



Marriage certificate and register stock - Closure, return and Destruction: Guidance for Clergy

Background

You will recall from recent clergy newsletters that on 26 March 2019, the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019 received Royal Assent and became law. Regulations to confirm the policy detail were laid in Parliament on 11 February 2021 and will come into force on 4 May 2021.

The Act introduces a new schedule system (for the Church of England this is known as the “marriage document”) which also means moving from a paper-based system to registration in an electronic register, known as RON (Registration on Line). This will facilitate change to the register entry including a line for the inclusion of the mother, father or parent in the marriage entry and create a more secure system for the maintenance of marriage records.

When the act comes into force, the paper register will cease to be the legal marriage record for marriages registered on and after 4 May. From 4 May, the local registration service will have sole responsibility for registering all marriages, both civil and religious, on RON.

Clergy will no longer be able to issue certificates; this will be a function solely of the local registration service and the General Register Office.

Clergy will be required to submit quarterly/nil returns to cover the final quarter up to 4 May. On 4 May they will also be required to close their current duplicate registers and return one of them to their local register office together with any unused registration stock, ie certificates, nil and quarterly return forms. The remaining duplicate register will be retained by the church or in archival or diocesan custody.

In some cases, you may have a completely unused (ie blank) set of duplicate marriage registers. In these circumstances you should return both registers to your local register office where they will be destroyed.

This guidance outlines the procedures for clergy to follow in the return of their registration stock and the storage of closed duplicate register which will become redundant from 4 May.

Quarterly Returns

In advance of closing your duplicate marriage registers you should ensure that any outstanding quarterly returns either from closed registers or from the current open register have been sent to your local register office. In order to ensure timely payments for the last quarterly returns you will need to submit the last quarter as soon as practicably possible. However, due to current COVID restrictions, your local office may be working differently so you should contact them to agree how these returns should be submitted.

Once quarterly returns are received and checked by the registration service they will arrange payment in the usual manner.

Closing the current register

Your local register office will have supplied you with labels stating the following:-

“Due to the introduction of the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act on 4 May 2021, this marriage register book has been closed.”

On 4 May in the page immediately after the last completed entry in your current duplicate marriage registers you should draw a diagonal line in registration ink through every unused entry and then stick the label on the front of both of the open duplicate registers. See example below.

Marriage solemnized at in the				in the parish of					
Columns:-		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No.	When married	Name and surname	Age	Condition	Rank or profession	Residence at the time of marriage	Father's name and surname	Rank or profession of father	
			years						
			years						
Married in the after				according to the rites and ceremonies of the					
				by me,					
This marriage was solemnized between us,		{	}	in the presence of		{	}		
				of us					

The register should then be delivered/collected to or by your local registration service, along with your other registration stock in accordance with your existing arrangements or by the method referenced below.

Return of Registration Stock (Registers, Quarterly Copies/Nil Returns and Certificates)

There will already be existing arrangements in place with your local register office for the delivery/collection of quarterly/nil returns and filled marriage registers. The Registrar General would suggest that you continue to use such arrangements. However, please be aware that due to current COVID restrictions these arrangements may have changed. Please contact your local register office to check their current arrangements before returning any stock.

Please note that when returning secure stock such as certificates a secure method of delivery should be used and for that reason, delivery in person may be the most suitable option. You may wish to discuss this further with your local office.

The registers and the associated stock should be delivered or sent to the register office, or any service point within the registration district agreed locally with the superintendent registrar. Registration officers have been advised to contact their clergy to advise which service point would be appropriate for each member of their clergy to use.

Once received at the register office, Registration staff will destroy the unused registration certificates as confidential waste. The duplicate register will be retained by the superintendent registrar with the records of his/her office. The closed duplicate register retained at the church should be kept in the church safe or in archival or diocesan custody as deemed appropriate.

If you have any further queries about the contents of this guidance, please contact GROCasework@gro.gov.uk.