

**Mark Burden, Michael Davies, Anne Dunan-Page and Joel Halcomb**  
***An Inventory of Puritan and Dissenting Records, 1640-1714***  
**(2016)**

**Introduction (by Mark Burden)**

**Objectives**

The primary purpose of this *Inventory* is to provide a comprehensive, reliable and detailed list of every church book, register, and account book from a Presbyterian, Congregational, or Baptist church in England, Wales, and Ireland which either dates from or copies information relating to the period 1640-1714. The authors of the *Inventory*<sup>1</sup> are of the view that such an account of the surviving records of Puritan and early dissenting congregations has long been needed to counteract the overreliance of historians and literary scholars on impressionistic and inaccurate antiquarian histories of these churches. While considerable work has been done to reclaim and reinterpret the manuscript inheritance of the Congregational churches in North America and the Huguenot consistories in France,<sup>2</sup> very little was known about surviving manuscripts from the British churches until we began work on the *Inventory*. The older histories and their more recent derivatives tended to reinforce the notion that early Puritan and dissenting churches quickly established themselves as recognisable bodies, with settled views on theology and church government, which gradually developed into the intellectually and architecturally familiar dissenting institutions of the nineteenth century. As a team of researchers, we have been keen to challenge some of these assumptions in our previous and forthcoming work, much of which takes as its starting point the investigation of early dissenting manuscripts, or the political significance of the Puritan churches in the mid seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> This inventory contributes to the process of systematically challenging the familiar linear, diachronic narratives, enabling scholars to investigate these congregations and their manuscripts in relation to each other and as products of their time, rather than as precursors of the nineteenth-century dissenting interest. Equally importantly, we hope that the *Inventory* will encourage researchers to investigate these churches and their records for their own sake, rather than simply mining them for biographical information or referring to them obliquely in wider narratives of political and religious change.

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Bendroth, James F. Cooper and Ken Minkema, 'New England's Hidden Histories: Colonial-Era Church Records', <http://www.congregationallibrary.org/neh/main>, and Raymond Mentzer, *Les registres des consistoires des Églises réformées de France, XVIe - XVIIe siècles. Un inventaire* (Geneva, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Joel Halcomb, 'A Social History of Congregational Religious Practice during the Puritan Revolution' (PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 2009); Mark Burden 'Sabbatarianism, Literary Form, and the Lothbury Square Church Book, 1652-4' (Dissenting Experience Blog, 2016) <http://dissent.hypotheses.org/1716>; Michael Davies, Anne Dunan-Page and Joel Halcomb (eds), *Dissenting Hands (1500–1700)*, an issue of *Bunyan Studies* (forthcoming, 2016); Michael Davies, Anne Dunan-Page and Joel Halcomb (eds), *Church Life in Seventeenth-Century England: Pastors, Congregations, and the Experience of Dissent* (OUP, under contract for 2017); Michael Davies (ed.), *The Bunyan Church Book 1656–1710* (OUP, forthcoming).



### Parameters for Inclusion

The main focus of the *Inventory* is to summarize information from existing catalogues in order to make it easy to locate important documents. We have not included the numerous records of the Presbyterian kirk in Scotland, since the Scottish Presbyterians did not generally consider themselves to be dissenters during this period. Neither have we included loose deeds, registration documents, or private papers relating to church officers and members. Later manuscript copies of each text are recorded where known, but microfilms are not listed. The earliest version of the *Inventory* consisted of a handlist of about 50 items compiled by Michael Davies, Anne Dunan-Page and Joel Halcomb from their own research. Since then, the number of documents included has increased nearly seven-fold as a result of our systematic investigation of repository catalogues across the second half of 2015; subsequently, the details have been checked either by the *Inventory*'s authors, or by repository staff, who have provided many corrections, clarifications and further lists of sources. All manuscripts listed from Regent's Park College Oxford, Dr Williams's Library and the Congregational Library have been checked in physical form by the authors; all of the registers at The National Archives which have been listed in the *Inventory* have been viewed digitally via [Bmdregisters.co.uk](http://Bmdregisters.co.uk) by Mark Burden. The next stage of our research into dissenting church books, beginning in July 2016, will involve checking the rest of the manuscripts in person; the results of our investigations into the contents of all 350 manuscripts will appear in our projected 'Calendar of Puritan and Dissenting Records, 1640-1714'.

### Geographical Spread

356 documents have so far been identified which fit our original brief, and of these, well over half were compiled during the period itself. The remainder consist of copies of early documents, mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With only two known exceptions,<sup>4</sup> all of the records relating to the Civil War and Commonwealth continue to the 1689 Toleration Act and beyond; at least 87% (317) of the total 356 documents contain information relating to the period after 1714; at least 229 records continue into the Georgian period but conclude prior to the Registration Commission submissions in 1837; around 85 documents were produced or added to during the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The largest concentration of records occurs in the East and South East of England and London, although this proportion is magnified by the number of copies produced by a small handful of enthusiastic nineteenth-century antiquarians. Nevertheless, even when these copies are discounted, the number of surviving manuscripts from these regions is remarkable and parallels the distribution of Puritan gathered churches and early Nonconformist churches in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, comparatively few records have yet been identified relating to the North East and North Yorkshire, Wales, and the West Midlands. Although there were fewer Puritan and Nonconformist churches in these regions during the later Stuart period, there was still a considerable Nonconformist interest in both Wales and Yorkshire underpinned by sympathetic gentry and

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<sup>4</sup> Bod. Lib. Rawl. MS D828: Lothbury Square (1652-4) and RPCO Hampshire: Broughton Church MS 1/1 (1655-84).

<sup>5</sup> Reliable figures for the geographical distribution of dissenting churches in this period have yet to be produced; the best estimates appear in A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1934); see also G. L. Turner, *Original Records of Early Non-conformity*, 3 vols. (London, 1911), Alexander Gordon, *Freedom after Ejection* (Manchester, 1917), DWL MS OD161: The dissenters' Common Fund Survey, c.1690-2, and DWL MS 38.4: John Evans's list of dissenting congregations, c.1715.



ejected ministers; it is therefore to be hoped that there may be more records to be found which relate to these areas, perhaps deposited in private archives, buried among other papers, or exported to Scotland, continental Europe, or North America.

### **Repository Catalogues**

The two main watchwords for the organization of this *Inventory* have been usefulness and consistency, although these objectives inevitably come into conflict at times. Complete transparency in our choice of repository names is not to be looked for, not least since these names are subject to frequent change according to their patterns of funding, ownership, organization, and perceived function. The titles of repositories provided are those which occur in the most recent pages of their websites; at times, this means that the names listed differ from those which feature in archive catalogues. Similarly, the existing shelfmark of a document quite frequently differs from its electronic catalogue number as well as its former shelfmark; in such cases, the current shelfmark has been used where possible. In the few cases where a collection has not been fully catalogued, the collection number has been adopted.

### **Denominational Labels:**

Scholars are becoming increasingly aware that the traditional denominational labels used to refer to seventeenth-century dissenting churches – Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist – are at best partial and at worst misleading. Nevertheless, in the absence of any widely-recognised alternative terms, these labels have been maintained for the *Inventory*. At this early stage of research into dissenting church books, complete consistency of approach in identifying denominations is not possible. Where appropriate, we have followed the label provided in repository catalogues. However, as will be seen from the titles given to churches in the *Inventory*, these catalogues frequently use nineteenth and twentieth-century denominational labels such as ‘Unitarian’, ‘United Reformed’, ‘United Church’, or ‘Shared Church’ which are hardly appropriate for seventeenth and early eighteenth-century church records. In these cases, we have usually relied on secondary literature to provide a familiar denominational designation relating to the early history of each church (in practice this means ‘P’, ‘C’, or ‘B’). To minimise error, we have in general only adopted the designations ‘PB’ (Particular Baptist) and ‘GB’ (General Baptist) when they are used in existing catalogues. The designation ‘B/C’ refers to churches whose leaders and members predominantly favoured believers’ baptism, but which included members who had scruples on this point; the expression ‘C/B’ refers to churches whose leaders and members predominantly favoured infant baptism, but which included members who rejected the practice in favour of believers’ baptism. These abbreviations have been used sparingly, and only in relation to those churches for which so-called ‘open communion’ has been an important topic of debate in subsequent scholarship. Further scholarship will undoubtedly reveal many more instances of mixed membership. The designation ‘7DB’ refers to churches whose membership included seventh-day Baptists for at least part of their early history. However, the issue of how best to describe such churches urgently needs reviewing by scholars in light of the patchy nature and unreliability of current evidence. Above all, it should be remembered that the views of ministers and members relating to church government tended to evolve continually, and so the designations provided in the *Inventory* should be taken as no more than a guide (frequently

no more than an approximation) to each congregation's beliefs and practices. Further research will no doubt result in changes to many of these labels.

### **Manuscript Titles**

Titles of manuscripts have also been taken from repository catalogues. In very many cases, the title written into the manuscript is different from that listed in the catalogue entry, although neither title is necessarily contemporaneous with the composition of the manuscript, nor does it always provide an accurate guide to the manuscript's contents, form, or function. One disadvantage of using catalogue titles is that they differ greatly in length, detail, and accuracy, meaning that the differences between various copies of a manuscript may be exaggerated; on the other hand, one major advantage is that the document can be located in the catalogue much more easily, where it is often followed by a fuller description than can be provided in this *Inventory*. One significant problem relates to the titles of documents in The National Archives. Until recently, it was perceived that the primary use of these documents to historians was to establish birth, baptism, marriage, or death dates of the church members; in other words, they were named according to the propaedeutic information which they could provide. However, the primary function of many of these documents in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was to record minutes and memoranda of the church, and several of them are not really registers at all. Nevertheless, to remain consistent across the *Inventory*, the titles relating to documents in The National Archives reflect the headings and subheadings listed on the Discovery website, rather than information now coming to light about the wider functions of the manuscript. Readers should therefore be aware that many of the documents listed as 'registers' in the *Inventory* may be described in other contexts as 'church books', 'minute books', or even 'ministerial commonplace books' rather than as registers.<sup>6</sup>

### **Manuscript Dates**

It is not possible at this stage to achieve complete consistency in the dating of manuscripts. The starting point for this *Inventory* has to be the dates provided in existing catalogues. Unfortunately, there are many cases where there is internal disagreement within the repository catalogue, usually because the period given as the manuscript 'dates' is different from the range of years mentioned in the 'title' or list of 'contents'. The years mentioned in the manuscript 'title' or 'contents' have been adopted when they exceed those provided as the manuscript 'date'. However, this does not entirely solve the problem of how to date nineteenth and twentieth-century copies of earlier manuscripts. In some repository catalogue entries, the end date provided is the date at which the copy was completed, whereas in other entries the end date refers merely to the dates covered in the source text. In this *Inventory*, the end date refers to the last known year in which additions were made to the contents of the manuscript in any significant way. For example, if the date of the copy is not known, the end date is the last year mentioned in the contents of the manuscript. If the date at which the copy was made is known, and there were no significant subsequent additions to the manuscript, the end date is the year in which the copy was completed. If the text was subsequently submitted to a form of manuscript publishing, as was the case with the works of Joseph Rix

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<sup>6</sup> For example, TNA RG4/496, RG4/755, RG4/938, RG4/1003, RG4/1728, RG4/2584, RG4/2649, RG4/3019, RG4/3423, RG4/3427, and RG4/4311; for a commonplace book classified as a register, see TNA RG4/63.

and Joseph Davey, the end date is the date on the manuscript title page. If, however, further additions were made to the manuscript after it had been copied (for example, if a nineteenth-century copy register continued to be used as a working document into the twentieth century), the end date is the last year in which additions are known to have been made. However, as a general rule, the end date provided does not take account of minor corrections, rebinding, ownership stamps and inscriptions, or marginal annotations.

### **Names of Churches**

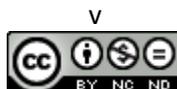
The naming of churches in the list causes particular problems. Even in their own day, seventeenth and eighteenth-century churches had several names which shifted in frequency of use over very short periods of time. To untangle all of these names is beyond the scope of this *Inventory*,<sup>7</sup> and therefore these churches are labelled as they appear in repository handlists. Where the names of churches appear in titles of collections or lists of manuscript creators, these names have been used; otherwise, they have been extrapolated from the titles or contents list as found in the catalogues. Readers should therefore be aware that these names are anachronistic, and that many of them originate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An unavoidable problem of taking this approach is that the same congregation is often provided with different names by different repositories (or even different collections within a repository); it is therefore quite frequently the case that the same church occurs under more than one name in the *Inventory*. Furthermore, the places mentioned in church names do not necessarily indicate the location of the congregation in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century. To ease this problem somewhat, a table of alternative names has been appended to this introduction, with catalogue variants listed (right hand column) and an abbreviated name suggested for each church (left hand column).

### **Manuscript Contents**

Identifying the contents of manuscripts from repository descriptions inevitably means that similar manuscripts may appear to have very different contents. Nevertheless, this approach works better than the alternative, which is to attempt a single identification of the form of the manuscript as either church book, register, or account book. While it is certainly the case that registers (R) and accounts (A) look distinct from minutes of church meetings (M), in practice the majority of documents listed contain a mixture of these three types of document. It is also useful to indicate when the manuscript includes copies of letters (L), detailed information relating to the minister or other officers of the church (O), or a history of the church (H). This latter category is not limited to later copies of manuscripts: several seventeenth-century church books open with a historical account of their belief and origin. The term ‘church book’ itself awaits an adequate definition, and one objective of this *Inventory* is to widen the discussion about how the phrase was used; at present, therefore, the abbreviation CB is in general adopted only when it appears in the repository catalogue entry. On the other hand, this editorial decision inevitably means that there are occasions when the contents of various copies of a document look more different in the *Inventory* than they may do in practice.

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<sup>7</sup> For further analysis of this problem, see Mark Burden, ‘What did Seventeenth-Century Dissenters Call Themselves?’ (Dissenting Experience Blog, 2015) <http://dissent.hypotheses.org/1534>.



## Church Location

Our main purpose in compiling this *Inventory* is to collate pre-existing information from repository catalogues. We have, however, made one significant intervention, which is to describe the location of each church in England according to early modern county boundaries, rather than using the boundaries of the post-1999 arrangement in England. Our chief sources for the topography of early modern England are Edmund Calamy's *An Account of the Ministers, Lecturers, Masters and Fellows of Colleges and Schoolmasters, who were Ejected or Silenced after the Restoration in 1660* (1713), his *A Continuation of the Account*, 2 vols. (1727), the dissenters' Common Fund Survey, c.1690-2 (Dr Williams's Library MS OD161), John Evans's list of dissenting congregations, c.1715 (Dr Williams's Library, MS 38.4), Samuel Lewis's *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, 7th edition, 4 vols. (1848), and the same author's *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, 2nd edition, 2 vols. (1849). The decision to use the old county boundaries means that several of the administrative counties currently in use in England do not appear in the inventory: Tyne and Wear is considered a part of Northumberland, and Greater Manchester is split between Cheshire and Lancashire. It also means that several churches appear in counties which might not immediately be expected: for example, Kingston upon Thames appears in Surrey, not London, and Abingdon is listed as part of Berkshire, not Oxfordshire. Churches in Middlesex, Southwark and Westminster have been listed under 'London', but the district names have been included in brackets. On the other hand, we have used modern versions of county names in order to avoid confusion between counties and cities: the word 'Bedford' is used for the town and 'Bedfordshire' for the county, 'Cambridge' for the city and 'Cambridgeshire' for the county, 'Chester' for the city and 'Cheshire' for the county, and so on. We have also found it useful for our own research to refer to the nine regions of England (established 1994), since this particular category helps to clarify the proximity of churches on either side of county borders. Monmouthshire (now part of Wales) was considered a part of England by early modern topographers, including Calamy; we have therefore followed suit, but we have not allocated it to a specific English region. Welsh congregations have been located according to the historic Welsh counties. Churches in what is now Northern Ireland have been located using the six historic counties, although we have not used the terms 'Northern Ireland' and 'Republic of Ireland' in the inventory.

## Variant Copies

One of the aims of this project is to explore the difference between a so-called 'original' church record and its various copies. However, this objective raises an important methodological question which historians of dissent have only begun to address recently: what is meant by an 'original' church record, particularly since we know that many of the earliest surviving minute books and registers are themselves either copied or compiled from other sources? After considerable experimentation with ways of distinguishing between the various versions of a text, a decision has been taken simply to provide each document with the same status in the *Inventory*. One reason for this decision is pragmatic: whereas the relation between earlier and later copies of the same information is known in many instances, there are many other manuscripts for which this relation can only be guessed. Furthermore, providing all known copies of these church records side by side enables researchers to reach their own judgements about how the texts are related. It is in any case true that very few later 'copies' of early documents are exact: either these copy records have been added to in subsequent years, or they present only a selection of the materials in the source text. While these additions and selections

are more likely to occlude than to reveal reliable information about the early development of the churches concerned, they do provide a fascinating window into how nineteenth and twentieth-century dissenters themselves perceived their past.

### **The Three Forms of the *Inventory***

The tensions outlined above between presenting information consistently and usefully in part explain why we have decided to release this *Inventory* in three different forms. The first version of the *Inventory*, with items arranged by repository, is designed primarily as a finding aid, on the assumption that researchers visiting an archive will find it useful to have similar items from that archive listed. The second version of the *Inventory*, with items arranged by county, enables researchers to gain an overview of the various manuscripts relating to each church, as well as comparing churches which were in geographical proximity. The third version of the *Inventory* groups these churches by denomination; it comes with the caveat emphasised above that we view denominational labels as a matter of shorthand convenience for the researcher rather than as a guide to how seventeenth-century churches described themselves. All three versions contain identical information; the only difference lies in the order of the records and the arrangement of the columns. The information also exists as an unpublished electronic database, which the authors of this inventory are supplementing with their ongoing primary research into the contents and provenance of these manuscripts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For further information, and contact details, see <http://dissent.hypotheses.org/>.



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