



Speech by  
**Mr DENVER  
BEANLAND**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

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Hansard 19 July 2000

**STATE ARCHIVES**

**Mr BEANLAND** (Indooroopilly—LP) (11 p.m.): Thousands of family historians throughout Queensland are alarmed at the State Government's recently imposed public access restrictions on certain Queensland State files stored at the Queensland State Archives. These files were previously accessible but have now been closed to the public. It is because they have now suddenly been closed to the public that these family historians have become concerned—most alarmed indeed.

In particular they are concerned about the recent restrictions imposed on the records of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum and Eventide Sandgate after, I understand, 30 years had elapsed from the date of the documents being sought. This means that previously documents that were 30 years old were available to the public, but that is no longer the case.

The Dunwich Benevolent Asylum was established on 13 May 1865 when inmates were first transferred to the Dunwich quarantine station from the benevolent ward attached to the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Dunwich Benevolent Asylum continued to operate until it was officially closed on 30 September 1946 when inmates were gradually transferred to Eventide Sandgate, which was officially opened on 4 October 1946. The function of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum as defined by the Benevolent Asylum Wards Act of 1861 was to provide for poor people who, because of age, accident, infirmity or otherwise, were unable to care for themselves. In other words, it was a place to take in many of the folk who found themselves wanting at the time. Similar conditions for eligibility for admission to Eventide Sandgate were applied by the 1946 regulations under the Charitable Institutions Management Act of 1885.

As the records of this facility go to the very earliest days of the colony of Queensland, it is only natural that members of the public conducting family history research desire to continue to access these documents as they have done for decades. Many Queenslanders would have relatives who were patients of these institutions. Now they want access to their relatives' history as they have had until very recently for a long period. In fact, they are now concerned that, because of the closure of access to these documents, they will be up for considerable costs and will be denied access at the end of the day. These days there are some tens of thousands of people doing this sort of work, as I am sure you are aware, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I understand that changes were also recently made by Education Queensland to school admission records. However, these will be available after 15 years, and this seems a sensible amendment that protects individuals' immediate privacy but still allows access after a reasonable period. I also understand that additional restrictions may have been placed on police files of those involved in murder investigations, which were previously available after 65 years. However, I understand that in this case they are still available under FOI in certain circumstances.

I ask that Dunwich and Eventide be reconsidered urgently, particularly as an enormous degree of inconvenience and uncertainty is being created for these many thousands of people undertaking family history and research. Where the documents are going to be covered, they are concerned, as I say, that at the end of the day they will no longer be able to gain access to their relatives' history and historical information. They are so concerned that they are proposing to hold a public meeting in the not too distant future.

When people such as the Family History Society of Queensland and the Genealogical Society of Queensland, two of the major bodies involved in the family history work, are themselves up in arms and concerned about the situation, one can well understand why Government ought to be considering doing something about this. As I say, these documents were available until very recently. After all, the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages makes available birth certificates, death certificates and marriage certificates after 90, 30 and 60 years have elapsed. That information has been available in a number of ways. The people involved in historical research are concerned because they see that this could be the thin end of the wedge and it may in fact apply to other information and documents. So I ask the Government to urgently—

Time expired.

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