

# Mount St Lawrence General Information and Plot Locations

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## Background Information

Mount St Lawrence graveyard has been the primary place of burial in Limerick City for all strata of society since its opening in 1849. The cemetery is 16 acres in size and formed part of the medieval parish of St Lawrence in the South Liberties of Limerick. The parish housed a leper hospital during the medieval period on land granted by King John, which later reverted to Limerick Corporation. Some of this land was then granted by Limerick Corporation to Limerick Diocese for use as a burial ground.

Due to the cholera epidemics in the 1830's and the Great Famine in the 1840's a new burial ground was badly needed in Limerick. Kileely graveyard had become overused and unsanitary. Mount St Lawrence Cemetery was officially opened on 29 March 1849. The ceremony was presided over by Dr John Ryan, Bishop of Limerick. Few burials are believed to have taken place in the early years, as people were reluctant to bury the deceased far from the graves of their relatives as at that stage the new graveyard was a long distance from the City Centre. The management of the cemetery was transferred from the Church to the Limerick City Council in 1979.

According to the Burial Register, over 70,000 individuals were interred in Mount St Lawrence between 1855 and 2009, though the actual number is believed to be higher.

Burial records start in March 1855. The first recorded burial is that of Ellen Sharkey aged 53, buried on the 14 March 1855, at location 90 Ra. The second recorded burial is that of a child, Agnes Moore aged 4 years and 10 months of North Strand buried at location 101 Sa on 26 March 1855. The third is again that of a child, Ellen Delaney aged 1 of Wellesley Place. The fourth burial was that of Ellen Mathews aged 22 of North Strand buried on 20 March and the fifth was Mary Enright aged 60, buried on 22 March address- Lunatic Asylum.

These first five burials illustrate both the high rate of infant mortality and the low average mortality rate. According to the register the average age of mortality did not exceed 38 years in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The infant mortality rate remained high up until the 1940s,

when it dropped dramatically to 12 % in 1940. From this decade onwards, the average age of mortalities increased steadily until the 1980's.

Some individuals bucked the trend however such as Mary Keane of Thomondgate, who was buried on 24 January 1880 at the age of 110- the eldest individual recorded in the cemetery register. Unfortunately the grave location was not recorded.

The neo-Gothic Church in the centre of the graveyard (now disused) was designed by local architects M. and S. Hennessy who also designed the spire of St. John's Cathedral.

The more prominent families tended to be buried along the central path close to the church and the highest and most ornate headstones are generally located to the left and right of this central nave. The poorest sections known as the Poor Squares are located at the extreme top of the burial grounds in the left hand corner and in the bottom of the graveyard in the right hand corner.

An extension to Mount St Lawrence was opened in 1960 and a new burial ground Mount St Oliver was opened in 1979.

## **Guide to Visiting the Graveyard and Locating a Grave**

### **To Visit the Graveyard:**

**From outside Limerick-** Follow signs for N24 and Limerick City Centre. At the Junction of the Kilmallock Road and The Ballysimon Road, turn left- before Tubs and Tiles. Take the first right and you will see the cemetery on your left.

**From Limerick City-** head north up William Street on to Mulgrave Street, and onto the Ballysimon Road. (N24) Turn left at the junction with the Kilmallock Road, (just past Tubs and Tiles). Take the first right and you will see the cemetery on your left. The cemeteries superintendent's office is located on the ground floor of a terrace of houses on your right almost directly opposite the main entrance to the cemetery.

**The phone number for the Cemetery Superintendent's Office is 061 410 466.**

### ***Finding a grave in Mount St Lawrence***

There is a location system used to identify graves in Mount St Lawrence. Over the years since its opening in 1849, the system has become quite haphazard and it can be very difficult to identify a grave. In the past, poorer people were often buried in land owned by the church, and generally without a headstone. These graves were often later sold to a family, who would then erect a gravestone on the plot.

**Without a headstone it is impossible to be certain about the place of burial. This can be very disappointing.** The name will be recorded in the register- usually with a location, but sometimes not. The location in the register is just an approximate guide to the burial location as without a headstone it is difficult to narrow it down to a single plot. If the grave location is not noted in the register then it is impossible to know where the grave is.

### ***The Location System.***

**The graveyard is divided by numerical and alphabetical lines whose intersections mark grave plots.**

**Numerical/Latitudinal Line:** A line roughly parallel with the railway line marks the latitudinal line which is subdivided **numerically** from 1 to 280. The 'latitudinal' line runs North to South, from the railway line, roughly parallel with the central path. These numerical lines are recorded in the burial register under latitude but there is no physical marker in the graveyard and in practice they appear to overlap constantly.

The centre path of the burial ground is at about 140. The top right hand corner (where A is marked on the hospital boundary wall) is approximately 50. The point at which the path running from the church in the centre of the graveyard, towards the hospital boundary wall intersects with the wall at about 1-10.

**Alphabetical/ Longitudinal Line:** The boundary wall with St Joseph's Hospital marks the longitudinal line. This line is divided **alphabetically** with four lines for each letter of the alphabet. The first four lines are A, Aa, Ab, Ac, while the next four are B, Ba, Bb, Bc. When the last letter of the alphabet is reached at Z, Za, Zb, Zc, the system changes slightly, and the new lines start with 2 capital letters. AA, AAa, AAb, AAc, BB, BBb, BBc, BBd as far as EE. There is about 34 feet between each main alphabetical section. Each line runs from the wall across the burial ground at an angle from East to West, or approximately parallel to the Ballysimon Road. In the register these alphabetical locations are recorded under longitude

The main letters of the alphabet are marked in white on the wall, the subdivisions are not. So you will see A but not Aa, Ab, Ac.

**It is the intersection of these alphabetical and numerical lines which mark grave locations. Eg 31 Xc**

On the ground the system is difficult to follow as the longitudinal/alphabetical lines run from the hospital wall across the graveyard at an angle that does not have any physical marker. The broken red lines in the map to the graveyard represent this, as they are not shown as parallel to each other. The result is that the lines merge, and overlap constantly in practice. It is very common to find a grave located at 31F and to find another right

beside it recorded as 30Fa where the numbers should be getting bigger as you go further away from the hospital boundary wall.

The register can also be incorrect. For example in the top corner of the graveyard where the location should be approximately **A50**, Michael Hayes is buried and the grave location in the register is recorder at **279 Ga**. If given this location it would be impossible to find this grave even though there is a headstone as the location would guide you to a completely different location.

The map below will be of assistance, if a headstone exists, as it will give an approximate location in which to start looking for a grave.