

Births 40% Complete, Project in total 46% Complete.

A quick update on where we stand:

Marriages. - Marriages are complete. All 949 registers held by the Register Office are fully indexed and listed on the web site. There are still some part filled registers at churches and chapels that are still in use, and there are also a few full registers at Churches and Chapels that have not been handed in yet that are not indexed. Registers in use at the Register Office also contain records that are not indexed yet, but these will all be recent records. I will survey any new registers to add when we have completed the Births.

Births. - We are in the thick of transcribing births, and are adding to the web site at the rate of over 1,000 records a day on average. It can seem a never ending task, but we are 40% of the way through all births, and that is data that is fully processed. I also have a further 85 indexes typed up for the years 1896 to 1930, and new indexes being photocopied and sent out to volunteers are now from the 1930's era. With perseverance and dedication, we will soon be over half way through the Birth mountain, and half way through the project in total. Every little helps, and we must keep plodding on. It WILL be worth the effort!

Deaths. - All Death registers have been catalogued and we are ready to start on these when Births have completed.

But pressing ahead with new indexing has not been our only activity. We continue to improve our system, and that includes methods to improve data checking and accuracy. The following describes what has been happening in this area.

Extended Characters

We have finally addressed the subject of extended characters. I am not talking about those tall people that need their B, M and D events indexing, but those alphabetic characters that are not part of the normal alphabet. Such characters are ü, á, ê, Ü, Ñ, etc., as well as numerics 0-9. I now have a routine that checks every character of every forename and surname before the file is even sent off for web publication. We have already had occurrences of Olive that should be Olive. (The first is with a number '0' and the second with an alpha 'O'). The only characters the test allows are A_Z, a-z, () - ' or a space.

Sometimes, extended characters are a valid part of someone's name, and are hand written in the relevant register. But to be found in a search, the input name must be the same as the stored name in the database. You cannot search on EULER and expect to find EÜLER. The ruling is therefore that we store all names to their nearest alphabetic equivalent character, and searches will also only use the standard 26 characters of the alphabet. So EÜLER is stored as EULER, and is searched and found by inputting EULER. It should make life simpler for transcribers and users alike.

There are a number of marriage records on the web that contain extended characters that we must soon amend. These were published before we started checking for them. Until such time, you can

always list all surnames beginning with a particular letter, so the EÜLER name will appear when listing all surnames beginning with "E", although it will probably be at the very end of the alphabetic listing.

Missing Entries.

There will always be missing entries in registers as mistakes were occasionally made when registrars were entering data, and made the record a 'spoilt' record. This is another check we can do to help ensure data accuracy. Ian Hartas has a routine that will scan the transcribed data and report which numbers are not included in each register. We are in the process of checking back and making sure that those entries are in fact void. In about 25% of cases, we have found that the record is not void, but has been entered with the wrong number. So there may be no record 323 in a register, but this is almost always because that record has been entered at 322, 324, 223 or some other near equivalent. This is another way in which data accuracy is being maximised.

It's a boy!

Readers will be well aware of the appalling infant mortality rate in the 19th century. Many births were recorded as 'boy' or 'girl' when a baby died and was registered with no forename being decided on. In some cases, parents were allowed to register live babies with only the sex stated, if they had not decided on a name. We know of one register at least where almost all entries record only the sex of the baby and not any forenames. This makes life even more difficult for the budding genealogist trying to find the correct birth certificate for their ancestors. We have 58 occurrences already of the SMITH surname with only (boy) or (girl) as forename. To help overcome this, we are going to include the father's forename as part of the record. So, (boy) SMITH will now become "(boy) Son of Albert" as the forename, with the surname as SMITH still. While not ideal, this is an approach that has already been adopted in some register indexes, and we now want to apply it retrospectively to fill in the missing data in the 4000 web records that only state (boy) or (girl). It's another way that BathBMD hopes to make its site as informative and accurate as possible.

I still can't find it!

There will occasionally be cases where the record you want cannot be found. This should not be often as BathBMD transcribes data sequentially. All Birth data for births recorded between 1837 and 1895 is complete, and this accounts for almost all the birth data we list on the web site. Only the data in the years 1896 to 1905 is incomplete, being part of the data as we work forward through the years. If users cannot find a record that would exist firmly in the years we have completed, then please contact us. We can do searches on forenames only and even on middle names only to help track down those elusive entries. We can also do reports on all occurrences of a name - useful for One Name Study projects, regardless of the year.

Keeping things moving.

I see my prime role with BathBMD as moving the project forward as fast as possible. I try to keep all volunteers with work to do, although there are no deadlines or targets to meet. All volunteers work at their own pace, and do as little or as much as suits them. We have had problems when some of the slower volunteers are still typing up indexes that are fast headed up for web publication and the next batch of years we want to complete. I therefore ask all volunteers that cannot return an index within six to eight weeks of receiving it to let me know please. If you have not started it, it can be copied again, and passed to another volunteer with none of your time wasted. If you have started it, but cannot finish it in a reasonable time, again, let me know please. You can always e-mail in part completed indexes. That will ensure that no-one has to re-type data that you have already typed. I know some of our volunteers have had new grand-children, or had spouses go into hospital, (or are not well themselves) and such things naturally take all precedence over BathBMD volunteering. But with a good dialogue between us, wasted effort can be minimised and hopefully eliminated in total.

Volunteers

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so if you have friends or family with an hour or three a week to spare, why not ask them if they can help the project? If they agree, all we need is their address to mail photocopies of indexes to.

A couple of questions we have had recently may interest our volunteers generally:

Can you tell me what information it was that I typed up? It seemed like it must have Marriages but I have no idea of the dates or the places other than it must have been in Bath somewhere. I seem to recall reading on the BathBMD website that there were only four names to a page in the Marriages index, but I sometimes typed up five names to a page. Can you please explain?

You did BAK-01. Look on the Birth Coverage page of the web site. You will see that BAK is Bathavon Keynsham. 01 means you did the first register of the eight there, and the eight run from 1936 to 1960, so your register was the first eighth of that range, and in actual fact it contained entries from 1936 to 1941. There are five births on each register page, so there should be five '1's, five '2's etc, up to five 100's. But don't worry if there are not. Sometimes there are spoilt entries that are not used so will only be four on that page. On other entries, a birth of Fred Hamilton-Smythe will be indexed under both Hamilton and Smythe, so a sixth entry.

Your file will now wait for the second stage where it will be screened against the register. The five 1's will be expanded to entries 1 to 5, the five 2's to entries 6 to 10. Middle names will be expanded from initials, and the actual year of each birth will be added. Data will be fully checked, and queries resolved. Then the data will await the next web issue. It's a real factory production line we have going!!

I have just come up with an interesting entry. The file is TW2_10A The last entry in the 'A's is ANDREWS, Patricia M, now this is followed by in brackets, (registered on 12.4.48) and in the page number box I have what looks like 'bath' 33/243. As this departs from the normal entries (a single number), any suggestions other than entering everything with a note to same ?

That birth entry is - for all practical purposes - defunct and can be ignored. The birth was registered again later and this is a pointer to the later entry.

There is no harm in entering it as normal. If anyone orders up the certificate, the register itself will point staff forward to the new registration in a register we have not done yet.

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