

Source Guide No. 1

PARISH REGISTERS

WHAT ARE PARISH REGISTERS?

Parish registers are records of baptisms, marriages and burials which took place in the parish church. The keeping of parish registers began formally in **1538**, when Henry VIII issued an order that all parish priests in England and Wales must enter baptisms, marriages and burials into a register, on a weekly basis. However, it must be noted that not all parish priests were as conscientious in this task as they should have been, and there may be omissions and mistakes due to inattention and human error. For example, a note in the register of Flint, St Mary tells us that '*Mr Tamberlain omitted to enter any christenings from 15th June 1764 to 18th December 1765*'.

In **1733**, a law was passed that forbade the use of **Latin in parish registers**. Before this date, Latin had often (but not always) been used to record baptisms, marriages and burials. For assistance with reading Latin entries, you can use the following books, available on open shelves in the search-room:

Goeder, E.A. Latin for Local History, An Introduction. London. 1961.

Stuart, D. Latin for Local and Family Historians, A Beginner's Guide. Chichester. 1995.

In **1752**, the **Gregorian Calendar** was adopted in Britain. Before this date, the Julian Calendar was used, in which the new year started on 25th March. After 1752, the year began on 1st January – this affects dates in parish registers.

In **1754**, **Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act** was passed 'for the better preventing of Clandestine Marriages'. The Act required that if both parties to a marriage were not at least 21 years old, then consent to the marriage had to be given by the parents. Even with consent, parties were not allowed to be married unless the male was at least 14 years old and the female was at least 12. The Act set forth much stricter rules regarding marriage, including that marriages must be performed in a church and must be officially recorded. Children of marriages that did not meet these requirements could not inherit property.

In **1813**, every parish in England and Wales was issued with **register books**, containing printed columns and headings to be filled in according to a standard form. Before this date, the keeping of parish registers was done according to the individual priest's style and some contain more information than others.

WHAT CAN I FIND OUT FROM PARISH REGISTERS?

Parish registers are invaluable sources for researching your Family History. **Please note that baptisms, marriages and burials are not the same as births, marriages and deaths** which began to be registered in 1837 under the Civil

Registration Act. These records are held by the local Register Office or the General Register Office. Please see Source Guide No. 7, Civil Registration.

Baptism entries after 1817 will usually give the names of the baptised child and its parents, the occupation of the father and the abode of the family. Before this date the entry may be very short and just give names of the child and its parents. Sometimes further information, such as the maiden name of the mother, is given.

Marriage entries before 1754 may be quite uninformative, and just give the names of the bride and groom and their parish of origin. After the Marriage Act of 1754, the priest was required to record the maiden name of the bride, the names of both parties' fathers, their occupations, and their abode at the time of marriage. Witnesses' names were also recorded, and these can sometimes offer further clues to family members and friends.

Burial entries will give the name of the deceased, and usually state their age at death and their abode. Sometimes further information such as 'wife of', or their occupation, is also stated.

Parish registers could also be used to study such subjects as: occupations; the age at which people died; demography (by studying neighbouring parish registers to see how people moved around); and many other areas of research. Some parish priests recorded information about the cause of death which can provide invaluable information for historians interested in health and disease, or the types of accidents which were common in different periods. The information gained from parish registers can be linked with other sources such as the **Census** (see Source Guide No. 2); **Wills** (see Source Guide No. 4); and **Electoral Registers** (see Source Guide No. 5); to create a more complete picture of people in the past.

HOW CAN I USE PARISH REGISTERS AT FLINTSHIRE RECORD OFFICE?

We hold parish registers for Flintshire parishes and some Denbighshire parishes on **microfilm**. The **indexes** to each parish are on open shelves, and will tell you which townships were contained within each parish. If you do not know which parish you require, you can consult the 'parish boundaries' map which is available from staff at the enquiries desk. **Microfilms are self-service**. Please insert your **yellow marker** into the space from which you have taken a parish register microfilm so that you can see where to put it back, and others will know that you are using it.

For further information please consult the following books in the search-room:

Hey, D. The Oxford Guide to Family History. Oxford. 1993.

Veysey, A.G. (ed.). Guide to the Parish Registers of Clwyd. Clwyd County Council. 1984

You can also visit The National Archives website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg. Cysylltwch â'r Archifdy i gael fersiwn Gymraeg.
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