

# How to do Banns of Marriage, Banns Certificates, Marriage Registers and Marriage Certificates

The following is the accumulated 'wisdom' of several years undertaking administration connected with weddings at my local parish church, including those things I learnt during a year of vacancy during which I seemed to spend a lot of time talking to our Diocesan Registrar! However, this doesn't make me an expert, so if you find you are told differently to any of what follows by someone important and trustworthy, please trust them not me!

*RFH November 2012*

*Where there is a star \* it suggests that though my information comes from Area Deans and Archdeacons I've met, there seems to be some debate or flexibility exercised by clergy. I would suggest you check with your 'line manager' what they would approve of!*

## Banns of Marriage and Banns Certificates

### **Banns of Marriage come in two basic forms:**

banns to be read for those getting married in your parish

banns to be read for those getting married in another parish. These couples require a Banns Certificate to be written up after the banns have been read 3 times (see below.)

### ***Rules covering all banns of marriage:***

banns must not be read earlier than 3 months (by date) before the date of the wedding we usually read banns on the first 3 Sundays of month, two months before the month the wedding falls in; e.g. for a wedding in November, the banns would be read on the first 3 Sunday's of September. Such a consistent pattern seems to help, but agree it locally

banns must be read at a main service in the church\*. If you have a church plant in an unconsecrated building (e.g. school hall) the banns can be read there if pastorally appropriate, but they must also be read a main service in the church building as well. If you have a multi-service church it is perfectly acceptable to read the banns at more than one service

after banns are read, the person reading them should always sign the book to say they have been read. A banns certificate (for those getting married elsewhere) should not be written until any missing signatures have been accounted for by confirming that the banns were in fact read on that date

banns certificates are NOT required for those couples getting married in 'your church', but the banns book should be checked for signatures preferably well before the Marriage Certificate is due to be written!

### ***Banns of Marriage Register***

try and prepare this at the cusp of the month several days before the first Sunday

check with your church administrative system what banns need to be read; it also helps to look ahead to see what's coming up in future months

use Registrar's Ink – probably available via your local Registry Office

each entry should be numbered consecutively to the previous one  
the details of the couples full names, parish of residence, status (single, widowed, previous marriage dissolved) should be entered from the Application for Banns of Marriage Form (other other electronic system used in your parish) followed by the dates on which the banns are to be read NB: the word 'divorced' is NOT to be used  
if both halves of the couple are non-resident in the parish, which will mean they are getting married by Qualifying Connection (<http://www.yourchurchwedding.org/youre-welcome/more-churches-to-choose-from.aspx>) you need to state this in the box marked "Parish" with the words "and with a Qualifying Connection to the parish of 'name of your parish'"  
depending on your pastoral policy, it can be good to ring one of the couple and confirm to them when their banns are going to read  
leave the Banns of Marriage Register in an OBVIOUS place so that priest/service leader is likely to notice it among the many other things they have on their mind on a Sunday morning  
in a multi-service, multi-minister parish, it can help to contact the relevant service leaders for the specific dates on which banns are to be read, to let them know there is a need for them to read banns on the appropriate dates

### ***Reading Banns of Marriage:***

these should be read in the form outlined in the Banns of Marriage Register in the language appropriate to the service  
clergy, authorised lay ministers and churchwardens are all able to read Banns of Marriage at a service\*  
it is only necessary to read out the full names and their parish of residence, with qualifying connection to your own parish if appropriate  
the person reading the banns should sign the Banns of Marriage Register after the service to confirm they have done so

### ***Banns Certificates:***

one certificate is issued for each couple getting married in another parish whose banns have been read 3 times  
check the Banns of Marriage Register to make sure that it has been signed against all 3 dates the banns were to be read. If this hasn't happened, check this up with the relevant service leader/minister before writing the certificate  
complete the Banns Certificate using the name and address details the couple supplied on their Banns of Marriage Application Form, NB: if you are an administrator you must leave the signature space for a priest to sign  
complete the details on the stubb, if the certificate is written by someone other than the priest, it is good practice for that person to initial it with their own initials as well as that of the priest who will sign it  
tear off the Banns Certificate and where relevant give it to your/a priest to sign  
when the priest has signed it, the couple should be contacted and arrangements made for them to collect it (some parishes post banns forms for a small extra charge, but it is worth noting there is an inherent risk with this for a legal document)

# Marriage Registers & Certificates

***Every marriage requires IDENTICAL copies to be made in the two green MARRIAGE REGISTERS and (usually) one MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE***

***These are all legal documents, for which there is a busy black market, making blank ones a valuable commodity. They should be locked in the safe cupboard at all times unless being written up, or prepared for a service.***

If you are an administrator, your vicar/priest should provide a copy of the details they have agreed with the couple should appear on their marriage certificate.

There are instructions in the front of each Marriage Register as to how to complete them, which are well worth reading and referring to.

## **Ink:**

**You must use Registrar's Blue/Black ink** and nothing else! It appears pale to start with but does go dark with time and really does last 300 years. If you don't you will get into trouble with your local Register Office when you lodge the completed registers at a later date.

## **Errors:**

No overwriting is allowed at all – all errors must have a **single straight line put through them and the correction written in above the mistake**. A pencil note should be made in the *outside margin* and also a pencil note kept in the back cover of those certificate numbers that have mistakes, initialled by the person making the mistake. A mistake on the heading line (district, county, parish) is corrected in the same way but does not need the pencil references.

## **Signatures:**

Because they are often illegible, **make a clear pencil note up the *spinal* margin of what the person has actually written**, e.g. Joe Blogs or J Blogs (must be the spinal margin). **Sample signatures for all clergy should be put in the front cover** against a clear note of their name – including and especially if there are visiting clergy officiating (as often happens during a parish vacancy)

## **Age:**

The age in registers should always be shown **in numbers accompanied by the word 'years'** (e.g. 63 years)

## **Heading line on Marriage Certificates:**

If you are unsure, it is worth checking what your Registration District is with your Diocesan Registrar or local Registrar's Office

## **Marriage Certificate Log:**

Each Marriage Certificate is numbered, and you should have a record sheet on which to record these, that will need to be submitted to a Registrar's Office at a later date

## **Empty Boxes:**

**Never leave empty boxes in a register/certificate** – if nothing is known there must put a single line through the box

## **Occupation:**

**Do not use the phrase 'self employed'** – discover the actual occupation

**Do not use 'trade names'** like the name of an airline company or bank

**When referring to a 'Doctor', you must be more specific** i.e. General Practitioner, Hospital Doctor, Doctor of Theology.... this may involve having to ask questions of the people concerned.

## **When a Father has died:**

For any “father” who has died, should have “deceased” or “dec'd” put in brackets below the name in the same box

## **When someone is retired:**

Any person named who is retired should have their last occupation specified and then “retired” or “ret'd” put in brackets below the name in the same box

## **By Banns or by License:**

It must be clear whether the marriage is being done based on Banns or a License – just put a line in the gap of whichever doesn't apply

## **Qualifying Connections:**

The Qualifying Connection by which the couple are marrying by Banns does not need to be noted on the Marriage Certificate; this will have been done on the Banns of Marriage Register

## **Quarterly Returns**

Every Quarter your parish will be sent a form which requires EXACT COPIES of the details of each Marriage Register entry onto a cream coloured form; you must start on the correct side (see top of the page they give you). This **MUST BE SIGNED BY A PRIEST**  
Spares sheets from any Quarters you haven't had weddings, are worth keeping for those Quarters where you have more than four!

If there have been no weddings in the previous quarter then a small white A5 form which they supply with the letter should be completed, signed by the vicar, and returned.

## **Ordering new Certificates or Registers**

There are forms stapled in the the Registers and the book of Certificates for ordering these.

## **Old Registers**

These should, if not required, be taken to your local Registry Office and wherever your County or Diocesan Records are kept, but check with your Diocese/Archdeacon

***The following outline just some of the special circumstances that I have come across with regard to Marriage Registers and Certificates:***

sometimes you get a bride (though I guess it's also possible with groom) known by a surname that is not the one she is legally entitled to use; the details of what should be put on marriage certificate/registers will have been agreed by the Vicar/priest with the Diocesan Registrar and the person concerned but may require both names to be clearly given, e.g. "XXX known as XXY"

if a bride or groom lives in Scotland but getting married in the CofE they will need to marry under a Common License because the Scottish legal system doesn't understand or use the banns system

the Marriage Act applies to both the Church of England (CofE) and the Church of Wales, so a church of Wales priest can officiate as registrar at a wedding in the CofE

with a Common License (where Banns have not been read), it is not the posh bit of paper that comes from the Diocesan Registrar that is important, it is the affidavit sworn in front of the appropriate person (a Bishop or their 'Surrogate'). If there is not time for the certificate to arrive before the wedding, then the officiating priest must make sure the Bishop/Surrogate gives permission for the wedding to proceed

if one or more of the couple are in the Armed Forces they may need more than one certificate especially if they are to be deployed shortly – these additional copies have to be charged for, as your parish is accountable to it's diocese for these fees (although a PCC could refund it for pastoral reasons at their discretion)

***Things learnt by bitter experience:***

The person who prepares the registers should do so *before the day of the wedding*, so there is time for any emergencies that may come to light

It is helpful to put in post-it reminders on the correct page of at least one register reminding the officiant of where to pencil the details of the witnesses actual names