



Delving deeper

#2: New Zealand marriage data

With marriages, as with deaths, there is far more information available than just civil registration marriage certificates.

When a couple intended to marry, one partner was required, after 1856, to complete what equates to a marriage licence application. These applications were called intention to marry (ITM). They could be completed at the local registrar's office and were then submitted to the Registrar General.

Archives New Zealand holds these returns from 1856 up to 1956, at either the Wellington archive or the regional archives concerned. They have been card indexed under both groom's name and bride's maiden name. From 1880-1920, the ITMs can be accessed providing that the date of marriage is known.

These returns are useful because they contain information not recorded on the marriage certificate, such as the length of residence in either a particular district or in NZ in general for both bride and groom. Where either party is aged under 21 years, the name of the parent or guardian who gave consent is also included.

Again, it must be remembered that the information given on these ITMs is what the people concerned wanted to tell the registrar. It may not be the truth. It is common for ages to be increased or decreased according to what the participants wished to portray.

NZSG has a CD available of marriages in NZ from 1856 to 1956. The name of each spouse is recorded against either party, which is very useful when trying to track down the names, often of wives who tend to figure less in archival records.

If the marriage you are seeking took place before civil registration began in 1856, there is a NZSG collection of data pertaining to marriages pre 1856 that has been gathered from a variety of sources, primarily church records, newspaper notices, family history and social history publications, Maori Mission records, Bible entries, ministers' diaries, journal entries and from the personal submissions made by NZSG members. Access is via the website.

Divorce was a costly business and involved a considerable social stigma. As a result, many couples chose not to get a legal divorce, hence subsequent "remarriages" were sometimes not legal. For those who could afford the legal fees, divorce records from the High Court proceedings are held by Archives New Zealand and can be searched under Archway (<http://archway.archives.govt.nz>). There may be Privacy Act restrictions on accessing the actual records.

However, newspapers of the time were very keen to publish the details of divorce cases, so accessing PapersPast from the National Library of New Zealand's website may give you sufficient information (<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>). Correspondents were often named in these cases.