



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

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.

How to find an index reference

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 and can be viewed online for free at libraries and record offices, or visit www.freebmd.org.uk.

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. 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



	Standard Service	Despatch target	Priority Service	Despatch target
Certificate with GRO index reference number supplied	£9.25	Four working days	£23.40	Next working day if ordered before 4pm
Certificate without GRO index reference number supplied	£9.25	Fifteen working days	£23.40	Next working day if ordered before 4pm

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
1	1888 November 1874 Blenheim	Winston Leonard	Boy	Randolph Henry Churchill	Sir Winston Churchill formerly Jerome	Mr. D. Woodstock	Randolph S. Churchill	16th March 1874	George Foster Registrar	
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										

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.

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GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE
ENGLAND

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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 and easy 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).

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 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 such as the name at birth, year of birth and district of birth. You will not be charged more for this service but it will take longer for your certificate to be dispatched. You will need to pay by credit or debit card.

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 – 8pm, Saturday 9am – 4pm.

By Post

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

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.