

Source Guide No. 3

NON-CONFORMIST REGISTERS

WHAT ARE NON-CONFORMIST REGISTERS?

Non-conformist registers are records of Non-conformist churches and include baptism, marriage and burial registers. Non-conformists were members of a religious body such as a chapel, who were separate from the established Church, i.e. the Church in Wales. They were also known as 'Dissenters'. There are many different denominations of Non-conformist churches, including Quakers, Methodists, Congregationalists, Independent, Presbyterian and Baptists.

Because they were outside the established Church, the early Non-conformists were liable to be punished for their beliefs and often held meetings in secret. Because of this, few records of the early period (mid-17th century onwards) are still in existence. The Toleration Act of 1689 meant that Dissenters were allowed to have their own ministers and build meeting houses. However, their registers were not recognised as valid for legal testimony until 1840.

By the mid-18th century, Non-conformity in Wales had become widespread and continued to expand throughout the 19th century. Chapels were built in most towns and villages, to accommodate the increasing communities which grew with the Industrial Revolution.

However, not all records of Non-conformist chapels have been deposited at local Record Offices. Some have been retained by the chapel itself; some are held at the National Library of Wales; and others are held at The National Archives in Kew (indexes are available on their website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk).

WHAT CAN I FIND OUT FROM NON-CONFORMIST REGISTERS?

Baptisms: Most baptism entries will record the name of the child baptised, its parents' names (often including the maiden name of the mother), when it was born, and possibly the abode of the family and the occupation of the father. Some ministers recorded more information than others.

Marriages: Before the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 (See Source Guide No. 1: Parish Registers), Non-conformists could marry at their own Meeting Houses. The marriage would not have been valid in law but was seen as a public contract, constituting a legal marriage. However, in order to avoid dispute, many Non-conformists (except Baptists) married in the local Anglican church. After the Act, all marriages (except for Quakers and Jews) had to be performed in an Established church – within the Church of Wales. This continued until 1837 when Civil Registration began, and couples could marry in a Registry Office. Chapels could apply for a license to conduct marriages, but the presence of a Registrar was also necessary in addition to the Minister, to record the marriage in a Registry Office register.

Burials: Some non-conformist Chapels had their own burial grounds, and we hold some burial registers for Chapels. If the Chapel did not have its own burial ground, the congregation may have been buried in the local Anglican churchyard, or later, in a local cemetery. Check the parish registers for the local Church first. If you think your ancestor was buried in a cemetery, you can contact: Cemeteries Department, Business, Finance & Support Services, Directorate Of Community & Housing, Flintshire County Council, County Offices, Chapel Street, Flint , Flintshire CH6 5BD, Telephone: 01352 703360/1. They have a database of records of burials in Local Authority-maintained Flintshire cemeteries.

HOW CAN I USE NON-CONFORMIST REGISTERS AT FLINTSHIRE RECORD OFFICE?

We hold Non-conformist registers for various churches and chapels at Flintshire Record Office. There are **indexes** on open shelves in the search-room, which are arranged by parish/township. These will tell you whether we hold baptism, marriage or burial registers for a particular chapel. Non-conformist chapels are not obliged by law to deposit their records at a Record Office, therefore we do not have records for every chapel. Some records may still be held at the chapel itself, whilst others may be in private hands. Many Non-conformist ministers worked a '**circuit**', where they travelled around the surrounding villages providing services, marriages, baptisms, etc. The number of chapels in a circuit varied widely. Circuits were then formed into Districts and the Districts formed a Connexion (for Methodists). Therefore as well as the particular chapel in which you are interested, you may want to search Circuit and District registers for the area.

Some of the records are on **microfilm**, for which you will need to book a microfilm reader in advance to view the records. You can find out which microfilm you require from the index in the searchroom. **Microfilms are self-service**. Please insert your **yellow marker** into the space from which you have taken a parish register microfilm so that you can see where to put it back, and others will know that you have got it out. Others are **original documents**, so you will need to book a desk to look at these. Order each individual item using a **document request slip**. Write the document reference number (along with your name and the date) on the slip and give it in at the enquiries desk to order the records.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT NON-CONFORMIST REGISTERS:

For further information see the following books on open shelves in the search-room:

Rowlands, John (ed.), Welsh Family History: A Guide to Research. Dyfed. 1993.

Chapter 6: 'Nonconformity'.

Steel, D.J.

Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy and Family History. Chichester. 1973.

**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg. Cysylltwch â'r Archifdy i gael fersiwn Gymraeg.
Ffôn: 01244 532364; e-bost: archives@flintshire.gov.uk**