her eighteenth birthday before making further contact.

Walters, Isobel, mother of a child to *James Quilty*, a married man who kept his identity a secret although he supported the child for five years until his death in 1935. In the following year, *Walters* was persuaded to relinquish the child for adoption.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xviii *Individuals Mentioned in the Text*

Webb, Susan, Sydney teenager whose decision to stay at home during her pregnancy was featured in a *Woman's Day* article in 1966.

Whiteball, John, Annie Rock's employer who aborted her twice during her time in his employ, 1859-60.

Whyte, Catherine, young woman, pregnant to John Henderson in 1890.

Will, son of *Ellie*, born in 1928 and boarded out with a large family who brought him up as their own, although his mother continued to have contact until he was 10. *Will* re-established contact in 1978 and continued to visit until his mother's death five years later.

Williams, Emma, Sandridge woman, reputed to be living by prostitution, who murdered her 2-year-old son in 1895.

Abbreviations

AFDC	Aid for Dependent Children
ARMS	Association of Relinquishing Mothers
Berry St	Statistics drawn from the records of Berry Street Incorporated, previously the Berry Street Babies' Home, the Foundling Home and the Victorian Infant Asylum.
BMD	Statistics drawn from the Victorian register of births, marriages and deaths.
CSMC	Council for the Single Mother and Her Child (Victoria)
CWD	Children's Welfare Department, previously the Neglected Children's Department and later absorbed within the Social Welfare Department, now the Department of Health and Community Services, Victoria
ILP	Infant Life Protection
MLBS	Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society
NCD	Neglected Children's Department (Victoria), previously the Department of Industrial and Reformatory Schools and later the Children's Welfare Department
NCOPF	National Council of One Parent Families (Britain), previously the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child
NCUMC	National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child (Britain)
RWH	Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne, previously the Lying-in Hospital and the Women's Hospital
St J's	Statistics drawn from the records of the St Joseph's Maternity Home, Carlton
VCNAS	Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society, now known as Oz Child
VPD	<i>Victorian Parliamentary Debates</i> (Hansard)
VPP	<i>Votes and Proceedings of the Victorian Legislative Assembly</i>
VPRS	Records held in the Public Records Office, Victoria

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface

This book has had a very long gestation. It had its origins in earlier work which Renate Howe and I had done on Victoria's welfare history and has been enriched by the institutional histories which we have completed since. Whatever the organisation, single mothers and their children emerged as among the most disadvantaged of its clients, their presence seldom acknowledged without echoes of derision and disgrace. Nor was this a characteristic simply of the 'bad old days' for, as periodic outbreaks of hostility in the media show, single mothers continue to be condemned today, for daring to have children without husbands, for resisting pressure to relinquish their babies for adoption and for expecting and/or accepting welfare assistance during their child's formative years.

Such issues were central to the debate which arose over Australia's celebrations for the 1994 International Year of the Family. As the committee members sought to be inclusive in their definition of family, they aroused opposition from those who saw such a definition as threatening the nation's fundamental moral and economic base. Much of this opposition was directed at single mothers and their children. It proceeded from a set of false assumptions, the most prominent of which were that all single mothers choose to have children without marriage, that all expect welfare support and remain dependent on it for long periods and that all their children would be better off adopted into two parent homes. At its roots was a call for a return to a non-existent past when 'mum, dad and the kids' was the only family around.

As this book goes to press, single mothers are again under fire, this time in the United States where the incoming Republican majority in the Congress believes it can overcome what it sees as America's moral decline by stopping welfare payments to teenage mothers, arranging for the adoption of the best of their children and constructing orphanages for the rest. In essence they are advocating, for teenage single mothers and their children, a return to a policy which, until the mid-1970s, applied to all women in Australia who dared to have children outside of

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia
Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface xxi

marriage. The lesson of this book is that this policy quite manifestly failed.

Ex-nuptial conception rates are little influenced by deterrent policies directed against children. Such policies do have an impact on ex-nuptial birthrates but it occurs after conception, forcing young people into premature marriages and lifting abortion rates. When abortion was both illegal and unsafe, these policies brought many women to an unnecessary death or left them to carry through their pregnancies only to destroy their babies within hours of birth. Separated from their mothers, other ex-nuptial children died of malnutrition, infantile diarrhoea or simply failure to thrive in their early years. Those who survived grew up with a mark on their character so shameful that it had to be hidden even from a potential spouse. In a nation which has always had an obsession with increasing the population, their treatment stands out as a lasting disgrace.

Yet this story was never told. Rather, the new generations of single mothers believed that they were the first to commit such a grievous sin, accepting their punishment rather than drawing attention to their disgrace. If there was any hope of survival, it lay in silence and deceit, joining with the general condemnation of the sinner rather than admitting to the sin. There have always been single mothers and their children in the Australian community but they seldom had the cues by which to recognise each other or, until the late 1960s, a political base from which to contest their state. While the extension of welfare benefits to single mothers has made them more visible (and dramatically decreased the number of babies available for adoption), Australia has not seen the increase in teenage pregnancy so worrying to the Republicans in the United States. It has however made a positive commitment to the welfare of all children irrespective of how they came to be.

There are many people to whom thanks are due as this project draws to its end. Deakin University and the Australian Research Council together provided the funding which enabled it to proceed. The Centre for Australian Studies at Deakin University, Geelong, provided the project with a home and continues to store the materials on which it was based. Associate Professor Renate Howe has been involved from the beginning, co-ordinating research funding applications, recruiting research staff and generally tossing around ideas. Although she wrote only the last chapter of this book, her contribution is evident throughout. Professor Patricia Grimshaw has also always been there encouraging, questioning and supporting from the initial funding application through to the final publication. Dr Peter McDonald, then Deputy Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, helped with the initial formulation of the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-47443-6 - Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment
and Survival in Australia

Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxii *Preface*

statistical aspects of the project and was always ready to offer advice on data analysis.

The research drew on the skills of many other people as it proceeded. Ros Lewis did much of the tedious work, from entering data through co-ordinating the oral history project to locating illustrations. If the project can be said to have been brought to birth she has been its midwife. Research assistants Inta Danbergs-Price, Sue Davies, Helen Duffy, Shirley Freeman, Margaret Glass, Jan Maljers, Amanda Samuels and Doreen Turner brought their particular skills to different aspects of the task. Tim O'Shaughnessy shared some of his research materials. The executive officer and library staff at the National Council for One Parent Families in London offered their time and hospitality. Rosemary West, and other journalists associated with the *Age* Accent pages, and Pauline Ley and the Geelong Adoption Group helped to locate the people interviewed for the oral history program, all of whom were generous in sharing what were often very painful memories. Renate Tratter and members of the Western Suburbs Supporting Mothers Group and Marie Meggitt and members of the Australian Relinquishing Mothers Society were involved in less formal discussions, all of which enriched my understanding of the experience which I had set out to study. Phillip Swain contributed his computing skills to the project. He, along with our children Kathryn, Eliza and Christopher, has shared our home with the 10,000 women and children who appear in this book and has good reason to see that the project has come to an end. Finally I must thank the School of Humanities, Deakin University, the History Department of the University of Melbourne and the Aquinas Campus of the Australian Catholic University, all of which have, at different times, provided me with employment, office support and the supportive collegial environments in which my research could proceed.

This book examines the lives of single mothers and their children, living and dead, and aims to place them in an historical context. In other words, it gives single motherhood in Australia a history; a story of survival in a harsh and unforgiving environment. If this history helps single mothers today understand the prejudice and hostility which they continue to encounter, it will have served its purpose. If it goes further and informs those in a position to defuse such hostility, all who were involved in its production will be greatly pleased.

Shurlee Swain
University of Melbourne and
Australian Catholic University