

# Library of Birmingham Archives & Collections

## Faith and Religious Records

**This guide is intended as an introduction to some of the main archive sources for research into faith and religious organisations. It is a starting point rather than an exhaustive list of collections and further sources will be found by checking the online catalogues, the Wolfson Centre paper catalogues and card indexes. Printed sources (e.g. annual reports of institutions and charities) will also be found in the local studies catalogue.**

Faith records are a key record of people's identity and history. They are heavily used by family historians to trace their ancestors as they often provide the earliest references to families and individuals as well as outlining family relationships. They are also of great importance to local historians mapping the changing landscape of the city.

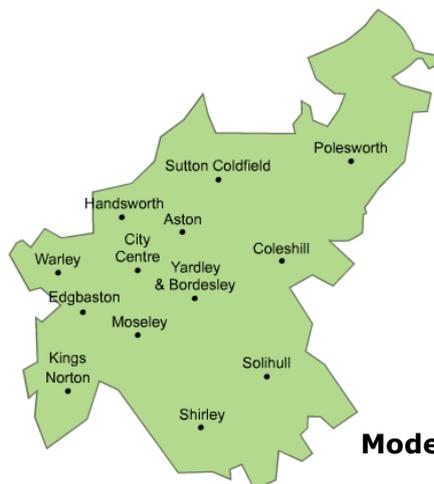
To access the Archives & Heritage online catalogue and information about our services go to <http://www.libraryofbirmingham.com>

### Church of England records

✳ **Important point:** We have legal responsibilities to look after records of the Church of England as they are the established religion in England. Legislation requires us to preserve and make available records of local parish churches and also of other administrative units within the church, mostly the records belonging to the Bishop of Birmingham and his jurisdiction: the Diocese of Birmingham.

### Diocese of Birmingham

The Diocese of Birmingham is the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Birmingham. It was established in 1905: before this date Birmingham was in the dioceses of Worcester and Lichfield.



**Modern diocese of Birmingham**

Most of the records of the diocese are concerned with its administration but also includes Faculty papers (found under catalogue reference BDR/C6) which are papers issued to parishes giving permission for alterations and additions to be made to the church building. This is similar to local authority planning applications but includes any alterations made to the interior of the building, such as central heating work, moving pews and furniture and putting in new windows.

► **Tip:** The catalogue reference for the archives of the diocese is BDR.

## Parish Records

Birmingham currently has around 110 parish churches and we have records for 138 past and present parishes dating from the sixteenth century onwards.

► **Tip:** The catalogue reference for parish records can be either EP or DRO.

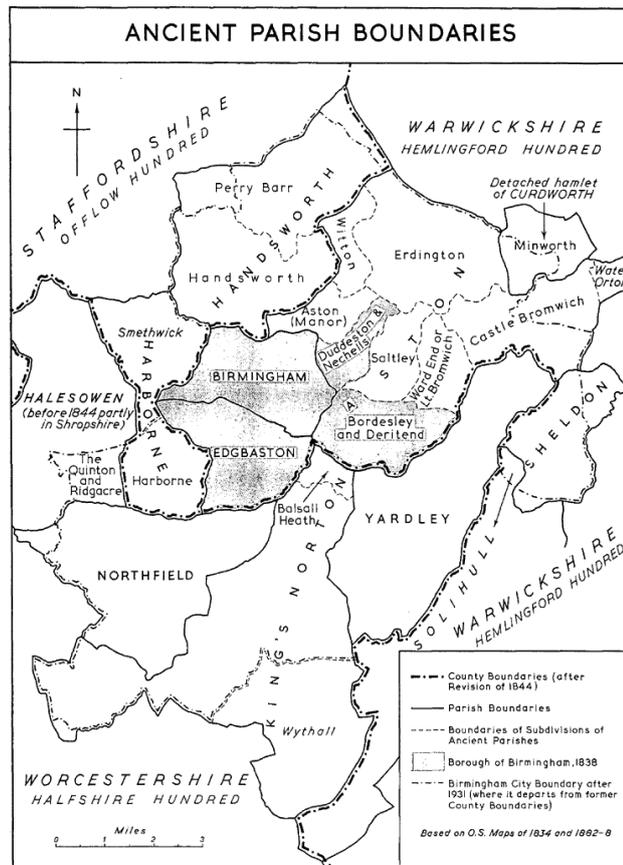
Before the nineteenth century the parish was the official local authority organisation which ensured the smooth running of the community. In addition to its religious responsibilities it looked after the health, social and moral welfare of the community. Records can be found which cover a wide range of functions including:

- Apprenticeship
- Poor relief and health care.
- Bastardy (child affiliation and maintenance)
- The poor were restricted in where they could live on it and a certificate was required to settle in a parish – records list these certificates and those who didn't have them.
- Apprehension of criminals
- Highway and bridge repair and maintenance

★ **Important point:** Parishes were charged with keeping records relating to the population of the parish, recording baptisms, marriages and burials from 1538 onwards. Parish records for Birmingham (St Martin's) date from 1555 but some of the suburban parishes have earlier registers.

Modern Birmingham is made up of a number of medieval parishes – these are the ones which will have the early parish records. They are:

- Birmingham (St Martins)
- Aston(-juxta-Birmingham, St Peter and St Paul)
- Handsworth (St Mary)
- Harborne (St Peter)
- Northfield (St Laurence)
- Kings Norton (St Nicolas)
- Yardley (St Edburgha)
- Sheldon (St Giles)



<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>

From around 1800 onwards Birmingham's population grew rapidly and with it grew the number of churches as well as the complexities of its local infrastructure. The churches continued to record baptisms (not births), marriages and burials (not deaths) and later – as restrictions on religious practices were relaxed – these were also recorded by other faith organisations.

In 1837 the General Register Office was established and from that date births, marriages and deaths could be registered centrally as well.

## Non conformity

The history of Birmingham is deeply interconnected with the faith of its people – in particular its development from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century is characterised by the practising of non-conformist Protestant faith.

★ **Important point:** Non conformity – a loose term covering Christian groups who are neither part of the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Church nor the established Church of England (also known as Anglican). These groups are sometimes referred to as dissenters or Free churches. We hold records for a large number of non-conformist faith groups in the City including Methodist, Unitarian, Congregationalist, Baptist, United Reformed, Presbyterian, Society of Friends ("Quakers").

These records include baptisms, marriages, membership roles and administrative records relating to the church or organisation. Because so many of Birmingham's prominent political and industrial families were from non-conformist traditions these papers are of great importance to the history and development of the city.

There are exhaustive lists of the holdings relating to the various religious groups although many remain uncatalogued. This includes the significant archive of the Central England Society of Friends dating from 1662-c2000 including quarterly, monthly and local meetings across the region.

### **Other religious groups**

We hold a number of marriage registers relating to independent and non-affiliated religious groups – these have largely been deposited by the Register Office in Birmingham where a copy of every marriage register from Birmingham is kept.

► **Tip:** The catalogue reference for other religious groups is XC

### **Roman Catholic Records**

We do not hold any records for Roman Catholic churches. There is no central repository for these records but they can be found variously at individual churches or at the Archives of the Archdiocese of Birmingham at St Chad's Cathedral.

### **Other faith groups**

Birmingham had a Jewish population from the early eighteenth century. At present we hold records for the Birmingham Hebrew Congregation which date back to the eighteenth century. Until 1901 this represented the only synagogue in a city with a significant Jewish population, boosted by an influx of refugees from Russia and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

► **Tip:** The catalogue reference for the records of the synagogue is J

There are also other collections relating to Jewish life in the city including:

- MS 2520 Birmingham Jewish Literary and Arts Society
- MS 2522 Birmingham Jewish Youth Council
- MS 2524 Papers of Zoe Josephs
- MS 2529 Birmingham Shechita Board

Although we have records relating to other faiths and religious organisations in the city we do not hold records of places of worship from other groups and organisations.