



Marriage Licences

Background

After Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, marriages were formalised and had to occur in a church. Couples also had to have either:

- **Banns** published (these announcements of an intention to marry were read at the churches of the groom's parish, the bride's parish and the church in which they intended to marry), or
- a **Licence** from the Diocese.

If neither of these were applied for then the marriage would be void.

To get a licence, the bride and groom had to allege before the bishop or his surrogate (someone appointed to stand in his place), that there was no lawful barrier to the marriage. This produced a document called an *allegation*. A licence could be applied for up to a day before the wedding, so they were popular for quick marriages. Anyone could apply for a licence but a fee was charged, which is why they are generally associated with the upper classes,

What information will they contain?

A licence allegation will usually give you the following information about the bride and groom:

- Name
- Marital status
- Age, especially if underage
- Occupation
- Where the marriage was to be held
- An oath of living in the parish of abode for 4 weeks

Early hand written allegations can be difficult to read and until 1733, some parts of the allegations will be in Latin.

Some allegations for 1822-1823 have baptismal entries attached, as required by an Act of Parliament.

Remember that a marriage did not always take place after the granting of a licence.

How to Find the Records

Gloucestershire Archives holds all the surviving allegations for the Gloucester diocese. There are several onsite indexes which can help you find an allegation for a specific person:

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| 1637-1700 | Indexed and transcribed in <i>Marriage allegations in the diocese of Gloucester</i> , Brian Frith (ed.) Ref: GAL/C5/36083GS |
| 1700-1837 | Paper slip index. Once you have found your person, order the relevant allegation from the strongrooms using a GDR/Q2 or GDR/Q3 reference followed by the folio number given on the index slip. |
| 1830-1906 | Two large volumes. These contain indexed summaries of the allegations. They are useful because most of allegations themselves do not survive for this period. (N.B. The volume covering the years 1854 – 1876 has not been deposited at the archives). |