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

STEP ONE: Visit 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 an 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.

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.scotlandspeople.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.

Guide to Marriage certificates

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 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.

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
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.

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

9. **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.

10. **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.