

A short guide to non-conformist registers

◆ How do I find out if there was a non-conformist chapel or church in a particular place?

- ◇ Check the *National Index of Parish Registers vol 5 (part 1)* by Sylvia Watts. This lists which non-conformist chapels and Catholic churches existed. The book is bright orange and is on the Reading Room Shelves (C 63).
- ◇ Check the *Kelly's Directories* on the Reading Room shelves. These list the non-conformist chapels and Catholic churches in each parish.
- ◇ Try looking at the Religious Census of 1851 (on microfilm). This gives information about the chapels and their congregations.
- ◇ The *Victoria County History of Shropshire*, vol. II pages 8-17 gives a summary of non-conformist activity in Shropshire.
- ◇ Photographs of non-conformist chapels with information about their history can be found on the web-site (in progress):
www.users.waitrose.com/~coxfamily/index.html

◆ Where are the registers?

- ◇ Surviving records of non-conformist churches are not necessarily held by Shropshire Archives.
- ◇ Our 'guide to non-conformist registers' shows what registers are held here.
- ◇ Some of the registers are on microfiche or microfilm but several are original copies only. To see originals, you will need one of our **Readers' Tickets**. Many, up to 1900, have now been digitised and are available on the **FindMyPast** website www.findmypast.co.uk (free access at Shropshire Archives and most Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin libraries).
- ◇ For Methodists, registers may have been kept by the chapel itself or by the relevant **Methodist Circuit** (a group of chapels). Details of which circuit a chapel belonged to (which does vary over time), are given in the Methodist Records file in the search room.

- ◇ Many **pre-1837** registers were sent to the National Archives in Kew. Extracts of Shropshire entries are available at the front of the black binder *Transcripts of non-conformist registers in the National Archives* (below the printed parish register transcripts).
- ◇ You can also search some these non-conformist baptisms, marriages and burials at www.bmdregisters.co.uk
- ◇ Non-conformist registers might still be at the church or, sometimes, with another central authority (see our *short guide to non-conformists*).
- ◇ Many non-conformist records have **not survived**. There is no legal requirement for keeping them or for their preservation or public access. Some early chapels did not keep registers at all.

◆ Other Useful Records

- ◇ Between **1695** and **1705**, the Church of England clergy were supposed to register the **births** of any children in their parish who were not baptised. However, the act was widely ignored.
- ◇ **Births** between **1743** and **1837** may have been registered on the 'General Register of Births of Children of Protestant Dissenters', which was set up at Dr Williams' Library. These are at the National Archives (RG4) – see transcripts above and on www.bmdregisters.co.uk
- ◇ Between **1754** and **1836** you should find **marriages** in the Church of England registers. At this time, marriages were not considered valid unless they were performed in a Church of England church (except for Quakers and Jews).
- ◇ From 1837, marriages could take place in non-conformist chapels but, until 1899, a civil registrar had to be present. Many churches did not keep their own registers for this period and so the civil register is the only record.
- ◇ Other non-conformist records, such as minute books and financial records can also provide information about individuals.
- ◇ Records of the **courts** of Quarter Sessions and Central Government can provide information about those who refused to attend the parish church or obey the teaching of the Church of England.

Shropshire Archives

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