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## **The Great Faces of Family History** by Barbara J Starmans

Throughout the last five hundred years, many individuals have contributed to the creation of the wealth of records that we as genealogists turn to, in our quest to trace our family history in the UK. Their reasons for initiating the collections of information were usually politically or religiously motivated, rather than stemming from a desire to leave an ancestral legacy for the generations to come. But whatever the rationality behind the archives, we owe these great faces of family history a debt of gratitude for leaving us a trail to follow.

### **Thomas Cromwell | 1538 | Introduction of Parish Registers**

We have Thomas Cromwell to thank for the introduction of parish registers in 1538.

Thomas Cromwell, the 1st Earle of Essex, was born about 1485 in London, the only son of Walter Cromwell, alias Smyth, a brewer, smith and fuller of Putney. Thomas married Elizabeth Wykes, the daughter of a shearman of Putney in about 1512. For some years, he engaged in business in London as a merchant and solicitor but from 1532 until his death, Cromwell served as chief minister to the infamous Tudor King Henry VIII of England.

In 1534, when King Henry VIII failed to obtain approval from the Pope in Rome to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon to marry Anne Boleyn, he broke from Rome and parliament endorsed him as the head of the new Church of England. His supporter, Thomas Cromwell, became Vicegerent for Spirituals and the Vicar General.

In his new role as the Vicar General, Thomas Cromwell, issued an order on 29 December 1538, that each parson, vicar or curate in each church was to keep a book and in it record each wedding, christening and burial made within the parish. Although many parishes were suspicious that the new orders were in preparation for some form of tax, most began keeping the new registers if only because any who failed to comply were to be fined three shillings and four pence.

Thomas Cromwell made many enemies as a strong advocate of the English Reformation. He fell from power after arranging the king's fourth marriage to a German princess, Anne of Cleves. The marriage between King Henry and Anne of Cleves was annulled after six months and Cromwell was arraigned under a bill of attainder. He was beheaded for treason and heresy on Tower Hill on 28 July 1540 and his remains were buried at the Town of London.

### **Dr. Daniel Williams | 1742 | Dr. Williams Library Protestant Dissenter's Registry**

We have the Rev. Dr. Daniel Williams to thank for an impressive collection of 50,000 Non-conformist birth records, recorded up until July 1837 when civil registration was introduced. These Protestant Dissenters' Registry birth records were transferred to the General Register Office in 1840 and are now part of the RG 4 series of records held by the National Archives.

Daniel Williams was born about 1643 in Wrexham, Denbighshire, Wales. A preacher from the age of nineteen, he ministered in Ireland until 1687 when he came to London and became the centre of the Non-conformist movement there. In 1675, he married Widow Elizabeth Juxon and after her death in 1698, he married another widow, Jane Barkstead in 1701, but had no children with either woman.

Rev. Dr. Daniel Williams died 26 January 1715/6 at Huxton, and was buried in a vault at Bunhill fields. His legacy of £50,000 was left primarily to charity, and his books, numbering 7600 volumes in all, were left along with a bequest to establish a library in his name as a centre for holdings relating to Protestant Non-conformity in England.

### **Philip Yorke, First Earle of Hardwicke | 1753 | Hardwicke's Marriage Act**

We have Philip Yorke to thank for the separate marriage registers that commence in 1753. These registers record not only the name of the bride and groom but also the names of the witnesses, the signatures of all parties, the occupation of groom and the residences of the couple marrying. The Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 was intended to prevent clandestine marriages and it required that all couples had to be married in the Church of England excepting only Jews and Quakers. In order for a marriage to be valid, besides being performed in the church, it could only take place either after the publication of banns or the obtaining of a licence. Those who were under twenty-one required parental consent to obtain a license.

Philip Yorke was born 1 December 1690 at Dover, the son of Philip Yorke and Elizabeth Gibbon. At sixteen, he began working at the attorney's office of Charles Salkeld in Holborn, London and was called to the bar himself in 1715. In 1719 he married Widow Margaret Lygon, and they had five sons and two daughters together. Yorke worked as a lawyer and politician and served as Lord Chancellor after 1737. He was a close confidant of the Duke of Newcastle, Prime Minister until his death on 6 March 1764.

### **Rev. William Dade | 1777 to 1812 | Dade Registers of Yorkshire**

We have the Rev. William Dade to thank for some wonderfully detailed parish registers of Yorkshire.

William Dade was born about 1740, the son of the Rev. Thomas Dade, the vicar of Burton Agnes in the East Riding of Yorkshire and his wife, Mary Norton. He attended St. John's College in Cambridge but left the college without a degree. In 1763, he received holy orders from the Archbishop Drummond and became the rector of St. Mary's in Castlegate, York.

By 1770, William Dade was the curate of two parishes in the city of York. While there, he introduced a new standard for recording baptisms and burials in his parishes. He wrote: "This scheme, if properly put into execution, will afford much clearer intelligence to the researches of posterity than the imperfect

method hitherto generally adopted.” For baptisms, Dade recorded the child’s name, it’s seniority in the family, date of birth, date of baptism, father’s name and occupation, mother’s name, the family’s abode and the grandparent’s names, occupations and abodes. Similarly, for burials, Dade included deceased’s name, date of death, date of burial, abode, occupation, parentage, age at death and cause of death.

In 1777, William Markham, the new Archbishop of York, decided to implement Dade’s standard throughout his diocese, including all of the East Riding and the city of York, most of the West Riding and part of the North Riding of Yorkshire. On 2 August 1790, after a period of ill health, William Dade died at Barmston but many Yorkshire parishes continued using his formats until pre-printed registers were introduced in 1812.

### **John Rickman | 1801 to 1841 | Census Records**

We have John Rickman to thank for the early censuses. Although few of the censuses from 1801 to 1831 survive, the 1841 census gives us the first picture of our ancestor’s family group.

John Rickman was born in August 1771, the son of a clergyman, and was educated at Oxford. In 1796 he wrote a paper suggesting that a census would give the government an advantage for military recruitment in the war with France. His paper was shown to Charles Abbot, a Member of Parliament who then hired John Rickman as his secretary. Abbot had Rickman prepare the first Census Act which he introduced to Parliament in late 1800.

In 1801, Rickman sent a census schedule to the overseers of the poor in each parish and asked them to fill in the number of houses and persons in their parish, along with their occupations and then to return the schedules to London. In 1811, 1821 and 1831, additional questions were asked including ages in 1821 and detailed occupational data in 1831. John Rickman was involved in the preparation for the 1841 census, but died on 11 August 1840, before it could be completed.

### **George Rose | 1812 | George Roses’ Act Preprinted Parish Registers**

We have George Rose to thank for the formatted, preprinted parish registers introduced in 1812.

George Rose was born near Brechin in Scotland in 1744, the son of Rev David Rose and Margaret, his wife. He had a very illustrious career and was Treasurer of the Navy, President of the Board of Trade, clerk of Parliament, Keeper of the Records in the Receipt Side of the Exchequer, a Lord of his Majesty’s Privy Council, an Elder Brother of the Trinity House, Verderer of the New Forest in Hants and Member of Parliament for the town of Christchurch.

In February of 1812, George Rose, after some comments on the current, imperfect way of keeping Parish Registers, moved for leave to bring in a Bill to improve them to aid in the proof of pedigrees of persons inheriting property or personal estates. On 31 December 1812, the act, named after Rose, went into effect and from that date onwards, all baptisms, marriages and burials were to be recorded in parish registers to be provided by His Majesty’s Printer at the expense of the parish. Every entry and every page was to be numbered and the entries were to be filled in as soon as possible after each ceremony in a fair and legible hand.

Rose died at the age of seventy-four on 13 January 1818.

### **Sir Richard John Griffith | 1848 to 1864 | Griffith Evaluation**

We have Richard John Griffith to thank for the Griffith Evaluation, one of the few surviving records of Irish land occupiers between 1848 and 1864.

Richard Griffith was born in Dublin, Ireland on 20 September 1784, the son of Richard Griffith and his wife, Charity Yorke Bramston. He studied in Edinburgh and after a year with the Royal Irish Artillery, he turned to civil engineering and mining. He was made a member of the recently established Geological Society of London in 1808 just prior to returning to Ireland.

In September of 1812, he married Maria Jane Waldie and over the course of the following decade, Griffith made many geological surveys and reports related to mineral deposits in Ireland. In 1825, he was appointed by the government in Ireland to complete a boundary survey of Ireland, making the boundaries of every county, barony, civil parish and townland. In 1827, he was appointed Commissioner of Valuation and in 1830 he began compiling Griffith's Valuation. This detailed valuation is invaluable for genealogists because the Irish census records prior to 1901 were lost in a 1922 fire in the Public Records Office.

Richard Griffith died at the age of ninety-four, on 22 September 1878 at his home in Dublin.

### **Thomas Henry Lister | 1837 | Civil Registration**

Thomas Henry Lister was the first Registrar General, head of the General Register Office from 1836 until he died in 1842 and we have him to thank for those early birth, marriage and death registration indexes and certificates.

Thomas Henry Lister was born in 1800 and attended Cambridge University briefly, but left without a degree. From 1826, when he published his first novel, Granby, he continued to pursue his career as a novelist, even after 1836 when he was appointed as Registrar General.

While the system of recording baptisms, marriages and burials in parish registers by the Church of England had been in place for centuries, with the increase in Non-conformists and more acceptance of the Catholics and other dissenting religions, it was recognised that a civil registration system was needed to ensure that births, marriages and deaths did not go unrecorded. The General Register Office was created in 1836 and civil registration commenced 1 July 1837 in England and Wales. The office was set up in London and Thomas Henry Lister was appointed. England and Wales were subdivided into 619 registration districts, based on the poor law unions formed in 1834. Each of these districts were further subdivided into sub-districts. A Superintendent Registrar in each sub-district would take registrations and then send a copy to the GRO in London every quarter, at the end of March, June, September and December. From these returns, the GRO would create indexes that could be used by the public to order birth, marriage and death certificates.

When Thomas Henry Lister died of tuberculosis at the age of forty-two, his death was registered in the June quarter of 1842, the registration district of Westminster in volume 1, page 329.

**Sidebar:**

From the London Evening Post on 26 March 1774, came the following news article, reporting on the Sunday prior to the date when the new Hardwicke's Marriage Act came into force:

*"The 14th Instant being the last Sunday of the Time allowed before the Commencement of the new Marriage Act, there was a prodigious Report to Mr. Keith's Chapel at May Fair, of young People desirous of taking a Voyage to the Land of Matrimony, before the Embargo upon all Shipping in the Port of Hymen should Take Place. Before Eleven o'Clock, forty-five Couple were joined in the Holy Bands; and a vast Number besides were then waiting their Turns. Two Men were constantly and closely employed in filling up Licences."*

From the Trewman's Exeter Flying Post on 5 March 1812, came the following news article, protesting George Rose's new pre-printed registers:

*"We have seen a printed circular addressed 'to the parochial Clergy and others,' alleging that the Bill introduced into the House of Commons, last Session, and as attended by the Committee, 'for the better regulating and preserving Parish Registers of Births, Baptisms, marriages and Funerals;' is fraught with much inconvenience to the Clergy--that it requires of them things impracticable, &c, and exhorting them to exert all the influence they may have with the members of either House of Parliament to prevent the same from passing into a law.*