

## THE HON JOHN HUBERT PLUNKETT – FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR (1865–69)

The Hon John Hubert Plunkett was one of the original 16 Fellows of Senate of the University of Sydney, appointed in 1850 by proclamation of the Governor. He served as a Fellow of Senate to 1869 and was elected Vice-Chancellor from 1865 to 1869.

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### PROFILE

(1802 - 1869)

BA *Dub*

**Fellow of Senate 1850 - 1869, including election by Senate as  
– Vice-Chancellor 1865 - 1869**

### His background

John Hubert Plunkett was born the younger of twins in June 1802 at Mount Plunkett, County Roscommon, Ireland.

Plunkett entered Trinity College, Dublin, in November 1819 (BA, 1823).

### His career

Lawyer and politician, Plunkett was called to the Irish Bar in 1826 and later to the English Bar.

He was appointed to the solicitor-generalship of New South Wales and arrived in Sydney with his wife and sister and four female servants in the *Southworth* in June 1832. In 1835 he published *The Australian Magistrate*, the first Australian practice book of its kind, which had great importance in effecting uniformity in the procedure of the inferior courts. In 1840 a second and revised edition was published by James Tegg. In February 1836 Plunkett was also appointed attorney-general, and was able to combine the two offices.

Plunkett considered the Church Act of 1836 the most important single achievement of his public career. It definitely disestablished the Church of England and established legal equality between Anglicans, Catholics and Presbyterians.

From late 1841 to August 1843 Plunkett had been granted leave to attend to family affairs in Ireland. On his return he resumed duty as attorney-general, but not as solicitor-general, and in 1843-51 was one of the twelve official nominees in the newly constituted council.

In 1849 he sat on the Wentworth committee to establish a university, and became a member of Sydney University's first Senate.

In 1856 Plunkett retired from office. His impartial administration over a quarter of a century had won him widespread appreciation, and he decided to seek election to the first Legislative Assembly under responsible government. However he was defeated for Sydney but

eventually won the country seat of Argyle. He felt unable to act as attorney-general. In 1857-58 he was president of the Legislative Council.

In February 1858 Cowper, as premier, dismissed Plunkett from the presidency of the National Schools Board. As a result Plunkett resigned the presidency of the Legislative Council and all his many public offices. He sat in the Legislative Assembly from September 1858 into 1860, but did not resume his post on the National Schools Board or become attorney-general when invited in December 1859. Governor Young later appointed him to the Legislative Council and he held office in the ministry of James Martin in 1863-65. In 1865 at Young's instance he accepted the attorney-generalship in Cowper's cabinet and precipitated the fall of the ministry when he resigned from it. His health now required frequent absence from the council and he eventually settled in Melbourne, coming to Sydney only for the parliamentary sessions.

He was elected a founding fellow of St John's College in June 1858, and was vice-chancellor of the University of Sydney in 1865-67.

He died on 9 May 1869 in East Melbourne.

*Information taken from the Australian Dictionary of Biography*



The Hon John Hubert Plunkett, *drawing by Edmund Thomas, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, digital order number: 1528443.*



The Hon John Hubert Plunkett in 1869, *image from the 'Illustrated Sydney News', 9 June 1869, NLA Newspapers.*



The Hon John Hubert Plunkett, *photo, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, digital order number: gpo1\_01382.*

### **His membership of Senate**

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