

Parish Registers

Family History before 1837

What are Parish Registers?

- Parish Registers are records of baptisms, marriages, and burials made by the Church.
- They are a valuable resource for researching your family tree because the census and official records of birth, marriage and death do not go back further than 1837.
- They can extend research back to the time of King Henry VIII, with many records going back to the 1600s.

A History of Parish Registers - 1500s

1538

- Cromwell, from the court of Henry VIII, ordered that every wedding, baptism and burial was to be recorded.

1553

- There may be gaps in Parish Registers between 1553 and 1558 and the Catholic Mary Tudor was on the throne.

1558

- Although early records were made on paper, in 1558 parchment was used, and the older records were supposed to have been copied (although some never were and have been lost).
- Because of the risk of persecution, Catholic Records from around 1559 to 1778 are incomplete.

1597

- A second copy of the records had to be made and sent to the Bishop. These are called Bishops Transcripts and are often more legible than the original

1600s

1642

- There may be gaps in the records during the English Civil War and Commonwealth (1642-1660), as records were poorly kept or hidden, and some have been lost.

1678

- Between 1678 and 1814 an affidavit was required to be sworn that when buried, the deceased was buried in wool or a fine of £5 was given.

1700s

1751

- In 1751 England and Wales were still using the old style, Julian calendar, which began each year on March 25th.
- Most of Europe had changed to the new style, Gregorian calendar, and so in 1752 England decided to change. This meant that 1751 commenced on March 25th and ended on December 31st, and was only nine months long.
- Some parish priests had recognised the new calendar before the official change, As a result some entries in the period 1582 – 1751 show dual entries for dates between 1 Jan and 24 March eg Jan 1st 1750 may be shown as Jan 1st 1750/51.

1783

- A stamp duty of 3 pence was imposed on every entry, although paupers were exempt. Tax evasion naturally occurred, and the Act was repealed in 1794, and declared unsuccessful.

1800s

1812

- Baptisms, marriages and burials were entered in separate, specially printed books, eight entries per page and including more information. 1837
- Civil registration is introduced.

Baptism Records

- These may not take place in the year of birth and can be several years later. You may from time to time find baptisms of more than one child in a family at the same time. This does not mean they were born at the same time, as sometimes families would wait to baptise several children together.
- Until 1812 the baptism record could often also include the mother's maiden name but standardisation of records after this date excluded this.
- From 1742, non-conformists were able to register baptisms in the General Register of Births of Children of Protestant Dissenters at Dr Williams' library in London. It has about 50,000 births.
- Methodists kept records from 1779.

Marriage Records

Church of England parish register marriage records usually contain:

- Marriage date
- Name of the bride and groom

After 1753, the records are more likely to show:

- Residence of the bride and groom
- Marital status of bride and groom
- The full names of usually two witnesses
- The minister's name

After 30 June 1837, marriage records also include:

- Age of the bride and groom
- Name and occupation of the fathers of bride and groom

Marriage Records cont'd

There were two ways to meet the requirements to marry,

1. By Banns. A law required couples to have the minister announce or post notice of their intent to marry for three consecutive Sundays, unless they obtained a license. This gave others the opportunity to object to the marriage. Beginning in 1754, officials recorded banns in separate registers. Banns registers contain information almost identical to marriage registers, but banns usually do not list the witnesses or marriage date.
2. By License. A couple applied to the proper church authority, usually the bishop, for a license when:
 - Circumstances made it desirable to marry without waiting the three weeks required for the proclamation of banns.
 - The bride and groom lived in different dioceses.
 - A couple preferred not to subject themselves to publication of banns (common among upper classes and nonconformists).

From 1754 (sometimes earlier) the parish of residence at the time of the marriage was recorded, note that this is not necessarily the birth parish.

The 1753 Marriage Act gave Quakers and Jews the right to hold their own ceremonies. Prior to that “clandestine” marriages were tolerated but perhaps not recorded.

Burial Records

A burial usually took place in the deceased's parish a few days after the death. Church of England parish register burial records usually contain:

- Burial date
- Name of the deceased.
- If the deceased is a child, the father's name might be given.
- If the deceased is a married woman, the husband's name might be given
- If the deceased is a widow, that may be noted.
- May give the sex of the deceased

The forms introduced in 1813 also called for:

- Age of the deceased
 - Residence of the deceased
 - Occupation of the deceased
 - Minister's signature
- Burial registers may mention infant children who were not christened, including stillbirths. Baptism records never record stillbirths.
 - From 1853 many churches, particularly urban ones, stopped churchyard graves and burials transferred to the local authority cemeteries. At this time church burial registers stopped. You may therefore find that Burial Registers for many churches cease around the mid 1800's.

Burial Record Edward Palmer, July 31 1801

buried Dec^r 14th
1801.
Mary D^{ch} of William Ringier and Mary his wife (late M. Vinge
Spin^r) aged was buried Jan^y 2nd
Samuel Wright married man aged 31 years was buried Feb^r 16th
Joseph Arnold widower aged 70 years was buried March 13th
Believed in at the Bishop's visitation July 3rd
Edward Bridges married man Son of Edward Bridges and Deborah
his wife (late D. Rushbrook Spin^r) aged 52 years was buried July 12th
Edward Palmer of Bunwell married man Son of Edward Palmer
and Margaret his wife (late M. Bennett Spin^r) aged 55 years was
buried July 31st
Ann D^{ch} of John Smith aged 27 years was buried Oct^r 19th
Mary wife of Robert Ringier aged 70 years was buried Dec^r 25th
John Son of Robert Love and Sarah his wife (late S. Bate Spin^r) aged
9 years was buried Dec^r 14th
1802: ... 1st Feb^r 1st 1802/21

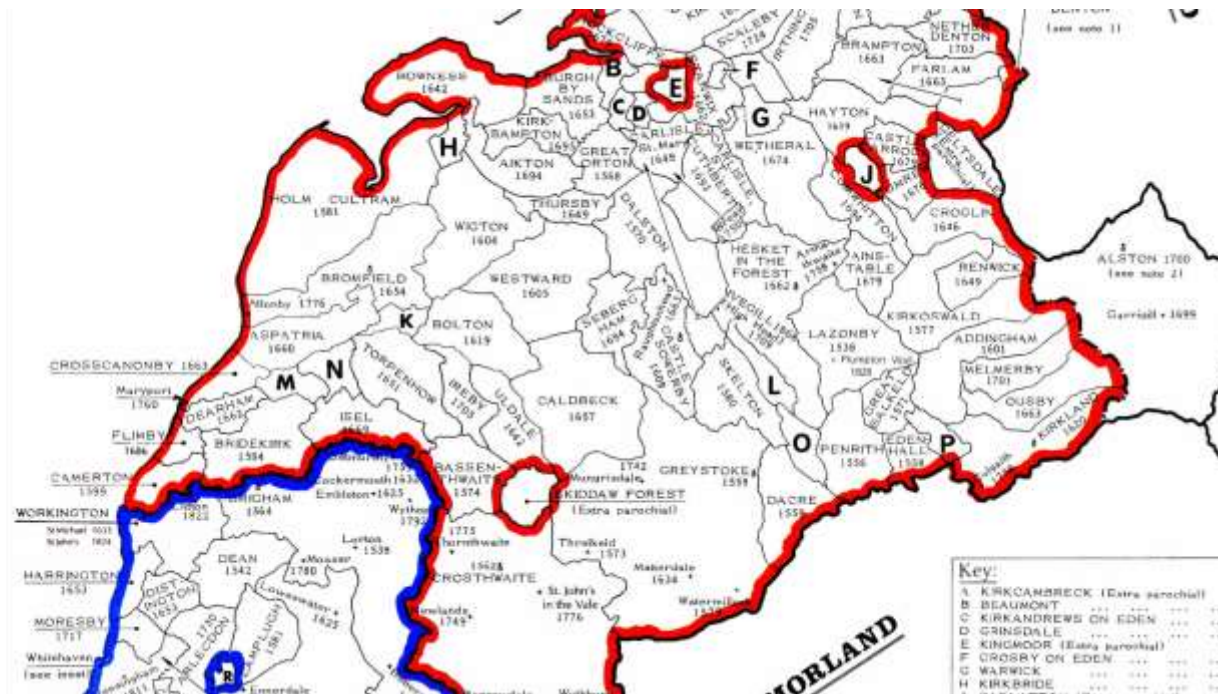
How do you find Parish Records

- Ancestry
- Find My Past
- Family Search
- Online Parish Clerks e.g.
<http://www.opcdorset.org/>
- County history websites

Old Parish Boundaries

- When looking for registers, it's important to know what the parish boundaries were at a specific point in time because many parish boundaries have changed over the centuries. For example, beginning in the 1830s many of the larger old, or "ancient," parishes began being split up into smaller parishes.
- The Phillimore Atlas outlines old parishes prior to 1832 and provides the date of the earliest surviving registers for the parish. The atlas includes England, Wales, and Scotland. Available on Ancestry

Ancestry – Phillimore Atlas Great Britain, Atlas and Index of Parish Registers



Family Search

Parishes , in 1851 overlaid over a current map

<https://www.familysearch.org/mapp/>



Material taken from and with thanks to

- John Steele – CFHS
- Family Search
- The Society of Genealogists
- Ancestry
- Wikipedia