

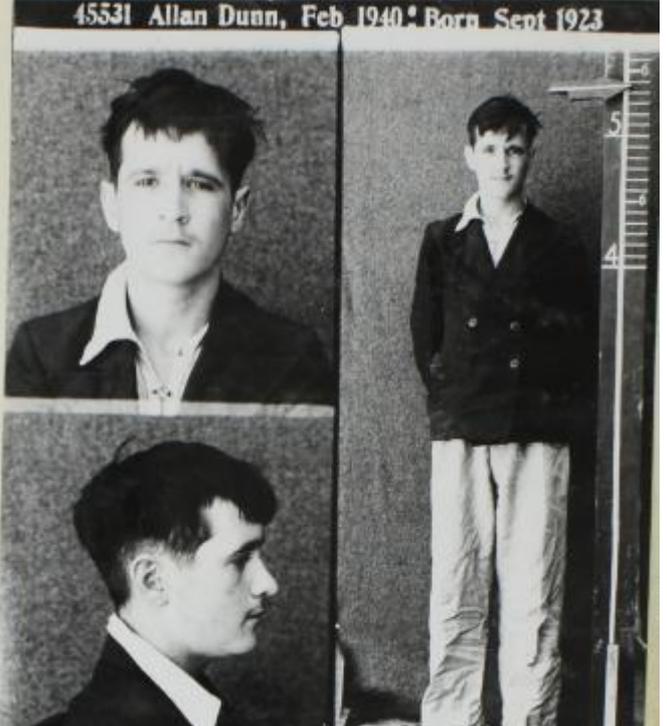
Old records tell stories of crime in the 1900s

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Source: Public Record Office Victoria

Reported by: Olivia Lambert

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Native Place | Tasmania |
| Date and Year of Birth | 21.9.23 |
| Arrival in State | { Ship Year |
| From Where | |
| Trade or Occupation | Labourer |
| Religion | |
| Education (degree of) | |
| Height (without boots) | 5 feet 2 inches |
| Weight | 7 stone 2 lb. |
| Colour of Hair | Black |
| Colour of Eyes | Brown |
| Complexion | Dark |



Patrick Allan Dunn lived a life of petty crime before he was murdered. Source: Public Record Office Victoria

SECRET records detailing the most heinous crimes in Victoria from the 1900s have been exposed, detailing court cases and prosecutions for some actions that nowadays would be seen by the courts as trivial.

Women were harshly punished, Tasmanian woman Alma Debona was jailed for nine months in 1939 for being married to two men at the same time.

Patrick Allan Dunn, a petty thief, was in and out of jail from when he was 13 years old on charges of larceny and unlawful possession.

He was a young labourer from Tasmania and was murdered in 1956 when he was about 33 years old.

He was shot during a struggle with Leslie William Gillis, who actually admitted he was scared of Dunn because he was a violent man who carried a gun.

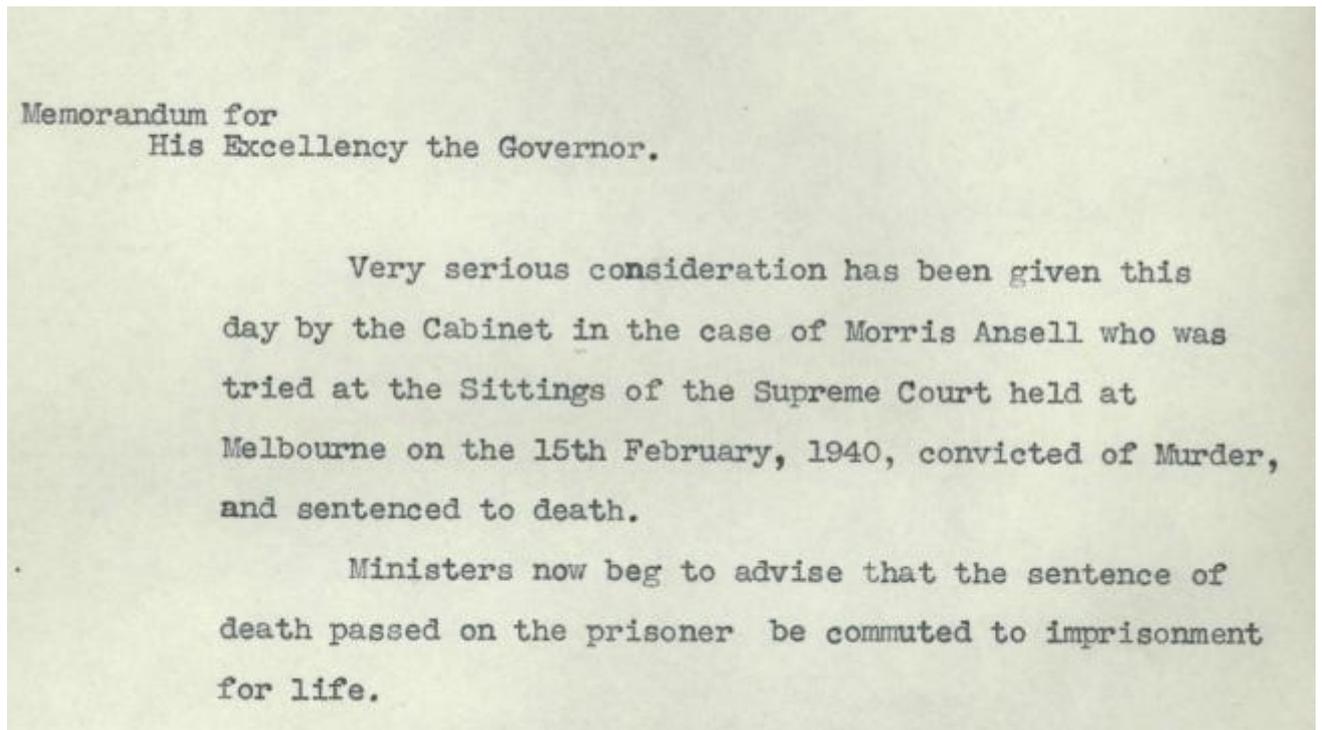
They were driving in a car together from the South Melbourne Hotel early in the morning when they got into a fight and the gun went off.

The old records, which have been sealed for 75 years under Section 9 of the Public Records Act 1973, are punched with fading typewriter letters and scrawled with ink calligraphy.

Men don tailored jackets and suit pants in their mug shots, reflective of the stricter times.

The documents are in the hands of Public Record Office Victoria and it's revealing the stories behind the dated paperwork.

A lot of them seem like old movie plots concocted in Hollywood by the likes of Alfred Hitchcock, but they are actually a reality of what happened in Australia all those years ago.



A letter asking for Morris Ansell's sentence to be lightened. Source: *Public Record Office Victoria*

Morris Ansell's story is one of love affairs and death.

He was a 19-year-old metal polisher from Carlton who murdered his lover's husband, Alfred Thomas Atherton.

Atherton's wife wanted a divorce because she had fallen in love with Ansell.

The husband then spoke to Ansell of killing his wife for running around with other men, but Ansell pointed the gun at him before he got the chance.

Ansell was sentenced to death for shooting Atherton, but a jury lodged a recommendation of life imprisonment instead because he was so young.

The records point fingers at Mrs Atherton, despite her never pulling the trigger.

They say she was a woman of very low morality and a bad type of woman.



George Frederick Pearson was murdered and the man accused was acquitted. Source: *Public Record Office Victoria*

Other court records tell of George Frederick Pearson, who was wanted by police for questioning regarding a shooting in Abbotsford.

He was murdered in 1949 before police ever caught up to him.

Former boxer and Pearson's brother-in-law, Harry Summers, was later accused of the murder.

Newspapers at the time reported Summers denied the crime throughout the trial and was acquitted of the murder after only 40 minutes of jury deliberations.

Public Record Office Victoria collection management co-ordinator Jack Martin said the records show attitudes and treatments that would not be accepted nowadays.

"There's a wide range of judgmental language used about women in the records," he said.

In the Ansell case, records say Mrs Atherton led her lover astray and was a woman of poor character.

"The language used back then, you wouldn't hear nowadays at that sort of official level," Mr Martin said.

"It also shows a time when we still had capital punishment."

Crime was also blamed a lot on parenting — actually called “training at home” back in the 1940s.

In regards to cases of bigamy, Mr Martin said it was quite a common crime.

Divorce had a stigma back then and it was a lot harder to have it approved.

“No fault divorce didn’t exist and at that time you had to show cause for divorce,” Mr Martin said.

“You had to prove cruelty or abandonment.”

| FEMALE DEPARTMENT.—Daily Ward Report for <i>Friday</i> the <i>12th</i> of <i>January</i> 194 <i>0</i> | | | |
|--|------------|------------------------------|--|
| Patients in Ward (Epileptic, Suicidal) | | Admitted, <i>rel. T.L.O.</i> | Free Practice in Ward and Date of last Practice. |
| <i>A</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>Robertson, Bertha</i> | |
| <i>B</i> | <i>7</i> | | |
| <i>C</i> | <i>4</i> | | |
| <i>D</i> | <i>5</i> | Discharged. | <i>Taylor E</i> <i>Saunders M</i> |
| <i>E</i> | <i>6</i> | | <i>Laird J</i> <i>Pavlovich M</i> |
| <i>F</i> | <i>7</i> | | <i>Dolger M</i> <i>McLean M</i> |
| <i>G</i> | <i>8</i> | | <i>Edmonds P</i> <i>Walker J</i> |
| <i>H</i> | <i>9</i> | Dead. | <i>Lynn M</i> <i>Keating J</i> |
| <i>I</i> | <i>10</i> | <i>White, Harriet Louisa</i> | <i>Watts J</i> <i>Williams J</i> |
| | <i>11</i> | | <i>Head E</i> <i>Miller J</i> |
| | <i>12</i> | | <i>Brown J</i> <i>Logarty E</i> |
| Total | <i>417</i> | Escaped. | <i>Hall E</i> <i>Robinson M</i> |
| Of whom are Private Patients | | | <i>Noon J</i> <i>Clark J</i> |
| NUMBER USEFULLY EMPLOYED | | Out on Trial, <i>v.</i> | <i>Reaves E</i> <i>Breadon E</i> |
| Kitchen | <i>20</i> | <i>Wells, Sylvia</i> | <i>Lee E</i> <i>Sletcher V</i> |
| Laundry | <i>34</i> | | <i>Sedan H</i> <i>Wickman E</i> |
| Sewing Room | <i>40</i> | | <i>Reich J</i> <i>Carter E</i> |

A daily record of patients from Kew mental hospital in the 1940s. Source: *Public Record Office Victoria*

Apart from murder, bigamy, divorce and other petty crimes, among the records now open are detailed patient clinical notes from Kew mental hospital.

The date and weather is scrawled onto each page alongside a list of patients who misbehaved or acted violent.

“Sometimes there’s a list of about 20 people,” Mr Martin said.

“It shows how busy the place must have been and how difficult some people must’ve been to manage.”

Mr Martin said patient clinical notes too showed how differently people with special needs were treated back then.

“My guess is they were still using electric shock therapy or convulsion therapy back then and also might have been treating a variety of illnesses that we no longer treat in the hospital like depression,” he said.

More than 120 boxes of records have been opened and can be accessed from Public Record Office Victoria.

“When you look at the openings, the records have very personal and private information in relation to court cases, hospitals and jails,” Mr Martin said.

“But there’s also a bright side, there are records about employment and important decision making that had positive impacts on the world then as well.”

Submitted by: Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council