FOREST OF DEAN TRANSCRIPTION PROJECT

Progress to date

The first stage of the project has been to transcribe the Church of England registers, for the Forest of Dean and surrounding areas, covering the period 1812 to 1900+. To date just over 100,000 records have been transcribed, which represents about 40% of the total. The registers are being made available to the volunteers on either fiche or as digital imagery, and at the present time only another 40 are required to provide complete coverage of the following 39 churches/parishes:

Abenhall
Alvington
Awre
Beachley
Blaisdon
Blakeney
Bream
Bulley
Christchurch
Churcham
Cinderford St.John
Cinderford St.Stephen
Clearwell
Coleford
Drybrook
Dymock
English Bicknor
Flaxley
Hewelsfield
Huntley
Littledean
Longhope
Lydbrook
Lydney
Minsterworth
Mitcheldean
Newent
Newland
Newnham
Parkend
Ruardean
Staunton
St. Briavels
Taynton
Tibberton
Tidenham
Viney Hill
Westbury
Woolaston

Of the 40 remaining registers half will be bought as fiche, and the other half photographed at our next session at the GRO which is planned for Wednesday 8 November.

Are there any more parishes we need to add to this list?

Although we have made a good start there is still a lot of work to do to complete the project and so in the following paragraphs I have tried to summarise what still remains to be done and to give my views on the way ahead.

Transcription of pre-1812 registers

Of the 39 churches listed above 28 have pre-1812 registers which will be of great interest to our more experienced researchers. Of these 2, Ruardean and Longhope have been completed already, and volunteers are presently working on Dymock, English Bicknor, Newland and Westbury, thus leaving 22 still to be started.

After some thought I have concluded that the best way to handle the pre-1812 registers is for the volunteers to work in pairs, with each transcribing half of the data and then checking each others work. My reasoning is that the transcription will become increasingly difficult as we move backwards in time, and it will be easy for the volunteers to lose heart as the records become more difficult to read. However by working in pairs they will be able to support and encourage one another.

I have also concluded that it would be best to work with photographs taken from the original records. We will need to take more time and care if we are to obtain the best quality imagery, but with the continued help of May Brace and Wendy Ford who have given me so much support over the last 6 months, I am sure we can produce a good set of imagery for the volunteers.

Later registers

The GRO holds later registers for many of the Churches, but to date we have only been collecting and transcribing data up to the early 1900s. Because of privacy issues we are currently only making, baptisms up to 1905, marriages up to 1925 and burials up to 1945, available for online searching. However Dave is also storing later information, which has been transcribed, and is willing to do offline searches when requested.

We could therefore film and transcribe all the registers held by the GRO with the older data being held online and the rest offline.

Missing registers

Although all the registers at the GRO will soon have been acquired as either fiche or imagery, there are a few pre-1900 registers which are still in use in the Churches. These are as follows:

Awre baptisms post 1882

Awre burials post 1865

Churcham burials post 1872

Flaxley baptisms post 1889

Longhope baptisms post 1847

Minsterworth baptisms post 1868

For the sake of completeness we should try to visit these Churches and photograph the registers. May Brace did this very successfully for us at Mitcheldean, so I am hoping that with some help she will be able to do the rest over the next few months.

Non-conformist registers

Details of the Non-conformist registers held at the GRO are given in their Genealogical Handbook. From a quick look at this I have found that the coverage is very patchy with many registers missing, however for completeness I feel we should transcribe everything that is available and put it on the website.

May has made the point that quite a lot of the Non-conformist records are contained in the GRO online Genealogical Database, and that you can also purchase CDs of Non-conformist registers from the GFHS website.

I have made a list of what`s available from the Handbook and will check this for completeness with Paul Evans at the GRO. We can then assess how much of this information is already online, or available on CD, before making any final decision.

Border parishes

A number of people have suggested we should include some of the Herefordshire border parishes in the project. The ones suggested are Goodrich, West Bicknor, Walford, Hope Mansel, Weston under Penyard, Lea and Aston Ingham. This will require an agreement with the Herefordshire Record Office (HRO) to give us access to the original registers.

One of our project team, who lives in South Africa, has a great interest in some of these border parishes, and so I thought it would be best to wait until she is next in the UK, and then try and arrange a working party to get it all done in one go over 2 or 3 days. If this is agreeable, I will contact the HRO, and see what can be arranged.

Conclusions

I would be glad of any suggestions you might have on the above. When we are agreed I would like to put an abbreviated version on the website for comment.

24 October 2006