

Advice for parish churches concerning the deposit and storage of registers and records in Herefordshire Record Office

The Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978 (amended 1992)

This measure was produced to ensure the long-term preservation and continued access to parochial registers and records, something that is becoming ever more important, not least with the increasing numbers of people researching both their family history and other aspects of local history.

The measure states that the bishop should appoint a record office to act as a Diocesan Record Office, which should keep those registers and records over 100 years old and safeguard them for the future. The measure also states that registers or records where the last entry is over 100 years ago, should be deposited in the Diocesan Record Office. This was amended in 1992 to include all registers (except post-1837 marriage registers) started over 150 years ago, even if they are still in use.

We are the record office that the Bishop of Hereford appointed in 1968 as the Diocesan Record Office for the Hereford Diocese.

Definitions

The Measure defines Register books as

“registers of baptisms (public and private), confirmations, banns of marriage, marriages, burials or services (ie. of public worship)...”

Whereas Records means

any other “materials in written or other form setting out facts or events or otherwise recording information”. This definition...will include, for example maps, architects’ drawings, photographs, lithographs, etc.

What do we hold?

In most cases, we hold registers from either the date a church was built or when registers begun to be kept, which in some cases can be as early as 1538. We have records for the majority of parishes in the Hereford Archdeaconry. In addition to registers, we also often have faculties, parish books, vestry minutes, churchwardens accounts and overseers accounts, often from the 18th and 19th centuries.

What does the Parochial Registers and Records Measure mean for you?

Older registers should be deposited with us as this will prevent the detrimental effects of widely varying temperature and relative humidity levels characteristic of church vestries.

Newer registers that are still in use are still at risk from these conditions, but there is no real alternative to keeping them in the church, because that is where they are needed. Measures can be found to minimise the effects of the conditions though, and if, once they are finished with, they are deposited in the Diocesan Record Office, the damage they sustain can be minimised.

If you are still retaining or using any 1813 baptism or burial registers or still retain any pre-1837 marriage registers, there is a statutory obligation to deposit these with us and begin new ones.

The alternative is to get an exemption from the Bishop, and in order to get this, you will have to store the registers in the church and meet certain criteria about the conditions they are stored in, such as using a multi-lever safe and recording the temperature and relative humidity on a regular basis.

Post 1837 marriage registers, according to the Parochial Registers and Records Measure, do not have to be deposited with the Diocesan Record Office. It is still highly recommended however that these are deposited with the Diocesan Record Office when completed for the reasons given below.

Why deposit them with the record office?

According to the measure, the records have to be kept in either the church or with us at the records office. Church vestries are often very damp places and even if they are not, the temperature and relative humidity will usually vary with the weather outside. High relative humidity and fluctuating temperature and relative humidity can be very damaging to records. Too high a relative humidity and mould can develop on them. Too high a temperature and they can become very brittle. Fluctuating conditions mean that the chemical make up of the paper can be damaged and they start to fall apart.

Besides the issues relating to the environment the records are kept in, there is also the matter of access. If people would like to see the registers, they will have to arrange a time with you for you to retrieve them from the safe and supervise them whilst they look through them. This can be a time consuming practice for busy parish officers. If the records are deposited with the record office, they can be kept in appropriate conditions and people can see them at any time during our opening hours, providing they have a readers' ticket. In order to obtain a readers' ticket, they have to produce a form of identification with both their name and address. Here, there are always staff on hand to guide people through how to use the registers and inform them what they should expect to find in them.

If deposited, the records can be looked after by professional archivists and conservators, who are trained how to properly store, look after and handle documents of this type and can therefore better ensure their long-term survival.

The records can be viewed with appropriate equipment such as weights and book rests.

Many registers have been microfilmed and the use of these surrogates ensures the better survival and preservation of the originals, which are no longer consulted.

We already have the earliest registers from the majority of parishes in the Hereford Archdeaconry and collecting the more recent examples would mean researchers should only have to visit one place to view all the records from a particular parish.

If parishes are still using registers over 150 years old and depositing these with the record office would mean purchasing new registers, the Herefordshire Family History Society do provide funding for this purpose. Please contact us at the Diocesan Record Office if you would like to find out how obtain these funds. Alternatively, you could contact the Family History Society directly at <http://www.herefordshirefhs.org.uk/>.

What about other records?

Any record of any kind that is more than 100 years old, with the exception of post-1837 marriage registers, there is a statutory obligation for you to deposit with the Diocesan Record Office. Relatively recent documents, in current use, can be kept in the parish and unlike the registers, these do not have to be kept in the parish church. If it is no longer used, it should be kept in the parish for the amount of time specified in the Church of England's *Keep or Bin: The care of your parish records* guidelines, and if these specify they should then be deposited with the Diocesan Record Office, then they should be at that point. Otherwise they can be destroyed. In many cases, we already have many of the records from Herefordshire parishes and people have come to expect them to be here. It is sensible to keep as much as possible in one place.

Keep or Bin Guidelines

For the most recent records, the Church of England have produced guidelines, which can be found at <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchcommissioners/librariesandarchives/recordsmanagementguides.aspx>, which inform you how long to keep different types of records and if they can be destroyed at the end of this time period or if they should be deposited with the Diocesan Record Office.

Conditions of deposit

The records come to us on permanent loan. The parish will retain ownership of them and will retain copyright for them. Copyright legislation however does not cover parish registers, because they are fact. These can be copied without the reader signing any declaration, but for all other records, researchers are allowed to copy them, but they have to sign a declaration to say they will not publish any of the information they have found. If they do wish to publish this, they will have to get permission from the relevant PCC. When records are deposited, you will get a receipt to keep with your records. We can also send you a copy of the catalogue when we have written it.

Borrowing registers back

We would advise against this, because once we have catalogued the records, people expect them to be available. Also, travelling with them or exhibiting them can be damaging to them. As they are your records, it is in your interests to keep them safe and to ensure no action is taken that could damage them. If you have a good reason for borrowing them back, it might be possible for short periods of time, but please ask us in writing and leave plenty of time. You will also have to bring a letter of permission from the vicar or rector and proof of identity. It will not be possible to process applications for loans overnight or on the same day as a condition report will need to be made of the record before it leaves.

Can you have access to the registers which are kept here if you need it?

Yes, as long as you either sign up as a reader or you can prove that you are the churchwarden from a particular parish, though in that case you will only be able to see the records from the parish in question.

The Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978 (amended 1992) surveys

Another stipulation of the measure is that records surveys are carried out every five years in each church. We do not have the resources to do this that frequently, but we are currently undertaking a programme of surveys, so if you have not already been visited by one of our staff, somebody should be in contact in due course. If you feel that your records would benefit from a survey, or you would like some advice about record keeping, please contact us to arrange one.

The aim of conducting the surveys is to ensure the long term preservation and accessibility of the Archdeaconry's heritage. By compiling lists of the records held and assessing the conditions in which they are kept, recommendations and advice can then be given as to the best courses of action for different

records, to ensure their long term preservation and accessibility. We would appreciate your co-operation in this. It will benefit both you and us because we and you will know what each of us holds and where to point enquiries to.

If you have any queries about anything in this guide or would like further information about any aspects of both your and our responsibilities, please write to us or telephone us.