

Using the General Register Office Index

A Guide by Tim Manners, creator of the [Online Genealogical Index](#)

19th January 2018

The [General Register Office \(GRO\) Index](#) is similar to [FreeBMD](#) in that it lists government records of Births and Deaths in England and Wales for the following year ranges:

Births: July 1st 1837 – Dec 31st 1916

Deaths: July 1st 1837 – Dec 31st 1957

General Register Office
Official information on births, marriages and deaths

It is possible that marriages will be added in the future. For now, [FreeBMD](#) is recommended to see the complete England and Wales civil registration marriages from Q3 1837 and beyond. A graph showing the coverage can be found here: [FreeBMD Coverage Charts](#)

There are other online sites offering the Civil Registration records.

[FamilySearch](#) (which is free to use) offers births to 2008, marriages to 2005 and Deaths to 2007 (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/location/1986340?region=England>)

Subscription sites such as [Ancestry](#), [findmypast](#), [MyHeritage](#), [The Genealogist](#) and others also offer the same information.

You may wonder why the [GRO Index](#) is more appealing than [FreeBMD](#), but they both have their advantages and together they can be a powerful research tool.

The [GRO Index](#) adds some information not included in [FreeBMD](#):

- Mother's maiden name for all births up to 1916 ([FreeBMD](#) covers the continued years)
- Death ages to 1957

[FreeBMD](#) does not include mother's maiden name until Q3 1911 and death ages only from 1866.

The additional information on the [GRO Index](#), especially the mother's maiden name, is a HUGE advantage. Married women on your family tree with no maiden name can now be found with all their children born after 1st July 1837. With a maiden name, it is easier to find christening and marriage records using other online resources. If a birth place is known from a census record, you can now find her christening record by using, for example, the [Online Genealogical Index](#) to view online records in a specific place.

The death age from 1st July 1837 can assist in finding their birth year and christening, parents, siblings, etc.

There are a lot of references to the census in this guide so here is a quick overview.

The UK census occurred every decade and from 1841, the names and rounded ages were included. 1851 added actual reported age, marital status, relationship, occupation and birth place. This census has continued every ten years since then. The last census currently available online is 1911 which was completed by the resident (usually the head of household) and includes years married, children born to this couple, number of living children in 1911. [FamilySearch](#) has all England and Wales census available for free and the subscriptions sites (such as [Ancestry](#), [findmypast](#), [the Genealogist](#)) also have the same information but often with better search capability. More info [here](#).

Here are the steps to get started with the [GRO](#).

1. Go to the [Registration](#) page and create a free account (Register as an individual).

Registration

Please complete the form below entering the registration details.

These details will be used to determine the delivery address for any orders which you may place. You may change these details at any time or you can alter these details for an individual order if you wish to do so.

All required fields are followed by the * character.

Please complete the form and press the "Submit" button to continue.

Registration details	
Email address*	<input type="text"/>
Confirm email address*	<input type="text"/>
Password*	<input type="password"/>
Instructions on how to set a password.	
Confirm password*	<input type="password"/>
Title	<input type="text"/>

2. You will get an email to activate your account.
3. Once your account is activated, go to the [GRO login page](#) and login.

Login

Please Note: This service requires your browser to accept cookies - please see our [Cookie Policy](#) for more information.

This service does not support the use of the browser BACK button, please only use links and button options to navigate the site.

First time users, please select a Registration option below.

Login details	
Email address	<input type="text"/>
Password (Forgotten your password?)	<input type="password"/>
<input type="button" value="Submit"/> <input type="button" value="Reset"/>	

4. Click on the link for **Search the GRO Indexes**



[Search the GRO Indexes](#)

Search historical birth and death registration indexes to find a GRO Reference.

5. The current search options are **Birth** and **Death** so select one of those.

Search the GRO Online Index

Which index would you like to search?

Events registered in England or Wales:

☐ Birth

☐ Death

6. You are now presented with the search form. Complete as much as you know.
7. To limit the results, you can specify the registration district and even volume and page number. Find suspected entries on [FreeBMD](#) and copy the same details across, if that is easier.

http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/census_place (based on the 1891 census)

<https://www.ukbmd.org.uk/reg/districts/index.html>

<https://www.ukbmd.org.uk/reg/places/index.html>

There are often clues to missing children either on a census (large gaps between children), in local burial records (children buried in the same parish as siblings' christenings) or from other family records. A great tool for confirming total children and those still living is the 1911 Census.

The family of William Herbert Ball and Edith Naomi Richards are shown here on the 1911 Census.


CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The metres should be written in ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family.	AGE (last birthday) and SEX.	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE.	PERSONAL OCCUPATION.	INDUSTRY or SERVICE with which entered in connection.	BIRTHPLACE of every person.	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country.	INFIRMITY.
<p>of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 20%;"> <p>(1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or</p> <p>(2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere.</p> <p>No one else must be included.</p> <p><i>(For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)</i></p> </div> <div style="width: 20%;"> <p>State whether— "Head of Family," "Son or Daughter," or "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant."</p> <p>For Infants under one year state the age in months as "one month," "two months," etc.</p> <p>For Children aged 1 year and upwards state the age in years and months as "1 year," "1 year 6 months," etc.</p> <p>For Widows— "Widowed," "Single," or "Married."</p> <p>For all persons aged 10 years and upwards state the year in which they were last married.</p> <p>For all persons aged 10 years and upwards state the year in which they were last married.</p> <p>For all persons aged 10 years and upwards state the year in which they were last married.</p> </div> <div style="width: 20%;"> <p>State, for each Married Woman under 15 in this Schedule, the number of— Children born alive to parent Marriages. (If no children born alive write "None in Column 7.")</p> <p>Children born alive to parent Marriages. (If no children born alive write "None in Column 7.")</p> <p>Children born alive to parent Marriages. (If no children born alive write "None in Column 7.")</p> </div> <div style="width: 20%;"> <p>The reply should show the precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacture, &c.</p> <p>If engaged in any Trade or Manufacture, the particular kind of work done, and the article made or material worked on should be clearly indicated.</p> <p>If not in any of the foregoing classes, state the nature of the service performed, or the nature of the work done, and the article made or material worked on should be clearly indicated.</p> <p>(See Instructions 1 to 6 and Examples on back of Schedule.)</p> </div> <div style="width: 20%;"> <p>Write whether— "Employed," "Unemployed," "Retired," "Invalid," "Sick," "Disabled," "Infirm," "Deaf," "Dumb," "Blind," "Lame," "Paralyzed," "Epileptic," "Insane," "Idiot," "Feeble-minded," "Alcoholic," "Drunk," "Addicted to Opium," "Addicted to Morphine," "Addicted to Cocaine," "Addicted to Heroin," "Addicted to Cannabis," "Addicted to Tobacco," "Addicted to Alcohol," "Addicted to Drugs," "Addicted to Poisons," "Addicted to Venereal Diseases," "Addicted to Syphilis," "Addicted to Gonorrhea," "Addicted to Chancres," "Addicted to Scabies," "Addicted to Eczema," "Addicted to Psoriasis," "Addicted to Dermatitis," "Addicted to Erysipelas," "Addicted to Tetanus," "Addicted to Diphtheria," "Addicted to Scarlet Fever," "Addicted to Typhoid Fever," "Addicted to Cholera," "Addicted to Malaria," "Addicted to Yellow Fever," "Addicted to Smallpox," "Addicted to Measles," "Addicted to Rubella," "Addicted to Mumps," "Addicted to Whooping Cough," "Addicted to Pertussis," "Addicted to Tetanus," "Addicted to Diphtheria," "Addicted to Scarlet Fever," "Addicted to Typhoid Fever," "Addicted to Cholera," "Addicted to Malaria," "Addicted to Yellow Fever," "Addicted to Smallpox," "Addicted to Measles," "Addicted to Rubella," "Addicted to Mumps," "Addicted to Whooping Cough," "Addicted to Pertussis," "Addicted to Tetanus," "Addicted to Diphtheria," "Addicted to Scarlet 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Using [FreeBMD](#), children with surname Ball who died in Hastings between 1893 (year of marriage) and 1911 were found using the criteria shown on the next page.



Search

To search FreeBMD enter the details of the search below. To get a fuller explanation of how to get the most out of y information.

Type: All Types Births **Deaths** Marriages

Surname:

First name(s):

Spouse/Mother surname:

Spouse first name(s):

Death age/DoB:

Date range: Mar 1893 to Jun 1911

Volume/Page: /

Options:

- ☐ Mono
- ☐ Exact match on first names
- ☐ Phonetic search surnames
- ☐ Match only recorded ages
- ☐ Identifiable spouses only

[Advanced Facilities](#)

[FreeBMD Main Page](#)

Help
Click for help on using FreeBMD

Districts: Hammersmith (from Sep1915)
Hampstead (Sep1848-Sep1977)
Hardingstone (to 1923)
Haringey (from Jun1965)
Harlow (from Jun1974)
Harrow (from Dec1947)
Hartismere (to Mar1983)
Hartlepool (Jun1859-Jun1938)
Hartlepool (Jun1967-Mar1974)
Hartley Wintney (to Sep1932)
Harwich (Sep1939-Sep1957)
Haslingden (to Mar1974)
Hastings & Rother (from Jun1977)
Hastings (to Mar1977)

One or more districts initially selected

Counties: All Counties
Anglesey (to Mar1974)
Avon (from Jun1974)
Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Breconshire (to Mar1974)

Filename: No file chosen
 [Help](#)

The results for this search are as follows:

Surname	First name(s)	Age	District	Vol	Page		
Deaths Dec 1895 (>99%)							
Ball	Edith Evelyn	0	Hastings	2b	15	info	GR
Deaths Dec 1896 (>99%)							
Ball	Gertrude Elsie M	0	Hastings	2b	15	info	GR
Ball	Male	0	Hastings	2b	31	info	GR
Deaths Jun 1897 (>99%)							
Ball	Kathleen	3	Hastings	2b	12	info	GR
Deaths Jun 1905 (>99%)							
Ball	Ada Petoria	4	Hastings	2b	28	info	GR
Deaths Sep 1910 (>99%)							
Ball	Henry J	1	Hastings	2b	13	info	GR

To find the name of the deceased child, the [GRO Index](#) can be used. Look for children born with the surname Ball and mother's maiden name Richards in the district of Hastings, Sussex between 1893 (year of parent's marriage) and 1911. This list can then be cross-referenced with the [FreeBMD](#) results.

The search criteria in the [GRO Index](#) is as follows:

Search the GRO Online Index

Which index would you like to search?
Events registered in England or Wales: ☒ Birth ☐ Death

Please enter your search criteria, mandatory fields are indicated with a *
Up to 250 matching results will be returned so providing any additional information you know will help locate the registration you are looking for.

Who are you searching for?

Surname at Birth: * Include:
Search for records with a matching surname

First Forename: Include:
Search for records with a matching first forename

Second Forename:

Gender: * Mother's Maiden Surname:
Search for records with a matching Mother's Maiden Surname

When was the birth registered?

Year: * +/- year(s) Quarter: *(used 1837-1917)*

Where was the birth registered?

District of Birth: [View list of registration districts](#)

Do you already know any GRO Reference details for the registration?

Volume: *(used 1837-1917)* Page: *(used 1837-1917)*

As the [GRO Index](#) requires a gender setting and can only search in 5 year intervals (a specific year + and – 2 years), searches should be made in 1895, 1900, 1905 and 1910 for both male and female.

Results matching these criteria will include the living children, Edith Ellen (born Mar 1894) and Walter George (born Dec 1899).

Here are the [GRO](#) results for the year ranges mentioned earlier.

Male:

Name:	Mother's Maiden Surname:
BALL, -	RICHARDS
<i>GRO Reference: 1896 D Quarter in HASTINGS Volume 02B Page 43</i>	

Name:	Mother's Maiden Surname:
BALL, WALTER GEORGE	RICHARDS
<i>GRO Reference: 1899 D Quarter in HASTINGS Volume 02B Page 36</i>	

Female:

Name:	Mother's Maiden Surname:
BALL, EDITH ELLEN	RICHARDS
<i>GRO Reference: 1894 M Quarter in HASTINGS Volume 02B Page 48</i>	

This shows that a male child born in the fourth quarter (“D Quarter”) of 1896 is the missing child. You may be able to locate the child’s burial record or headstone by researching in the area of residence. Use the [Online Genealogical Index](#) (OGI) to find online records for specific places in England, Wales and the Isle of Man.

An illegitimate child on the [GRO Index](#) is shown with the mother's maiden name as a dash (-) and the child will have the same surname as the mother. Example below:

Name:

HUXLEY, ELEANOR GEORGIE

Mother's Maiden Surname:

-

GRO Reference: 1882 D Quarter in WORCESTER Volume 06C Page 306

Finding deaths in the GRO

You may wonder why the death information in the GRO is advantageous.

1. Knowing the death age for your ancestor can help locate their birth or christening records (especially pre-1837) which will lead to their parents and siblings.
2. Knowing the death place for your ancestor can help locate a headstone which may include exact birth and death dates. There may also be other relatives buried in the same grave or graveyard. The [Online Genealogical Index](#) will show all known online records for a specific place in England, Wales and the Isle of Man.

To find the correct death, use the search features of [FreeBMD](#) to locate options.

You can narrow down a decade of a death by following the individual on the census. If the spouse survived until the next census, you will see them as a Widow or Widower. Also, the last census where they are living, note the district in which they reside. This can help find the death record.

Example:

William Brimblecombe appears here on the 1841 census with his wife Elizabeth. He lived in the district of Charles the Martyr in Plymouth, Devon.

William Brimblecombe	50	
William do	10	
Elizabeth do		45

On the 1851 census, his wife is shown as a widow.

Elizabeth Brimblecombe	Head	Widow
------------------------	------	-------

A quick search on [FreeBMD](#) finds his death but without an age.

Surname	First name(s)	Age	District	Vol	Page
Deaths Mar 1841 (>99%)					
BRIMBLECOMBE	William		Okehampton	10	121
Deaths Mar 1845 (>99%)					
BRIMBLECOMBE	William		Plympton St M	9	308
Deaths Sep 1847 (>99%)					
BRIMBLECOMBE	William		Totnes	9	275
Deaths Mar 1848 (>99%)					
BRIMBLECOMBE	William		Plymouth	9	327

We can use the Volume and Page number to find this record on the [GRO Index](#).

Which index would you like to search?

Events registered in England or Wales: ☐ Birth ☒ Death

Please enter your search criteria, mandatory fields are indicated with a *

Up to 250 matching results will be returned so providing any additional information you know will help locate the registration you are looking for.

Who are you searching for?

Surname at

Death: *

Include:

Search for records with a matching surname

First Forename at

Death:

Include:

Search for records with a matching first forename

Second Forename

at Death:

Gender: *

Age at

Death

in years:

+/- year(s)

(Enter 0 if less than 1 year old)

When was the death registered?

Year: *

+/- year(s)

Quarter:

(used 1837-1957)

Where was the death registered?

District of Death:

[View list of registration districts](#)

Do you already know any GRO Reference details for the registration?

Volume: *

(used 1837-1957)

Page: *

(used 1837-1957)

The results show the recorded age at death (in this example, 57)

Name:

BRIMBLECOMBE, WILLIAM

Age at Death (in years):

57

GRO Reference: 1848 M Quarter in PLYMOUTH Volume 09 Page 327

This shows that William's birth year was 1790-1791. Through this information, his christening, parents and siblings were all found in parish registers. The [OGI](#) helped to locate this information.

Finding a maiden name using the GRO

The GRO will show the maiden name of the mother of any child born after 1st July 1837. The maiden name can also help clarify a marriage found on [FreeBMD](#) where two women have the same first name. This process only applies to marriages after 1st July 1837.

Example:

Suppose your ancestor Henry Wilson married a Sarah in the December quarter of 1837.

Surname	First name(s)	District	Vol	Page		
Marriages Dec 1837 (>99%)						
CLAY	Sarah	Halifax	22	190	info	G
GLEDHILL	Edward	Halifax	22	190	info	G
HARDY	Mary	Halifax	22	190	info	G
Kershaw	William	Halifax	22	190	info	G
OGDEN	Hannah	Halifax	22	190	info	G
SHEPHERD	Sarah	Halifax	22	190	info	G
SMITH	David	Halifax	22	190	info	G
WILSON	Henry	Halifax	22	190	info	G

The results shown above from [FreeBMD](#) show the dilemma of two women names Sarah with surnames Clay and Shepherd. By finding children born to this marriage in the [GRO](#) (matching known children seen on a census), you can determine which Sarah is correct.

Often, a family will be found on a census but the mother's maiden name is unknown as the marriage has not been located, possibly as it was before civil registration began (pre-1837). The [GRO](#) can be used to find the mother's maiden name if there are children born after 1st July 1837.

Example:

Here is John Jackman and his wife Charlotte on the 1861 census living in Worcester.

John Jackman	Head	Mar:	56	-
Charlotte do	Wife	Mar:	-	46
Charles do	Son	Un:	17	-
Edward do	Son	-	8	-
James do	Son	-	4	-

To find the mother's maiden name, we need to look up the birth of a child born after 1837 in the [GRO Index](#).

According to the 1861 census, Edward was born in Kempsey which is in the Upton on Severn district of Worcestershire. His age is shown as 8 on the census (which was taken on 7 April 1861). This places his birth between 1852 and 1853.

The search and results using the [GRO](#) are shown on the next page.

Which index would you like to search?

Events registered in England or Wales: ☒ Birth ☐ Death

Please enter your search criteria, mandatory fields are indicated with a *

Up to 250 matching results will be returned so providing any additional information you know will help locate the registration you are looking for.

Who are you searching for?

Surname at Birth: * ? Include: ?

Search for records with a matching surname

First Forename: ? Include: ?

Search for records with a matching first forename

Second Forename: ?

Gender: * ?

Mother's Maiden Surname: ?

?

Search for records with a matching or phonetically similar Mother's Maiden Surname (uses a metaphone algorithm)

When was the birth registered?

Year: * ? +/- year(s) ? Quarter: ? *(used 1837-1917)*

Where was the birth registered?

District of Birth: ? [View list of registration districts](#)

Do you already know any GRO Reference details for the registration?

Volume: ? *(used 1837-1917)* Page: ? *(used 1837-1917)*

[Search](#)

[Reset](#)

Results: ?

Name:	Mother's Maiden Surname:	Order: ?
JACKMAN, EDWARD	WAGSTAFF	Certificate
GRO Reference: 1853 M Quarter in UPTON ON SEVERN Volume 06C Page 309		PDF

We now know that his mother was Charlotte Wagstaff.

By searching the parish registers for a marriage of John Jackman and Charlotte Wagstaff, we find the following at FamilySearch.org.

John Jackman

England Marriages, 1538–1973

Name:	John Jackman
Spouse's Name:	Charlotte Wagstaff
Event Date:	15 Dec 1834
Event Place:	Croome D'Abitott, Worcester, England

By using the FamilySearch.org Catalog, the film for Croome D'Abitott was located and the marriage entry found.

John Jackman of *this* Parish
Bachelor
 and *Charlotte Wagstaff* of *this* Parish
Spinster
 were married in this *Church* by *Banns* with Consent,
 this *fifteenth* Day of
December in the Year One Thousand eight hundred and *fourty four*
 By me *W. Lister* *Parson* *Rector*
 This Marriage was solemnized between us { *John Jackman*
Charlotte Wagstaff
 In the Presence of { *Thomas & Dixon's mark*
Martha Wagstaff
 No. *15*

Once the maiden name is known, other children of this family can be found on the GRO Index. Also, by using the full name of the mother, her age from the census and birthplace, a christening record can be found along with her parents and, therefore, siblings christened in the same parish.

Here is her christening found on FamilySearch.org:

Charlotte Wagstaff


England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975

Name:	Charlotte Wagstaff
Gender:	Female
Christening Date:	12 Sep 1813
Christening Date (Original):	12 SEP 1813
Christening Place:	CROOME D'ABITOT, WORCESTER, ENGLAND
Father's Name:	Joseph Wagstaff
Mother's Name:	Susanna

Now that her parents' names are known, a search in the same area with these parents shows the following siblings:

Henry Badan Wagstaff England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975	christening: 3 May 1807	GREAT AND LITTLE HAMPTON, WORCESTER, ENGLAND	father: Joseph Wagstaff mother: Susannah
Mary Wagstaff England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975	christening: 30 April 1809	GREAT AND LITTLE HAMPTON, WORCESTER, ENGLAND	father: Joseph Wagstaff mother: Susannah

As the maiden name is now known, the marriage of Charlotte's parents was quickly found on FamilySearch.org.

 Joseph Wagstaff mentioned in the record of Joseph Wagstaff and Susannah Ruck	
Name	Joseph Wagstaff
Spouse's Name	Susannah Ruck
Event Date	21 Sep 1804
Event Place	Saint Clement, Worcester, Worcester, England

The examples above highlight the value of the options available in the [GRO Index](#) combined with [FreeBMD](#), the census, [OGI](#) and other online tools.

Referenced Websites:

GRO Index - https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/indexes_search.asp
FreeBMD - <http://www.freebmd.org.uk>
FamilySearch - <http://familysearch.org>
FamilySearch Maps - <http://maps.familysearch.org>
FamilySearch Catalog - <https://www.familysearch.org/catalog/search>
Genuki 1891 Places - http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/census_place
Registration District Search - <https://www.ukbmd.org.uk/reg/>