

BDA Source Description Pages

<https://www.bda-online.org.au>**St James Church of England, Melbourne VIC: Parish Registers**

This dataset comprises full transcripts of baptisms, marriages and burials recorded in the registers of St James's Church of England (later Cathedral) in the City of Melbourne between 1837 and 1842. The settlement had been formed in 1835 but had no Anglican chaplain until 1837.

Prior to 1851 the colony of Victoria was part of New South Wales. The BDA transcripts are derived from the clergy returns sent to Anglican authorities in Sydney and later acquired by the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Baptisms

A total of 669 baptism records were registered in the period April 1837–June 1842. They 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). About 1,320 parents are named. The first two baptisms recorded are for John Melbourne Elliot and John Charles Batman on 30 March 1837.

Residences of the families included (in addition to Melbourne itself) South Melbourne, Melbourne Beach, Williamstown, Goulburn River, Owens River, Yarra Yarra, Merri Creek, Plenty River, Darebin Creek, Stringybark Forest, Batmans Swamp, Collingwood, Moonee Ponds, Heidelberg and Geelong.

Marriages

The 517 marriage records transcribed identify well over 2,000 brides, grooms and witnesses. They 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 name as signed or 'X mark' respectively.

Parish or district of residence is usually given for the bride and groom and the locality 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).

Burials

The 289 burial records generally record the occupation and residence of the deceased. From 1837 burials for all denominations took place in the Old Melbourne Cemetery at the corner of modern Peel and Victoria Streets. With the cemetery almost full, few burials were allowed there after 1854 and by the early 20th century the site had been completely built over by the Queen Victoria Markets.

Background

At the period of first contact with Europeans, the area of greater modern Melbourne at the north end of Port Phillip Bay was occupied by Aboriginal people speaking various dialects of the Kulin language group.

The first European settlers arrived in the vicinity of the modern Melbourne city centre from Tasmania in 1835. The settlement was a private enterprise project initiated in Tasmania by the Port Phillip Association, without government approval. It comprised two groups under the separate leadership of John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner. Both settled near the banks of the Yarra River.

In 1836 the settlement, with a population of about 224, was given an official status with the appointment of Captain William Lonsdale as Police Magistrate to act as Government Agent for the Port Phillip region. He and his family and retinue arrived in September-October 1836. He was supported by three surveyors, two customs officials, a commissariat clerk, Ensign George King and about thirty privates of the 4th Regiment, and thirty convicts.

In September 1839 Charles Joseph La Trobe arrived to take up the post of superintendent of the Port Phillip District, reporting to the Governor in Sydney. Two counties were proclaimed: Bourke, around Melbourne and the area north of Port Phillip and Grant, around Geelong on the west side of Port Phillip. Beyond the frontier bounding these counties, squatters were spreading in all directions with flocks and herds securing new runs, displacing local Aboriginal populations as had been done in other parts of Australia.

Economic growth and demand for labour was explosive as Melbourne expanded rapidly. By 1839 immigrant ships were sailing direct to Port Phillip from the British Isles, docking at Hobson's Bay, Williamstown, and transferring passengers and cargo to the Yarra in smaller boats. The March 1841 census recorded that the total settler population of Melbourne and its hinterland (County of Bourke) was 4,479 (2,676 male and 1,803 female). Of these 2,114 were Anglicans and 770 were aged under 22.

Victorian convicts

There was no direct transportation to Melbourne but the 1841 census records 111 convicts under sentence lived in Bourke and Grant counties. Of these 11 had tickets of leave and of the remainder 16 were assigned to private employers and 84 worked for government. Most had been transferred from Sydney to work on public works projects. The 95 convicts in Melbourne's Bourke County formed just 2% of the entire settler population of the county in 1841.

Another report based on the 1841 census figures for a slightly broader area around Melbourne, including Westernport, Portland and Geelong (in addition to Bourke and Grant) put the convict population at 359 out of a Victorian settler population of 11,728 (3%):

Condition — Convicts employed by government in Melbourne 64 — in County Bourke 34 in District of Western Port 5— in Geelong 20— in County Grant 17— in Portland 312— in district and county of Portland Bay 4. Total 146, In private assignment, the numbers are for Melbourne, 10 — for County Bourke 70— for District of Western Port 122 — for Geelong 6 — for County Grant 0 — for Portland 7 — for County and District of Portland Bay 23. Total 213. Grand Total of Convicts in the district, 359, Exclusive of 2 women.

Port Phillip Gazette (Vic) 10 Jul 1841: 3. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article225010925>

Melbourne's first Church of England

Anglican services were initially read by lay colonists in private homes, barns or storehouses, or out of doors. A rough timber building erected by April 1837 was used for services by Anglicans and other denominations.

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Anglicans led by James Smith raised funds for their own timber church in William Street in 1838, The structure doubled as a school. The Anglican community followed the English custom of renting pews to better-off parishioners who elected churchwardens to manage parish affairs. Trustees managed finances and loans. Churchwardens elected at Easter 1839 were William Frederick Augustus Rucker (c1807-1882) and Patricius William Welsh (c1802-1869).

On 9 November 1839 Latrobe laid the foundation stone for a more substantial stone church on the same block. The architect was Melbourne surveyor Robert Russell, whose design included the original square bell tower. A domed octagonal upper tower was added in 1853, designed by James Laing.

Thomas Beagley Naylor, a visiting Tasmanian clergyman, conducted three Anglican baptisms and a marriage in April-May 1837. Bishop William Grant Broughton baptised seven children on a visit from Sydney in April 1838.

The first permanent Anglican chaplain, John Couch Grylls conducted services on arriving from England in October 1838 and was replaced by James Yelverton Wilson in February 1840. By this time the Anglican population of Melbourne was estimated to be around 900 but the church could only contain 90. Alan Compton Thompson served as minister from September 1840, holding services in the unfinished St James' church building from October 1842, near the corner of Little Collins and William Streets. The church became a pro-Cathedral with the arrival in 1848 of Charles Perry, the newly appointed Bishop of Melbourne.

St James was superseded by the much larger St Paul's Anglican Cathedral completed in Swanston Street in 1891. The original church was in a decayed state by the early 20th century. It was dismantled in 1914 and re-erected on its current location opposite Flagstaff Gardens at the corner of King and Batman Streets, West Melbourne. It is now known as St James Old Cathedral.

The design of the upper part of the tower was altered during reconstruction in 1913-1914, probably to make the tower look more like the tower of St Matthew's Church of England, Windsor, New South Wales (1822). The original lower part of Russell's original square tower at the ground floor and first floor level remains in place.

Notes on the registers

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

Baptisms

Church Registers Baptisms Apr 1837 – Jun 1842 : NSW Registry of BDM clergy returns microfilm Reels 5005-5007 **Online**

Marriages

Marriages Nov 1838 – Dec 1842 : NSW Registry of BDM clergy returns Reels 5005-5007 **Online**

Burials

Burials Jul 1836 – Dec 1841 : NSW Registry of BDM clergy returns Reels 5005-5007 **Online**

For more information about the years covered in these microfilms, see *Index to the Microform Collection of the Society of Australian Genealogists as at 31 January 1990* (SAG, Sydney, 1990, p 24) or search for St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral Sydney on the SAG library catalogue: www.sag.org.au.

Some original parish registers are stored in a fireproof safe at St James Old Cathedral (<https://www.sjoc.org.au/history>). Early original St James registers for the years 1836-1853 are held by the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages but are not available online.

Transcription and editing

The St James' Melbourne baptism, marriages and burial returns were transcribed and edited for BDA by Malcolm Sainty in 2023-2024 with some editing by Michael Flynn.

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[Drawing viewable online at State Library of Victoria] St. James Cathedral [picture] / Stringer, Mason & Co. Stringer, Mason & Co. engravers. [ca. 1850]
<https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE1533003&mode=browse>

[Photograph viewable online at State Library of Victoria showing St James in its original location]
Panorama of Melbourne in 1881 taken from the tower of the Law Courts [picture] Nettleton, Charles, 1826-1902, photographer. 1881
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[Engraved drawing viewable online at State Library of Victoria] THE INSTALLATION OF THE BISHOP OF MELBOURNE - THE BISHOP PREACHING HIS INAUGURATION SERMON [picture] Melbourne : David Syme and Co. 1887
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City of Melbourne History & Heritage, Old Melbourne Cemetery [website with cemetery plan]
<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/building-and-development/shaping-the-city/qvm-renewal/heritage/Pages/old-melbourne-cemetery.aspx>

Information Page written by Michael Flynn 2024.

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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