



Shropshire Archives

7. A short guide to non-conformist registers

- ◆ **How do I find out if there was a non-conformist chapel or church in a particular place?**
- ◇ Check the *National Index of Parish Registers vol 5 (part 1)* by Sylvia Watts. This lists which non-conformist chapels and Catholic churches existed. The book is bright orange and is on the Reading Room Shelves (C 63).
- ◇ Check the *Kelly's Directories* on the Reading Room shelves. These list the non-conformist chapels and Catholic churches in each parish.
- ◇ Try looking at the Religious Census of 1851 (on microfilm). This gives information about the chapels and their congregations.
- ◇ The *Victoria County History of Shropshire*, vol. II pages 8-17 gives a summary of non-conformist activity in Shropshire.
- ◇ Photographs of non-conformist chapels with information about their history can be found on the web-site (in progress): www.users.waitrose.com/~coxfamily/index.html

- ◆ **Where are the registers?**
- ◇ Surviving records of non-conformist churches are not necessarily held by Shropshire Archives.
- ◇ The *National Index of Parish Registers vol. 5 (part 1)* by Sylvia Watts shows which registers are held by Shropshire Archives. Some of the registers are on microfiche or microfilm but several are original copies only. To see originals, you will need one of our **Readers' Tickets**. Our list of parish registers (next to the fiche cabinets) contains a blue section at the back showing what format the non-conformist registers are in.
- ◇ Many **pre-1837** registers were sent to the National Archives in Kew. Most of these original registers can be seen at Family Records Centre, Middleton Place, London.
- ◇ **Transcripts** are available at Shropshire Archives.
- ◇ You can also search some non-conformist baptisms, marriages and burials at www.bmdregisters.co.uk (website in progress).

- ◇ Non-conformist registers might still be at the church or, sometimes, with another central authority (see our *short guide to non-conformists*).
- ◇ Many non-conformist records have **not survived**. There is no legal requirement for keeping them or for their preservation or public access. Some early chapels did not keep registers at all.

◆ Other Useful Records

- ◇ Between **1695** and **1705**, the Church of England clergy were supposed to register the **births** of any children in their parish who were not baptised. However, the act was widely ignored.
- ◇ **Births** between **1743** and **1837** may have been registered on the 'General Register of Births of Children of Protestant Dissenters', which was set up at Dr Williams' Library. Extracts of Shropshire entries are available at the front of the black binder *Transcripts of non-conformist registers in the National Archives* (below the printed parish registers).
- ◇ Between **1754** and **1836** you should find **marriages** in the Church of England registers. At this time, marriages were not considered valid unless they were performed in a Church of England church (except for Quakers and Jews).
- ◇ From 1837, marriages could take place in non-conformist chapels but, until 1899, a civil registrar had to be present. Many churches did not keep their own registers for this period and so the civil register is the only record.
- ◇ Other non-conformist records, such as minute books and financial records can also provide information about individuals.
- ◇ Records of the **courts** of Quarter Sessions and Central Government can provide information about those who refused to attend the parish church or obey the teaching of the Church of England.

Shropshire Archives

Castle Gates, Shrewsbury SY1 2AQ
 tel: 01743 255350, fax: 01743 255355
 e-mail: archives@shropshire.gov.uk
 web site: www.shropshirearchives.org.uk



Gateway to the history of Shropshire and Telford