PARISH REGISTERS

In all early registers the details will vary depending upon the customs within the parish, the guidelines provided by the dioceses, and the administrative abilities of the local priest. Earliest records 1538.

Christenings

The minimum details are the date of the christening, the child's name and the father's name. Other common items include the mother's first name, the family's place of residence and the father's occupation. Around 1808 the register may also show the date of birth, the father's place of birth and his father's name, plus the mother's place of birth and her father's name.

The George Rose Act of 1812 provided better regulations for recording christenings, marriages and burials. Printed registers provided columns for the christening date, child's name, parents first names, parents surname, abode, father's occupation, minister's signature. The margins may also contain added notes with the actual birth date being the most common. The same form is in use today.

Marriages

The marriage registers often record only marriage date, the name of the bride and groom. The records may include the marital status, the parish of residence of both parties, the groom's occupation, the bride's father's name, and the minister's name.

1753 saw the passage of Lord Hardwicke's Act to prevent clandestine marriages. The Act stated that every marriage should be by banns or by licence. From 1754 to 1837, printed registers were used and consist of three types: separate volumes for banns and marriages, single volume with banns at the beginning followed by separate marriage entries, and a single volume combining the marriage and bann entries. The information required included for both the bride and groom their names, marital status and parish of residence, where they were married and how (banns or licence), parental consent if needed, date of marriage, signatures or mark for the priest, groom, bride and generally two witnesses (who may be relatives or the parish clerks).

After 1 July 1837 all parishes were required to use a new form which provided the groom and bride's names, ages, residences, occupations and the names and occupations of their fathers. The same information is contained on the civil registration certificates.

Banns

The law required couples to have the minister announce in church on three consecutive Sundays their intent to be married. The assumption is that over three weeks anyone who knew of just reason why they could not be married would speak up. The banns had to be read in the parish of both the bride and the groom and can therefore provide an indicator of where the marriage took place. Finding banns does not mean that the marriage took place.
See above under marriage for information contained and types of printed books in use from 1754 to 1824. The Marriage Act of 1824 codified the requirements for banns and resulted in separate books being kept for the banns. The General Registration Act of 1836 resulted in the use of smaller printed bann books which are still in use today.

**Burials**

Prior to 1813 burial records will provide deceased's name and burial date. Sometimes the age, place of residence, cause of death and occupation is given. Occasionally the cause of death and mother's maiden name may be included. For a woman's death her husband's name may be given, and for a child the father's name might be given.

Following the George Rose Act of 1812 printed forms were introduced providing name, age, abode, burial date and minister's signature. The same forms are in use today.

Burial registers may include still births and infant children who were not christened. Christening records never record stillbirths.

**DIOCESAN RECORDS**

**Bishops Transcripts**

The Bishops Transcripts are copies of the parish registers sent annually, within a month after Easter to the proper authority, usually but not always the bishop. The practice was instituted in 1597 by The Provincial Constitution of Canterbury.

The bishops transcripts are a useful alternative when the parish registers are missing, damaged, or entries appear to be missing. Generally the information in the parish register and the bishops transcript is the same but this cannot be guaranteed so they should be checked where available.

**Marriage Licences**

A marriage licence allowed a couple to marry without the publication of banns. Licenses are known from the Middle Ages, but grew in the 16th century. The authority to issue licenses was generally limited to archbishops and bishops, or their designated representatives. Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753 restricted the granting of licenses to marriages in those churches or chapels where the bride or groom had lived for four weeks before issue of a licence. This period was in 1824 reduced to fifteen days.

The issue of a marriage licence generated three documents:

a. The licence - had to be produced for the priest performing the marriage. The licence was usually retained by the couple and rarely survives.

b. The allegation - a sworn statement made by one of the parties that there were no known legal impediments to the marriage and that it met the requirements of the laws of the Church of England. If either party was a minor, the written consent of the parents or guardians were required when the allegation was made. Marriage allegations were abolished in 1823.

c. The marriage bond - was issued to the party applying for the licence. They were bound by sureties that consent of the parents had been obtained, that there was no impediment and that the marriage would take place in the parish church of one of the parties within canonical hours. Normally the bridegroom was one of the sureties or bondsmen. The other bondsmen...
may be related but the relationship is rarely stated. The bond is in two parts: the obligation, or declaration by the bondsmen and the sum in which they are bound, and the condition, giving the names of the parties and church where the ceremony will be performed. Before 1731 the obligation is usually in Latin and the condition in English. After 1731 both documents are in English.

**ACCESSING THE RECORDS**

**FamilySearch**
Primary source will be FamilySearch which are parish register extractions. The older patron submissions in the International Genealogical Index (IGI) have been moved. Scanned images are now being put online, some indexed, some not; some searchable at home others at a FHC. Good collections - Cheshire, Norfolk, Durham.

**DustyDocs** at [www.dustydocs.com](http://www.dustydocs.com) provides links to free websites in the British Isles that contain parish records. The site is arranged by county and by parish and provides links. Many of these links can be found with other search engines but they are all pulled together in one place. In addition some of the links will take you to the wayback machine and still provide free access to records that may now be behind a paywall.

**Commercial Sites**
All of the commercial sites have some parish record collections. You will need to determine geographic coverage and whether they provide access to original records, an index of original records or an OCR index of earlier published transcripts.

Sites to investigate include: [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com), [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) [www.Genealogist.co.uk](http://www.Genealogist.co.uk)

**Online Images**
Medway CityArk - “Parish Registers Online” www.cityark.medway.gov.uk

**Transcription projects**
FreeREG [www.freereg.org.uk](http://www.freereg.org.uk) coverage of counties and periods varies widely.
Cheshire Parish Register Project - [www.csc.liv.ac.uk](http://www.csc.liv.ac.uk)
Kent extractions - [www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mrawson/parish.htm](http://www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mrawson/parish.htm)
Durham Records Online - [www.durhamrecordsonline.com](http://www.durhamrecordsonline.com)

**Published Indexes - Transcripts**
Internet Archive - [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) - look for many 19th century published transcripts. Search on name of parish or registers and name of county. Be careful as many are extractions of key landed families only, not of everyone in the community.

Many county and local Family History Societies have published indexes or transcripts to parish registers. Search on the appropriate society pages.

**Online Parish Clerks**
Volunteer extractors of records related to specific parishes. Coverage varies but projects in place for Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Somerset, Sussex, Warwickshire and Wiltshire.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Discover English Parish Registers: How to Access, Use and Interpret
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