

CHURCH RECORDS IN WALES

I. Background

- A. Thomas Cromwell directs parish priests to begin keeping a register of baptisms, marriages and burials - 1538.
 - 1. Chest to keep them in – 2 keys
 - 2. Record them on Sunday for the previous week
 - 3. Penalty applied for repairs on church
 - 4. Order reemphasized in 1547. Penalty to poor
 - 5. 1559, reemphasis again 3/4 divided between poor and repair on church.
- B. 1598 the convocation of Bishops at Canterbury reemphasize keeping of parish registers. Bishop's transcripts kept from this year onward.
 - 1. Constitution set down by convocation of bishops at Canterbury and confirmed by the Queen to the more careful keeping of the parish registers
 - 2. Kept on parchment rather than paper
 - 3. Copy old registers from beginning to of Elizabeth's reign (1558) to present
 - 4. Transcript of entries in the register sent to diocesan registry (BT's) within a month of Easter.
- C. Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753
- D. Printed registers for baptisms, marriages, and burials - 1813.
- E. Marriage register changed in 1837

II. Parish registers in Wales

- A. Extent and condition of parish registers
 - 1. Gwaenysgor - Only parish with registers dating back to 1538
 - 2. Half a dozen PR's dating before 1560
 - 3. About 70 PRs predating 1600
 - 4. Over half of these 70 are in the Diocese of St. Asaph
 - 5. Diocese of St. David's over 1/2 of PRs do not have registers dating before 1754

III. Bishop's transcripts in Wales

- A. Bishop's Transcripts
 - 1. Limitations
 - a. Time coverage doesn't predate 1662 for any of the five dioceses in Wales
 - b. Extensive gaps often occur
 - (1) For the Archdeaconries of St. David and Cardigan, BTs missing for whole of 18th century
 - (2) Diocese of Llandaff – few BTs before 1723
 - (3) Willful neglect on part of clergy to record all entries
 - 2. Microfilm limitations
 - a. Not all BT's extant were filmed.
 - b. Gaps that exist on film do not necessarily exist in the originals

III. Use of parish registers and bishop's transcripts

- A. From our discussion so far, it should be clear: **Look at both the parish registers and Bishop's transcripts!**

- B. Survey to see what parish registers are available and where the records are now deposited.
 - 1. Reference books to determine location and extent of PR's and BT's.
 - a. The Parish Registers of Wales (Cofrestri Plwyfi Cymru)

NONCONFORMITY IN WALES

I. BACKGROUND

- A. Henry the VIII
 - 1. Established Church of England is, technically speaking, a nonconformist church. It dissented from the Catholic Church
 - 2. Nonconformity in England and Wales.
 - a. Puritanism was nonconformity within the Established Church of England, which led groups seeking reform within the church to come to America to worship freely
 - b. Political events during the Commonwealth period 1649-1662 strongly affected the growth of nonconformity in Wales
- B. Acts of Conformity 1662
 - 1. As the act implies by its title, marks the true beginning of nonconformity in Wales, and where the term nonconformity has its origin.
 - 2. Years of persecution 1662-1688
 - 3. Sects during this time
 - a. Baptists
 - b. Independents (Presbyterians)
 - c. Quakers
 - 4. Many Quakers emigrated to U.S. between 1670-1690 settling in Pennsylvania. Members of Baptists and Independents also came
- C. Acts of Toleration (for those who did not conform) - 1688
- D. Period of peace and steady growth (1690-1800)
 - 1. With the granting of Religious freedom in 1688 (sects prospered, except for Quakers who declined after 1700)
 - 2. Methodist revival in Wales (origin of Calvinistic Methodists in 1737)
 - a. Howell Harries and Daniel Rowlands preach throughout Wales
 - b. Establish religious societies for prayer meetings and preaching
 - c. Methodist revival takes place within framework of established church
 - d. This sect breaks away from established church in 1811
 - e. Children baptized in parish churches until 1811 at which time the Calvinistic Methodists began to keep its own records
 - 3. Spread of nonconformity accelerates (1775-1800)
 - a. Revival meetings held by all sects

II. GROWTH OF NONCONFORMITY

- A. The age of nonconformity (1800-1900)
 - 1. At beginning of 19th century about 10-15% of population was nonconformist
 - 2. By 1850 most areas in Wales were 50% nonconformist, while industrial areas averaged between 75% and 95%. Some rural areas were over 80% nonconformist.
 - 3. By 1900 75-80% of total population were nonconformist
- B. Change in rural Wales and the Industrial Revolution.
 - 1. Increase in population 1801-1851. Population nearly doubled.
 - 2. Industrial revolution drew many people from rural areas into the industrial valleys
- C. Genealogical research in nonconformist records
 - 1. Biggest difficulty determining what chapels were in existence.
 - d. In early days, members were scattered (i.e. Rhyddwilyn Baptist Chapel)
 - e. In early days, also, not much choice of which chapel to attend since there were so few
 - f. In a later period, the problem became one of over-abundance—deciding which chapel the ancestor attended.

III. MAJOR SECTS IN WALES (See list below)

IV. HOW TO TRACE A NONCONFORMIST ANCESTOR

- A. List of Chapels
 - 1. Royal Commission's Enquiry in 1910 on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire. Volume six: Appendices to Minutes of Evidence (GS film 104427).
 - 2. The Religious Census of 1851: A Calendar of Returns Relating to Wales. Edited by Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and David Williams. Volume 30 (South Wales. Microfiche #6054483) and Volume 31 (North Wales. Microfiche #6054484). Published by the Board of Celtic Studies. Family History Library call number 942.9/B4b, Volumes 30-31.
 - B. Chapel Histories (Most written in Welsh)
 - C. Maps.
 - 1. Ordnance Survey
 - a. 6" to the mile.
 - b. 16" to the mile.
 - c. 25" to the mile
- The ordnance survey maps are available online. Google: National Library of Scotland – maps. On the site:
Select Ordnance survey maps

Under Map Series-Scotland Select:

“Ordnance Survey, Six inch to the mile 1st edition, 1843-1882

On the next screen under “Browse the maps” select

“As seamless zoomable overlay on Google and OSmaps

Exit “help” screen by clicking the “x” in top right hand corner.

Type the place desired in the box and initiate the search. It will take you to place you entered in the search.

D. Compiled Sources for Nonconformist chapels and records in Wales.

1. Cofrestri Anghydfurfiol Cymru (Nonconformist Registers of Wales)

Published by the National Library of Wales (1994). Editor Dafydd Evans.

This compilation lists nonconformist records in existence which are available for each county of Wales. This only lists what christening, birth, marriage, and death or burial registers that exist for each chapel and the dates they cover. It does not list the myriad of other types of records that may exist that forms a part of each chapel’s collection. It is a very helpful volume, if it has been determined which chapel a family attended. The steps listed in A, B, and C above is the steps to follow in determining the importance of a particular chapel in the lives your ancestors.

Family History Library call number is 942.9/K23c

2. The Parish Churches and Nonconformist Chapels of Wales: Their Records and Where to Find Them.

Volume one, for the counties of Pembroke, Cardigan, and Carmarthen was written to eliminate laborious work in the above cited sources for tracing a nonconformist ancestor. You can find all of the nonconformist chapels for a particular parish in less than five minutes with this book. It is a must for anyone who has ancestry coming out of the three counties contained in this book.

Family History Library book call number is 942.9/K2rp

Or, obtained through:

Bert J Rawlins

2856 South Lakeview Drive

Salt Lake City, UT 84109

E. Types of nonconformist records

1. chapel histories (published and unpublished) 2.
- baptismal, marriage and burial registers
3. Account books
4. Sunday School rolls
5. Membership rosters and membership recommendations
6. Pew rent books

7. Special societies and brotherhoods organized under auspices of chapel
8. Chapel deeds listing trustees, etc.
9. Chapel graveyards

V. MAJOR SECTS IN WALES

- A. Baptists
 1. Origins in Wales: Mid 17th Century (1640)
 2. Types of records:
 - a. No baptismal or christening registers
 - b. Occasionally birth registers (entries nearly always incomplete).
 - c. Lists of members baptized and confirmed.
- B. Independents (Sometimes referred to as Presbyterians or Congregationalists)
 1. Origins in Wales: earlier than 1640
 2. Types of records available
 - a. Often christening register (few date earlier than 1800)
 - b. Lists of members, account books, etc.
- C. Calvinistic Methodists (Now the Presbyterian Church in Wales)
 1. Origins in Wales: 1737
 - a. This began as a revival within the Establish Church
 - b. Separated from the Church in 1811
 2. Types of records available
 - a. Children of this sect should be found in the registers of the parish church until 1811.
 - b. After 1811 many chapels of this sect kept their own baptismal registers
 - c. These chapels also kept account books, membership rolls, etc.
- D. Welsh Wesleyan Methodists
 1. Origins in Wales: 1800
 - a. This sect is strongest in North Wales (few chapels in South Wales)
 2. Types of records available
 - a. Baptismal registers
 - b. Other records such as account books, membership rolls, etc.
- E. Unitarians
 1. Origins in Wales 1700's
 - a. This sect developed from members of the sects mentioned above, usually the Baptists and Independents.
 - b. It was strongest in South Wales
 - 1) Industrial areas
 - 2) Teifi Valley on the border of Carmarthen and Cardigan Counties.
- F. Wesleyan Methodists
 1. Origins in Wales: 1760's
 - a. This sect strongest in the English speaking areas
 2. Types of records available
 - a. Christenings of children for members of this sect should be found

in the registers of the parish church during the 18th century and later.

- b. Baptismal registers
- c. Accounts, membership registers, etc.

G. Primitive Methodists

- 1. Origins in Wales: 1820's
 - a. Numerically very small. Found in the English speaking areas.

H. Moravians

- 1. Origins in Wales
 - a. Numerically very small. There were only two or three chapels in South Wales.
- 2. Types of records
 - a. Baptism and burial registers, accounts and membership rolls, etc.

I. Society of Friends (Quakers)

- 1. Origins in Wales
 - a. Mid seventeenth century.
 - b. Most of these emigrated to the U.S. and settled in Pennsylvania
 - c. Numerically insignificant in Wales by 1800.