

Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates (England and Wales)

The best place to find documented information about your ancestors is from these certificates. However, one really important thing to remember is that the details were only as accurate as the knowledge of the person who was reporting the information. Civil registration in England and Wales only started on 1st July 1837, so you will not be able to find such certificates prior to this date and will have to rely upon Parish Registers, which are covered in a separate hand-out.

So, what can you expect to find?

Birth Certificates

- When and where born
- Name, if any
- Sex
- Name and surname of father**
- Name, Surname and Maiden name of mother
- Occupation of father**
- Signature, description and residence of informant
- When registered
- Signature of registrar

** The thing to remember with this is that if the child was illegitimate, these details will be omitted.

Marriage Certificates

- When married

For both bride and groom:

- Name and Surname
- Age^^
- Condition (Bachelor, spinster etc)
- Rank or Profession
- Residence at time of marriage
- Fathers' name and surname**
- Rank or profession of father**

It will also provide details of where the marriage took place, whether or not Banns were read or if it was by licence, the names of at least two witnesses, plus the name of the Minister and/or Registrar.

^^ Please bear in mind that this might not be wholly accurate. The happy couple might not know how old they are or they might want to appear older – or younger – than they really are. Also, the certificate might just say, 'Over 21'.

** You might need to find other information to verify this information. The Bride or Groom may have been illegitimate and therefore no father might be listed – or there could even be a fabricated one!

Ministers or their clerks only recorded what they were told and so no proof was supplied that it was true!

Death Certificates

- When and where died
- Name and Surname
- Sex
- Age
- Occupation
- Cause of death
- Signature, description and residence of informant
- When registered
- Signature of registrar

Rather than just having the age, deaths registered from 1969 also had the date of birth recorded.

Important: Please remember that the information registered was only as good as the knowledge of the person registering the event. Therefore, some ages or names might be different from what you expect. Also, the event was registered where it took place, which is not necessarily where you would expect. For example, a person's home might be in Hertfordshire, but their death occurred in Kent. It will be Kent where you find the certificate registration!

Where do I get a certificate copy?

The best place to obtain one is from the General Register Office (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>), which is the Government's official source for such certificates and they will cost £9.25 each, standard service. You may find that you can also obtain them from the Register Office local to where the event took place, but the charge may be more.

If you are after a second opinion or you would like some assistance in ensuring that you are ordering the correct certificate, Genealogy Specialists (TOP DOG) is able to help. Register for FREE at <http://www.genealogy-specialists.com/> and join our community of like-minded people. The forum also has an Article that shows examples of the different certificates.

There is a lot more information that may be had about Civil Registration than can be written here and so listed below are some products that will certainly help you along your way and all of them are available from www.parishchest.com. Just pop the reference number in the website search box to see the details.

- An Introduction to British Civil Registration Ref: IOW-FFHS22
- An Introduction to British Civil Registration Ref: FHP-043
- Registration Districts Ref: SOG-1105xx
- A Handbook to the Civil Registration Districts of England and Wales Ref: FHP-004
- Civil Registration of Births, Marriages and Death (Book) Ref: NWA-OHM39