

# Diocesan records

## Background

The Diocese is the administrative area ruled over by the Bishop of Oxford. Below him is an Archdeacon for each Archdeaconry within the Diocese, the Rural Dean for each Deanery (a group of parishes within an Archdeaconry), and the vicar, rector or curate for each parish or joint benefice (linked group of parishes). The Diocesan Records are the administrative records of the Bishop, created in the running of the Diocese.

Oxford Diocese was formed in 1542, when the Archdeaconry of Oxford was split away from the huge Diocese of Lincoln. This did not please the Archdeacon of Oxford, who had been accustomed to a great deal of autonomy and now had a Bishop giving him orders. However, fate played into his hands; for 44 of the first 47 years of the Diocese there was no Bishop, and successive Archdeacons took on his duties.

This led to considerable confusion in the records; Bishops and Archdeacons used the same officials and clerks, these often wrote affairs pertaining to their masters in the wrong books, and sometimes it can be difficult to tell which records belong to the Bishop (the Diocesan records) and which to the Archdeacon (the Archdeaconry records). Demarcation was finally agreed in the Court of Arches after the Civil War and Interregnum.

Until 1836, Oxford Diocese consisted of the single Archdeaconry; only then was the Archdeaconry of Berkshire added, transferred from the Diocese of Salisbury. An attempt was immediately made to add the Archdeaconry of Buckingham from Lincoln Diocese, but Bishop Bagot objected and the transfer finally took place under Bishop Wilberforce in 1845.

## The following are the major classes of Diocesan records:

**Registers and Act Books** These are the central record of the actions of the Bishop. Much of the information they originally contained later spawned record classes of its own.

**Clergy Records** The dealings of the Bishop with his clergy, including ordinations, licensing and induction papers, and resignations.

**Records of Benefices** A benefice (or living) is a parish or group of parishes in its capacity of providing for the upkeep of the clergy who serve it. The records



include terriers (inventories of property), mortgages, glebe papers and records of Queen Anne's Bounty.

**Diocesan parish boxes** These contain the records relating to individual parishes/benefices from various other series after 1850.

**Churches** Records of places of worship, both Church of England and nonconformist.

**Parishioners** Papers relating to parishioners (the non-clergy) mainly concern schools, confirmations, recusants (those who follow other Christian faiths than the Church of England) and information on parish registers (**not** the registers themselves).

**Church Courts** The Bishop and Archdeacon had the right to try matters relating to the clergy and the morals of the laity (non-clergy); these are the records. They include papers relating to faculties and marriage bonds.

**Visitation** Senior clergy have the right to visit and inspect parishes; these are the records of the inspections and their outcomes.

**Letters and Memoranda** The correspondence of the Bishops and the notes made on the parishes and clergy in their care.

**Property records** Deeds, surveys, accounts and correspondence relating to the properties owned by the Diocese.

**Care of Churches** Records of the Diocesan Church Building Society and the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

**Education** Records of the Diocesan institutions concerned with education.

There are some odd strays among the Diocesan archives, including a few Militia papers.

## Where to find these records

The diocesan records are all with the Oxfordshire History Centre, including those after 1836 relating to Berkshire and those after 1845 relating to Buckinghamshire.



## Catalogue

The records themselves are not online, but the catalogue of the records is available on [Heritage Search](#). All the diocesan records have the prefix DIOC.

## More information

- Oxfordshire History Centre [catalogues](#)
- [Visiting](#) Oxfordshire History Centre
- [Contact us](#) to make an enquiry about the records