The History of Bishops' Transcripts

Following Thomas Cromwell's order in 1538 for parishes to record all baptisms, marriages, and burials, these events tended to be registered on loose sheets of paper or parchment which were sometimes lost or destroyed. So, in 1597 Elizabeth I ordered that not only should the records of baptisms, marriages and burials be recorded in a bound register but that an annual transcript from the parish register should be copied onto a single sheet of parchment and sent to the diocesan registrar, i.e. the bishop. These copies, prepared by the incumbent or the churchwardens, became known as 'Bishops' Transcripts' (BTs). Hardwicke's Act of 1754 resulted in more complete transcripts. After George Rose's 1812 Act ordering that baptisms, marriages and burials be recorded in separate, pre-printed registers, the bishops' transcripts became essentially duplicates of the original registers.

Information Provided by Bishops' Transcripts

In theory they should mirror the entries in the parish registers but the information recorded can sometimes be different, especially prior to 1812. Nevertheless they can be a valuable alternative source:
- as they may cover gaps in the original parish registers
- where the registers are in a fragile condition
- where there is difficulty in interpreting handwriting, as they may be written in a different hand to the registers.

Worcestershire Bishops' Transcripts

If a parish fell within the Diocese of Worcester there should be a set of bishops' transcripts covering the period of time that it remained in the Diocese. It is important to remember that the Diocese covers a different area to the County and also covered a much larger area than it does today. Consequently, you are likely to find transcripts for parishes in other counties, particularly Warwickshire and Gloucestershire.

Many marriages recorded in the transcripts up to 1840 may be found in *Boyd's Marriage Index* (First and Second Miscellaneous Series).

Limitations of Bishops' Transcripts

The transcripts start in 1598 but very few survive before 1608. In 1646, during the Commonwealth, the office of Bishop was abolished and was not resurrected until 1660. This means that there are no transcripts for this period. After 1837, when Civil Registration of births, marriages and deaths was introduced, marriage registers in particular were sent to the registrar rather than the bishop. The importance of producing the bishop's transcripts gradually declined until they ceased to exist after 1946.

Using this Handlist to Find a Microfilm

This handlist is divided into 2 parts:

- c.1600-1700 (arranged alphabetically by parish)
- c. 1701-1946 (arranged numerically by BA number)

Finding Bishops' Transcripts between c.1600-1700:

1 Find the relevant parish in the alphabetical sequence in Part 1 of this handlist and make a note of the Film No.

2 The alphabetical sequence only gives you the date range for a particular parish. If you wish to check whether there is a Bishops' transcript for a specific year, you need to consult the bound, brown place index to Bishops' Transcripts found in the Index Area.

3 When you have used the handlist to find the film you require, go to the drawers marked 'Bishops' Transcripts' in the cabinets. The films are arranged in numerical order. Take out the film, leaving one of your markers in its place.

Finding Bishops' Transcripts between c.1701-1837:

1 Find the relevant parish and year in the bound, brown place index to Bishops' Transcripts found in the Index Area.

2 Make a note of the full reference number, e.g. BA 2015/280/83.

3 Go to Part 2 of this handlist and look down until you find the Ref. No. you need.
    e.g. The reference for Abberton in 1719 is BA 2015/280/83 and the corresponding film number is 72.

Finding Bishops' transcripts between 1837-1946:

Go to part 2 of this handlist. Find the relevant parish or deanery in the parish column.

Please note this list is not in alphabetical order and a parish or deanery may be listed more than once throughout the list.