

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>**Christ Church St Lawrence Church of England, Sydney NSW: Parish Registers**

This dataset comprises full transcripts of baptisms, marriages, banns and burials in Christ Church St Lawrence Church of England in the City of Sydney between 1838 and 1856. The BDA transcripts were made from the original registers microfilmed by the Society of Australian Genealogists.

Copies of the registers were sent annually to Anglican authorities. These 'Clergy Returns' were later acquired by the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. These have been used to assist in interpreting difficult entries on the original register. Some brides and grooms on the original parish registers are missing from the Registry's online index and others are wrongly attributed to this parish on the index. These editorial errors in the Registry's index are noted in BDA's Editor's Remarks field.

The modern spelling Christ Church St Laurence came into common usage by the 1890s and was later formally adopted by the parish (see parish website: <https://ccsl.org.au/>).

Baptisms

Baptism records provide date of birth and baptism, name of child, names of parents (mother's own surname only given if unmarried), residence and occupation of father (and sometimes the mother).

The baptism records of 4,804 children are included for these years, many of them belonging to couples married in the church, or elsewhere, the parents being either Australian-born or convicts, emancipists or free immigrants in the growing city.

Marriages

The marriage records for 1838-1856 note whether the bride, groom and witnesses signed with their name or with their X mark if unable to write. These are signified on the transcript by the letters S and X respectively.

Parish or district of residence is usually given for the bride and groom and the street and/or suburb of residence is given for most witnesses. Couples with financial means paid for a marriage licence, while less well-off couples married by banns. The name and status of the parent or guardian giving consent is recorded if the bride or groom was a minor (aged under 21).

The records of 1,324 marriages have been transcribed for a total of 2,648 brides and grooms and about 2,800 witnesses, a total of 5,448 residents of Sydney in the years 1838-1856.

Banns

The St Lawrence Banns Register at this period often supplies useful additional details not found in the marriage register itself. These include status of the bride and groom (free emigrant, free by servitude, ticket of leave, bond/convict, came free to the colony, native of the colony). For much of the banns register the street of residence of bride and groom is given, whereas only parish of residence is given for them in the actual marriage register. A total of 1,310 banns have been transcribed for 2,620 prospective brides and grooms in the parish for the years 1839-1867, providing unique biographical details for less well-off couples.

Banns registers have only survived for a small number of Church of England parishes. Banns consisted of the clergyman reading out to the congregation the intention of two people to marry, thus giving time for any objection to come forward. They were read out on three successive Sundays.

It should not be regarded as a certainty that a couple listed in a banns register actually married, though most did. This can be confirmed by matching entries in the marriage register proper (they are being progressively linked on the database). Some couples were not permitted to marry when church and civil authorities determined they were ineligible for reasons including absence of consent for minors and real or suspected bigamy or consanguinity.

In some cases, a couple advised the clergyman that they wished to be married and were recorded, but banns were read only once or not at all, indicating the couple had decided not to proceed or had been rejected. In some cases, a couple may have decided to reschedule their marriage in another parish.

Burials

Burial records generally record the occupation and residence of the deceased. The burials of 2,747 persons have been transcribed, recording their place of residence, age and occupation, workplace or status (and sometimes ship of arrival). Most were buried on the Sydney Burial Ground, across the road from the church on a site now occupied by Central Station. Many were inmates of the adjacent Sydney Benevolent Asylum, a charitable institution where many elderly and poor people were accommodated.

Among the burials is Mrs Rachel Williams, said to be aged 98 (but more likely in her eighties) a householder of Botany, who was buried from the church in 1840, almost half a century after her arrival in the colony as the convict Rachel Watkins on the *Neptune* in 1790. She had been employed by Simeon Lord at Botany.

Mrs Mary Pearce of Castlereagh Street, said to be 97, was buried in 1851, two years after her husband, having lived with him in Sydney since shortly after her arrival as a convict in 1806.

George 'Halliburn', aged 93, died in the Benevolent Asylum in 1842. He had arrived as a convict per *Coromandel* 1804 as George 'Alleburn'.

Background

Christ Church St Lawrence is located at 812 George Street, Sydney, near Central Station. The foundation stone of the church was laid on 1 January 1840 and the completed structure was consecrated and used as a parish church from 1845.

In 1835 Sydney was divided into four Anglican parishes, comprising the existing parishes of St Phillip and St James at the north end of the town of Sydney and two new parishes excised from southern parts of St Phillips and St James. At the time the parishes also served as civil divisions for police, property, census and other government administrative purposes.

The boundaries of the new Anglican parish of St Lawrence were formed by George Street on the west, Park Street and Sydney Grammar School on the North parts of Wentworth Avenues, Foster, Elizabeth and Chalmers Streets and Cleveland Street to the south, including Prince Alfred Park, Regent Street and the later site of Central Station.

St Lawrence's parishioners actually came from a much larger area of what is now Sydney's eastern suburbs, where there was initially no other church. In 1841 the parish had a total resident population within its boundaries of 4,844 persons (of all denominations) living in 767 houses.

The Anglican parish of St Lawrence operated from October 1838, the date of the first entries in the parish register. From that month onwards services were held in temporary premises in a storeroom at the Albion Brewery near the corner of Elizabeth and Albion Streets, Surry Hills, provided gratis by the owner, John Terry Hughes.

By 1839 the parish had its own Minister, the Rev William Horatio Walsh, recently arrived from England, as well as a school, organist, clerk and churchwardens. The term Christ Church St Lawrence is first mentioned in newspaper reports of the laying of the foundation stone in January 1840.

The broad scope of the parish catchment is reflected in the addresses of people in the registers as the city's population expanded around streets on its south-eastern flank, particularly George, Pitt, Castlereagh, Elizabeth, Goulburn and Liverpool Streets, and Parramatta Street (on and near modern Broadway).

Places of residence in 1838-1856 outside the city proper ranged from Surry Hills and the Benevolent Asylum (close to the 1845 church) to Ashfield, Glebe, Ultimo, the Albion Brewery, Brickfield Hill, Blackwattle Swamp, Redfern, Alexandria, Petersham, Annandale, Newtown, Chippendale, Strawberry Hill, Camperdown and parts of Darlinghurst along what is now Oxford Street (then South Head Road). From 1839 the southern flank of this area was served by an Anglican parish of 'Petersham' based on a church at St Peters.

Around 1840 some of these areas were a still semi-rural hinterland, partly occupied by the villas and country residences of prosperous Sydneysiders, as well as mills and waterworks around the ponds and swamps between what is now Centennial Park and Botany Bay. By the late 1840s and 1850s some of these areas had their own Anglican parish churches as the population and building density increased.

St Lawrence seems to have been patronised in its early years by some prosperous farmers and squatters who came to marry there from all over what is now Greater Sydney and places as far afield as Moreton Bay, Yass, Bathurst,

Wellington, Mudgee, Port Macquarie, Liverpool Plains, Port Fairy, Geelong, Melbourne, Twofold Bay, Gippsland, the Macleay River, Castlereagh River and Clarence River.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (24 Oct 1838:2) published this report of the church's beginnings:

'PARISH OF ST LAWRENCE. - On Sunday next the temporary place of worship which has been fitted up at the joint expense of the Bishop of Australia (from the funds placed at His Lordship's disposal by the Church Societies in England) and the Diocesan Committee, will be opened; on which occasion a sermon will be preached by His Lordship. The building appropriated for this purpose has been kindly lent for the required period by Mr. J. T. Hughes, and is the north wing of his extensive brewery, at the southern extremity of Elizabeth-street. A place of public worship has long been seriously needed in that populous neighbourhood, and it is hoped that the numerous respectable individuals who cannot obtain accommodation in the other parish churches, will avail themselves of the considerate provision now made for them, until the intended church is erected. The service, on Sunday next, will be in the afternoon, at half past three o'clock.'

Notes on Christ Church St Lawrence Church of England Sydney registers

Those marked "Online" are included in BDA and are available to be searched for online.

Baptisms

Church Registers Baptisms Nov 1838 – Dec 1856 ML: SAG Reel 15 Online

Marriages

Banns Register Feb 1839 – Sep 1867 (+ one entry 1875) ML: SAG Reel 15 Online

Marriages May 1838 – Feb 1856 ML: SAG Reel 15. Online.

Burials

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Burials Mar 1838 – Aug 1856 ML: SAG Reel 15 Online

The entries from St Lawrence's original church registers were used for BDA's transcriptions of baptisms, marriages and burials. Entries from the 19th century are available on the Society of Australian Genealogists' microfilm reels 14 to 16 and 136 to 137 (held by SAG and State Library of NSW).

The marriage banns register 1839-1867 and burial register 1838-1856 were transcribed for BDA by Paul Gunning in 2021. The banns register includes an additional stray entry for 1875.

Baptisms 1838-1856 were transcribed during 2021-2022 by:

Mary McVay: 1838-1842 & 1854 & part 1855

Jennifer Bell: 1843-1844

Ian Turnbull: 1845-1846

Charmaine Hardy: 1847-1848

Natalie Lonsdale: 1849-part 1850

Paul Gunning: part 1850-1851

Charmaine Hardy: 1852-1853 & May 1855-1856.

Marriages 1838-1856 were edited by Michael Flynn and transcribed by Helen Coultis, Mary McVay and Michael Flynn.

For more information about the years covered in these microfilms, particularly for the post-1856 **period**, see *Index to the Microform Collection of the Society of Australian Genealogists as at 31 January 1990* (SAG, Sydney, 1990: 24) or search for St Lawrence Church of England Sydney on the SAG library catalogue: www.sag.org.au.

Sources

Newspapers:

[New districts and parishes, County of Cumberland NSW] *New South Wales Government Gazette* 17 June 1835: 414.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article230655635>

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"LETTERS PATENT FOR ERECTING THE COUNTY OF CUMBERLAND, AND DIVIDING THE SAME INTO HUNDREDS AND PARISHES." *New South Wales Government Gazette* 27 May 1835: 335.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article230655473>

"The Diocesan Committee" *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 8 Jun 1839: 2.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2544672>

The Church. (1840, Jan 2) *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*: 2.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2548103>

The Colonist (Sydney) 4 Jan 1840: 2. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31724342>

"THE POPULATION OF SYDNEY." *Sydney Herald* 8 May 1841: 2.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12869035>

[Church of England Diocesan Committee on the role of John Terry Hughes in providing temporary chapel accommodation for St Andrew's & St Lawrence's], *Sydney Herald* 9 Oct 1841: 2.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12871572>

Other publications:

New South Wales. Department of Lands. Parish of St. Lawrence, County of Cumberland Sydney: Dept. of Lands, 1971.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-570699956>

K J Cable, 'Walsh, William Horatio (1812–1882)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/walsh-william-horatio-2771/text3865>.

This article was published in hardcopy in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 2, (Melbourne University Press), 1967.

Information Page written by Michael Flynn 2022 (amended 2023, 2024).

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For more detailed information about the different types of church registers and for the list of other church registers included in the BDA see:

<https://www.bda-online.org.au/sources/church-registers>

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