

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 48

Marriage Licence Bonds

1. Introduction

Marriage Licence Bonds can be useful in finding a marriage of an ancestor if you do not know where the marriage took place. This is because the bonds cover a whole archdeaconry or diocese, rather than only a single parish. The bonds are not usually indexed, however, so you may have a fairly lengthy search to find the bond for the marriage in which you are interested. Alternatively, you may have found an entry in a marriage register stating that a couple were married by licence and wish to investigate further.

Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1754 stated that all marriages had to take place either by banns or by licence. Before this date, some marriages took place without the calling of banns or issuing of a licence.

2. When were licences issued?

Most marriages took place after banns (notice of the marriage) were read out in church. Banns registers should have been kept for every parish from 1754 onwards. They usually record the names, marital status and parishes of residence of the bride and groom and the three dates on which the banns were read out in church. You should find banns registers with the other parish registers, amongst collections of church records. To find out which banns registers the Record Office holds, look at the Parish Registers and Transcripts summary (available in the Norfolk Record Office's searchroom or on our website).

A licence was usually obtained if:

- the parties lived in different church jurisdictions,
- if one of the parties was a minor (under 21 years old),
- the parties wanted to marry promptly (some licences were issued as late as the day of the marriage),
- the parties wanted to avoid the publicity of having banns read in church.

3. What is a marriage licence bond?

A marriage licence bond contained three parts. The **affidavit** (or allegation), was a sworn statement made by one of the parties, normally the bridegroom, stating that there was no legal impediment to the marriage. The groom and bondsman entered into the **bond** agreeing that the bondsman would forfeit a sum of money if the marriage did not take place. The court which issued the licence kept the bond and affidavit. After 1823, only the affidavits normally survive. The applicant presented the marriage **licence** to the clergyman who was to marry the couple. It is rare for the actual licence to survive, but you may find licences amongst the parish records of the church at which the marriage took place.

4. What information do the marriage licence bonds give?

The affidavits (or allegations) and bonds generally supply:

- the names and residences of the parties
- the bridegroom's occupation
- details of the bondsmen (who were sometime relatives of the groom)
- the church at which the marriage was to take place
- occasionally an age (although most will just state 21 and upwards)
- occasionally (in the case of one of the parties being a minor) the name of a parent or guardian, whose consent had to be given.

5. Where will you find marriage licence bonds?

The following ecclesiastical courts could issue marriage licences to people living in Norfolk:

- Norfolk Archdeaconry Court
- Norwich Archdeaconry Court
- Norwich Consistory Court (the Bishop's Court)
- Dean and Chapter of Norwich Peculiar Court
- Great Cressingham Peculiar Court
- Archbishop of Canterbury's Court

The court which issued the licence normally depended on the bride's and groom's parishes of residence. For more details, see the following sections on each court. Please note, however, that the rules were often broken, and licences were sometimes issued by a court higher or lower in the hierarchy than was necessary. If you do not find the bond in the court where you would expect to find it, try checking the records of the next court, up or down in the hierarchy.

The bonds are kept in yearly bundles for each court. Sometimes there is a name index to the bundle. Bonds were usually filed within two or three years of the date of the licence, but occasionally they were filed as many as ten years afterwards. No licences were granted during the Civil War and Commonwealth period (1642-61).

See the list *Marriage Licence Bonds* on the searchroom shelves for a full list of years covered for each court, and a list of indexes and transcripts available. There are a number of indexes available at the Record Office, 1476-1837, but note that there are many gaps.

6. Norfolk and Norwich Archdeaconry Courts

If the bride and groom lived in the same archdeaconry or peculiar jurisdiction usually the archdeacon or peculiar court official would grant the licence. There is a map in the searchroom indicating which parishes were in each archdeaconry, and which parishes were covered by peculiar courts.

Bonds survive as follows:

6.1 Norwich Archdeaconry

- Bonds, 1712-1863, 1873-1915, are on microfiche
- Cancelled affidavits and licences, 1850-73, are on microfiche
- Registers of licences granted, 1590-1632, entered in the Norwich Archdeaconry administration act books, are on microform
- Registers of licences granted, 1660-81, are on microform
- Letters of matrimony, 1590-1609, are entered in administration act books (reference ANW 22/2)
- Letters of matrimony, 1624-37 (with gaps), entered in administration act books, are on microform.

6.2 Norfolk Archdeaconry

- Bonds, 1670, 1704-5 (a few), 1706-11, 1715-1886, are on microfiche
- Bonds, 1672, 1676-9, 1683-86 (a few only), found with administration bonds, are on microform
- Letters of matrimony, 1541-1602, 1670-76, entered in the Norfolk Archdeaconry administration act books, are on microform
- Register of licences, 1689-94 (reference MC 2276/1, 949X6) are unfit for production and cannot be consulted.

6.3 Indexes to Norfolk and Norwich Archdeaconry bonds

Published indexes are available in the searchroom for both the Norfolk Archdeaconry court and the Norwich Archdeaconry courts, 1813-1837, (*Norfolk Genealogy*, volumes 23 and 25). Both include surname and places indexes; for the Norwich Archdeaconry court there is also an occupations index. An unpublished index of bonds is available in the searchroom covering both Archdeaconry courts and the Consistory and Peculiar courts, 1715-34. There is also a typescript index (on the searchroom shelves) for the Norwich Archdeaconry court, 1712-29, indexed by groom's surname, and a manuscript list of Norfolk Archdeaconry bonds, 1663-1690, (reference BOL 3/27, 740X8).

The Norfolk Family History Society, Kirby Hall, 70 St Giles Street, Norwich, NR2 1LS, telephone (01603) 763718, website: <http://www.norfolkfhs.org.uk/> has a transcript of marriage licences for both the Norfolk and Norwich Archdeaconry Courts, 1780-1812.

7. Peculiar Courts

Dean and Chapter bonds, 1705-1860, are available on microfilms (MF/X 186-187). Bonds for licences issued by the Great Cressingham Peculiar Court, 1719-1760, are all available on microfilm (MF/X 31).

There are printed indexes to bonds issued by the Peculiar Court of the Dean and Chapter of Norwich and the Great Cressingham Peculiar Court in *Norfolk Genealogy*, volume 16 (available in the searchroom).

8. Norwich Consistory Court (the Bishop of Norwich's Court)

If the bride and groom lived in different archdeacons, but within the same diocese, the bishop would normally grant the licence. The diocese of Norwich included both Norfolk and Suffolk until 1837. Parishes in the eastern half of Suffolk (the Archdeaconry of Suffolk) continued to be in the Norwich Diocese until 1914.

Marriage licence bonds issued by the Bishop of Norwich are available on microfiche, 1558-1902 (with gaps). For 1903-1988, see the original licences (references DN/MLB 206-251).

Bolingbroke's calendars (lists) of Norwich Consistory Court marriage licence bonds cover the period, 1476-1708, with gaps (references HMN 313-317), and 1709-11 (reference BOL 3/26/1). There are names indexes to these calendars in the searchroom. There are also some selective lists of marriage licence bonds, 1712-33 (references BOL 3/20-22) and some indexes to them, 1731-51 (BOL 3/23-25, 740X8). An unpublished name index covering both Archdeaconry courts and the Consistory and Peculiar courts, 1715-34, is available on the searchroom shelves.

9. Archbishop of Canterbury's Court

If the bride and groom lived in different dioceses, the Archbishop would normally grant the licence. There are licences issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury for the years 1557, 1559, 1584 and 1598 with the Norwich Consistory Court bonds. Other bonds issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury are held at Lambeth Palace Library, London, SE1 7JU, telephone 020 7898 1400.

For further information about these records and the indexes available, see the Lambeth Palace Library's website at <http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/>. See also Jeremy Gibson's *Bishop's Transcripts and Marriage Licences, Bonds and Allegations* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1997).



If you need this leaflet in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the County Archivist on 01603 222599 and we will do our best to help.

Produced by:

Norfolk Record Office
The Archive Centre
Martineau Lane
Norwich
NR1 2DQ

Tel: 01603 222599
Fax: 01603 761885
E-mail: norrec@norfolk.gov.uk
Website: <http://archives.norfolk.gov.uk/>



© Norfolk Record Office, May 2006