



## Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates

There are two places where indexes to birth, marriage and death certificates are held:

- The National General Register Office (GRO) Indexes
- Local Register Offices

The national indexes are created from quarterly returns from local register offices and have been transcribed three times before the final indexes are created and are, therefore, open to human error and omissions at all these stages.

There is an excellent article written by Tony Foster from the Lancashire BMD project giving an insight into how approximately **1 million entries from 1837-1899 could be missing or mistranscribed in the GRO indexes.** [www.lfhhs.org.uk/help/factsh/lbmd.htm](http://www.lfhhs.org.uk/help/factsh/lbmd.htm)

### Important Dates in Civil Registration

- **1st July 1837** - Civil Registration in England and Wales begins.
- **1852** - GRO References change from Roman Numerals.
- **1866** - GRO References include Age at Death.
- **1875** - Implementation of the Birth and Death Act of 1874.
  - a) Compulsory Registration of Births (parents or guardians responsibility).
  - b) Fines for non-registration/penalties for late registration (42 days to register).
  - c) Illegitimate births - father must be present for his name to appear.
  - d) Deaths to be registered within 5 days, instead of 8 as previously.
  - e) Medical Certificate in respect of cause of death required.
- **1898** - Nonconformist and Catholic churches can appoint an 'Authorized Person' to register marriages, removing the need for the registrar to attend.
- **September Quarter 1911** GRO Indexes include Mother's maiden name.
- **March Quarter 1912** GRO Marriage indexes include Spouse's Surname.
- **1st July 1927** - Introduction of the Register of Still Births.
- **1927**
  - a) Introduction of the Adopted Children's Register.
  - b) Re-registration of illegitimate births allowed if parents subsequently marry each other.
  - c) Registrar's Certificate/Coroner's order required before a burial/cremation of a body.
- **1929**
  - a) Legal Age of marriage increased from 14 (males) and 12 (females) to 16 for both but parental consent still required up to the age of 21.
  - b) Functions of civil registration transferred to Local Authorities.
  - c) Newly appointed Registration Officers paid salaries.
- **1946** GRO Registration District numbers change.
- **1947** Short Birth Certificates introduced.
- **1969**
  - a) Format of Birth and Death Certificates changed from landscape to portrait.
  - b) Age of majority reduced to 18.
  - c) Reregistration of births of illegitimate children to include name of the father irrespective of whether the parents marry.
- **June Quarter 1969** Death Indexes show Date of Birth instead of Age at Death.
- **1975** Adult adopted people allowed access to information on original birth certificates.
- **1984** GRO Indexes changed to annual compilations.

**UK BMD Project - (FREE website) [ukbmd.org.uk](http://ukbmd.org.uk) and [cheshirebmd.org.uk](http://cheshirebmd.org.uk)**

Pioneered by the Family History Society of Cheshire, volunteers have been working now for nine years, with the co-operation of the staff in local Register Offices, towards getting all the Birth, Marriage and Death indexes for the whole of participating counties available for searching on-line via the UK BMD project. The UK BMD Project aims to make its indexes the most **accurate source anywhere** because they are checked against the **original entries in the original registers**. This local project also includes significantly more information than the national one, therefore helping to avoid applying for the wrong certificates.

**LOCAL REGISTER OFFICE CERTIFICATES COST LESS**

Certificates cost £9.00 from Local Register Offices and £9.25 from the General Register Office (GRO) in Southport. Remember, though, that local BMD projects are helping to make it less likely that you will order the wrong certificate.

Counties involved include: Cheshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands, North Wales, Bath, Berkshire, Wiltshire and the North East of England. Please go to the **UK BMD Project** for more information. These are now cross database searchable by clicking on Local BMD and then UKBMDsearch. Check the coverage pages for these areas, since this project is not necessarily as advanced in the various individual registration districts. It's no use saying that you can't find a birth of someone in say 1930, when these have only been checked and uploaded up until 1910.

**Free BMD - (free website) - [freebmd.rootsweb.com](http://freebmd.rootsweb.com)**

This is your next best place to search if your ancestors are not yet covered by one of the local BMD projects.

Another extremely useful project whereby it is hoped eventually to transcribe all the General Register Offices (GRO) indexes of Births, Marriages and Deaths and make them searchable on-line. The GRO indexes are compiled from quarterly returns sent by Local Register Offices and are the same as those available to view on microfilm at Family History Centres and Local Record Offices. [The FreeBMD Database was last updated on Thu 10 Nov 2011 and currently contains 208,303,224 distinct records \(264,209,871 total records\). Progress is rapidly approaching 1953.](#)

Coverage can be a little patchy, most years are complete whilst some have hardly been started you can check this by clicking on the Information page and then on Statistics. The reference numbers quoted, in this instance, are different from those at the UK BMD project, and are the ones to quote when ordering from the General Register Office at Southport.

The General Register Office  
PO Box 2  
SOUTHPORT  
Merseyside  
PR8 2JD  
Tel: 44 (0) 300 123 1837

**Certificates On-line - [www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/](http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/)**

Offers the ability to apply directly on-line for certificates from the General Register Office at Southport - excellent site and the best way of ordering GRO certificates.

**Ancestry - (subscription website) [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)**

Ancestry uses the FREE BMD indexes up until 1915 and then their own individually indexed entries up until 2007. The Ancestry.com Library Edition is available to use free of charge in many libraries.

**Find My Past - (subscription website) [findmypast.co.uk](http://findmypast.co.uk)**

Similar to Ancestry but also includes registrations notified to Army Chaplains and the British Consular records of Births, Marriages and Deaths which occurred abroad. Find my Past is available to use at our Alderley Edge Research Centre.

**BMD Index – (subscription website) [bmdindex.co.uk](http://bmdindex.co.uk)**

Rival to the above sites - £5 for three month's subscription, £14.95 for 12 months, fully surname searchable. The entire GRO indexes are now searchable on-line. BMD Index is part of the Genealogist group of websites and is also available to use at our Alderley Edge Resource Centre.

**Family Relatives – (subscription website) <http://www.familyrelatives.com/>**

Possibly not the best subscription site for birth, marriage and death certificates, but full subscription is only £30 per year and has a growing collection of Parish Registers, Directories, Military and Medical records.

It is still possible to search through the National GRO Indexes even if you don't have access to a computer or don't want to subscribe to one of the pay sites above, either at:

- **The Family History Society of Cheshire – Alderley Research Centre.**
- **Latter-day Saints Family History Centres.**
- **The Greater Manchester County Record Office (GMCRO) on fiche.**

For a full list of registration districts in England and Wales [www.ukbmd.org.uk/genuki/reg/](http://www.ukbmd.org.uk/genuki/reg/)

For an excellent detailed guide to the legislation which governs what should appear in the columns of birth, marriage and death certificates, see Barbara Dixon's Certificate Tutorial Page: [www.dixons.clara.co.uk/Certificates/indexbd.htm](http://www.dixons.clara.co.uk/Certificates/indexbd.htm)

**Some useful webpages:**

<http://www.behindthename.com/> - etymology of given names.

<http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~oel/givennames.html> - old English and Latin given names.

<http://www.antiquusmorbus.com/Index.htm> - old medical terms.