



HM Passport  
Office



# Guide to Marriage certificates

Collect the evidence for one of the most important days in your ancestors' lives and take your research back another generation.

## Reveal your family unions

Marriage certificates are key documents and provide a wealth of information on two strands of your family tree. They will help take you back to the next generation by providing the father's name for the bride and groom as well as their occupations and may lead to surprising discoveries, for instance, the witnesses may be unknown family members.

The General Register Office (GRO) in Southport holds comprehensive records of all marriages recorded in England and Wales from 1837 onwards as well as records for some British Nationals married overseas.

## How to find an index reference

The GRO provides a public index that lists basic details of every marriage recorded in England and Wales. 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](http://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 marriage record you will need to note the following:

- full name of the person on the certificate
- year and quarter in which the marriage 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	<b>£9.25</b>	Four working days	<b>£23.40</b>	Next working day if ordered before 4pm
Certificate without GRO index reference number supplied	<b>£9.25</b>	Fifteen working days	<b>£23.40</b>	Next working day if ordered before 4pm

# Guide to marriage certificates

## 1 When married

This marriage happened on 18 September 1907 so it will be found in the GRO indexes for the September quarter for 1907.

## 2 Name and surname

The names given by the bride and groom at the time of the marriage.

## 3 Age

The age given by the bride and groom is only as accurate as they believed it to be. If it says 'Of full age' it means that the bride or groom was over 21.

## 4 Condition

This shows the marital status of the parties. Bachelor or spinster for those who had not married before; or widower/widow or marriage dissolved.

## 5 Rank or profession

Don't assume a woman didn't have a paid occupation if there is no entry next to her name. It is common to find only the groom's occupation stated.

## 6 Residence

The address given here can be misleading as some couples used a temporary address to qualify for marriage in the parish. Some just name the parish.

## 7&8 Name and profession of father

These details are useful for checking you have the right certificate and will help you delve into the lives of your ancestors

**Witnesses** Always check the witnesses on a marriage certificate as they may reveal family connections.

**Signatures** The certificate you receive from the GRO is a copy of the register. Although it doesn't show actual signatures it will show if your ancestors could sign their name. Those that couldn't marked an 'x' here.

**Married in...** Often the parish church, but you may find a non-conformist chapel here and confirmation of whether your ancestors married by licence/banns.

  
**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE**      GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE  
 Application Number: SPECIMEN

1907. Marriage solemnized at The Parish Church in the Parish  
 of St. Margaret Westminster in the County of London

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
373	Sept 18 <sup>th</sup> 1907	Arthur Conan Doyle	40	Widower	Author	39, Old Leece Street, S.W.	Charles Alhamont Doyle	Artist
		Jean Elizabeth Leekie	31	Spinster		Glebe House Blackheath	James Blythe Leekie	Merchant

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by licence or otherwise by me,  
 This Marriage was solemnized between us, Arthur Conan Doyle in the presence of us, James B. Leekie C. Cyril Angell  
Jean Elizabeth Leekie Mary Josephine Doyle Lisa Leekie Officiarius

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of St. George Hanover Square  
 Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 16th day of March 2015

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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# It's quick and easy...

## Online

It's quick and easy to order a marriage certificate online, just follow these three steps:

**STEP ONE:** Visit [www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates](http://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 'Marriage 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 marriage (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 a index reference number but you will need to give some identifying information such as the names of the bride and groom, year of marriage and district of marriage. 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](http://www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates)

## Find that marriage

Try these five tips if you can't find an ancestor's nuptials recorded in the indexes

**TIP 1:** Prior to 1875, the registration of an event was not compulsory and therefore some were missed.

**TIP 2:** Marriages sometimes took place after the birth of the first child. Widening the timescale searched may help.

**TIP 3:** A marriage might have taken place outside of England and Wales e.g Scotland. For Scottish records, visit [www.scotlandspople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspople.gov.uk).

**TIP 4:** The bride may have been married more than once – try looking under the name of the groom instead.

**TIP 5:** Bear in mind that there may never have been a marriage. Couples often lived together as man and wife because divorce was rare and expensive. Some did not remarry after their spouse died.