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# Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

## Marsh, William

(1775–1864)

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**Marsh, William** (1775–1864), Church of England clergyman, third son of Colonel Sir Charles Marsh (*d.* c.1805) of Reading and his wife, Catherine (c.1745–1824), daughter of John Case of Bath, was born on 20 July 1775 in Reading, and until the age of eleven or twelve was educated under Dr Valpy in the grammar school there. His intention was to enter the army, but when he was eighteen the sudden death in his presence of a young man in a ballroom deeply shocked him, and under the influence of the Hon. and Revd William Cadogan he became an evangelical. He matriculated from St Edmund Hall, Oxford, on 10 October 1797, and started his studies the following year, graduating BA in 1801, MA in 1807, and BD and DD in 1839.

At Christmas 1800 Marsh was ordained to the curacy of St Lawrence, Reading, and was soon known as an impressive evangelical preacher. In 1801 Thomas Stonor gave him the chapelry of Nettlebed in Oxfordshire. His father presented him to the united livings of Basildon and Ashampstead in Berkshire in 1802, soon after which he resigned Nettlebed, but retained the curacy of St Lawrence, which he served without pay for many years. On 27 November 1806 he married Maria Chowne (1776–1833), the youngest child and only daughter of John Tilson and his wife, Maria (*née* Lushington), of Watlington Park, Oxfordshire. They had five children. The Revd Charles Simeon paid a first visit to Basildon in 1807, and was from that time a friend and correspondent of Marsh. In 1809, with the consent of his bishop, Marsh was appointed as perpetual curate of St James's Chapel, Brighton, but the vicar of St Nicholas's, Brighton, Dr R. C. Carr, afterwards bishop of Worcester, refused his assent to this arrangement, and after some months Marsh resigned. Simeon presented him to St Peter's, Colchester, in 1814. His attention was early drawn by Simeon to the subject of biblical prophecy and the conversion of the Jews, and in 1818 he went with him to the Netherlands to inquire into the condition of the Dutch Jewish community. His continuing interest in this subject led him to publish several works on eschatological themes in later years. *A Few Plain Thoughts on Prophecy* (1840) was particularly well received. Marsh's evangelical influence extended to the family of his wife's brother James Tilson, and through them for a time to Jane Austen.

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Ill health obliged Marsh in early 1829 to leave Colchester, and in October, after some months in Guernsey, where he ministered to the English church, he accepted the rectory of St Thomas's, Birmingham. In spite of the restless and riotous times during which he arrived he soon won the respect of what was initially an undisciplined congregation. The excitement and expectations of these years gave a certain topicality to his frequent sermons on the second coming, from which he came to be known as Millennial Marsh. However, his ministry in Birmingham was overshadowed by the death of his wife on 24 July 1833. Early in 1837 Marsh was appointed principal official and commissary of the royal peculiar of the deanery of Bridgnorth. In 1839, finally leaving Birmingham, he became incumbent of St Mary's, Leamington Spa. On 21 April 1840 he married Lady Louisa, third and youngest daughter of Charles, first Earl Cadogan, and his wife, Mary Churchill. After a year of growing blindness from cataract, he was successfully operated on in November 1840. His second wife died in August 1843, and on 3 March 1848 he married the Hon. Louisa Horatia Powys (*d.* 1871), seventh daughter of Thomas, first Baron Lilford, and his wife, Mary Mann. From 1848 he was an honorary canon of Worcester, and in 1851 went to live with his daughter Matilda, whose husband, Frederick Chalmers, was the rector of Beckenham, Kent. In 1860 he accepted the rectory of Beddington, Surrey, where he was assisted by two younger curates. Few men preached a greater number of sermons, and many of these were later published. His conciliatory manners gained him friends among all denominations. On 24 August 1864 he died in the rectory at Beddington and was buried in Beddington on 2 September.

**Catherine Marsh (1818-1912), philanthropist and writer**, was the youngest of William Marsh's five children and his fourth daughter. Born on 15 September 1818 at St Peter's vicarage, Colchester, she lived with her father and later wrote his biography. During the 1850s in Beckenham, she became concerned for the spiritual welfare of the labourers working on the re-erection of the Crystal Palace nearby and for the many soldiers setting out for the Crimean War. *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars* (1855), her emotive biography of an earnest Christian killed in the war, caught the heroic mood of the day, selling 78,000 copies in its first year of publication. Likewise, the account of her work among the navvies given in *English Hearts and English Hands* (1857) was reassuring in its positive approach to the labouring masses. She also established a convalescence hospital in Brighton during the cholera epidemic in 1866. She died on 12 December 1912 at Feltwell rectory, Norfolk, and was buried at Upshire, Essex, on 17 December.

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## Sources

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[C. Marsh], *The life of the Rev. William Marsh* (1867)

L. E. O'Rorke, *The life and friendships of Catherine Marsh* (1917)

W. T. Marsh, *Home light, or, The life and letters of Maria Chowne, wife of the Rev. William Marsh*, 3rd edn (1859)

*Jane Austen's letters*, ed. D. Le Faye, new edn (1997)

## Archives

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BL, corresp. with W. E. Gladstone, Add. MS 44246  
[Catherine Marsh]

## Likenesses

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W. L. Colls, portrait, 1842 (Marsh, Catherine), repro. in O'Rorke, *Life and friendships*, frontispiece

T. Rogers, photograph, 1858 (Marsh, Catherine), repro. in O'Rorke, *Life and friendships*, following p. 144

L. Fawkes, watercolour, 1895 (Marsh, Catherine), repro. in O'Rorke, *Life and friendships*, following p. 344

Elliott & Fry, photograph (Marsh, Catherine), repro. in O'Rorke, *Life and friendships*, following p. 204

Elliott & Fry?, photograph (Marsh, Catherine), repro. in O'Rorke, *Life and friendships*, following p. 274

W. Holl, engraving, repro. in Marsh, *Life*

## Wealth at Death

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under £3000: resworn probate, March 1866, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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National Portrait Gallery [http://www.npg.org.uk/  
live/search/person.asp?LinkID=mp02971](http://www.npg.org.uk/live/search/person.asp?LinkID=mp02971)