

## **What is the census?**

Although there have been censuses taken at various times, the regular decennial ones commenced in 1801. The first four were essentially only head counts which named just the head of household only. However, a very few examples of these early censuses do still exist that contain the names of whole households. From 1841 onwards full households were named and, thus, it is from then on that the genealogist and family historian are offered the most help in assembling families and whence they came, together with occupations.

### **How the census was taken**

In the days leading up to census night (see below for dates), an enumerator delivered individually numbered schedules (forms) to each household in his district. Each form contained detailed instructions on how and when it should be filled in. On the morning after census night, the enumerator went round each house and collected the forms. He had a duty to ensure that all the forms were completed properly and collected, even if this meant going back to some houses many times. Once all the forms were gathered in, the information on them was collated, by the enumerator, and entered onto large sheets which were bound into volumes and a folio number stamped on the top corner of each right hand page. These volumes were then delivered to government statisticians whose job it was to extract important data about the population as a whole. In the course of this process, they often made marks and notes on the pages which can cause confusion when we try and read them.

### **What do the numbers mean?**

Each census is designated with a letter and number code

1841 HO 107  
1851 HO 107  
1861 RG 9  
1871 RG 10  
1881 RG 11  
1891 RG 12  
1901 RG 13

The number after this code is known as a piece number and refers to a particular bound volume of enumerators' books. These numbers and piece numbers were allocated by the PRO at a later date as part of their cataloguing of the enumerators' books.

### **What information is there in the census?**

The information given is only as good as the person giving it, which may have been another family member, a friend, a neighbour or a visitor. If the form had not been filled in or had unanswered questions, then the enumerator would fill in the answers as he was given them, therefore, spellings may not be as expected. The enumerator had to fill in occupations under broad headings, thus, an ancestor shown as an Ag Lab could be either just that or something rather more.

1841 census gives the names of each person at an address on census night, their ages rounded down to the nearest 5 for those over 15. The under 15s were shown with their age as given by the householder. Occupations are given but not the relationships between each person in a household; nor are the places of birth, only whether a person was born in the county or not. Occasionally exact

ages are given for all.

From 1851 onwards, there is more detail included. Everyone had their age shown with no rounding down. The relationship to the head of the household is given, as is the place of birth.

It should be remembered that ages and dates of birth were much less important then than now and individuals often only had a hazy idea of how old they themselves were, let alone the other members of the household. Ages, therefore, can be significantly out, especially for older people. Place of birth is another column which can bring a great deal of confusion and is an area which challenges those from outside London more than any other. Since nobody can actually remember being born, let alone the name of the place where it happened, children had to rely on what they were told by their parents or what they themselves remembered which means that if a child grew up in a certain place it would be easy for them to believe they had been born there when, in fact, they had moved there when very young.

From 1861 onwards the censuses have sections for people on board ships.

In later censuses there is a column for disability but this varied from census to census. In the 1851 and 1861 there is a column for 'Whether blind, deaf or idiot'. The 1871 has a column for 'Whether blind, deaf, dumb, imbecile, idiot or lunatic'. The 1881 varies this slightly 'Whether deaf and dumb, blind, imbecile or idiot, or lunatic'. The 1891 and 1901 have 'Whether deaf, dumb, blind, or lunatic'. Occasionally an enumerator will add other information regarding disabilities.

### **Where can I find the censuses?**

Local record offices, LDS Family History Centres, Family History Societies are amongst places that will hold copies of the censuses.

TheGenealogist ([www.thegenealogist.co.uk](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk)) has transcriptions and images of all the London censuses, and BritishOrigins who are bringing more counties out on a regular basis.

The 1841 census is being added to [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) and [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) in 2006. Ancestry, which is a subscription service, has all the other censuses to 1901 available.

The 1861 and 1891 censuses are also available on [www.1837online.com](http://www.1837online.com) as transcriptions and as images. This is a pay to view site.

The 1881 census transcriptions are available, free of charge, on [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).

The 1901 is available as transcriptions and images on [www.1901census.nationalarchives.gov.uk/](http://www.1901census.nationalarchives.gov.uk/). Searching is free but there is a charge for the images or a transcription.

Parts of the censuses are gradually being added to FreeCen (<http://freecen.rootsweb.com/>) but only a small section of the 1891 for London is transcribed at present. There is a transcript for the whole of Lambeth in 1891 available at [www.familyhistoryonline.net](http://www.familyhistoryonline.net).

The censuses are also available for purchase on CD-ROMs from, amongst others, Stepping Stones, S & N and ArchiveCD Books.

There are a number of census indices available on fiche/CD from the various Family History Societies. Almost the whole of London in 1851 is thus indexed. All these indices are at the FRC, and it is worth checking with other large family history libraries both in and outside the UK to see

whether they hold any indices and, if so, for which areas.

### **What was the date of the census?**

On Sunday midnight as follows:

6 June 1841  
30 March 1851  
7 April 1861  
2 April 1871  
3 April 1881  
5 April 1891  
31 March 1901  
2 April 1911  
19 April 1921  
26 April 1931 (destroyed in WWII)  
29 September 1939 National Registration (Although this was not a census the information contained therein is very close to. It is also subject to the 100 year rule.)  
1941 (no census taken due to WWII)

The next census to be made available will be the 1911 which won't be released until the first working day after 1 January 2012 as it is covered by the S.41 exemption of the Freedom of Information Act relating to breach of confidence.

### **Where can I find out if there is a pre-1841 census available?**

There are a few, a very few, surviving 1821 or other early census listings; they were intended only as a numerical check on the numbers in total and in the various age groups (how many potential young soldiers if needed etc). However, the simplest way of making sure you have collected the numerical data from each house is to note the name of the household and line up the statistics against it (\*1M 40+, 1F 40+, 2M 20+, 3F 15+, 1M 10+, 1F 10+, 3 F 1M 5+) and also the very approximate allocation to occupation -- farming, industrial, not employed (which caught the paupers and the rich).

In just a few places, these summaries were not junked after collection, but kept and very rarely even amplified by the notes of the enumerator (e.g. local schoolmaster or overseer of the poor). There was a lot of point if it helped the overseers plan their likely requirements.

There are so few for the whole country that most of them have been, or will be, published. In London, there are returns with householder's names for:

1801 Chelsea (St Luke); Chiswick; Hampstead; Hendon; St James (part of) and St Margaret (limited names), St Mary Le Strand (limited), Westminster:

1811 Hampstead; Hackney St John\*, Hendon; New Brentford

1821 Hammersmith, Hackney St John, Marylebone\*, Poplar, Willesden, Westminster (St Mary le Strand limited, part of St Margaret)

1831 Hackney, Hammersmith, Little Stanmore, Marylebone, Poplar, Harrow, Willesden

\*more detailed information

These are mostly kept by the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) or Westminster Archives and are normally available for searching.

(Our thanks to Eve McLaughlin for the information in this section.)

### **Why is my ancestor shown in two places at once?**

It sometimes happens that a person is enumerated where they would normally be, ie at home, and also where they actually were, ie visiting or at work.

### **Why is my ancestor shown as a son in law when he's only 5?**

Relationships are sometimes shown using a different terminology from that which we are used to today, e.g. step or half relations are sometimes shown as in-laws. Thus, a 5 year old son in law is likely to be a son from a previous marriage or relationship.

### **Why can't I find my ancestor in the census?**

There are many reasons why ancestors appear elusive. They might be:

In an institution and enumerated by initials

Not in England - check Wales and Scotland and Channel Islands

At sea (it was only from 1861 that vessels were included)

In domestic service and employer couldn't be bothered to check exact details

Enumerator's schedules were incorrectly bound (for instance the parents are at the bottom of one page and children five pages later at the top, with the children, therefore, transcribed as belonging to the wrong family - solution is to always check the schedule numbers)

Incorrectly transcribed by enumerator (if we think his handwriting is bad, we can only imagine what that of the average householder must have been like)

Incorrectly transcribed by indexers.

The parish or district is completely or partially missing.

In the 1841 census, Paddington (HO107-680) is missing.

In the 1861 census several districts are missing.

Belgravia is totally missing. It doesn't have a piece number, but is sub-district 3 of St George Hanover Square. It includes parts (though not all) of Pimlico. In West London South (RG9-219) St Dunstan in the West is intact, rest is lost. Most of Woolwich Arsenal (RG9-407) is missing, but a small part does survive.

As well as the sections mentioned here, literally thousands of individual pages or small groups of pages are also missing.

Although the administrative County of London was not established until 1889, London was a "census county" from 1851 onwards, bringing together those parts of Middlesex, Surrey, Kent and Essex which formed the metropolis. This can cause all sorts of confusion and complications for those researching "London" ancestors. See here for more details

### **Are the civil and ecclesiastical parishes the same?**

No, they aren't. A civil parish is a unit of local government, responsible originally for the collection and distribution of poor rates. An ecclesiastical parish is the area served by a specific church. Confusion can arise because civil parishes are generally known by the name of the original main parish church. For example, St George's Hanover Square is a civil parish containing many ecclesiastical parishes, one of which is St George's in Hanover Square. The use of a contemporary map is invaluable in understanding census locations.