

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society



Chorley Branch Education Group Talk Handout Further Steps Catholic Research (Extract from The National Archives)

1. Why use this guide?

This guide details how and where records relating specifically to Catholics can be found at The National Archives, though its scope is not exhaustive and there are countless records with coverage of Catholics and Catholicism not touched upon here. The primary focus is the period between the mid-16th and the mid-19th centuries, a period of persecution and exclusion from mainstream society for Catholics in England.

2. What kinds of records do Catholics appear in and why?

Until 1534, England was a Catholic country. Then, after years of upheaval, the 1559 Act of Supremacy made the Protestant Church of England the established church. Following this act there is an increasing number of state records documenting Catholics and their activities, reflecting their status outside of the establishment, subject as they were to new laws, taxes and a wave of persecution. Thus, records of penalties and punishments, including fines and land seizures, provide a significant proportion of the records of Catholics at The National Archives, especially those from the 16th and 17th centuries. By the 18th century Catholics were no longer persecuted, but were still effectively barred from entering the professions, holding civil or military office, or inheriting land. Formal emancipation finally came in 1829 and state records relating to Catholics tend to die out a little from this date onwards.

Like all churches, Catholic churches kept their own records, though very few of these, in common with most local or parish church records, have found their way into The National Archives.

3. Catholic birth, marriage and death registers

Very few Catholic birth, marriage and death registers are kept at The National Archives. There are 77 in total, most of which are baptism registers, and they are found in record series [RG 4](#), viewable on one of our partner websites, [BMD Registers](#), searchable by name. They were collected together when the Registrar General called in the non-parochial registers in 1837 and 1857, part of the process of establishing the new system of civil registration. Perhaps so few Catholic registers were surrendered because they contained records of illegal marriages, since between 1754 and 1837, under the terms of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, it was a legal requirement to marry in the Church of England. Most of those that were handed over came from Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland. A full list of all these Catholic registers is in the Nonconformist Registers Reference Book - List of Chapels by Denomination & Miscellaneous which is available in the reading rooms at The National Archives at Kew. For more on Catholic registers see Catholics in records outside of The National Archives below.

Origins of the Catholic registers in RG 4

Cumberland 1	Hampshire 1	Northumberland 10	Warwickshire 1
Dorset 1	Lancashire 1	Nottinghamshire 1	Westmoreland 1
Durham 13	Lincolnshire 2	Oxfordshire 1	Yorkshire 44

4. Catholics and recusancy

The 1559 Act of Uniformity imposed fines on all men who refused to attend Church of England services at their parish church and these people were known as recusants. Holders of public office and many others were required to swear an oath of loyalty to the Sovereign as head of the Church and records were kept of people who did and didn't take these Oaths of Allegiance. Catholics could not accept the monarch as head of the Church, and so could not be loyal subjects in the eyes of the law. Subsequent laws imposed numerous penalties and fines for non-attendance at Anglican services, for which there are equally numerous records, and Catholics were effectively barred from inheriting land, entering the professions or taking up civil or military office. These punishments were not always strictly enforced and there was considerable variation according to time and place but the records of their issue, collection and enforcement provide a rich source of information on Catholics during this period.

4.1 Catholic recusants in state papers

Within the records originally assembled by the State Paper Office (department code [SP](#)), one of the richest sources of information on Catholics during the 17th and 18th centuries, there are numerous details of and references to Catholics. These include reports sent by ecclesiastical and civil authorities, letters from private citizens and spies as well as details of arrests and prosecutions.

4.2 Catholic recusants in other records

Details of Catholic recusants can also be found in records relating to the imposition of fines or seizures of land for failure to attend Church of England services. The fines laid down in the 1559 Act of Uniformity for failure to attend church were collected by churchwardens and so do not appear in the central government records. After 1581, recusancy became an indictable offence, so fines levied were accounted for at the Exchequer (department code [E](#)) by sheriffs of each county. There are records of Catholics who took the Oath of Allegiance, as well as of some who didn't.

4.3 Searching the records

Searching online indexes by the name of an individual is either impossible or very problematic with records detailing Catholic recusants. State papers (searchable under department code [SP](#)) are generally indexed by subject matter in Discovery, our [catalogue](#). However, not all documents in this department have a catalogue description and therefore some are unsearchable. Details of how best to search state papers, along with the other relevant record departments and series, are found in the following table.

Principal subjects covered relating to Catholic recusants	Record department/ series	Main dates covered	How to search the index to this series online	Other search resources
Surveillance and scrutiny of Catholic activities and movements; reports of Catholic attitudes and opinions	SP	c.1600-1782	Search by keyword on the State Papers Online website (institutional subscription required) or by using one or more of the following terms in our catalogue: Catholic; recusant; papist; popish; romish; nonjuror	The Calendars of State Papers (each calendar has a subject index). See 'Further reading' below
Catholic recusants in Dorset	PRO 30/24	c.1580- c.1680	Search using one or more of the following terms in our catalogue: recusant; popish	
Catholic recusants in Lancaster	KB 18	1714	This series cannot be searched online. Order the original document at The National Archives at Kew	
Catholics who took the Oath of Allegiance; petitions from Catholics on various matters	PC 1	c.1700- c.1800	Search using one or more of the following terms in our catalogue: Catholic; recusant; papist	
Fines, taxes, seizures and registrations of lands and estates, and other revenues received from recusants; oaths of allegiance from Catholics	E	1581- c.1870	Search by county (including abbreviations of) in our catalogue or using the following terms: Catholic; recusant; papist; popish; nonjuror	
Seizure of recusants' lands and estates	FEC 1 , FEC 2	1552- 1744	Search by county or town in our catalogue or using the following terms: papist; popish; recusant	
Revenues received from recusants	AO	1627- 1655	Search using the following terms in our catalogue: popish; recusant	

5. Records in other archives

Specifically Catholic records are relatively few in number compared to many Protestant denominations in England and the UK. The number of Catholics themselves in England dwindled following the Act of Uniformity, and remained low from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Furthermore, between 1754 and 1837 it was a legal requirement to marry in the Church of England and though many Catholics were still married illegally according to Catholic rites, registers for these illegal marriages were not generally kept since it might have been dangerous to do so.

The first new Catholic chapels since the Reformation were built in the 18th century and more Catholic registers were kept from 1791, but most do not begin until the early to mid 19th century. The earliest records were often kept in small notebooks or even loose sheets, which could easily be concealed or destroyed if necessary. Most surviving registers are for baptisms, and these often give more detail than Anglican registers, but there is considerable variation.

You can search [our catalogue](#) to find out what is held at Catholic libraries, Catholic archives and local records offices. Refine your results using the filters.

5.1 Catholic priests' mission records

Until 1918, the Catholic church was based on missions, rather than geographical parishes; as a result some priests seem to have treated the registers as their private or personal property and many registers moved around with their keepers. Events from different places may therefore be entered in a single register. Many of these personal registers are in the custody of Archbishop's House, Westminster. There is a list of these in 'Sources for Roman Catholic and Jewish Genealogy and Family History' in the National Index of Parish Registers series. Others can be found at the [Catholic National Library](#).

5.2 Catholic parish records

The majority of Catholic registers remain in the custody of parish priests, although a number have been transcribed and indexed by the [Catholic Record Society](#). Many of these transcripts have been deposited at the [Catholic National Library](#), and some are available at the library of the [Society of Genealogists](#). Those that have been published are listed in the National Index of Parish Registers but a more comprehensive and up to date listing is contained in the six volumes of Michael Gandy's Catholic Missions and Registers. Names and addresses of parish priests and diocesan archives are in the annual Catholic Directory, and some parish addresses can also be found through the website of the [Catholic Church in England and Wales](#).

5.3 Anglican records

Although Catholic registers may be relatively few in number, many Catholics appear in Anglican registers. Marriages between 1754 and 1837 had to be in the Church of England to be legally valid (even if the parties were also married according to

Catholic rites) and burials of Catholics might be in the Anglican parish churchyard, as there was often no other burial ground in the area. Catholic children might appear in the parish baptism registers, and they are not always identified as Catholics. Church of England clergy were required to supply lists of recusants in their parishes and as a result, the names of Catholics may appear in Anglican parish records, though not in the baptism, marriage or burial registers.

6. Further reading

M Gandy, *Catholic parishes in England, Wales and Scotland: an atlas* (M Gandy, 1993)

M Gandy, *Catholic Missions and Registers 1700-1880* (6 volumes) (M Gandy, 1998)

M Gandy, *Tracing Catholics* (PRO, 2001)

D Shorney, *Protestant Nonconformity and Roman Catholicism: a guide to sources in the Public Record Office* (PRO, 1996)

Steel, D J, *Sources for Roman Catholic and Jewish Genealogy and Family History* (Society of Genealogists by Phillimore, 1974)

See also the multiple volumes of *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* published by various publishers including PRO.

7. Websites

<https://catholicfhs.wordpress.com/>

<https://catholicfhs.wordpress.com/tag/lancashire/>

<http://www.catholic-history.org.uk/cfhs/>

http://echoesofliverpool.com/?page_id=56

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/religion-in-london/resource-guides/roman-catholics.htm>

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society
Chorley Research Centre at Astley Hall Farmhouse

Opening times

First & Third Saturdays Noon—4:00pm

Monday, Wednesday & Friday 10:00am—4:00pm

Last appointment 3:00pm

Booking advisable—Tel. 01257 231 600 (When centre is open),

Tel 01257 262 028 (When centre is closed)

or

Book in line at - Chorley Family History Research Centre Website – www.cfhrc.com

Research Enquires - chorleyresearch@lffhs.org.uk

Chorley Branch Website - www.lfhhschorleybranch.com

LFHHS

President – Steve Williams

Society Website – www.lfhhs.org.uk

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