



# Parish Registers and Family Search

## Part One - Legislation, Key Dates:

**1534** The Reformation.

**1538** Edict by Thomas Beckett for all Churches to keep a record of baptisms, marriages and burials.

**1598** Elizabeth 1 – required her parish clerks to gather together all loose leaf parish registers back to 1538 and to put them together in bound volumes. Failing that, at least to try to get them back to the beginning of her reign (1558). These new **Parish Registers (PRs)** to be on parchment. Churches were also obliged to send returns to the Bishop each year of all their **PR** entries – these became known as **Bishop's Transcripts (BTs)**.

**1604** An Act to restrain people from marrying until their former wives or husbands had died.

**1644 – 1660** During the Civil War, churches were in turmoil and nonconformity was rife. Record keeping was often extremely patchy during this period.

**1653 – 1657** The Commonwealth Period – a brief period of Civil Registration was introduced. Couples seeking to marry had to post notices, usually at the market cross, of their intended nuptials. The marriage had to take place in front of a Justice of the Peace, often at his home before two witnesses. These could sometimes be followed by a church blessing. It often happened that the parish clerk kept a record of these marriages in a separate book – he being the only person literate enough for the job.

**1666 – 1678** Acts were passed requiring people to be buried in woollen shrouds (to help the woolen industry). Those found burying their loved ones in linen etc., were subject to a fine.

**1688** An Act exempting Protestants who dissented from the Church of England from penalties. **The Toleration Act.** The start of nonconformist registers.

**1694** Taxes levied on register entries to fund the wars with France: 2s per birth, 2s 6d per marriage and 4s for a burial. This lasted until 1706 so check after this date for any missing baptisms

**1751 – 2** New style year. Under the old Julian calendar the year ended on Lady's Day 25<sup>th</sup> March. We then adopted the Gregorian calendar which started the New Year on January First. Old Style years are often shown as 1731/2. Ten days were also dropped from the calendar that year, September 3 – 13<sup>th</sup>.

**1753** Lord Hardwicke's Act to regulate and prevent clandestine marriages. Banns had to be read for three successive weeks and the ceremony had to take place before two witnesses. Consent was also required for marriages of minors (under 21). The marriage also had to take place in the official Parish Church (hated by nonconformists) Jews and Quakers were exempt. Sadly there is little information on these printed marriage forms and no indication of the father's names and occupations.

**1783** Stamp Duty of 3d on all entries – very unpopular, some children were not baptized until after the Act was repealed in 1794.

**1812** George Rose's Act to standardize parish register entries and the introduction of printed books. Dependent upon the diligence of the parish clerk this could mean that more or less information was recorded than previously.

**1837** – The introduction of Civil Registration.

## Part Two - Where to Find Parish Registers:

[GENUKI \(Genealogy for the UK and Ireland\)](#) - before rushing to family search or one of the pay sites it's a good idea to find out as much as you can about churches, types of records and the geography of the area your ancestors lived; which records survive and where you are likely to find them. GENUKI was the first and is still a wonderful resource for family historians. You can drill down from Country through County down to individual Towns and Parishes. [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk)

### International Genealogical Index (I.G.I.) [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org)

To understand the I.G.I. you really need to understand how it developed and where to find it now on the NEW familysearch.org website.

- 1973 Originally published as "the Computer File Index." Published on microfiche. Contained 20 million entries. About 80% were from their controlled extraction programme.
- 1975 Microfiche edition with 34 million names.
- 1981 This, the 4th edition, was the first to be called the International Genealogical Index. Contained 81 million entries.
- 1984 Record count was 108 million. Offered for sale to the public.
- 1988 First published on compact disc (CD-ROM). Part of the FamilySearch DOS computer program. Contained 147 million names. Excluded some indexed entries from the 1984 edition.
- 1992 Microfiche edition. Contained 187 million names. About 94.5 were indexed.
- March 1993 The CD-ROM edition took longer. Contained over 200 million names from over 90 countries.
- July 1994 CD-ROM release of the 1994 edition issued as an addendum with 42 million entries. Includes entries dropped from the 1988 edition. Duplication rate increased over previous editions.
- 1997 CD-ROM addendum increased entries from 240 to 284 million, of which 100 million were from extraction.
- 24 May 1999 FamilySearch website released. Not all 285 million IGI entries available immediately, but were released by region.

When I started my research in 1996 I was using the set of microfiches at Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre and at the Family History Centre, Patterdale Road. You can still use the microfiches but since it went online in 1999 mostly everyone began to use the family search.org website. For reasons of their faith the Mormons believe in the baptism of their ancestors by proxy into the Mormon faith. For this purpose they have filmed millions of entries from Parish Registers and Bishop's Transcripts all over the world. This information is searchable on-line for everyone via the old Family Search site, but this has finally been turned off and you can only access it now via their new website

There were two separate parts to the I.G.I.

- Community Contributed IGI (Personal family information submitted to the LDS Church)
- Community Indexed IGI (Vital and church records from the early 1500s to 1885)

In general those entries from their community indexed programme can be regarded as accurate, making allowance for the fact that errors can happen when transcribing any original sources, but those entries from community contributes submissions are to be viewed with extreme caution. The rules governing proof of ancestry for church members was not as rigorous as those required by family historians, and were indeed interpreted with a considerable degree of license, especially in the early days. Be especially careful with entries that say 'Relative' or 'About'. In the past church members went about collecting as many entries of the same surname in an area as possible, without proving any relationship between them. Also having found a marriage of their ancestors in a certain place they could assume by some guesstimate formula that she/he had been baptised in the same area about 20/25 years previously, again without any real proof at all.

A large number of records in the community indexed programme were taken from Bishop's Transcripts. This is because the Parish Registers at the time were still at the church and the incumbent may have refused permission to film, so the Mormons went to the relevant County Record Office to film the BT's.

Although the I.G.I. was possibly one of the most useful tools available to family historians, it is vital that it is treated as an index only - **it is not a primary source**, but is extremely useful in trying to

pinpoint ancestors for further research. There are, however, many pitfalls and without referring back to the original parish registers and or bishop's transcripts, it is extremely easy to find that you are researching the wrong line altogether. You can get very useful leads from indexes via the internet but the parish registers often contain the extra information required as proof: examples:

- Twenty three baptisms attributed to Robert, on referring back to the parish register, five of these baptisms referred to his son Robert Junior and that Robert Senior and Robert Junior were living at separate farms. This was made clear in the actual entries.
- People with common surnames with nothing else to distinguish them the Parish Registers may reveal that they had different trades and lived at opposite ends of the parish.
- 1st March 1807, baptism of Ann the daughter of Richard Cartwright and Ann his wife *the daughter of David and Tabitha Jackson, born 1st February 1807.*

### **So without referring back to the original registers, you can also be missing out on vital extra information.**

Family Search's new site is now the only route into their records, which continue to be added to at an amazing rate, some are indexed and some are browse only. It's a good idea to have a browse around the collections before you begin searching, but if you do want to simply search the old IGI you can go to the following page on their new site and access the original IGI here: <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/igi>

### **Some tips on searching the I.G.I.**

It is important here to search the more accurate Community Indexed database this covers the old controlled extraction programme, the Community Contributed I.G.I. database includes the old patron submitted data. Some Community Contributed database can give clues as to where LDS Patrons have found records, particularly if it shows exact dates, but proceed with caution.

All entries on the I.G.I. were added in a series of batches each with their own individual number, called batch numbers. There are two valuable websites to help with this, one was created by Hugh Wallis <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hughwallis/> He organized the batch numbers for each country, county, city and parish (British Isles and North America), so that you can easily see which batches are available for the area you are researching.

Steve Archer at Archer Software <http://www.archersoftware.co.uk/igi/index.htm> has done the same thing but, has included many extra batches that didn't make it onto the Hugh Wallis website.

Try just adding a SURNAME and a batch number only - this will reveal all the events related to that surname for the period covered by the batch number. Again, an example from my own family history. Batch number C076442 covers the christenings at Old Chapel Dukinfield between 1676-1713 and 1762-1828 and surname STANLEY, this gives me 154 results and, yes, they are all mine and they were a bit of a nightmare to sort into family groups to add to my tree.

We are quite lucky in Tameside in that most of the parish registers in the area had been filmed and are on the I.G.I. up until at least 1837.

### **Family Search [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)**

Family Search's new site is now the main route into their records, which are being added to at an amazing rate, some are indexed and some are browse only. It's a good idea to have a browse around the collections before you begin searching. Click on BROWSE by location and then on United Kingdom and Ireland

It is very much still a work in progress and learning the best search technique is also evolving. So far I am finding that if you initially use a wide search criteria on the less is more principle, you can adjust your criteria at any time by clicking on the little down arrow next to REFINE YOUR SEARCH in the top left-hand corner. It does seem to be rather PLACE sensitive. Family Search will then give you the results which match your criteria and below these a list of near matches.

Remember, though that some of the new records lead you to actual images of the original source material whilst others are browse only. There are also new records on the site which are indexes only to various census and nonconformist records, but these will take you through to pay sites to view the images – fine if you already have a subscription. The new site is adding millions of new records world wide, so continually going back to the old I.G.I. means you are missing out on millions of new records. Also burials are appearing for the first time – these were largely ignored when compiling the original I.G.I.

An interesting bit of extra help from the Family Search is while searching censuses, particularly 1911. Find My Past does not include place of birth in their search results, but Family Search does. This can save quite a bit of time when searching for common names.

There is good and growing coverage of C of E parish registers for the Cheshire Towns of Tameside. I can't be exact, but it seems that most of these are covered from the inauguration of the particular churches records until about 1906. These are indexes only, but most of the original films can be consulted at [Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre](http://www.tameside.gov.uk/archives/familyhistory/parish) - <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/archives/familyhistory/parish>

- Dukinfield St John
- Dukinfield St Mark
- Dukinfield St Luke
- Hyde St Thomas
- Hyde St George
- Millbrook St James
- Mottram in Longdendale St Michael
- Stalybridge New St George
- Stalybridge Old St George
- Stockport St Mary

#### Non Conformist Catholic Churches:

- Stalybridge St Peter
- Hyde St Paul

They are also available via Find My Past, Cheshire Record Office did a deal with FMP to release the images of the indexed Family Search Cheshire Collection.

From February 2013 the [Manchester Diocese Collection](#) is now available via Ancestry

[Manchester, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1915 1702491](#)  
[Manchester, England, Deaths and Burials, 1813-1985 917791](#)  
[Manchester, England, Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1573-1812 \(Cathedral\) 376533](#)  
[Manchester, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1901 \(Cathedral\) 282956](#)  
[Manchester, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1930 \(Cathedral\) 409330](#)  
[Manchester, England, Deaths and Burials, 1813-1866 \(Cathedral\) 42850](#)  
[Manchester, England, Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1541-1812 1186882](#)  
[Manchester, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1930 1437698](#)

[check this page](#) for other recent additions Sadly Ashton Christ Church and Ashton St Michael are not included in the above, but more records in the collection are promised for later in the year.

#### **B.V.R.I. (British Vital Records Index)**

**The B.V.R.I.** - was a collection of indexed Baptisms and Marriages as an addition to the I.G.I. (International Genealogical Index). It included approximately 17 million christening entries and 7 million marriages. It does include quite a bit of extra post 1837 information on baptisms and marriages at Ashton St Michael, Stalybridge St Paul's, Denton Christ Church and St Lawrence, and Dukinfield St John and St Marks. Some of this is up until about 1910 so is very useful for narrowing down some information before purchasing certificates via GRO or Tameside Register Office. The marriage entries do give both fathers' names, so pretty useful.

## **The BVRI information is available via Ancestry –**

Christenings here: <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1351>

Marriages here: <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1352>

As far as I can deduce all the previous I.G.I. records and the B.V.R.I. databases are now all on the new Family Search website.

If you go to familysearch.org and then **browse** their UK and Ireland collections you will find lots of new databases, which are being added to all the time.

- The new Cheshire Collection is indexed only, with the images available via Find My Past.
- The Manchester Diocese (Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire) collections are about 30% complete and browse only, but do have images. If you browse this collection you can see which churches are covered so far.
- The England and Wales Census Collection is indexed only, with a gateway to the images on Find My Past.
- England and Wales, Non-Conformist Record Indexes (RG4-8) are indexes but lead to images at BMD Registers and the Genealogist. These are from Non-Conformist registers deposited at the National Archives under an Act of Parliament from 1841. Now also at Ancestry and Find My Past
- There are also significant Scottish, Welsh and Irish records including a free index to Irish Civil Registration

## **Now to find original source material:**

Armed with indexes, it's time to seek out the original entries (mostly on microfilm). Parish Registers and BTs are, with some exceptions, held in Diocesan Record Offices, for Cheshire this is Chester Record Office. Most Local Studies Libraries also hold these for their own locality. This webpage shows holdings in Tameside: [www.tameside.gov.uk/archives/familyhistory/parish](http://www.tameside.gov.uk/archives/familyhistory/parish)

Our Family History Society [www.fhsc.org.uk](http://www.fhsc.org.uk) has a huge selection to view on microfilm at our

Mobberley Research Centre. Click on Mobberley Resource Centre, then Available Resources, and you can then download our parish register collection from our library resources. We also have a large collection of parish registers to purchase on microfiches and on CD. Our Crewe Resource Centre also holds fiche and films for the South Cheshire area.

## **The Cheshire Parish Register Project:**

A partnership between the School of History and the Department of Computer Science at Liverpool University and the County Archivist at Chester Record Office

A volunteer project to transcribe and record the Parish Register entries for the thirty six ancient Cheshire parishes. Thirty two parishes are complete. You can check out progress at: [www.csc.liv.ac.uk/~cprdb/](http://www.csc.liv.ac.uk/~cprdb/)

You can also find lots of information for free via various online parish clerk websites: <http://www.genuki.org.uk/indexes/OPC.html>. Counties covered are:

- Cornwall
- Devon
- Dorset
- Essex
- Hampshire
- Lancashire
- Somerset
- Sussex
- Warwickshire
- Wiltshire

Good Luck with your Search!

Gay Oliver September 2017

Web Manager for [tamesidefamilyhistory.co.uk](http://tamesidefamilyhistory.co.uk)