



Lambeth Palace Library Research Guide Marriage Records

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1 Procedures

Marriages normally took place following the reading of banns in a couple's home parish on three successive Sundays. However, they could also be 'by licence', dispensing with the requirement for reading the banns and enabling the marriage to take place more quickly, and without publicity.

The majority of those issued were common licences, but some were special licences: the latter allowed for a marriage service to be performed in a church or chapel not normally licensed for weddings, or outside the normal hours.

Reasons for applying for a marriage licence varied. One was speed - useful for people perhaps going abroad or expecting babies (Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway applied for an Archbishop's Licence seven months prior to their first baby being christened). Another was confidentiality: dispensing with the requirement to announce wedding banns meant that people could marry (or indeed, as was often the case, re-marry) more discreetly.

2 Issuing Bodies

If couples are said to have been married 'by licence' there is no guarantee that Lambeth Palace Library holds the associated records. A licence could be issued by the Archbishop, but also by the Bishop of the diocese in which the wedding was to take place. If you suspect that the marriage you are researching was conducted by licence, it may be worthwhile consulting Jeremy Gibson's *Bishops' Transcripts and Marriage Licences, Bonds & Allegations* (4th edn. Federation of Family History Societies 1997) to determine the issuing office. If the licence was issued at diocesan level, then the records will usually be kept locally. For example, if the wedding took place in Eastbourne in East Sussex, then the Archdeaconry of Lewes would have issued the licence, and records would usually be kept at the East Sussex Record Office in Lewes. Lambeth Palace Library holds local records only for some of the Archbishop's *peculiars*, archiepiscopal jurisdictions outside the diocese of Canterbury.

Records for licences issued under the Archbishop of Canterbury are held at Lambeth Palace



Library. The issuing offices were the *Vicar General* and the *Faculty Office*. The Vicar General records cover all the dioceses in the Province of Canterbury; the Faculty Office records cover all the dioceses in England and Wales.

The majority of the licences issued by the Archbishop in these series were common licences. After Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 only the Faculty Office issued special licences as well as common licences, and Vicar General licences are all common.

Note that licences were not issued during the Commonwealth period. The series began again with the restoration of the Church of England in 1660.

3 The Documents

Marriage licences themselves were usually given to the couple intending to marry and consequently have rarely survived. Lambeth Palace Library holds the administrative documents (namely *allegations* and, until 1823, bonds) created during the process of applying for an Archbishop's Licence.

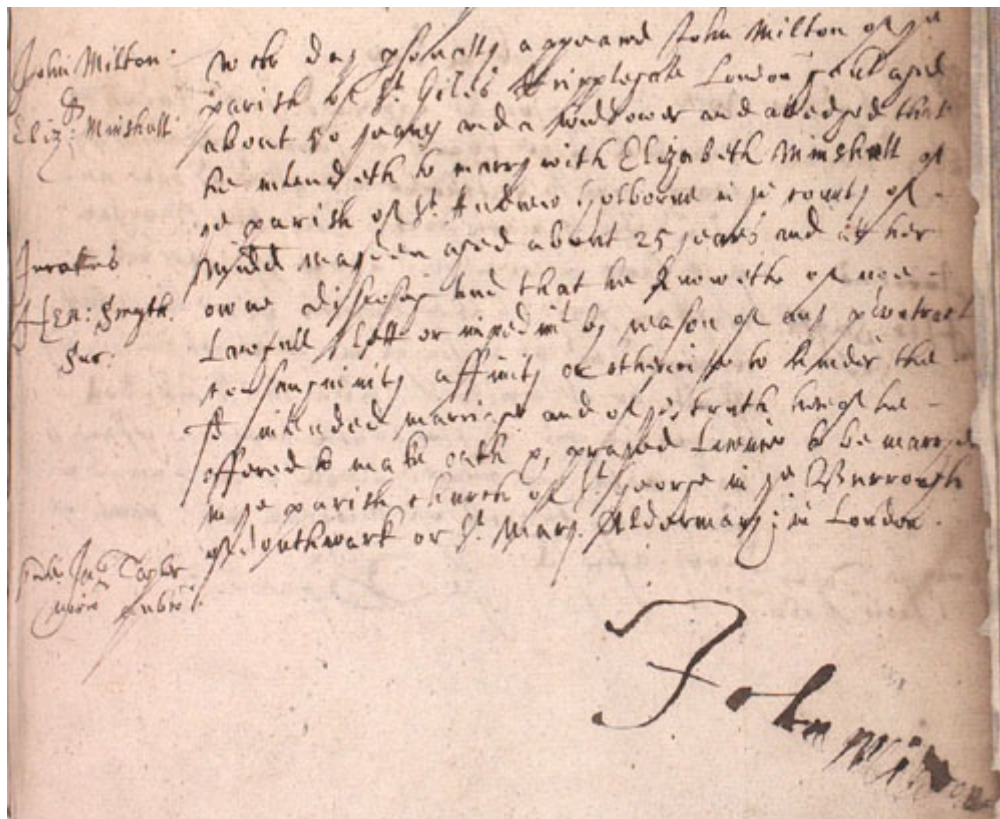
Before a licence could be granted, somebody (usually the groom, although it could be either the prospective bride, or a third party representative, acting on their behalf) had to submit an allegation (a sworn statement), stating that both parties were available and able to marry. In the case of either person being under 21, confirmation of the parent or guardian's consent also had to be given. Until 1823 only, there was also the obligation to enter a bond, although these were rarely forfeited.

Every allegation gives the full names of both parties (although it is worth checking variants on these, as the issuer often wrote phonetically, and may have transcribed names differently), their parish and current marital status. It may also give the couple's ages - although more often than not, this is simply stated as "over 21 years". It also usually states the name of the church or churches in which the marriage may take place. There may be additional information for minors.

From a genealogical point of view, bonds rarely contain any additional information to that which is provided on the allegation, with the possible exception of the groom's profession. Unlike the allegations, bonds were not bound up, and may not have survived.

Note that these documents only demonstrate that a couple intended to marry, and do not prove that a marriage took place. Records after 1837 post-date the advent of civil registration, which may be a better way of finding genealogical information. In searching for records, note that licences were usually issued just before the marriage, but were valid for up to three months. There is further background on the records on the British Origins website (www.britishorigins.com).

Allegation (11 February 1663) for the third marriage of the poet John Milton, aged 54, to 24-year-old Elizabeth Minshull (ref: FM I/3b, folio 149r.). The Dictionary of National Biography records that 'the marriage, though not romantic, was successful'.



4 Holdings

4.1 Faculty Office

Early marriage licences were registered in the main series of registers, the muniment books, which commence in 1533 (ref: F I). After 1575 it seems there was a separate series, but this does not survive before October 1632.

The main series of allegations in the Library dates from October 1632 (ref: FM I). There are bonds from 1694-1823 (ref: FM II). Original records for the 20th century are not held, only chronological Faculty Office calendars (ref: FM III), recording only the names of the parties who applied for licences and the date.

Published indexes to 1714 are available in the Reading Room. See also the online archives catalogue: www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/content/searchcollections

Indexes to marriage licences issued by the Faculty Office 1701-1850 are available online at www.britishorigins.com



Copies of the indexes 1701-1850 are also available in the Library Reading Room.

There are no indexes after 1850, but there are manuscript calendars (available in the Reading Room to 1913), which can be searched chronologically.

Vicar General

Marriage allegations survive from 1660 (ref: VM I). There are bonds until 1823 (ref: VM II). Original records for the 20th century are not held, only chronological calendars (ref: VM III) recording only the names of the parties who applied for licences and the date. Latterly the Vicar General ceased to issue licences and licences are now issued by the Faculty Office alone.

Published indexes covering 1660-1694 are available in the Reading Room. See also the online archives catalogue: www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/content/searchcollections

Indexes to marriage licences issued by the Vicar General 1694-1850 are available online at www.britishorigins.com

Copies of the indexes 1694-1850 are also available in the Library Reading Room.

There are no indexes after 1850, but there are manuscript calendars (available in the Reading Room to 1911) which can be searched chronologically.

4.2 Peculiars

Lambeth Palace Library holds marriage records for some of the Archbishop's peculiars: the deaneries of Croydon (certain parishes in Surrey), Shoreham (certain parishes in Kent), the Arches (certain parishes in the city of London), and (for 1771-1831) Bocking (certain parishes in Essex and Suffolk). These principally comprise allegations, 1676-1859 (ref: VH 91), and bonds, 1672-1818 (ref: VH 92). The records cease in the 19th century as the peculiar parishes were absorbed into other dioceses. See the online archives catalogue: www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/content/searchcollections

Faculty Office, Vicar General and peculiars marriage allegations (but not bonds) are microfilmed to 1851 and are also available at the Society of Genealogists (www.sog.org.uk). Lambeth Palace Library can supply copies from the microfilm via its reprographic services. The films of the Faculty Office and Vicar General allegations may also be consulted at the Genealogical Society, Salt Lake City.

There are also scattered bonds and licences among the *Carte Miscellenee*, and twelve Somerset marriage licences, 1812-1819, among the records of the *Court of Arches* (ref: Ff 65).

5 Glossary

Allegation – a sworn statement

Carte Miscellenee – The *Carte Miscellenee* or Lambeth Charters comprise records of the archbishops from the 12th century onwards, including royal charters relating to the archiepiscopal estates, patents of appointment of officials, and many other records.

Court of Arches – The Court of Arches, the court of appeal of the archbishop of Canterbury, dates back to the 13th century. In its heyday the court exercised an extensive jurisdiction



over marriage, probate and testamentary disputes, defamation, church property (rates, tithes, fabric of churches), and morals of the clergy and laity.

Faculty Office – The Faculty Office was set up under Peter's Pence Act of November 1533 to issue 'licences, dispensations, faculties, compositions, and rescripts, etc.' previously granted by the pope or papal curia.

Peculiars – Peculiars' are those parishes or places which are exempt from the jurisdiction of the bishop in whose diocese they are physically located.

Vicar General – The Vicar General is the official appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to administer the provincial, diocesan and peculiar jurisdictions on his behalf.

June 2010