

MARRIAGE MINING IN SOUTH YORKSHIRE

..... or how to save paying £9.25 for a copy of a marriage certificate

Introduction

This article explains how to find a marriage in a church register. It relates to marriages under civil registration from 1st July 1837 onwards to the end of 1911. Churches recorded marriages in two "original" registers, one of which was retained by the church and the other of which was sent to the local registrar. They also made a copy on loose pages, which was sent to the General Register Office (GRO). Currently, a copy of an "original" marriage certificate costs £10 plus postage from the local registrar (Sheffield charges £11 including first class postage back), while the GRO charges £9.25, including postage, for a copy of their copy certificate.

Alternatively, provided that the marriage took place in an Anglican church, it is possible to discover the church in a systematic way and since nearly all Anglican churches have deposited their marriage registers at the appropriate Archives, and many of the 19th century registers have been filmed, the marriage details can be extracted from the original church register (which is more authentic than the copy held by the General Register Office), without payment. Key to this is understanding the ways of GRO clerks.

The GRO marriage indexes

From 1852 to 1911 a typical entry in The General Register Office's quarterly index to marriages takes the form, for example, "Sheffield 9c 347", Sheffield being the Registration District (RD), 9c being the GRO volume number and 347 the page number. While Sheffield, along with other South Yorkshire Registration Districts, was always allotted Volume 9c, the page numbers varied from quarter to quarter. Before 1852, the volume numbering differed: South Yorkshire occupied volume 22 (xxii).

The GRO clerks followed a set pattern. Within each RD, they arranged marriages in the order: Anglican; Register Office and Non-Anglican. The Anglican churches were arranged in alphabetical order, firstly by name of parish or town and then by name of church within that parish or town. For example, in Sheffield RD, the first parish alphabetically is Attercliffe Christ Church, so this took the lowest page numbers and Wicker Holy Trinity or Wincobank St Thomas the highest. Occasionally, an ancient parish church, notably in Sheffield City the Cathedral Church of St Peter & St Paul, took precedence over the other churches in the same town or city. So, in central Sheffield, St Peter & St Paul is followed by St George, St James etc. in alphabetical order.

Up to the 1898 Marriage Act, which came into force on 1st April 1899, all non-Anglican marriages, except Quaker and Jewish, had to be conducted before a Registrar, so they were recorded in the Registrar's marriage books and filed by the GRO clerks after the Anglican. Quaker and Jewish marriages followed in that order.

From 1st April 1899, the non-Anglicans could keep their own registers if they applied to do so and so long as the officiating minister was an "authorised person", i.e. he had a permit. These "authorised person" churches were filed after the Register Office, Quaker and Jewish ones. A study of West Bromwich RD shows that the GRO clerks simply added them in the order in which they became authorised, rather than by religious denomination or the alphabet.

Determining the "cardinal points"

From 1852 onwards, within each quarter of the year, the GRO clerks normally arranged their register so that each Anglican church began on an odd-numbered page. There were 2 marriages to every page, just as in the church registers, in the same order. There were no blank pages other than, sometimes, the last even-numbered page for a particular church. Thus, the clerks must have collected in all the copy registers for each church before they began to index them. Before 1852, there were 4 marriages to the page.

Given this system, it will at once become apparent that the GRO page range for a particular church and particular quarter of a particular year, within a particular RD, can be discovered by looking up the first and last marriages of the quarter in the church register and then using the GRO index (nearly always accessible via FreeBMD or Family Search) to determine the corresponding GRO page numbers. The GRO page numbers for these first and last marriages have been termed by marriage miners the "cardinal points". Each set of cardinal points is unique to the quarter of the year and the church or other place of marriage.

Once the cardinal points are known, then anyone wishing to obtain the marriage details of an Anglican marriage without paying for a GRO certificate can do so by looking up the GRO page number in FreeBMD and then consulting the church register, at an Archives, Local Studies Centre or a Latter Day Saints Family History Centre, for example.

It might be asked how it is known that a marriage is Anglican. This is achieved by determining the cardinal point for last marriage in the quarter of the final church in the alphabetical sequence. For example, in the 1st quarter of 1908, running from 1st January to 31st March, the last marriage of the quarter at Wincobank St Thomas, the final Anglican church in Sheffield RD, occurred on GRO page 705. It follows that any higher page number than this in the same quarter and in Sheffield RD means a Register Office or non-Anglican marriage.

How the cardinal points method works in practice

To illustrate the working of cardinal points methodology, here is a simple example. In the 2nd quarter of 1862, running from 1st April to 30th June, the first marriage at Ecclesfield St Mary church was between George Marsh and Allethea Bacon on 7th April. The church register records this marriage as entry No. 486 (there are usually 500 entries to a 250-page church register, although sometimes, in country churches, a smaller book was used). The corresponding GRO reference is Wortley 9c 199. Easter was late that year, on 20th April. The last marriage in the quarter was as early as 5th May, between Frederick Gunson and Maria Marshall Pearson, recorded in the GRO index as Wortley 9c 206. There were thus 16 marriages in the quarter and they were recorded in the church registers as numbers 486 to 500 and number 1 in a new register. (The correspondence is not always so perfect, as some church registers contain spoiled entries struck through.) Obviously, therefore, if a particular Wortley RD marriage in that quarter is indexed by the GRO at, say, page 200, the marriage must have taken place at Ecclesfield St Mary, because page 200 is within the range 199 to 206.

Magic predictions

Cardinal points can be used to predict that a marriage occurred in a particular church, without even looking at the church register. For example, in the 1st quarter of 1902, a sought-after marriage is indexed by the GRO as Barnsley 9c 259. Let us suppose that known cardinal points indicate the following ranges of pages: Barnsley St George - GRO pages 245-256, St Mary - GRO pages 263-271. Page 259 must belong to a church in Barnsley town alphabetically between St George and St Mary, in this case St John.

Getting started

Marriage mining is a science in its infancy. Few staff at Record Offices are aware of it and still fewer know the Church order for a particular RD. There are very few published lists of cardinal points. The Guild of One-Name Studies is collecting them for 1837 to 1911 and provides some limited help to the general public at <http://www.marriage-locator.co.uk/>. The Library of Birmingham has a set for that City and also for Aston and Kings Norton, all extending to 1924, thanks to voluntary work by P.L.Loach, but this is a paper copy that can only be accessed by inspection at the Library: they do not have the resources to provide a look-up service. The limited availability of cardinal points is expected to become less of a problem as more archives have many of their registers digitised and put online by "Ancestry" and "Findmypast". Thus, the West Yorkshire Archive Services at Wakefield has had its registers digitised by "Ancestry", which is helpful in relation to Barnsley and Wortley RDs.

There is a way of narrowing down the possible churches without any list of cardinal points. The first step is to find the range of GRO pages occupied by a particular RD for the quarter of year of interest. Buried within the FreeBMD website are lists of page ranges at: <http://www.freebmd.org.uk/district-page-reverse-map-index.html>. By selecting a particular year, one can bring up all the ranges for all quarters. For example, in the second quarter of 1904, the page range for Rotherham RD is 1127 to 1275. The target marriage is at GRO page 1136. Thus, it must have taken place in a church near the beginning of the alphabet, but probably not the letter "A". After a failed attempt at Brampton Bierlow (GRO pages 1131-1133), it was found at the new church of Brinsworth St George. Here is another example. The target marriage in the fourth quarter of 1904 is referenced as Wortley 9c 455. The GRO page range for Wortley is 409 to 478. Remembering that some pages at the end of the quoted page range will be for Register Office and non-Anglican marriages, one is looking for an Anglican church very near the end of the alphabetical order for Wortley RD. A search in "Ancestry" showed that the final cardinal point for Silkstone was 452 and the starting one for Thurgoland was 463. It should be at either Stannington or Tankersley and, indeed, was found at the former on Christmas Day.

The following are proposed as church orders for 5 Registration Districts in South Yorkshire.

Church orders for Barnsley, Ecclesall Bierlow, Sheffield, Rotherham & Wortley RDs

Barnsley RD (created 28th March 1850): Ardsley Christ Church; Barnsley St George; Barnsley St John the Baptist; Barnsley St Mary; Barnsley St Peter; Carlton St John the Evangelist; Cudworth St John the Baptist; Darfield All Saints; Darton All Saints; Dodworth St John; Elsecar Holy Trinity; Gawber St Thomas; Hoyland Nether St Peter; Monk Bretton St Paul; Royston St John the Baptist; Wombwell St Michael & All Angels; Jump St George; Woolley St Peter; Worsbrough St Mary; Worsbrough Bridge St James (from 1909); Worsbrough Dale St Thomas.

Note: Jump St George is anomalous: in 1896, 1902 and 1910 4th quarters it was found after Wombwell, as indicated above, but in 1885 4th quarter after Royston.

Ecclesall Bierlow RD: Abbeydale St John; Abbeydale St Peter; Beauchief Abbey; Broomhill St Mark; Crookes St Thomas; Dore Christ Church; Ecclesall All Saints; Endcliffe St Augustine; Fulwood Christ Church; Heeley Christ Church; Millhouses Holy Trinity; Norton St James; Norton Lees St Paul; Owlerton St John; Ranmoor St John; Sharrow St Andrew; Sheffield (Highfield) St Barnabas; Sheffield St Bartholomew; Sheffield St Jude (Eldon Street); Sheffield St Matthew; Sheffield St Matthias; Sheffield St Silas (Gilcar); Walkley St Mary.

Sheffield RD: Attercliffe Christ Church; Attercliffe Emmanuel; Brightside St Thomas (old parish church takes preference); Brightside All Saints; Carbrook St Bartholomew; Darnall Holy Trinity; Dyer's Hill (Sheffield) St Luke; Firvale St Cuthbert (from 1902); Gleadless Christ Church; Handsworth & Woodhouse St James; Hollischoft (Sheffield) St Luke; Moorfields (Sheffield) St Jude; Neepsend St Michael & All Angels; Netherthorpe (Sheffield) St Anne; Pitsmoor Christ Church; Sheffield St Peter & St Paul (old parish church takes preference); Sheffield St George; Sheffield St James; Sheffield (Park) St John the Evangelist; Sheffield St Mary (Bramhall Lane); Sheffield St Paul; Sheffield St

Philip; Sheffield St Simon; Sheffield St Stephen; Wadsley no dedication (from 1st October 1902, before which it was in Wortley RD); Wicker Holy Trinity; Wincobank St Thomas (from 1st October 1902, before which it was in Wortley RD).

Rotherham RD: Aston cum Aughton All Saints; Beighton St Mary the Virgin; Brampton Bierlow Christ Church; Brinsworth St George; Dalton Holy Trinity; Eastwood St Stephen; Greasbrough St Mary; Hooton Roberts St John the Baptist; Kilnhurst St Thomas; Kimberworth St Thomas; Laughton-en-le-Morthen All Saints; Maltby St Bartholomew; Masbrough St John the Evangelist; Northfield St Michael & All Angels; Parkgate Christ Church; Ravenfield St James; Rawmarsh St Mary; Rotherham All Saints; Rotherham St George (from 1903), Swinton St Margaret; Thorpe Hesley Holy Trinity; Thrybergh St Leonard; Tinsley St Lawrence; Treeton St Helen; Ulley Holy Trinity; Wath-upon-Deane All Saints; Wath-upon-Deane St James (from 1902); Wentworth Holy Trinity; Whiston St Mary Magdalene; Wickersley St Alban.

Wortley RD (created 1st October 1838): Bolsterstone St Mary, Bradfield St Nicholas; Cawthorne All Saints*; Chapelton St John; Denby St John*; Ecclesfield St Mary; Grenoside St Mark (from 1911); High Hoyland & Clayton West All Saints*; Hillsborough & Wadsley Bridge Christ Church; Oughtibridge Church of the Ascension; Penistone St John the Baptist* (up to the end of 1910, after which Penistone was allotted its own Registration District); Silkstone & Stainborough All Saints*; Stannington Christ Church; Tankersley St Peter; Thurgoland Holy Trinity*; Thurlstone St Saviour (from 1905)*; Wadsley no dedication (up to 30th September 1902, after which it was moved to Sheffield RD); Wincobank St Thomas (up to 30th September 1902, after which it was moved to Sheffield RD). The asterisked parishes were moved to the newly-created Penistone RD on 1st January 1911.

Ecclesfield RD was abolished on 28th March 1850. It lost many of its parishes to the newly-created Wortley RD on 1st October 1838 and Cumberworth on 15th July 1843 to Huddersfield RD. On its abolition, most of its remaining parishes went to Barnsley RD, a few more to Wortley RD (Cawthorne, Denby, High Hoyland & Clayton West and Silkstone & Stainborough) and Chevet to Wakefield RD.

The church orders, which cover only to 1837 to 1911, have not been fully checked for every church and quarter and they are liable to variations from apparent misfilings by GRO clerks, which, however, are rare. As has been noted above, an old parish church has sometimes taken precedence over younger ones in the same town, so the order has departed from strictly alphabetical. While this article relates to South Yorkshire, the same principles apply in all other RDs in England & Wales. This is a sister paper to the same author's "Marriage Mining in the West Midlands", published in "The Midland Ancestor", March 2011, pages 38 to 42.

Keith Percy
Member of the Guild of One-name Studies
www.users.waitrose.com/~whitehousefhc