

**What are parish registers, and what do they record?**

Parish registers are chronological records of the baptism, marriage or burial ceremonies performed in a particular Anglican (i.e. Church in Wales) parish church. They are associated with that particular building, and do not record the ceremonies that took place in other churches or chapels in the same parish. Parish registers were first ordered to be kept by Thomas Cromwell in 1538. However, only a handful of parishes in Wales have registers before 1600, and the earliest in West Glamorgan are for Swansea, dating from 1631.

In all but exceptional circumstances, burials take place soon after the death. Baptisms can take place at any time after the baby is born: sometimes people would wait until they had several children before taking them all down to the church to be baptised. Others may have been baptised as adults; others again may never have been baptised at all.

Before 1754 baptisms, marriages and burials were all recorded in the same book, which was often made of parchment (considered to be more durable) or occasionally of paper. At the end of each year the vicar would make a copy of the entries for that year and these were periodically batched up and sent to the Bishop. These Bishop's Transcripts are held in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth, but copies are available on Microfilm. They can be used to fill in gaps where early parish registers have been lost. For most of the ancient parishes of West Glamorgan Bishop's Transcripts survive for at least some years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<i>Christnings</i>	<i>Weddings</i>	<i>Burials</i>
<i>1747</i>	<i>1747</i>	<i>1747</i>
<i>George son of George &amp; Susan of Kuelston Novem. 4. 5<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>William Jones &amp; Jane Lucas May 13</i>	<i>Davis Radford Dec. 12. 1746</i>
<i>Anne D<sup>ch</sup> of John Morris. Jan. 4. 24<sup>th</sup></i>		<i>John William, sometime Clark, Octob. 12. 1742</i>
<i>William son of William Jones of Kuelston &amp; Jane his wife. Jan. 31.</i>		<i>Anne D<sup>ch</sup> of John Morris. Jan. 26<sup>th</sup></i>
	<i>Dr. William &amp; William Long</i>	<i>Jno. Evans Vic.</i>
		<i>Church-Wardens</i>

The earliest registers, like the example on the left, give very sparse information, and are often disorganised and difficult to read. In the case of baptisms the child's name and father's name are given, and the date of baptism, but the inclusion of the mother's name depends on the preference of the vicar. Marriage entries give the date and the names of the bride and groom. Burials only include the name of the deceased and the date.

Following the Act for the better preventing of Clandestine Marriages, 1753, marriages were recorded in specially printed registers from 1754 (see the example on the right). These give the parish of residence of both parties and, for the first time, names of witnesses and signatures. Where the bride, groom or witnesses could not write, they signed with a cross and their name was written beside it. Baptisms and burials continued to be recorded in the old registers.

Page 1. [ The Year 1781 ]

N<sup>o</sup> 13. 3 William John & Rachel Richard both of this Parish were

Married in this Church by Banns

this 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of January in the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty One By me O. Davies Curate

This Marriage was solemnized between Us <sup>The mark of</sup> William John <sup>The mark of</sup> Rachel Richard

In the Presence of { David Jones  
John Richard

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MARRIAGES solemnized in the Parish of Llanquick  
in the County of Glamorgan in the Year 1819

David Thomas Widrow of the Parish  
of Gibrador, Wales

and Gwenllan Morgan of this Parish

were married in this Church — by Banns with Consent of  
this second Day of  
April in the Year One thousand eight hundred and eighteen

By me John Price D. C. of Llanquick

This Marriage was solemnized between us David Thomas by mark  
Gwenllan Morgan by mark

In the Presence of Jonathan Thomas  
William Gwan

No. 61.

In 1813 new registers were introduced for baptisms, marriages and burials. The marriage registers look different from the 1754 version but include the same information. An example is given on the left.

The major change was to the recording of baptisms and burials, for which only the briefest information had been recorded up to this point. The

new baptism registers now included the names of both parents, the address, and the father's occupation. Some vicars also include the date of birth alongside the date of baptism, particularly if it is an adult baptism. The new burial registers gave the name, address and age of the deceased. Sometimes, and very rarely, the vicar also records the plot number of the grave as well.

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BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of Llanquith  
in the County of Glamorgan in the Year 1817.

When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents Name.		Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
		Christian.	Surname.			
1817. 4 <sup>th</sup> Apr.	Sarah Daughter of	John Anne	Lucas	Bevanog	Shoemaker	D. Davies Curate
No. 33.						

The same kind of registers are in use today for baptisms and burials, although some modern baptism registers have extra columns for the names of godparents. Examples of the most common formats are given on the right.

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BURIALS in the Parish of Bucon Tyny in the  
County of Glamorgan in the year One thousand  
eight hundred and 1807

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<u>Elizabeth Morgan</u>	<u>Bucon Tyny</u>	<u>July</u> <u>11</u>	<u>67</u> <u>m</u>	<u>J. Thomas</u>
No. 15				

1837 saw the beginning of state registration of births, deaths and marriages.



## **How are nonconformist chapels different from churches?**

Nonconformist is an umbrella term meaning those churches that are not Anglican (i.e. Church in Wales). They include a number of different groups known as denominations, including Baptists, Congregationalists, Independents, Calvinistic Methodists (Presbyterians) and Methodists. Nonconformist denominations also include the Roman Catholic church. Each denomination is organised in a different way and has a different doctrinal emphasis and history, which has an impact on the kinds of records that are kept.

Many chapels are *congregational*: this means that each church organises its own affairs and makes its own policy decisions. This is done democratically through church meetings, at which church members are able to vote. Membership of this sort of church is a formal matter and means more than simply attending the services.



Full details of all the different kinds of chapel and all the differences between them is beyond the scope of this leaflet, but listed below are those types of chapel that are most widespread in West Glamorgan, with some of the distinctions that affect the sort of records that they create:

### ***Baptist churches***

- There are Welsh Baptist churches, which are affiliated to the Welsh Baptist Union (Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru), and usually have their services in Welsh, and English Baptist churches, which are affiliated to the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and hold services in English. The records tend to be in the language in which services are held.
- Baptist churches are congregational (see above) and the two unions do not intervene in the running of the churches that are affiliated to them. This means that there is no prescribed way of keeping records, although practice is broadly similar from one church to the next.
- Baptist churches practice adult baptism: there is no baptism of children.
- Records that are useful for genealogy:
  - Cradle rolls (rare)
  - Marriage registers from 1898
  - Graveyard records
  - Annual reports
  - Membership records

### ***Welsh Independent, Congregational and United Reformed churches***

- Welsh Independent churches (also known as Annibynwyr or Eglwysi Annibynnol) are those that are affiliated to the Union of Welsh Independents (Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg). Some have a history dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The services and the records are usually in Welsh.
- Congregational churches are the English counterpart of Welsh Independent churches, and in many cases were set up by Welsh churches to provide for the English-speaking sections of their congregations. They were affiliated to the Congregational Union. In 1972, this merged with the Presbyterian Church of England to form the United Reformed Church (URC). Some churches opted out of the URC and either joined the newly formed Congregational Federation or continued without affiliation.
- Both are *congregational* (see above), and the union they are affiliated to does not intervene in the running of the churches.
- There is no prescribed way of keeping records, although practice is broadly similar from one church to the next.
- All of these churches practice infant baptism.
- Records that are useful for genealogy:
  - Baptism registers and cradle rolls (rare)
  - Marriage registers from 1898
  - Graveyard records
  - Annual reports (Welsh Independent churches only)
  - Membership records

### ***Presbyterian Church of Wales (Calvinistic Methodist) churches***

- The Presbyterian Church of Wales (Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru) was formed in 1811, but its origins are in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Churches are also known as Calvinistic Methodist (Methodistiaid Calfaidd)
- Calvinistic Methodist churches are to an extent congregational (see above), so the churches organise their own affairs, but they are also answerable to district meetings and there is more centralised control than in Baptist and Welsh Independent churches.
- Calvinistic Methodist churches practice infant baptism.
- Records are frequently in Welsh, and records that are useful for genealogy are as follows:
  - Baptism registers
  - Marriage registers from 1898
  - Graveyard registers
  - Annual reports
  - Membership records

### ***Methodist churches***

- Methodism began with the preaching of John Wesley, an English clergyman, in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. After his death in 1791 the movement became a separate denomination which soon divided into a number of separate organisations after further revivals and disagreements over church government. After a century of division, they began to reunite in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and today's Methodist church is a combination of a number of Methodist churches that were once separate, including the Primitive Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists and Bible Christians.
- Methodist churches are organised geographically into circuits consisting of several chapels, sometimes with one minister each, but often with one minister or a team to oversee the whole circuit. Records sometimes relate to one chapel and sometimes to all the chapels within a circuit. Methodist church records are usually arranged by circuit.
- Methodist churches practice infant baptism.
- In West Glamorgan, most Methodist churches are English, although there are a small number of Welsh congregations. The records are consequently mostly in English.
- Records are usually in the language that the services are held in. Records that are useful for genealogy are as follows:
  - Baptism registers
  - Marriage registers from 1898
  - Graveyard registers

### ***Roman Catholic Churches***

- Roman Catholic churches are in parishes grouped into dioceses in a similar way to the Anglican church. The churches are not congregational, but governed through the church hierarchy.
- Record types and record keeping are prescribed and regulated by the church.
- The Catholic Church practices infant baptism.
- Records are in English or occasionally in Latin.
- In the main, records are kept at the churches themselves and have not been deposited at West Glamorgan Archives. Records for St David's, Swansea can be found at the Richard Burton Archives at Swansea University.
- Records that are useful for genealogy:
  - Baptism registers
  - Marriage registers from 1898
  - Burial registers



## What registers do chapels keep?

**Baptism registers in Methodist and Catholic churches** are printed and formatted in columns. The information recorded includes the child's name, parent's names, date of baptism and birth, and address (Methodist only).

**Baptism registers in other chapels** are rare and may only be compiled for a short period of time. The information recorded depends on the person who compiled it, and it may be little more than the date, the child's name and parents' names.

When Baptized	Child's Name Sex or Daughter	Parents' Names Christian	Baptism	Abode	Child's Age when Baptized	The Minister by whom the Baptism was administered
18 87 May 7 <sup>th</sup>	John	John & Mary Jones	David	St. Paul's Church, Cardiff	18 87	Rev. Wm. Lewis
No. 9. May 18	Lillian	John & Jane Jones	Jays	Tai-bark	19 87	Rev. Wm. Lewis
No. 10. June 10	Marcell	Henry & Mary Jones	Doyle	Tai-bark	18 87	Rev. Wm. Lewis
No. 11. August 21 <sup>st</sup> 1887	John son of	William & Sarah Ann	Villey	Tai-bark	18 87	Rev. Wm. Lewis
No. 12.						

**Cradle rolls** were occasionally kept: they are lists of children born to members of the congregation. The information they record is usually very sparse, often just the names of child and parents, and the date.

**Marriages** could take place in chapels from 1837 onwards, but it was initially necessary for a registrar to be present, which meant that the only record was kept by the registrar. Churches could keep their own registers from 1898 onwards, and a member of the chapel is given the responsibility for maintaining them and registering the marriages. The marriage registers are exactly the same as church marriage registers and record the same information. Not all chapels have taken advantage of this. Marriages can still take place in a chapel without its own registers, but as before it is necessary for a registrar to be present.

**Graveyard registers** for chapels are different to those for churches. They are usually arranged by plot, not in date order. The plots usually have a row and plot number. Each plot may have up to four burials in, all of which will be recorded together, even if they took place many years apart. The amount of information recorded varies, but most give the plot number, name, address, age and date of burial. Many chapels, especially in towns, do not have their own burial ground and would tend to bury in the graveyard of another chapel of the same denomination.

**Annual reports (adroddiadau blynyddol):** chapel annual reports are distinctive and informative. They are printed every year and include a full list of the chapel members and their addresses, along with details of baptisms, births, marriages and deaths. They were almost exclusively created by Welsh-speaking chapels and are usually in Welsh, but using the glossary at the end of this leaflet it should be possible to understand them.

**Membership records:** these include lists of members, which are sometimes incomplete and difficult to use, and usually include a membership number and the name and address of the member. There are also dismissal forms: when members want to join another congregation, a form is filled in by the church secretary recommending them to the new church. Chapel records sometimes include forms for people who have joined the congregation, and counterfoils of forms for people leaving.

## A glossary of Welsh words you might find in chapel records

<b>Aelod</b>	member	<b>Hanner</b>	half
<b>Aelodaeth</b>	membership	<b>Hoedran</b>	see <i>Oedran</i>
<b>Awst</b>	August	<b>Hunodd</b>	died (literally <i>slept</i> )
<b>Bedyddiwyd</b>	baptised	<b>Hwn, hon, hyn</b>	this, these
<b>Bedd</b>	grave	<b>Hydref</b>	October
<b>Blwyddyn, flwyddyn, blwydd</b>	year	<b>Ionawr</b>	January
<b>Capel</b>	chapel	<b>Mab</b>	son
<b>Chwefror</b>	February	<b>Mai</b>	May
<b>Claddedigaeth</b>	burial	<b>Mam</b>	mother
<b>Claddwyd</b>	buried	<b>Marw</b>	died
<b>Cofrestr</b>	register	<b>Marwolaeth</b>	death
<b>Cyfeiriad</b>	address	<b>Mawrth</b>	March
<b>Cynulleidfa</b>	congregation	<b>Medi</b>	September
<b>Dosbarth</b>	division, Sunday School class	<b>Mehefin</b>	June
<b>Ebrill</b>	April	<b>Merch, ferch</b>	daughter
<b>Eglwys</b>	church	<b>Mis</b>	month
<b>Ei</b>	his, her	<b>Mynwent</b>	cemetery
<b>Enw</b>	name	<b>Oedran</b>	age
<b>Ferch</b>	see <i>merch</i>	<b>Parchedig</b>	Reverend
<b>Fu farw</b>	died	<b>Plentyn</b>	child
<b>Ganwyd</b>	born	<b>Priodas</b>	marriage
<b>Genedigaeth</b>	birth	<b>Rhagfyr</b>	December
<b>Gorffennaf</b>	July	<b>Tachwedd</b>	November
<b>Gweinidog</b>	minister	<b>Tad</b>	father
<b>Gwrandawyr</b>	listeners (i.e. non-members who attend the chapel)	<b>Teulu</b>	family
		<b>Ysgrifennydd</b>	secretary

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