

THE		
NATIONAL		
ARCHIVES		

Reproduction of birth, death and marriage certificates

	General Register Office approved guidance on the use of certified copies of official certificates	
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1. Introduction

This guidance explains how official birth, death, marriage and civil partnership certificates ('extracts' in Scotland) can be used, and has been produced by The National Archives in consultation with the General Register Office for England and Wales, together with the General Register Office of Scotland – part of the National Records of Scotland - and the General Register Office for Northern Ireland.

Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships are registered in accordance with civil registration legislation (e.g. the Marriage Act 1949 in England and Wales). Civil registration legislation authorises the making of certified copies of these register entries. These copies are commonly referred to as "certificates".

Certificates (an 'extract' in Scotland) are issued either by the General Register Office or the local register office for the area where the event took place. In Scotland, births and deaths can be obtained from the National Records of Scotland or any registration office regardless of where the event was registered.

It is an offence to make a copy of a certificate and pass it off as the original certificate. The layout of these certificates is protected by [Crown copyright](#), but the Crown does not assert any rights of ownership of the contents of the forms.

The copying of certificates is strictly controlled because of the potential for documents being used for the purposes of fraud.

2. Reproducing the certificate

2.1. Definition of reproduction

For the purposes of this guidance, the term reproduction includes:

- Photocopying
- Scanning
- Filming
- Publishing in a book
- Reproduction in any other medium including placing material on the internet

2.2. Reproducing uncompleted forms

Certificates are produced on forms which contain a number of security features and are uniquely serially numbered. You are authorised to reproduce the layout of the form (not any content) in any format including on the web, in films and in print, under the terms of the [Open Government Licence](#), but you may not imply that your copy is an official form.

2.3. Reproducing completed forms

You are authorised to reproduce certificates for all purposes other than providing evidence of an event (see 4 below), subject to the restrictions listed below. This may include publishing in a book or magazine, or placing a copy on the internet.

You must:

- ✓ Acknowledge Crown copyright.
- ✓ Comply with the [Data Protection Act 2018](#) and the [Human Rights Act 1998](#). This means, for example, that if you propose to reproduce the contents of any certificate containing personal data about any living individual, you should obtain the permission of the individual(s) before you do so

You must not:

- ✗ Reproduce the Royal Arms and any departmental logo unless this is as an integral part of a certificate (that is, you must not just copy these items from a certificate)
- ✗ Use certificates or their contents to advertise or promote a particular product or service, or in a way which could imply endorsement by HM Government.

2.4. Providing evidence of an event (birth, marriage, death)

Certified copies (certificates or extract) are produced on forms which contain a number of security features and are uniquely serially numbered. Reproduction of certificates potentially removes these security features from the copy. It is therefore government policy not to authorise the copying of certificates for cases where the intention is to prove evidence of the event – birth, marriage, death.

You should not provide a photocopy of a certificate as evidence of the event, even where this has been endorsed by a solicitor, notary or other organisation.

For organisations which request sight of a certificate as evidence of an event, it is acceptable, once the certificate has been seen and with the permission of the person who has supplied it, for that organisation to keep a photocopy of the certificate in their files and return the certificate.

3. Frequently Asked Questions

Q1 *I have been researching my family history for many years and bought many certificates, some not relating to my family and therefore of no use to me. Are there any rules or regulations preventing me from passing these relevant certificates on for a small charge or donation to charity?*

When managing certificates there are always two issues to consider - the [Data Protection Act](#) and [Crown copyright](#). If the certificate is a recent record containing e.g. details of living individuals, then the Data Protection Act a set of rules which must be followed to protect the identity and personal details of living individuals should be taken into consideration when passing on or selling any completed certificates. Certificates are protected by [Crown copyright](#) so if they were reproduced in a published work, Crown copyright should be acknowledged.

Q2 *I need to apply for a passport, and I've been asked to send my birth certificate as part of the evidence to support my application. Can I send a photocopy of this?*

A photocopy of the birth certificate is not an acceptable form of proof of the event (the birth), including those so-called "endorsed by a recognised body". You should send an original certificate. The Passport Office will return this to you once they have seen it, and you can keep it for future use.

Q3 *I've just registered my daughter's birth and I want to put copies of the birth certificate on Facebook. Can I do this?*

Modern certificates will contain details about living individuals and therefore will be subject to the Data Protection Act, a set of rules which must be followed to protect the identity and personal details of each individual. There would be no objection to the certificate being shown on social media sites providing that permission has been granted for its publication by all parties concerned.

Q4 *I'm publishing my family tree on the internet - I want to publish images of the certificates I have.*

As long as there are no details about living individuals there is no problem about publishing the images of the certificates on your family tree website. Any modern certificates would be subject to the Data Protection Act, and would need the permission of any living named person prior to publication.

Q5 *I want to join an internet "certificate-swapping" site. Are there any restrictions about what I can do?*

You will need to be aware that the publication of the details of living individuals is prevented under the Data Protection Act, so when passing on or selling any completed certificates, this should be underlined. The certificates are protected by Crown copyright so any re-use of the certificates would also need to be addressed.

Q6 *I want to publish some certificates in a book I'm writing. Can I do this and do I need to get anyone's permission before I publish?*

The layout of all certificates are protected by Crown copyright, so if you are publishing these in a book or online publication you should acknowledge Crown copyright (you don't need to do this if you're just placing them on Facebook or similar). You do not need to approach GRO or The National Archives for permission. But do bear in mind that if any of the certificates relate to living individuals you need to consider the Data Protection Act provisions above and make sure you have their permission to publish.

Q7 *I want to publish a copy of a death certificate on the internet. Surely the Data Protection Act doesn't apply to these?*

The death certificate will contain details about the "informant", that is, the person who gave information to the registrar so that the death could be registered. You need to consider whether they may still be alive before you can be sure the Data Protection Act does not apply.

4. Further information

Enquiries relating to the re-use of certificates covered in section 2 should be sent to the Copyright Team at The National Archives by emailing psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Any further queries regarding reproduction should be directed to the appropriate General Register Office (listed below)

England and Wales

General Register Office
PO Box 2
Southport
PR8 2JD

Email: certificate.services@gro.gov.uk

Scotland

General Register Office for Scotland
The National Records of Scotland
3 West Register Street
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH1 3YT

[Online contact form](#)

Northern Ireland

General Register Office for Northern Ireland
NISRA
Colby House
Stranmillis Court
Belfast
BT9 5RR

Email: gro_nisra@finance-ni.gov.uk