

London Metropolitan Archives

Information Leaflet Number 8

Births, marriages and deaths overseas



There are a number of sources available in the United Kingdom which can be used in searching for births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials of British persons overseas.

For some baptisms and marriages in the period before ca.1880 there is the International Genealogical Index (IGI), compiled by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon Church), which includes some British residents overseas. The most up-to-date version of the index is available to search free of charge at the [Family Search website www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). The Index is also available on microfiche; a set including parts which relate to countries other than England is available at the Genealogical Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 64-8 Exhibition Road, London SW7 2PA, at other Mormon libraries throughout the world and at the Society of Genealogists, 14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA; [website: www.sog.org.uk](http://www.sog.org.uk) .

There are many other sources besides the IGI; brief details of the more important sources can be found below. More information is given in *The British Overseas: a guide to records of their births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials available in the United Kingdom* (Guildhall Library, 3rd edition, 1994); a copy is available from the Information Desk at LMA. *The British Overseas* gives full details of sources held by: LMA; The National Archives, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU ([website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)); the Society of Genealogists; and other record offices and libraries throughout the United Kingdom.

Records held by London Metropolitan Archives: introduction

Records of overseas chaplaincies available for consultation in the United Kingdom fall into three categories: original registers brought back to the United Kingdom; copies made for official purposes, such as bishop's transcripts; and published and unpublished transcripts or copies made by researchers. LMA holds many Anglican registers, both originals and official copies, as part of the archives of the Bishop of London, and of the Bishop of Gibraltar and his successors.

From 1633, the Bishop of London was held to have responsibility for Anglican chaplaincies overseas where no local bishop had been appointed. In Europe, Anglican chaplaincies and congregations were established after the Reformation, and proliferated from the 17th century. The Bishop of London's jurisdiction over those in southern Europe ceased in 1842 on the creation of the Diocese of Gibraltar. However, he retained responsibility for those in northern and central Europe until 1980 (although from 1883 this was administered through a suffragan bishop, later given the title of Bishop of Fulham). Between 1970 and 1980 the jurisdictions of Gibraltar, and of North and Central Europe, remained separate, but were administered by one bishop, the Bishop of Fulham and Gibraltar. In 1980 the Bishop of London divested

himself of all jurisdiction overseas and a single diocese of Gibraltar in Europe was formed, known subsequently and to this day as the Diocese in Europe.

Outside Europe, the allegiance of the American (Episcopal) church to the Bishop of London had ended after American independence in 1776. The first Anglican bishop in Canada was appointed in 1787, and other British colonies generally acquired bishops of their own in the 19th century. This explains why registers from colonial territories are not usually found in the Bishop of London's archives. In addition, records of baptisms, marriages and burials in India were returned to the civil authorities and are now part of the India Office Records at the British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB; www.bl.uk. Remember also that few chaplaincies in non-English-speaking countries outside Europe were established before the 19th century.

Original registers

When English chaplaincies were established overseas, they naturally began to maintain their own registers. The earliest known survive for the 16th century for chaplaincies in Europe. However, for most Anglican chaplaincies in Europe, and indeed elsewhere, the surviving records do not begin until the 18th or (more commonly) the 19th century. Chaplaincies within the Diocese in Europe continue to deposit their registers, some including events in the 20th century, but it is important to realise that this is inevitably on a piecemeal basis. Others are keen to retain their registers, and in some cases LMA has lists of these: details are given in *The British Overseas*. Addresses of overseas chaplaincies within the Diocese can be found in its current yearbook or online at the Diocese in Europe's website <http://europe.anglican.org>

It is not known what arrangements were made by Anglican and English non-conformist residents in countries where there was no English chaplaincy. Some baptisms, marriages and burials may have been entered in the registers of local protestant churches. These registers are of course kept in their country of origin, usually at the church in question or at a local repository. English Roman Catholics overseas should be sought in the registers of local Roman Catholic churches.

Official copies

From 1816 to 1924 the Bishop of London's registry maintained a series of volumes, now known as the "International Memoranda", for the registration of miscellaneous foreign baptisms, marriages and burials (Ms 10926). Most of the entries are for baptisms and marriages by chaplains officiating at British embassies abroad, but the series includes a number of other registrations, for example, by clergymen travelling overseas or on board ship. It is important to note that registrations were sometimes accepted up to thirty years after a baptism, marriage or burial took place. *The British Overseas* gives full details of countries covered by the series. Indexes to the "International Memoranda" are available on the open shelves in the Information Area.

Associated with the “International Memoranda” are the original certificates of baptisms, marriages and burials transmitted to the Bishop of London for registration in the “International Memoranda”, 1816-1924 (Ms 11224). Note that not every certificate transcribed in the “International Memoranda” survives in the original. Further details are given in *The British Overseas*.

From 1921 to 1969, the Bishop of Gibraltar also maintained a memorandum book of miscellaneous baptisms, by clergymen travelling overseas or on board ship, or at British embassies or other diplomatic premises abroad (Ms 23607). An index is available on the open shelves in the Information Area and *The British Overseas* gives details of countries covered.

Many registers held by LMA are official copies or transcripts deposited with the diocesan authorities for safekeeping. The official copies come in a variety of formats, not solely register transcripts. For example, in some cases certificates were returned, in others merely the certificate stubs.

Indexes

Both the “International Memoranda” and the Bishop of Gibraltar’s memorandum book are indexed as described above. There is also an index compiled by the London Diocesan Registry in the 1960s to the foreign registers and register transcripts which it held (Ms 15061). The index is not entirely straightforward to use as it is arranged alphabetically by the initial letter of each surname, and within each letter alphabetically by place. It also uses references formerly in use at the Diocesan Registry. Other indexes are few and far between.

Marriage allegations

Few marriage allegations exist within the overseas records of the diocesan authorities because licences for marriages outside British colonial territory were not granted by them. However, some allegations survive for intended marriages in Gibraltar Cathedral and the King’s (Military) Chapel on Gibraltar from 1859-1873 (Ms 20979). There also survive some marriage licence allegations and certificates for marriages at the British Embassy in Paris, 1828-1829, 1835-1837, amongst the records of the Bishop of London (Ms 10891C). Neither of these sets of marriage allegations is indexed.

Records held elsewhere:

Australia: microfiche copies of the civil registration indexes of births, marriages and deaths in some Australian states and other sources are available at the Society of Genealogists (see above for address). Otherwise advice may be sought from the civil registration authorities in the state concerned. Addresses can be obtained from *The British Overseas*, on application to the Office for National Statistics (at the

Overseas Section of the General Register Office, Smedley Hydro, Trafalgar Road, Birkdale, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2HH for postal enquiries) or from the Australian Overseas Information Service, Australian High Commission, Strand, London WC2B 4LA. Some state houses provide a service for certificates; details are given in *The British Overseas*. Assistance may also be obtained from the Society of Australian Genealogists, Richmond Villa, 120 Kent Street, Sydney, New South Wales 2000, Australia.

Canada: apart from the IGI and some other sources held at the Society of Genealogists (see above), there are no sources available in the United Kingdom. Advice may be sought from the local genealogical societies in the province concerned, whose addresses can be found in *Meyer's Directory of Genealogical Societies in the USA and Canada* (edited by Mary Keysor Meyer, Mount Airy, Maryland, 1990).

India, Burma, Pakistan, Bangladesh: virtually complete records, 1698-1968, are in the India Office Records at the British Library (see above for address).

New Zealand: apart from the IGI and some other sources held at the Society of Genealogists (see above), there are no sources held in the United Kingdom. Advice may be sought from the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages, PO Box 31-115, Lower Hutt, New Zealand. Assistance is also available from the New Zealand Society of Genealogists Inc, PO Box 14036, Panmure, Auckland 1741, New Zealand.

West Indies: original records are held locally in the West Indies. However, some register transcripts for a number of West Indian islands are available in the United Kingdom: details are given in *The British Overseas*.

Other countries in the British Empire or Commonwealth: most original records are likely to be held locally in the country concerned. However, a few sources are available in the United Kingdom (for example, some 19th and 20th century sources are held by The National Archives); details are given in *The British Overseas*.

United States: for persons of English or Welsh origin, there are "consular" records 1849 to date at the Office for National Statistics (see above); and for persons of Scottish origin, there are "consular" records 1860 to date at the General Register Office for Scotland, New Register House, Edinburgh EH1 3YT. For the period before 1849, apart from the IGI and some other sources held by the Society of Genealogists, there are no sources in the United Kingdom. Advice may be sought from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Family History Centre, 35 North West Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84150, USA, or from local genealogical societies in the state concerned, whose addresses can be found in *Meyer's Directory of Genealogical Societies in the USA and Canada* (see above).

Other countries outside the British Empire or Commonwealth: for persons of English or Welsh origin, there are "consular" records 1849 to date at the Office for

National Statistics (see above) and at The National Archives (full details of the latter are given in *The British Overseas*); for persons of Scottish origin, there are "consular" records 1860 to date at the General Register Office for Scotland (see above). Further records, 17th to 20th centuries, are available in the United Kingdom as follows: The National Archives has numerous registers for individual places overseas; other records are held by LMA and various other libraries and record offices. Full details are given in *The British Overseas*.

Persons on board ship or in a military unit abroad: records of births, marriages and deaths in British Army regiments abroad after ca. 1790, and of English or Welsh births and deaths at sea after 1837, are mostly at the Office for National Statistics (see above). Records of Scottish births and deaths at sea after 1855 are mostly at the General Record Office for Scotland (see above). There are some entries for baptisms at sea after 1893 in the parish registers of St Dunstan Stepney held at LMA; however, the popular belief that all baptisms at sea were registered there is incorrect. Details of other sources are given in *The British Overseas*.

What if no record can be found?

If no relevant entry can be found in the year when the birth, marriage or death is thought to have occurred, it may be useful to consult the records of subsequent years, as events abroad were often registered some time after they took place.

If no registers exist for the town or locality concerned, it may be useful to examine the records of other towns in the same country, as births, marriages and deaths abroad were not always registered in the place where they occurred.

If no relevant records can be traced in the United Kingdom, it will be necessary to search for records held overseas. Advice on where to begin such a search may be obtained from the Overseas Registration Section of the General Register Office or from the London embassy or high commission of the country concerned. Some further information is given in *The British Overseas*.

Many births, marriages and deaths overseas, especially in the 18th century and earlier, were not registered at all. In other cases, the register may have failed to survive. Thus for a large number of births, marriages and deaths overseas no record exists anywhere.

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