



Parish Records

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Parish Registers

What are parish registers?

Parish registers are records of baptisms, marriages and burials and can date from as early as 1538. Until civil registration of births, marriages and deaths began in 1837, parish registers were the only records to attempt to collect information about all individuals at every level of society.

How can I find out which parish registers are held at Lincolnshire Archives?

A list of parish registers held at Lincolnshire Archives is available in the archive search room and on our website.

In some cases 21st century registers may still be held in the parish. Contact details for parish clergy and churchwardens are available from the Archives.

How do I look at parish registers at Lincolnshire Archives?

To prevent damage from regular use, most parish registers have been copied onto microfiche. When registers have been recently deposited and have not yet been filmed it is possible to order the original documents to view in the search room. Most Lincolnshire parish registers can now also be viewed online for free on the Lincs to the Past website (www.lincstothepast.com)

What can I do if there are gaps in the records?

When parish registers are missing or difficult to read, Bishops' Transcripts can sometimes be used as an alternative. Each year, parishes sent a copy of entries in the register to the Bishop, these are known as Bishops' Transcripts or BTs. Most surviving Lincolnshire Bishops' Transcripts date from the 1560s to the 1830s or 1840s. They are available on microfilm in the search room.

Secondary transcripts – typed or handwritten copies of parish registers or BTs, sometimes indexed – are also available for some Lincolnshire parishes.

As parish registers record religious ceremonies, they became less comprehensive with the growth of Non-Conformism in the late 18th century. Other religious denominations chose not to baptise their children into a faith that they disagreed with and, in some cases, also had separate burial grounds. Non-Church of England marriage services (with the exception of those of Quakers and Jews) were not legally recognised until 1837, earlier marriages of Non-Conformists can therefore often be found in parish registers.

The International Genealogical Index (IGI) is an index of many parish baptisms and marriages. It is available on-line through www.familysearch.org or on microfiche at Lincolnshire Archives. Lincolnshire Family History Society indexes to marriages between 1753-1850 and some baptisms are also available in the search room.

Parish registers: some key dates

1538: Ministers were first required by law to keep written records of all baptisms, marriages and burials. Not all immediately complied. Entries were usually made on paper, sometimes only on loose sheets. Few of the first paper entries have survived.

At the most basic level, information in early or non-printed parish registers may consist of just a name and date. In some cases however clergymen also included details such as age, parish, occupation or, with baptisms and some burials, the names of parents.

1598: Ordered that baptisms, marriages and burials now be written in parchment books. Earlier entries (particularly from 1558 onwards) are to be copied into these books.

1653-1660: Civil registration introduced during the Commonwealth – births and deaths to be recorded by a ‘parish register’, instead of baptisms and burials recorded by the minister. Many records are incomplete during this period, refer to indexes for covering dates.

1666-1814: To boost the wool trade Acts of Parliament in 1666 and 1678 required people to be buried in wool. Registers may include references to affidavits being sworn that the deceased was buried in wool. The Act was widely ignored by the time of its repeal in 1814.

1694: Act passed levying taxes on births, marriages and burials of non-paupers. Widely ignored but may have discouraged the recording of some events.

1752: New Year officially started on 1 January. Previously (between 1536 and 1751) Lady Day (25th March) was considered to be the first day of the year. This can cause confusion as, for example, a baptism recorded at the time as taking place on 6th February 1604 would now be considered to have taken place in 1605.

1754: Marriages to be entered in a separate printed register. Information to include the parish and occupation of the bride and groom, and whether they were married by banns or licence. The entry to be signed or marked by the bride, groom and at least two witnesses.

1783-1794: Stamp duty of 3d on every register entry of burials, marriages, births or christenings.

1813: Baptisms and burials to be entered in separate printed registers. Baptism entries to include the names of both parents (where known), their residence and occupation. Burial entries to include the age and residence of the deceased. In many cases the name of the parish is all that is given as a place of residence.

1837: Civil registration introduced. New marriage registers to also include ages of the bride and groom (may just state whether they were over or under 21), their marital condition (e.g. bachelor or widower) and the names and occupations of their fathers.

The vestry and parish officers

The **vestry** carried out many of the functions of a Parish Council and Parochial Church Council until the Local Government Act of 1894. Accounts and minutes relating to the civil and ecclesiastical administration of the parish can be found in vestry books and in the papers of parish officers.

The office of **churchwarden** evolved during the medieval period and continues to the present day. In most cases each parish had 2 churchwardens, one appointed by the clergyman, the other elected by the vestry. Churchwardens' accounts may include references to church repairs, the purchase of goods for the church and general running expenses (e.g. purchase of communion wine, washing of surplices and payment of bell-ringers).

The 1597-8 Act for the **Relief of the Poor** required each parish to appoint one or more overseer of the poor. The overseer of the poor was responsible for maintaining or finding employment for paupers, and was involved in apprenticing poor children and collecting maintenance for illegitimate offspring. Many of the powers of the office were taken over by the Board of Guardians following the establishment of Union Workhouses during the 1830s. Records of the overseer of the poor may include minute books and accounts relating to the maintenance of paupers; parish rate books; settlement, apprenticeship and bastardy papers; and agreements and accounts relating to the parish workhouse (see Guide to Sources on 'The Relief of the Poor, 1601-1834' for further information).

The office of **parish constable** dates back to at least the medieval period and continued until the mid-late 19th century, when the introduction of professional police forces rendered the post obsolete. The duties of the parish constable included organising the watch in the parish; apprehending 'suspicious persons', rogues and vagabonds; organising a hue and cry for offenders, arresting criminals and bringing them before Justices of the Peace; enforcing orders of JPs; dealing with breaches in licensing regulations; looking after the parish armour, managing the parish contribution to the militia and collecting the county rate. They may also be involved with the administration of the poor law by, for example, giving relief to maimed or sick soldiers or sailors and removing vagrants. Records of the parish constable may include accounts, rate assessments and orders from the Justices of the Peace.

In an attempt to deal with increasingly unsafe **roads**, an Act of Parliament in 1555 required every parishioner to work on the roads or provide a labourer to work on his behalf for a certain number of days each year. The office of surveyor of the highways was created to oversee this 'Statute Work' on the parish roads and continued until the 19th century. From the 1830s onwards able-bodied paupers were often employed on the roads. Records of surveyors of the highways may include accounts and rate assessments; occasionally measurements of roads are given.

Some parishes in the county also had a dikereeve (who was an appointed officer to oversee drains, sluices and sea-banks in the parish). Records of the dikereeve may include accounts and rate assessments together with orders and verdicts of the Court of Sewers.

The earliest surviving records of parish officers at Lincolnshire Archives are as follows:

- Churchwarden, late 15th century.
- Overseer of the Poor, mid 16th century.
- Constable, late 16th century.
- Surveyor of the Highways, mid 17th century.
- Dikereeve, late 16th century.

Other records that may be found in the parish chest

Catalogues of parish records held at Lincolnshire Archives are available in the archive search room. Examples of some of the more common parish records are given below:

Records of tithes. Tithes (or tenths) were originally payments of a tenth of the produce of the land (e.g. grain, lambs, poultry) to the church. This gradually changed to a more convenient annual cash payment. The 1836 Tithe Commutation Act allowed tithes to be replaced by an annual rent charge linked to the price of corn. Tithe awards and plans could then be drawn up by Tithe Commissioners to fix the rent-charge. Tithe awards are useful sources for parish history as they identify landowners and give information about their property. Tithes were finally abolished during the 20th century.

Records relating to enclosure. Enclosure refers to the consolidation of pieces of land into larger units. Land communally farmed or waste ground was allotted to a few landowners to cultivate. Early enclosures may have been marked by a private agreement or enrolled in an equity court. Later enclosures, particularly from the 18th century onwards, were often marked by an Act of Parliament. Enclosure awards and plans show the land that was enclosed and state who it was allotted to.



Records relating to the income received by the clergyman - for example: records of glebe land (e.g. surveys, plans and rentals), tables of fees and accounts of stocks and shares.

Documents relating to the rectory or vicarage – may include plans or correspondence and accounts relating to repairs.

Records relating to the churchyard (plans of graveyards are rarely included).

Documents relating to the fabric of the church - e.g. faculties giving the Bishop's permission to undertake work, reports of surveyors, accounts and plans for restorations and alterations.

Terriers and inventories of parish property – may include information about glebe land, the church, the vicarage or rectory, parochial fees and church furniture.

Parish charity records - for example foundation deeds, surveys of land, rentals and distribution accounts. Descriptions of parish charities operating in Lincolnshire are included in the Charity Commissioners' report of 1837 (available behind the staff counter).

Briefs - records of charitable collections made in the church

Parish school records - e.g. logbooks, managers' minutes, accounts, plans and deeds.

Banns books – record the reading of banns in the parish before marriage.

Registers of services performed in the church.

For further reading please see Lincolnshire Archives' online catalogue included on the Lincs to the Past website at:

<http://www.lincstothepast.com>