

Marriage Registers and Certificates: A Note from the Registry

Introduction

1. I assisted with clergy 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.

Identity Documents and Marriage Preliminaries

2. For information about establishing the identity of couples, their addresses and qualifying connections and information about marriage preliminaries, please refer to our guide '**Marriage in the Church of England: Guidance for the Diocese of Oxford**' which can be found here: <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Marriage-in-the-Church-of-England-Guidance-for-Clergy.pdf> . The 'Legal (Diocesan Registry)' section of the Diocesan website also contains other helpful information about marriages, faculties, churchyards, PCC issues etc which can be found here: <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/support-services/legal-diocesan-registry/>.

Ink

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 Registration ink can be ordered from Ecclesiastical Stationery Supplies by phone, on 01440 784 596, or from their website www.registrarsink.co.uk.
- 3.3 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

- 4.1 The top section of a Marriage Register entry looks like this:

..... Marriage Solemnized at in the parish of in the
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- 4.2 Before the words 'Marriage Solemnised at', the *Year* should be put in the first space in figures.
- 4.3 After the words 'Marriage Solemnized at' you should enter '**the Parish Church**' or '**the Church of ...**' if it is not a parish church.
- 4.4 After the words 'in the parish of' you should enter the ecclesiastical parish such as '**Chilton**' or '**Bucknell**' etc.
- 4.5 After the words 'in the' you should enter '**County of Oxford**' or '**County of Buckingham**' or '**County of Berkshire**' as appropriate.

5. 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 day and month should be written in words and the year in figures e.g. **Twenty-fourth September 2012**

Column 2

When a couple first approach you with a request to get married in your church, you must 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 must 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 must 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 (GRO) 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 avoid using the word 'unemployed' but try to refer to the person's previous occupation where possible.

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 GRO 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(es) 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 or three months before their wedding, 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: Blank Boxes If you leave a box blank an 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.

6.1 After the columns you will find the following:

<p>Married in the.....according to the rites and ceremonies of the..... by..... or after.....by me,</p>
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6.2 In the first space you should put the words '**Parish Church**' or '**Church of ...**'.

6.3 In the second space after the words 'rites and ceremonies of the' you should put '**Church of England**'.

- 6.4 If the couple have been married by Banns you should strike through the words 'by' and 'or' and insert the word '**Banns**' following the word 'after'. If they were married by licence or certificate, then after the word 'by' you should put '**Common Licence**' or '**Superintendent Registrar's Certificate**' and strike through the words 'or after'.

Signatures

- 7.1 The couple should be asked to check the Marriage Registers for errors before signing.
- 7.1 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.
- 7.3 The witnesses should also sign using their usual signatures. There needs to be at least two witnesses but can be more provided there is space for them to sign.
- 7.4 The minister should sign their name and add their designation such as '**Rector**', '**Vicar**', '**Curate**', '**Clerk-in-Holy Orders**' or '**Officiating Minister**'.
- 7.5 To assist Superintendent Registrars and the GRO 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, it will be difficult for certified copies to be provided at a later date by a minister or the GRO.
- 7.6 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

- 8.1 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 – the GRO's guidance is that they should be completed on the day of the wedding although I know, in practice, some parishes complete their registers ahead of time due to time constraints on the day of the wedding).
- 8.2 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).
- 8.3 The GRO's Guidebook covers corrections quite thoroughly so please refer to this guidance if you do need to correct an error (currently section 5 on page 23 and Appendix G, example 1, on page 40).
- 8.4 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. The Certificate with the error should be shredded or confidentially destroyed and the stub should be annotated accordingly.

After the Marriage Registers have been signed

- 8.5 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 G (examples 2, 3 and 4) 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 margin by the incumbent or minister who took the service in the presence of the couple. The minister should then sign, put their designation and the date of the correction, and the couple should also sign. If the couple are not available, then the correction may be made in the presence of two churchwardens, who should also sign.

- 8.6 If a month has already elapsed before the correction is made, then you should ask the couple to contact the GRO, either by phone, on 0300 123 1837, or refer them to the following website, where they will find guidance notes and an application form to send to the GRO: <https://www.gov.uk/correct-marriage-registration/how-to-apply>.
- 8.7 The GRO 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.

Marriage Certificates

- 9.1 Marriage Certificates are completed in a similar way to Marriage Registers, however, at the top of the Certificate you have to identify the '**Registration District**'. If you are unsure of your Registration District, please contact your local Superintendent Registrar's Office for clarification. You also need to put the Marriage Register entry number in the first column.
- 9.2 At the foot of the Certificate there is an additional section to complete, certifying that it is a true copy of the marriage entry.

**I,ofin the
do hereby certify this is a true copy of Entry No of the Register Book of
Marriages in the said Church.**

Witness my hand this day of

- 9.3 In the first space, the minister, including guest Church of England ministers who may be invited to take the wedding, should enter their full name, including middle names.
- 9.4 After 'of' the benefice name and county name, e.g. '**the benefice of Cottesloe** in the '**County of Buckingham**' (you can use '**Diocese of Oxford**' instead of a county), should be inserted. If a retired or guest minister is taking the service, the village/ town and county of where that minister resides should be entered.
- 9.5 The number of the entry in the Marriage Register should be inserted after 'of Entry No.'
- 9.6 The minister will then enter the date and sign the Certificate followed by their title as mentioned in 7.4 above.
- 9.7 If a Marriage Certificate is required after the date of the marriage, the information for the Certificate should be completed from the Marriage Register (including the style of the bride's, groom's and witnesses' signatures) and the incumbent or a minister should certify the copy as a true copy as detailed in this section.

Quarterly Marriage Returns

- 10.1 Shortly after the end of each quarter, the incumbent of a benefice will receive a request from the local Superintendent Registrar for your quarterly returns. The **quarterly return** should be a certified copy of any marriage entries which have been made during the previous quarter. The Superintendent Registrar will provide the relevant form for completion.
- 10.2 If no marriages have taken place during the past quarter, a **nil return** should be submitted (please ask for the form from the Superintendent Registrar if one has not already been sent to you).

Security of Registers and Certificates

- 11.1 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 your local Superintendent Registrar, the GRO and police.
- 11.2 Paragraph 1.9 of the GRO's Guidebook requests that you keep a secure list of the certificates you have issued, including serial numbers, on a separate sheet, stored in another place, so that you can easily account for what has and has not been issued. This list should be confidentially shredded once the certificate book has been completed.
- 11.3 In the same paragraph, the GRO also request you keep a secure list of marriage register entries which have not yet been submitted by quarterly return because they may have to be registered again if the Marriage Registers are stolen. This list should be confidentially shredded once the quarterly return has been submitted.

Further Information

12. 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.

Sara Leader
Oxford Diocesan Registry Clerk
Updated October 2018
Tel: 01865 297211
Email: sleader@wslaw.co.uk