



# Melton Family History Group Inc

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Registered 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 1994

## August 2021-September 2021

Meeting Times: 6:30pm on the second Thursday of each month except for January

Venue: Melton Library – McKenzie Street, Melton

Membership Fee: \$25 per year payable July each year prior to August A.G.M.

Correspondence: 17 Sutherland Ave, Melton Sth, Vic, 3338.

President: Judith Bilszta

Vice President Janeen O'Connell

Secretary: Ian Bowey

Treasurer: Deborah Slattery

Email: sec.meltonfhg@outlook.com

Web site [www.meltonfamilyhistory.org](http://www.meltonfamilyhistory.org)

Committee Members: Sue Morton and Pauline Stotten

### 2021 Monthly Meetings at Melton Library in McKenzie Street.

12th August (A.G.M)	Malcolm Peacock
9 <sup>th</sup> September	Ian Arnold
14 <sup>th</sup> October	Terry Fogarty
11 <sup>th</sup> November	Christine Love. To be confirmed
9 <sup>th</sup> December	Christmas break-up.

All dates and times are subject to change

## **Update: Regular work:**

Because of the Covid rules our help sessions via Zoom restarted in early June. Our face to face library help sessions were resumed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July. Several members of the public arrived on that day requesting assistance. Sadly, our face to face meetings were again cancelled after just the one session due to restrictions by the Victorian Government. Restrictions were eased again so face to face sessions will resume early August.

For the same reason, our June monthly meeting was cancelled. Terry Fogarty was to be our guest speaker. Terry has kindly agreed to appear at our October meeting.

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The planned Researching Indian Ancestry workshop for May was postponed until the 31<sup>st</sup> of August. This is now a joint programme with Wyndham Libraries.

Another planned workshop is an Introduction to Family History. This workshop is to be held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August. Both workshops require bookings.

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## **Using Findmypast records:**

### ***3 top tips for tracing English Catholic ancestors:***

- 1) Use Findmypast's name variant tool to account for the many Catholic records that were written in Latin.
- 2) The Findmypast 'Diocese' search field allows you to focus your search on the most relevant region.
- 3) Between 1754 and 1837, only Church of England marriages were legal, so search beyond Catholic marriage collections.

### ***3 top tips for tracing criminal ancestors:***

- 1) See original mugshots in the MEPO 6, PCOM 2 and PCOM 4 series in the Findmypast crime collection.
- 2) Watch out for aliases. Criminals often used their mother's maiden name to conceal their identity.
- 3) Check newspapers for more information. Crimes and court appearances were reported in detail.

### ***3 top tips for tracing Welsh ancestors:***

- 1) Surnames like Jones, Evans and Davies are common in Wales. Research their origins.
  - 2) Welsh names often give clues to a place of origin. For example, Bryn means hill.
  - 3) With Findmypast's Welsh parish records, you can choose to search in English or native Welsh languages.
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## **The Parish Clerk.**

The office of Parish Clerk was at one time firmly rooted in the religious rather than the secular, where it now rests in the modern age. It is a very old office indeed, going right back to the early church before England existed as a unitary entity, back to the time of St. Augustine and the Saxon King Ethelbert.

The church in earlier ages had a far more influential role in the everyday lives of people and upon the laws of the land. Indeed, the parish church was the very centre of village life. The original Parish Clerks were church functionaries appointed by the local minister, never by parishioners, who were taken into Minor Orders and

had certain rights and privileges. They inhabited a kind of twilight world between clergy and laymen, being neither, but at the same time, subject to church law and not civil law.

In some parishes in England's West Country after the reformation, and especially when the local minister was responsible for more than one parish, the Parish Clerk was often raised to Major Orders as a Deacon so as to be able to officially undertake baptisms, marriages and funerals.

Such was the social status of Parish Clerks that they also had the right to vote in national elections, regardless of whether they were landowners or not. This right for Parish Clerks even existed prior to the 1832 Reform Act, which brought more people into the franchise. Today casting ones vote is so often seen by people as a tiresome inconvenience, but it should always be remembered that universal suffrage was a right that had to be hard fought for by our ancestors.

The earliest duties of the Parish Clerk on record give us a flavour of what his role was. He was expected to take responsibility for the parish school, so he would by definition need to be a man of letters and learning. He would also read the Liturgical Epistle in church, and sing the Psalms in Divine Service. These duties were enshrined into canon law in the decretals of Pope Gregory IX in the 13th century. His other duties involved were serving at the altar, giving out notices, keeping the keys and undertook an abundance of other duties.

The medieval Parish Clerk passed the *pax* around the congregation to be kissed, accompanied the priest whilst visiting the sick, distributed holy bread and carried the holy water bucket.

The Parish Clerk however, has now almost disappeared from the church and is rarely mentioned in the history books.

Whilst England at the time was a Catholic country it was preferred that the Parish Clerk was an unmarried man but in practice, most Parish Clerks were married. The office of Parish Clerk was often used as a stepping stone to higher religious office, and those seeking to enter the priesthood would remain celibate. After the reformation, such a restriction was unnecessary.

One very interesting duty of the Parish Clerk pre-reformation was to go from house to house in the village sprinkling holy water for a fee. This holy service was not considered optional either, and payment was expected.

During the English Civil War, many Parish Clerks out of necessity had to perform many clerical functions normally carried out by an ordained minister, including burials. During that time, Parish Clerks burying the dead were threatened with death by the Puritans if they used the Book of Common Prayer. It was a time when fine religious lines had to be trod.

It was traditional for the Parish Clerk to dress in a surplice; indeed, it was a requirement of office. A cassock may also have been worn beneath the surplice.

One very interesting 18<sup>th</sup> century function of the Parish Clerk during church services was that of 'Sluggard Waker'. His task was to keep a beady eye upon the congregation and to take note of any parishioners who appeared to be dozing off. These miscreants were unceremoniously rapped sharply on the head with a long straight pole of stout local wood, which was sometimes tipped with brass knobs, forks, or fox tails. A brass tip or fork would usually be used for waking the men, while the fox tail was used for waking inattentive female members of the congregation.

Nowadays, the duties of the secular Parish Clerk employed by the local Council are many and varied. These include arranging meetings, circulating the agenda, keeping the minutes of the matters discussed, dealing with correspondence, advising on rules, and responsibility for the presentation of the financial accounts – certainly a far cry from rapping the skulls of the sluggards and assisting with the religious services in church. It is such a shame that the Christian church has allowed such an ancient office to lapse. Whilst much of the above article is freely available from the internet, certain parts were taken from the web page of James of Glencarr entitled PARISH CLERKS Two Hundred Years of James Family Parish Clerks 1682 – 1888.

# Thanks, Thomas Cromwell

by Barbara Beaumont

He was not popular in his lifetime, and history has given him a bad rap, but we genealogists have cause to be grateful to Thomas Cromwell. In his role as Lord Privy Seal and Vice-Regent to Henry VIII, he instigated the system of parish records for England and Wales that, with various refinements over the ages, continued until civil registration began in 1837.

Prior to 1538 there was no system of recording these vital records. Four years after the establishment of the Church of England in 1534, all parishes were ordered to keep records of baptisms, marriages and burials taking place in their church or chapel, and to keep these in a secure coffer under lock and key. In 1555 Cardinal Pole added the requirement that the names of godfathers and godmothers be added to the register of baptisms.

Queen Elizabeth I reinforced Cromwell's system in 1558, but in 1597 a significant advance took place. The records had to be recorded on parchment, which was more durable than paper, and a copy had to be sent to the Bishop each year (now referred to as Bishop's Transcripts). In 1598 it was further ordered that records that had been written on paper earlier in the queen's reign were to be copied on to parchment. Thus we have some records dating back to this period, however not all of the early records survive; those that do are often lacking in detail, and may be written in Latin.



The Civil War and the Commonwealth (1642-1660) are a stumbling block for genealogists, as in most cases church registers ceased to be compiled. Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the old system of parish records was reinstated.

The next significant development was Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1754, which introduced Banns and licences, and required standardised forms for marriages, including the names of witnesses. Standardised forms for baptisms and burials were introduced in 1813. Baptisms recorded the names of both parents, the father's occupation, and the place of residence of the parents. Burials only required the name, age and place of residence of the deceased. Finally in 1837 civil registration began, which recorded births, marriages and deaths rather than baptisms, marriages and burials. ■

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▲ Image: Detail from *Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex* after Hans Holbein the Younger oil on panel, early 17th century, based on a work of 1532-1533 NPG 1727  
© National Portrait Gallery, London

The above article has been taken from June edition of 'Ancestor', the quarterly magazine of the Genealogical Society of Victoria. Many thanks to the author Barbara Beaumont for her kind permission in allowing this article to be used. Please note: the image of Thomas Cromwell is from the National portrait Gallery of London.

Cromwell was one of the strongest and most powerful proponents of the English Reformation. He helped to engineer an annulment of the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon so that Henry could lawfully marry Anne Boleyn. Henry failed to obtain the Pope's approval for the annulment in 1534, so Parliament endorsed the king's claim to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, giving him the authority to annul his own marriage. However, Cromwell subsequently charted an evangelical and reformist course for the Church of England from the unique posts of Vicegerent in Spirituals and vicar-general.

During his rise to power, Cromwell made many enemies, including his former ally Anne Boleyn. He played a prominent role in her downfall. He later fell from power, after arranging the king's marriage to German princess Anne of Cleves. Cromwell had hoped that the marriage would breathe fresh life into the Reformation in England, but Henry found his new bride unattractive and it turned into a disaster for Cromwell, ending in an annulment six months later. Cromwell was arraigned under a bill of attainder and executed for treason and heresy on Tower Hill on 28 July 1540. The king later expressed regret at the loss of his chief minister.

Until the 1950s, historians discounted Cromwell's role, calling him a doctrinaire hack who was little more than the agent of the despotic King Henry VIII. The 1911 *Encyclopædia Britannica* states "his power has been overrated." Geoffrey Elton, however, in *The Tudor Revolution* (1953), featured him as the central figure in the Tudor revolution in government, the presiding genius, much more so than the king, in handling the break with Rome and in creating the laws and administrative procedures that reshaped post-Reformation England. Elton wrote that Cromwell had been responsible for translating royal supremacy into parliamentary terms, creating powerful new organs of government to take charge of Church lands, and largely removing the medieval features of central government.

Subsequent historians have agreed with Elton as to Cromwell's importance, though not with his claims of "revolution. Leithead (2004) wrote, "Against significant opposition he secured acceptance of the king's new powers, created a more united and more easily governable kingdom, and provided the crown, at least temporarily, with a very significant landed endowment." Diarmaid MacCulloch credits the advancement of the most significant politicians and administrators of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, including William Cecil and Nicholas Bacon, to the influence and guidance of Thomas Cromwell at the start of their careers.

Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell was the great-grandson of Sir Richard Cromwell, Thomas Cromwell's nephew.

The above article with extra information on Thomas Cromwell was taken from Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia.

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## Researching the history of synagogues and mikvehs

Jews are mentioned in English ecclesiastical documents as early as 740 AD and came to England in significant numbers after the Norman conquest, settling in London and other towns of significant size: Bristol, Cambridge, Canterbury, Exeter, Gloucester, Hereford, Ipswich, Nottingham, Warwick, Worcester and York. After outbreaks of anti-Semitism, they were driven from England in 1290. Wales was under English rule by that time. There was no persecution of Jews in Scotland, but little to attract them there either at that date. Urban life was less developed in Scotland than in England. What's more - England and Scotland were at war. Most English Jews left for France and Belgium.

After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1496, Jewish refugees made their way from country to country. Some arrived in the south of Ireland. Others settled in Bristol and London between 1590 and 1600. The re-admittance was officially sanctioned in 1656, giving Jews freedom of worship. Subsequently political disturbance and anti-Semitism in Europe at various times caused more Jews to flee to Britain.

In the establishment of a new Jewish community, the rabbis of the Talmud gave top priority to the building of a mikveh - a ritual bath. Jews could congregate in their houses or rented rooms to worship until the community grew large enough and wealthy enough to build a synagogue. Both mikveh and synagogue should ideally be within walking distance, since travelling on the Sabbath is prohibited to Jews.

The earliest recorded synagogue in Ireland was a prayer room established in 1660 opposite Dublin Castle. The first post-medieval, purpose-built synagogue in England was the Bevis Marks, London, consecrated in 1701 and retaining much of its interior from that period.

**Finally, please do not forget our Annual General Meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August at 6:30pm at the Melton Library. Malcolm Peacock has agreed to be our guest speaker.**