

Bristol Archives

Vehicle licencing and registration records



Image: Bristol City Council Public Relations Office photographs, ref. 40826/MOT/2

Bristol Archives holds records of vehicles registered in Bristol between 1904 and 1974. This guide explains what records are available and how you can access them.

For further information, please contact us:

Email	archives@bristol.gov.uk
Telephone	0117 922 4224
Website	www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-archives
Online catalogue	archives.bristol.gov.uk

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Vehicle registration - general background

The registration of motor vehicles, using 'index marks' made up of letters and numbers, was introduced throughout the UK by the Motor Car Act 1903. For many years, the system was administered by local authorities: in Bristol, vehicle registration was managed by the city council's Motor Vehicle Licences department.

In 1965, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre (DVLC) was set up in Swansea to licencing of vehicles transferred from local authorities to this national system. The transfer of responsibility was not completed until 1978. Until then, local authorities continued to manage vehicle licensing as agents for the Department of the Environment (parent body of the DVLC).

In 1990, the DVLC became the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), an executive agency of the Department for Transport.

Vehicle registration in Bristol

Under the Motor Car Act 1903, each registration authority was allocated an index mark of one or two letters followed by digits (initially 1 to 999, later up to 9999).

We hold records of cars with Bristol index marks, which initially began with the letters AE and later with HT, HU, HW, HY, Y, YA, YB and YC.

By the 1930s, more index marks were needed. Local authorities added an extra letter at the beginning, starting with A: AAE, AHT, AHU, AHW, AHY, BAE etc.

By the 1950s, to create yet more numbers, vehicle registration numbers became digits (1-999) followed by three letters.

Year letters were introduced in 1963 with the "A" suffix, but not made compulsory until 1965. 'A' was not used in Bristol; 'B' was used from September 1964 to December 1964 and from 1 Jan 1965 the standardised suffix system was followed, starting with 'C'.

At first, the suffix was changed on 1 January every year, but the motor industry found that there was a rush to buy new cars during the new year period. In 1967, the change was moved to August, to meet the demand for new vehicles more easily.

On 1 August 1967, the 'F' suffix was introduced. Vehicles registered in 1967 carry either an 'E' suffix (January to July) or an 'F' suffix (August 1967 to July 1968).

We hold the following records of vehicle licensing and registration in Bristol:

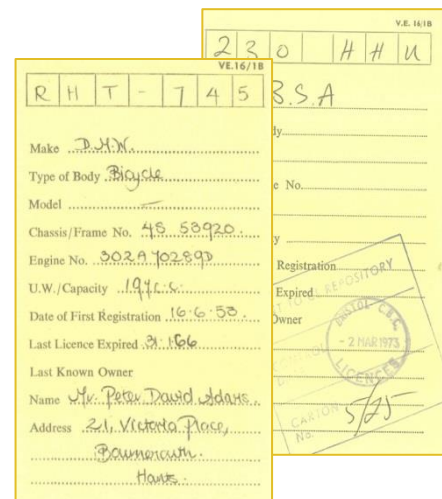
Vehicle licensing cards, 1904-1977 (ref. 36407/1/1 to 84)

These cards were created by local authorities for the purpose of collecting motor vehicle tax. When a vehicle was sold or moved to another county, the new local authority created a new card to collect vehicle tax there. This may explain why the amount of information recorded on such cards varies, as some local authorities were more diligent than others about completing details.

When the DVLC was set up, these cards were used to create a database of all vehicles registered and taxed (i.e. on the road) in the UK. The DVLC returned the registration cards to the local authority which originally registered each vehicle. Cards held at Bristol Archives therefore include cards created by Bristol City Council (for cars registered and taxed in Bristol) and by other local authorities (for cars registered here but taxed elsewhere).

The cards are sorted by registration number and contain some or all of the following information:

- make of vehicle
- type of body
- model
- chassis/frame number
- engine number
- unladen weight (UW) /capacity
- date of first registration
- date the last licence expired
- last known owner (name/address)



Vehicle registration books, 1959-1974 (ref. 36407/2/1 to 18)

These books record information collected when a vehicle was first registered. The volumes are arranged in the catalogue by the date that they were commenced. Within the books, vehicle information is arranged by registration number.

The entries show the motor dealer to whom the first registration was issued and the date of issue.

Index #	Registered by name	Date of issue	License No
	SAE		
1	Wagon (land) for Bryan Bros	21/2	002088
2		21/2	008142
3		21/2	025729
4		21/2	222 001924
5		21/2	092 558
6		21/2	619 398
7	Welch & Co	5/2	1531-70000
8	Wright & Co	25/1	02-20-05048
9	Adams	7/1	720285, 115
10	Western Motor	28/1	222 544 40
11	Preston Garage	31/1	307912
12		31/1	014079
13		27/6	183676
14		5/2	221373
15		25/1	146826
16	General Garage	25/1	19147
17	General Garage	28/1	1106
18	Western Motor	31/1	154210
19	Western Motor	31/1	144430
20	LEX GARAGES	24/1	2/252-55619

From March 1961, the books also record the vehicle chassis number (ref. 36407/2/3/4 onwards).

The books do not contain details of individual vehicles - i.e. the make and model of the vehicle is not included.

Accessing these records

To find a vehicle listed in these records, you will need to know the registration number.

The records can be consulted in our public searchroom. Please [see our website](#) for information about visiting Bristol Archives.

If you cannot visit our searchroom

If you provide the registration number of your vehicle, we can search our records for a registration card and/or an entry in the vehicle registration books. We will provide a transcription of the information for a single vehicle free of charge.

Obtaining copies

- Registration cards: we can supply copies either as a PDF sent by email or a paper photocopy sent by post.
- Registration books: these cannot be photocopied due to the risk of damage. You can photograph pages in our searchroom (after purchasing a daily photography licence) or order a photograph from our digitisation department.

Our current copying charges are available [on our website](#).

Related material

- Motor Car Act 1903: driving licence registers, 1904-1915 ([ref. 13454](#))
 - *How to Trace the History of Your Car - A Guide to Motor Vehicle Registration Records in the British Isles*, by Philip Riden (Merton Priory Press), 1998 ([ref. Bk/2039](#))
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