



# Australia's Geographical Divisions and Historical Places



- Jenny Joyce

The country that we now know as Australia was initially settled by Europeans in 1788 as the colony of New South Wales. At that time it covered the whole of the eastern half of the country, including Van Diemen's Land (called Tasmania since 1856). Slowly the country was divided into separate colonies (called states since 1901).

- 1825 Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania)
- 1829 Swan River Colony (called Western Australia since 1832)
- 1836 South Australia
- 1851 Victoria
- 1859 Queensland
- 1863 South Australia expanded to include what is now the Northern Territory
- 1911 Northern Territory
- 1911 Federal Capital Territory (called Australian Capital Territory since 1938)

This means that if someone was born in Moreton Bay near Brisbane in 1857, then they were born in New South Wales, and their birth was registered in that state.

In 1901 the Colonies joined together to become the Commonwealth of Australia.

## Cadastral Divisions

Cadastral refers to a country's comprehensive record of real property, including the location, boundaries, and ownership of land parcels.

Most colonies (but not all) were divided into Counties or Land Divisions and further subdivided into Parishes, Hundreds or Land Districts. These parishes are not ecclesiastical parishes, and the counties have no administrative or political function. You will find counties and so on used on land documents like certificates of title, some early church registers, some newspapers, as well as geographic surveying.

## New South Wales

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands\\_administrative\\_divisions\\_of\\_New\\_South\\_Wales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands_administrative_divisions_of_New_South_Wales))

The first county (Cumberland) was proclaimed 4 June 1788. Another eighteen counties were added surrounding Cumberland up until 1829. They stretched from the Manning River in the north, the Moruya River in the south and the Lachlan River in the west. Although there were already squatters beyond these counties, in 1831 they were declared the "limits of location", and land for settlers was only sold within these counties. By 1861 sale of agricultural crown land in designated unsettled areas was allowed, making the "limits of location" redundant, and additional counties were established, until NSW was completely covered by 141 counties by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These counties are divided into parishes.



## Tasmania

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands\\_administrative\\_divisions\\_of\\_Tasmania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands_administrative_divisions_of_Tasmania))

Over the years Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) has had a variety of land divisions. Initially, in 1804, Van Diemen's Land had only two counties: Buckingham and Cornwall. In the time of Governor Phillip they were divided into hundreds, each of which contained four parishes. From the 1820s, there were also 36 Divisions, but they did not cover the whole island. They are shown on early records like musters. By the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century the two counties had evolved into 18 counties, subdivided into parishes. Now it is divided into 20 land districts, which consist of the former 18 counties, along with King Island and Flinders Island.

## Western Australia

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands\\_administrative\\_divisions\\_of\\_Western\\_Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands_administrative_divisions_of_Western_Australia))

The Colonial Secretary in London issued instructions for Western Australia to be divided into counties, hundreds and parishes, but this system only lasted a few years. Counties were set up, but not parishes or hundreds. After that system, the colony was divided into six land divisions, which were subdivided into land districts. In 1917 Central Division was merged into Eastern Division, leaving five land divisions. Land Divisions are subdivided into Land Districts.

## South Australia

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands\\_administrative\\_divisions\\_of\\_South\\_Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands_administrative_divisions_of_South_Australia))

The divisions of South Australia do not cover the whole state, just some of the southern part. There were originally 37 counties, but later 49. These were originally divided into 540 hundreds, though now there are only 535 hundreds. "Out of hundreds" refers to land outside the proclaimed hundreds.

## Victoria

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cadastral\\_divisions\\_of\\_Victoria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cadastral_divisions_of_Victoria).)

Victoria has 37 Counties, gazetted in stages 1849-1871. The counties are divided into parishes (2004 in total) and townships (909 in total). Before the colony was divided into counties, it was divided into land districts (see map of the land districts at <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-229935414/view>). A list of parishes in Victoria is available at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/Series%20Pages/ListofParishes.pdf>.

## Queensland

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands\\_administrative\\_divisions\\_of\\_Queensland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands_administrative_divisions_of_Queensland))

Queensland currently has 322 counties and 5,319 parishes, but prior to 1897 there were only 109 counties. Several of the counties & parishes were in NSW before 1859. Queensland also has land districts, which are used today for land titles. Parishes are no longer used on title documents, they will only be found in historical contexts. There is a parish directory from 1987 that can be downloaded from <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/historical-parish-directoryqueensland>.



## Northern Territory

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands\\_administrative\\_divisions\\_of\\_Australia#Northern\\_Territory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands_administrative_divisions_of_Australia#Northern_Territory)

As the Northern Territory was part of South Australia until 1911, it has part of the Top End of the Territory divided into five counties and hundreds.

## Australian Capital Territory

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands\\_administrative\\_divisions\\_of\\_Australia#Australian\\_Capital\\_Territory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lands_administrative_divisions_of_Australia#Australian_Capital_Territory)

The area now known as the Australian Capital Territory was transferred from New South Wales to the Federal Government in 1911. It consists of land from New South Wales: four parishes from the county of Murray and fifteen parishes from the county of Cowley, along with parts of other parishes of these counties. Counties and parishes are not currently used in the ACT, instead since 1966 it is divided into 18 districts, and Canberra itself is divided into divisions.

## Maps

For each state, it is worth searching on the relevant state library website as well as the National Library website (<https://www.nla.gov.au/>) has many old maps and parish and county maps have been digitized. Look up places in the catalogue, adding the phrase 'parish map', 'county map', 'town map' etc.

## Australia

- Trove - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/> (many people forget that Trove has more than just newspapers).
- Elvis – Place Names – Foundation Spatial Data (<https://placenames.fsdf.org.au/>). This website, which covers the whole of Australia, includes creeks, mountains etc, as well as settlements. Search for a place and then go to Layers - > Base Maps and select a base map (Open Street Map is often good). Includes creeks, mountains etc.

## New South Wales

- State Library of NSW - <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/>.
- Parish Maps can be viewed on the Historical Land Records Viewer (HLRV) at <https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au/>. Search by the attribute of 'Parish Name'.
- Six Maps (<https://maps.six.nsw.gov.au/>) allows you to search for an address and see land title information, such as Deposited Plan Number. It also allows you to change the overlay to the 1943 aerial photographs of the Sydney region.

## Tasmania

- State Library and Archives of Tasmania - <https://libraries.tas.gov.au/>
- Tasmania's spatial maps are available on *The List* (<https://maps.thelist.tas.gov.au/>).

## Western Australia

- State Library of Western Australia - <https://slwa.wa.gov.au/>
- Western Australia's online maps and plans can be found at <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/state-records-office-of-western-australia/online-maps-and-plans>.



## South Australia

- State Library of South Australia - <https://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/home>
- SAPPA - <https://sappa.plan.sa.gov.au/>

## Victoria

- State Library of Victoria - <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/>
- VICNAMES (The Register of Geographic Names) <https://maps.land.vic.gov.au/lassi/VicnamesUI.jsp> and LASSI (Land and Survey Spatial Information) <https://maps.land.vic.gov.au/lassi/LassiUI.jsp> allow you to search for places, addresses and features like creeks and rivers. The two different websites initially look the same but give slightly different results.
- Some parish maps are available on the Public Record Office of Victoria's Map Warper (<https://mapwarper.prov.vic.gov.au/>), but not all parishes have maps available.

## Queensland

- State Library of Queensland - <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/>
- Queensland, Parish, County and Historical Town Maps at <https://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/arts/heritage/museum-of-lands/maps-plans/parish-country>
- Queensland Historical Maps and Plans at <https://www.qld.gov.au/recreation/arts/heritage/museum-of-lands/maps-plans>.
- Historical Cadastral Maps of Queensland <https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/historical-cadastral-map-seriesqueensland>

## Northern Territory

- Library & Archives NT - <https://lant.nt.gov.au/>
- Historic Maps of the Northern Territory - <https://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/imfPublic/historicMapImf.jsp>.
- Map of Northern Territory showing counties - <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231076882/view>

## Australian Capital Territory

- Libraries ACT - <https://www.library.act.gov.au/find/history>
- There is a map of ACT parishes at <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-360708644/view>

## Places

### Place Name Lists

#### New South Wales

- Geographical Names Board place names search - <https://proposals.gnb.nsw.gov.au/public/geonames/search> (sometimes contains old place names)
- Gleeson's List of Names (1954) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/geographical-names-board/resources/historical/place-names-book>

#### Tasmania

- Placenames Tasmania <https://www.placenames.tas.gov.au/#p0>



## Western Australia

- Geographical Names (GEONOMA) <https://catalogue.data.wa.gov.au/dataset/geographic-names-geonoma>

## South Australia

- SA Property and Planning Atlas (SAPPA) is at <https://sappa.plan.sa.gov.au/> Use the 'layer' function, and expand the Place Names menu to choose from Dual Naming or Place Names (Gazetteer).
- <https://geoffmanning.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Mannings-Place-Names-full-version-.pdf>
- Place Names Online (on Wayback machine) - <http://www.placenames.sa.gov.au/pno/index.jsf>
- A Compendium of the Place Names of South Australia  
<https://published.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/placenamesofsouthaustralia/>
- To locate a place name in South Australia the Property Location Browser website may be used.  
<http://maps.sa.gov.au/PLB/> and instructions for using it are given at  
<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/planning-and-property/planning-and-landmanagement/suburb-road-and-place-names/place-names-search>
- Manning Index of South Australian History. <https://manning.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/> - select "Place Names" on the left hand side

## Victoria

- Search for road and Place name historical information <https://www.land.vic.gov.au/place-naming/services-and-resources/vicnames-register>

## Queensland

- Queensland Place Names - <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/title/place-names>

## Northern Territory

- Place Names Register - <https://www.ntlis.nt.gov.au/placenames/>

## Lost & Changed Place names

Place names change over time. There are few definitive lists of them, but the following information could be helpful.

During World War I many German or German-sounding places were renamed. For example, Germanton in NSW became Holbrook, Hessenburg in Queensland became Ingoldsby and Hochkirch in Victoria became Tarrington. The vast majority of the changes were in South Australia, as a large number of German people had settled there and given places German names. A full list is available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Australian\\_place\\_names\\_changed\\_from\\_German\\_names](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Australian_place_names_changed_from_German_names).

## Indigenous names

Some places have had their name changed from a European name to an indigenous name, such as Fraser Island being renamed K'gari recently. Others have been allocated dual names, such as Ayers Rock/Ularu, Mount Olga/Kata Tjuta and Middle Head/Gubbuh Gubbah. There could possibly be more of these in the future. A google search will usually find these name changes.

## New South Wales

No definitive list, but some of them are Liberty Plains (now Auburn), Patrick's Plains (now Singleton), Lambing Flat (now part of Young), Coal River (now Newcastle) and Sally's Bottoms (now Tennyson)



## Tasmania

- Place name changes from Tasmanian FHS [https://www.hobart.tasfhs.org/changed\\_places.php](https://www.hobart.tasfhs.org/changed_places.php)
- Prettyman Index to Tasmania Place names <https://libraries.tas.gov.au/Digital/NS2809>
- Pioneers of the Tasmanian Northwest <http://www.tasmanianpioneers.com/nomenclature.html>

## Western Australia

There is no definitive list, but some of them are Newcastle (now Toodyay) and King George's Sound (now Albany)

## South Australia

- Changed place names include Hummock Hill, which is now known as Whyalla, and Mobilong, now known as Murray Bridge.
- There is also a list of obsolete Adelaide suburb names at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Adelaide\\_obsolete\\_suburb\\_names](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Adelaide_obsolete_suburb_names).
- See also [https://www.genealogysa.org.au/images/PDF/LOST\\_PLACE\\_NAMES\\_OF\\_SOUTH\\_AUSTRALIA\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_15218.pdf](https://www.genealogysa.org.au/images/PDF/LOST_PLACE_NAMES_OF_SOUTH_AUSTRALIA_Fact_Sheet_15218.pdf).

## Victoria

A couple of place name changes are Hotham (now North Melbourne), Emerald Hill (now South Melbourne), Sandhurst (now Bendigo) and Belfast (now Port Fairy).

The following books are helpful, but are not online. They are available in a number of libraries:

Watson, Angus B. *Lost & almost forgotten towns of colonial Victoria : a comprehensive analysis of census results for Victoria, 1841-1901*.

Blake, Les. *Place Names of Victoria*.

## Queensland

- Limestone Station is now known as Ipswich.
- There is also a very useful website, *Renamed Places in Queensland* (<https://www.chapelhill.homeip.net/FamilyHistory/Other/Renamed-Places-in-Queensland.html>).

## Northern Territory

Palmerston is now called Darwin, and Stuart is now Alice Springs.

## Gazetteers etc.

### Australia

- Gazetteer of Historical Australian Places <https://ghap.tlcmmap.org/>
- Gazetteer of Australia <https://placenames.fsdf.org.au/> (modern only)

### Bailliere's Gazetteers

- South Australia, 1866 <https://archive.org/details/baillieressouth00firgoog>
- Tasmania, 1877 <https://archive.org/details/baillierestasma00whitgoog>
- Queensland, 1876 <https://archive.org/details/baillieresqueens00whit> NSW, 1866 <https://archive.org/details/baillieresnewsou00bail>. The 1870 edition is browsable on Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/60887/>



- Victoria, 1879 browsable on Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/60891/>

#### New South Wales

- Wells' Gazetteer (1848) - <https://archive.org/details/geographicaldict00wellrich/page/n7/mode/2up>

#### South Australia

- SA gazetteer - <https://data.sa.gov.au/data/dataset/gazetteer>

### Finding an Old Place

If you have come across a place name that you cannot identify from any searchable map, gazetteer or atlas, then there are a couple of other options that might help you. Firstly, try searching Trove (<https://trove.nla.gov.au/>), as newspapers might mention the name change. Google can also be a help, and finally, check books about the approximate area where you think the place might be located. A local library in that area may prove fruitful.

