

# A short guide to Roman Catholic records

## ◆ History

- ◇ England and Wales were Catholic countries until the Reformation and the separation of the Church of England from the Catholic Church (complete in 1559).
- ◇ From 1559 to 1778, it was **illegal** to attend Catholic services. Catholic priests faced jail or even execution. Until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Catholics were excluded from official posts and faced extra taxation.
- ◇ Despite this, some people continued to hold to the Catholic faith. They were known as '**recusants**' or '**papists**'.
- ◇ In Shropshire, only a small number of Catholics remained active after the Reformation. They were served by priests from abroad, who were usually attached to the houses of the leading recusant families.
- ◇ Most of the **anti-Catholic laws were repealed** by 1829 (when the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed).
- ◇ Shropshire's **Catholic population increased** hugely with the industrial expansion of Telford and Shrewsbury and influx of Irish settlers.
- ◇ Madeley was the earliest public Catholic church to be built in the county in 1853, followed by the Catholic cathedral in 1856.
- ◇ In 1851, the Roman Catholic diocese of Shrewsbury was formed. It included the counties of Cheshire, Shropshire and the 6 northern counties of Wales (detached in 1895). Shrewsbury was the centre until it moved to Birkenhead in c 1985.

## ◆ Catholic Records

- ◇ Shropshire Archives holds records for many Catholic churches in Shropshire.
- ◇ The **registers** are an excellent useful source for genealogy. For example, the baptism registers often give the mother's maiden name. Also, details of an individual's confirmation or marriage were sometimes added to the baptism entry.
- ◇ The earliest registers, made illegally by priests, date from 1763. They are rough notebooks written in English.
- ◇ The later ready-printed registers are in **Latin**, up to the present day. They are:
  - ◆ *liber baptizatorum* (baptism register)
  - ◆ *liber confirmatorum* (confirmation register)
  - ◆ *liber coniugatorum* or *liber matrimoniorum* (marriage register)
  - ◆ *liber defunctorum* (burial register)

- ◇ Useful words: *natus/nata* (born), *baptizatus/baptizata est* (baptised), *filius* (son), *filia* (daughter), *patris* (father), *matris* (mother), *de quo loco* (of what abode), *uxor eius* (his wife), *olim* (once i.e. neé), *in matrimonio conjunxi* (married), *sepultus/sepulta* (buried), *mortuus/mortua* (dead), , *sponsorum* (godparents), n.b. sometimes *patrinus et matrina* are also used for godfather and godmother.
- ◇ NB Latin verbs vary according to gender and case. **Names** are often Latinized (eg *Johannes* for John). Eileen Gooder's *Latin for local history* (447.82) is helpful.
- ◇ All of the registers are available on **microfiche**. The microfiche must be used to protect the originals, which are often very fragile. Catholic registers are **closed** for 100 years.
- ◇ There are some transcripts of the registers – see the 'list of non-conformist registers' in the reading room or online.

### ◆ Other Records

- ◇ Remember that between 1754 and 1837, all marriages (except for Quakers and Jews) had to take place in the Church of England to be legal.
- ◇ Under the Act of 1606, baptisms were supposed to take place at the parish church within one month of birth (under a £100 penalty). Sometimes diocesan court records contain references to offenders - these are held at the relevant diocesan record office. Occasionally 'papist' is noted by a baptism in a parish register.
- ◇ Some of the earliest references to Catholics are found in **official records**:
  - ◆ An Act of 1657 required people to 'abjure' (deny) the papacy. Those who refused to do so were presented at the court of **Quarter Sessions** and so may appear in the order books or rolls.
  - ◆ From 1673 holders of civil and military office had to prove that they had attended Anglican services and received Holy Communion. They had to obtain a 'sacrament certificate' which was deposited with Quarter Sessions.
  - ◆ Under Acts of Parliament of 1715 and 1717, Catholics were required to register their names and estates with the Clerk of the Peace. The records made under these acts cover the period 1717-1790 and are in the Quarter Sessions.
  - ◆ Some references to Catholics can be found in sources at **The National Archives**. There are some indexes and transcripts for Shropshire entries – search our library catalogue for more details.

### ◆ Useful books and addresses

- ◇ *Catholic parishes: an atlas* (p929.3)
- ◇ D J Steel, *Sources for Roman Catholic and Jewish Genealogy* (939.432)
- ◇ Catholic Family History Society <http://catholicfhs.online/>
- ◇ Catholic Record Society, <http://catholicrecordsociety.co.uk/>

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