

A brief guide to the chief series of records of genealogical interest in Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections

Introduction

The chief sources for genealogical research among the University Library's holdings relate to the diocese of Durham. Until the creation of the diocese of Newcastle in 1882 the diocese of Durham covered Northumberland (with the exception of some parishes and chapels until earlier in the 19th century) as well as the historic County Durham, and also Alston with the chapelries of Garrigill and Nenthead in Cumberland.

The Northumberland exceptions were Thockrington, a peculiar of the York prebend of Tockerington, and a small area around Hexham (Allendale, Allendale St Peter, Allenheads chapel, Bingfield St Mary, Carrshields or High West Allen, Hexham St Cuthbert, Ninebanks or Low West Allen, St John Lee, St Oswald in Lee and Whitley chapel) which was a detached part of York diocese. The Hexham and Hexhamshire parishes and chapels were transferred to the diocese of Durham in 1837, and Thockrington in 1851.

Crayke in north Yorkshire was a detached part of the diocese of Durham until transferred in 1837 to the diocese of York. The series of records for the diocese of Durham also cover the Bishop of Durham's ecclesiastical peculiar of Allertonshire in Yorkshire (Birkby, Cowesby, Hutton Bonville, Leake, Nether Siltan, North Otterington, Osmotherley and Thornton-le-Street). Some record series mentioned below also include records from the Dean & Chapter of Durham's peculiar of Allerton and Allertonshire in Yorkshire (Brompton, Deighton, High Worsall, Kirby Sigston, Northallerton, West Rounton). Both Allertonshire peculiars were transferred to the diocese of York following an order in council of 1846.

Durham Probate Records

These include:

1. Original wills proved in the diocese of Durham (including Northumberland and areas of Cumberland and Yorkshire as detailed above) 1540-1857. From the 16th century to c.1720's some are accompanied by inventories. (The Durham Dean & Chapter Muniments, also in the University Library's care, include a few earlier Durham wills.) The wills are arranged by the year in which they were proved, usually within a year or two of the testator's death but sometimes later.
2. Registered copies of wills proved in the diocese of Durham (including Northumberland and areas of Cumberland and Yorkshire as detailed above) c.1526/7 to January 1858. Few entries prior to the 1550's. There are gaps in the series, especially in the 17th century. Up to the early 17th century the registers also contain some copies of inventories.
3. Registered copies of wills proved at Durham District Probate Registry 1858-1940. County Durham wills only (and from 1926 Gateshead and some areas south of the Tyne were transferred to the Newcastle upon Tyne District Probate Registry).
4. Probate bonds for the diocese of Durham (including Northumberland and areas of Cumberland and Yorkshire as detailed above), 1558 (one only), 1565-1858. There are gaps in the series, particularly in the 17th century. Administration bonds (relating to intestates), will bonds (relating to executorships) and some tuition and curation bonds (relating to appointment of guardians for minors).
5. Original wills, inventories and bonds, 1670-1845 (with gaps), relating to the Dean and Chapter of Durham's peculiar of Allerton and Allertonshire in Yorkshire (Brompton, Deighton, High Worsall, Kirby Sigston, Northallerton, West Rounton). [Probate documents for the Bishop of Durham's Allertonshire peculiar are in the main series above].

Finding-aids

For (1), (2) and (4), modern card indexes cover the period up to 1690 and 1832-58. The intervening period is covered by two earlier manuscript index volumes (but not all documents recorded in these survive). A similar volume covers (5). For (3) there are annual indexes in each register, microfilms of which are available in the Search Room. The National Probate Calendars, available in the Search Room on microfiche for 1853-1935, also index the wills in (3) for those years, and are easier to use.

Note: copies cannot be supplied from the registers in (3); copies of the original wills for this period can be obtained from:

York Probate Sub-Registry
Duncombe Place
York
YO1 2EA.

Parish Register Transcripts

Transcripts of the registers of baptisms, marriages and burials for most parishes and chapelries in the diocese of Durham (including most of Northumberland and areas of Cumberland and Yorkshire as detailed above) c.1760-1840. There are gaps in most series, and few marriage records after 1837.

Finding-aid

List of the parishes and chapelries which are covered, with outside span dates. Note that the only original parish registers in the University Library's care are for Durham Cathedral 1609-1896 (in the Dean & Chapter Muniments) and Muggleswick 1783-1812 (in the Diocesan Records). Other original parish registers for County Durham are at Durham County Record Office.

Marriage licence applications

Papers relating to applications for marriage licences granted in the diocese of Durham from 1592 onwards (but very few before 1664). Main series includes coverage of most of Northumberland and Alston with its chapelries up to 1882 (Hexham and Hexhamshire only from 1837-1882), and Crayke in Yorkshire to 1837. Separate series of similar material for the Bishop of Durham's Allertonshire peculiar in Yorkshire c.1667-1881, with gaps. The applications relate only to marriages carried out by licence rather than following the calling of banns, and only to cases where both parties were resident in the diocese of Durham (or the Bishop's peculiar). They are arranged chronologically, not by place, and indexed only up to 1820. Special permission is necessary to consult applications less than 60 years old.

The series includes two types of document, bonds c.1664-1823 (with a few earlier examples), and allegations or affidavits from c.1738 onwards. Bonds were sworn statements that there was no impediment to the marriage and that the couple would marry in a specified church. Allegations or affidavits usually state the names, ages (but usually not the specific age if over 21), marital status and places of residence of the couple, and where the marriage was to take place; if either bride or groom was a minor, the document should also have named the parent or guardian consenting to the marriage. Information on occupations is sometimes given. The existence of a marriage application does not necessarily prove that a marriage took place.

Finding-aids

Calendar and index to the main series (not including Allertonshire bonds) for 1590-1815, available on microfilm in the Search Room, together with a printed version of the 1664-74 section; the calendar records virtually all the information in the original documents, and for the period 1590-1664 includes details of documents in antiquarian collections, the originals of which do not survive. Card index of parties and bondsmen 1816-20 available in the Search Room.

Diocese of Durham ordination papers

Papers from c.1730 onwards relating to ordinations of individual deacons and priests, arranged by date. Deacons' ordination papers are usually more informative genealogically, normally including a baptismal certificate and educational details. Special permission is needed to consult papers less than 80 years old.

Finding-aid

computerised database, available in Search Room.

Durham Bishopric Halmote Court Records

This extensive series of manorial court records deals primarily with copyhold land, and tenants thereof, on the estates of the Bishopric of Durham, mainly in County Durham, from c.1520 (with earlier copies) to 1953. Copyhold, which evolved from medieval villein tenure, was often an hereditary tenure. As the name implies, the copyholder's title was a copy of the court roll entry on which his or her admission to the holding was recorded. When a tenant died, or a holding was transferred for some other reason, the holding had to be surrendered to the manorial lord, the Bishop, and the claimant had to prove his or her title. Many surrenders and admissions were made "out of court" but the particulars were usually subsequently enrolled in the court book for the appropriate area.

The records of tenancy transactions in the Halmote Court books are therefore a rich source for family historians, and particularly valuable since they often deal with humble people who would not have made a will and have left little trace in other sources. Details of family relationships are often recorded. Ancestors may be mentioned, and maiden names and names of children are often given. Details of the property are always included. Court books are in Latin until 1733, and thereafter in English.

Finding-aids

lists of each series and sub-series, available in published form and (more up to date) on the Web. For genealogical research the series of court books (DHC1/I-IV) are of greatest interest. From 1720 there are separate series for each topographical division or head court, and each book has an index of persons who surrendered and persons admitted. Before 1720 transactions were entered in a single series of court books. These do not incorporate indexes, but a separate series of index and alphabet books (DHC1/VII) can be used, with some difficulties, to trace transactions relating to particular people.

Gretna Green marriage records in the Hudleston Papers

A series of original registers and loose sheets recording the irregular marriages performed by Robert Elliot and his predecessor, Joseph Paisley, at Springfield, Gretna Green, from the late 18th century to c.1839 (chiefly 1810 onwards).

Finding-aid

List and incomplete card index. [A list of known records elsewhere of other irregular Border marriages is also available in the Search Room.]

Other sources

Numerous pedigrees and much other genealogical information can be found in the antiquarian collections, family papers, and other ecclesiastical records in the University Library's care. The Local Collection includes the publications of the Durham and Northumberland Parish Register Society, and many other printed parish registers, family histories, records of heraldic visitations, local directories, newspapers, etc.

Further information on the Web: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/>

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