



HM Passport
Office



Discover your Family History

Getting the most from the **General Register Office**

www.gov.uk/discoveryourfamilyhistory

Did you know 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 certificates it can offer you
- The information you will find on the certificates
- The information you will need to order the certificates
- How you can order and pay

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

For more details please go to www.gov.uk/familyhistory

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 material, birth, marriage and death certificates are an invaluable source of information. They provide links back to the next 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/familyhistory

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 the next working day (if the order is received before 4pm, excluding weekends and Bank Holidays). The online service is the quickest way of placing an order – www.gro.gov.uk

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.

Ordering certificates

You can order birth, marriage or death certificates from 1837 onwards providing you have the General Register Office index reference or sufficient information to identify the entry.

What is a GRO index reference?

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 which 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.

More information about index references is available at www.gro.gov.uk

Where can I find a GRO index reference?

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.

Alternatively, 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. A volunteer project is digitising the index and you can access their records for free. See www.freebmd.org.uk for more details.

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.gsi.gov.uk

Phone

+44 (0) 300 123 1837

Monday to Friday: 8am-8pm

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 quickest way to order a certificate is to go to www.gro.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 Friday: 8am-8pm

Saturday: 9am-4pm

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

Post

You will be asked to complete an application form, 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.

Where can I find out how much certificates cost?

Please refer to www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates for prices and information on ordering. 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 Certificates: Getting the most from the General Register Office'.

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

For postal applications:

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.

Online

For further details please see our leaflet How to Order and Pay for Certificates visit www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates or call **+44 (0) 300 123 1837**.

I have placed an order, what happens next?

If you have not provided the index reference, records are searched 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. 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?**'

If the GRO is unable to produce a certificate, you will be issued with a full refund and email (or letter) of explanation. This will extend all despatch dates by up to five working days.

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	2	3
388	Shurhitt November 1874 Blenheim	Winston Leonard boy

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

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the authority of the Registrar-General

CAUTION: THESE COPIES ARE NOT VALID FOR LEGAL PURPOSES

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

4	5	6			7	
<i>Randolph Churchill</i>	<i>Janie Churchill formerly Jerome</i>	<i>Mr. H Hoo Woodstock</i>	<i>Randolph J. Churchill Father Blenheim</i>	<i>Twenty third December 1874</i>	<i>George Hester Registrar</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

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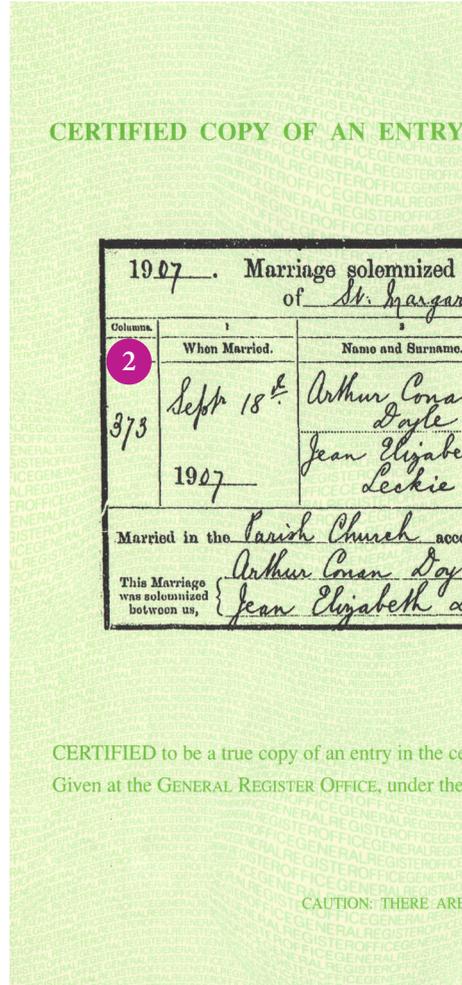
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Annex A

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.
- 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** *The Parish Church* in the *Parish*
 of *Westminster* in the County of *London*

3	4	Rank or Profession.	Residence at 5	Father's No. 6	Surname.	Rank or 7	Occupation of Father.
<i>48</i>	<i>Widower</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>39, Old Queen Street, S.W.</i>	<i>Charles</i>	<i>Ullamont Doyle</i>	<i>Artist</i>	
<i>31</i>	<i>Spinster</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>Glebe House, Blackheath</i>	<i>James</i>	<i>Blythe Leckie</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	

According to the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Established Church* by *License* or after *—* by me,
James B. Leckie **8** *Mary Josephine & Lucia Leckie* *C. Cyril Angell*
Leckie } in the Presence of us, } *Officiarius*

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*

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7294633 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

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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	5	6	7	8	9
Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
3 90 years	4 Spencer and Daughter William Edwards Nightingale (deceased) of independent means	6 Old age Heart Failure Certified by G. Sarnett Anderson M.D.	5 B. Shore Nightingale Cousin of Sea House Tollway, Matlock	8 Sixteenth August 1910	6 W. S. Hamilton Registrar

Copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

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

See note overleaf

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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/familyhistory

GRO 01.02.15s