

Births, Marriages and Deaths (BMDs)

Birth, marriage and death records are the building blocks of a family tree. These can be found in parish registers and since civil registration became mandatory, at local and national records offices.

Parish Registers

Records are kept in all churches or religious establishments of baptisms, marriage and burial ceremonies. These are in the form of registers and since the end of the 16th century copies of these have been sent to the Bishop of the Diocese.

Transcripts of register entries are available at local libraries and records offices or online at paid genealogy web sites or free at Online Parish Clerk projects (OPCs).

The information available will vary from area to area but will usually give:

Baptism - date of baptism and parents' forenames and surname. Some entries will also have the date of birth, father's occupation and address.

Marriages – records of marriage Banns are available. Marriage records before 1837 gave date of marriage, name of both parties and usually fathers' names. Since 1837 the information is that of a standard marriage certificate.

Burials – mostly these give the date of burial and the name and age of the deceased. For children it may give the parents name(s).

Civil Registration

Civil Registration began in England and Wales on 1st July 1837 and required that all births, marriages and deaths be registered nationally. Scotland followed in 1855 and Ireland in 1864, although non catholic marriages needed to be registered from 1845.

Indexes of registration are arranged in four quarterly volumes (March, June, September and December) for each year arranged in alphabetical name order.

Index information

Although there are some national differences, the Index gives the following information:

- Surname, Forename
- Registration district
- Volume and page number
- Age at death (from 1866)
- Mothers maiden name (births from Sept 1911)
- Spouse's surname (marriages from March 1912)
- Year of birth (deaths from 1969)

The exact date of birth, marriage or death is not given.

Reasons for omission from the registers

Quite often it is difficult to find BMDs, even though they certainly exist. Possible reasons might be:

- In England and Wales, in the first 25 years while registration was required it was not compulsory or enforced. It was reckoned that up to one third of parents failed to register their child's birth
- Deaths were almost always registered as a certificate was necessary before a corpse could be buried but infant deaths were fairly easy to conceal and so often not registered
- Inaccurate spellings of surnames - many people could not write or spell their name, so variations occurred
- Registration could have taken place overseas

BMD Certificates

Information obtained from certificates is invaluable and enables the researcher to move on to the next level. Although there are slight differences in countries within the UK and Ireland, basically the information will be the same.

Birth Certificates

- day, month and year of birth
- place of birth – could be the actual address, but may just be the town or village
- name and sex of the child
- fathers name and occupation
- mothers name and maiden name
- date and place of registration
- signature or mark and address of informant

Marriage certificates

- place the marriage took place, religious establishment or register office
- date of marriage
- name of spouses, addresses and occupations
- age – this could be the actual age or may just say 21 or 'full' regardless of age
- condition of spouses - single, widowed or divorced. When a woman is widowed it will give her previous married name but not her maiden name and this can cause difficulty finding birth details later.
- name and occupation of both spouse's fathers
- witnesses to the marriage

Death certificates

- date and place of death
- name, sex, age and occupation of deceased
- cause of death
- date and place of registration
- signature or mark and address of informant

Obtaining Certificates

Indexes and copies of the records for England and Wales are kept at the General Register Office (GRO) – www.gro.gov.uk

General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside, PR82JD

Tel: 0330 1231837

In Scotland, indexes are held at ScotlandsPeople, the National Records of Scotland office in Edinburgh – www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

National Records of Scotland, 2 Princes Street, Edinburgh, EH13YY

Tel: 0131 3144411

Records for Northern Ireland from May 1921 are kept at the General Register Office (Northern Ireland) (GRONI) in Belfast – www.geni.nidirect.gov.uk

NISRA, Colby House, Stranmillis Court, Belfast, BT95RR Tel: 0300 2007890

Records for the Republic of Ireland are held at the General Register Office – www.civilregistrationservice.ie

HSE Civil Registration Service, Joyce House, 8 - 11 Lombard St., Dublin 2, DO2Y279 Tel: (01)8638200

When requesting a certificate it is necessary to quote:

- Surname and forename(s)
- Date i.e. year and quarter
- Registration district

Cost of Certificates

In England and Wales a full certificate ordered from the GRO costs £9.50, £10 from a local register office. A digital copy is now available from the GRO for £6.

In Scotland copies of certificates cost £15 plus postage available from Scottish Certificates www.certificates@clacks.gov.uk

In Northern Ireland certificates cost £15 plus postage available from the GRONI.

In the Republic of Ireland a full certificate will cost 20€ but a photocopy is available for 4€ available online from the General Register Office.