

Useful Information

Census returns for England and Wales can be viewed at:

Ancestry

www.ancestry.co.uk

Find my Past

www.findmypast.co.uk

Genes Reunited

www.genesreunited.co.uk

The Genealogist

www.thegenealogist.co.uk

Scottish census returns can be viewed at:

Scotland's People

www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

Find my Past (Transcriptions only)

www.findmypast.co.uk

Irish census returns for 1901 and 1911 can be viewed at:

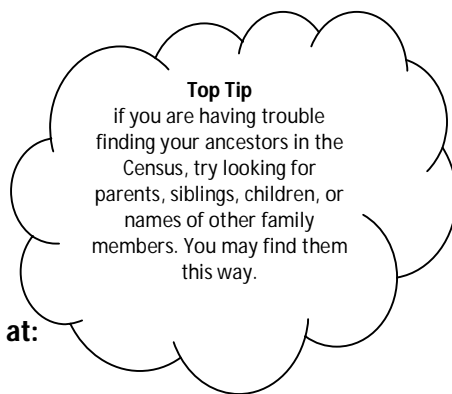
National Archives of Ireland

www.nationalarchives.ie

The 1939 Register can be viewed at:

Find my Past

www.findmypast.co.uk



For more detailed information:

www.mlfhs.org.uk/guides

Archives +

Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society

3rd Floor, Manchester Central Library,
St. Peter's Square, Manchester, M2 5PD

Tel: 0161- 234 1060 Email: office@mlfhs.org.uk



Census

A census is a survey which was put together by the government. It contains a particular set of questions in order to find out and record information about the country's population. It is unique because it covers everyone at the same time and asks the same questions of each person.

History of the Census

Since 1801 and every ten years since (except during World War 2) the government has set aside one day for holding a census in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland (from 1921 onwards this covered Northern Ireland only). The last census that was held in the UK was in March 2011.

The early census returns for 1801-1831, with a few local exceptions, did not contain names or personal details and so are of no value to family historians. The census material that is available today and that family historians find most useful are the census returns from 1841-1911.

What information will the census show me?

The 1841 census, although the least detailed, will give you valuable information about your ancestors. It shows for each person in the household on census night:

- First name and surname
- place where they were living
- gender
- age (for those over 15 this is rounded down to the nearest 5 years)
- occupation (job)
- whether they were born in the county (Y or N)
- whether they were born in Scotland (S), Ireland (I) or Foreign parts (F)*

From 1851 onwards the returns are more useful as they also show:

- the relationship of each person to the head of household (Note: sometimes brother/sister-in-law refers to a step brother/sister)
- whether they were married or single
- Their precise age in years (or months/weeks for infants)
- certain medical disabilities
- county and parish of birth
- country of birth if they were born outside England or Wales

Please note: You are unable to view census material earlier than 100 years as it is protected by the 100 year rule to safeguard the confidentiality of the living. The latest census that we are currently able to view is 1911.

How will this help me?

Census returns show your ancestors as part of a family unit and provide place of residence, place of birth, age and occupation. This can help you to obtain birth, marriage and death certificates which can provide more specific information to enable you to gain a fuller picture of the lives of your ancestors. The census returns will also show their neighbours, to whom they might be related either at the time or, through marriage, in the future.

Census returns from 1841-1911 in England and Wales are readily available online on a variety of pay per view sites. You can access two of the larger genealogical websites: Ancestry and Find my Past on the computers at Manchester Central Library. These are free using your library card and personal pin number.

1841-1901 Census

From 1841 to 1901 a census schedule was completed for each household, this was then collected by the enumerator who copied the information into enumeration books before the schedules were destroyed. It is the enumeration books which you view online. Special enumeration books were completed for institutions such as workhouses, barracks and hospitals. There were also special schedules for vessels from 1851 onwards.

1911 Census

In 1911 household schedules were not copied into enumeration books but were analysed directly. When viewing these you see the return as filled in and signed by your ancestor (if literate). Of particular help to family historians, the 1911 census is the first census that shows how many years a couple had been married, how many of their children were living and how many had died. This census was also the first in which the army overseas was enumerated by name.

The 1939 Register

The census returns for 1931 were lost in a fire and there was no census in 1941. Consequently there is a gap in the census between 1921 and 1951. If you are trying to trace an ancestor alive during this period it may be helpful for you to try the 1939 Register which was compiled on 29 September 1939. This became available on the Find my Past web site in 2016.

Data is redacted for individuals who, if alive, would still be under 100 years old and who are not known to be deceased. The index shows families in households but is not as comprehensive as a census. It includes:

- Address
- Surname
- First Forename and other Forename(s)/Initial(s)
- Date of Birth
- Gender
- Marital Status
- Occupation

How trustworthy is census information?

You should always be cautious about the information in census returns, particularly ages. A person may not have known their precise age or may have had reason to 'adjust' it. Birthplaces may be the first place of which a person has any memory and not where they were actually born. It is useful to look at the census for several years to compare details. In earlier censuses, the term 'cousin' does not always mean what it does today and can denote other, possibly more distant, relationships.