



Getting married in an approved venue or hotel

Thank you for choosing Darlington as a venue for your wedding. Darlington has some amazing venues to host your marriage ceremony. From a railway museum, a theatre to a range of hotels; from town centre boutique to castle and country house. We are really proud of our town!

The following information will help you plan and understand what will happen on the day.

Arrival times

Two registrars attend each wedding. One will be performing the wedding ie, saying the words; the other will be registering the marriage ie. making the legal record of the wedding.

The registrars will arrive at the venue 30 minutes before the start of the ceremony. We use these 30 minutes to meet the couple being married and anyone who has a key role in the ceremony. You will not start the wedding unprepared!

The usual format when we arrive is:

- 30 minutes before the wedding starts - meet the groom/partner and any best man/woman, ring bearers and ushers. We will do this in the ceremony room and we will meet any photographers, videographers and musicians that you might have.
- 15 minutes before the ceremony starts – meet the bride/partner, anyone escorting the bride/partner down the aisle, any bridesmaids and flower girls. We will explain the order of walking down the aisle and meet any additional photographers and videographers that you have with you. Please be ready for us when we arrive.
- The venue will bring the guests into the marriage room.

Pre-ceremony questioning

Prior to the start of the ceremony we will need to ask you some questions to ensure that the information we will record on the marriage schedule is correct.

This is similar to the information that you were asked at your notice of marriage appointment. You don't need any proof of identity or address with you on the day.

We will also confirm the names of the witnesses being asked to sign the marriage schedule with you. They don't need any proof of identity with them either.

Some of the information we ask you, particularly about your parents, can be sensitive or upsetting. If this is the case, please ask to be questioned alone, in private. Let us know when we arrive if you want to do this.

About the ceremony room.

Each of our approved wedding venues has a number of rooms licensed for civil marriages and civil partnerships and each of those rooms has a maximum capacity of people who can be present for the ceremony.

If you are unsure of this and worried that you will be over the maximum capacity then you should ask the venue what the maximum capacity is or you can contact us.

We do have the right to halt proceedings until the capacity is within licensed numbers.

Alcohol is not allowed in the ceremony room. The venue will be aware of this and will ask guests to leave drinks outside of the room until the ceremony has finished.

Outdoor weddings

Many couples choose a venue with the option of an outdoor ceremony. This makes for a beautiful ceremony in some fantastic locations, providing perfect photo opportunities.

Of course, this is England and one thing we can't order is the weather! You should ensure that there is a back-up plan for an indoor ceremony and ask the hotel the arrangements for when a final decision has to be made about holding the ceremony inside or outside.

If the weather did change during the ceremony we cannot stop and begin the ceremony again in another location, once started we must continue with the ceremony. We will ensure that the legal parties to the wedding ie, the couple being married, the two witnesses and the two registrars are under cover at the licensed structure and the guests can stay or relocate inside.

Music

You will need to provide the hotel or venue with music for the ceremony and you should check with them in what format they want it, ie, CD or MP3 or phone etc. You will need music for:

1. Seating of the guests
2. Entrance of the bridal party
3. Signing the marriage schedule and the official photographs
4. Exit of the couple

We do not need to know your choice of music, but it must not be religious in content or intent, eg. a hymn.

Photographs

We understand the importance of photographs and we are here to help official photographers and videographers make the most of the ceremony. We will meet them when we arrive on the day, some are already familiar with the venue and some will welcome some ideas to make the most of the ceremony. Guests will have an opportunity to take photographs at the end of the ceremony after you have signed the legal paperwork.

Witnesses

Two witnesses are required to sign the marriage schedule with you.

Your witnesses must be aged 16 or over but can be anyone present for the duration of the ceremony. They can be friends, family or your own children (age permitting). Witnesses are not required to bring an identification on the day with them.

Seating arrangements

The hotel or venue will help you plan the seating for the ceremony. Some couples are traditional and separate families, bride to the left, groom to the right, but many couples mix their guests. We would recommend that you reserve seating for parents, best man/woman, bridesmaids, flower girls, ushers, witnesses and other key family members who you want to have priority seating. The couple being married usually stand throughout.

Ceremony entrance

Some couples walk down the aisle together but most stick to tradition with the groom/partner 1 waiting at the front of the room and the bride/partner 2 making an entrance escorted by a parent or family member with an entourage of bridesmaids, flower girls and page boys.

You should think of the order of those walking down the aisle with you and usually the bride/partner 1 and the person escorting her down the aisle would be at the back of the bridal party, ie the last to walk in.

Ceremony choices and personalising your marriage ceremony.

We understand and encourage you to personalise your marriage ceremony to be able to allow other people present to take part and also to reflect your wishes to each other. The words spoken by the registrar are a standard format, but you will still be able to personalise your ceremony by:

- Choosing your vows and words you say to each other.
- Including readings for your guests to say.
- Including a candle ceremony
- Including promises to your children

We no longer offer a pre-wedding meeting to discuss the ceremony.

We have improved the information we give to you to help make your choices and understand what will happen on the day of the wedding. Once we have your wedding questionnaire returned to us that is all we need before seeing you on the day of the wedding.

If you are getting married at one of our approved hotels, we attend all of their open days and you can meet us there to discuss the ceremony if it helps you.

Religious content in ceremonies

A civil ceremony is a non-religious marriage. We cannot allow any religious content in a civil ceremony. Couples have a distinct choice of a religious ceremony in a church or a civil marriage in a register office or approved venue such as a hotel. Only a registrar can marry a couple at a register office or an approved venue

However, we respect that couples have customs and traditions which they may want to acknowledge and include in the ceremony.

We want you to enjoy your wedding day as much as possible and for the marriage ceremony to be personalised to meet your needs. No two weddings are same. If you have any questions or ideas that you would like to include in the ceremony, please do not hesitate to contact us.