

Parish Registers

Family History before 1837

What are Parish Registers?

- Parish Registers are records of baptisms, marriages, and burials made by the Church.
- They are a valuable resource for researching your family tree because the census and official records of birth, marriage and death do not go back further than 1837.
- They can extend research back to the time of King Henry VIII, with many records going back to the 1600s.

A History of Parish Registers -1500s

1538

- Cromwell, from the court of Henry VIII, ordered that every wedding, baptism and burial was to be recorded.

1553

- There may be gaps in Parish Registers between 1553 and 1558 and the Catholic Mary Tudor was on the throne.

1558

- Although early records were made on paper, in 1558 parchment was used, and the older records were supposed to have been copied (although some never were and have been lost).
- Because of the risk of persecution, Catholic Records from around 1559 to 1778 are incomplete.

1597

- A second copy of the records had to be made and sent to the Bishop. These are called Bishops Transcripts and are often more legible than the original

1600s

1642

- There may be gaps in the records during the English Civil War and Commonwealth (1642-1660), as records were poorly kept or hidden, and some have been lost.

1678

- Between 1678 and 1814 an affidavit was required to be sworn that when buried, the deceased was buried in wool or a fine of £5 was given.

1700s

1751

- In 1751 England and Wales were still using the old style, Julian calendar, which began each year on March 25th.
- Most of Europe had changed to the new style, Gregorian calendar, and so in 1752 England decided to change. This meant that 1751 commenced on March 25th and ended on December 31st, and was only nine months long.
- Some parish priests had recognised the new calendar before the official change, As a result some entries in the period 1582 – 1751 show dual entries for dates between 1 Jan and 24 March eg Jan 1st 1750 may be shown as Jan 1st 1750/51.

1783

- A stamp duty of 3 pence was imposed on every entry, although paupers were exempt. Tax evasion naturally occurred, and the Act was repealed in 1794, and declared unsuccessful.

1800s

1812

- Baptisms, marriages and burials were entered in separate, specially printed books, eight entries per page and including more information.

1837

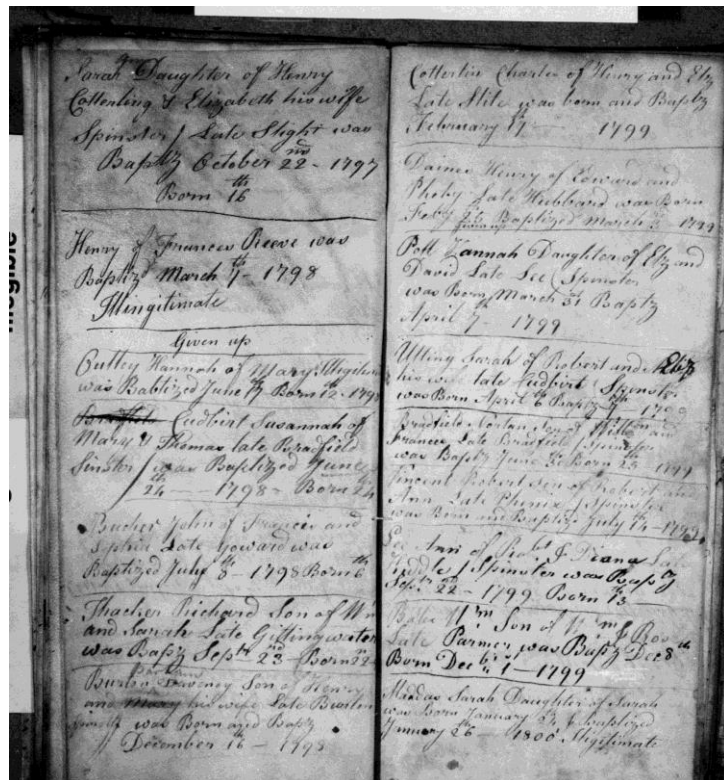
- Civil registration is introduced.

Baptism Records

- These may not take place in the year of birth and can be several years later. You may from time to time find baptisms of more than one child in a family at the same time. This does not mean they were born at the same time, as sometimes families would wait to baptise several children together.
- Until 1812 the baptism record could often also include the mother's maiden name but standardisation of records after this date excluded this.
- From 1742, non-conformists were able to register baptisms in the General Register of Births of Children of Protestant Dissenters at Dr Williams' library in London. It has about 50,000 births.
- Methodists kept records from 1779.

Baptism record Ann Lee , daughter Robert Lee and Diana Lee nee Kiddle 22 Sept 1799

Original nearly illegible parish record



Much clearer Bishop's Transcript

FADED DOCUMENT

1798		1801 con.	
778	John of Francis + Sophia Bucher (Gorward)	July 6	July 8
779	Richard of William + Sarah Thacker (Gillingwater)	Sept 22	Sept 23
780	Burton (Nathan + penial) of Henry + Mary Davenny (Burton)	Dec 16	Dec 16
1799			
783	Charles of Henry + Elizabeth Cottelton (Shile)	Feb 17	Feb 17
784	Henry of Edward + Phely Daines (Hubbard)	- 25	Mar 3
785	Hannah of David + Elizabeth Toll (Lee)	Mar 31	April 7
786	Sarah of Robert + Elizabeth Utting (Cudbut)	April 6	- 7
787	Bradfield of William + Frances Norton (Bradfield)	June 25	June 30
788	Robert of Robert + Ann Vincent (Phenix)	July 14	July 22
789	Ann S. of Robert + Diana Lee (Kiddle)	Sept 13	Sept 22
790	William of William + Rose Baker (Parsons)	Dec 1	Dec 8
1800			
791	Sarah of Sarah Maddas, illegitimate	Jan 24	Jan 26
in the new book			
792	Isaac of Isaac + Mary Johnson (Chastney)	April 12	April 13
793	Isaac of Robert + Ann Vincent (Phenix)	- 29	May 8
794	Isabella of John + Elizabeth Howe (Norman)	June 6	June 8
795	Isabella of Thomas + Mary Lovell (Dade)	- 28	- 29
796	Charles of Francis + Sophia Bucher (Gorward)	Nov 27	Nov 30
797	William Henry of Henry + Elizabeth Cottelton (Shilft)	Dec 20	Dec 28
1801			
798	Hannah of Mary Cudbut	March 26	April 3
799	Isaac of John + Berakela Gorward (Dunnet)	April 3	April 12
800	Ann of Henry + Ann Davenny (Burton)	July 29	Aug 2
801	Henry of Henry + Susanna Blankling (Baker)	Aug 2	Aug 23
802	Ann of Hannah Tompson (Slig)	Sept 24	Sept 27
803	William of Thomas + Mary Lovell (Dade)	Oct 20	Oct 25
804	Harriet of Honor Daine (Slig)	- 25	Nov 8
805	Mary Ann of Elizabeth Vincent (Slig)	Nov 14	Nov 8
806	Robert of Robert + Ann Vincent (Phenix)	- 1	- 22
807	Hannah of William + Susanna Bullard (Boult)	Dec 26	Jan 3 1802
1802			
808	William of William + Frances Norton (Bradfield)	Jan 10	Jan 7
809	Robert of Robert + Sarah Tuck (Barnon)	- 24	- 31
810	Sarah of Anne Flowers (Slig)	May 12	May 6
811	Rose of Sarah Maddas (Slig)	Sept 30	Sept 31
1803			
812	Jama of John + Berakela Gorward (Dunnet)	Jan 1	Jan 2
813	Robert of Francis + Sophia Bucher	Feb 4	Feb 5
814	Thomas of Thomas + Mary Lovell	Mar 28	Apr 1
815	Marianne of John + Frances Parsons	- 28	- 2
816	Marianne of John + Sarah Morse	May 7	May 5
817	Edward of William + Sarah Davenny	July 28	July 31
1804			
818	John of Henry + Ann Davenny (Burton)	Aug 2	Aug 7

Marriage Records

Church of England parish register marriage records usually contain:

- Marriage date
- Name of the bride and groom

After 1753, the records are more likely to show:

- Residence of the bride and groom
- Marital status of bride and groom
- The full names of usually two witnesses
- The minister's name

After 30 June 1837, marriage records also include:

- Age of the bride and groom
- Name and occupation of the fathers of bride and groom

Marriage Records cont'd

There were two ways to meet the requirements to marry,

1. By Banns. A law required couples to have the minister announce or post notice of their intent to marry for three consecutive Sundays, unless they obtained a license. This gave others the opportunity to object to the marriage. Beginning in 1754, officials recorded banns in separate registers. Banns registers contain information almost identical to marriage registers, but banns usually do not list the witnesses or marriage date.
2. By License. A couple applied to the proper church authority, usually the bishop, for a license when:
 - Circumstances made it desirable to marry without waiting the three weeks required for the proclamation of banns.
 - The bride and groom lived in different dioceses.
 - A couple preferred not to subject themselves to publication of banns (common among upper classes and nonconformists).

From 1754 (sometimes earlier) the parish of residence at the time of the marriage was recorded, note that this is not necessarily the birth parish.

The 1753 Marriage Act gave Quakers and Jews the right to hold their own ceremonies. Prior to that “clandestine” marriages were tolerated but perhaps not recorded.

Marriage record

Richard Palmer and Ann Lee 29 April 1823

[Page 44]

MARRIAGES solemnized in the Parish of *St Michael at Northgate* in the County of *the City of Norwich* in the Year 1823

Richard Palmer Bachelor of *this* Parish
and *Ann Lee* Spinster of *this* Parish
were married in this Church by *Banns* this *twenty ninth* Day of
April in the Year One Thousand eight hundred and twenty *three*
By me *James W. Tompson Curate*
This Marriage was solemnized between us { *Richard Palmer*
Ann Lee
In the Presence of { *Richard Williams*
Phoebe Silby *Elizabeth Selby*
No. 130. *Wm. St.oughton*
John Laelling Bachelor of *this* Parish

Bleed through

Burial Records

A burial usually took place in the deceased's parish a few days after the death. Church of England parish register burial records usually contain:

- Burial date
- Name of the deceased.
- If the deceased is a child, the father's name might be given.
- If the deceased is a married woman, the husband's name might be given
- If the deceased is a widow, that may be noted.
- May give the sex of the deceased

The forms introduced in 1813 also called for:

- Age of the deceased
 - Residence of the deceased
 - Occupation of the deceased
 - Minister's signature
- Burial registers may mention infant children who were not christened, including stillbirths. Baptism records never record stillbirths.
 - From 1853 many churches, particularly urban ones, stopped churchyard graves and burials transferred to the local authority cemeteries. At this time church burial registers stopped. You may therefore find that Burial Registers for many churches cease around the mid 1800's.

Burial Record Edward Palmer, July 31 1801

buried Dec^r 14th
1801.
Mary D^r of William Ringer and Mary his wife (late M: Wright
Spin^r.) aged _____ was buried Jan^y 9th
Samuel Wright married man aged 31 years was buried Feb^r 16th
Joseph Arnold widower aged 70 years was buried March 13th
Deceased in at the Bishop's visitation July 3^d
Edward Bridges married man Son of Edward Bridges and Deborah
his wife (late D: Rushbrook. Spin^r.) aged 52 years was buried July 12th
Edward Palmer of Bunwell married man Son of Edward Palmer
and Margaret his wife (late M: Barnard Spin^r.) aged 55 years was
buried July 31st
Ann D^r of John Smith aged 27 years was buried Oct^r 18th
Mary wife of Robert Ringer aged 70 years was buried Oct^r 25th
John Son of Robert Love and Sarah his wife (late S: Bats Spin^r.) aged
9 years was buried Dec^r 14th
1802: _____ Spin^r aged 27

How do you find Parish Records

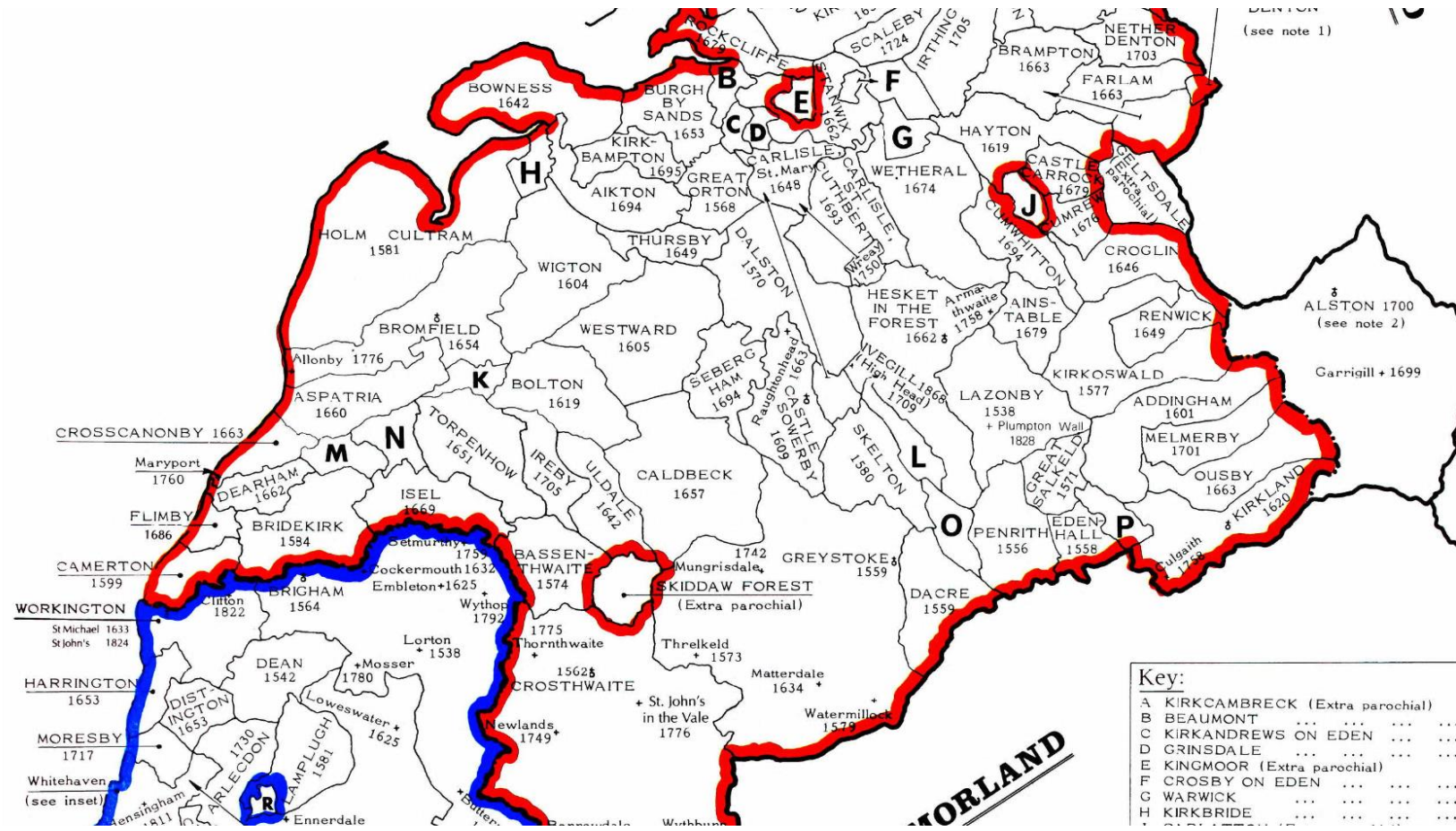
- Ancestry
- Find My Past
- Family Search
- Online Parish Clerks e.g. <http://www.opcdorset.org/>
- County history websites

Old Parish Boundaries

- When looking for registers, it's important to know what the parish boundaries were at a specific point in time because many parish boundaries have changed over the centuries. For example, beginning in the 1830s many of the larger old, or "ancient," parishes began being split up into smaller parishes.
- The Phillimore Atlas outlines old parishes prior to 1832 and provides the date of the earliest surviving registers for the parish. The atlas includes England, Wales, and Scotland. Available on Ancestry

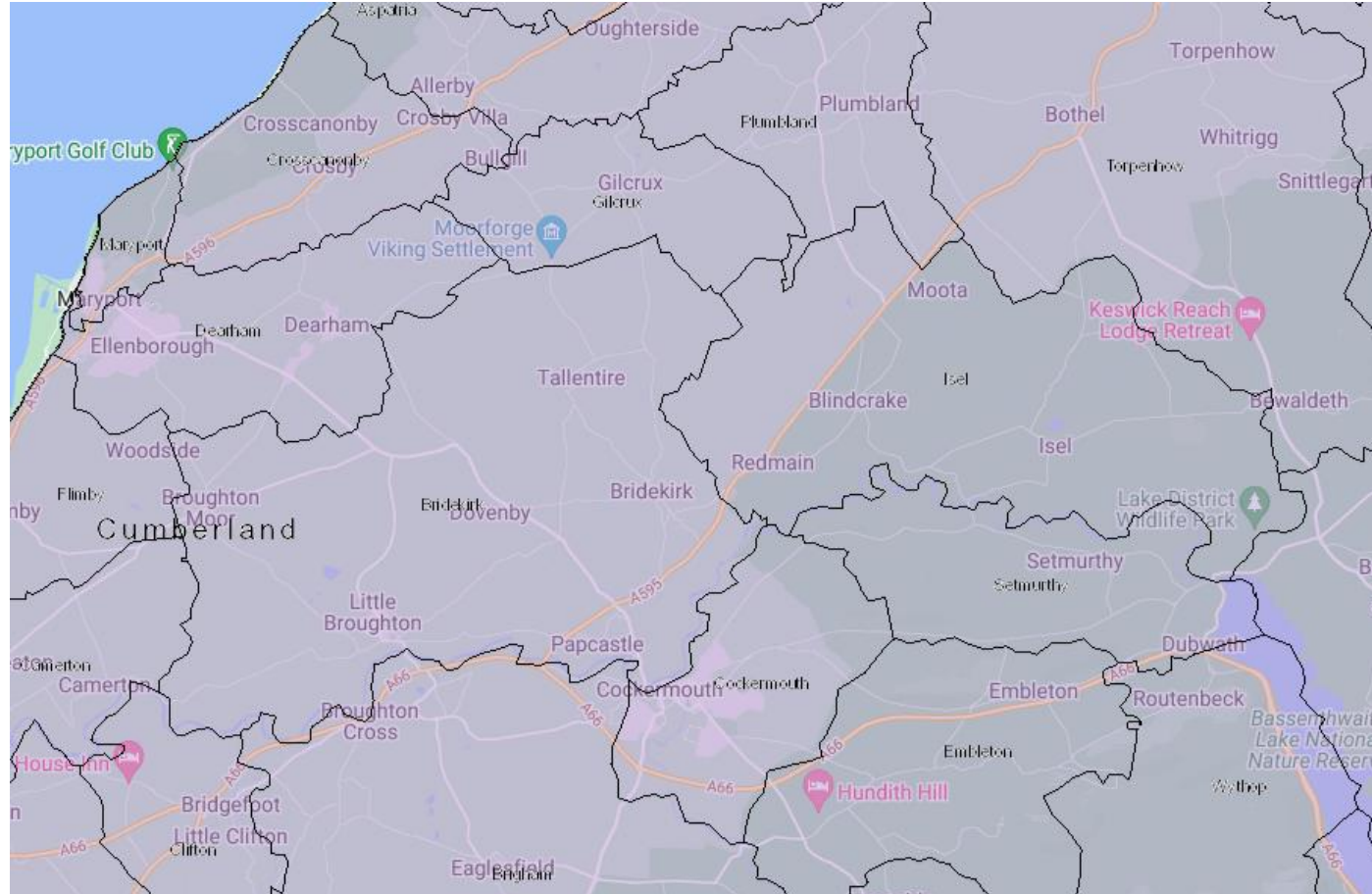
Ancestry – Phillimore Atlas

Great Britain, Atlas and Index of Parish Registers



Family Search

Parishes , in 1851 overlaid over a current map
<https://www.familysearch.org/mapp/>



Material taken from and with thanks to

- John Steele – CFHS
- Family Search
- The Society of Genealogists
- Ancestry
- Wikipedia