



## Scotland – Church Records & Indexes

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The Scottish government did not begin general registration of births, marriages, and deaths until 1855. Prior to that date, church records are the prime source for family information. If you have Scottish ancestry, you must become familiar with, and learn to use, Scottish church records.

NOTE: A local church unit is called a parish.

### Historical Background

Prior to the 1500's, Scotland was Catholic, as was all of Europe. In the 1500's, John Knox spread Protestantism throughout England; tactics of brutality inflicted by (Catholic) Queen Mary, attempted to force Protestantism—already set in place by Henry VIII—out the door. However, in 1568, she was forced to abdicate the throne; she was eventually imprisoned and later executed.

- In 1552, General Provincial Council ordered Scotland's parishes to keep registers of baptisms & marriages. Earliest registers commence from 1553.
- In 1560's, Catholic Church abolished and Presbyterianism grew in strength.
- In 1564, earliest known Blotter registers kept
- In 1600, a calendar change; year now began on January 1st.
- In 1603, James VI of Scotland (Queen Mary's son) became James I of England.
- In 1606, church government established in Scotland by James I.
- In 1616, 1636, and again in 1699, laws were passed requiring ministers to keep registers.
- In 1690, Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) was 'established' permanently.
- Lord Hardwick Act – many marriages in established church parishes from 25 Mar 1754
- Between 1733-1843 - many break-offs from the Established Church that affected records (Non-conformists)
  - Secessionists - seceded from the Established Church—still Presbyterian
  - Dissenters - other denominations (Episcopalian, Baptist, Catholic, etc.)
- From 1783 to 1793, a tax was imposed on all entries in parish registers.
- Registers of Neglected Entries – about 115 parishes keep registers from about 1810 to about 1855
- 1855+ quod sacra parishes, with new registers were begun; some delayed entries recorded at those times

### Content of Church Records

Baptisms/christenings:

- Date and place
- Name and sex of child
- Father's name and residence

- Mother's name and maiden name
- May include - placement in family, father's occupation, residence & witnesses' names

#### Marriages:

- Date and place
- Names of bride and groom
- Residences
- May include - groom's occupation, marital status, fathers' names, witnesses' names

#### Burials:

- Name of deceased
- Date and place
- May include - occupation, age, relatives' names, residence, 'mortcloth dues' (fee paid for use of funeral cloth/pall draped over the casket).

## Burial Records

- Most of Scotland's population were buried in Church of Scotland parish churchyards
- Most parishes did not record burials (not a church sacrament).
- Locate cemetery records (usually for more wealthier Scots). Check the Family History Library Catalog (FHLC) on both the parish & county levels. Tombstones are called Monumental Inscriptions. Also contact local family history societies in Scotland. See [www.safhs.org.uk](http://www.safhs.org.uk) for contact information.
- Existing burial registers are now indexed and online at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

## Churchyard (Cemetery) Records

- Not all could afford a stone monument
- Commence mostly after 1852; a few, before
- Most were buried (including just about all Nonconformists) in the local parish churchyard before 1852

## Kirk Session Records

- Key records containing numerous accounts of-- 'spurious' marriages, names of children, administration of poor, all matters of church discipline, minutes & accounts, etc.
- Not indexed online.
- Scanned images are available at the National Archives in Scotland, or at 10 regional archives. Go to [www.scan.org.uk](http://www.scan.org.uk) and click on 'Directory' for contact information.

## Scottish Church Records Union List

- Five-volume set found in the British reference area of the FHL; arranged by county & parish.
- Lists most denominations and congregations; gives histories; lists existing records and their location. Use with caution; not all chapels listed. Not on microfilm.
- Available [online](http://wiki.familysearch.org/catalog) at <http://wiki.familysearch.org/catalog>.

## Reasons Family *Not* in Church Records

- Some families lax in having events recorded.
- Traditional/local customs may have prevented a marriage or burial being recorded.
- Political and religious upheavals may have caused events not to be performed/recorded.

- Names may have been changed or variant
- Baptisms may have occurred years after birth, or several siblings baptized at once.
- Some Nonconformist marriages may be found in Church of Scotland registers starting in 1754
- From 1783-1793, a tax imposed on entries in registers; some did not register events.
- Individuals, families may have left state church and attended a 'nonconformist' or seceding church. Search records of both where extant.
- In some cases, vast numbers, or whole congregations left Church of Scotland and formed or joined seceding churches, taking registers with them. Always check seceding registers where extant, as they may have former Church of Scotland members' names.
- Surname of the family could be spelled differently than expected. Try different spellings and review original records, i.e. McKane vs McCain or Kane/Cain.
- If a marriage takes place in the Scottish Church Records but no children are listed, they may be nonconformists/seceders.
- Widows may be listed under married or maiden names; check both.

## Research Helps

- Naming patterns:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> son** – named after father's father
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> son** – named after mother's father
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> son** – named after father
  - 1<sup>st</sup> daughter** – named after mother's mother
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter** – named after father's mother
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> daughter** - named after mother
- 1820 & 1855 - new registers with delayed entries recorded. Search for missing baptisms in these years.
- FamilySearch.org: click "Learning Center"
- Parish: Govt attached a number to ea. parish
- Consider handwriting, condition of records & availability.
- Nearly 40% nonconformity by 1851

## Countering Birth/Marriage/Death Under-Registration

- Kirk Session records
- Marriage registers of surrounding parishes
- Church burial registers (where extant)
- Monumental inscriptions (MI's) where they exist (i.e. the Mitchell Collections)
- Civil registration records of death and marriage
- Marriage Contracts: from Sasines
- Marriage Contracts: from Register of Deeds (sometimes given after husband's death)
- Blotter Registers - draft copies of about 75% parish registers. (Search the FHLC under the parish and 'Church Records').
- Register of Neglected Entries – from ~1820-1855
- Nonconformist reg.– in surrounding places

## Online Resources

- [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- [www.books.google](http://www.books.google) – books online
- [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) – many publ. Ch. Reg.
- [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk) (\$)
- <https://www.facebook.com/familysearch.org>
- [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk)
- [www.safhs.org.uk](http://www.safhs.org.uk)
- [www.scan.org.uk](http://www.scan.org.uk) – (\$)
- [www.scotlandsfamily.com](http://www.scotlandsfamily.com)
- [www.scotlandsplaces.com](http://www.scotlandsplaces.com) (\$)
- [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com)

## Church Records at The FHL

- On film – all known surviving records of the Church of Scotland – Old Parochial Registers; most cover early to 1855; a few go later. Check the FHLC by parish name and subject.
- On microfiche – an index (OPR) to births/baptisms and marriages to 1855. Indexed by given name & surname. No burials
- On computers – The Scottish Church Records index. Contains Established Church records and some others. Available in the DOS version of FamilySearch.
- The data *may* also be found in the International Genealogical Index found online at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). click “Search”; click “Browse all records collections”
- Some other types of church’s records are on film at the FHL. Look in the FHLC on the parish level. There are 202K books digitized at BYUarchives.edu including Scottish Record Soc.
- Catholic Church records are now indexed online at [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

## NonConformist Church Records in Scotland

Most church registers of the many denominations are held at the Scotland National Archives, 2 Princes Street, Edinburgh, Midlothian EH1 3YY, United Kingdom; website:

[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

However, some church registers have never been deposited for preservation

**Episcopal Church:** registers are scattered throughout country, held at each parish

**Roman Catholic:** records were digitised by Scotlandspeople

**Huguenots:** see Publications of the Huguenot Society at many research or university libraries or visit Huguenot Society of Great Britain online or at The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU, United Kingdom

**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons):** held at Salt Lake City Church Headquarters, & available mostly online at FamilySearch.org (visit/logon to FamilyTree)

**Presbyterian churches,** various seceding church denominations: some held in local custody; contact surrounding/nearest chapel congregations if yours closed down. Google to find their websites

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## “Learn by Doing” Exercise

### Gazetteers

- 1) On the internet, go to <http://scotlandspeople.gov.uk> and register with a username and password.
- 2) Login with your username and password
- 3) Under “Old Parish Registers” (left side margin), click “Births & Baptisms”
- 4) In Surname field/box, type the surname: “Reith”
- 5) In the Forename field/box, type the given name “Jane”
- 6) In the Date From, type: “1840”
- 7) In the Date To, type: “1850”
- 8) Ignore the “County/City” and “Parish” portion of the search page, and click: “Do the search”
- 9) How many “Jane Reith” results/hits did ScotlandsPeople’s system return for you?
- 10) Go back to the “Surname” field and in the box next to it, entitled “Surname Options”, highlight and click on “Surname Variants”; then click “Do the search”
- 11) How many results/hits were found this time?
- 12) Try performing this same search, only this time, type in as a given name, the name of “Stuart” next to “Jane”
- 13) How many hits were found?
- 14) What year was Jane Stuart Reith born and in which parish and county?
- 15) Re-do this search only this time, change Jane’s middle name spelling from “Stuart” and type instead—“Stewart”. How many hits did you receive?
- 16) Visit [www.byuarchives.edu](http://www.byuarchives.edu) of the Family History Library ([www.familysearch.org/catalog](http://www.familysearch.org/catalog)) and type in “Scottish Record Society”. Look for the parish of interest for *your* ancestor[s] by using the cntrl-F keys. See what’s available for the parish of Annan.

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