

## A short guide to parish registers

- ◇ Parish registers were kept by clergymen of the Church of England and record **baptisms, marriages** and **burials** conducted in their churches.
- ◇ The registers for the majority of 300 plus parishes in Shropshire are held at Shropshire Archives.
- ◇ Shropshire parish registers up to 1900 are digitised and available on **FindMyPast**. Shropshire Archives has a free subscription.
- ◇ Most registers pre and post 1900 are also available to consult on **microfiche**. This must be used as it helps preserve the original registers.
- ◇ If you do need to view original registers, but you will need a **Shropshire Archives Reader's Ticket**.
- ◇ Some recent registers are still retained by the parish. Incumbents are legally obliged to permit access but can charge for searches or access.
  
- ◆ Parish registers are useful because:
  - \* from 1837 onwards, they can supplement certified information.
  - \* print-outs from the registers on microfiche re much cheaper than purchasing a Certificate.
  - \* they are easier to search than the national General Register Office indexes if the place is known.
  - \* they are **necessary** to trace information **pre July 1837** (prior to Civil Registration).
  - \* between 1754 and 1837 everyone (except for Quakers and Jews) was supposed to be married in the Church of England.
- ◇ Many registers have been **transcribed** and this is a useful starting point. For further information see our leaflet – 'short guide to transcripts'.
- ◇ The **format** of registers varies depending on date - usually due to changes in law (Acts of Parliament).
- ◇ Until Middle Ages the **church** had only **limited role** in marrying couples, who usually performed a simple ceremony themselves, exchanging vows in a public place before witnesses. The church encouraged the couple to have a blessing by the priest afterwards.
- ◇ The **earliest registers are circa 1538**. Thomas Cromwell, Vicar General to Henry VIII ordered every wedding; baptism and burial in the parish should be recorded.

- ◇ In 1598 Queen Elizabeth ordered that the earlier paper registers be copied onto parchment. The wording of the Act "especially since the 1st year of her majesty's reign" gave the excuse of only copying from 1558.
  - ◇ There are **gaps during Commonwealth period 1648 - 1660** when registers often not properly maintained.
  - ◇ Early registers are **General Registers** containing baptisms, marriages and burials.
  - ◇ In **1754 Hardwicke's Marriage Act** aimed to prevent clandestine (secret) marriages by ensuring that all marriages were conducted in the Church of England (Quakers and Jews were exempted). After 1754, records of marriages are usually recorded in separate register.
  - ◇ After 1754 marriages had to be preceded by the reading of **banns** or purchase of a **marriage licence**. Parental consent was required for minors (until 1929 boys of 14 and girls of 12 could marry).
  - ◇ Rose's Act 1812 provided specially printed forms in separate registers for marriages, baptisms and burials.
- ◆ The following information is given in parish registers:
- \* **Baptisms** - information varies. Some registers give only the date, name of child and father; others give mother's name, father's occupation, place where they lived - particularly if it was out of parish. After **1812 printed forms** should include all the above plus by whom ceremony performed.
  - \* **Marriages** - until **1753** the entries, often in a general register, may just give both names and the date and the place where they lived, sometimes "of this parish" (otp). From **1754** separate **printed registers** include the date, both names, status, parish, groom's occupation, signature or mark of both parties, names of two or more witnesses and officiating minister. **Modern registers** (after July **1837**) also give the **ages** of the spouses, places of residence, occupations, names and occupations of their fathers and whether the marriage took place by banns or licence.
  - \* **Burials** - until **1813** often give only the name or in addition father's name in case of infant death. They sometimes give additional details such as age or "widow of..." After 1813 the printed format gives date, name, age, officiating minister.

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