

Marriages are Complete!!

Yes, it's true! All marriage registers held by Bath Register Office (all 959 of them), are now indexed and published on the BathBMD web site. This is a major feat, and it is thanks to the tireless effort of our volunteers. They deserve full credit for this marvellous achievement. That so much can be achieved without one penny changing hands shows that there is a lot of good in human nature after all. Considering that the BathBMD project was only conceived at the beginning of 2004, we have done tremendously well. In that time we have also got over 114,000 births done, and the whole project is some 39% complete.

Marriages are a lot of work in comparison to Births and Deaths, as there are two names to each event to transcribe, and on top of that, there can be the added complication of previous names of widows and divorcees not to mention Deed Poll name changes and the pairing up of all those names. There are 148,607 distinct marriage references on the web site so that many events are indexed. This has involved transcribing 318,539 names and pairing them into the 170,201 pairs you see on the web home page.

To our knowledge, BathBMD is the first UKBMD site to claim completion for either Births, Marriages or Deaths. It's true that other areas have far more records on line, and they even get records added faster than we do. But having Marriages complete means that genealogists can search knowing that if the record is not found, it is almost certainly not held!

What's not included?

Please bear in mind that we do not index and publish records in registers still in use at Churches and Chapels, or records in full registers still held by Churches and Chapels, that have not been handed in yet. (There are at least 10 of them.) We also do not index registers still in use at the Register Office. We will add newly completed marriage registers from time to time, as and when I get to hear about them, but by and large, they will be listing fairly recent marriage events that do not have a big genealogical value. As stated in an earlier newsletter, the oldest register we are waiting to be handed in was started in 1889, and is for St Margaret's Church at Queen Charlton. All others that are full but not yet handed in start from 1987 or later.

Even so, you should now be able to search the marriage index on the web site with a high degree of confidence. If the marriage took place within the area now covered by the Bath and North East Somerset Authority, we should have it listed. If you still cannot find it, and are sure it did happen in this area, please write to Webmaster@BathBMD.org.uk and we will see what we can do. At BathBMD headquarters (sounds impressive eh?) we can do searches that are not possible on the web, like searching only on forename or even on only a middle name. We can also help out people doing one name studies with searches across all years from 1837 to date on a particular family name. And we have some details of the records in Church held registers since 1992, even though the Register Office cannot supply certificates against them.

Whatever next?

All volunteer effort is now being directed to Births. As stated, we have 105,000 births done already, which is all births to 1870 available on line. We have all index books transcribed up to about 1905, meaning another 70,000 births ready for the second stage of transcribing. So our small team of dedicated Stage 2 volunteers have a good stock of work to keep them busy. All births from 1992 onwards are also done to stage 1, being exported from the Register offices own computer system. As is usual, the early years from 1837 are often the slowest to do, with handwriting being the most difficult to read. As we progress through the years, the data comes steadily easier to read. It has been a boon that the Register Office were re-writing out some of the oldest Birth index books, but we will not have this luxury when it comes to Death index books. They are universally of a poor quality. The up side is that getting them typed up and web published is even more significant and an even greater achievement.

Differences in handling Stage 1 volunteers.

Now marriages are done, index books for Births and Deaths are uniform in size. The oldest are all of 500 entries. I will tend to load all Stage 1 volunteers up with as many indexes as I suspect they will need so as not to run out of work in the next week. The faster you work, the more work I will send you!! Each update on the web will be for about 35,000 to 40,000 names, and this will be almost a monthly rate. It could be this time next year that we are wrapping up Births!!

When will Deaths be done?

I originally estimated that BathBMD would take six years to get all its records on line. This was highly dependent on the number of volunteers we got and how fast they would get through the work involved. In the last newsletter, I stated that we were down to five years in total. This time, my estimate is down to four and a quarter years, and over one and a half of those have elapsed already! We now have an 'advert' on the home page of the web site for new volunteers and this ensures we have a steady stream to replace those that will inevitably stop helping for whatever reason. All in all, there are about 35 active transcribers. This is quite a team to keep fed with work. Some of them work at alarmingly high rates which is absolutely fantastic. But all help is good help, and provided that no-one sits on an index for too long, even the smallest help will move the project forward. Most volunteers are UK based, but we have one in The Netherlands, and another in New Zealand.

In the last newsletter I canvassed the opinion on Death records. Do genealogists want these? Do they help in tracing your family history? The answer came back as an emphatic 'Yes'. It is only by knowing when an ancestor has died, that the picture on them can be closed. It also helps to tell you who to search for on each census return. Even knowing the name of the informant will add to the picture of the family's position at that time. Causes of death too may show any family trends that might be useful as prevention measures for current living people. The Death Registers have all been catalogued and we are now finishing the management database ready for sending out indexes to Stage 1 transcribers. Age at death will be included on the web site for all death records regardless, although it will not be a search parameter - it will just be displayed on the search output screen.

Feedback...

We welcome feedback from any volunteers, past, present or future! Tell us what you think is good, or bad. Tell us what you want to do, or what you want us to do. Send all comments to Submit@BathBMD.org.uk.

John Fairlie.

Thank You for Helping and Supporting BathBMD