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# Tracing Birth Relatives

A Practical Guide for  
Adopted People

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## **Introduction**

Deciding to trace a relative can be one of the most life-changing decisions you may ever make. The final outcome is unknown and the journey has often been described as an emotional rollercoaster – at times exciting and satisfying; at others frustrating and disappointing. It can also be exhausting, both physically and emotionally. It is therefore important to start a search at a time that is right for you and to go at your own pace.

This is a practical guide to assist adopted adults who are thinking of tracing their birth relatives. Although this guide has been written primarily for people adopted in England and Wales it will be a useful resource for anyone in the UK who is trying to find information about a family member who they are trying to locate.

The guide provides a range of tracing resources and information with links to the relevant websites to get you started and help you go down the right track to a successful search. Searches can be relatively easy or can prove very difficult, taking anything from a few days or weeks to many months or even years. However, providing you have managed to gather sufficient information to begin your search, it is usually possible to find the person or a relative of the person you are looking for.

## **What do I need to think about?**

Before you begin your search, it is important to think about your motivations, as your life and those of others may be changed forever as a result. It is therefore vital to ask yourself a few questions at the start. For example, what do you want to achieve by tracing and contacting your family? Is it to satisfy curiosity, to complete a family tree, to clarify the past, or do you wish to establish or renew a longed-for relationship? It may be a combination of these and others. Sometimes motivations are hard to put into words, but it is helpful to be as clear about these as possible. By thinking things through in advance, you will be as prepared as possible for what lies ahead and therefore best able to cope.

It is important to think about the potential impact on you and your present family if you find the person you are tracing. How will you, your partner, children, parent, sister/brother feel? It is important to identify a source of support throughout the search. This may be a family member or friend, an adoption support worker or adoption support group, among others. It is not only good to have this support when the search is frustrating or leads to sad or disappointing information, but also to have someone to discuss your hopes and fears with, as well as the decisions you need to make along the way. If you can, try to find out about support groups before you start searching.

It is really important that you do all you can to find an up-to-date address for the birth relative you are seeking, rather than finding an address for another family member, even if the latter sometimes appears an easier and quicker route. Finding the person you are actually looking for helps protect their privacy and also ensures that the approach is made to the person you really want to find, rather than another family member who may not always be helpful or sensitive to the situation, or who may have their own reasons for not wanting to you to have contact.

It may feel like an easy route to trace somebody on one of the social networking sites such as Facebook or Friends Reunited but we strongly advise caution, as confidentiality on these sites is not always assured and you may find the process running out of your control. Such social networking sites offer an immediate contact point but this may have disadvantages; the person being approached may feel pressure to respond as soon as they have received a message, whilst a letter may allow them to have more time to think through the implications and prepare for contact.

It is helpful to think ahead about what you intend to do if and when you finally discover where your relative is living. Many adopted people find it helpful to use an intermediary, at least at first. Having the initial contact made by someone outside of your family or close circle means that your relative may be more likely to give a considered response, rather than an emotional reaction, either for or against contact. This can often lead to a positive experience and outcome for all the parties involved as the intermediary can be independent and help people think through some of the issues and options.

An intermediary can help both you and the relative you have traced maintain a sense of privacy and control until you hopefully both feel ready to be in direct contact with each other. They can also be a support if the contact you wish to have with a birth relative is refused. You may already be in touch with a potential intermediary, for example an adoption advisor at your Local Authority, adoption agency or adoption support agency. If not, this is the time to request such a service and contact details can be found using the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/) Please note that not all of the adoption agencies listed on the ASR website provide intermediary services, so you will need to check what services the agency provides when you contact them and also ask about the charges they make.

Think about and prepare yourself for the range of outcomes you may encounter once you have found the relative you are looking for. What if the person you find does not respond or does not want contact? What if they are no longer alive or you cannot find them? What if they are in need of financial or personal support and expect help from you? What if the person is overjoyed and wants to spend too much time with you and your family? These are all possible outcomes, along with many others. You may find it helpful to read about other people's experience of adoption and reunion and you can find some recommended reading on the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/reading/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/reading/)

It is also worth remembering that your relative may have had a very different life experience from you and their lifestyle may be very different to yours. You may find that you do not have much in common and may be disappointed when you finally meet the person you have been searching for. If this is the case, try to remember this can happen in any family, even without the separation of adoption. Alternatively, you may find that when reunited with your relative, strong feelings come to the fore, which can be all-consuming and confusing. Some people have described these feelings as similar to falling in love. Usually these intense feelings reduce with familiarity and time. If you do begin to get feelings that concern you, it is important to talk them over with someone such as your adoption advisor. You can also read more about preparing for a reunion on the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/reunions/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/reunions/)

While everyone hopes to find relatives alive and well, it is inevitable that sometimes during the course of your search you may discover that the person you are seeking has died. Some people who have had this experience describe it as a double blow because there has been a loss at birth and then again later in life. The emotions involved on this discovering that the relative you are looking for has died can be complex. Some people have said that it has left them with so many things unresolved and feeling that they have been robbed of the chance to get to know the relative personally. If this happens to you do share your loss with your adoption advisor – she or he may be able to put you in touch with other adopted adults who have had a similar experience or with a bereavement counsellor

If you decide you are ready to begin your search, the next sections are here to guide you through the process. It should be possible to undertake the research needed to trace your relative yourself through relevant public records and websites. This enables you to stay in control of your search and at a pace that is comfortable to you.

## How do I get started?

### **Birth certificates**

The first step is to make sure you have as much information about your family origins so you need to have a copy of your original birth certificate, which will contain identifying information about your birth mother and birth father if it has been recorded on the birth certificate. If you do not have a copy of your original birth certificate then you need to apply for a copy. If you were adopted **before 12<sup>th</sup> November 1975** and do not know your name at birth, you will need to apply to the Registrar General for Access to Birth Records. You will also need to meet with an adoption advisor so that arrangements can be made for the Registrar General to send them the information needed to apply for a copy of your original birth certificate. One of the reasons you are required to meet with an adoption advisor is because prior to 12<sup>th</sup> November 1975 promises of lifelong confidentiality were given to birth parents and families. At that time it was understood the adoption order would mean that all legal ties to the birth family were severed and that there would be no further contact.

If you were adopted on or after 12<sup>th</sup> November 1975 and before 30<sup>th</sup> December 2005, and do not know your birth name, you can apply to the General Registrar for the information to enable you to obtain a copy of your original birth certificate. You can apply for Access to Birth Records and a certificate of your original birth entry by contacting the General Register Office (GRO) on 0300 123 1837 or ordering them through the GRO website: [www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/](http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/). You can read more about your right to access information about your origins on the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/search/righttosearch/accessinfo.htm](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/search/righttosearch/accessinfo.htm)

If you already know your original name then you have the information to apply directly to the Registrar General for a copy of your original birth certificate. Contact information for General Register Offices in the UK can be found on the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/websites/#gros](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/websites/#gros)

### **Adoption records**

It is important to gather as much information as you possibly can about your adoption and family background. Some people may already have information that the adoptive parents were given at the time of the adoption, however, providing your adoption was not a private arrangement, the best place to find information about your origins and family background is in the records held by the agency that was responsible for your adoption. As well as giving the circumstances leading to your adoption, you should also be able to learn the names of birth relatives and possibly their dates of birth and addresses at the time.

If you know the adoption agency, you can contact them directly and arrange to have access to the record of your adoption. They may offer you an appointment or they may advise you to contact the adoption team at your own Local Authority. Contact details can be found on the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/)

You can also request access to the adoption record through the local authority where you live. If the local authority is not the agency that arranged your adoption (Appropriate Adoption Agency, or AAA), the local authority will need to contact the AAA to obtain the adoption file information. If you are hoping to trace and contact birth relatives and have also applied for an intermediary service then the local authority will also need to ask the AAA if there is any reason why they should not act as intermediary. This may cause some delay.

If you do not know the name of the adoption agency that arranged your adoption, you may be able to find this out through the General Register Office: [www.direct.gov.uk/gro](http://www.direct.gov.uk/gro). The GRO may also be able to tell you if you were privately adopted.

Private adoptions were legal until 1984 and were placements made through private individuals such as doctors, lawyers or clergymen. It can be much harder to find information about a private adoption. The General Register Office should be able to provide the name of the court where the Adoption Order was made. It could also be worthwhile writing to the Local Authority that covers the area of the Court, as it would have undertaken your welfare supervision pending the adoption and may still hold a record. It may also have a copy of the *Guardian ad Litem* report which would have been prepared for the Court.

The court records should hold some background information. However, not all records have survived and the courts are variable in their response to a request for access. Although it is possible to do this yourself, it may be helpful for your adoption advisor to apply on your behalf. You can find more information about contacting courts on the Adoption Search Reunion website [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/search/righttosearch/accessrecords.htm](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/search/righttosearch/accessrecords.htm)

### **Found babies**

The only circumstances in which no information about your parents and/or details of your birth will be provided are if you were in fact 'abandoned' or 'found'. Found babies are registered by the Registrar General and details of their 'finding' is recorded, but without a parent or the person who abandoned the baby being traced, no birth details are known.

The adoption advisor with whom you meet will be able to help you find what information exists about where you were found and the details of your adoption.

### **Adoption Contact Registers**

It is also recommended that you register with an Adoption Contact Register. There are two main registers, the first set up by NORCAP in 1982 ([www.norcap.org.uk](http://www.norcap.org.uk)) and the Adoption Contact Register operated by the General Register Office since 1991 ([www.direct.gov.uk/gro](http://www.direct.gov.uk/gro)). Both adopted adults and birth relatives can register a wish for contact and if a link is made, the adopted adult will be sent the birth relative's contact details. The birth relative will only be notified that a link has been made and their name and address have been sent to the adopted adult.

Both the AAA NORCAP register and the Adoption Contact Register will also accept registrations from people who want to record a wish for no contact, and you can read more about this on the Adoption Search Reunion website [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/nocontact/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/nocontact/)

### **How do I begin my search for my birth relatives?**

It is important to get as much comprehensive information as possible about your birth relatives and there are many ways that you can do this.

### **Electoral Registers**

If you have a last known address for your birth relative in the first instance you could try checking the Electoral Registers to see if they are still living there. Although many people will have moved, it is always worthwhile checking out old addresses to see whether the person you are looking for is still living at that address or if anyone else in the family is still there. You will also be able to identify when they were last at that address.

The easiest and safest way to check an address is to look at the most recent electoral roll. Since 2002, local authorities produce two electoral registers: the full register and the edited register. The full register can still be viewed by anyone at council offices. The edited version is the document that is available on commercial software such as [www.tracesmart.co.uk](http://www.tracesmart.co.uk) and [www.192.com](http://www.192.com).

It may also be possible to check the electoral register by telephoning the local library or council electoral registration office for the area of the address. Some local councils provide this information freely and some make a charge for looking up the information on your behalf. It is free to search the registers in person, but depending on distance this is not always convenient or cost-effective.

The local library may also hold past electoral rolls for their area or be able to tell you where they are held, such as the local reference library or County Record office. These can help you trace how long a family stayed at a particular address, when and if the family moved away, or whether there are longstanding neighbours who are still resident. Street directories and phone books are also means of checking occupants of old addresses. There are central holdings of these, which you access at local record offices and local studies libraries. The directories are also useful for checking whether a place of birth was a private house or was a mother and baby or maternity home. If you think it may be a mother and baby home it is worth checking the Adoption Search Reunion website as it holds a database of mother and baby homes: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/search/adoptionrecords/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/search/adoptionrecords/)

Electoral rolls relating to previous years can be requested through the British Library in London. However, several days' notice are required for registers before 1984 and a reader's ticket is necessary. For further details about the procedure, contact the British Library: [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

If you find a family member is still at the address, it is strongly advised that you get back in touch with your adoption advisor to plan together whether and how you would like an approach to be made to the family. Most post-adoption services offer an **intermediary service**, and it is far better that a careful approach is made through an intermediary rather than turning up on the doorstep.

## **Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths**

One of the main ways of locating family members is by searching through public records such as The Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths for England and Wales. These can be a very useful and helpful way to gather more information and locate the current whereabouts of birth relatives. However, when searching for birth relatives through Public Records, it is very important that you are methodical and systematic while searching through records to avoid making mistakes or missing entries and do keep a written record of every search you have made, including the place you made it, the material you looked and the results.

The General Register Office has a duty to collect copies of all registrations of births in England and Wales, and these are an invaluable source of information for adopted people and people who have grown up in care or have otherwise lost track of their birth families.

The Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths for England and Wales contains information dating back to 1837. Registration of births was instituted by Act of Parliament in 1837 and became compulsory in 1886. However, it was only strictly enforced from about 1920. Every birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership or death registered in England or Wales has a General Register Office index reference number. It usually consists of the year, volume number, page number and district in which the event was registered. Quoting the index reference when ordering a certificate reduces the cost and the time it takes to find the record.

Remember that change of name has been possible by Statutory Declaration since 1835 or by Deed Poll, but this would not alter the entry in the Birth Register. There is no central register of deed poll name changes.

If the person you are seeking has had a gender change, a new birth certificate will have been issued. Although there is a Gender Recognition Register, this is a confidential link between

the original and new birth certificates and is maintained by the GRO – this is not open to public inspection.

### **Where can I access these registers?**

The National Archive at Kew ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)) keeps a complete and updated copy of the Birth Marriage and Death indexes. Many regional Reference Libraries also keep microfiche copies of the indexes, which can be viewed by appointment. Apart from the National Archive at Kew, only seven of the regional libraries have continued to be updated with each year's new Birth, Marriage and Death indexes. These libraries are:

- Birmingham Central Library
- Bridgend Reference and Information Library
- City of Westminster Archives Centre.
- Greater Manchester County Record Office
- Newcastle City Library
- Plymouth Central Library
- The British Library\*

These locations get updates for you to view in person. This is expected to continue until free, online access can be provided.

\*At the British Library, customers will need to undertake a pre-registration process. Two forms of identification showing a signature and proof of address will be needed to gain entry into this location. For further details about the procedure, contact the British Library: [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

### **Where should I start when looking at the Public Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths?**

It may be helpful to start your search with the Birth Indexes by looking for and obtaining your parents' birth certificates. Having their birth certificates will confirm that you have the correct spellings of names and dates of birth and they will also provide the names of their parents and the address of the family home. This information can be useful later to check marriage certificates, as father's names and occupations are given on these certificates. If you should later need to trace brothers or sisters of your parents, i.e. your aunts and uncles, you will already have information about their parents. Additionally, try to gather as much information as you can about your maternal and paternal grandparents, such as their full names and year of birth or age at the time of your adoption. This information will be particularly useful if you decide to search the Death Indexes as you will then be able to tell whether any entries match the details of your grandparents.

### **Births**

Births are supposed to be registered within 42 days, but this does not always happen. The birth is entered in the index for the quarter in which the birth was registered and NOT when the birth took place. For example, a December birth might appear in the March quarter of the following year, so it is important to check both volumes.

Births are registered in the last name of the child, usually the father's name. Many adopted people's original birth certificates may not have any details of the birth father recorded; the absence of such information is all too often interpreted as meaning "father unknown". In fact, a mother can only name the father on her child's birth certificate if she is married to him or has an affiliation order or he is present when the registration of the birth was made. For an unmarried father to be entered on his child's birth certificate, he has to personally acknowledge paternity to the Registrar.



If you discover when you have a copy of your original birth certificate that your birth mother was married at the time of your birth, then do not automatically assume that the husband is your birth father even if named on your birth certificate. Unless it was specifically stated that this was not the case, a married woman's husband would automatically be named as father as it would be deemed that you are a child of the marriage. A statutory declaration may have been recorded later to say if this was not the case.

The birth entry will give the child's full name, the mother's maiden name, the district where the birth was registered and the volume and page.

| <b>Name of child</b> | <b>Mother's Maiden Name</b> | <b>District</b> | <b>Volume</b> | <b>Page</b> |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>WILSON Sally</b>  | <b>GREY</b>                 | <b>Bedford</b>  | <b>2a</b>     | <b>746</b>  |

Your mother may have had another child prior to marriage, so look for births using the surname of your mother. You should check both before your birth and from your birth until she married. Once you know your mother's married surname, check for the same year and quarter as her marriage for any children. In order to reduce the expenses, you could buy only the birth certificate for the youngest child.

If all or any of the found children is 16 or over, check the marriage registers for his/her marriage and once again buy the most recent certificate. Your aim is to locate your birth parent's present address. If his/her children have married from their family home, as some people still do, the marriage certificate will give that address. This method has become less useful in recent years, as more couples live together, marry later and are less frequently married directly from the home where they have lived with their parents.

## **Marriages**

Most adopted people will have obtained their birth mother's name, but not necessarily that of their birth father. If your birth mother was unmarried when you were born, you should start by looking for a marriage for her. Most men do not change their surname at all during their lifetime, while until recently almost all women who married took their husband's surname. Start with the year and quarter you were born. Keep a record of every entry of people with the same name as your birth mother. You must be methodical in your search and keep accurate records of your findings.

A typical marriage entry from the June 1971 quarter:

| <b>Names of persons married</b> | <b>District</b> | <b>Volume</b> | <b>Page</b> |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>GREY Jane      WILSON</b>    | <b>Bedford</b>  | <b>3b</b>     | <b>466</b>  |

The volume will only give the surname of the other party to the marriage. So look up the other surname for the same year and quarter until you find the corresponding entry – this will have the same surnames, area and volume as the first entry you looked up, but will also give you the first name and middle initial, if any, of the other party.

| <b>Names of persons married</b> | <b>District</b> | <b>Volume</b> | <b>Page</b> |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>WILSON Ian      GREY</b>     | <b>Bedford</b>  | <b>3b</b>     | <b>466</b>  |

You may find quite a list of possible marriages, and no way of knowing which, if any, is that of your birth mother. If you have several possibilities, you may get a clue from the area of the marriage, or the middle names or initials.

If you know your birth father's name, the same searching process can be applied for his marriage.

After finding a marriage, it can be worthwhile continuing research in the General Register Office indexes, checking the index of births to find details of any children born to your birth mother, birth father or other relative.

## **Deaths**

All deaths in England and Wales are recorded and indexed in a similar manner to births. Like births, the informant (person providing the information) has to be a “qualified person” and is usually a close relative, but can be a hospital administrator or member of staff at a care home if no relative was available to register the death. The informant’s full name, address and relationship to the deceased is given on the certificate and can often be useful to your search, particularly if the person is a close relative.

The death indexes can, potentially, be very useful. If you have purchased your birth parent’s birth certificate, you will know the full names of his/her parent/s. In addition, the birth parent’s father’s name will appear on their marriage certificate.

While searching the death index may be depressing, looking for death entries of grandparents, possibly when aged 80-plus, is an effective way of establishing the address of members of their family. For example, if you are aged around 30, your parents may be around 50 and their parents and in-laws perhaps around 80. One of your grandparents may well have died quite recently, and your parent or their spouse could have been the informant – in which case their address will be on the certificate. If it was not your mother or father who registered their death, it may have been one of their brothers or sisters. If the combination of initials is right but the surname is different from your mother’s, could this indicate a (re-) marriage? If so, this would give you another method of locating her.

## **Adoption**

After an adoption order is made, an adoption certificate is issued. The original birth entry remains, but if an original birth certificate is subsequently purchased, the word “adopted” will be noted on it. The index to the Adopted Children’s Register is available to the public to view at the above-mentioned libraries and archives, but there are restrictions of what information must be provided before a certificate can be issued. Certificates of adoption can only be issued by the General Register Office. However original birth certificates for adopted people can be issued either by the GRO or the local Register Office providing the name and place of birth is known.

## **General Register Office Index Reference Numbers**

It is important to understand how the GRO index reference number can be found and the following information should help you do this.

From 1837 to 1984, the index information for each year is divided into quarters. The quarters are split as follows:

- March quarter – events registered in January, February and March
- June quarter – April, May and June
- September quarter – July, August and September
- December quarter – October, November and December

The earliest index is for September quarter 1837.

After 1984, the indexes are organised by year only.

The indexes are arranged in year order, and in each quarter or year, the entries are listed alphabetically by surname, and then by forename. To search marriage records, you can use either the surname of the married man or maiden surname of the married woman.

Civil partnership records start from December 2005 and are listed by surname, together with the surname of partner, year of formation, registration authority and registration entry number.

The General Register Office has withdrawn the service to sell birth, marriage and death marriage indexes and the last indexes supplied to commercial customers are for 2005 marriages and 2006 births and deaths. This means that searches for marriages, births and deaths after these dates can only be carried out at the seven libraries/archives listed above and at the National Archive at Kew. Applications for certificates after these dates can be made either through the General Register Office or by contacting the appropriate registration office directly. A list of contact details for registration offices can be found on the GENUKI website: [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk).

### Can I view the indexes of births Marriages and death online?

Yes it is possible to view the indexes online by visiting one of the following websites:

| Website  | Service available   |
|--|---|
| <a href="http://www.freebmd.org.uk">www.freebmd.org.uk</a>             | Free indexes start from 1837 and are nearly complete with some gaps mainly in the 1930s and 1940s and the index does not go beyond 1983 |
| <a href="http://www.findmypast.com">www.findmypast.com</a>             | Birth, marriage and death indexes from 1837   |
| <a href="http://www.bmdindex.co.uk">www.bmdindex.co.uk</a>             | Searchable online version of the index for civil birth, marriage and death records for England and Wales                                |
| <a href="http://www.familyrelatives.com">www.familyrelatives.com</a>   | Access to a variety of records, including births, marriages, deaths, wills, military records  |
| <a href="http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk">www.thegenealogist.co.uk</a> | Birth, marriage, death and parish records indexes, as well as Census indexes and transcripts, 1841 – 1901                               |
| <a href="http://www.ukbmd.org.uk">www.ukbmd.org.uk</a>                 | Hub for many websites that offer online transcriptions of UK births, marriages, deaths and censuses                                     |
| <a href="http://www.ancestry.co.uk">www.ancestry.co.uk</a>             | Archive of records from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales including the GRO Indexes  |

### How can I order Certificates?

As already mentioned you can order a certificate online from the General Register Office. If you don't want to apply online you can apply by post, telephone or at your local register office.

Certificate Services Section  
 General Register Office  
 PO Box 2  
 Southport  
 PR8 2JD  
 Web: [www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/](http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/)  
 Tel: 0300 123 1837

### **Standard Service**

There will be a charge of £9.25 for each birth, marriage or death certificate ordered using the standard service. If you supply the certificate index reference, the certificate is sent within four working days. Without the reference, it will be sent within 15 working days.

### **Priority Service**

The charge for the priority service is £23.40. The certificate will be despatched on the next working day from receipt of order, if received before 4pm.

### **Scotland and Northern Ireland**

Information regarding searching and applying for Scottish records can be found at [www.gro-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk)

Information regarding searching and applying for Northern Ireland records can be found at [www.groni.gov.uk](http://www.groni.gov.uk)

### **Will there be any barriers/hurdles to me applying for certificates?**

In recent years, the General Register Office has introduced measures to restrict the misuse of birth certificates in 'identity theft' and has asked applicants for certificates of births in the last 50 years to supply further information, such as the full date of birth and parents' names, before supplying the birth certificate. This has created problems for adopted people and others who usually want the birth certificate in order to discover this information.

However, the GRO has introduced a button on its certificate-ordering website which allows an adopted person who knows their birth name to order their own birth certificate online without entering further details. This does not, though, help adopted people or others trying to find siblings or other relatives.

Without full details, it is not possible to order certificates online from the GRO, but they can be ordered by telephoning the GRO on 0300 123 1837. If you encounter any problems and the GRO's operators declines your request for certificates without further information, they should be reminded that the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 gives a statutory right to any birth certificate on payment of the appropriate fee (£9.25 from April 2010).

Before a certificate can be requested in this way, the GRO reference number must be found in the GRO Index. This is held at various archive sites and is available online through several commercial providers (most public libraries subscribe to ancestry.co.uk ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)) which allows free access to the Index).

### **What other sources of information may help me locate the birth relative I am looking for?**

There are other sources of information that may help you in your search and we have listed some of the following below:

#### **Wills**

Having found a family death entry in the General Register Office indexes, it is well worth checking the probate registry. Wills can be checked at the Principal Registry of the Family Division, in High Holborn, London. If the relative died intestate – that is, without having made a valid will – you will only learn the value of the estate and the names of the person(s) granted letters of Administration. However, for a nominal charge (currently £5), you can purchase a copy of the will. This might provide a great deal of background information, including names and address of beneficiaries, and may also give the name and address of a family solicitor.

For further information about Probate and Wills, go to: [www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/cms/1226.htm](http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/cms/1226.htm)

### **Divorce records**

If you have found a marriage for your birth relative but have been unable to trace them in their married name, it may be worth checking to see if the marriage ended in divorce. However, this is a costly process and you cannot search the divorce records yourself. It should, therefore, probably only be done when all other avenues have been explored. For example, it might be easier to look again in the marriage record indexes to see if your birth relative has remarried, as this would lead you to their change of name and address at that time, without having to search for their divorce.

Divorce registers are held at the Principal Registry of the Family Division in London and for a fee you can request a search over a 10 year period. The current charge for a 10 year search is £40. Further information and an application form (D440) can be downloaded from Her Majesty's Courts Service at: [www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/HMCSCourtFinder/GetLeaflet.do?court\\_leaflets\\_id=134](http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/HMCSCourtFinder/GetLeaflet.do?court_leaflets_id=134)

Remember there is no guarantee what name a previously married woman will be using. You may therefore need to search in both maiden and married names for any subsequent marriage.

### **Local newspapers**

Once the date and place of an event has been found, it might be worth looking at the local newspaper to see if it carries a matching announcement of a birth marriage or death in the classified section, a photograph of a wedding, an obituary or a report of a funeral. Local libraries hold film copies of all the newspapers in their areas.

### **Do you have any more ideas about searching as mine is proving difficult?**

Sometimes a search turns out to be very difficult and frustrating and you may find that you have worked through the research recommended so far in this guide without success. This is most likely to be the case if the name of the relative you are seeking is a common one, or you had very little information to go on, or the relative moved abroad. In that case, there are other avenues you can try and hopefully one will bring the breakthrough you are seeking.

### **Reference books/Professional directories**

If your relative had a professional occupation, it is worth finding out if there is a register you can check. This may be in the form of a reference book held at a library – although increasingly, you are likely to find the relevant information on-line. Some examples of professions/occupations where resources are available are listed below, but it is always worthwhile checking other occupations:

|  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Armed Forces' List                       | GSCC (social workers)       |
| Chiropodists Register                    | Kelly's Directories         |
| Civil Service List                       | Medical Register            |
| Crockfords Clerical Directory            | Nursing Register            |
| Dental Register                          | Opticians' Register         |
| Debretts                                 | RIBA Directory (architects) |
| Directory of Directors                   | Telephone directories       |
| Equity (actors)                          | University Registers        |
| Institute of Chartered Accountants' List | Who's Who                   |

The *London Gazette*, now free to search on line, is a rich source of information on insolvency cases, awards such as OBE, MBE or civil and public service awards for long service, military

promotions, clergy appointments, partnerships, creditors etc. The index to the *Times* on line is free, but a payment is required to read the full text.

### **Social networking sites**

Websites such as Friends Reunited and Facebook can be useful in providing clues when a search is proving difficult. For example, someone may mention on a website that they have moved to another part of the country or abroad, indicating the direction to continue your research. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed on such sites and it is important to remember that any messages sent may be seen by other people and for that reason we advise they are used with caution.

### **Other electronic databases**

Searches can be made by name on websites such as 192.com ([www.192.com](http://www.192.com)) and TraceSmart ([www.tracesmart.co.uk](http://www.tracesmart.co.uk)). For example, you could look for people of the name "Graham South", either in the whole of the UK or in a specific region. You could also search by name (first name or full name) and age range or date of birth. There are usually charges for using these sites other than at the most basic level. You may be able to find people listed of the name you are looking for. However, if the name is a common one, there may be too many possible people of that name listed to make it a useful search option. If the name is uncommon, you may find them useful although you will need to keep in mind that the people identified may have no connection to the person you are looking for, other than sharing the same name.

### **Old addresses or former neighbours**

If you have tried all the research you can to trace the relative you are seeking without success, it can be a useful option to write to an old address where you know they used to live or to neighbours of that old address. Your intermediary may be able to do this for you. In order to protect your own privacy and that of your relative, they/you will need to have a suitable cover story, for example that you are trying to find an old friend of your mother. It is just possible that a neighbour or current occupant may remember your relative and know where they moved.

### **Searching abroad**

Having failed to find a trace of your relative, you may wonder whether they have emigrated. Without any idea of which country they moved to, it is usually easier to try to trace a member of the wider family in the UK, as they may be able to assist you.

It may be that your birth relative had come to the UK from another country and may have returned there or that you were born in another country and brought to the UK.

If there is an international element to your adoption, it would be worthwhile you contacting the Intercountry Adoption Centre ([www.icacentre.org.uk](http://www.icacentre.org.uk)) who can offer advice regarding searching overseas. They have an International Searchers Group where adopted adults can meet and support each other in their search for birth relatives. The Intercountry Adoption Centre also offers a search and intermediary service. Please contact the Centre for further information.

### **Should I use a professional researcher?**

If you feel you have done as much research as you can and have not been successful, one option is to put your search into the hands of a professional service. The adoption agency that arranged your adoption or the agency that is helping you now maybe able to provide a tracing service for a fee or know of a service they can recommend. Some registered Adoption Support Agencies provide a tracing service, for example AAA NORCAP and Ariel Bruce. You can search for Adoption Support Agencies on the Adoption Search Reunion website ([www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/)) but remember you will need to

contact each service direct to obtain further details of their service and fees. There are also some reputable researchers who can provide a tracing service, although they are not registered to provide intermediary services.

### **Are there any useful websites that might help me locate the birth relative I am looking for?**

There are a large number of websites dedicated to genealogy and tracing relatives. Most of these websites charge a fee and it is best to get an idea of the cost before you go ahead. It is very important to be sure about the credibility of anyone offering on-line tracing services, as there are a number of unscrupulous private investigators operating on websites who will make promises, take your money and not deliver. It is worth remembering that intermediary services can only be provided by registered Adoption Support Agencies.

Also, think very carefully before you put any personal details about yourself or your birth relative on to a website. Remember once you have pressed that button, you no longer have any control on what happens to that information or who might use it or contact you.

Listed below are just a few of the many websites that may you may find helpful in your search.

#### **Adoption**

[www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk)

The first port of call for anyone thinking of searching. This website has a list of all the local authorities, registered adoption agencies and adoption support agencies in the UK.

[www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)

The British Association for Adoption and Fostering.

[www.norcap.org.uk/home.asp](http://www.norcap.org.uk/home.asp)

Adults Affected by Adoption.

[www.afteradoption.org.uk/](http://www.afteradoption.org.uk/)

Helping those affected by adoption

[www.afteradoption.org.uk/page.asp?section=0001000100030004](http://www.afteradoption.org.uk/page.asp?section=0001000100030004)

Direct link to Talk Adoption, a service for young people under 26

[www.ttag.org.uk](http://www.ttag.org.uk)

The Transnational and Transracial Adoption Group

#### **Government sites, Official Bodies**

[www.gro.gov.uk/content](http://www.gro.gov.uk/content)

General Register Office for England and Wales

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Adoptionfosteringandchildrenincare/AdoptionAndFostering/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Adoptionfosteringandchildrenincare/AdoptionAndFostering/index.htm)

Information about all adoption issues

[www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/adoptions/adoptioncontactregister](http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/adoptions/adoptioncontactregister)

The Adoption Contact Register

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Registeringlifeevents/Birthandadoptionrecords/Adoptionrecords/DG\\_175603](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Registeringlifeevents/Birthandadoptionrecords/Adoptionrecords/DG_175603)

The Adoption Contact Register

[www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL\\_Services/Leisure\\_and\\_culture/Records\\_and\\_archives/](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL_Services/Leisure_and_culture/Records_and_archives/)

London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) is the archive for many London-wide organisations including personal records held by the GLC, LCC and Middlesex County Council

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

Formerly the Public Record Office

<http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>

Newspaper archive for UK and overseas

[www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/cms/1226.htm](http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/cms/1226.htm)

Information about Probate and Wills

## **Wales**

[www.gro.gov.uk/content](http://www.gro.gov.uk/content)

General Register Office for England and Wales

[www.archivesnetworkwales.info](http://www.archivesnetworkwales.info)

Online catalogue of over 7,000 collections of historical records held in 21 archives in Wales.

## **Northern Ireland**

[www.proni.gov.uk/](http://www.proni.gov.uk/)

Public Record Office for Northern Ireland

[www.groni.gov.uk](http://www.groni.gov.uk)

General Register Office for Northern Ireland

## **Scotland**

[www.gro-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk)

General Register Office for Scotland

[www.barnardos.org.uk/saas](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/saas)

Scottish Adoption Advice Service

[www.nas.gov.uk](http://www.nas.gov.uk)

National Archives for Scotland

[www.birthlink.org.uk](http://www.birthlink.org.uk)

Service for people separated by adoption where there is a Scottish connection

[www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk)

Online source of parish register, civil registration, census and wills & testaments records for Scotland.

## **Republic of Ireland**

[www.groireland.ie](http://www.groireland.ie)

General Register Office for the Republic of Ireland

[www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie)

The National Archives of Ireland

## **Searching**

[www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com)

Family history research with access to births marriages and death indexes



[www.192.com](http://www.192.com)

UK People search

[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

Family history website with access to births marriages and death indexes

[www.freebmd.org.uk/](http://www.freebmd.org.uk/)

Free Birth Marriage and Death indexes online. The indexes start from 1837 and are nearly complete with some gaps mainly in the 1930s

[www.bmdindex.co.uk](http://www.bmdindex.co.uk)

Searchable online version of the index for civil birth, marriage and death records for England and Wales

[www.familyrelatives.com](http://www.familyrelatives.com)

Access to a variety of records, including births, marriages, deaths, wills, military records

[www.thegenealogist.co.uk](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk)

Birth, marriage, death and parish records indexes, as well as Census indexes and transcripts, 1841 – 1901

[www.ukbmd.org.uk](http://www.ukbmd.org.uk)

Hub for many websites that offer online transcriptions of UK births, marriages, deaths and censuses

[www.genesreunited.com](http://www.genesreunited.com)

Family tree and genealogy site

[www.tracesmart.co.uk](http://www.tracesmart.co.uk)

A people finder database

[www.eircomphonebook.ie](http://www.eircomphonebook.ie)

Find residential and business listings for Republic of Ireland

[www.whitepages.com](http://www.whitepages.com)

International telephone directories

[www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)

Provides a wide range of resources including databases, familyfinder, articles, societies, projects and discussion groups

[www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)

American genealogy site

## **Forces**

[www.ssafa.org.uk/adoption.html](http://www.ssafa.org.uk/adoption.html)

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)

[www.servicepals.com](http://www.servicepals.com)

Ex service personnel

[www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FreedomOfInformation/FOIContact/RequestsForAccessToPersonalDataHeldByTheMinistryOfDefence.htm](http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FreedomOfInformation/FOIContact/RequestsForAccessToPersonalDataHeldByTheMinistryOfDefence.htm)

To request personal information from the Ministry of Defence records: Army, Navy, Air Force

[www.forcesreunited.org.uk](http://www.forcesreunited.org.uk)

Ex service personnel

[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)

The Royal British Legion

[www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

## **Overseas**

[www.icacentre.org.uk](http://www.icacentre.org.uk)

Specialist centre for intercountry adoption and any adoption with an international element

[www.gitrace.org](http://www.gitrace.org)

For tracing American GI fathers

[www.usa-people-search.com](http://www.usa-people-search.com)

USA people search engine

[www.vetreco.archives.gov](http://www.vetreco.archives.gov)

National Personnel Records Centre for US military

[www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

Australian National Archives

[www.bensoc.org.au/parc/director/searchandreunion.cfm](http://www.bensoc.org.au/parc/director/searchandreunion.cfm)

Australian Post Adoption Resource Centre for NSW

[www.motherlandnigeria.com](http://www.motherlandnigeria.com)

Information about Nigeria

[www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy/index-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy/index-e.html)

Canadian Archives

[www.ussearch.com](http://www.ussearch.com)

Searching in USA

[www.fibis.org](http://www.fibis.org)

Families in British India Society

[www.digitalarkivet.no/sab/howto.html](http://www.digitalarkivet.no/sab/howto.html)

Searching in Norway

## **Social networking sites**

[www.friendsreunited.co.uk](http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk)

Friends Reunited

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

Facebook

[www.bebo.com](http://www.bebo.com)

Bebo

[www.123people.co.uk](http://www.123people.co.uk)

123people

[www.genesreunited.co.uk](http://www.genesreunited.co.uk)

Genes Reunited

### **Tracing services**

[www.norcap.org.uk/home.asp](http://www.norcap.org.uk/home.asp)

Adults Affected by Adoption. NORCAP is a registered Adoption Support Agency and can provide both tracing services and an intermediary service.

[www.arielbruce.com/index.htm](http://www.arielbruce.com/index.htm)

Private tracing agency registered under Adoption Support regulations. Can provide both tracing and intermediary services

[www.afteradoption.org.uk](http://www.afteradoption.org.uk)

It is After Adoption's policy to only undertake a search when this is part of the Intermediary Service.

[www.birthlink.org.uk](http://www.birthlink.org.uk)

Service for people separated by adoption where there is a Scottish connection

[suehyam@btinternet.com](mailto:suehyam@btinternet.com)

Sue offers a tracing service only. She is not registered to offer an intermediary service.

[www.historicalresearchassociates.com](http://www.historicalresearchassociates.com)

Joan and Jennifer offer a tracing service for Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. They are not registered to offer an intermediary service.

### **General interest**

[www.bbc.co.uk/familyhistory](http://www.bbc.co.uk/familyhistory)

BBC Family history site

[www.workhouses.org.uk/](http://www.workhouses.org.uk/)

The history of the Workhouse

[www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com)

Family history online

[www.ancestry.co.uk/community/](http://www.ancestry.co.uk/community/)

Family history online

[www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk)

A collection of genealogical information for England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

[www.lineages.co.uk](http://www.lineages.co.uk)

News and articles on English, Scottish and Irish genealogy

[www.movinghere.org.uk](http://www.movinghere.org.uk)

The history of migration to the UK

[www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/)

World Fact Book

## **Making contact with your birth relative**

If your research appears to have led to a current address for your birth relative and you feel ready to take the step of seeking contact, this is the point to actively involve your intermediary. If you have been in touch previously with an adoption advisor at your Local Authority, adoption agency or one of the other registered adoption support agencies, they may be able to act as intermediary for you. If not, you can request this service from one of the available registered agencies which can be found using the database provided on the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/help/database/) Not all of these agencies provide intermediary services, so you will need to check what services the agency provides when you contact them and also find out about any charges they make.

Intermediary services can only be provided by registered agencies that are able to offer you the skills, knowledge and understanding required to make the initial contact with the birth relative you have found. If the intermediary agency is not the adoption agency that arranged your adoption (the Appropriate Adoption Agency, or AAA), they will need to contact the AAA to ask their view on the provision of an intermediary service before contact can be made with your birth relative. The intermediary service can offer your relative support and assistance and wherever possible work to establish contact between you and your relative. You will need to be careful to avoid unscrupulous internet-based tracing services that do not have the necessary skills and experience and are not registered to provide intermediary services. Some will sadly exploit adopted people wishing to find their birth relatives by taking money for a search with promises that are later unfulfilled.

The point of using an intermediary is that it can provide an emotional buffer, giving the birth relative the opportunity to discuss their initial feelings and any concerns they may have. The intermediary will aim to provide reassurance and an opportunity to discuss the different ways forward. The approach may have come as a shock and your relative may not be as ready as you are for contact. For example, your birth relative may have married and not told their partner about you – or perhaps have told their partner, but not other children they have had. Even if it is something they have wanted for years, they may still need time to think through the implications for them and their family.

Some people may feel they cannot wait while an intermediary service is arranged or they may have a strong wish to remain in full control of the situation and therefore consider making a direct approach. These feelings are understandable, but practice and experience has shown that using an intermediary can provide many benefits for you and also the relative who has been contacted. It can be more of a risk if the initial contact comes direct from the adopted adult, as there is no “third party” to mediate, resulting in a higher chance of the relative giving a quick emotional reaction to the contact, rather than a considered response.

Your intermediary should talk with you before contact is made so they are aware of your hopes and expectations and what details about yourself you are willing to be shared with your birth relative. You can also talk with your intermediary and ask questions you have about the service to ensure you agree with the proposed way forward. It is important to achieve a level of confidence and trust in your intermediary who is going to be acting for you in this sensitive situation.

Once contact is made, the intermediary will be able to let you know your relative’s response and share with you more details about your relative, with their agreement. When an initial response indicates that a birth relative is not ready for contact or feels unable to respond in any way, then the intermediary will try to leave things in a way that the door is left open. The relative should be informed that they can contact the intermediary again for support and to talk things through or let them know if they change their mind and feel able to proceed and have contact.

If the approach leads to initial contact being established between you and your birth relative, you may find it helpful to read about the issues and emotions that can come up, especially in the early stages of reunion. Your intermediary may also be able to offer you practical advice on establishing contact, first meetings and other stages in an adoption reunion.

You can learn more about the impact of reunions on the Adoption Search Reunion website: [www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/reunions/](http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/contact/reunions/)

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