

GRO online birth and death indexes overview

Customer Guide Number 11

1. The GRO online birth and death indexes

The GRO indexes contain a sub-set of information from the full record such as name/surname/district of event and index reference number. This information can be used to help customers identify and purchase a copy of the record.

A number of GRO birth and death indexes are freely available to search online. These cover birth records from 1837 to 1934, and 1984 up to two years ago. Death records from 1837 to 1957, and 1984 up to two years ago. The following documents provide an overview and guide to using these indexes.

GRO is currently working on a rolling programme to put all of its indexes online. We will notify you via our website when new indexes are added.

You can view GRO's birth, death and marriage indexes online via other websites, e.g. <https://www.freebmd.org.uk>, where they are available to view free of charge up to 1983.

2. Available Indexes

GRO online indexes are available to search for: birth records from 1837 up to 1934, and 1984 up to the current year; and death records from 1837 to 1957, and 1984 up to the current year. We are currently identifying a rolling programme to put more of our indexes online and we will notify you via our website when any new indexes are added.

You can view GRO's birth, death and marriage indexes online via other websites, e.g. <https://www.freebmd.org.uk>, where they are available to view free of charge up to 1983.

3. How the index works

The index is searchable and customers will need to key in certain information with the results returned in a table format. As a minimum, the type of event, year, surname and sex will have to be entered to conduct a search. Further fields are available to input data and help refine the search such as mother's maiden name and district of birth.

4. Q&A

Q1. Why have you chosen to not publish all the indexes online?

The online index has been created from the records and indexes GRO already has digitised.

We are currently identifying a rolling programme to put more of our indexes online and we will notify you via our website when any new indexes are added.

You can view GRO's birth, death and marriage indexes online via other websites, e.g. FreeBMD, where they are available to view free of charge up to 1983.

Q2. How have you defined "historical" and "modern" records?

We have used the same demarcation as used by the National Records of Scotland and GRO Northern Ireland whereby records become categorised as historic when they reach 100 years old for births, 75 years old for marriages and 50 years old for deaths.

Q3. Are there any plans to add further to the records shown in the index i.e. add in marriage indexes and further historical death data?

We are currently identifying a rolling programme to put more of our indexes online and we will notify you via our website when any new indexes are added.

You can view GRO's birth, death and marriage indexes online via other websites, e.g. FreeBMD, where they are available to view free of charge up to 1983.

Q4. Is there a charge to use the online index?

No, the index is available free of charge for customers, but you must have a registered GRO online certificate ordering account. This can be set up via the GRO online ordering site.

Online Indexes can be located [here](#).

Q5. Why is GRO publishing an online index when other organisations have already done this?

The GRO has a statutory duty to publish its indexes. By publishing the indexes online, GRO aims to improve the customer journey by providing a 'one stop shop' where possible to its services making it easier for customers to order certificates and PDFs. In some instances the online index also contains additional data fields to those which are already available and this will assist family historians to identify the correct record. GRO will also be able to update its online index if errors or omissions have been identified.

Q6. How will the customer access the index?

The index will be accessed via the current online certificate ordering system. New customers will be asked to register with an email address and password. Existing customers are not required to re-register and will automatically have access to the service, once they have verified their email address.

Q7. What if I cannot find a result?

To help customers locate a record, further functionality is available for searches of the historical indexes, such as phonetic/soundex searches. Customers are also able to extend the year ranges for their search. Customers will still be able to order certificates if they do not have the GRO index reference. An administration charge of £3.00 for each different application where a GRO index reference is not provided will be charged to cover additional processing costs.

Q8. Why is the maximum number of possible matching index entries limited to 250? 250 returns should be sufficient to cover most searches. Where the limit is exceeded you will need to refine your search.

Q9. Why is the maximum search period limited to 2 years either side of the year identified?

Indexes allow for up to a two year search period for modern records and five year search period for historic records. Beyond this, you will need to refine your search.

Q10. What if there is a dash against details in an index entry?

A dash is recorded where the details have not been data captured in the index. Not all information will have been provided by the informant when the birth or death was registered, or in some cases the information may not have been data captured. In these circumstances there will be a dash against the field when the search results are displayed.

Q11. Why is Mother's Maiden Name shown in most, but not all birth indexes?

In some cases, Mother's Maiden Name was not data captured, and will appear in the online index as a dash.

For historic indexes, we have where possible enhanced the indexes to include Mother's Maiden Name where it has previously not been provided on the microfiche indexes.

For modern birth indexes, the mother's maiden name will only be included in the returned index if it was already entered as part of the online search.

Q12. Why is age at death shown in some but not all death indexes?

Over the years the format of the indexes has changed several times. In addition GRO has taken decisions to provide additional or redacted information to that which is available on the microfiche index to help or protect the public.

Age at death is shown in "historic" indexes because it was captured as part of the microfiche during that time. If it is missing this is because the information was not recorded or was unclear/illegible.

For modern records, the information in the microfiche changed and so rather than age of death, the index will provide the year of birth.

Q13. How is the age at death for infant deaths (i.e. died within 12 months of birth) recorded in the indexes?

Generally, age at death for 'infant deaths' will be shown as 0, in line with the microfiche index. However, we are aware of a number of records where the age at death is showing a different value e.g. 9. If this is the case, it is likely that the information held in the online index relates to the age in minutes, hours, days, weeks, or months (recorded this way on the original death registration) rather than in years. It is not possible to identify which records maybe affected but we will continue to correct any errors that we do become aware of, or those reported to us.

Q14. Why do the search results contain a name which appears to relate to the opposite sex from what was requested?

Sex was not data captured for some of the records. In order to ensure that all relevant records are included in the search and to present as much useful information as possible, those records where sex has not been data captured are searched every time a request is made. On occasion therefore, a search for a male may return a female sounding forename and vice versa.

Q15: How do I find an index that relates to an entry in the Presumption of Death register?

Entries from the Presumption of Death register are included in the online indexes, and are recorded in the year that the death was entered into the register. This may not be the same year as the presumed year of death.

Entries are recorded in the Presumption of Death register held by the General Register Office on direction from the Courts, rather than by a Local Authority in England and Wales, and therefore there is no "District" information held in the entry. Please note that if an index return relates to an entry in the Presumed Death register the 'District' field will remain blank/will comprise of a dash for the District Name, and 000 for the district number.

Q16: Why is the 'District' field blank in some index returns relating to death entries?

Whilst it is possible that the 'District' field is incorrectly blank, and the index may require correction (the "Data Quality and Error Reporting" page explains how to notify GRO of an error in the online indexes), it is also possible that the index relates to an entry held in the Presumption of Death register. This register is held by GRO and entries are entered into this register on direction from the Courts when a person has been presumed deceased. An index entry relating to the Presumption of death register will comprise of a dash for the 'District Name', and 000 for the 'District Number'.

5. Error Reporting

Please use the **[online form](#)** to report details of the error, which is located at the bottom of the search results page.

All reports will be investigated and where an error is found, we will update the Index to reflect the correct information. Updates to the indexes will be made on a weekly basis. Once we have finished investigating the record you have reported we will update the status of your query which can be viewed **[here](#)**.