

Church Records

Dundee City Archives - Research Guide 06

Background

Following the 16th century reformation, the Church of Scotland became the established church in Scotland. However over the years, two secessions and a disruption, caused the church to split and created new churches. Groups that have split from the Church of Scotland, include the Reformed Presbyterian, Original Secession, Relief, United Secession, United Presbyterian, Free Presbyterian, Free Church, United Free and the Episcopalian churches.

Due to all of these splits in the church it is important to make sure you have the correct one. In villages or areas, there were often many Presbyterian churches, so families may not have attended the Church of Scotland kirk. Some of the churches later chose to go back to the Church of Scotland. However some did not and continue under a different denomination or as independent churches.

This guide covers the records of the Church of Scotland and those churches which split from the established church and rejoined (mostly in the 20th century).

Dundee City Archives holds the records of the Churches within the Presbytery of Dundee. These include churches in:

- Dundee,
- Broughty Ferry,
- Abernyte,
- Auchterhouse,
- Inchture & Rossie,
- Invergowrie,
- Kinnaird,
- Liff & Benvie,
- Longforgan,
- Monifieth,
- Monikie,
- Murroes,
- Tealing.

As well as the individual churches in the Dundee Presbytery, we also hold the records of the Dundee General Kirk Session, which covered the whole of the city. These are held under the reference CH2.

We also hold records of other protestant churches which united with the Church of Scotland in 1929. These include Free, United Free, Presbyterian and United Presbyterian Churches. These records are held under the reference CH3.

All of these records are held at Dundee City Archives on behalf of the National Records of Scotland. The records are all listed on their [online catalogue](#).

A list of the churches that we hold records for, can be found on [our website](#). Please note that this list may not be completely up to date. For more information on what records we hold for each church, please contact us.

What Records are there?

Kirk Session Minutes

The kirk session is a meeting of the church elders. Elders would meet to discuss the running of the church and the parish. Minutes can include detailed accounts of events within the parish. The Kirk would often pass down punishment on moral crimes, such as drunkenness, quarrelling, adultery, swearing and breaking the Sabbath. In some cases the kirk sessions can go into great detail. Unmarried mothers were often judged by the kirk session and accounts often include the name of the father. Information about marriages, baptisms and burials may also be mentioned in the minutes. Before 1845 the church also administered poor relief, so the minutes could contain details of individuals given poor relief. The Church usually also provided a school, so information about the schoolmaster and some pupils may also be recorded in the minutes.

Baptism, Marriage and Burial Registers

We only hold these records for a few churches. Please note all pre-1855 registers are usually held by the National Records of Scotland. However the Church of Scotland records have been digitized and can be searched via the [Scotland's People website](#). Please note that for burials within Dundee, please see the Burials Records Guide.

Church/Communion Roll

These records are usually contain a list of the names of the members of the church. Addresses, date of joining/leaving and further information could be included. Often just adults are recorded but children may also be noted. Some records are a register which is updated with new information. Others are produced at a particular time, i.e. all of the members on that date.

Seat Lettings Books

Rather like communion rolls, these usually just give the name and address of members. Individual or families who were members of the kirk could rent a seat within the church. The books will tell you how much they paid for their seat, and it should also be possible to work out where in the church they sat.

Accounts/Financial Records

Accounts will detail the money coming in to the church and how much they were spending. Individual payments by or to kirk members may not be listed. However the accounts will give you an idea of how much the kirk was paying out in poor relief, school expenses, maintenance of the church and much more.

School Records

Some church collections include records relating to the Sunday School. This could include minutes relating to the operation of the school, financial records, Sunday School attendance records or library borrowing records. Few records relating to the attendees of church-run schools exist. As mentioned above, information about the school is likely to appear in the kirk session minutes.

Records held elsewhere...

Generally more recent records could still be held by each individual church. If the records you are looking for are not held at Dundee City Archives, we advise that you contact the church to find out if they hold the record. If the record is quite old, i.e. early 20th or 19th century and it is not held by the Archives, then it is more likely that it has not survived. However it might be worth contacting the church just in case.