

## **HENRY CHAMBERLAIN RUSSELL CMG – FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR (1891–92)**

An early graduate of the University of Sydney (BA 1859), Henry Chamberlain Russell CMG was a Fellow of Senate of the University from 1875 to 1907, during which period he was elected Vice-Chancellor by and from the Fellows from 1891 to 1892.

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### **PROFILE**

(1836 - 1907)

CMG, BA *Sydney*, FRS

**Fellow of Senate 1875 - 1907, including election by Senate as  
– Vice-Chancellor 1891 - 1892**

### **His early years**

Henry Chamberlain Russell was born at West Maitland, NSW, on 17 March 1836, second son of Bourn Russell and his wife Jane.

Henry's father Bourn, who was part-owner and commander of ships on the India, China and South Sea runs, had arrived in Sydney in 1826 and after some whaling ventures opened a store at West Maitland in NSW in 1835. He was elected to the first Legislative Assembly of New South Wales in 1856. Henry was educated at West Maitland Grammar School.

### **His student days at the University of Sydney**

For some time after leaving school Russell studied at home, but in 1856 went to the University of Sydney, and was one of the first two who entered when the University year was altered so as to make the terms begin in February. Having in this way one less term than his compeers, he lost the opportunity of competing for scholarships when he entered.

At the end of 1856, however, he obtained first classes in Mathematics and Physics, and received one of the University scholarships for general proficiency.

At the end of the second year (1857), Russell won 2nd class honours in Mathematics as well as in Chemistry and Experimental Physics, and won the 1858 Deas-Thomson Scholarship for encouragement of Physical Science.

He passed his BA exams which began on 29 November 1858.

The SMH published the top 5 students for each subject on 15 December 1858, with the names in order of merit: Russell came 2nd in Classics, 1st in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy and 1st in Chemistry and Experimental Physics.

Russell graduated Bachelor of Arts from the University on 18 July 1859.



Henry Chamberlain Russell (standing, 3rd from right) and fellow students in 1857, photo G3\_224\_0343 by Professor John Smith, University of Sydney Archives.



Certificate in Latin issued to Russell for completing the second year of studies in Arts at the University of Sydney in 1857, image a916003, Mitchell Pictures, State Library of NSW.



Henry Chamberlain Russell when a young man, this photo possibly taken to celebrate his graduation from Sydney University in 1859, *photo, courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum Collection on flickr.*

### **His career**

Russell was an astronomer, meteorologist and one of the most eminent men of science in Australia in the nineteenth century.

Upon leaving the University at the end of 1859 he was appointed assistant to the Government Astronomer. He became the Government Astronomer in 1870 and subsequently held the position for 35 years. Russell was also Australia's first native born Government Meteorologist.

He invented and made many instruments including telescope mountings and self-recording meteorological devices. He exchanged weather data by wire, set up a system of forecasting and from February 1877 released a daily weather map to the press. In Sydney that year he published his *Climate of New South Wales*. In 1879 he presided over the first Intercolonial Meteorological Conference held in Australia, began river records and published a seminal paper on artesian water in the Darling basin.

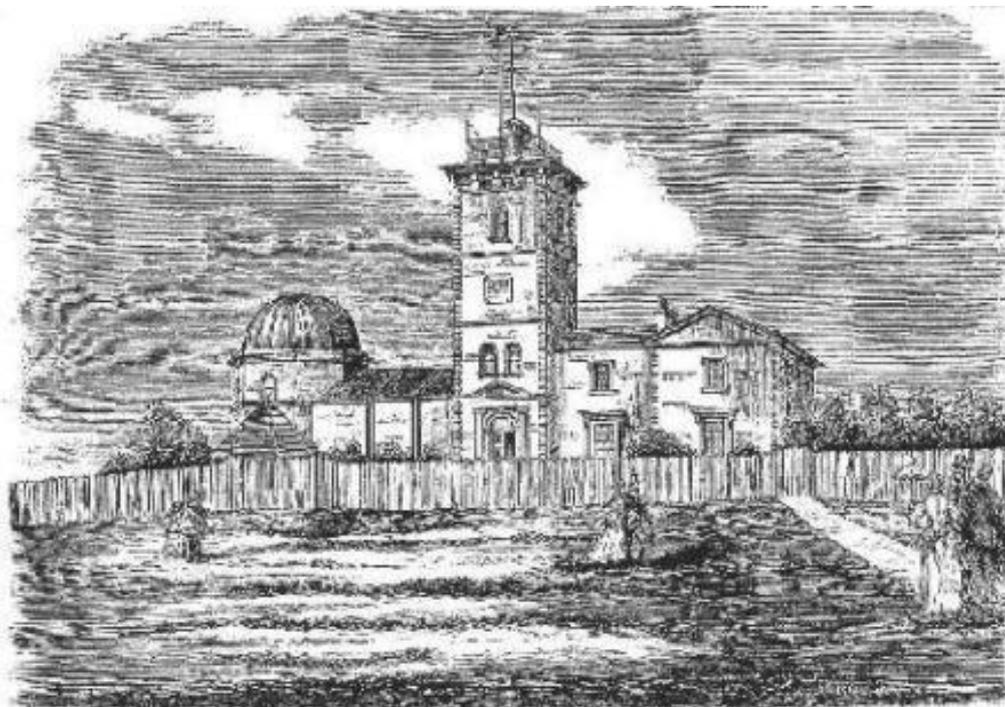
In 1887 Russell attended the International Astrophotographic Congress in Paris and then visited other Continental observatories. By 1893 he had remeasured all the principal stars in J F W Herschel's *Results of Astronomical Observations at the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1847), having discovered 500 new double stars. He was also a dedicated natural historian, interested in terrestrial magnetism, underground water, the growth rate of trees, the effects of vegetation upon climate, the artificial production of rain and the measurement of tides and seiches.

Russell was elected a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1871 and of the Meteorological Society and a member of the Royal Colonial Institute in 1875. In 1886 he was the first graduate of the University of Sydney to be elected a fellow of the Royal Society. He was a founder of technical education in the colony and a vice-president of the Board of Technical Education from 1883.

Russell was almost the victim of an assassination plot in 1877. A play by Nigel Sutton, "Getting Away with Murder", is an historical whodunit which details the attempt to blow up the Government Astronomer (and possibly Sydney Observatory as well) and was performed on 7-8 June 2008 to mark the 150th Anniversary of Sydney Observatory (School of Physics and ISS Alumni Association Alumni Update June 2008).

Russell became ill in 1903 and after a year's leave of absence retired. He died at the observatory on 22 February 1907.

*from the Australian Dictionary of Biography*



The Sydney Observatory in 1871, *image, 'Australian Town and Country Journal', 16 September 1871.*

## **His membership of Senate**

Russell was elected as a Fellow of Senate of the University of Sydney to fill a vacancy between 1875 and 1907.

Senate elected him as Vice-Chancellor from 1891 to 1892.

The following resolution was passed by the Senate at a meeting held on 4 March 1907: "That the Senate desires to place on record its sense of the valuable services rendered to the University, and the cause of education generally, by the late Mr H C Russell, CMG, BA, FRS, who was a Fellow of the Senate for nearly thirty-two years, being at the time of his death the Senior Fellow, and an expression of sympathy with his widow and family in their bereavement."