Useful information:

Find My Past

www.findmypast.co.uk

Ancestry

www.ancestry.co.uk

The Genealogist

www.thegenealogist.co.uk

Genes Reunited

www.genesreunited.co.uk

192

www.192.com/genealogy

Family Relatives
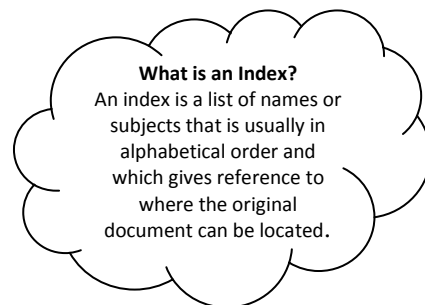
www.familyrelatives.com

FreeBMD

www.freebmd.org.uk

UKBMD

www.ukbmd.org.uk

Lancashire BMD

www.lancashirebmd.org.uk

Cheshire BMD

www.cheshirebmd.org.uk

> **What is an Index?**
> An index is a list of names or subjects that is usually in alphabetical order and which gives reference to where the original document can be located.

For more detailed information:
www.mlfhs.org.uk/guides

Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes on the Internet

Indexes to civil registration (i.e. registration from 1 July 1837 onwards) are widely available on the internet. There are several services, some free and others commercial, each of which has something to offer the researcher.

The Registration and Indexing Process

Before using these indexes it is helpful to understand how events were registered and the entries indexed. After 1837, each birth or death was to be reported to a Registrar and recorded in his register. It is worth noting that up to 1875, when penalties were introduced for failure to register a birth, there is a possibility that a birth went unregistered. After 1875 this is uncommon. Death and marriage registration is generally complete.

Marriages in the nineteenth century were mostly conducted in Church of England churches. The minister acted in the capacity of Registrar and kept two copies of the marriage register. One of these remained the property of the church and the other was to be handed in to the Registrar once full. Similar arrangements applied to marriages in Jewish Synagogues and Quaker Meeting Houses. Up to 1898, you could only marry in a nonconformist church if a Registrar was present. The Registrar entered the marriage in his own (single) register, which he retained. From 1899 onwards, a nonconformist chapel could appoint an Authorised Person who would keep his own registers similarly to those of the Church of England. Not all chapels took up this option immediately. Roman Catholic churches often did not do so until 1950 or later. It was also possible to marry in the Register Office where marriages were recorded in the Registrar's own (single) register. Registrars retain all of the registers from 1837 to the present day.

Each quarter, the Registrar (including the minister of any church holding marriage registers) was required to submit a copy of the register entries for the preceding three months to the Registrar General. These were bound into

numbered volumes and a composite manuscript index book made for all entries each quarter. The index books received heavy use so typed copies were made of most of them. The index books were microfilmed and before indexes appeared on the internet these microfilms and fiche provided the usual way to locate births, marriages or deaths. The indexes, it should be noted, are imperfect. The successive transcriptions required to produce the indexes resulted in omission of some entries and introduced errors into others. Some pages are also known to have been omitted from microfilming.

Commercial Web Sites - GRO Indexes on the Internet

Several commercial sites provide searchable indexes of birth, marriage and death registrations from 1837 to about 2005 compiled from transcriptions of the GRO indexes. These sites allow you to search the complete index for a specific name across several quarters or years. You can also usually search for similar surnames (ROE/ROWE) or use a 'wild card' (e.g. a search for W?LLS might find WALLS, WELLS or WILLS). Search results are often linked to images of the original microfiche entry, which allows details to be checked.

Online GRO indexes are subject to the same errors and omissions as the original indexes and new errors might have been added during transcription.

Some sites charge a small sum for each search result viewed. Others allow unlimited use for a regular subscription. By and large, all offer the same information but the quality of the indexes may vary. Findmypast is one of the few sites to offer the miscellaneous indexes to the military and consular registers. You can access the Ancestry and Findmypast indexes on the computers at Manchester Central Library. These are free using your library card and personal pin number.

FreeBMD

The FreeBMD project started in 1998 and is ongoing. Volunteers have typed the GRO indexes into a database and made this is available, free of charge, on the internet. Over 230 million index entries are now on line, dating mostly from 1837 to about 1970. Coverage can be patchy with some years completed but others, particularly the more recent, hardly touched. Users are strongly recommended to consult the coverage pages.

The database can be searched for a specific name over a specified period, either in all records or in those for a specific Registration District or county and a list of matching index entries will be displayed. A useful feature is the capability to display all the marriage entries which share the same reference. If the name of only one party to a marriage is known, perhaps the groom, and the bride is known only by a forename, the names of the others on the same register page may allow a guess to be made as to the bride's surname.

You should remember that these indexes are no more accurate than the imperfect GRO indexes from which they were created.

UKBMD and Local Indexes

UKBMD is a portmanteau title for (currently) eleven internet sites providing access individually to indexes of BMD registrations in the counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Cumbria, Shropshire and North Wales. A further site covers the Bath registration district. Sites for other counties are under discussion. The sites currently offer over 42 million index entries in total.

The chief difference between UKBMD sites and the sites described above is that UKBMD indexes have been compiled directly from the original Registrar's registers or index books. Errors and omissions should therefore be less common. As with FreeBMD, coverage is still incomplete and users are advised to refer to the coverage pages, which are very detailed.

Searches can be made for births, marriages and deaths against a surname and forename or initial. Searches may be limited to a specific year or register office or may be made across all records for the county.

A major benefit of these indexes is that they precisely identify the bride and groom for each marriage and the church where it took place. They also frequently include the age at which a person died or the maiden name of a child's mother for periods before these appear in the GRO indexes.