



Gateway to
the history
of Shropshire
and Telford

A short guide to non-conformists

- ◇ Non-conformists are those who belong to Protestant Churches other than the established Church of England. This guide gives information about the main movements, including Methodists, Baptists and Quakers. A separate guide to Roman Catholics is available.
- ◇ For further information see Michael Gandy, *English Nonconformity for Family Historians*, D. J. Steel *Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy and Family History*, the *Victoria County History of Shropshire* vol 2, p9-17 and www.users.waitrose.com/~coxfamily
- ◇ For general information about non-conformist **registers**, please see our *short guide to Catholic and non-conformist registers*. Some nonconformist registers can be seen on microfiche or film at Shropshire Archives. To see any original records here, you will need a **Shropshire Archives Reader's Ticket**.

◆ The Religious Society of Friends

- ◇ The Religious Society of Friends was founded by George Fox in the 17th century. Members of the Society are known as **Quakers**.
- ◇ Quakers were subject to persecution for not taking oaths, refusing to serve in the armed forces, not paying tithes and not attending parish churches. The **Quarter Sessions records** give details of their sentences.
- ◇ From **1656** Quakers kept their own registers of births, marriages and burials. Quaker marriages were recognised as legal. Unlike other non-conformists, they did not have to marry in the Church of England between 1754 and 1837.
- ◇ Most Quaker registers can be seen at the National Archives. Indexes (digests) of the registers and other useful material can be seen at **Friends House** in London www.quaker.org.uk
- ◇ Shropshire Archives holds some Quaker records including plans of the Quaker Burial Ground at Coalbrookdale [SA 1987/63/3, 4430/Bur/1/1-6 and 5187/Bur/1] and minutes of the monthly and preparative meetings [SA 4430 and 5187]

◆ Methodists

- ◇ The Methodist movement was founded by John Wesley, Charles Welsey and George Whitfield in 1740.
- ◇ Methodist churches are organised into groups called 'circuits'. Methodist registers can be found in the **chapel** and/or **circuit** records.
- ◇ Records of most of the chapels and circuits can be consulted at the Shropshire Archives.

- ◇ Records of the central government of the Methodist Church (the Conference) are held at the **John Rylands Library**, Deansgange, Manchester M3 3EH.
- ◇ William Leary, *My Ancestors were Methodists* is a helpful introduction to the history of Methodism.

◆ **Independents and Presbyterians**

- ◇ Independents and Presbyterians were Protestant dissenters with similar views to Puritans. The movements were particularly strong during the Civil War and Commonwealth period.
- ◇ Following the Restoration in 1660, Independents and Presbyterians were subject to discrimination. However this ended when the Act of Toleration of 1689 granted freedom of worship to all Protestants.
- ◇ By the early 19th century, most Independents began to call themselves **Congregationalists** and English Presbyterians had become known as **Unitarians**.
- ◇ The Presbyterian Church became the established church in Scotland in the 17th century. In the 19th century the Scottish Presbyterians founded new churches in England (which became known as the **Presbyterian Church of England**).
- ◇ In 1972 the Congregational Union of Churches merged with the Presbyterian Church of England to form the **United Reformed Church**.
- ◇ Some records are at Shropshire Archives. Others may be at the **Dr Williams Library**, 14 Gordon Square, London WC1 <http://www.dwlib.co.uk> (although the 'Dr Williams' register of births and baptisms' is at the National Archives). The United Reformed Church website gives more information about their archives www.urc.org.uk

◆ **Baptists**

- ◇ The Baptist movement started in the 17th century. Baptists believe that only adult believers should be baptised. Their registers note the baptisms of adults and sometimes the births of children.
- ◇ The movement split in the 17th century into the **General Baptists** and **Particular Baptists** and again in the 18th century into the **Old Connection** (later named Unitarian) and the **New Connection**.
- ◇ A useful summary of the whereabouts of surviving records is in Breed, *My ancestors were Baptist, How can I find out more about them?* (929.3088 Reading Room shelves) www.baptisthistory.org.uk is also helpful.

Shropshire Archives
 Castle Gates, Shrewsbury SY1 2AQ
 tel: 0345 678 9096, fax: 01743 255355
 e-mail: archives@shropshire.gov.uk
 web site: www.shropshirearchives.org.uk