



1. The GRO index reference and where to find it

The reference number identifies a birth, marriage or death in our records and indicates the year, quarter and district where the event was registered. The GRO index reference number will not be shown on copies of the certificate and should not be confused with the sequential serial number or application number shown on previous copies of the certificate.

A GRO index reference number typically comprises of a year, a quarter and the reference number that is shown in the indexes - for example 'March 1954 2a 222'. The district name is also given a number and is shown as a "volume number".

If you are going to be doing family history research, you will find the GRO Indexes an important resource.

A number of our indexes are available to search online for free. Online indexes are available for: birth records from 1837 up to 100 years ago, and 1984 up to the current year; and death records from 1837 to 1957, and 1984 up to the current year. Having traced a record, you are also able to directly order a certificate, for which index details will automatically be carried forward into your order.

Additionally, a complete set of GRO Indexes are available to view in microfiche format at:

- The Library of Birmingham
- Bridgend Local and Family History Centre
- City of Westminster Archives Centre
- Manchester Central Library
- Newcastle City Library
- Plymouth Central Library and
- The British Library

The indexes are available for searching by the public, but the records themselves are not available for scrutiny and information from the entry can only be provided in the form of a certificate. There is no charge for searching the indexes.

We are currently identifying a rolling programme to put more of our indexes online and we will notify you via our website when any new indexes are added.

You can view GRO's birth, death and marriage indexes online via other websites, e.g. <https://www.freebmd.org.uk> where they are available to view free of charge up to 1983.

Some public libraries and other organisations hold full or part sets of the GRO Indexes on microfiche or CD ROM.

Further information can be found at GOV.UK.

If you don't have the GRO reference number you can still order a certificate but it may take a little longer to arrive, dependant on the service required. It will also incur an administration charge to cover additional work searching for the record by GRO.

2. Q & A

Q1. From what date are the references available?

The earliest available birth, marriage and death registrations for England and Wales date from 1 July 1837 (September quarter of 1837).

Q2. What information do I need to find the index number that I want?

To search the GRO online indexes you will need to provide the event type, the year the event was registered, the sex of the individual you are looking for and their surname. There are other information fields that you can use which may help you narrow down your search such as forename and mother's maiden name.

Q3. How are the indexes organised?

GRO Microfiche indexes:

Entries are listed alphabetically by surname then forename. Babies whose parents had not decided on a name at registration appear at the end of the relevant surname listing. The indexes are arranged by year and then alphabetically by surname. Before 1983 the indexes are also split into the quarter of the year in which the event was registered: e.g. events registered in January, February or March will all be indexed in the March quarter for the relevant year. Please note that the indexes relate to separate events and are not linked together in families.

GRO Online Birth and Death Indexes

The GRO online indexes return results by year, surname, forename and quarter. Taking advantage of the computerised indexes, we have used feedback on searching to maximise the likelihood of finding a match against the search criteria provided.

Q4. What information will I see in the indexes?

Over the years the format of the indexes has changed several times. As a minimum the index will provide the following information:

- Surname and forename
- Year and quarter of registration
- Registration district
- Index reference number.

Depending on the event type and year of event you may also be provided with additional information including mother maiden name, age at death or year of birth.

Q5. Is there anything else I should be aware of when I'm searching?

A birth can be registered in the quarter after it took place. A death, although usually registered immediately, can sometimes be registered many months after the event.

Remember to check several indexes if you don't find what you are looking for straight away, and to check for alternative spellings.

Q6. What are unrelated marriages?

If you have found an entry in the marriage indexes that you think relates to the certificate you are looking for, it is recommended that you cross reference the name to ensure that the page/entry numbers are the same. For example, if you are looking for a marriage between Michael Harrison and Mary Jenkins, the same page/entry number will be listed in the indexes under both Michael Harrison and Mary Jenkins.