

Marriage Licences

Background

After Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, marriages were formalised and had to occur in a church. Couples also needed 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 or 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, meaning 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 handwritten allegations can be difficult to read and until 1733, some parts of the allegations would be in Latin. Some allegations for 1822-1823 have baptismal entries attached, as required by an Act of Parliament. It is worth remembering 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:

1637-1700	Indexed and transcribed in <i>Marriage allegations in the diocese of Gloucester</i> , Brian Frith (ed.) Ref: GAL/C5/36083GS
1700-1837	Available under reference GDR/Q2 or GDR/Q3 . Search the name you are looking for on the online catalogue and you will find a full transcription of what is listed on the document.
1830-1906	Two large volumes, available to view on the open shelves in the Frith Room in the Archives Searchroom. Q5/1 contains indexed summaries of the allegations between 1830-1854, and Q5/2 contains 1876-1906. 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).