

London Metropolitan Archives

Information Leaflet Number 7

Marriage licence records



This is a brief introduction to searching for records relating to the issue of marriage licences, with particular reference to those held by London Metropolitan Archives and elsewhere concerning the City of London and the counties of Middlesex and Surrey. Those who require a more detailed explanation are recommended to consult chapter 14 of D.E. Gardner and F. Smith, *Genealogical research in England and Wales*, vol. 1 (2nd edition, Salt Lake City, 1956). Those who seek allegations and bonds for other areas should consult J.S.W. Gibson, *Bishops transcripts and marriage licences, bonds and allegations: a guide to their location and indexes* (4th edition, 1997). Both publications may be seen at LMA and in other libraries and record offices.

Licence

Persons intending to be married usually had their banns read in church on three Sundays before the marriage. Those not wishing to be married by banns could obtain a licence from an appropriate (usually ecclesiastical) authority to marry at a place within its jurisdiction. Marriage by licence was often preferred because it was quicker, more convenient and/or more discreet, or because it was thought to confer social prestige.

Allegation

A marriage license was issued only after a written allegation of intention to marry was made by the prospective bride or bridegroom (or by their representative), giving their parishes and their approximate ages and stating that there was no legal impediment to the marriage. It is the allegation which should be sought when evidence of the issuing of a licence is required, since the allegations were usually retained by the issuing authority, while the licences themselves, having been shown to the person who was to conduct the marriage ceremony, were not preserved systematically and rarely survive.

Bond

Until 1823 an applicant for a licence also had to sign a bond, by which he would incur a monetary penalty if it was found that there was a legal impediment to the marriage. The bonds were also usually kept by the licence-issuing authority.

When searching for an allegation or bond for a marriage known to have been by licence it should be noted that:

It may be necessary to search the records of several licence-issuing authorities, since their jurisdictions often overlapped. Details of relevant authorities for the City of London and the counties of Middlesex and Surrey are given below.

It may be necessary to search allegations for up to **three months before** the date of the marriage, as marriage licences were valid for three months.

It may prove impossible to find the allegation or bond required, since many of the surviving records are believed to be incomplete.

When searching marriage registers after an allegation/bond had been found it should be noted that:

It may be necessary to search registers for up to **three months after** the date of the allegation, as marriage licences were valid for three months.

The marriage may perhaps have taken place in a church other than that specified in the allegation.

The existence of an allegation does not prove that the marriage took place at all.

The following authorities are known to have issued licences for marriages in the City of London and the counties of Middlesex and Surrey:

The Archbishop of Canterbury

Jurisdiction

The whole of England and Wales. (Note: the majority of the marriage licences granted by the archbishops of Canterbury were common licences for residents of the province of Canterbury (England south of the Humber, and Wales). From 1753, the Faculty Office alone was responsible for the issue of the archbishop's special licence throughout England and Wales.)

Records

1534-date (some gaps) including the records of the Faculty Office and the Vicar General of the Archbishop of Canterbury at [Lambeth Palace Library](http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org) (www.lambethpalacelibrary.org), London SE17JU.

Microfilm of the Vicar General's allegations 1694-1850 and Faculty Office allegations 1701-1850 may be consulted at the Society of Genealogists, 14 Charterhouse Buildings, London EC1M 7BA, www.sog.org.uk, and at Family History Centers of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints worldwide.

Lambeth Palace Library has 22 volumes of unpublished calendars and indexes to the Faculty Office marriage allegations 1632-1913. Those for 1543-1869 have been selectively abstracted and indexed in G J Armytage (ed.) and J L Chester (extractor) *Allegations for marriage licences issued from the Faculty Office of the archbishop of Canterbury, 1543-1869* (Harleian Society, vol.24, 1886); a copy is available at LMA (60.52 HAR). This can be supplemented by G E Cokayne and E A

Fry (eds.) *Calendar of marriage licences issued by the Faculty Office, 1632-1714* (British Record Society's *Index Library*, vol.33, 1905).

Vicar General's records 1660-1694 have been abstracted fully in Harleian Society *Publications*, vols. 23, 33, 34, 30 and 31; all available at LMA (60.52 HAR). The Society of Genealogists has produced surname indexes to the Vicar General's records for 1694-1850 (available in book form, on microfilm and online at www.findmypast.co.uk/) and to the Faculty Office records for 1701-1850 (available online only as above).

For a description of the records of marriage of the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace Library see the article by Melanie Barber in *The Genealogists' Magazine* Vol.20 December 1980.

Some original licences, chiefly 18th century and 19th century, for marriages at City of London churches, are held at LMA. An index to these licences 1712-1838 is available on the open shelves in the Information Area (Ms 24657).

The Bishop of London

Jurisdiction:

The Diocese of London (i.e. the City of London and Middlesex; also, until 1845, Essex and parts of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire; between 1845 and 1867, parts of Essex, Kent and Surrey; between 1867 and 1877, parts of Surrey).

Records:

1520/1-1685; 1597-9 and 1601-1982 at London Metropolitan Archives.

Records 1520/1-1685 are the Vicar General's books which record the granting of licences (DL/C/0330-0345); records 1597-9 and 1601-1982 are marriage allegations and bonds (Ms 10091 and 10091E).

Use of microfilm is compulsory for all allegations of the Bishop of London to 1900 and bonds 1664-1823. Later allegations can be consulted in their original form by prior appointment only.

Indexes:

There are published calendars, indexed by the names of both parties, for 1597-1700 in the British Record Society's *Index Library*, vols. 62 and 66 (available at LMA). Marriage allegations 1520-1828 have been abstracted fully in Harleian Society *Publications*, vols.25 and 26, available at LMA (60.52 HAR). These volumes also include marriage allegations from 1521 recorded in the Vicar General's books. (N.B.

BRS 62 and 66 contain many inaccuracies. The copies in the Information Area have manuscript amendments and references to extant related bonds by B. Lloyd.)

Unpublished calendars for 1700-1745 and 1751-1859 are on the open shelves in the Information Area. Calendars for 1746-50 (Ms 10091G/17) and 1860-1964 (Ms 10091G/24-28) can be ordered from the stores.

The Bishop of Winchester: Archdeaconry of Surrey

The Bishop of Winchester delegated his jurisdiction over the Archdeaconry of Surrey including the granting of marriage licences to a Commissary.

Jurisdiction:

The whole of the ancient county of Surrey except for the parishes of Barnes, Burstow, Charlwood, Cheam, Croydon, East Horsley, Merstham, Mortlake, Newington, Putney, Roehampton, Walworth, and Wimbledon which formed part of the Deanery of Croydon. In 1846 Barnes, Mortlake, Newington, Putney, Roehampton, Walworth and Wimbledon were transferred to the Diocese of London until 1877 when they together with parishes in east and mid Surrey were transferred to the Diocese of Rochester. In 1927 the Diocese of Guildford was formed from the remaining Surrey parishes and a few Hampshire parishes.

Records:

Marriage bonds and allegations 1673-1692, 1709, 1724-1926 at London Metropolitan Archives (DW/MB, DW/MP), available for consultation on microfilm.

These records for the years 1673-1850 have been digitised by Ancestry.co.uk. Free access to Ancestry is available at LMA and Guildhall Library.

Indexes and Transcripts:

The Surrey marriage allegations for 1673-1770 were transcribed, indexed and published in 1907 by Alfred Ridley Bax as *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Commissary Court of Surrey between 1673-1770*.

Copies of this book are available at Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, London EC1R 0HB, and the Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking, Surrey GU21 6ND. A photocopy of the book can be consulted in the Information Area at LMA.

A microfiche index for 1770-1850 is available in the Information Area. LMA also has the original calendars of marriage licences 1763-1927 (DW/MC/001-005).

The Bishop of Rochester

Jurisdiction:

Parishes in north west Kent. Parishes in east and mid Surrey were transferred to the Diocese of Rochester in 1877.

Records:

Marriage warrants 1877 -1905 at London Metropolitan Archives (DR/MP). As these records are uncatalogued, they are available for consultation by prior appointment only.

Indexes:

For a calendar of marriage licences 1877-1905 see Diocese of Southwark (DS/MC/001).

The Bishop of Southwark

Jurisdiction:

Parishes in Deptford, Eltham, Greenwich, Lewisham, Mottingham and Woolwich formerly in Kent and parishes in east and mid Surrey were transferred from the Diocese of Rochester to the new Diocese of Southwark in 1905.

Records:

Marriage warrants and affidavits 1905 -1985 at London Metropolitan Archives (DS/MP). As these records are uncatalogued, they are available for consultation by prior appointment only. Records less than 30 years old are not available for public consultation.

Indexes:

Calendar of marriage licences for Diocese of Rochester 1877-1905 and Diocese of Southwark 1905-1910 (DS/MC/001). Lists of marriage licences 1940-1958 (DS/MB/001-004).

The Bishop of Guildford

Jurisdiction:

Parishes in west Surrey and a few parishes in Hampshire were transferred from the Diocese of Winchester to the new Diocese of Guildford in 1927.

Records:

Marriage affidavits 1927 -1974 at London Metropolitan Archives (DG/MP). As these records are uncatalogued, they are available for consultation by prior appointment only.

The Archdeacon of London**Jurisdiction:**

Most parishes in the City of London; Clerkenwell, Islington and Shoreditch in Middlesex.

Records:

1666-1691 at London Metropolitan Archives (Ms 09063). Not known if licences were issued after 1691 (no later records survive). Photocopies of surviving licences are available in the Information Area (Ms 09063A).

Indexes:

A typescript index, indexed by the names of both parties and followed by photocopies of the records, is in the Information Area (Ms 09063A). There are no published indexes.

The Archdeacon of Middlesex**Jurisdiction:**

Many parishes in Middlesex.

Records:

1668-9 at London Metropolitan Archives (7 marriage bonds only). No later records survive, but the Society of Genealogists holds a manuscript index to licences issued 1709-1711.

There is a copy of this index on the shelves in the Information Area (Ms 34392).

As these records are uncatalogued, they are available for consultation by prior appointment only.

The Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral

Jurisdiction:

4 parishes in the City of London (St Faith under St Paul, St Giles Cripplegate, St Gregory by St Paul, St Helen Bishopsgate), 8 parishes and precincts in Middlesex, 6 in Essex and 3 in Hertfordshire.

Records:

1670-1841 at London Metropolitan Archives (Ms 25801-3). No licences issued after 1841.

Indexes:

A typescript index by groom's name only is available in the Information Area (Ms 25804). There are no published indexes.

The Dean and Chapter of Westminster

Jurisdiction:

Much of Westminster and a few other parishes and precincts in London, Middlesex and Essex.

Records:

1558-1699 (a few references only, fully abstracted in Harleian Society *Publications*, vol.23, available at LMA (60.52 HAR); these are not licence allegations, only a record of names and sometimes parishes plus bonds) and 1772-1804 (an account book of fees for marriage licences) at City of Westminster Archives Centre, 10 St Ann's Street, London SW1P 2DE, email archives@westminster.gov.uk. Records for other dates are lost.

The Deanery of the Arches

Jurisdiction:

13 parishes in the City of London.

Records:

1684-1707 at Lambeth Palace Library. Not known if licences were issued after 1707 (no later records survive).

The Deanery of Croydon

Jurisdiction:

The parishes of Harrow, Hayes, Norwood and Pinner in Middlesex, and 12 parishes in Surrey.

Records:

1689-1804 and 1812-18 at Lambeth Palace Library. Not known if licences were issued after 1818 (no later records survive).

Royal Peculiar of St Katharine by the Tower

Jurisdiction:

The precinct of St Katharine, a small area adjoining the Tower of London.

Records:

1686-1802 (some gaps) at London Metropolitan Archives (Ms 09664, Ms 09741, Ms 09772, Ms 20954, Ms 09740). No licences issued after 1802.

Indexes:

Indexes by names of brides and are available in the Information Area and are [available to download](#).

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