

Vehicle Licensing Records

Background

The scheme of giving motor vehicles, such as cars, motorbikes and trucks, individual registration numbers began in 1903. This became the responsibility of the county and city councils. Some vehicles had been registered from 1896 but this was not enforced until after the 1903 Motor Act. Each county was allocated an index mark of two letters, which was followed by a unique number e.g. AD 1234. Registering vehicles in this way allowed the police to enforce speed limits and issue fines. Vehicles could be registered anywhere in the UK, not necessarily with the local council. Separate registers were kept for motorcycles, cars and goods vehicles between 3 and 5 tons. The system was altered slightly in 1921. Vehicles now had to be registered with the local council and only one register was kept for all vehicles.

When councils ran out of unique numbers, they were to add a third letter at the beginning, followed by 3 numbers only, e.g. AAD 123. The letters I, Q and Z were not used. In the 1950s, when these unique marks ran out, councils were to reverse the order – numbers followed by the letters, e.g. 123 AAD. In 1963 an extra letter which changed every year was added. The letter A was issued for 1963, but many councils didn't change to the new system until 1964, so there are no A registrations, e.g. AAD 123 B. In 1967, the date the letter changed was moved from January 1st to August 1st (so the mark E only covers 7 months). Although the responsibility for issuing registrations began to move to the centralised DVLA in 1969, this was not fully completed until 1974.

Gloucestershire County

The letters given to Gloucestershire were AD, DD, DF and DG. Remember if there are three letters in the registration, it is the last two which tell you the County. The single letter (if there is one) tells you the year.

Gloucester City

The letters given to Gloucester City were FH.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

Registers

These are sorted by registration number. Some early registers are indexed by name.

Between 1903 and 1921 the registers list the name and address of the owner, together with a description of the vehicle, including the colour.

After 1921 the registers only give you the name and address of the first owner. After 1956 the registers also give the name of the car salesman and the make of vehicle.

Index Cards

These are sorted by registration number.

The index cards give the date of the registration (or re-registration) of the vehicle. The chassis number, make and model of the vehicle are sometimes given also.

How to Find the Records

Gloucester County: the records are held under the reference K264:

Finding Ref	Description	Date
K264/1	All vehicles under 3 tons	1903-1921
K264/2	Vehicles in the 3 ton - 5 ton range	1920-1921
K264/3	Motorcycles	1903-1921
K264/4	Registers of identification marks	1920-1974
K264/8	Index cards (few before 1921)	1903-1974

You will need to find the specific reference of the registers you wish to see. To order an index card use the reference K264/8 and the registration number of the vehicle.

Gloucester City: the records are held under the reference GBR/L15. Most of these are records of licence renewals only, held on microfilm (reference: GBR/L/15/20), although a few sample files and log books also survive. No index cards have survived for Gloucester City.

To view a list of records in these collections please use our online catalogue, which can be found on our website at: <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/> . Use the references given above as your search term.

For guidance on how to use our online catalogue, please see the Help page and FAQs. Or you can watch our YouTube tutorial.

If you need a copy of these records for the DVLA, you may need to have them certified. We can do this for you for a fee.

For more information about this please ask a member of staff or email us at archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk.