

CENSUS RETURNS

The purpose of a census is to 'count' the population and to provide statistical information about age, occupations, families and communities.

There has been a census in Britain every 10 years since 1801 except in 1941 during World War 2. Earliest records were collected by local parishes, contained limited information and have been mostly destroyed although some have survived. Since 1841 the Census has been administered by the Registrar General and more formalised records kept.

The census takes place on a single night across England and Wales with separate returns for Scotland and Ireland. Information must be provided about everybody at home on that night including visitors. People who are away from home - night workers, visiting, travelling, in hospital or prison, armed services etc are excluded as they will appear on the census elsewhere.

For reasons of data protection, there is a 100-year privacy rule covering censuses meaning the most recent records that can be viewed are from 1911.

The following information relates to Census Returns in England and Wales.

1841 – Sunday 4th June

- place – not always the address
- names of inhabitants
- age – separate columns for male and female
- profession, trade employment or of independent means
- where born – whether born in same country (Y or N) whether born in Scotland, Ireland or Foreign parts (S, I or F)

There were no relationships given. Ages above 15 were supposed to be rounded down to the nearest 5 years.

1851 – Sunday 30th March and 1861 Sunday 7th April

- name of street, place or road and name or number of houses
- name and surname
- relationship to head of household
- marital status
- age – separate columns male and female
- rank, profession or occupation
- where born – county/place
- whether blind or deaf and dumb

1871 - Sunday 2nd April

As 1861 plus:

- whether 1. Deaf & dumb, 2. Blind, 3. Imbecile or idiot, 4. Lunatic

1881 – Sunday 3rd April

As 1871 plus:

- age last birthday

1891 – Sunday 5th April

As 1881 plus:

- number of houses owned or occupied
- number of rooms occupied if less than 5
- employer (X), employed (X), neither employer or employed (X)
- whether 1. deaf and dumb, 2. blind, 3. lunatic, imbecile or idiot

1901 – Sunday 31st March

As 1891 plus - Wales and Monmouthshire only:

- Language spoken – English, Welsh or Both to be entered

1911 – Sunday 2nd April

This was the first census to be completed by the head of the household rather than an enumerator. It includes more information about the family.

- name and surname
- relationship to head of household
- age and sex
- for married women – number of complete years marriage has lasted, number of children born alive, number still alive, number died
- occupation, whether employer, worker or working on own accord, whether working at home
- birthplace – village/town and county
- nationality – 1. British subject, 2. Naturalized British, 3. Foreign
- infirmity – 1. Totally deaf or deaf and dumb, 2. Totally blind, 3. Lunatic, 4. Imbecile or feeble minded

1921 – Sunday 19th June

Expected to be released January 2022

Census Returns for England and Wales for 1841 – 1911 are held at The National Archives (TNA) – www.nationalarchives.gov.uk , they can also be accessed on subscription websites e.g. Ancestry, Find My Past. Some returns for 1841 – 1891 are freely available in a transcribed form on FreeCen, a volunteer-based website www.freecen.org.uk

Some Scottish records are available as above, but the digitised images can only be accessed on ScotlandsPeople www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

In Ireland, virtually all the returns from 1821 – 1891 have been destroyed. All the surviving records plus the returns for 1901 and 1911 are free to access at www.genealogy.nationalarchives.ie

The 1939 Register – 29th September

The Register was compiled at the outbreak of World War 2. The information was used mainly to produce Identity Cards and from January 1940, Ration Books, it also helped to administer conscription.

The records include the civilian population of England and Wales, they **do not** include the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

This was not a census but was arranged along similar lines. For each individual:

- address
- surname and first name
- gender
- date of birth
- occupation

As the 1931 Census for England & Wales was destroyed by fire during WW2 and there was no census in 1941, the Register provides the most complete survey of the population between 1921 and 1951.

The original register books are **not** kept at The National Archives and have been retained by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (now NHS Digital).

Only digital copies are available to the general public and these can be viewed on Find My Past and Ancestry. It is free to search the documents but there is a charge to view a full transcription and download images of documents.