

## **Devon Parish Registers Online**

### **Introduction**

Original parish registers for much of Devon are held in the archive collections of Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter and North Devon Record Office in Barnstaple. Digitising began back in 2012, followed by indexing, which has been carried out by Find My Past. The rest of the Devon parish registers are held at Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, and most of these were already digitized before 2012.

Almost all of the Church of England parish registers dating up to 1915, and held at the Devon Heritage Centre and North Devon Record Office, have now been digitised, and many [but not all] of these are now searchable online on the genealogical subscription website, Find My Past. The first batch of digitised parish registers was released online on 30 May 2014, and the second batch on 14 November 2014. This second batch included digital images of many of the registers held at North Devon Record Office.

Despite the release of this second batch of parish registers on November 2014, not all of the parish registers already digitised and supplied to Find My Past appear to have been uploaded yet.

The digitised parish registers span the years 1538 to 1915 – but this can only be the case where the original registers actually survive and have been deposited in either archive. In some cases, registers dating before 1915 have not been deposited yet, and are still in the possession of the parish.

Registers from an additional 49 Devon parishes were digitized separately after the others, and those digital images are now online on the members' area of the Devon Family History Society website. In order to use this site you must be a member of the Devon Family History Society. We expect these registers to appear online on Find My Past at a later date. To find a list of these 49 parishes, click on the link relating to coverage of Devon parish registers online, below this text.

Most (but not all) of Plymouth and West Devon Record Office's parish registers are already available in digital format on Find My Past. They have a cut-off date of 1912.

Devon Family History Society's indexes and transcripts to baptisms (1813 - circa 1839), marriages (1754 – 1837) and burials (1813 - 1837) have also been available on Find My Past for some time, and have been incorporated into the Devon parish registers record sets to provide typed transcriptions of entries for the listed dates.

### **Coverage of Devon parish registers online**

Although many of the Church of England registers of baptism, marriage, banns and burial for Devon parishes are now digitised and most of these digitised register images are now included online on Find My Past, you should be aware of the limitations on what has been placed online.

A cut-off date of 1915 has generally been imposed for baptism, banns and marriage entries from Devon Heritage Centre and North Devon Record Office collections, which are digitised and available online on Find My Past, so these entries will only rarely relate to those still living.

Also at present, only burial register entries up to 1915 have been made available by Find My Past.

A cut-off date of 1912 was applied to Plymouth and West Devon Record Office's holdings of parish registers, which became available as digital images online on Find My Past several years earlier than ours.

Less than half of the digital images of parish registers which we have supplied so far to Find My Past were launched online in May 2014. For many parishes, only transcripts of baptisms, marriages and burials, which were in any case made available to Find My Past by the Devon Family History Society, and were already online, were made available during the first release in May 2014.

A second release of digital images was made in mid-November 2014, and this greatly increased the availability of Devon parish register images online. North Devon parish registers are now largely included.

Despite the release of this second batch of parish registers on November 2014, not all of the parish registers which we believe have been already digitised and supplied to Find My Past appear to have been uploaded yet.

There are a number of other parishes for which all surviving registers have been digitized, but which will always have unavoidable gaps in their online coverage, because of loss, destruction or severe damage to their registers in the past.

Note also, that there are a number of parishes [roughly 10% of Devon parishes] for which permission to digitise was initially refused by the incumbent, and these registers were digitized under alternative arrangements to those which were put in place for the majority of parishes. These digitized parish registers have now been made available on the members' area of the Devon Family History Society website. In order to use this site you must be a member of the Devon Family History Society. We expect these registers to appear online on Find My Past at a later date.

### **Explanation of which parish registers are now online on Find My Past**

The Find My Past website includes a list of the Devon parishes and the date coverage for which baptism, burial, marriage and banns registers are now online on that site. The date ranges are those derived from the earliest and latest records and do not necessarily reflect a complete run of years. This list includes the digital images of registers held at all three archive repositories in Devon, including Devon Heritage Centre, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office and North Devon Record Office.

It can be found at <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/devon-parish-records-coverage>.

However, this list, compiled by Find My Past, does not only record the parishes for which digitised images have been put online. It also lists parishes for which so far, only typed transcripts (supplied by Devon Family History Society) are online. These transcripts are largely of baptisms, burials and marriages in the 49 parishes for which registers were digitized separately, in 2015. The transcripts cover a narrower range of years – this is because they have been copied from the Devon Family History Society's indexes and transcripts to baptisms (1813 - circa 1839), marriages (1754 – 1837) and burials (1813 - 1837), There are also only transcripts available for those two Devon parishes for which permission to digitise registers was refused by the parish incumbent (see more information below).

In addition the list includes transcripts of entries from a few non-conformist registers which were indexed by Devon Family History Society, but which are not included in our digitising project at all.

The Parish Register List on our own website records all of the original Church of England baptism, marriage and burial registers held in Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter as well as those held in the other two record offices in Devon – you can distinguish which office holds a particular parish register collection by interpreting the code in the far right hand column of the list. The codes are explained on a separate webpage which gives information on using the Parish Register List.

## **Banns**

Since the Devon Family History Society has not indexed or transcribed banns registers, there were no transcribed entries to be linked to the digital images of banns registers which we supplied to Find My Past. The index and transcripts of the digitised banns register images had to be created by Find My Past. The parishes for which banns register images have been made available online are also listed on the webpage at

<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/devon-parish-records-coverage>.

## **Explanation of date coverage**

The general statement that the Devon parish registers launched online from 30 May 2014, 'span the years 1538 to 1915' needs some explanation.

Although Thomas Cromwell, the Vicar General during the reign of Henry VIII, ordered clergy to keep written records of baptisms, marriages and burials from 1538 onwards, not all of the earliest registers survive. In fact in many Devon parishes, surviving registers of baptism, marriage and burial begin much later, because the earliest registers were lost or destroyed sometime during the intervening centuries. Of course, if no early registers survive, then they could not be digitised and they will not be found online.

If these early parish registers do survive, they have been in almost every case deposited, by law, in Devon Heritage Centre or one of the two other record offices in Devon.

The Parish Register List on our website records the covering dates of the registers which have been deposited. Unless a register from a parish which is included on Find My Past was extremely damaged by fire, water or vermin, it was included by us in the digitizing programme, and should therefore have been included by Find My Past on their website. There do however seem to be some registers which have not been uploaded onto the Find My Past site, even though we do hold the originals and we believe that they were digitized.

A few registers were just too badly burnt or damaged to be read. This includes parish registers burnt during the Exeter Blitz in 1942. A few registers from Exeter parishes are included in this category. Although these are included in our Parish Register List, it was impossible to digitize them.

The most recent baptism, banns and marriage registers are not included online in their entirety on Find My Past, because of the need to conform to Data Protection legislation and to protect the privacy of living persons. Thus the cut-off date for these two types of registers is 1915, as stated on the Find My Past website. In some cases, parishes have deposited registers dating up to the early 2000s, but these have not been digitized and the originals have to be consulted at the archive repository where they are deposited.

In other cases, parishes have not yet deposited baptism and marriage registers dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and because these registers are still held at the church concerned, we have not been able to digitize them. In addition, a few registers were deposited by the parishes after digitising had been completed for those parishes, and therefore these have not been digitised. This means that baptisms and marriages in these parishes may not be covered online, right up to 1915. As far as we understand, the cut-off date for baptism and

marriage registers held at Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, which were placed online a few years earlier than ours, was 1912.

There should be no set cut-off date for burial registers from Devon parishes, as these do not record living persons. The cut-off date should vary according to the date coverage of the burial registers deposited by the parish – in some cases, burial registers dating up to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century have already been deposited. However, Find My Past has apparently imposed a cut-off date of 1915 for the burial registers as well.

In some cases, even mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century burial registers had not been deposited by the parish, by the time that digitizing ended, so could not be included online.

Check the Parish Register List to see which burial registers have not yet been deposited. Even where a full set of registers have been deposited by a parish, there may be gaps in the date coverage within a register. In many parishes, there are large gaps in the registers in the Civil War and Commonwealth period, between about 1645 and 1660, when there was great disruption to the established church, with some of the Royalist clergy ejected from their livings, and Puritan ministers sometimes appointed to replace them. In 1653, a new system was introduced for a short time – men titled “Parish Registers” were appointed to record births, marriages and burials in their parishes, and they were expected to provide parchment books for the purpose. Only civil marriages after publication of banns were legal, though people often had a church ceremony as well.

After the restoration of the monarchy and the re-establishment of the Church of England in 1660, the former practices of the established church were gradually restored, though a return to regular recording appears to have taken several years in some parishes; and in many cases the records of the preceding Commonwealth period have disappeared. So - if a gap in recording exists within the original register, then the same gap will exist in the series of digitized images.

### **Missing Parish Registers**

In addition to the earliest registers which were lost or destroyed, some parishes have completely lost more recent registers, through fire, bombing, theft or neglect, and in these cases we don't hold them, so we could not have them digitized.

Check the Parish Register List to determine whether there is a large gap in the series of registers for a particular parish.

In some cases, Bishops Transcripts - which include baptism, marriage and burial entries for dates which were included in the missing parish registers - still survive in the Exeter Diocesan collection at Devon Heritage Centre. However, these were not digitized as part of this project, and images are not included online on Find My Past. In most cases though, these entries have been included in the Devon Family History Society's transcripts.

### **Parishes not yet included on Find My Past**

Registers from an additional group of Devon parishes were digitized separately after the others, in 2014-2015, and those digital images are now online only on the members' area of the Devon Family History Society website. In order to use this site you must join the Devon Family History Society. Although we expect these registers to appear online on Find My Past at a later date they are not yet included on the site. The parishes concerned are as follows:

- Abbotskerswell
- Arlington
- Axminster

- Bigbury
- Bow
- Bratton Fleming
- Challacombe
- Clayhidon
- Coffinswell
- Coldridge/Coleridge
- Combyne
- Cullompton
- Culmstock
- Exeter St Matthew
- Exeter St Sidwell
- Hemyock
- Holsworthy
- Ilsington
- Kennerleigh
- Kentisbury
- Kingskerswell
- Lapford
- Loddiswell
- Malborough
- Mary Tavy
- Milton Damerel
- Modbury
- Morchard Bishop
- Peter Tavy
- Plymtree
- Ringmore
- Salcombe
- Shirwell
- South Huish
- Stockleigh English
- Stockleigh Pomeroy
- Stoke Rivers
- Torquay, Holy Trinity
- Torquay, St Mark, Torwood
- Torquay, St Matthias
- Washford Pyne
- Withycombe Raleigh
- Woodleigh
- Woolfardisworthy East

The following parish registers appear in digital format on both Find My Past and the Devon Family History Society members' area, though in the case of Find My Past, there may be some registers missing in the sequence:

- Aveton Gifford
- Hawkchurch
- Kingston
- Loxhore
- Nymet Rowland

The following registers have been digitised, but digital images are not yet online on either the Devon Family History Society members' area or on Find My Past:

- Zeal Monachorum

The following parish registers have not yet appeared in digitized format on Find My Past, and are not on the Devon Family History Society members' area either:

- Clannaborough
- Chardstock
- Dawlish

### **Parishes which will not be included on Find My Past**

The registers from the following Devon parishes will not be included in digital format on Find My Past, because the incumbents did not give permission for the registers belonging to those parishes to be digitized. Unless this situation changes, they cannot be included:

- Abbotsham
- East Allington

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South West Heritage Trust is a charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in England.  
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