

England Beginning Research Series—Handout



Lesson 4: Understanding Church Records

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Overview

Since civil authorities did not begin registering vital records until July 1837, Church records are an excellent source to find the names and dates of family members before that time.

Most British subjects are recorded somewhere in the baptism (christenings), marriage, and burial entries found in Church records.

Church of England Records

The Church of England has the most complete and accessible collection of Church records for England. Its ecclesiastical divisions are listed below from largest to smallest:

- Province - Archbishop
- Diocese - Bishop
- Archdeaconry - Archdeacon
- Rural Deanery - Dean
- Parish - Vicar
- Chapelry - Vicar

The divisions are called jurisdictions, and local records were kept at the parish or chapelry levels. A "parish" can be defined as the jurisdictional unit that governs Church affairs within its boundaries. Small villages often do not have their own parishes but are part of a parish headquartered in another town.

A parish may have one or more "chapelries" (dependent branches), which often keep their own records as well.

What is important to know for research purposes is that each parish kept records of the christenings, marriages, and burials, and these were recorded in parish registers.

Details about Events Found in Parish Registers

Christenings (Baptisms):



BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of <u>Newham</u> in the County of <u>Northampton</u> in the Year 18 <u>27</u>						
When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents' Name.		Abode.	Quality, Trade, Or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
		Christian.	Surname.			
18 ²⁷ 11 th February No. 265	George son of	John Mary	Frost	Newham	Shoe maker	P. Green
25 th March No. 266	John son of	John Sanny	Mowl	Newham	Laborer	P. Green
9 th March No. 267	Henry son of	William Hannah	Lined	Newham	Butcher	P. Green
22 ^d April No. 268	Philip son of	William Eleanor	Flickman	Newham	Publican	P. Green
6 th May No. 269	Catherine daughter of	Joseph Ann	Johnson	Newham	Laborer	P. Green
20 th May No. 270	Mary daughter of	James Mary	Watts	Newham	Laborer	P. Green
3 ^d June No. 271	James son of	Martin Mary	Brown	Hornton	Laborer	P. Green
23 ^d July No. 272	Harriet daughter of	James Maria	Lesson	Newham	Laborer	P. Green

Children were usually christened within a few weeks of birth, though christenings of some older children or adults were recorded. The parish registers give at least the infant's name and the christening date. Additional information may include the father's name and occupation, the mother's first name, the child's birth date and legitimacy, and the family's place of residence. In larger cities, the family's street address is given. Preprinted forms were introduced in 1813.

Marriages:

Parish registers often recorded only the marriage date and the names of the bride and groom. The records may also include the marital status and the parish of residence of both parties, the groom's occupation, signatures of witnesses, and the minister's name, especially after 1754. Couples usually married in the bride's parish. Typically, the English married in their 20s. To be accepted, the following laws and requirements applied and produced various records:

By Banns. This law required couples to have the minister announce or post notice of their intent to marry for three consecutive Sundays. 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. If you believe a marriage took place but cannot find a record of it, search the banns register (if available). The banns should have been recorded in both the bride's and the groom's parish. The marriage is usually recorded only in the parish where it took place.

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).

MARRIAGES solemnized in the Parish of Northampton
 in the County of Northampton in the Year 1824
James Lesson Bachelor of this Parish
 and Mariah Falkner Spinster of this Parish
 were married in this Church by Banns with Consent of
July in the Year One thousand eight hundred and twenty four
 By me Richard Warfield officiating
 This Marriage was solemnized between us { The T of James Lesson
The T of Mariah Falkner
 In the Presence of { of Thomas Falkner
Elizabeth Harris

were married in this Church by Banns
July in the Year One thousand eight hundred and
 By me Richard Warfield



Marriage licenses could be granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, bishops, and archdeacons, or their surrogates within their respective jurisdictions. The licensing process created three types of documents, which may provide additional information to what the marriage record itself contains:

- Marriage bond. A written guarantee, usually made by the groom and another person swearing to the legality of the planned marriage. The bond usually lists occupations.
- Marriage allegation. A statement filed by the couple in support of their license application. It records the couple's names, ages, and parish of residence. The allegation sometimes lists where the marriage was to take place or gives a parent's name or signature.
- Marriage license. The actual document given to the couple to present to the minister. This document seldom survives but is sometimes found in family papers.



If a couple married by license but the bond or allegation cannot be found in the records for the diocese, check the records of the Vicar General and the Faculty Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which had a higher level of jurisdiction.

Burials:

A burial usually took place in the deceased's parish a few days after the death. Pre-1813 burial records listed the deceased's name and burial date and sometimes mentioned the age, place of residence, cause of death, or occupation. After 1813 the forms called for the name, age, abode, burial date, and minister's signature. The husband's name is sometimes given on the wife's burial entry. The father's name may be on the record for a deceased child. Burial registers may mention infant children who were not christened, including stillbirths. Christening records never record stillbirths.

BURIALS in the Parish of <u>Newnham</u> in the County of <u>Northants</u> in the Year 18 <u>87</u>				
Name.	Abode.	Where buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<i>George Russell</i> <small>No. 785</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>Oct 17</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>Abraham</i>
<i>Mary Russell</i> <small>No. 786</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>Oct 22</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Abraham</i>
<i>Dorothy Walker</i> <small>No. 787</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>From Lisson Bury 30</i>	<i>2 Days</i>	<i>Abraham</i>
<i>James Leason</i> <small>No. 788</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>Jan'y 28</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>Abraham</i>
<i>Ann Shaw</i> <small>No. 789</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>March 9</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>Abraham</i>
<i>Jane Bird</i> <small>No. 790</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>May 2</i>	<i>76</i>	Abraham <i>W. Scratton</i>
<i>Henry Thomas Robinson</i> <small>No. 791</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>May 12</i>	<i>9 Days</i>	<i>Abraham</i>
<i>Ethel Mary Cox</i> <small>No. 792</small>	<i>Newnham</i>	<i>May 30</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Abraham</i>

Always Search the Indexes First

You can find record indexes online. The next page contains a list of sites you will find helpful.

Free web sites:

- www.familysearch.org –Record Collections for the British Isles
- www.freereq.org.uk–Volunteer effort to index early parish registers
- www.onlineparishclerks.org.uk–Indexed transcriptions available for some select counties
- www.genuki.org.uk–Virtual reference library to locate transcribed records
- www.google.com and other search engines–Search for transcribed or indexed parish records

Pay websites—available free at the FHL and FamilySearch Centers

- www.findmypast.co.uk–Leading genealogy resource; continuing to add parish records
- www.ancestry.co.uk–Largest for-profit genealogy company in the world; many parish records
- www.thegenealogist.co.uk–Extensive databases; rich resource
- www.origins.net–Access to many genealogy records; Boyd’s Marriage Index

The Family History Library Catalog

Many parish records are still not digitized or indexed online. Go to:

- www.familysearch.org, then click **Catalog**, then **Place-names**, then **Name of Parish**, and then **Church Records**
 - Locate reference information for the record, and view it on film or microfiche at the library or order it in to local FamilySearch Center (FSC)–locate the FSC by going to www.familysearch.org and clicking **FamilySearch Centers**

Nonconformist Church Records

Keep in mind that for any denomination other than the Church of England:

- Records may exist and can be very useful.
- These records can be found on microfilm, transcriptions in book form, and online at www.thegenealogist.co.uk or www.BMDRegisters.co.uk.



Non-conformist churches	
Baptists	Congregationalists
Methodist	Protestant Dissenters
Independents	Society of Friends (Quakers)
Roman Catholics	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
Presbyterians	