

Using the General Register Office to research family history

The General Register Office holds birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership and deaths records, some dating back to 1837. You can order certificates of these events, which hold clues to your family history.

Using the General Register Office Reference Number

Every birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership or death registered in England or Wales has a General Register Office (GRO) index reference number. It usually consists of the year, volume number, page number and district in which the event was registered.

When ordering a birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership or death certificate, quoting the certificate index reference reduces the time it takes to find the record. This means you will receive your certificate sooner.

Understanding the General Register Office Reference Number

From 1837 to 1984 the index information for each year is divided into quarters. The quarters are split as follows:

- March quarter – events registered in January, February and March
- June quarter – April, May and June
- September quarter – July, August and September
- December quarter – October, November and December

The earliest index is for September quarter 1837. After 1984 the indexes are organized by year only.

The indexes are arranged in year order, and in each quarter or year the entries are listed alphabetically by surname, and then by forename.

To search marriage records, you can use either the surname of the married man or maiden surname of the married woman.

Adoptions records start from 1927, and are listed alphabetically by surname and then by forename.

Civil partnership records start from December 2005 and are listed by surname, together with the surname of partner, year of formation, registration authority and registration entry number.

What the information contains

Index information varies depending on the type of event and the year it was registered. For further details use the link below to the 'Index information' table. The table lists information recorded in the index for the year you are searching for.

- Download Index information
(http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/@government/documents/digitalasset/dg_184035.pdf)
- Download Index of County Information
(http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_176250.pdf)

Viewing the GRO Indexes in person or online

You can view GRO indexes online through several specialist organisations and websites, or you can view the indexes at a library or office in your area.

Viewing full copies of the indexes

Copies of the indexes can no longer be purchased but a complete set, including 'Births, Deaths and Marriages from 1837 – 2008', 'Overseas from 1761 – 2008', 'Civil Partnerships from 2005 – 2009', 'Adoptions from 1927 – 2009', and the provisional indexes for 'Births and Deaths from 2009 to June 2010', are available at:

- Manchester City Library
- Birmingham Central Library
- Bridgend Reference and Information Library
- Plymouth Central Library
- City of Westminster Archives Centre
- London Metropolitan Archives
- The British Library*

These locations get updates for you to view in person. This is expected to continue until free, online access can be provided.

* Please be aware that customers will need to undertake a pre-registration process. Two forms of identification showing a signature and proof of address will be needed to gain entry into this location.

View the indexes online

To view the indexes online, visit one of the following websites:

Website	Service available
FreeBMD	Volunteer project - indexes start from 1837
findmypast.com	Birth, marriage and death indexes from 1837
BMD Index	Searchable online version of the index for civil birth, marriage and death records for England and Wales
Familyrelatives.com	Access to a variety of records, including births, marriages, deaths, wills, military records
The Genealogist	Birth, marriage, death and parish records indexes, as well as Census indexes and transcripts, 1841 – 1901
UKBMD	Hub for many websites that offer online transcriptions of UK births, marriages, deaths and censuses
Ancestry	Archive of records from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales including the GRO Indexes

Please note that some of these sites may charge for their services

- <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/>
- <http://www.bmdindex.co.uk/>
- <http://www.familyrelatives.com/>
- <http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>
- <http://www.ukbmd.org.uk/>
- <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

Viewing the indexes in your area

Some indexes, although not complete, are also available at other locations including libraries, family history societies, or local record officers.

For the latest information on information available in your area, contact the library or office concerned by viewing the PDF below.

GRO makes every effort to ensure the accuracy and legibility of its index information, but does not guarantee it in all cases – some entries are taken from archive material and the quality of reproduction varies.

- Download where you can view the GRO indexes in your area (http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/@government/documents/digitalasset/dg_184626.pdf)

Need help deciphering the record

All General Register Office (GRO) indexes are stored on microfiche. If you need help reading the record or microfiche, contact the General Register Office on:

General Register Office, Trafalgar Road, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2HH

Telephone: 0345 123 1837

Email: general.section@ips.gsi.gov.uk

You will be contacted within one working day of receipt of your request. Note that GRO checks the information available in the indexes, but cannot confirm it is the correct entry.

Other help available

The following documents may help you understand your reference. They detail the registration district and volume number information. There is no charge for using these references.

- Download 'District Book' (http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_176223.pdf)
- Download 'Abolished List' (http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_176275.pdf)