

Time Line of England and Wales Church Registers

Church registers are useful, as we all know, for finding baptisms, marriages and burials. In many cases finding the correct entry in a church register means it is not necessary to purchase a birth, marriage or death certificate to get that vital piece of information needed.

For any birth/baptism, marriage or death/burial before the start of civil registration on 1 July 1837 (England and Wales) they are absolutely vital.

The following timeline is intended to be an overview of the development of church registers and the changes and development of different churches. It does not set out to be a full history of all the denominations but to give key points that will provide some possible clues as to where to look.

The *Dictionary of Genealogy* by Terrick V H Fitzhugh was used in the creation of the timeline.

Pre 1531 England and Wales was a Roman Catholic country and the head of the church was the Pope in Rome.

Some monasteries may have kept records of baptisms, marriages and burials but these would only have been for leading local families. These same families may well have kept their own records which may or may not have survived.

1534 Henry VIII became 'head of the Church in England and Wales as far as the word of God allows.' This marks the beginning of the Church of England (Anglican and also called the Established Church).

1536 the Dissolution of the monasteries began.

1538 an attempt was made to start Parish Registers; however only about 800 still exist.

1538 The first Bible in English printed.

1559 Act of Uniformity made non-attendance at services of the Church of England an offence called recusancy. A fine of one shilling for each absence was collected and used for the poor.

1574 Catholic priests trained in Douia came secretly into England. 1581 the fines increased and in 1586 non-payment of fines became punishable by the seizure of goods and two-thirds of one's land. The missionary priests were concealed in hiding holes in their country houses.

1589 Queen Elizabeth I gave her approval that registers had to be kept in parchment books and all old register entries were to be copied into the book. Churches could also start their registers

from 1558. Also from 1598 copies of all entries were to be sent annually to the Bishop. These are what are known as Bishop's Transcripts.

Late 16th Century Independents (later Congregationalists) began as a movement within the Church of England by Robert Browne. His followers were persecuted. Browne and some followers escaped to Amsterdam in 1608.

1611 English Baptist movement was founded in Amsterdam by John Smith. Thomas Hewly came to London in 1612 and founded the first Baptist church in England

1647 English Nonconformity had begun as a Puritan movement within the Church of England. The Presbyterians grew in influence and became the established church of the country in 1647 under the Commonwealth. It was overthrown at the Restoration in 1660.

1647 George Fox began preaching and began the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Between 1645 and 1660 often people did not have their children baptized because they were not happy with the changed service under the Commonwealth.

1654 Records of Quaker meetings began.

1660 Restoration of the Anglican Church children born during the Commonwealth often baptised as older children.

1660 persecution of Non Conformists began (at that time Independents (Congregationalists), Baptists, Quakers and joined by the Presbyterians in 1662 and others).

1661 Corporations Act restricted membership to those who took the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England.

1662 Act of Uniformity required all clergy to accept the teachings of the Church of England. Presbyterian clergy who refused were ejected from their livings.

1664 Many supporters formed their own congregations with the ejected clergy. The Conventicles Act forbade these gatherings.

1672 — 1674 Declaration of Indulgence allowed these conventicles and dissenting teachers to operate if they were licensed.

1672 Test Act - all holders of public office had to take an oath of supremacy (of the Anglican Church) Many Non Conformists refused.

1689 Toleration Act ended persecution for non-attendance at the Parish Church (Anglican). All Non Conformists were allowed to build their own chapels and meeting houses and have burial grounds. They had their own registers. This did not apply to Roman Catholics.

1714 All persons over the age of 18 had to take an Oath of Allegiance. The wording was such that they had to renounce the Catholic Church.

1738 Methodist Movement began.

1742/3 a register of births for the Three Denominations (Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Baptists) began at Dr William's Library.

Until 1754 marriage by affirmation before witnesses but not in a church was valid by law. Under Lord Hardwicke's Act for the better preventing of clandestine marriages 1754 there had to be a separate marriage book and book of banns. The marriage had to be in a Church of England only Quakers and Jews were exempted from this law.

1778 Catholics were allowed to take an Oath of Allegiance and attend the Law Courts. Many Catholic registers start at this time. 1784 Methodist clergy were being banned from Anglican churches (they had up to this point remained within the Church of England) so they came under the Toleration Act and became Dissenters (Non Conformists) with their own chapels and registers.

1791 Catholic Relief Act let Catholics worship at their own registered churches with their own registered priests. Many churches were built and again registers often start from this time.

1813 George Rose's Act of 1812 meant that printed registers were started from 1 January 1813 for baptisms, marriages and burials.

1828 Repeal of the Test Acts allowed all Non Conformists and Quakers to hold office.

1829 Roman Catholic Emancipation Act allowed Catholics to vote, sit in Parliament and hold property unconditionally.

1 July 1837 Civil Registration began.

1837 Existing non parochial registers of England and Wales, including some foreign churches were called in. Three thousand six hundred and thirty congregations sent in around seven thousand registers. The Roman Catholic Bishops refused to deposit their registers as did the Jews and Quakers. Some RC registers were received mainly from Yorkshire.

1840 Non Parochial Registers Act the received registers were deposited at the General Register Office and much later (1961) into the National Archives.

1841 The Quakers sent in their registers.

1857 another three hundred registers sent in.

1979 Parochial Registers and Records Measure was laid down by the Church of England General Synod in 1978 to ensure the long term care and preservation of and access to parish records. It specified that completed records over 100 years of age were to be deposited at the diocesan record office or be kept in the equivalent of archival conditions at the parish church. The records remain the property of the church.

*Source: Hilary Ambrose,
Liverpool Family Historian*