

Getting the most from the **General Register Office**

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Discover Your Family History



Home Office

**Identity &
Passport Service**

www.direct.gov.uk/gro

Did you know when you are researching your family history you can get invaluable information from birth, marriage and death certificates? The General Register Office for England and Wales (GRO) holds records for all births, marriages and deaths registered in England and Wales from 1 July 1837, and can help you in your search.

This booklet tells you about:

- The General Register Office for England and Wales, what its role is and which certificates it can offer you
- The information you will find on the certificates
- The information you will need to order the certificates
- How you can order and pay

It will give you an introduction to how the General Register Office can help. For more details please go to **www.direct.gov.uk/gro**

Where should I start my search?

When you are starting to research your family history, gather together family memories, photos and documents and you may be able to quickly develop an understanding of the last couple of generations. To find out more detailed material, birth, marriage and death certificates are an invaluable source of information. They provide links back to the next generation by giving details of a relative's address, occupation or cause of death. Certificates will also give clues about the individual's parents or husband/wife.

How can GRO help?

People come to the GRO because it has the records of every birth, marriage and death registered in England and Wales available in one place. Some commercial organisations also offer a service to get certificates for you, but these organisations apply to the GRO or the local registration service on your behalf so it is cheaper and quicker to order direct.

GRO also holds overseas records containing details of births, marriages and deaths of British citizens that have taken place abroad since the late 18th century. These include those registered with British consuls, High Commissions, HM Forces, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen. It is not compulsory to register every birth, marriage or death that occurs overseas and GRO is not automatically notified of every event that has taken place.

For a full list of records available see Annex D on pages 22 and 23 or for more information visit www.direct.gov.uk/gro

What services does GRO provide?

The GRO can provide you with birth, marriage and death certificates covering England and Wales from 1 July 1837 onwards. The standard service aims to send out a certificate in four working days (if the GRO index reference number is provided). The priority service will send a certificate by the next working day (if the order is received before 4pm, excluding weekends and Bank Holidays). The online service is the quickest way of placing an order - www.direct.gov.uk/gro

How do I search for records that date from before 1837?

Local parish records contain details of baptisms, marriages and burials. You will usually find parish registers at the local County Record Office or through various websites where registers have been digitised.



What information will I find on a birth, marriage or death certificate?

As well as the full names of the individuals, you will find the following information:

Birth certificate - includes date and place of birth, the name and residence of the mother (and sometimes the mother's maiden name). The name and occupation of the father is also shown on the certificate. See Annex A on pages 16 and 17 for an example certificate.

Marriage certificate - includes the full names of the bride and groom. It will also normally include their occupations, residences and the date and place of the marriage and in addition the names and occupations of the fathers of both bride and groom. See Annex B on pages 18 and 19 for an example certificate.

Death certificate - includes the date of death, age, occupation, final residence and cause of death, as well as the name and relationship of the person who informed the authorities. See Annex C on pages 20 and 21 for an example certificate.

What is the difference between a short and a full birth certificate?

A short certificate is an extract of the full record and only shows the name and surname, date of birth, place of birth and sex of the child.

Ordering certificates

You can order birth, marriage or death certificates from 1837 onwards providing you have the General Register Office index reference or sufficient information to identify the entry.

What is a GRO index reference?

The GRO index reference provides unique reference information that helps find the birth, marriage or death in England and Wales that you are interested in. It includes:

- The year when the birth, marriage or death was registered
- Quarter (e.g. Oct-Dec is the December quarter, Jan-March is the March quarter)
- The earliest index is for September quarter 1837. After 1984 the indexes are organised by year only
- The district in which the event was registered
- The volume and page number

The entries within the indexes are arranged in alphabetical order by surname, with first names listed alongside (as recorded on the certificate). The full index data varies depending on the type of event (birth, marriage or death) and the year when the event was registered.

More information about index references is available at
www.direct.gov.uk/gro

Where can I find a GRO index reference?

A complete set of GRO Indexes is available in microfiche format to view free of charge at:

- Birmingham Central Library
- Bridgend Reference and Information Library
- The British Library
- City of Westminster Archives Centre
- Newcastle City Library
- Manchester City Library and
- Plymouth Central Library

Some public libraries and other organisations such as family history societies, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints family history centres or local record offices hold partial sets of the GRO Indexes on microfiche or CD ROM. Contact them direct to find out opening times etc.

Alternatively, a number of organisations make the index available online and you can use these to find the index reference that you need. Most websites that offer access to these records will make a charge for this service. A volunteer project is digitising the index and you can access their records for free. See www.freebmd.org.uk for more details.

The GRO index reference isn't clear. Can the GRO help?

Yes. If you can't decipher part of an index reference number you can use the GRO's unclear microfiche service. GRO will provide clarification of the index reference number. You can contact the GRO by:

Email

unclearfiche@ips.gsi.gov.uk

Phone

+44 (0) 300 123 1837

Monday to Friday: 8am-8pm

Saturday: 9am-4pm

Post

General Register Office

PO Box 2

Southport

Merseyside

PR8 2JD

The aim is to reply within one working day of receipt of your request and the service is free. This service clarifies the reference number for you but won't confirm that it is the entry you are looking for.



How can I order a certificate?

Online

The quickest way to order a certificate is to go to **www.direct.gov.uk/gro** and then follow the links to ordering a certificate. You can order a certificate and pay for it online.

Phone

+44 (0) 300 123 1837

Monday to Friday: 8am-8pm

Saturday: 9am-4pm

GRO is 'Typetalk' enabled, text 18001 (followed by + 44 (0)300 123 1837).

Post

Please complete a GRO application form. Send an email to **certificate.services@ips.gsi.gov.uk** confirming the number and type of application forms required. Please include the code **GQ** in the subject line of your email to ensure a personal response to your query, and include your name and address in the email.

Completed application forms should be returned to:

General Register Office

PO Box 2

Southport

Merseyside

PR8 2JD

Can I order a certificate from the local register office?

A local register office will have the original register of births, marriages or deaths and if you know that the event you are interested in occurred in the district that they cover, you can approach the local register office for a certificate.

Where can I find out how much certificates cost?

Please refer to the www.direct.gov.uk/gro website for prices and information on ordering. If you are unable to access the internet please contact the GRO by email, phone or post (details given on page 9) for a copy of the leaflet How to Order and Pay for Certificates: Getting the most from the General Register Office.

How do I pay for a certificate?

You can pay using most major credit/debit cards. If you want to apply by post you will be asked to complete a GRO application form. Email your request for a form to certificate.services@ips.gsi.gov.uk and insert the code **GQ** in the subject line of your email. Please remember to include your name and address in the email as well as details of the type and number of application forms required.

For postal applications:

Payment can be made either by cheque, postal order or international bankers draft payable to '**IPS**'.

- Payments made by international bankers draft should be in sterling. The draft must bear the name and address of a clearing bank within the UK
- Please do not send cash
- Where you wish to use the priority service please clearly mark your envelope 'priority'
- A stamped self-addressed envelope is not required.

For further details please see our leaflet How to Order and Pay for Certificates, visit www.direct.gov.uk/gro or call **+44 (0) 300 123 1837**.

I have placed an order, what happens next?

If you have not provided the index reference, records are searched to find it. Once an order has an index reference the next stage is to look for the entry checking in the year/quarter provided on your application. When found, the certificate is printed, folded and sent to you in a C5 envelope using standard postal services. Target dates for despatch are also included on page 4 under the heading 'What services does GRO provide?'

If the GRO is unable to produce a certificate, you will be issued with a full refund and email (or letter) of explanation. This will extend all dispatch dates by up to five working days.



What should I do if I cannot find a birth, marriage or death certificate?

Prior to 1875, the registration of an event was not enforced and therefore some were missed. In addition, some events may have taken place outside of England and Wales. An important factor to remember when searching is that there could be some variations in the spelling of names, as many people could not read or write and the registrar would have to interpret spellings.

Births

- The child may have been registered under a forename/surname other than that by which he/she was known in later life
- The child could have been registered before the parents had chosen a forename, in which case, the entry in the indexes would be at the alphabetical end of the listing under female/male
- The child could have been born in a period other than that searched. Ages on census records and marriage certificates should be treated with caution. No proof of age was required and often people did not actually know their own age.

Marriages

- Marriages sometimes took place after the birth of the first child - therefore widening the timescale searched may help
- The bride may have been married more than once - try checking under the name of the groom instead
- Couples often lived together as man and wife as divorce was rare and expensive. Often, couples never married, or did not remarry after their spouse died

Deaths

- Widen the timescale that the death occurred as it could have been registered some time after the event i.e. if an inquest was involved
- Widen the search for the place of death - the person may have died in a different location to where they actually lived
- In a minority of cases, deaths would be registered without a name i.e. if there was nobody to identify a body. These are listed as 'unknown' in the indexes and appear at the end of each quarter



How can I contact other General Register Offices?

Contact details for other GROs are:

Scotland

The Registrar General
New Register House
3 West Register Street
Edinburgh
EH1 3YT
Tel: +44 (0) 131 314 4411
Website: www.gro-scotland.gov.uk

Northern Ireland

The Registrar General
Oxford House
49/55 Chichester Street
Belfast BT1 4HL
Tel: +44 (0) 2890 252 000
Website: www.groni.gov.uk

Republic of Ireland

The Registrar General for events outside Dublin and
at non-Catholic Churches
Government House in Dublin:
Convent Road
Roscommon
Eire
Tel: +353 (0) 1671 1000

For events in the greater Dublin area:
Tel: +353 (0) 906 632 900
Tel: +353 (0) 1671 1929/1968/1974
Website: www.groireland.ie

Isle of Man - Civil Registry

The registration of births and deaths was compulsory from 1878 onwards, and the registration of marriages was obligatory from 1884, although records go back to 1849 for non-Anglican births.

Deemsters Walk
Bucks Road
Douglas
Isle of Man
IM1 3AR
Tel: +44 (0) 1624 687 039

Jersey - General Registry

Holds births, marriages and deaths from 1842.

Office of the Superintendent Registrar
10 Royal Square
St Helier
Jersey
Channel Islands
JE2 4WA
Tel: +44 (0) 1534 441335

Guernsey - Register Office

Holds births and deaths from October 1840, non-Anglican marriages from States Offices January 1841 and Anglican marriages from 1919.


The Greffe
Royal Court House
St Peter Port
Guernsey
GY1 2PB
Tel: +44 (0) 1481 725 277

Birth certificate help sheet

(*for births registered before 1 April 1969)

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH

GIVEN AT THE
Application No



REGISTRATION DISTRICT **Woodstock**

1 1874 BIRTH in the Sub-district of **Woodstock** in the County of **Oxford**

Column:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant
	20th November 1874 Banbury	Winston Leonard	Boy	Randolph Henry Spencer Churchill	Jemie Churchill formerly Jerome	No. 11 Stee Woodstock	Randolph V. Churchill Father Banbury

2

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 6th day of _____

SPECIMEN

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. ©CROWN COPYRIGHT
WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

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AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Registration Number **SPECIMEN**


8 9 10

and When registered Signature of registrar Name entered after registration

3	4	5
Twenty third December 1874	George S. Miller Registrar	

January 2010

REGISTRAR



TM

1. Year of registration

2. **Entry number** in the birth register

3. When registered

This determines in which quarter the entry appears in the GRO Indexes.

4. Signature of registrar

In the case of a birth registered more than three months from the date of birth the signature of the Superintendent Registrar will also be included.


5. Names entered after registration

Any names given up to 12 months after the initial registration, e.g. at baptism, are entered in this column.

If no additional names are added, a line is marked through the box by this office to prevent any unauthorised changes.

* On 1 April 1969 the law relating to birth registrations was amended resulting in a change to the format of a birth certificate. This information relates to births registered **before** 1 April 1969.

Marriage certificate help sheet



CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE
GIVEN AT THE

Apply

1927. Marriage solemnized at 1 <i>The Parish Church</i>					
of <i>St. Margaret Westminster</i> in the County of					
	2 When Married.	Name and Surname.	3	4 Rank or Profession.	5 Residence and Time of Marriage.
373	Sept 18 ^E 1927	Arthur Conan Doyle Jean Elizabeth Leckie	48 31	Widower Spinster	Author — 39, Old Lucan Street S.H. Glebe House Blackheath
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Established Church</i>					
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<i>Arthur Conan Doyle</i> <i>Jean Elizabeth Leckie</i>	in the Presence of us,		<i>James B. Leckie</i> <i>Mary Josephine Doyle</i> 8

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District
 Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 6th day of

SPECIMEN

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE / FALSE CERTIFICATE. © CROWN COPYRIGHT
 WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY
 075 10000 1234 5678 901234


THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number: **SPECIMEN**

in the Parish of <i>London</i>	
Age of	of
Father's Name	Rank or Profession of Father
<i>Charles Ulhamont Doyle</i>	<i>Artist</i>
<i>James Rhythe Leekie</i>	<i>Merchant</i>
by licence or after _____ by me,	
<i>C. Cyril Angell</i> Officer Minister	
<i>Luia Leekie</i>	

District of *St George Hanover Square*
January 2010

STATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A
IDENTITY.



1. District

This tells you where the marriage took place. The district name is usually repeated at the bottom of the certificate.

2. Entry number in the marriage register

3. Age

The age given by the bride and groom at the time of marriage, is only as accurate as they believe it to be. 'Full' indicates 21 or over.

4. Condition

Marital status at time of marriage, e.g. bachelor/spinster, widow/widower or previous marriage dissolved.

5. Residence at the time of marriage

Until 1995, for a marriage to take place in a register office, one of the couple had to live within that registration district. This rule didn't always apply to couples marrying in a parish.

6 & 7. Name and profession of father

With the exception of an adoptive father, the name entered in this column, must be that of the birth father.


8. Witnesses

Marked with an 'X' if the person couldn't write.

Death certificate help sheet

(*for deaths registered before 1 April 1969)

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH



REGISTRATION DISTRICT	Saint George Hanover Square					
1910	DEATH in the Sub-district of Mayfair and Knightsbridge				in the County of London	

Column-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description of residence of info
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	55 Fifteenth August 1910 10 South Street Mayfair	Clarence Nightingale	Female	90 years	Spinner and Daughter William Edward Nightingale of 11, Chandos Mansions	Old age death (failure) Certified by S. Garrett Anderson M.D.	E. B. Hale Nightingale Cousin 12, Old Street St. Pancras Middlesex

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 6th day of _____

SPECIMEN

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE ©CROWN COPYRIGHT
WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

DPS 027106 21542 10/10 10/02/04 023204

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number **SPECIMEN**

7 8 9

Description and of informant When registered Signature of registrar

g. Kingale Sixteenth August 1910 J. Hamilton Registrar

of January 2010

See note overleaf

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE ENGLAND

IM

6

1. Entry number in the death register

2. Name and surname

This is the name used at time of death, which is not always the same name given at birth.

3. Age

The informant gives the deceased's age at the time of death to the best of their knowledge and belief; therefore it is possible that this may not be accurate.

4. Occupation

If the deceased is female, the occupation of the deceased's father or male spouse, current or former, living or dead might be given.

5. Signature of informant

Marked with an 'X' if the informant was unable to write. After 1875, the relationship of the informant to the deceased was given.

6. Signature of registrar

In the case of a death registered more than three months from the date of death the signature of the Superintendent Registrar will also be included.

* On 1 April 1969 the law relating to death registrations was amended resulting in a change to the format of a death certificate. This information relates to deaths registered **before** 1 April 1969.

What records does the General Register Office hold?

Events recorded in England and Wales

Record held	Explanation	From - To
Birth, marriage and death records	A record of all events recorded	July 1837 - 18 months prior to the present date
Civil Partnership records	A record of all civil partnerships recorded	2005 to the present date
Adopted Children Register	A record of all adoptions granted by courts	1927 - present date
Stillbirth Register	A record of all stillbirths recorded	1927 - present date
Abandoned Children Register	A record of all abandoned babies whose parentage is unknown	1977 - present date
Thomas Coram Register	A record of children given into the care of the Foundling Hospital	1853 - 1948
Parental Order Register	A record of all births that have been re-registered on production of a court order where a child has been born via a surrogacy agreement	1994 - present date

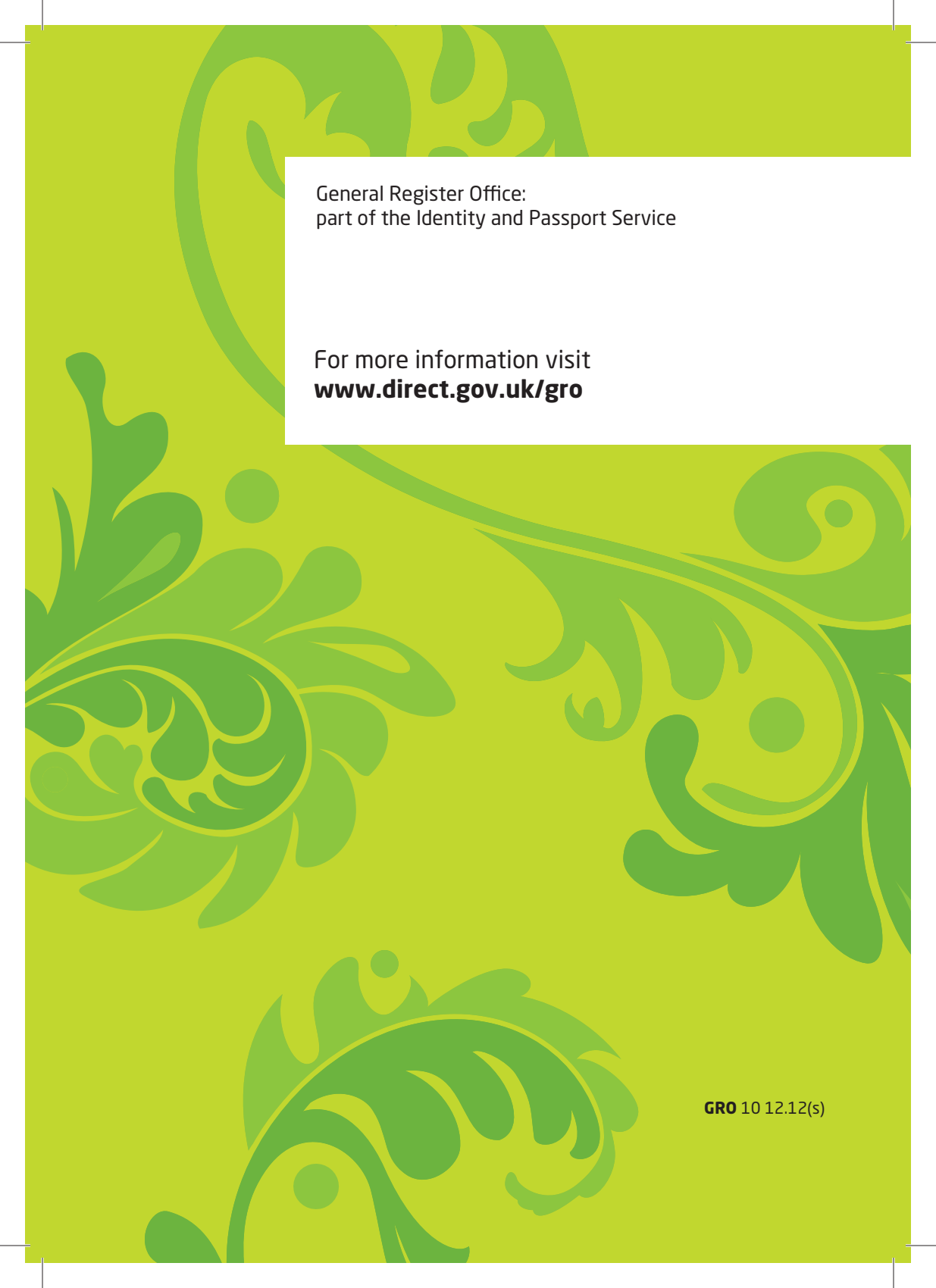
Events recorded abroad

Record held	Explanation	From - To
Regimental records	Records of births/baptisms, marriages and some deaths relating to British Army Regiments	1761 - 1924
Chaplains returns	Army Chaplains records of baptisms, marriages and deaths	1796 - 1880
Ionian Islands records	Births, marriages and deaths of the British Garrison on Corfu	1818 - 1864

Annex D

Events recorded abroad (cont.)

Record held	Explanation	From - To
Marine records	Births and deaths at sea	1837 - present date
Consular records	Births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths of British subjects registered at British Consulates	1849 - 12 months prior to the present date (birth, marriage and death) 2005 - present date (civil partnership)
Army records	Births, marriages and deaths of members of the British Army or their families	1881 - 1965
War deaths	Deaths of serving personnel during the Boer War World War 1 World War 2	1899 - 1902 1914 - 1921 1939 - 1948
Aircraft records	Births and deaths on board British registered aircraft	1947 - present date
Foreign Marriage and Civil Partnership certificates	Certificates deposited with the General Register Office	1948 - present date (marriages) 2005 - present date (civil partnerships)
High Commission records	Births and deaths of British subjects registered at British High Commissions	1949 - present date
Armed Forces records	Births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths of members of the British Armed Forces or their families	1965 - present date (birth, marriage and death) 2005 - present date (civil partnerships)
Installation deaths	Deaths of workers on British Oil and Gas rigs	1971 - present date
Hovercraft records	Births and deaths on British registered hovercrafts	1972 - present date



General Register Office:
part of the Identity and Passport Service

For more information visit
www.direct.gov.uk/gro

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