

Over 11,000 reasons to keep going!

With over 11,000 hits to the web site, more marriages on-line, births started, and the Register Office in new premises, it's time for another newsletter!

A quick update on where we stand:

Marriages: We now have 58,702 marriages on line and we have another 5,000 here ready for the next update. Together they comprise about 37% of the total number of 172,500 marriages that we expect on completion. We are now working solely on the 1840 to 1860 period and that will be issued before the end of the year completing all marriages to 1860. On further updates, we hope to complete spans of 20 years of marriages each time, so by the middle of 2005, we should have all marriages to 1900 issued on line. Work will then concentrate primarily on Births, to bring them to the same state.

Births: Work has started on transcribing the 1,125 Birth registers - slightly fewer than we announced in the last newsletter. So far we have 22 done and ready for issue, comprising 11,112 births from a total estimate of 460,000. Only 2%, but it's a good start! About half of these came from the Register Offices computer system, which was a help. All the 11,112 are from the 1837 to 1860 period. Our management database is now complete with all registers catalogued, so we fully know the extent of the task, and can monitor who is working on what index.

Deaths: On the basis that there are 826 death registers compared to 1,125 birth registers, we should have about 335,000 deaths to index. Work has not started on this yet.

Transcribing Births

Most volunteers have now been sent photocopies of index books for Birth Registers. These are virtually identical to marriages, except for the occasional forename of Girl / Boy / Male / Female. We know these were often a result of the appalling infant mortality rate of the era. We have decided to standardise on MALE and FEMALE for such entries, purely for the sake of consistency. So, if you come across such entries where the forename is just GIRL or BOY, please replace this with FEMALE and MALE respectively.

Register Office Move.

On Thursday and Friday 21st and 22nd October, the Register Office moved to new premises in the Guildhall, Bath. As I write (a day later!) much chaos still abounds, and it has not been possible to satisfy the volunteers demands for photocopies to transcribe, as we had hoped. We will catch up in the coming week hopefully. In the meantime, all I can say to our volunteers is a BIG Thank You - and have a well earned break until we can get more work to you. You are doing a first class job, and we cannot thank you enough! For those not conversant with Bath, pictures of the old and new premises are included below.



Formerly - 12 Charlotte Street



Now - The Guildhall

Who can assist at the Register Office?

It has always been a problem getting the files that our volunteers produce, through the second stage of transcribing. Volunteers type up index books - and we call this Stage 1 typing. Stage 2, the next stage - involves access to the register, and as these are not loaned out, a backlog of Stage 1 files has (purposely) accumulated. In fact, virtually all marriage index books for registers to 1900 have been done by volunteers to Stage 1. The plan is now to invite volunteers to come to the Register Office where they can use the registers, along with the Stage 1 file, to produce the finished Stage 2 file for issue. We appreciate that only the local volunteers will be able to do this. It has not been possible up to now due to lack of office space. But now that the Register Office is in larger offices, we are hoping this backlog can be cleared. The total issued records will then get a well deserved boost.

We have produced three sides of written instructions for Stage 2 processing, (just ask if you want a copy) but it is still wise probably to give those that can be involved in it, a brief tutorial in person. If anyone feels they might be interested in Stage 2 processing, can they please let us know in the first instance. The plan is that we will invite you to the Guildhall where you can meet us and be taken through what's involved - probably on a Friday morning. After that, you will be free to make contact with the Register Office and arrange as much - or as little - times as you want with them for Stage 2 processing. You are of course under no obligation. If you attend and then decide it's not for you, and that you would rather keep to doing Stage 1 typing at home, then that's great. We still need you! When we know how many might be interested in Stage 2 processing, we will fix a date for the visit to suit you as well as us.

Stage One Typing.

Here are a few points to help those that are doing Stage 1 typing for us. Maybe you have your own tips which you can send in and share with us??

- 1) If using MS Excel, go to TOOLS, OPTIONS, and click on the Edit tab, and UNCHECK the box marked "Enable Auto-complete for cell values". This will stop Excel second guessing what you might type and completing it for you, often erroneously. For example, having once typed the forename "Sarah Ann", Excel will think you want this every time you just want "Sarah".
- 2) Have you ever tried typing the name ALWAYS as a surname? Excel will again try and be helpful and add a "S" to the end of it thinking you want ALWAYS. No amount of editing can get rid of that "S". This had me beaten for a while too! The answer is found in TOOLS - AUTOCORRECT. There is a list of common typing mistakes and when Excel finds you have made an error that is in its list, it will automatically correct it for you, thinking it is being helpful. The answer is simply to tell Excel to delete that automatic correction from its autocorrect list.

- 3) Another problem we found is the occasional surname that is the same as a Month. John MARCH was one, and we have had a few occurrences of MAY as well. If you find that Excel wants to change the name to be a date, or even a number, just amend the formatting of the cell back to GENERAL. The name will then display as it should.

Text Recognition.

The science of Text Recognition of handwriting by computer has yet to reach a stage where it can handle 21st century writing, let alone 19th century Copperplate handwriting! But we have come across a few index books at the Register Office, where the data has been typed on a typewriter or computer, but we do not have the computer file - just the printed sheet. These are ideal candidates for processing with text recognition software. Anyone that has a scanner with a suitable text recognition capability, like Textbridge, or Abby Finereader, may like to have a go at these. Please let us know if you want to give this a try. As we want to make life easy for our volunteers, we don't want one volunteer typing such data manually, if another can do it so much quicker and easier with a scanner and some software. We will still need the data in cells (columns) of a spreadsheet, so you may need to do some processing on the file your text recognition software produces. Anyone want to give it a go? Let us know please.

Feedback.

We welcome feedback from any volunteers, past, present or future! Tell us what you think is good, or bad. Tell us what you want to do, or what you want us to do. Send all comments to Submit@BathBMD.org.uk. Readers might be interested to know that e-mails sent to this e-mail address will be forwarded automatically both to the Register Office, and to us at home. Mails sent to webmaster@BathBMD.org.uk get additionally sent to Ian Hartas who sponsors the web search software as they may be asking questions which only he can answer. Please use the submit address for all volunteer communications with the project and for submitting your Stage 1 files.

Accolades.

This lady came on the Somerset Rootsweb list, having found the Bath site. She was full of praise. I told her we were trying to get the births up and running as well. (R.P. 4/10/2004)

I would like to thank you for taking the decision to enable people to access marriage indexes held at Bath & North East Somerset Council's Register Office in Bath.

As well as providing an enhanced working environment for your staff, this will prove a very valuable tool for myself and many other B&NES residents, not to mention those in other counties and countries with an interest in genealogy and ancestors who either were born, married or died in what is now the B&NES area.

Being born and married in Bath, and part of a long line of Bath residents, I particularly welcome the historical and social information that this facility will provide.

Once again, many thanks for providing such a valuable source of historical information. (W.L. 17/5/2004)

What a useful website it is, as is the Cheshire one! Thanks. (J.M. 21/9/2004)

John and Andrea Fairlie.