

Learning Activity

This resource provides learning activities for your students using People's Collection Wales. It can also be used as a template for creating your own activities using the People's Collection Wales website



Progression Step

3



Subject

Using Archives to Explore Local History



Title

On Your Doorstep - Parish Registers

Using archives to explore local history



Author

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and the following local archives: Gwent Archives; Pembrokeshire Archives; Anglesey Archives; Wrexham Archives and Local Studies Services.

Using Archives to Explore Local History - Parish Registers

This resource explores how you can investigate the history of your locality using parish registers as a type of source found in local and national archives or record offices in Wales. It forms part of a series forming the basic building blocks for finding out about local history.

The resource is intended as a guide for teachers, helping them to use primary sources in the classroom. The resource can also help teachers work with their local archive to locate similar sources for their own locality. It aims to introduce teachers and students to the types of archival sources used for local history and to familiarise them with the form, appearance and content of the sources.

On Your Doorstep - Parish Registers - Learning Objectives

Learners will understand:

- The role of the archives in providing important historical sources.
- The role of using Parish Registers as a type of historical source.
- What life was like in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in their own locality compared to other localities across Wales.

Learners will be able to:

Subject Curriculum—History

- Use a range of sources, including ICT, to search for information.
- Ask and answer relevant questions about the past.
- Identify differences between ways of life at different times.
- Identify the ways in which the past is represented and interpreted.
- Select, record and organise historical information.
- Plan the investigative approach to be used, suggesting how to find relevant information.
- Communicate ideas, opinions and conclusions with an increasing independence in a variety of ways.

Literacy Framework

- Identify main ideas, events and supporting details.
- Listen and respond to the viewpoints and ideas of others.
- Contribute to discussions and presentations.
- Make connections within/across a range of texts/themes.
- Carry out research to develop a full understanding.
- Organise and analyse relevant information.
- Use a structure and language appropriate to the purpose and focus of the writing.

On Your Doorstep - Parish Registers - Skills Framework

Thinking

- Asking questions.
- Activating prior knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Gathering information.
- Determining the process/method and strategy.
- Considering evidence, information and ideas.

Communication

- Developing and presenting information and ideas.
- Locating, selecting and using information using reading strategies.
- Organising ideas and information.
- Writing accurately.
- Communicating information.

ICT

- Finding and developing information and ideas.
- Creating and presenting information and ideas.

On Your Doorstep - Introductory Text

Introduction

This resource forms part of a series of eight. Each resource in the series introduces a different type of historical source. The types of historical sources introduced in this resource are typically what you might look at during a local history project and they are all available from local archives.

The different types of sources introduced are:

- The Census
- Tithe and Ordnance Survey Maps
- School Log Books
- Photographs
- Parish Registers – baptisms and deaths**
- Trade Directories
- Sales Catalogues
- Newspapers

The exemplar historical sources in each resource come from four localities across Wales: Holyhead, Blaenavon, Saundersfoot and Wrexham. They cover the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using these as examples, it is possible to explore, make connections and comparisons, ask and answer questions, discover landscapes and people, and the links between them.

There is a short film introducing archives and for each type of source there is an additional short film explaining the type of source and how we can use it to find out more about local history. A transcript of the films and thumbnail images are included in the **teachers' notes**. The full size images are available by following the links to the People's Collection Wales website.

Each resource in the series has several **online tasks** for pupils which use the sources from the four localities. These sources can be viewed online at the People's Collection Wales website by following the links on the pupil task sheets. There are also **additional activities** that suggest ways in which pupils could use sources from local archives to investigate local history on their doorstep. These additional activities enable pupils to compare and contrast their own locality with those across Wales. There is a contact list for local and national archives throughout Wales at the end of the teachers' notes.

[View the film - The Archive and the Archivist](#)

On Your Doorstep - Introductory Film - Parish Registers

This is a short filmed introduction with an archivist explaining parish registers as a type of source and how we can use them to find out more about local history.

[View the introductory film here — Using Parish Registers \(link to video on People's Collection](#)

Looking at Archives - *Parish Registers*



Using parish registers

This resource explores how you can investigate the history of your locality using parish registers.

Before 1837 there were no official records of births or deaths. From 1 July 1837 all births, marriages and deaths had to be officially recorded. They still are. For many people born or dying before July 1837, the only record that existed was if they were baptised in the church, if they were married in the church and when they were buried. These records were handwritten in a register or book by the minister or priest who performed the baptism, marriage or burial. Not everybody was baptised and non-conformists, such as the Methodists, Baptists, etc. kept their own registers.

This tiny sample gives us some idea of how parish registers can be used for studying local history. Looking at a bigger sample would tell us a lot more. For example, a comparison of baptisms and burials for one year might tell you something about how many baptised children were buried within a year of their baptism. Comparing later baptism and burial records with the census returns would also tell you a lot more about these families and where they lived.

Most registers are kept in local record office or archives but you will usually not see the original register. All the registers are on microfilm (a way of storing archive material). Many of the original books are fragile and because so many people want to look at them, microfilm means the originals are protected. You can ask the archivist to show you an original register if you visit the archive but if you wanted to look at baptisms, marriages and burials for a specific parish or year, you would need to use the microfilms.

There are four examples of parish registers to be used with this online pupil investigations:

Baptisms in the Parish of Holyhead in the year 1891

Baptisms in the Parish of Blaenavon in the year 1891

Burials in the Parish of Saint Issell's, Saundersfoot, in the year 1896

Baptisms in the Parish of Wrexham in the year 1837

Whilst undertaking the tasks, look at all the parish registers in the online collections on the People's Collection Wales website. Comparing the parish registers gives us useful information about similarities and differences in various parts of Wales in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Use the links to the People's Collection Wales website to see the parish registers online.

On Your Doorstep - Parish Registers / Task 1

What type of historical information can we find by looking at the parish registers?

Study the parish registers from the collection below to help you answer the above question.

Here are some questions to help you with your investigation.

Who do you think would have kept the parish registers?

What is recorded on the parish registers?

Why is the information on the parish registers important?

Look at the three baptism registers. What can you say about the sorts of first names the babies were given in 1837 and 1891?

Collection for Task 1

[Link to collection on People's Collection Wales website](#)

On Your Doorstep - Parish Registers / Task 2

What do parish registers tell us about daily life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century?

Study the primary sources from the collection below.

Here are some questions to help you with your investigation.

Look at the occupations of the fathers, as listed in the baptism registers.

Are there any that you don't recognise?

Are they the sort of occupations you would expect to find?

Between 27 November 1896 and 16 February 1897, the register listed eight burials in the parish of St Issell's, the parish church for Saundersfoot.

What time of year is it?

What comments can you make about the deaths on this page?

Does anything surprise you?

Collection for Task 2

[Link to collection on People's Collection Wales website](#)

On Your Doorstep - Parish Registers / Task 3

How do parish registers connect with other primary sources such as maps and census returns ?

Study the primary sources from the collection below - see if you can link the sources together.

Here are some questions to help you with your investigation.

Look at the Wrexham baptism register for 1837. These children were baptised just before civil registration became compulsory in July 1837. On 17 February Hannah and Sarah Rowland, the daughters of Edward, a plasterer, and Jane Rowland were baptised together. They lived at Lampit Street in Wrexham. Why might they have been baptised together? Can you find out where Lampit Street is in Wrexham? Is the street still there in Wrexham?

Because the births were not recorded, we don't know whether they were twin sisters or not. The 1851 census for Wrexham, 14 years later, still has Edward and Jane living at Lampit Street and Hannah is listed as being 16, and a servant. While there is a younger sister and brother, there is no mention of Sarah. We would need to look through the Burial Register for Wrexham to see whether Sarah died or moved.

Collection for Task 3

[Link to collection on People's Collection Wales website](#)

Well done you have finished your tasks and you have collected information using parish registers.

Now it's over to you to find out more.

You can visit or ask your local record office or archive for examples of parish registers for your own area. What sort of information do they tell you? Are there any other sort of parish registers, for example marriages which the archive hold, which we have not looked at in the tasks? What do these registers tell you? Can you find any more registers on People's Collection Wales website?

What new questions would you like answers to?

You can do more research online, at archives, local record offices, museums and at your local library.

Find your local archive or record office @ <http://www.archiveswales.org.uk/>

Find your local museum @ <http://www.culture24.org.uk/places+to+go/wales>

The National Library of Wales @ <http://www.llgc.org.uk>

People's Collection Wales @ www.peoplescollectionwales.co.uk

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales @ <http://www.rcahmw.gov.uk>

Coflein @ <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/>

Additional Activities - Historical Information

Using parish registers from your local archives discuss what type of historical information can we find by looking at the parish registers.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Discussion

Look at parish registers from your local area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. What type of information does this give us? How does this differ from the other localities? Are there any other type of parish registers in your local archive? What do these tell us?

Looking at parish registers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century - children's names

After studying the parish registers the pupils, either in groups or individually, look at how children's names have changed since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. What have been the most popular names for children since the late nineteenth century? What are the most popular names today? How about parents and relatives names? Display the information in a chart and compare the groups results. Are there any trends? What might influence these trends?

The information chart might include the following information:

- A survey of children's names in the class, their parents, siblings and relatives names.
- Are any of the names modern day versions of older names.
- Is there a predominance of Welsh names in your locality—how has this changed since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Ideas for further follow on activities:

- What other information might researchers want to know about baptisms and burials which are not included on the registers.
- Look at a modern day baptism and burial register. Does it contain any information which is not recorded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century register?



Additional Activities - Daily Life

Using parish registers from your local archives compare how daily life and occupations in your local area was different to that of the other localities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Discussion

Look at the parish registers from your local area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Can you make any links between how people lived and their occupations and the different localities? What are the main occupations listed for your local area?

Looking at parish registers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century - creating a family tree

After studying the parish records from the local archive, each pupil draws their family tree based on their knowledge of their family and ancestors. What were their ancestors occupations? They may wish to bring photographs from home to illustrate this. The children should decide which information they wish to put into their family tree and how the information should be represented.

Discussion topics might include the following:

- The information they wish to include and why they feel this is important.
- Why they have chosen the method used to represent the information.
- Is there anything else they would have liked to have included on their family tree?

Ideas for further follow on activities:

- If you look at the Blaenavon register in 1891 (in [Collection 1](#)) you might notice some odd or different things on the pages which are not in the other baptism registers. What do you see that is different? (You can listen to the film again and find out why this register has notes and dates that do not follow chronologically).



Additional Activities - Using Different Sources

Using parish records combined with other sources from your local archives investigate life in your local area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Discussion

Look at parish registers and other sources, including for example, the census returns, and maps of your local area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. What more can they tell us about daily life in our local area and the individuals that lived there?

Looking at parish registers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century - combining archival resources

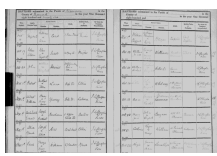
Using parish registers from the local archives combined with local census returns, can you find any families or individuals who appear in more than one source? Do they appear in any other sources, for example, can you find any photographs of them? If they are children, are they mentioned in any of the school log books? Build up a profile of the person or family based on the information you can find from the different sources. Compare the profile of the person to those profiles other members of the class have made. How do they differ? Why?

The profile might include the following information:

- The persons/families name.
- The primary sources where they can be found.
- Are there any gaps which are unaccounted for?
- Does their name or house appear in any of the trade directories?

Ideas for further follow on activities:

- Look at the 1891 census page for Princes Street, Blaenavon (in [Collection 1](#)). Can you identify any of the people who were baptised in the census page? How old was she when she was baptised? What else do you notice when you compare these two records from the same year? Can you explain this?
- Look at the Ordnance Survey maps for Saundersfoot (in [Collection 1a](#)). Can you find St Issell's Church? Hean Castle, where Charles Vickerman lived, is not far from the church. If you explore the Ordnance Survey maps for Saundersfoot you should be able to find most of the places mentioned in the burial register.



As well as what is supposed to be officially recorded, what makes this register from Blaenavon interesting are the notes in the margins:

Adult Baptisms: John Davies, Catherine Williams and Kezia Llewellyn were all baptised as adults. This is not uncommon. Sometimes families avoided the church, either because they did not truly believe in God, had not got around to baptising their children or because baptisms had to be paid for. When the child grew up and then wanted to marry, the church may then demand proof of baptism. Without adequate proof, the individual would have to be baptised as an adult. (It is worth considering who was considered an adult. According to the 1891 census, taken on the night of 5 April, Catherine Williams was recorded as 15).

M Ch: this stands for Mission Church. In Blaenavon, as well as the main parish church of St Peter's, there was another established Church of England church that people could attend called St James. This indicates that 5 baptisms took place here, and were copied up in the main parish church register afterwards. It is also noticeable that for 3 out of these 5 children the profession of the father has not been recorded. It is probable that the 3 fathers all had jobs, it was just that when the baptisms were copied into the register, probably a couple of weeks after the event, their occupations could not be remembered.

So what information can we find in parish registers?

They are one of the most popular sources used at archives because of the information they give to family historians. In 1836 acts were passed meaning births, marriages and deaths had to be registered by law from 1 July 1837. So parish registers are the main form of registration before this date. Baptism registers can be checked with information found in other sources such as the census. For people researching their family or local history to find relatives, baptism registers can be looked at for free whereas birth certificates have to be paid for.

If we look further at this example it is interesting to see what jobs men had at this time. When baptisms or births are registered today, parents' occupations can be quite vague such as 'Director' or 'Manager.' Professions around the nineteenth century tended to be specific. Here we see quite a lot of industrial jobs:

Miner: specifically someone who mined iron ore, though later used more generally.

Collier: someone who mined coal ore.

Weigher: someone who weighed unloaded cargo at the docks.

Baller: someone who measured out balls of clay for a potter to use.

Mason: someone who cut stones.

Away from this we also have a ship's captain, a labourer and a fireman. We also have a 'water course' man. Most likely this would have been somebody who helped direct streams for use by a local colliery.

These professions show how heavy industry dominated the Blaenavon area at this time. Nowadays, only the professions fireman and labourer would be seen in Blaenavon.

Another person who may use parish registers would be somebody studying names. We have already seen the biblical name Kezia, which was more popular in Victorian times, than it is now.

On Your Doorstep - Parish Registers / Teachers' Notes

Another Kezia appears earlier in the same register. A lot of royal first names also appear. On these pages we see Albert taken after Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert, and Alice, the name of one of the Queen's daughters.

Not everybody was baptised. Even then, not everybody who was baptised in Blaenavon would appear in this church register. Non-conformists, such as the Methodists, Baptists, etc. kept their own registers too.

Further Information - Local Archives

Find your local archive below:

[Aberystwyth University Archives](#) archives@aber.ac.uk Tel: 01970 628593

[Anglesey Archives](#) archives@anglesey.gov.uk Tel: 01248 751930

[Bangor University Archives](#) archives@bangor.ac.uk Tel: 01248 382966

[Cardiff University, Special Collections and Archives](#) keelanp@cardiff.ac.uk Tel: 029 2087 5678

[Carmarthenshire Archive Service](#) archives@carmarthenshire.gov.uk Tel: 01267 228232

[Ceredigion Archives](#) archives@ceredigion.gov.uk Tel: 01970 633697/633698

[Conwy Archives Service](#) archifau.archives@conwy.gov.uk Tel: 01492 577550

[Denbighshire Record Office](#) archives@denbighshire.gov.uk Tel: 01824 708250

[Flintshire Record Office](#) archives@flintshire.gov.uk Tel: 01244 532364

[Glamorgan Archives](#) glamro@cardiff.gov.uk Tel: 029 2087 2200

[Gwent Archives](#) enquiries@gwentarchives.gov.uk Tel: 01495 353363

[Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon](#) archives.caernarfon@gwynedd.gov.uk Tel: 01286 679095

[Gwynedd Archives, Meirionnydd](#) archives.dolgellau@gwynedd.gov.uk Tel: 01341 424 682

[Neath Antiquarian Society Archives](#) westglam.archives@swansea.gov.uk Tel: 01639 620139

[Pembrokeshire Record Office](#) record.office@pembrokeshire.gov.uk Tel: 01437 775456

[Powys Archives](#) archives@powys.gov.uk Tel: 01597 826088

[Swansea University Archives](#) archives@swansea.ac.uk Tel: 01792 295021

[University of Wales, Trinity St David Archives](#) rodericbownlibrary@tsd.ac.uk Tel: 01248 38296

[West Glamorgan Archive Service, Swansea](#) westglam.archives@swansea.gov.uk Tel: 01792 636589

[Wrexham Archives and Local Studies Service](#) archives@wrexham.gov.uk Tel: 01978 297480

Further Information - Local Archives

You can find more resources online, at archives, local record offices and museums.

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