

Marriage Registers and Certificates: A Note from the Registry

Introduction

1. I have recently been asked to speak to clergy at training sessions undertaken at the Superintendent Registrar's Offices in Oxford, Banbury and Abingdon. A number of helpful suggestions emerged from these sessions in relation to the completion of Marriage Registers which may be of assistance across the Diocese, and I thought it might be helpful for you if I summarise some of these.

Ink

- 2.1 Marriage Register entries should be completed in **blue/black registration ink** using a fountain pen. Entries should **not** be completed using a ball point pen or felt tip pen in all the colours of the rainbow – apparently this does happen.
- 2.2 Registration ink can be ordered from Ecclesiastical Stationery Supplies by phone, on 01440 760 630, or from their website www.registrarsink.co.uk.
- 2.3 A number of people reported problems with their ink and clogging of fountain pens etc. Some possible solutions were suggested such as replacing the ink annually or every couple of years (depending upon the number of weddings you have) and/or to flush the pen through after every use so that it does not clog and the ink does not congeal in the pen.

Entries

3. Here is an example of the columns contained on a typical Marriage Register or Marriage Certificate to which I will refer throughout this guidance.

Columns: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
No.	When Married	Name and surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the time of marriage	Father's name and surname	Rank or Profession of Father

Column 1

The date should be written in numbers and the year in figures e.g. **Twenty-fourth September 2012**

Column 2

When the couple first approach you with their request to get married in your church, you should ask to see their passports or photographic driving licences, together with their birth certificates, so that you can check the names they have given match the names on their identity documents. This will also help establish their nationality and, as a result, which marriage preliminaries are best suited to them.

When entering their names on the Marriage Register and Certificate, the surname should be entered in CAPITALS not in lower case e.g. **Juliette Elizabeth SMITH**

Column 3

The age should be entered in figures followed by the word 'years' e.g. **35 years**, not just the figures alone.

Column 4

If neither party has been previously married the term '**Single**' should be entered. The terms bachelor/spinster are no longer used.

If one or both of the parties have been previously married, and that marriage ended by divorce, the term '**Previous marriage dissolved**' should be entered not 'Divorced'. You should ask to see the original Decree(s) Absolute to confirm the previous marriage(s) were legally ended before accepting the marriage booking.

If the previous marriage ended through the death of a spouse, the term '**Widow**' or '**Widower**' should be entered accordingly. You should ask to see the death certificate of the spouse.

For any other circumstances (such as a civil partnership dissolution etc), please refer to the '*Guidebook for The Clergy*' issued by the General Register Office which can be found at the following web address: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/agencies-public-bodies/ips/general-ips-publications/civil-reg/clergy-guide>.

Column 5

As much information as possible should be entered in this column. Abbreviations should be avoided, for example, '**Information Technology Consultant**' rather than 'IT Consultant' or '**Agricultural Labourer**' rather than 'Labourer'.

You should never use the word 'unemployed' but try to refer to the person's previous occupation.

If the person is a Housewife or Househusband, these descriptions can be recorded.

For any further advice about descriptions of occupations, again, please refer to the Guidebook mentioned earlier.

Column 6

The current full address(es) of the couple should be entered in this column, including the postcode.

As with the identity documents mentioned earlier, you should ask to see evidence of the couple's address when they make their application, such as bank statements for six months or Council Tax bills for two years. Due to the recent sham marriages which have taken place throughout the country, we no longer accept utility bills because it is so easy to add someone to a bill even if they do not live at the address.

Bearing in mind many couples do change address between applying to marry in a church and getting married, please check with the couple, perhaps when you are about to read their Banns, whether there has been a change of address or is likely to be a change of address so that you know you have the correct information for their Banns and for the Marriage Registers.

Column 7

The full names of both fathers should be entered here; again the surnames should be in CAPITALS.

If one of the parties would prefer their stepfather's name to be included on the Marriage Registers, you can do this so long as he is or has been married to their mother. You should enter his name in full followed by the word '(stepfather)', e.g. **Joseph Thomas JONES (stepfather)**.

If either father has died you should put his name followed by '(deceased)' underneath:

e.g. **James Ernest WRIGHT
(deceased)**

If either party does not wish to put their father's details in the Register or they do not know who their father is, you should **not** put 'unknown' or leave the column blank. You should put a **horizontal line** through both columns to show that no information was given.

Column 8

The information for Column 5 applies here but if the father is retired you should enter his profession followed by '(retired)', e.g. **Chartered Accountant (retired)**.

Even if the father has died, his profession should be entered at the time of his death or his profession and (retired), if he was retired when he died.

NB: You should never leave a box blank because the assumption will be made that the Marriage Registers were incorrectly completed, resulting in questions being raised when you submit your Quarterly Returns. Always put a horizontal line through a box if no information is provided.

Signatures

- 4.1 The couple should sign the Marriage Registers using their usual signatures. The bride should sign using her maiden name, as this is the name she contracted to marry under; however, if she does sign using her married name it does not invalidate the entry nor require correction.
- 4.2 The witnesses should also sign using their usual signatures.
- 4.3 To assist the Superintendent Registrars and the General Register Office when providing Marriage Certificates, they have asked that the names of the signatories are written legibly in pencil in the margins so that copies of the entries can be provided. If someone's signature is illegible, you, or the General Register Office, will not be able to provide a Certified copy.
- 4.4 If someone has signed their name in full, you should enter this in pencil in the margin, in capitals, (e.g. YVONNE MASEY). If someone has signed using their initials and a surname, you should enter this in pencil in the margin, in capitals, (e.g. J J SINGH).

Errors

Before the Marriage Registers have been signed

- 5.1 At the time of signing the Marriage Registers, you should ask the couple to check that all the information in the Registers is correct. Due to emotional distraction on the day, it may be sensible to ask the couple to check the Registers at the rehearsal (if they have been filled-in at that stage).
- 5.2 If an error is discovered before the Registers have been signed, you can amend the Registers using the numbered error system. You should check the back or front inside covers of the Marriage Registers to find the next number to be allocated to an error. Find the last numbered

error within the Register and work forward, checking all subsequent entries, to make sure no further errors have been allocated a number without being entered in the cover. (The numbers may be different in each Register).

- 5.3 The General Register Office's Guidebook covers corrections quite thoroughly so please may I refer you to this guidance if you do need to correct an error (currently section 5 on page 20).
- 5.4 In this instance, the Marriage Certificate does not need to record the error(s) so a new Certificate should be drafted, at the same time the amendments are made, if the error has been repeated on the Certificate.

After the Marriage Registers have been signed

- 5.5 At a later date, especially after returning from honeymoon, couples may notice an error on their Marriage Certificate. As soon as you are contacted by the couple, you should check the Marriage Registers to ensure it is not just an error on the Marriage Certificate. If an error is noticed there is a period of **one month** within which clergy are permitted to make corrections to completed marriage register entries and certificates. The original entries should not be altered in anyway but the correction should be made in the margin of the Marriage Registers and Certificate in the manner shown in Appendix H of the GRO's Guidebook. Before making any correction, you should ask to see evidence to support the correction such as passports for the spelling of a name or Council Tax bills to confirm an address. In order to effect the alteration, the correction should be made in the presence of the couple, or if either is not available, then in the presence of two churchwardens.
- 5.6 If a month has already elapsed before the correction is made, then you should ask the couple to contact the General Register Office, either by phone, on 0300 123 1837, or refer them to the Direct Gov website, where they will find guidance notes and an application form to send to the General Register Office. The form and guidance notes can be found at the following address: <https://www.gov.uk/correct-marriage-registration/how-to-apply>.
- 5.7 The General Register Office will send a letter of instruction, to the incumbent or officiating minister, setting out how to make the correction. The original Marriage Certificate will need to be destroyed and a new one issued showing the original entry and the correction in the margin, meaning the Marriage Certificate will always show the error and marginal correction. This is why it is always best to ensure the couple check things thoroughly at the time of signing.

Security of Registers and Certificates

- 6.1 Please note there is a lucrative black market in Marriage Registers and Certificates which means that your registers and certificates should be stored in a safe. Any theft should be reported immediately to the Superintendent Registrar, General Register Office and police.
- 6.2 The General Register Office ask that you keep a list of the certificates you have issued on a separate sheet, stored in another place, so that you can easily account for what has and has not been issued. They also ask you to keep a list of marriage register entries which have not been submitted by quarterly return because they may have to be registered again if the Marriage Registers are stolen.

Further Information

7. I hope this additional guidance will be of assistance to you in dealing with the paperwork for weddings. If I can assist further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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