

Civil Registration

The systematic registration of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales started on 1 July 1837, although birth registration only became compulsory in 1875. Registration Services hold the registers of births, marriages and deaths that have taken place in their districts since 1837. A national index is held at the General Register Office.

How to get copies of birth, marriage or death certificates

You can order Somerset certificates online from www.somerset.gov.uk (search for “request certificate”), by telephone 0300 123 2224 or writing in to Certificate Services, Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, TA2 6SF. Please make cheques payable to Somerset County Council). Charges apply, and depend on the service you choose (up to 5 working days, Express Service next day or While You Wait if ordered before 2pm. Certificates can be collected or a postal charge applies.

Alternatively you can order certificates from the General Register Office (GRO), quoting the volume and page number if possible; charges apply for this service. To order a certificate from the General Register Office by post, you will need to contact them first to get the right form. You can do this by phoning 0300 123 1837, or by emailing certificate.services@ipsi.gsi.gov.uk. The address is: General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2JD. Forms may also be available from your local Registration Service.

You can order certificates online at www.gro.gov.uk, if you know the volume and page number of the certificate. To find this, use the indexes in the microfiche area of the Heritage Centre searchroom. These are arranged by year.

Before 1974, Somerset was divided into seven registration districts. The names and boundaries have changed over time – see <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/civreg> for a summary. The registers from the districts that cover modern Somerset are held by the Somerset Registration Service at the Heritage Centre. The contact details for the other districts in historic Somerset are:

- **Bath:** The Guildhall, High Street, Bath, BA1 5AW, (01225) 477234
- **North Somerset:** 41 The Boulevard, Weston super Mare, North Somerset, BS23 1PG, (01934) 627552

General Register Office Indexes

Civil indexes of births, marriages and deaths have been put together quarterly in March, June, September and December. Originally, registration sub-districts followed the boundaries of the Poor Law Unions, so the place-names given in the civil indexes are not the names of parishes but of groups of up to 30 parishes. The index used to be known as the St Catherine’s House Index.

Indexes that used to be held at the Family Records Centre can now be seen at The National Archives, but you cannot get certificates from them. That has to be done direct from the General Register Office or local Registration Services.

You can see copies of the indexes at the Somerset Heritage Centre (1837 to 2004) or at these libraries:

- Weston super Mare Library, The Boulevard, Weston super Mare, BS23 1PL, (01934) 636638, Email: weston.library@n-somerset.gov.uk (1837 to 1998)
- Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Forest Hill, Lysander Road, Yeovil, (01935) 426817 (1837 to 1901)
- Barnstaple Local Studies Library, Tuly Street, Barnstaple, Devon, EX31 1EL, (01271) 388607, Email barnstaple.library@devon.gov.uk. (Births and marriages (1857 to 1906, deaths 1837 to 1983)

What information do the certificates give?

Births

Date of birth

Place of birth (name of parish; sometimes the street if in a town)

Name of child

Sex of child

Father's name (often left blank for illegitimate children)

Mother's name

Father's occupation (again, often blank for illegitimate children)

Name, signature and residence of the informant (usually the mother)

Marriages

Date of marriage

Name of church, chapel or register office where it took place

Names of both parties

Ages of both parties (before 1870 often just say "of full age", usually taken to mean 21 or over)

'Condition' of both parties (e.g. bachelor, widow)

'Rank or profession' of both parties (i.e. social status or job)

Places of residence at time of marriage

Full names and 'ranks or professions' of both fathers

Witnesses to the marriage

This is the exactly the same information you will find in the parish registers.

Deaths

Date of death

Place of death

Name of deceased

Sex of deceased

Occupation of deceased

Age at death (after 1866)

Cause of death

Signature, description and residence of the informant

Common problems

If you cannot find an entry, these suggestions may help you:

- The event was never registered. This is especially common for births before 1875. You may be able to trace this event using a different source, such as parish registers.
- The event was registered, but was left out of the General Register Office indexes, or indexed wrongly. Check different spellings of the surname, or think if it could be misheard, which would mean that it could have been written down in a different way. You may still be able to find the entry if you know the area the event happened in.
- The event happened outside the United Kingdom. You can see separate indexes of events registered by British Consuls or relating to Servicemen (including many army births in the United Kingdom), at The National Archives. You can see indexes to some of these registers at the Heritage Centre.
- The event happened in Scotland. You can see Scottish records online at www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk or at the Scotland's People Centre at General Register House, Edinburgh, EH1 3YY, (0131) 314 4300, Email: enquiries@scotlandsppeoplehub.gov.uk.
- Still births are not included in the birth or death indexes, but certificates are available from the General Register Office.
- The registration district boundary changed. This happened at various times and may mean that a parish 'moves' from one district to another.

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Website: www.swheritage.org.uk/somerset-archives

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