

FEATURE ARTICLE



**Tracing Your
English
Ancestry Online,
Part 3 of 3**
by Richard
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Registration Records for Births, Marriages and Deaths

After census records, the next most useful information for genealogists are records of births, marriages, and deaths.

While certificates are not available online (yet), it is possible to search the entire index of the General Register Office's (GRO) Civil Registrations. There is a separate index for each type of record, and they are compiled every three months.

Records between 1837 and 2002 are available thanks to *1837 Online* (www.1837online.com) on a pay-per-view basis, although free trials are available. The results return the pages of the index that cover the range specified in your search. You will need to view each record to check whether the person you are looking for is listed on that page.

Once you have identified the entry you're interested in, you can, if you wish, use the reference number for the entry to order a copy of the appropriate certificate. Full certificates often contain useful additional data such as parent's names and occupation (in the case of birth certificates). Don't confuse full certificates with the cheaper, short birth certificates that contain little information of interest to family historians.

Certificates can be ordered over the Internet directly from the GRO. Their website can be found at www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content.

If you don't want to pay, but are prepared to rely on transcribed data, then it may be worth having a look at FreeBMD at freebmd.rootsweb.com. The amount of data on the site is being added to constantly, and it is likely that you will find what you are looking for. However, as with any information that has been transcribed voluntarily, be aware that there may be spelling mistakes and errors that have crept in during data

entry. Again, once you have identified the registration district, volume, and page details, you can order a copy of the certificate.

Other Records

Once you've discovered who your ancestors were and where they came from, there are lots of other records available online. Many of these are free, others require a modest fee to view or download records. With a little effort you can find wills, records of death duties, military medal index cards, maps, and many other types of document.

A useful free site is the Historical Directories website at www.historicaldirectories.org. The University of Leicester has put together an excellent, searchable collection of historical trade directories giving a fascinating insight into historical conditions around the UK. Two of the most important websites for archive collections in the UK are the National Archives at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the similarly named but unrelated National Archivist at www.nationalarchivist.com. Both organisations offer numerous archives of documents that can be searched and, in most cases, downloaded for a fee.

Going Further

Once you begin exploring the wealth of information available, it can become addictive. You could find yourself searching through the wills held by The National Archives on the off chance of finding something or trawling through the records of the East India Company at the National Archivist on a wet Saturday afternoon.

Eventually, all genealogists benefit from exchanging their research, and sites such as Genuki at www.genuki.org.uk and the Guild of One-Name Studies at www.one-name.org can put you in touch with other people with the same areas of interest. If you remember to check everything, and don't assume that what you find will always be 100% accurate, then you're more than likely to find something that's relevant to you.

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Richard Crowhurst is a freelance writer from Lincolnshire in England. He writes about many things but specialises in British history and heritage subjects. He is a keen amateur genealogist and (with help) has researched his own family history back to the early 1600s.