



Local History Guide

Sands Directory



The Sands Directory was published between 1858-1932, and is one of the most useful resources available for researching family and property history in Sydney.

The directory's full name was the Sands Sydney, Suburban and Country Commercial Directory. It was produced by John Sands Ltd (a printing firm) and listed the names and addresses of householders, businesses and institutions throughout the entire Sydney region. The directory was updated and reprinted on a yearly basis, except for the years 1872, 1874, 1878 and 1881.

The City of Sydney Council has digitised every edition of the directory, and these are available in full through the City of Sydney's website. The directory can be downloaded and viewed in sections, or searched by keyword across the whole length of its publication or a particular span of years.

Sands can be found online at:

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/learn/search-our-collections/sands-directory>

How the Sands Directory is organised

The format of the Sands Directory varied during the 74 years in which it was published. Nonetheless, the major components of the directory were largely consistent across time.

The first major section of each year's edition of Sands was the 'suburban directory'. To begin with, this consisted of an entry for each of Sydney's suburbs, followed by an alphabetical list of all householders, businesses and organisations based in that suburb, along with their addresses. After 1879-1880 however, this was replaced by a street-based system, where there was an entry for each suburb, followed by an alphabetical list of their streets along with the names and occupations of the householders in each property on that street.

The second major section of Sands was its 'alphabetical directory'. This section was simply a single alphabetical list of the names of all householders, businesses and major organisations within Sydney, with the addresses of each attached.

The 'suburban' and 'alphabetical' sections contain essentially the same information – it is simply organised in different ways. This can be useful for cross-checking purposes. For instance a particular person can be searched for using the 'alphabetical' section, then further details about them, such as their occupation, can be located in the 'suburban' section.

In addition to these sections, Sands also contains a 'city streets directory', which functions in a similar way to the 'suburban' section except that it covers inner-city areas. Throughout the years, different editions of Sands would also contain information such as commercial shipping rates, lists of tradespeople and professionals, the names of elected municipal officials, and indexes of recreational and sporting associations, schools, and religious organisations. As the directory was produced by a

commercial business, it also has many advertisements placed throughout, including at the top and bottom of most pages. These can make for interesting documents in their own right.

Using Sands

The Sands Directory was produced on a yearly basis, and each year's edition is grouped together with others from the same time period (usually by decade) on the City of Sydney website. Within these pages, each edition of Sands is broken down into several files, which can be downloaded and searched through. Alternatively, it is possible to search for a particular keyword across every edition of Sands, or every edition within a particular span of years.

There are many potential uses of the Sands Directory. Most obviously, it can be a highly effective way to locate particular individuals, such as family members, and discover their occupations, as well as trace their changing occupations and addresses over time.

Following the switch to street-based listing in the 'suburban directory' in 1879-1880, it is also possible to follow a particular property over several years and build up a profile of its occupants. In a similar way, a particular street can be followed for a number of years to trace changes in the types of industries its residents were employed in.

Other patterns can also emerge. During the First World War, for instance, a conversion from a male householder in one year to a female householder with the same surname in another year could indicate that the previous head of the household, the husband, was away undertaking military service.

It is also possible to use the first year that a property appears in Sands to give an indication of when a piece of land was first developed. In some areas the same can also be done for entire streets or even suburbs. Caution should still be exercised however. Sometimes what appears to be the first listing of a property can in fact be the first listing after a period (sometimes lengthy) of omission from Sands. Since the directory only lists properties that are occupied, this can often occur if a property has been vacant for some time.

Things to be aware of

Some problems or difficulties that may come up when using Sands include:

- Street names changing over time (eg Point Piper Road became Jersey Road)
- Street numbering changing over time
- House names (usually indicated with quotation marks) changing over time
- Listings not always including a householder's employment
- Listings only including head householders (almost always men) and not the owners of a particular property (if the occupants were tenants) or other householders

- Sands not being an official, legal document – information was collected by Sands’ agents and was therefore open to error
- The directory listing only occupied properties
- The directory ending in 1932 – ownership of a property can still be checked using Council rate books, however these list property owners only, and not tenants

How we can help

Other research guides produced by library staff can be useful for finding more information. In particular, our ‘family tree research’ and ‘house history’ research guides are particularly relevant to filling out details that can be found in the Sands Directory. Library staff are also available to provide advice on how to conduct your research and access library resources. Alternatively, staff are able to undertake research on your behalf for a fee. Fees can be viewed on our ‘fees and charges’ page.