



HM Passport
Office



Discover your Family History

Getting the most from the **General Register Office**
www.gov.uk/research-family-history

Did you know that when you are researching your family history you can get invaluable information from birth, marriage and death certificates? The General Register Office for England and Wales (GRO) holds records for all births, marriages and deaths registered in England and Wales from 1 July 1837, and can help you in your search.

This booklet tells you about:

- The General Register Office for England and Wales, what its role is and which records it can offer you
- The information you will find on registration records
- The information you will need to order registration records

It will give you an introduction to how the General Register Office can help.

For more details please go to [**www.gov.uk/research-family-history**](http://www.gov.uk/research-family-history)

Where should I start my search?

When you are starting to research your family history, gather together family memories, photos and documents and you may be able to quickly develop an understanding of the last couple of generations. To find out more detailed information, birth, marriage and death certificates are an invaluable material. They provide links back to the previous generation by giving details of a relative's address, occupation or cause of death. Certificates will also give clues about the individual's parents or husband/wife.

How can GRO help?

People come to the GRO because it has the records of every birth, marriage and death registered in England and Wales available in one place. Some commercial organisations also offer a service to get certificates for you, but these organisations apply to the GRO or the local registration service on your behalf. It is therefore cheaper and quicker to order direct.

GRO also holds overseas records containing details of births, marriages and deaths of British citizens that have taken place abroad since the late 18th century. These include those registered with British Consuls, High Commissions, HM Forces, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen. It is not compulsory to register every birth, marriage or death that occurs overseas and GRO is not automatically notified of every event that has taken place.

For a full list of records available see pages 21 and 22 or for more information visit www.gov.uk/research-family-history

What services does GRO provide?

The GRO can provide you with birth, marriage and death certificates covering England and Wales from 1 July 1837 onwards. If you use the standard service, the certificate will be dispatched from GRO on the fourth working day (if the GRO index reference number is provided).

If you use the priority service, the certificate will be dispatched from GRO on or before the next working day (if the order is received before 4pm, excluding weekends and Bank Holidays).

The online service is the **cheapest and simplest** way of placing an order
www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates

How do I search for records that date from before 1837?

Local parish records contain details of baptisms, marriages and burials. You will usually find parish registers at the local County Record Office or through various websites where registers have been digitised.

It may also be worth checking the GRO regimental records if there was a connection to the British Army (see pages 21 and 22).

What information will I find on a birth, marriage or death certificate?

As well as the full names of the individuals, you will find the following information:

Birth certificate – includes date and place of birth, the name and residence of the mother (and sometimes the mother's maiden name). The name and occupation of the father is also shown on the certificate. See Annex A on pages 15 and 16 for an example certificate.

Marriage certificate – includes the full names of the bride and groom. It will usually include their occupations, residences and the date and place of the marriage and in addition the names and occupations of the fathers of both bride and groom. See Annex B on pages 17 and 18 for an example certificate.

Death certificate – includes the date of death, age, occupation, final residence and cause of death, as well as the name and relationship of the person who informed the authorities. See Annex C on pages 19 and 20 for an example certificate.

What is the difference between a short and a full birth certificate?

A short certificate is an extract of the full record and only shows the name and surname, date of birth, place of birth and sex of the child.

The GRO Index Reference

It is cheaper to order certificates online and provide a GRO index reference although you can also apply by telephone or post.

The GRO index reference provides unique reference information that helps find the birth, marriage or death in England and Wales that you are interested in. It includes:

- The year when the birth, marriage or death was registered
- Quarter (e.g. Oct-Dec is the December quarter, Jan-March is the March quarter)
- The earliest index is for September quarter 1837. After 1984 the indexes are organised by year only
- The district in which the event was registered
- The volume and page number

The entries within the indexes are arranged in alphabetical order by surname, with first names listed alongside (as recorded on the certificate).

The full index data varies depending on the type of event (birth, marriage or death) and the year when the event was registered.

Where can I find a GRO index reference?

The GRO provides a public index that lists basic details of every birth, marriage and death recorded in England and Wales since 1837. If you provide details of the index reference number it will be cheaper for you and also help speed up your application.

The historical birth and death index - births over 100 years old and deaths up to 1957 (those records that have been digitised) are available to search free of charge, via the GRO website at www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates

You can also visit www.freebmd.org.uk which contains a transcription of the index from 1837 to 1983.

Further information on researching GRO index reference numbers is available at www.gov.uk/research-family-history

Alternatively a complete set of GRO Indexes is available in microfiche format to view free of charge at:

- Bridgend Local and Family History Centre
- City of Westminster Archives Centre
- Manchester Central Library
- Newcastle City Library
- Plymouth Central Library
- The British Library and
- The Library of Birmingham

You are advised to check opening times and availability with the libraries directly before making any travel arrangements.

Some public libraries and other organisations such as family history societies, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints family history centres or local record offices hold partial sets of the GRO Indexes on microfiche or CD ROM.

A number of organisations make the index available online and you can use these to find the index reference that you need. Most web sites that offer access to these records will make a charge for this service.

The GRO index reference isn't clear. Can the GRO help?

Yes. If you can't decipher part of an index reference number you can use the GRO's unclear microfiche service. GRO will provide clarification of the index reference number. You can contact the GRO by:

Email

unclearfiche@gro.gov.uk

Phone

+44 (0) 300 123 1837

Monday to 8am-8pm

Friday: Saturday: 9am-4pm

Post

General Register

Office PO Box 2

Southport Merseyside

PR8 2JD

The aim is to reply within one working day of receipt of your request and the service is free. This service clarifies the reference number for you but won't confirm that it is the entry you are looking for.

How can I order a certificate?

Online

The **cheapest and quickest** way to order a certificate is to go to **www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates** and then follow the link to order certificates online. You can order a certificate and pay for it online.

Phone

+44 (0) 300 123 1837

Monday to 8am-8pm

Friday: Saturday: 9am-4pm

To contact GRO using the Text Relay service text 18001 (followed by 0300 123 1837).

Post

Forms can be downloaded from **www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates**

Completed application forms should be returned to:

General Register

Office PO Box 2

Southport Merseyside

PR8 2JD

Can I order a certificate from the local register office?

A local register office will have the original register of births, marriages or deaths and if you know that the event you are interested in occurred in the district that they cover, you can approach the local register office for a certificate.

How can I order a PDF?

The GRO is continually improving the way it provides civil registration services; including registration records in a format other than by paper certificate.

We offer historical birth and death records for England and Wales in Portable Document Format [PDF]. These include birth registration records over 100 years old and deaths from 1837 to 1957.

An order for a PDF copy of a registration record must be made via our online ordering site. Please note that this service is not available via telephone or postal applications. The PDF product is selectable under the "service option" on the order page for an England & Wales birth event for the years 1837 - 1917 and death events for the years 1837 - 1957

You will need to provide the full GRO index reference number for the record that you are interested in, you will be prompted to supply details of the event as you complete the online application form.

You will be sent an email notification to inform you that your PDF image is ready to view and download. You will need to log on to your ordering account and you will find a link to your PDF in your order history. At this point you can view your image by clicking onto the "View PDF" button, download and save.

PDFs will remain available to view for a period of 3 months from the point of ordering, after which it will be removed. You will not receive a reminder prior to deletion.

For more information on the PDF service please visit www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates click 'start now' and select 'Most Customers Want to Know'

Where can I find out how much copies of registration records cost?

For information on our current prices please refer to the booklet on GOV.UK 'How to order and Pay for Civil Registration Records' or visit www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates click 'start now' and select 'Most Customers Want to Know'.

If you are unable to access this information please contact the GRO by phone, or post (details given on page 8) for a copy of the leaflet 'How to Order and Pay for Civil Registration Records'.

How do I pay for a certificate?

You can pay online or by telephone using most major credit/debit cards. If you want to apply by post you will be asked to complete a GRO application form. Application forms can be downloaded from

www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates

Payment can be made either by cheque, postal order or international bankers draft payable to 'Her Majesty's Passport Office'.

- Payments made by international bankers draft should be in sterling. The draft must bear the name and address of a clearing bank within the UK
- Please do not send cash
- Where you wish to use the priority service please clearly mark your envelope 'priority'
- A stamped self addressed envelope is not required.

Please note that additional administration fees are payable if you do not apply online (when service is available) or include a GRO index reference. These cover the extra cost of processing such applications and are generally non-refundable, other than the index fee, if it exceptionally transpires the index information is unavailable.

How do I pay for a PDF?

You can only order and pay for a PDF online at -

www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates

I have placed an order, what happens next?

If you have not provided the index reference, we will search the indexes to find it. Once an order has an index reference the next stage is to look for the entry checking in the year/quarter provided on your application. This takes longer than if you provide the GRO index reference. When found, the certificate is printed, folded and sent to you in a C5 envelope using standard postal services. Target dates for despatch are also included on page 3 under the heading **'What services does GRO provide?'**

Refunds

If we are unable to produce the certificate you require, you will receive a partial refund of the certificate fee, less a deduction to cover work incurred. Any additional administration fees which may have been paid if not applying online or including a GRO index reference are non-refundable. Refunds will take up to five additional days to process. Orders for PDFs are non-refundable.

For full details of fees see the guide: How to Order and Pay for Civil Registration Records

What should I do if I cannot find a birth, marriage or death certificate?

Prior to 1875, the registration of an event was not enforced and therefore some were missed. In addition, some events may have taken place outside of England and Wales. An important factor to remember when searching is that there could be some variations in the spelling of names, as many people could not read or write and the registrar would have to interpret spellings.

Births

- The child may have been registered under a forename/surname other than that by which he/she was known in later life
- The child could have been registered before the parents had chosen a forename, in which case, the entry in the indexes would be at the end of the listing for the surname under female/male
- The child could have been born in a period other than that searched
- Ages on census records and marriage certificates should be treated with caution. No proof of age was required and often people did not actually know their own age

Marriages

- Marriages sometimes took place after the birth of the first child – therefore widening the timescale searched may help
- The bride may have been married more than once – try checking under the name of the groom instead
- Couples often lived together as man and wife as divorce was rare and expensive. Often, couples never married, or did not remarry after their spouse died

Deaths

- Widen the timescale that the death occurred as it could have been registered some time after the event i.e. if an inquest was involved
- Widen the search for the place of death – the person may have died in a different location to where they actually lived
- In a minority of cases, deaths would be registered without a name i.e. if there was nobody to identify a body. These are listed as 'unknown' in the indexes and appear at the end of each quarter

How can I contact other General Register Offices?

Scotland

The Registrar General
The National Records of Scotland
New Register House
3 West Register Street
Edinburgh
EH1 3YT
Tel: +44 (0) 131 314 4411
Website: www.gro-scotland.gov.uk

Northern Ireland

The Registrar General
Oxford House
49/55 Chichester Street
Belfast BT1 4HL
Tel: 0300 200 7890 from the UK or +44(0)2891 513101 from outside the UK
Website: www.nidirect.gov.uk

Republic of Ireland

The Registrar General for events outside Dublin and at non-Catholic Churches
Government House in Dublin:
Convent Road
Roscommon
Eire
Tel: +353 (0) 1671 1000

For events in the greater Dublin area:
Tel: +353 (0) 906 632 900
Tel: +353 (0) 1671 1929/1968/1974
Website: www.groireland.ie

Isle of Man – Civil Registry

The registration of births and deaths was compulsory from 1878 onwards, and the registration of marriages was obligatory from 1884, although records go back to 1849 for non-Anglican births.

Deemsters Walk
Bucks Road
Douglas
Isle of Man
IM1 3AR
Tel: +44 (0) 1624 687 039

Jersey – General Registry

Holds births, marriages and deaths from 1842.

Office of the Superintendent
Registrar 10 Royal Square
St Helier
Jersey
Channel Islands
JE2 4WA
Tel: +44 (0) 1534 441335

Guernsey – Register Office

Holds births and deaths from October 1840, non-Anglican marriages from States Offices January 1841 and Anglican marriages from 1919.

The Greffe
Royal Court House
St Peter Port
Guernsey
GY1 2PB
Tel: +44 (0) 1481 725 277

Birth certificate help sheet

(*for births registered before 1 April 1969)

1. **Date and place of birth**

The later the date of birth, the more likely a full address will appear.

2. **Name**

The forename(s) given to the child at birth.

3. **Father’s name**

The absence of a name here may indicate that the parents were not married to each other at the time of the birth.

4. **Name and maiden name of mother**

This extra information will help you track down the mother’s parents as well as a marriage between her and the father.

5. **Occupation of father**

This information can be useful for confirming that you are looking at a certificate for the right family – although it is not definitive proof.

6. **Signature, description and residence of informant**

Usually one of the parents, however, it could be a grandparent, another relative, or someone present at the birth.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF

REGISTRATION DISTRICT			
1874	BIRTH in the Sub-district of Woodstock		

Columns:- 1 2 3

No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name
1	18th November 1898	Winston Leonard	boy	Kan

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certificate

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the

CAUTION: THERE IS NO GUARANTEE AS TO THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN

7284633 84109 04/14 3M TSSD 035203

7. **Names entered after registration**

Used to record any names given to the child – for example, at baptism – up to 12 months after the initial registration.

OF BIRTH



GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number SPECIMEN

WOODSTOCK

in the County of Oxford

4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration

<i>Randolph J. Churchill</i>	<i>Janet Churchill</i>	<i>Mr. J. H. Churchill</i>	<i>Randolph J. Churchill</i>	<i>Twenty</i>	<i>George</i>	
<i>formerly</i>	<i>formerly</i>	<i>Woodstock</i>	<i>father</i>	<i>third</i>	<i>Register</i>	
<i>Churchill</i>	<i>Jerome</i>		<i>Blenheim</i>	<i>December</i>		
				<i>1974</i>		

ed copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

the Seal of the said Office, the

16th

day of

March

2015

ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE
SING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE ©CROWN COPYRIGHT

NG: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.



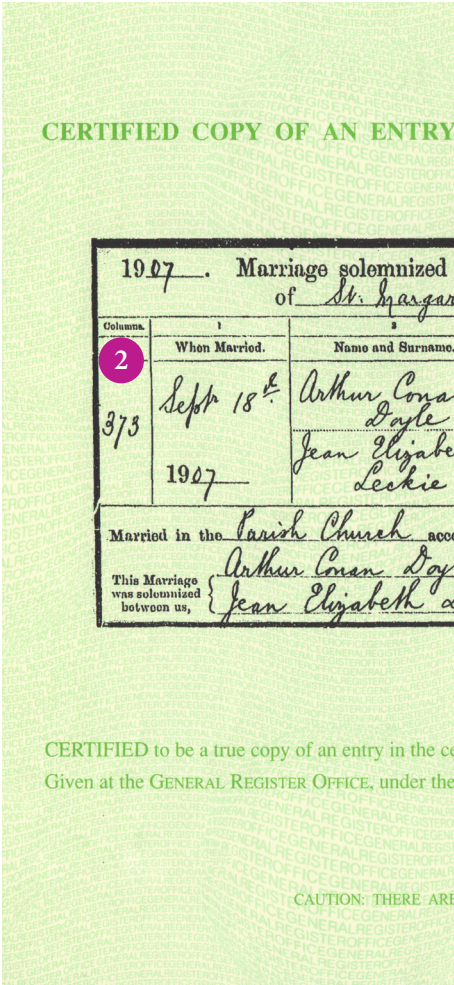
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Annex A

On 1 April 1969 the law relating to birth registrations was amended resulting in a change to the format of a birth certificate. This information relates to births registered before 1 April 1969.

Marriage certificate help sheet

- District** This tells you where the marriage took place. The district name is usually repeated at the bottom of the certificate.
- Entry number** in the marriage register.
- Age** The age given by the bride and groom at the time of marriage, this is only as accurate as they believe it to be. 'Full' indicates 21 or over.
- Condition** Marital status at time of marriage, e.g. bachelor/spinster, widow/widower or previous marriage dissolved.
- Residence at the time of marriage**
Until 1995, for a marriage to take place in a register office, one of the couple had to live within that registration district. This rule didn't always apply to couples marrying in a parish.
- 6 & 7. Name and profession of father**
With the exception of an adoptive father, the name entered in this column should be that of the birth father.



- Witnesses** Marked with an 'X' if the person couldn't write.



OF MARRIAGE

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number SPECIMEN

at 1 <u>The Parish Church</u>		in the <u>Parish</u>				
of <u>Westminster</u>		in the County of <u>London</u>				
3	4	Rank or Profession.	Residence at 5 of Marriage.	Father's No. 6	Surname.	Rank or 7 of Father.
<u>48</u>	<u>Widower</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>39, Old Queen Street, S.W.</u>	<u>Charles Allamont Doyle</u>	<u>Doyle</u>	<u>Artist</u>
<u>31</u>	<u>Spinster</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>Glebe House Blackheath</u>	<u>James Blythe Leckie</u>	<u>Leckie</u>	<u>Merchant</u>

According to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by licence or after — by me,

James B. Leckie C. Cyril Angell
in the Presence of us, { Mary Josephine Leckie **8** Livia Leckie } Officiating Minister

certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of St. George Hanover Square

Seal of the said Office, the 16th day of March 2015

OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. ©CROWN COPYRIGHT

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

7284633 84880 04/14 3M.TSSD 035222



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Annex B

Death certificate help sheet

(*for deaths registered before 1 April 1969)

- 1. **Entry number** in the death register.
- 2. **Name and surname** This is the name used at time of death, which is not always the same name given at birth.
- 3. **Age** The informant gives the deceased's age at the time of death to the best of their knowledge and belief; therefore it is possible that this may not be accurate.
- 4. **Occupation** If the deceased is female, the occupation of the deceased's father or male spouse, current or former, living or dead might be given.
- 5. **Signature of informant** Marked with an 'X' if the informant was unable to write. After 1875, the relationship of the informant to the deceased was given.
- 6. **Signature of registrar** In the case of a death registered more than three months from the date of death the signature of the Superintendent Registrar will also be included.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF

REGISTRATION DISTRICT			
1910	DEATH in the Sub-district of Mayfair and		

Columns:- 1 2 3

No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex
55	Fifteenth August 1910 South Street Mayfair	Florence Nightingale	Female

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified


Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the

CAUTION: THERE AND USE

WARNI

7284633 84108 04/14 3MTSSD 035202

DEATH



GIVEN AT THE **GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE**

Application Number **SPECIMEN**

SAINT GEORGE HANOVER SQUARE
in the County of London


4 Age	5 Occupation	6 Cause of death	7 Signature, description and residence of informant	8 When registered	9 Signature of registrar
3	4	5	6		
90 years	Spencer and Daughter William Edwards Nightingale (deceased) of independent means	Old age heart failure Certified by S. Garrett Anderson M.D.	S. Shore Nightingale Cousin of Dea Horst Tollway Matlock	Sixteenth August 1910	M. S. Hamilton Registrar

I hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

I, _____, Clerk of the said Office, the _____ day of _____ 16th _____ March 2015

See note overleaf

THESE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE OF DEATH OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE ©CROWN COPYRIGHT
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Annex C

* On 1 April 1969 the law relating to death registrations was amended resulting in a change to the format of a death certificate. This information relates to deaths registered before 1 April 1969.

What records does the General Register Office hold?

Events recorded in England and Wales

Record held	Explanation	From - to
Birth and death records	A record of all births and deaths recorded	July 1837 - 6 months prior to the present date
Marriage records	A record of all marriages recorded	July 1837 - 18 months prior to the present date
Civil Partnership records	A record of all civil partnerships recorded	2005 - the present date
Thomas Coram Register	A record of children given into the care of the Founding Hospital	1853 - 1948
Adopted Children Register	A record of all adoptions granted by courts	1927 - present date
Stillbirth register	A record of all stillbirths recorded	1927 - present date
Parental Order Register	A record of all births that have been re-registered on production of a court order where a child has been born via a surrogacy agreement	1994 -present date
Presumption of Death Register	A record of all events recorded in the Presumption of Death Register	2015 - present date

Events recorded abroad

Record held	Explanation	From - to
Regimental records	Records of births/baptisms, marriages and some deaths relating to British Army Regiments	1761 - 1924
Chaplains returns	Army Chaplains records of baptisms, marriages and deaths	1796 - 1880

Events recorded abroad (cont.)

Record held	Explanation	From - to
Ionian Islands records	Births, marriages and deaths of the British Garrison on Corfu	1818 - 1864
Marine records	Births and deaths at sea	1837 - present date
Consular records	Births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths of British subjects registered at British Consulates	1849 - 12 months prior to the present date (birth, marriage and death). 2005 - present date (civil partnership)
Army records	Births, marriages and deaths of members of the British Army or their families which took place abroad	1881 - 1965
War deaths	Deaths of serving personnel during the Boer War World War 1 World War 2	1899 - 1902 1914 - 1921 1939 - 1948
Aircraft records	Births and deaths on board British registered aircraft	1947 - present date
Foreign Marriage and Civil Partnership certificates	Certificates deposited with the General Register Office	1948 - 2013 (marriages) 2005 - 2013 (civil partnerships)
High Commission records	Births and deaths of British subjects registered at British High Commissions	1949 - present date
Armed Forces records	Births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths of members of the Armed Forces or their families	1965 - present date (birth, marriage and death). 2005 - present date (civil partnerships)
Installation deaths	Deaths of workers on British Oil and Gas rigs	1971 - present date
Hovercraft records	Births and deaths on British registered hovercrafts	1972 - present date

General Register Office:
part of Her Majesty's Passport Office

For more information visit

www.gov.uk/research-family-history

GRO Feb 19