



## ST MARY'S CHELTENHAM PARISH RECORDS TRANSCRIPTION PROJECT 1558-1804

### The Cheltenham Parish Records

The ancient parish of Cheltenham served by St Mary's was divided into four tithings – Cheltenham, Alstone, Arle and Westal, Naunton and Sandford. Cheltenham tithing was in the north-east, with Alstone and Arle to the south-west and Westall, Naunton and Sandford forming an irregular area to the south. The tithing of Cheltenham also contained the main burghage area which in these records is sometimes referred to as 'the Borough'.

Gloucestershire Archives holds records for the parish church (now Minster) of St Mary's Cheltenham from 1558 to 1980. Only the early records to 1804 have been transcribed. This cut-off point may seem arbitrary, but at this date other sources become more readily available – besides those on the Web there are transcriptions (Phillimore and Gloucestershire Family History Society) and the first Census of 1801. Since there are no parish records for 1653-1676, the information was originally presented in two separate *Excel*<sup>®</sup> databases.

Information on the six Registers is set out below:

Register	Start date	End date	Events	Format	Dimensions inches (centimetres)	Nos. of Pages	Databases
1	17 Nov 1558	3 Mar 1630/31	BMD	Landscape	7½ x 10¼ (18 x 26)	234	<b>1558-1653</b>
2	28 Mar 1631	3 Nov 1653	BMD	Landscape	7¾ x 10 (19.5 x 25.5)	130	
3	4 Jun 1776	19 May 1703	BMD	Landscape	7¼ x 8¼ (19.5 x 21.5)	140	<b>1676 - 1804</b>
4	2 Jun 1703	30 May 1745	BMD	Portrait	11½ x 8 (29 x 20.25)	156	
5	2 Jun 1745	4 Aug 1769	BD Marr only to Mar 1754	Portrait	11¾ x 8 (30 x 20.25)	94	
6	2 Aug 1769	30 Dec 1804	B only	Portrait	12 x 8 (30.5 x 20.25)	92	

The starting date of November 1558 is the beginning of many parish registers. In 1597 it was ordered that all parishes should keep a bound register and that earlier records, from 1558, should be copied into them.<sup>1</sup> The St Mary parish books reflect this, with the pre-1558 records having been lost, decayed or destroyed.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cromwell, as part of his spiritual and administrative reforms, had decreed that registers should be kept from 1539 onwards. However, no set form was specified and the majority of early records, often made on loose sheets of paper, were lost.

The second book ends in 1653 when new legislation linked to the Commonwealth reforms was enacted and the records do not start again until 1776. The next significant date is Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, when it was decreed that to prevent 'clandestine marriages' a specific form of recording should be used.<sup>2</sup> At St Mary's the registering of marriages in the old format continued up to March 1754. Non-conformity, appearing in the records from c.1658 (see *dissenter* and *Quaker*) will also have had an effect on the accuracy of the registers. The Compton Ecclesiastical Census 1676 states that there were four Papists and 97 Non-conformists in Cheltenham. If Cheltenham's community followed the national pattern then most Non-conformist marriages and burials will have been recorded in the St Mary's Registers. Baptisms are likely to have been made by the individual Non-conformist ministers in the Non-conformist books.

### Editorial approach

There is no standard way of presenting transcribed parish registers, but the *Excel*<sup>®</sup> template that was devised by Nicholas Kingsley for the initial work was deemed to answer most of the problems set by the Cheltenham parish registers and therefore, with minor modifications, was used to complete the project. Transcribers made the initial transcriptions; this was then passed to a checker and finally was rechecked and readied for publication by the co-ordinator. All researchers should be aware that the original pages and ink were often of poor quality, that spelling at this date was eccentric, the clerk's handwriting (initially in Secretary Hand) was as individual as all handwriting is today and that wear and tear has taken its toll of the books. Occasionally, reference was made to the Bishop's Transcripts (BT) to verify a name, but the BT are copies of the original loose papers and can contain copying errors. Researchers can access the BT at the Archives and they can be used to check these transcriptions, though not every year is available.

### Method of recording

The entries follow a fairly standard format, for example:

1676 March

19 Bap<sup>t</sup> Henery son of Henry Gregory and Mary his wife

26 Bap<sup>t</sup> Mary daughter of William Humphris

27 Mar John Ashmead and Mary Bubb both of Cheltenham

30 Bur<sup>d</sup> John Gregory of Arle

The template standardises these original records, using columns for the first, second and third named persons, with further columns for any additional information, editorial comments and Gloucestershire Archives reference numbers, as set out below.

Column	Explanation
A	<b>Event:</b> baptism (Chr), marriage (Mar), burial (Bur), also birth (Born), death (Decd). Also on occasions column A is merged with columns B to S; this is so that the longer entries for Visitations, Ministers and Churchwardens can be entered (in <i>italics</i> ).
B	<b>Year:</b> prior to 1751 the New Year started on the 25 <sup>th</sup> March; so dates between 1 January and 24 March from 1558 to 1750 are dated thus 1558/1559; 1559/60; 1560/61, etc.
C	<b>Mon:</b> the months; Jan, Feb, Mar, etc. to Dec.
D	<b>Day:</b> from 1 to 31.
E & F	<b>First Person: SURNAME&lt;alias&gt;; Forename;</b> - the original spelling and abbreviations were adhered to.
G - I	Modern spelling

<sup>2</sup> It had to include the calling of the banns, the place of residence of both parties and the signatures of the bride and groom.

	<p><b>Title/Status:</b> e.g. Mr, Esq, widow, junior, elder, stranger, etc.</p> <p><b>Occupation:</b> see <b>Occupations pdf.</b></p> <p><b>Abode:</b> modern spelling is used, <b>except</b> where the location has not been identified, e.g. "Haskombe". For more information on locations see <b>Locations pdf.</b></p>
<b>J</b>	The <b>relationship</b> between the parties; ' <i>son of, daughter of, wife of</i> '; marriages are indicated by ' <i>and</i> '.
<b>K - O</b>	<b>Second Person:</b> repeats the information, as above, for the second person: usually the male relative or in the case of a marriage, the spouse.
<b>P - S</b>	<b>Third Person:</b> this information is very sparse, for example ' <i>and Ann his wife</i> ' and no occupations are recorded.
<b>T</b>	<b>Additional Information:</b> although rarely given, where it does occur, it is informative; e.g. ' <i>and buried the next day</i> ' or ' <i>buried shortly after</i> '. Occasionally there are longer entries, and these have been transcribed. You will find the transcriptions in <b>Notes pdf.</b>
<b>U</b>	<b>Editorial comment:</b> includes notes about the entry where the transcription is doubtful or an alternative can be offered.

### Editorial conventions

Where an entry is incomplete [BLANK] or [blank]

An illegible entry [ILLEG] or [illeg]

Where an entry is partially illegible HUM[...]IS and a suggestion is made in the editorial comments column – 'poss HUMPHRIS'

Some entries include the additional information for the death of an infant:

*Bap<sup>t</sup> 3 March Eliz<sup>th</sup> child of George Humphris and buried the next day*

*Bap<sup>t</sup> 16 John child of Jo<sup>n</sup> Ashmead and buried the following week.*

Where it is absolutely clear as to the date of the burial, as in the first example, the information is entered into the main text. Where the date is doubtful, second example, the information is included in the **Additional Information**, column **T**.

Sally Self, Project Co-ordinator, wishes to whole-heartedly thank all those people who gave so many hours peering at photocopies and fiches and making such valiant efforts to decipher the writing. Sally would be grateful to be notified of any discrepancies or further information bearing on this material. See Cheltenham Local History Society website for contact details.