

# **PROTESTANT NONCONFORMIST ARCHIVES IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

Dr Clive Field  
University of  
Birmingham  
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# OVERVIEW

- Introduction
- Archive Map
- Commentary: 5 Observations
- Recommendations: 10-Point Action Plan

# INTRODUCTION: Nonconformity

- Protestant Nonconformity, also known as Religious Dissent or Free Churches
- Broad theological definition, including Trinitarian/non-Trinitarian Christians who not Anglican, Roman Catholic or Orthodox
- 350 years of formal history with much earlier antecedents
- Numerically significant, eg in 1851 113 bodies, 22,900 chapels, 6,842,000 attendances in Britain; in 2005 29,600 chapels, 2,805,000 members in UK
- Influence disproportionately large in relation to numbers, eg Quakers and Unitarians

# INTRODUCTION: Research Inputs

- First systematic mapping and evaluation since British Records Association, 1936
- Extensive literature review
- Detailed searches on 70 websites, including generic databases such as Access to Archives, Archives Hub, National Register of Archives
- Qualitative survey of archives by email – 42 responses (of 49 approached) covering achievements, challenges and opportunities for collaboration

# INTRODUCTION: Research Outputs

- Report of 11,500 words
- Bibliography of 140 items
- Contact details for 65 repositories
- Survey responses for 42 archives
- Overview in this presentation

# ARCHIVE MAP: General

- Will not explain denominational background/history
- Describes current disposition, not necessarily history of archives nor their formal ownership
- Focus on institutional records, not personal papers
- Focus on manuscripts and archives, not printed materials which part of hybrid collections
- Not all denominations covered (more detail in main report)
- Denominations introduced chronologically followed by Wales, Scotland, Ireland and general resources

# ARCHIVE MAP: 17<sup>th</sup> Century

## BAPTISTS

- Angus Library (Regents Park College, Oxford) main repository – holds national, overseas mission and some local records, plus personal papers
- Dr Williams's Library has national and some local General Baptist records
- Otherwise local records with local repositories, Strict Baptist Historical Society Library, Gospel Standard Baptist Library, Unitarian Archives, John Rylands University Library or retained by churches

# ARCHIVE MAP: 17<sup>th</sup> Century

## CONGREGATIONALISTS

- Congregational Library (co-located with Dr Williams's Library) and Dr Williams's Library (incorporating New College Library) combined main repository – hold national and some local records, plus personal papers
- Overseas mission records generally at SOAS
- Most local records with local repositories or retained by churches



# ARCHIVE MAP: 17<sup>th</sup> Century

## PRESBYTERIANS AND UNITARIANS

- Dr Williams's Library, Unitarian Archives, John Rylands University Library and Harris Manchester College, Oxford main repositories for national records and personal papers, but also hold some local records
- Otherwise local records with local repositories or retained by churches (Unitarian Historical Society maintains register on web)

# ARCHIVE MAP: 17<sup>th</sup> Century

## RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)

- Friends House Library main repository for national, overseas mission and some (London/Middlesex only) local records, plus personal papers
- Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre has some personal papers
- Local records mostly with local repositories

# ARCHIVE MAP: 18<sup>th</sup> Century

## METHODISTS

- John Rylands University Library main repository for national and district records and personal papers
- Overseas mission records at SOAS
- Smaller national/personal collections at Wesley College, Bristol, New Room, Bristol, Methodist Studies Unit, Oxford and Duke, Southern Methodist and Drew Universities in US
- Most local records with local repositories
- Independent Methodists and Wesleyan Reform Union have separate archives

# ARCHIVE MAP: 18<sup>th</sup> Century

## MORAVIANS

- International Unity Archive at Herrnhut, Germany
- British Province archive remains with Church – comprises national, overseas mission and some local records, plus personal papers
- Some national records and personal papers at John Rylands University Library
- Other local records with local repositories or retained by congregations

# ARCHIVE MAP: 18<sup>th</sup> Century

## COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON'S CONNEXION

- Cheshunt Foundation (Westminster College, Cambridge) main repository
- John Rylands University Library has additional personal papers

## INGHAMITES

- John Rylands University Library main repository
- Some local records with local repositories

# ARCHIVE MAP: 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## NEW CHURCH (SWEDENBORGIANS)

- Swedenborg Society main repository for national, overseas mission and local records, plus personal papers

## SOUTHCOTTIANS

- Archives at 13 British and US repositories, but principal collection at British Library, with next largest at University of Texas at Austin and London Metropolitan Archives

# ARCHIVE MAP: 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## PLYMOUTH BRETHREN

- John Rylands University Library main repository for national, overseas mission and local records, plus personal papers

## CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH (IRVINGITES)

- No official archive, but important unofficial collections of national material at Universities of Birmingham and St Andrews, and West Yorkshire Archives Service, and of local records at Borthwick Institute of Historical Research

# ARCHIVE MAP: 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND

- National records at Westminster College, Cambridge and local records at local repositories

## FREE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

- No official archive, but relevant material at Lambeth Palace Library, and some local records in local repositories

## SALVATION ARMY

- Salvation Army International Heritage Centre main repository for international, national and local records, plus personal papers



# ARCHIVE MAP: 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## LATTER-DAY SAINTS (MORMONS)

- Main repository for British mission is international Church archive centre in Salt Lake City

## CHURCHES OF CHRIST (CAMPBELLITES)

- University of Birmingham main repository for national and local records

## CHRISTADELPHIANS

- Christadelphian Office Library main repository

# ARCHIVE MAP: 19<sup>th</sup> Century

## SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS

- Newbold College main repository for national, overseas mission and local records, plus personal papers

## JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- No central archive, but some local records in local repositories

# ARCHIVE MAP: 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## PENTECOSTALISTS

- Include Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God, Elim Church, New Testament Church of God, and many others
- Donald Gee Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Research (Mattersey Hall) main repository
- Some Apostolic Church records at West Glamorgan Record Office and some Elim local records in local repositories

## HOLINESS CHURCHES

- Church of Nazarene is largest, and its main repository is at Nazarene College

# ARCHIVE MAP: 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

- Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches holds national and (for churches whose trusts managed centrally) local records

## UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

- National records at Westminster College, Cambridge and local records, if deposited, with local repositories

## NEW CHURCHES

- Association of Vineyard Churches and Newfrontiers main groupings – apparently no archive as yet

# ARCHIVE MAP: Wales

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES (CALVINISTIC METHODISTS)

- National Library of Wales (NLW) main repository for national, overseas mission and local records, plus personal papers
- Some local records in local repositories

## BAPTISTS

- NLW has largest collection of local records
- Some material at Welsh Baptist Union Library

# ARCHIVE MAP: Wales

## CONGREGATIONALISTS

- NLW holds national and many local records

## WESLEYAN METHODISTS

- NLW holds national and some local records, especially for Welsh-speaking Methodism
- Most local records in local repositories

## RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

- Local records in local repositories

# ARCHIVE MAP: Scotland

## PRESBYTERIANS

- Include Church of Scotland, Secession Churches, Free Church of Scotland, United Presbyterian Church, United Free Church of Scotland
- National records split between National Archives of Scotland (NAS) and New College Library
- Overseas mission records mostly at National Library of Scotland (NLS)
- Local records mainly in local repositories but NAS also holds some
- Personal papers especially at New College Library

# ARCHIVE MAP: Scotland

## BAPTISTS

- Scottish Baptist History Archive (Baptist Union of Scotland) main repository

## CONGREGATIONALISTS

- National records split between NAS, Glasgow Archives and Special Collections, and New College Library
- Local records mainly in local repositories



# ARCHIVE MAP: Scotland

## UNITARIANS

- National and some local records at Glasgow Archives and Special Collections

## RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

- NAS is main repository

## METHODISTS

- Records split between NAS and local repositories

# ARCHIVE MAP: Ireland

## PRESBYTERIANS

- Include Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
- National and local records split between Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Gamble Library (Union Theological College) and Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), but PRONI has microfilmed Presbyterian records extensively

# ARCHIVE MAP: Ireland

## BAPTISTS

- Irish Baptist College Library main repository

## CONGREGATIONALISTS

- PRONI main repository

## RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

- Dublin Friends Historical Library main repository
- Ulster Society of Friends Library holds Ulster records

# ARCHIVE MAP: Ireland

## METHODISTS

- PRONI holds most official records and many Ulster local records
- Wesley Historical Society in Ireland holds most other records and personal papers at its branches in Belfast and Dublin

## MORAVIANS

- Records retained by Church but copied by PRONI

# ARCHIVE MAP: Generic Sources

## INTERDENOMINATIONAL

- Dr Williams's Library premier resource for Old Dissent but also holds Free Church Council archives
- Protestant Dissenting Deputies archives at Guildhall Library and Liberation Society archives at London Metropolitan Archives

# ARCHIVE MAP: Generic Sources

## ANGLICAN

- Lambeth Palace Library important resource for Anglican Nonconformist relations
- Local repositories contain ecclesiastical court presentments of individuals and clergy visitation returns

## STATE

- The National Archives (TNA) hold non-parochial registers to 1837, chapel trust deeds, meeting house registrations, 1851 religious census
- Local repositories hold quarter session records which contain court presentments of individuals and meeting house registrations

## COMMENTARY: Lack of Strategy

- Nonconformist Churches not generally noted for strong sense of archival ownership and strategy, nor engagement with modern records management
- Concerted attempts to safeguard archives mostly made retrospectively, in late 20<sup>th</sup> century, often through initiative of individual(s)

## COMMENTARY: Lack of Strategy

- One reason that archives have low priority in relation to Nonconformity's focus on evangelical here-and-now, spreading gospel
- Another reason that power-base of Nonconformity has been local chapel, in hands of minister but especially lay officials, making it difficult to get compliance with national initiatives



## COMMENTARY: Loss of Archives

- Significant loss of official records (national and local), caused by ...
- Denominational indifference (as above)
- Early persecution disincentive to record-keeping
- Turnover of meeting-places in early days disruptive of record-keeping

# COMMENTARY: Loss of Archives

- Chapel closure in late 20<sup>th</sup> century leads to disappearance of archives
- Nonconformist fissiparousness disruptive of record-keeping
- Destruction of records in natural and man-made disasters
- Personal papers have survived far less well than official records
- Digital records and websites at considerable risk

## COMMENTARY: Complexity of Map

- Large number of individual repository players
- Multiple models of provision, funding and governance
- Very unpredictable and confusing for researchers
- High dependence on denominational or 'private' provision
- Dr Williams's Library major 'private' provider
- John Rylands University Library and (for overseas missions) SOAS major public providers

## COMMENTARY: Complexity of Map

- Of national archives, NAS and PRONI important players, TNA for state records only, National Archives of Ireland not significant
- Of national libraries, NLW important player, NLS for overseas missions, British Library and National Library of Ireland relatively insignificant
- All local authority repositories and some university repositories hold local records
- Many local records retained by churches

# COMMENTARY: Collaboration

- Some mechanisms already exist for repositories to work together, eg
  - Religious Archives Group
  - Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries
  - Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries
  - Association of Church Archivists of Ireland

# COMMENTARY: Collaboration

- Research Support Libraries Programme helped foster some project-related collaboration, eg Mundus
- Archives do work with international denominational counterparts
- However, all in all, not much deep intra-national collaboration between repositories (eg on collection development, cataloguing and preservation) in evidence until last few years

# COMMENTARY: Collaboration

- Barriers to repository collaboration include:
  - Lack of time – heads above water syndrome
  - Lack of national infrastructure, eg online catalogues
  - Parochialism of denominational governing bodies and advisory groups – guarding independence syndrome
- Few formal links with academic stakeholders until recent years

# COMMENTARY: Under-resourcing

## GENERAL FUNDING

- Issue highlighted by recent sale of Shakespeare First Folio by Dr Williams's Library
- However, much evidence of under-resourcing from current survey, particularly in 'private' archives
- Resourcing of archives generally less than of libraries and museums



# COMMENTARY: Under-resourcing

- Religious archives generally seen as less 'glamorous' than literary or political archives
- Nonconformist archives affected by:
  - Funding pressures on parent denominations with decline of historic Nonconformity
  - Difficulty of 'private' repositories qualifying for public funding
  - Nonconformist opposition to applying to Lottery
  - Declining funding power of, and increasing demands on, specialised Nonconformist trusts

# COMMENTARY: Under-resourcing

## REVENUE FUNDING

- Tiny numbers of fte professional and para-professional staff
- Huge dependence upon volunteers in 'private' archives (with variable quality of effort)
- Limited opening hours in many 'private' archives
- Expanding customer base, especially on genealogical side
- Increasing remote enquiries, especially by email

## COMMENTARY: Under-resourcing

- Effort tends to be drawn away from cataloguing, leading to growing backlogs
- Major retrospective conversion challenge, with only limited availability of detailed finding aids online, relative to non-religious archives (TNA survey, 2005/6)
- Website presence in general often at minimalist end of spectrum

# COMMENTARY: Under-resourcing

## CAPITAL FUNDING

- Less of an issue for acquisitions, apart from personal papers
- Despite some new schemes, generally pressures on quantity and inadequacy of quality of collection storage
- Preservation and conservation universal challenges, although some needs assessments and fundraising under way, and there has been some preservation microfilming (often with third parties)
- Large (5m pages) digitisation project on Church of Scotland records, otherwise only small-scale activity

# RECOMMENDATIONS: 1

- Focus in recommendations is on collaborative actions, on assumption that repositories will pursue unilateral actions as appropriate
  1. More frequent and effective collaboration between repositories, under auspices of Religious Archives Group and with support of TNA, to improve information flow, share best practice, and facilitate targeted joint planning and working – recent improved networking among literary archives may be a model

## RECOMMENDATIONS: 2-3

2. Stronger advocacy on behalf of Nonconformist archives, to ensure their existence and importance kept in public mind, and to redress any image problems – requires deep engagement with academic historians and with friendly journalists and Parliamentarians, and marketing know-how
3. Concerted action to ensure all non-current chapel records transferred to suitable repository, either denominational or (preferably) local – such records especially at risk given chapel closures – Nonconformist equivalent of *Keep or Bin?* needed

## RECOMMENDATIONS: 4-5

4. Co-ordinated national campaign, working with denominational headquarters and academic historians, to agree most influential Nonconformist leaders of late 20<sup>th</sup> century and to secure deposit of their papers in suitable repository
5. Agreement by all repositories a) to report accessions expeditiously to National Register of Archives and b) to create within specified timescale (say, three years) collection-level descriptions for all principal Nonconformist collections and to include such descriptions in freely accessible existing online archive catalogue

## RECOMMENDATIONS: 6-7

6. Agreement by selected repositories to secure external funding for research-focused project, also including some resource creation (eg database of Nonconformist ministers) or resource enhancement (eg cataloguing) component – £8m AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme possible target
7. Agreement by selected repositories to seek external funding for family and community history-focused project, cataloguing, conservation and digitisation of photographs being one option – Lottery funding possible target



## RECOMMENDATIONS: 8-10

8. Agreement by selected repositories to seek external funding for oral history-focused project, in conjunction with National Life Stories – could cover elites and/or people in pews
9. Accelerated focus on archiving of Nonconformist websites, in conjunction with UK Web Archiving Consortium
10. Consideration to major exhibition or event in 2012 to mark 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Great Ejection, often seen as formal start of Nonconformity – could align as contribution to London's Cultural Olympiad

# RECOMMENDATIONS: Summary

- Action plan obviously not complete answer to all issues arising from current research, but a start
- Represents balanced portfolio which tackles old- and new-style archival formats and should help stem loss of records
- Should also considerably raise visibility of Nonconformist archives and deepen engagement with range of stakeholders and users
- We owe it to our Nonconformist forebears, and to posterity, to try to implement at least some of this!