

Background

In England and Wales Church of England parish priests were required to keep registers of baptisms, marriages and burials from 1538 (just after the Reformation). The compliance to this law was inconsistent, and it was re-iterated in 1597, which is often the earliest date from which any register may survive. From this date parishes were also required to copy the entries annually and send them to the Diocese, thus creating the Bishops' Transcripts. Many records were destroyed or lost during the Commonwealth period (1643-1660) and the records only restart from the Restoration in 1660 – most records date from this new start to registration.

Initially, priests recorded the information in whichever way they wished, so details may vary depending on the type of record and inclination of the priest. In 1753 Hardwick's Marriage Act required all marriages in England and Wales to take place in an Anglican Parish church (excepting Quakers and Jews), and many separate marriage registers start around this date. From 1812 a standard, printed, register book was produced and baptism, marriages and burials were recorded in separate books in an official form, not allowing for any interesting extra information to be recorded.

Non-conformists

Non-conformist (i.e. not Anglican in England) chapels sometimes kept their own records of baptisms and burials, as these were not limited by law. Some chapels may also have recorded marriage ceremonies that took place under their own rites, even if the legal marriage was officially in the Anglican parish church, which may lead to two entries for the same union. With the advent of civil registration in 1837 non-conformists could marry in their own chapel if it was licensed and a Registrar attended (after 1898 an 'Appointed Person' who was often the minister).

Holdings

This table lists overall holdings - there may be some years missing within the sequences.

Ancestry has copies of the Anglican registers for Somerset: up to 1812 the mixed registers; after 1812 the separate registers (1754 for some marriage registers) – see below for details.

The website FreeReg has also a good range of transcriptions of all registers, which may be easier to search. They generally stop in c.1840 when civil registration started.

BT = Bishop's Transcripts; * = books kept offsite & must be requested in advance