

Durham County Record Office

County Hall Durham DH1 5UL

Telephone 03000 267619

Email: record.office@durham.gov.uk

Website: www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk



USER GUIDE 1 : A BRIEF GUIDE TO CIVIL REGISTRATION

Issue no. 28

February 2018

Civil registration, that is the registration of **births**, **marriages** and **deaths**, was introduced in England and Wales on 1 July 1837. Thereafter it was a requirement for all births, marriages and deaths to be registered with the local registrar, although penalties for non-registration were not introduced until 1875. The only similar records before 1837 are the records of baptisms, marriages and burials performed by the Church of England (see page 4) and other churches, such as Methodists, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

For the purposes of civil registration, the country was divided into registration districts, each covering the same area as one or more poor law unions; the unions themselves were made up of a number of parishes, chapelries or townships, grouped together for the relief of the poor. Every registration district therefore contained a number of parishes (or parts of parishes). The boundaries of registration districts changed over time, principally in 1937 and 1974.

In 1837, the County of Durham was divided into 12 registration districts corresponding to the poor law unions in the County. Later this became 15, as follows:

Auckland Registration District	containing 20 parishes
Chester-le-Street Registration District	containing 13 parishes
Darlington Registration District	containing 25 parishes
Durham Registration District	containing 26 parishes
Easington Registration District	containing 23 parishes
Gateshead Registration District	containing 32 parishes
Hartlepool Registration District	containing 16 parishes
Houghton-le-Spring Registration District	containing 13 parishes
Lanchester Registration District	containing 22 parishes
South Shields Registration District	containing 30 parishes
Sedgefield Registration District	containing 8 parishes
Stockton Registration District	containing 14 parishes
Sunderland Registration District	containing 30 parishes
Teesdale Registration District	containing 21 parishes
Weardale Registration District	containing 12 parishes

A guide to the parishes included in each registration district is available in the Record Office publication, *Durham Family History Gazetteer* (1996).

Registration

After 1837 each registrar was able to register births, marriages and deaths, but only a superintendent registrar was able to perform civil marriages. Church of England clergymen were allowed to perform marriages without a registrar in attendance. Initially a registrar was required to be present and record marriages performed by clergymen of other denominations but after 1898 it was no longer necessary, in many cases, for a registrar to be present at such marriages.

Copies of entries

Local registrars were required to send copies of the entries in their registers each quarter to their superintendent registrar, who sent them to the Registrar General's office in London. Originally this was in Somerset House, then St. Catherine's House, and now at the General Register Office in Southport.

Two copies of each certificate of birth, marriage and death, therefore exist, one kept by the superintendent registrar in his registration district and one kept by the Registrar General. Copies of the entries of marriages performed by Church of England clergy (and, after 1898, other clergymen) are collected each quarter and details sent to the Registrar General. The duplicate register, used whenever a church marriage is performed, is not sent to the superintendent registrar until it is filled.

The General Register Office also holds other registers: still-births; births and deaths at sea; births and deaths in aircraft; service births, marriage and deaths; consular registers of births, marriages and deaths; registers of service deaths in World Wars I and II; adopted children. Details of these records are available at www.gov.uk/browse/births-deaths-marriages

Copy certificates

The original registers retained by the superintendent registrar for each registration district (and the copies collected from clergymen) are indexed quarter by quarter. The registers themselves are not available for inspection.

Certificates of entries in registers for a particular area can be supplied, on payment of a fee, by the superintendent registrar for that area (see below).

For the whole of England and Wales and for the other registers referred to above, by the General Register Office (OPCS, Box 2, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2JD). Certificates can be ordered online from www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates

Where marriage registers are held by the Durham County Record Office certificates can be supplied by the County Archivist.

Further details of the costs of certificates and the fees for searches are available from any superintendant registrar or the General Register Office.

Present registration districts

Copy certificates from **County Durham** Registration Service should be ordered from:

Cockton House, 35 Cockton Hill Road, Bishop Auckland, DL14 6HS

Telephone: 03000 266000

Email: bishopaucklandregisteroffice@durham.gov.uk

Website: www.durham.gov.uk/article/2256/Order-a-copy-of-a-certificate

Durham County Registration Service is currently indexing the birth, marriage (completed) and death registers within the county and this information is available online in a searchable database at gro.durham.gov.uk.

Contact details for the other registration districts which include parts of the historic County Durham are currently as follows:

- Darlington** Register Office, Backhouse Hall, Bull Wynd, Darlington DL1 5RG
www.darlington.gov.uk/your-council/register-office
(01325) 346604 registeroffice@darlington.gov.uk
- Hartlepool** Register Office, Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool TS24 8AY
www.hartlepool.gov.uk/info/20002/births_marriages_and_deaths/396/order_a_copy_certificate
(01429) 523337 registrar@hartlepool.gov.uk
- Stockton-on-Tees** Register Office, Nightingale House, Balaclava Street, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 2AL
www.stockton.gov.uk/stockton-council/births-deaths-marriages-and-civil-partnerships
(01642) 527720 registrars@stockton.gov.uk
- Gateshead** Register Office, Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear NE8 1HH
www.gateshead.gov.uk/People%20and%20Living/Births-Deaths-and-Marriages/Home.aspx
(0191) 4333000 registeroffice@gateshead.gov.uk
- South Tyneside** Register Office, 10 Broughton Road, South Shields, Tyne & Wear NE33 2RN
www.southtyneside.gov.uk/article/34706/Births-deaths-marriages
(0191) 4246350 registrars@southtyneside.gov.uk
- Sunderland** Register Office, PO Box 108, Civic Centre, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear SR2 7DN
www.sunderland.gov.uk/copy-certificates
(0191) 5205553 registrars@sunderland.gov.uk

GRO Indexes

The Registrar General compiles alphabetical indexes (popularly known as the "St. Catherine's House Indexes") from the information sent to them by superintendent registrars. These indexes cover the whole of England and Wales. There are separate indexes for births, marriages and deaths and the indexes can be seen online at www.freebmd.org.uk (free of charge), www.ancestry.co.uk (subscription only) and www.findmypast.co.uk (pay as you view).

The indexes give the name of the individual, the quarter in which his or her birth, marriage or death occurred and the registration district in which it occurred. A series of reference numbers follow, which are of relevance only to the General Register Office.

Indexes up to 1983 were compiled for quarters of the year (e.g. March quarter - January, February and March; June quarter - April, May and June) by the date of registration, consequently a birth or death may be registered in a quarter later than that in which the event occurred. From 1984 the indexes are compiled for the full year and give the month and year of the event.

Birth indexes from September 1911 contain the maiden name of the mother.

Marriage indexes from January 1912 give the name of both parties to the marriage under both entries.

Death indexes from January 1866 to March 1969 give the age of the deceased; from April 1969 the deceased's date of birth is given.

The St Catherine's House Indexes have also been microfilmed and the films have been purchased and made available to the public by some local libraries, record offices and branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormon Church), including:

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, The Linkway, Billingham, Cleveland TS23 3HG (Tel: 01642 563162)

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Family History Centre, Alexandra Road, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear SR2 9BT (Tel: 0191 5285787)

Darlington Library, Local Studies Section, Crown Street, Darlington DL1 1ND (Tel: 01325 349630)

Durham Clayport Library, Millennium Place, Durham, DH1 1WA (Tel: 0191 3864003)

Middlesbrough Central Library, Victoria Square, Middlesbrough TS1 2AY (Tel: 01642 263358)

Newcastle City Library, Humanities and Arts Department, Princess Square, Newcastle upon Tyne NE99 1DX (Tel: 0191 2610691)

North Yorkshire County Library, Thirsk Road, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL6 1DF (Tel: 01609 776202)

Northumberland Record Office, Morpeth Library, Gas House Lane, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1TA (Tel: 01670 504084)

South Tyneside Borough Library, Prince Georg Square, South Shields, Tyne & Wear NE33 2PE (Tel: 0191 4271818)

Sunderland City Library, Central Library and Arts Centre (Local Studies Section), Fawcett Street, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear SR1 1RE (Tel: 0191 5141235)

Teesside Archives, Exchange House, 6 Marton Road, Middlesbrough TS1 1DB (Tel: 01642 248321)

York City Library, Museum Street, York YO1 2DS (Tel: 01904 655631)

Parish Registers

Parish registers commence in 1538 (although many early registers have been lost), and they record the ecclesiastical ceremonies of baptism, marriage and burial (rather than the births, marriages and deaths recorded by the civil registration authorities from 1837).

The Durham County Record Office holds a large number of registers for parishes in the diocese of Durham (which covers the area between the Rivers Tyne and Tees) and that part of the diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales which is in the county of Durham. Microfilm copies of these registers are available for inspection in the public search-room of the Record Office. Full details of the registers held by Durham County Record Office can be found online at www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/article/10528/Search-Church-Registers However, many registers are still retained in parishes and where this is the case, it is necessary to contact the appropriate clergyman (names and addresses can be found on the diocese's website www.achurchnearyou.com).

Limitations which must be born in mind:

- (1) Parish registers are the records of the established church and do not necessarily contain information on all the inhabitants of a parish. By the end of the nineteenth century all non-conformist churches had their own systems of recording events; we hold some registers for Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches and the Society of Friends. Into the 20th century there is a decrease in the proportion of children baptised and there is an increase in register office weddings and in burials in municipal ceremonies rather than church burial grounds.
- (2) It is essential to know the parish in which the event took place and this may not be the parish in which the people concerned were living. The boundaries of parishes have changed, especially in the nineteenth century when many new parishes were created, and a village or part of a town may be in different parishes at various dates. It must be remembered that a large town could contain a substantial number of parishes by the end of the nineteenth century (Sunderland had 28). Civil registration districts, which are given on birth, marriage and death certificates, have different boundaries from parishes.
- (3) Only a comparatively small number of registers are indexed, all unofficially, and the coverage and standard of indexing is variable.
- (4) Difficulties over the handwriting can occur in the earlier registers and entries were sometimes made in Latin.