

# EVERYONE HAS ROOTS

## No. 3 - "Birth, marriage and death certificates"

Discover the information contained in birth, marriage and death records which are the fundamental 'building blocks' of family history research.

In 1836, the General Register Office (GRO) was established to maintain a central record of all the births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales.

Today the GRO index to civil registration certificates forms the main thrust of initial family history research. In theory all deaths and marriages from 1 July 1837 should have been registered close to the event for deaths and usually on the day for marriages, but the registration of births was not compulsory until 1875, so coverage can be patchy before then. There was also a six-week time period to allow for a birth to be registered.

Though the certificates are not available online, the digitised indexes can be searched on-line from July 1837 to 2007 making it easy to order hard copies of entries from the GRO in the form of PDFs or as certified copies. PDFs are cheaper but provide exactly the same information as contained in a certified copy, which for most family historians is now the preferred option. Microfiche copies of the indexes up to the current year are held at the British Library and some regional libraries

### Results: ?

Name:	Mother's Maiden Surname:	Order: ?
WALLER, JOHN	-	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 M Quarter in MITFORD AND LAUNDITCH</i>	<i>Volume 04B Page 302</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	EVERSON	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 M Quarter in THE SHOREDITCH DISTRICT</i>	<i>Volume 01C Page 174</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	HOLMES	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 M Quarter in CHERTSEY</i>	<i>Volume 02A Page 28</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	KNIGHT	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 M Quarter in THE HITCHIN UNION</i>	<i>Volume 03A Page 218</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	HYDE	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 S Quarter in BIGGLESWADE</i>	<i>Volume 03B Page 309</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	HALLSEY	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 S Quarter in AMPHILL</i>	<i>Volume 03B Page 321</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	CANDLETON	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 S Quarter in SALFORD</i>	<i>Volume 08D Page 75</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	UNWIN	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1852 D Quarter in LIVERPOOL</i>	<i>Volume 08B Page 10</i>	PDF
WALLER, JOHN	HAMPSHIRE	Certificate
<i>GRO Reference: 1853 M Quarter in HEMSWORTH</i>	<i>Volume 09C Page 92</i>	PDF

The GRO online indexes only operate for births 1837 – 1918 and deaths 1837 – 1957. Marriages are currently not available in this format. Outside this period, you will need to search other indexes through FreeBMD or on the commercial websites. You can also search on fiche or film which may be held by local archives and local studies libraries for the later period. One word of caution however, there are occasional errors in the indexes, so if you can't find your ancestor using one website, try one of the others. Each website has their own transcribed indexes so if someone could not read the first letter of a surname it may be mis-indexed. The same applies to census indexes.

Some indexes compiled by local register offices are gradually becoming available online and can be found using the free site [www.ukbmd.org.uk](http://www.ukbmd.org.uk). It is slightly more expensive to

purchase certificates locally than it is through the GRO but in practical terms they usually arrive sooner than those ordered from the GRO. Some local registrar offices no longer offer an historical certificate production service.

The indexes list the name under which the event was registered (which could be different to that by which an ancestor was known or could be spelled differently to how you would spell the name). I have in my own ancestry ALBONE which has been spelt as Auburn, Owlburn, Alban, Olban and Olbin. As the indexes were compiled by hand from the register office returns there may also be some omissions and inaccuracies in the transcriptions. They are also alphabetically arranged so you would need to think about spelling variants which were often recorded according to the way dialect sounded. The other information needed to obtain a certificate is also shown in the indexes and includes the year and quarter it was registered (not necessarily the quarter of the event), the district of registration and a volume and page number.

The minimum information needed to obtain a certificate or a pdf copy is:

Name/s, Year, Quarter (Mar, June, Sept, Dec) Registration district, Volume, Page no.

As: John Smith 1876 March, Downham, 4b, 237.

As index information is minimal finding the correct entry for someone with a common surname may result in you obtaining an incorrect certificate even though you can match with the surname of the mother. There will be times when this is unavoidable no matter how careful you are. Once you have this information, you can order a copy of the full certificate from [www.gro.gov.uk](http://www.gro.gov.uk)

## **USING CERTIFICATES TO BUILD YOUR TREE**

Certificates are essential for proving the connections between each person.

### ***Birth certificates***

Births indexes on the GRO website include the mother's maiden name which makes it easier to pinpoint that you have likely found the right birth. Victorian census returns can confirm places of birth which can help where the mother's maiden name is a common one.

As it is necessary to work from the known to the unknown when researching, if you've found a marriage certificate which will normally indicate the ages of both parties and names of their fathers, the next step is to look for their birth certificates. There may be more than one likely entry in the birth index, particularly for common names, so you may need to develop skills to establish which one is correct.

Birth certificates are the foundation of research for any individual and contain valuable information to enable you to research your ancestry. Besides the date and place of birth and the given name of the child they also give you the names of the parents which will enable you to investigate their marriage. Any addresses will also be valuable when researching the census returns to locate other family members.

The later the birth the more likely you will be able to find a full address rather than just a place name. If no forename is given in the entry it means that at the time of registration the parents had not decided on a name or that their religious denomination meant that a child

was not named until baptism. This very often occurred when the family were nonconformist. If a time is given in the entry this indicates a multiple birth.

The absence of a fathers name either meant illegitimacy or that the parents were not married to each other at the time of the birth. Mothers are usually recorded as "Mary Smith formerly Jones" showing their maiden surname. If there is more than one previous surname this indicates a previous marriage. A child registered before a marriage may be registered only in the mother's maiden surname.

The occupation given for a father will help determine that you have identified the correct family but be aware that some occupations are enhanced and sometimes occupations changed for example, on one certificate the father may be an agricultural labourer and on another as a "labourer".

There is a column at the right-hand side (no. 10) to allow a name to be entered after registration. If a name was given at baptism then sometimes this is entered. It could only be used for a period of one year after the initial registration. Not every parent availed themselves of this facility.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH



GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number COL285509

REGISTRATION DISTRICT	Bedminster
1859 BIRTH in the Sub-district of Bedminster	in the Counties of Bristol and Somerset

Columns:-	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
235	11th month baptized 1859 12 Southwick Place	Louisa Gore		William Hayden Hord	Mary Ann Hord formerly Gwynne	Professor of Music	W. H. Hord Father 22 Southwick Place Bedminster	Twelfth month October 1859	Stephen James Ogilvie	

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 26th day of April 2006

BXCB 670410

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WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.



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## Marriage certificates

The GRO marriage index shows the spouses' surname after 1912. Before then it is still possible to identify a marital match between two parties by searching for both the bride and groom in the same year as both entries should be identical. However, using FreeBMD automatically locates those names with matching registration details assuming you enter both names in the search field. If you know the place of marriage go directly to the parish marriage register particularly if these are available online as the information is exactly the

same (and sometimes more accurate) as the GRO certificate for no financial outlay. You also see original signatures which may be important in follow-up research. Marriages which took place in registry offices cannot be accessed in this way.

A marriage certificate gives a wealth of information to enable both paternal and maternal ancestry to be traced. Marriages were normally registered on the day of the event so will appear in the indexes in the quarter in which the event actually occurred.

The names given are those which the couple were known by at the time of marriage. A previously married woman will inevitably marry using her surname as taken upon the first marriage rather than her maiden surname.



**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE**      GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number COL285509

1857. Marriage solemnized at the <u>Brunswick Chapel</u> in the District of <u>Mistol</u> in the County of <u>Bristol</u>							
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.
	Thirtieth	William Scott	29	Bachelor	Accountant	21 Victoria Street Bristol	Richard Smith
178	September	Veronica	27	Spinster		1 Brunswick Place Clifton District	Thomas Hickey
	1857	Mary Ann Hickey	27	Spinster		Clifton District	Thomas Hickey

Married in the Brunswick Chapel according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Independent by me, Joseph Gardiner

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Scott Veroniam and Mary Ann Hickey in the Presence of us, S. W. Buckley and Thomas Scott Gardiner

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of Bristol  
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 26th day of April 2006

MXC 568638

This certificate is issued in pursuance of section 65 of the Marriage Act 1949. Sub-section 3 of that section provides that any certified copy of an entry purporting to be sealed or stamped with the seal of the General Register Office shall be received as evidence of the marriage to which it relates without any further or other proof of the entry, and no certified copy purporting to have been given in the said Office shall be of any force or effect unless it is sealed or stamped as aforesaid.

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039955 31105 08035 9958 012030



Sometimes ages are inaccurate or the entry may state "full age" which normally means over 21yrs. The question is how old are the groom and bride? Some may even be younger than 21yrs. Ages may also be inaccurate as it was tradition in some areas for the bride to appear younger than the groom. Up to 1929 marriages may have taken place when the bride was 12yrs old and upwards and the groom 14yrs and upwards. However, it was not unusual for couples to marry in their late 20s early 30s. Marital status is also shown but those widowed may be recorded as bachelor or spinster or as single person.

Don't assume that a female did not have an occupation if this is not shown. It was quite common to only find an occupation given for the groom and many officiators did not ask for a brides occupation.

Addresses are again useful to identify families on census returns although some addresses given may be "accommodation addresses". Some couples used temporary addresses to

qualify for a marriage in the particular parish. Some addresses can also be vague perhaps only naming a town or village rather than including a full address.

Fathers names are also given and in some cases the certificate may indicate that he is deceased. The absence thereof does not automatically mean he was still alive. If no father is shown it may indicate illegitimacy but a name given might be that of a guardian or be totally fictitious and given for respectabilities sake.

You need to be aware that some couples never married or did so after the birth of some or all of their children.

### Death certificates

Death certificates are often overlooked in research. English and Welsh death certificates are not as informative as birth and marriage certificates but can still be extremely useful, particularly for researching older generations born before July 1837 and to confirm marital status. They will also provide an insight into how, where and when your ancestor died. A death certificate confirms the deceased's age, and from 1969 exact dates of birth are given. The informant was frequently a relative and their details can be useful for confirming suspected links in your ancestry. Birth, marriage and death certificates also provide home addresses, which might help to locate your family in other records like electoral registers.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH



GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number COL285509

REGISTRATION DISTRICT	Bristol
1888 DEATH in the Sub-district of St Mary Redcliff	in the City & County of Bristol

Columns:- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 No. When and where died Name and surname Sex Age Occupation Cause of death Signature, description and residence of informant When registered Signature of registrar

76	21st December 1888 24 Victoria Square St Maryle W.1.B.	Sarah Brown	Female	93 years	Widow of James Brown a Blacksmith	Domestic Absorption Certified by B. H. Bellfield M.R.C.S.	Caroline Gwyther daughter present at the death 24 Victoria Square Simple Bristol	21st December 1888	A. Bodiod Registrar
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CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 26th day of April 2006

DYB 010774

See note overleaf

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039895 10103 08005 SPSL 012028



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It is always necessary to “kill off” your ancestors so obtaining a death certificate is really useful. The date and place of death may be an institution or an address of a relative rather than the usual home address. That address could be in a different registration district to that of the home address and this could create an element of doubt as to whether you have identified the right person. Names are those used at the time of death which for many

(particularly females) are not those given at birth. Married women are always recorded on death certificates under their last married name.

Ages can be notoriously inaccurate but are usually about right if a close relative has registered the death. At best they are a guide but can be as much as 10 -15 years adrift particularly if an informant was not familiar with the deceased. Occupations given are usually the last known occupation and again can sometimes be enhanced. In many cases the occupation for a woman indicates whether she is the wife of, widow of, or spinster. Causes of death, if certified, normally use medical terms and were certified by a medical practitioner in attendance. On certificates issued before medical certification was needed the causes of death can be vague or use colloquial names for diseases or illnesses.

The informant information is often that of a spouse or close relative. Most relationships to the deceased are given for registrations after 1875 and if the informant address is the same as the deceased then it suggests the death occurred at home. The informant could be a Coroner in which case it is advisable to search for records of an inquest and certainly research local newspapers for an inquest report. Many deaths occurred as a result of accidents.

Death certificates are also extremely useful if you are trying to determine hereditary diseases within families.

### ***Other civil registration indexes***

Outside of the main birth marriage and death indexes there are supplementary indexes for events which took place overseas, within the military, on board British ships or aircraft and for legal adoption. Obtaining certificates uses the same system as that for a traditional certificate.

These include births, marriages or deaths registered by the armed forces; those recorded by British consulates or high commissions and events at sea, or on British oil or gas rigs or aircraft including:

Regimental records of births/baptisms, marriages and some deaths relating to British Army regiments 1761 to 1924.

Army chaplains' records of baptisms, marriages and deaths 1796 to 1880.

Births and deaths at sea 1837 to present date.

Consular records of births, marriages and deaths of British subjects registered at British Consulates from 1849 to 12 months prior to the present date (birth, marriage and death).

Army records of births, marriages and deaths of members of the British Army or their families, which took place abroad 1881 to 1965.

Deaths of serving personnel during: The Boer War 1899 to 1902, World War 1 1914 to 1921 and World War 2 1939 to 1948.

Births and deaths on board British registered aircraft 1947 to present date.

Foreign marriage certificates deposited with the GRO 1948 to 2013.

Births and deaths of British subjects registered at British High Commissions 1949 to present date.

Births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths of members of the British armed forces or their families 1965 to present date.

Deaths of workers on British oil and gas rigs 1971 to present date.

Births and deaths on British registered hovercrafts 1972 to present date.

Registration of births, marriages and deaths in Ireland commence in 1864 except protestant marriages which were registered from 1845 onwards.

The civil registration system in Scotland commenced in 1855.

## **WHERE NOW?**

Now that you have got yourselves organised you can progress further and begin the research. The following guides are available to help you gain an understanding of how to research and what you can discover about your ancestors.

### **EVERYONE HAS ROOTS (a series of helpful research guides)**

*No. 1 It starts with you*

*No. 2 Ready to begin your research*

**No. 3 Birth, marriage & death certificates**

*No. 4 Grow your tree with census returns*

*No. 5 Baptism, marriage & burial registers*

*No. 6 Records created after death*

*No. 7 Discovering more about your ancestors*

*No. 8 The military connection*

*No. 9 Tracing your ancestors when they moved*

*No. 10 Proving your research is correct*