

EVERYONE HAS ROOTS

No. 4 - “Growing your tree with census returns”

The census returns are one of the most important resources that family historians have available. By identifying your family on as many returns as possible you are able to find out how a family evolved over the years and use the information in tracking down elusive ancestors.

Census returns were completed by each household on a specific night every 10 years from 1801, but until 1841 were basically headcounts or information about the head of the household and few have survived. Those post 1841 contain valuable information.

For every census an enumerator delivered a form to each household in the country for them to complete. The heads of household were instructed to give details of everyone who slept in their dwelling on census night, always a Sunday. The forms completed by each household were then collected by the enumerator. In the 1841 to 1901 censuses the information from the forms was copied into enumeration books. Once the enumeration books had been completed the household schedules were destroyed. It is the enumeration books that you consult during your research.

Because of privacy rules there is a 100-year closure on all the censuses, so the 1911 census is the latest available for research. The 1921 census will become publicly available in January 2022. The 1931 census was destroyed. There was no census taken in 1941 because of the war. We have a long wait for the release of the 1951 census.

The census was taken at midnight on:

6 – 7 June 1841 identified by the series and piece numbers HO107/ 1- 1465

30 – 31 March 1851 also identified by the series and piece numbers HO107/ 1466 - 2532

7 – 8 April 1861 RG9

2 – 3 April 1871 RG10

3 - 4 April 1881 RG11

5 – 6 April 1891 RG12

31 Mar – 1 Apr 1901 RG13

2 April 1911 RG14.

The census returns from 1841 to 1911 have been digitised and name indexed and are available online. You can search by name, browse by place, or locate an exact page if you have the full census reference.

A census reference consists of a government department code (HO = Home Office, RG = Registrar General), a series number, and a piece number. A piece contains many pages identified firstly by folio numbers and then page numbers. Folio numbers are shown on every other page usually bold numbers in the right-hand top corner. The location of page numbers differs depending upon the return. Individual dwellings or occupancies are further

identified by schedules and some online sources provide the latter as well as the full reference.

For example, a reference of **HO107/1830/111/4** in the 1851 census is compiled as follows:

111

Parish or Township of		Ecclesiastical District of		City or Borough of		Town of		Village of		
No. of House	Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House	Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where Born		Whether Blind, or Deaf, or Dumb
					Male	Female				
19	Wach Lane	James Ferris	Head	Mar	32	-	Ag Lab	Norfolk	Norwiche	
		Susan Ferris	Wife	Mar	32	-	Put over Work	do	do	
		Herbert Ferris	Son	-	-	-	At Home	do	do	
20	do	Sarah Balls	Head	Widow	66	-	Chain Maker	do	Norwiche	
		James Balls	Son	Wid	12	-	Ag Lab	do	do	
		Nehemiah Balls	do	Wid	26	-	Ag Lab	do	do	
		Charles Balls	do	Wid	24	-	do	do	do	
21	do	William Chesson	Head	Mar	40	-	Ag Lab	do	do	
		Mary Chesson	Wife	Mar	34	-	Put over Work	do	do	
		Mariah Chesson	Daughter	-	-	-	do	do	do	
		John Chesson	Son	-	-	-	At Home	do	do	
		William Chesson	do	-	-	-	do	do	do	
		Thomas Chesson	do	-	-	-	do	do	do	
		Sarah Chesson	Daughter	-	-	-	do	do	do	
22	do	John Thurston	Head	Widow	79	-	Ag Lab	do	Stamford	
		Sarah Thurston	Daughter	Wid	26	-	Put over Work	do	Norwiche	
		William Thurston	Grandson	-	-	-	Scholar	do	do	
		Charlotte Thurston	Granddaughter	-	-	-	At Home	do	do	
		Mary Ann Thurston	do	-	-	-	At Home	do	do	
		Mary Ann Murrell	Daughter	Mar	27	-	Waiter	do	do	
Total of Houses 14				Total of Persons 19						

B 2

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1	2	3	4	5	6
		1		2	

Reference: **H.O. 107/1830**

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Census returns only provide a snapshot of the family on a particular date but enable an analysis to indicate which events may have taken place in the family structure in the intervening years, be it possible deaths, marriages and remarriages, births, move outs etc. Used in conjunction with other information they prove very informative. The usefulness becomes very apparent as you develop analytical skills and find your ancestors in as many returns as you can.

What you see as you search between 1841 and 1901 are the transcribed enumeration books arranged geographically by district. In 1911 you see the actual household return.

In theory, everyone was recorded in the census even if your ancestors were prisoners, workhouse inmates, in hotels or hospital or even fairground or circus workers living in a caravan. There are however, many shortcomings and logical reasons why a person may not show. A few returns were even lost or damaged over time.

Each census had a purpose. For example, the first taken on 10 March 1801 during the Napoleonic Wars was intended to provide statistical information to manage the demand for food and find out how many men were of military age.

The 1841 census records the names of everybody resident at the address on census night. Householders were asked to describe the occupations of people at their property which

may have included servants and apprentices so you could find ancestors residing with an employer rather than with their own family.

The censuses gradually became more detailed with every decade that passed. Marital status was included from 1851 onwards, together with the relationship of each person to the head of the household. Your ancestor may have been boarding at an address temporarily or may have had visitors staying on census night.

Enquiries were also made asking if people were 'blind or deaf-and-dumb' and from 1871 whether anyone was deemed to be a 'lunatic, imbecile or idiot', by Victorian standards that is! Some census questions were about employment status in the later census returns.

The 1911 census is the most detailed and is the census that most people start with systematically working through the earlier returns. The 1911 census was known as the "fertility census" as you will discover how long your ancestors had been married, how many children they had, and whether any had died. This can be used alongside the marriage, birth and death certificates to paint a picture of our ancestors' lives.

The 1911 census is also unique as we see the original forms completed in the householder's own handwriting showing also the signature of the person who completed the form (usually the head of the household).

SEARCHING FOR YOUR ANCESTORS IN THE CENSUS RETURNS

The digitisation and indexing of the 1841-1911 censuses make it straightforward to locate ancestors as you can search by name, age, place of birth and residence and also cross-reference with the names of relatives who should be in the same house. However, every now and then a family seems to just disappear and you have to think laterally how to find them. This can happen for a number of reasons.

Because enumerators transferred the information from the household forms into the enumeration books, they could have mis-interpreted or mis-copied your ancestor's handwriting. They may also have had to complete the return on the doorstep if the householder was illiterate and would have recorded what they heard or how they thought a name was spelt. Any errors could be compounded when the online indexers struggled to read the enumerator's handwriting thus rendering the digital indexes inaccurate. The biggest challenge facing researchers is the interpretation of the capital letter at the start of a surname. When you are unable to find your family try looking at different website indexes as all are separately transcribed.

1841 census

Although the detail contained is not as comprehensive as later returns the 1841 census is invaluable when you reach the transition period within the early 1800s before civil registration and the useful Victorian censuses.

The 1841 census contains the following information:

Name.

Age - unique to this census the ages are rounded down to the nearest five years for people over the age of 15, up to then the ages are supposed to be exact.

Sex.

Occupation.

birth place - whether they were born in the county where they were enumerated or whether they were born in Scotland (S), Ireland (I) or Foreign Parts (P).

This census was void of information on relationships, marital status and occupations.

The image shows two pages of a census form, numbered 28 and 29. Page 28 is for 'Earlside High Street' and page 29 is for 'Post-Office High Street'. Both pages list names, ages, sexes, professions, and birthplaces. A vertical stamp on the left of page 28 reads 'HO 107 / 872 / 17'.

PLACE	HOUSES	NAMES	AGE and SEX		PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, or of INDEPENDENT MEANS.	Where Born	
			Male	Female		Wales	Foreign Parts
Earlside High Street		William Fisher	8			4	
		Thomas do	6			4	
		John Colman	40			20	
		Ann do	40			20	
		John Williams	30		Ag Lab	20	
		William Cooper	50			4	
		John Gardner	20		Ag Lab	20	
		John do	10			4	
		William do	10			20	
		William Luff	60		Lab	4	
		Ann do	50			20	
		John Curney	50		Plasterer	20	
		Ann do	20			4	
		John Curney	40			4	
		Ann Curney	50			4	
		John Curney	50		Ag Lab	4	
		Ann do	35			4	
		John do	40		Lab	4	
	John do	55			4		
	John do	30		Coal boy	4		
	John do	10			4		
	John do	30		Ag Lab	20		
	Ann do	50			20		
	Ann do	8			4		
	Ann do	1			4		
TOTAL in 2						132	
Page 17							
City or Borough of <u>Bristol</u>							
Parish or Township of <u>Bristol</u>							
PLACE	HOUSES	NAMES	AGE and SEX		PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, or of INDEPENDENT MEANS.	Where Born	
			Male	Female		Wales	Foreign Parts
Post-Office High Street		Jessie Burtell	20			4	
		John do	20			4	
		Ann do	15			4	
		John do	4			20	
		John do	20			4	
		John do	20		Lab	4	
		Ann do	20			4	
		John do	20			4	
		John do	20			4	
		John do	20			4	
		John do	15			4	
		Ann do	3			4	
		Ann do	1			4	
		Ann do	2			4	
		Ann do	10			4	
		Ann do	10			20	
		Ann do	9			20	
		Ann do	7			20	
	Ann do	15		S.L.	20		
	Ann do	10			4		
	Ann do	10			4		
TOTAL in 2						169	
Page 18							

1851 and 1861 census

From 1851 the census returns follow much the same pattern with slightly differing information. They are much more informative and therefore become more useful in your research.

The 1851 and 1861 census returns contain the following information:

- Name -middle names are sometimes identified by initials.
- relationship to the head of the household.
- marital status.
- Age.
- Sex.
- Rank, profession or occupation.
- Where born – county and parish if born in England or Wales, country only if born outside England and Wales. Sometimes enumerators only recorded the county for England and Wales.
- Whether blind, or deaf and dumb.

1871 and 1881 census

Contain the same information as the 1851 and 1861 census except the medical conditions are expanded to include:

Blind, Deaf and Dumb, Imbecile or Idiot and Lunatic, however, definitions of the latter are only loosely defined and leave a lot to individual interpretation.

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The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the [Page 21]

Civil Parish (an Township) of		City or Town	Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Sever	Village or Hamlet, &c., of	Local Board, or (Commissioners) of	Administrative District of
St. Mary, Bristol		Bristol	St. Mary, Bristol	Bristol	Bristol			Bristol	St. Mary, Bristol
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES Inhabited (to be marked with a tick)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION	AGE of	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	Whether 1. Deaf and Dumb 2. Blind 3. Imbecile or Idiot 4. Lunatic
						Males Females			
134	19 South Place	1	Elizabeth J. Robertson	Wife	Mar.	26	Captn's Wife	Baptist Gloucestershire	
			Helen J. de	(Daughter)	Mar.	15	Seamstress	Bristol	
			Ann M. de	de	de	13	Child	de	
			Sarah A. de	de	de	12	de	de	
			Emily W. de	de	de	8	de	de	
135	20 do	1	Elizabeth A. Nash	Wife	Mar.	24	Charwoman	Wilton de	
			Hannah W. Nash	Sister	Mar.	24	de	de de	
136	21 do	1	Jane East	Head	M.	16	de	Bristol	
			Siwanub S. de	(Daughter)	Mar.	14	Dee mucker	de	
137	21 do	1	Sarah Burrows	Head	M.	53	Janetress	South Bristol Somerset	
138	22 do	1	Maria Hancock	Head	M.	24	(late) Tobacconist	Warbon Monmouth	
			Sarah de	(Daughter)	Mar.	20	de	Bristol	
139	22 do	1	Edward Matthew	Head	Mar.	24	Book-binder	de	
			Maria de	Wife	de	20	de	de	
140	22 do	1	Ann Hudson	Head	Mar.	61	de	de	
	23 do	1	de	de	de	de	de	de	
142	24 do	1	Robert Miller	Head	Mar.	60	Black & Stray Shopper	Leipers Gloucestershire	
			Ann E. de	Wife	de	60	de	Warford Oxfordshire	
			Florence H. de	(Daughter)	Mar.	29	Assistant to a Photographer	de	
143	25 do	1	William Evans	Head	Mar.	52	Copper	Bristol	
			Sarah de	Wife	Mar.	41	de	de	
144	26 do	1	Alexander Parker	Son	Mar.	48	Cart to Wholesale Grocers	Wickham Southhampton	
145	26 do	1	William Taylor	Head	Mar.	68	de	Bristol	
			Charlotte de	Wife	de	40	de	de	
	West Side Ship Lane	18	Con Lane & Gable	de	de	de	de	de	
Total of Houses..		270	Total of Males and Females..			518			

* Draw the pen through such of the words as are inappropriate.

Eng- Sheet E.

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Reference -

PC10/8520

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1891 census

Base information is as the earlier post 1851 census returns with following additional information on employment:

Whether an employer or employed, or whether not an employer or employed.

On Welsh returns they also asked for language spoken.

1901 census

Information as contained in the 1891 census with some enhancement to the employment questions.

Employer, Worker or Own account (Self- employed).

Whether working at home.

Manx language spoken (for Isle of Man returns only).

1911 census - frequently referred to as the "fertility census"

The information seen on individually completed household forms as opposed to enumeration books contained the same information as in 1901 plus the following.

For married women only, the number of years of their present marriage, the number of children born of that marriage, the number still living, and the number that had died – this was frequently placed against the husband and included ALL children.

The industry in which the person was employed and if employed by a government, municipal or other public body, the name of that body.

Parish and county of birth for anyone born in the UK - this time including all of Ireland and If born in the British Empire where.

For any foreigner - whether they were resident or visitor in the country.

Nationality of anyone born overseas including those born of British parentage.

Infirmity - the age at which the person had become afflicted.

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedule 216
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection)

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX		PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE				PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged 10 years and upwards				BIRTHPLACE of every person		NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country	INFIRMITY
		Males	Females	Single, Married, Widowed, or Divorced	Completed years of present Marriage	Children born alive to present Marriage	Children born alive to previous Marriage	Personal Occupation	Industry or Service with which worker is connected	Whether Employer, Worker, or Workman on Own Account	Whether Working at Home	(1) If born in the United Kingdom, write the name of the County, and Town or Parish	(2) If born in any other part of the British Empire, write the name of the Dependency, Colony, etc., and of the Province or State		
Alfred Shouler	Head	45		Married	14	3	3	Bookmaker	Railway	Worker	at home	Wilton, Wiltshire	British		
Maudie E. Shouler	Wife	45		Married	14							Wilton, Wiltshire	British		
Dennis H. Shouler	Son	14						Grocer Assistant	Co-op Society	Worker		Wiltshire	British		
Constance D. Shouler	Daughter	11						School				Wiltshire	British		
Lucie F. Shouler	Son	6						School				Wiltshire	British		

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

I certify that—		Total	
(1) All the names on this Schedule are entered in the proper columns.	(2) I have counted the males and females in Columns 2 and 3 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.	Males	Females
(3) After making the necessary corrections I have compared all entries on this Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.		3	2

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor warehouse, office, shop.

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: Alfred Shouler
Postal Address: 54 Tintock Road, Wiltshire

Interpreting the census information

Your ancestor's name could have changed between census years. This frequently happened when a woman's husband died, she re-married and her children from her first marriage adopted their stepfather's surname.

If any of your ancestors were institutionalised in places such as a prison or workhouse they may have been listed only by their initials which could make finding them more challenging. Some people deliberately gave misleading information to evade resettlement by the authorities, while the Suffragettes encouraged supporters to boycott the 1911 census altogether.

If you can't find your family on a census return it might be that they were abroad. Many British men in 1901 were in South Africa serving in the army in the Boer War.

It is important to identify your ancestors in as many census returns as you can and then compare the information. Ages and places of birth may vary and if you rely only on one set of census papers you may be misled in further research as you could be looking in the wrong places or time period. In most cases however, you should be able to find your ancestors on the census without too much trouble, but where there are gaps, other records will need to be used.

There are various other reasons why you may struggle to locate your ancestors in every census although they were alive.

Enumeration error – misinterpretation as previously discussed or omission of information on the household forms. Some enumerators have even transposed information between lines giving different information.

Refusal to complete a return – although technically a criminal offence. People managed to avoid officialdom in this way as few were actually prosecuted.

Pages missed in filming – human error.

Original records destroyed or lost – various sections of census returns are not available.

Houses physically missed – in courtyards, alleys, isolated rural areas.

Change of street name or numbering system.

The flit – by staying ahead of their landlords many people evaded completing a census return.

On a ship or in a foreign country.

Travelling – as the census was related to a specific time of midnight those not resident at the time legitimately were not always enumerated. Such cases as itinerants, barge people, commercial travellers, train crew etc. who were not at home.

Working away from home and enumerated elsewhere – in other words not where you would expect them to be. To some extent this can be mitigated by putting information into search fields and missing out the place of residence.

Ships and Institutions

Special enumeration books were completed for institutions such as workhouses, barracks and hospitals in every census year from 1851, including 1911.

Census returns for ships, barges etc were introduced in 1851 but none survive for that year.

The 1861 census was the first to include returns from the Royal Navy and merchant shipping both at sea and in British ports and abroad. These are known to be incomplete as forms were not always collected from ships who were at sea or in foreign ports.

In 1861 all returns for the Royal Navy and merchant vessels are at the end of the series covering their location. In later returns vessels in home ports are listed at the end of the enumeration districts where they were docked and those in foreign waters are all together at the end of the series.

There are no surviving 1891 census returns for Royal Navy ships in foreign waters. In 1901 Royal Navy ships in foreign waters are listed alphabetically, and there are no returns for ships with names A-H except for HMS Cygnet which can be found at the National Archives in piece RG 19/20.

Missing pieces of the census

There is a complete and detailed list of missing census pieces available on the FindmyPast website:

<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/census-for-england-wales-and-scotland-missing-pieces>

Your research journey doesn't end with the census and certificates. There are many other basic sources that will help you trace your ancestors' history.

The 1939 Register

Although there are no available census records beyond 1911 there is one valuable set of documents created on 29 September 1939, national registration day. The 1939 Register is a useful stopgap during our recent history. It provides information about what ordinary people were doing at the start of the Second World War. It was used in order to implement a system of identity cards, and legislation made it a requirement that cards must be produced on demand or presented to a police station within 48 hours. The national identity system was operative until 21 February 1952.

Every man, woman and child had to carry an identity card at all times and the cards would include the following information:

Name

Sex

Age

Occupation, profession, trade or employment

Address; Marital status

Membership of Naval, Military or Air Force Reserves or Auxiliary Forces or of Civil Defence Services or Reserves.

You may find different colour card within your family archive. The most common were the blue version issued in 1943 for adults. Until then all identity cards had been brown. Government officials had green ID cards with a photograph whilst those in the armed services had completely separate identification cards.

Children under 16 were issued with Identity Cards but they were to be kept by their parents. Identification was necessary if families got separated from one another or their house was bombed, and if people were injured or killed.

Of particular value to family historians is the lower section of the card showing changes of address. Many people moved several times during the war.

The register was implemented in much the same way as the census. 65,000 enumerators across the country delivered forms ahead of the day and on 29 September 1939, householders were required to record details on the registration forms. On the following Sunday and Monday the enumerators visited every householder, checked the form and there and then issued a completed identity card for each of the residents.

So, why was the register introduced and how valuable is it as a tool for research?

The major dislocation of the population caused by mobilisation and mass evacuation needed to be tracked. There was a wartime requirement for complete manpower control and planning in order to maximise the efficiency of the war economy. It also helped in the implementation of the rationing system which was introduced in January 1940.

As the last census had been held in 1931, there was little accurate data on which to base vital planning decisions. The National Register acted as an instant census.

For family history the identity card and the schedules are valuable.

Not everyone was included, those recorded were the civilian population of England and Wales but not the civilian population of Channel Islands or Isle of Man. Scotland and Northern Ireland had their own separate systems.

Armed forces personnel were not included unless they were at home on leave or were civilians working on military bases. No records exist for British army barracks, Royal Navy stations, Royal Air Force bases or for members of the armed forces billeted in homes.

Information included in the register:

Name.

Full date of birth – This is useful to find or confirm the birth date of an ancestor.

Address.

Marital status – because the register was “live” the married surname of many females (if they married subsequent to 1939) are also included.

Occupation - were recorded in great detail so that the Government would be able to identify trades and skills that would be useful in the war effort.

Most people are recorded as a member of a household. Some people are recorded as a member of an institution.

ADDRESS.		SCHEDULE.		SURNAME AND OTHER NAMES.		O, V, S, P, or I.	M. or F.	BIRTH-		S, M, W, or D.	PERSONAL OCCUPATION.	See INSTRUCTIONS.
1		No.	Sub. No.	4	5			6	7			
Clifton St. Fern Rd		125	2	Mead Ethel		F	7 Nov 84		M	Unpaid domestic duties		
8 Fern Rd		126	1	Millward James		M	21 Nov 84		M	Day Worker		
Ditto			2	Millward Betsy		F	22 Feb 88		M	Unpaid domestic duties		
Belvedere Fern Rd		127	1	White Susan W.		M	13 Apr 89		M	Consol basket foot trade		
Ditto			2	White Nellie		F	14 June 87		M	Unpaid domestic		
Ditto			3	White Alice		F	20 Nov 87		M	Unpaid domestic		

You may not see information for certain individuals. An individuals' records remains closed for 100 years from their date of birth because of the 100-year privacy rule, as applied to all census records. Records remain closed for people born less than 100 years ago until proof of death is verified. You are able to have an entry opened if you have a death certificate and know that the closed entry in the register would have related to the individual concerned.

The register can be searched online at FindMyPast, Ancestry and My Heritage. Information may be more up to date on FindMyPast because they have opened originally closed records when death has been proven, as part of the administration granted to them under the original licence. These entries may not have been updated on other search sites.

WHERE NOW?

Now that you have got yourselves organised you can progress further and begin the research. The following guides are available to help you gain an understanding of how to research and what you can discover about your ancestors.

EVERYONE HAS ROOTS (a series of helpful research guides)

- No. 1 *It starts with you*
- No. 2 *Ready to begin your research*
- No. 3 *Birth, marriage & death certificates*
- No. 4 *Grow your tree with census returns***
- No. 5 *Baptism, marriage & burial registers*
- No. 6 *Records created after death*
- No. 7 *Discovering more about your ancestors*
- No. 8 *The military connection*
- No. 9 *Tracing your ancestors when they moved*
- No. 10 *Proving your research is correct*