



HM Passport
Office

Guide to Birth certificates

Find the documentation for your ancestor's birth and you will have the information you need to leapfrog back another generation.

Track down a forebear's birth How to find an index reference

Birth certificates are the foundation of any family historian's research into an individual. They will help take you back to the next generation, providing the father's name and occupation as well as, importantly, the mother's maiden name. These details will allow you to locate a marriage for the parents with a greater degree of certainty.

The General Register Office (GRO) in Southport holds comprehensive records of all births recorded in England and Wales from 1837 onwards as well as records for some British Nationals born overseas.

The GRO provides a public index that lists basic details of every birth recorded in England and Wales since 1837. The index is divided into four quarters for each year.

The historical birth indexes for England and Wales (those over 100 years old) are available to search free of charge via the GRO certificate online ordering service on GOV.UK. The index is searchable, for which you will need to key in certain information. Additional functionality includes phonetic/soundex searching. Also, the Mother's Maiden Name is shown in the online index where available.

Birth indexes are also available to search on FreeBMD. This free-to-use website has an almost complete transcription of the indexes for England and Wales from 1837 to 1983. You can also search the indexes for a fee using commercial websites.

The indexes are also available to view in microfiche format at certain libraries (see our leaflet 'Discover your Family History').

Once you have found the right birth record in the indexes you will need to make a note of the following:

- full name of the person on the certificate
- year and quarter in which the birth was registered
- registration district
- volume and page number of the entry

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'

Guide to Birth certificates

1 Date and place of birth

The later the date of birth, the more likely a full address will appear. A time of birth may indicate the child is a twin, triplet etc.

2 Name

The forename(s) given to the child at birth. A line through this column means no name was given at the time of registration.

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. From the September quarter of 1911 the mother's maiden name is included in the index.

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.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number SPECIMEN

REGISTRATION DISTRICT WOODSTOCK

1874 BIRTH in the Sub-district of Woodstock in the County of Oxford

Column:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	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
	388 November 1874 Blenheim	Winston Leonard	Boy	Randolph Henry Spencer Churchill	Jemie Churchill formerly Serome	Mr. W Geo Woodstock	Randolph V. Churchill Father Blenheim	Twenty third December 1874	George Halter Registrar	

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 16th day of March 2015


BXCG 457713

CAUTION: THERE ARE 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.

728453 84106 0454 3M15SD 03205

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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.

7 Date registered

Registration was supposed to take place within 42 days of the birth. The date determines which quarter the birth appears in the indexes, in this case the Dec quarter.

8 Names entered after registration

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

It's quick and easy...

Online

It's quick, easy and cheaper to order a birth certificate online, just follow these three steps:

STEP ONE: Visit www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates and click on 'Start now'. Select 'Order a certificate online now' and register if you have not registered before (you will need an email address and will be asked to verify your account before you can start).

STEP TWO: Select 'Birth Certificate' and if you know the GRO index reference number, click yes, if not click no. You will need to add the year of the event (if you do not have the index reference number an additional administration fee is payable and a search will be carried out for you that covers a three-year period around the year you provide).

STEP THREE: Once your address has been confirmed you will be asked to provide the information you have got from the index. You can order a certificate without an index reference number but you will need to give some identifying information. You will be charged more for this service to cover the extra work involved, and it will take longer for your certificate to be dispatched if using the standard service. You will need to pay by credit or debit card.

You can now apply for Portable Document Format (PDF) copies of our digitised historical birth records (over 100 years old) for England and Wales. They are cheaper than certificates.

We now have an Online View digital image service that provides a digital alternative for customers wishing to access certified copies of historic register entries in England and Wales. You will be able to apply for an individual digital image (in JPEG format) of a historic birth entry from 1837 up to one hundred years ago.

If you apply by phone or post you will be charged an additional administration charge to cover the extra work of processing applications not made online.

By Phone

If you don't wish to order online you can apply by telephone with a credit/debit card on 0300 123 1837. Lines are open Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm, Saturday 9am – 1pm.

By Post

Application can also be made by post and forms can be obtained from GRO or downloaded via www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates

Refunds

If we are unable to produce the certificate you require, you will receive a refund of the certificate fee, less a deduction to cover work incurred. Any additional administration fees which you may have paid, if not applying online or including a GRO index reference, are non-refundable. For full details of fees see the guide: **How to Order and Pay for Civil Registration Records.**

Find that birth

Try these tips if you can't find an ancestor's arrival into the world recorded in the indexes.

TIP 1: Prior to 1875, the registration of an event was not compulsory and therefore some births were never officially registered.

TIP 2: Registration of a birth may have happened in the quarter after it took place, so search later indexes.

TIP 3: A birth might have taken place outside England and Wales e.g in Scotland. Search Scottish records at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk.

TIP 4: Babies were not always named immediately, many appearing as 'infant', 'boy' or 'girl' in the indexes.

TIP 5: The name you know your ancestor by might not be the one that appears on their birth certificate. Many people chose to be called by their middle names.