

Introduction: Using the Census

The Census is a brilliant document to use to find out about the history of your family or your area. You can choose a street and you can find out about the people who lived there over 100 years ago. The Census can tell us all sorts of things about the people who lived in 1891 because of the questions they had to answer. To find out this information you need to understand the entries that are made on the Census returns. These can be hard to read so here are some to practice on.

[illegible]

A Census return

from 1891

Road, Street and number or name of house

ROAD, STREET, and No. or Name of House
34 Melman Street
34 Melman Street
34 Melman Street
34 Melman Street

This is where the name of the house and street was recorded. This information is very important as it gives you the location you are looking for.

Have a look at this Census return, can you make out the names of the houses?

Problems

A problem you might have is that the street name has changed or the houses have been destroyed or replaced. This often happens where housing was destroyed during the Second World War. Also a lot of very poor housing (slums) was replaced after the war.

Number of rooms occupied if less than five

Number of rooms occupied if less than five
2
2
2
1

This information tells you if people were living in just a few rooms. If the number of rooms occupied is 2 and there are 8 people living in just these rooms then you can tell they were living in very cramped conditions and were likely to be poor.

Name and surname of each person

NAME and Surname of each Person
Morris Richard
do Mary
do Eleanor
do Richard
do Ada
do Walt
do Ethel
George Parkin
Caighell Charles
do Jane
do Margaret
do Charles
Edward Bifield
Hannah Bifield
Walter Burton

This is where the name of each person was recorded. This information is very important as it gives you name of the family and the number of people in the house and shows if they were part of the same family. When you see this “do” it means all the people with this mark have the same surname.

Have a look at this Census return, can you make out the names of all the people?

Problems

Even something as simple as recording a name could result in a mistake. This often happened when an enumerator misheard a name. For example, William Price may have been heard as William Bryce. Mistakes could also be made when the enumerator was copying information from the original form to the official book?

Relation to the Head of the Family

RELATION to Head of Family
Head
Wife
Daughter
Son
Daughter
Son
Daughter
Stepson
Head
Wife
Daughter
Son
Head
Wife
Head

This is where the relation to the Head of the Family of each person was given. The Head of the family was usually a man in the Victorian age (1837 - 1901) The rest of the people were then usually shown as:

Wives, Daughters

Sons, Sisters

Brothers, Visitors

Servants, Lodgers

Have a look at this Census return, can you make out the descriptions of all the people?

Problems?

Relationships were not always described in the way they would be today. Brothers and sisters-in-law could be described as brother or sister, grandchildren could be recorded as son or daughter

Condition as to marriage

CONDITION as to Marriage
M
M
S
S
S
S
S
M
M
S
S
M
M
S

This is where it was recorded if the person was married, widowed or single. If a woman was widowed then she could become Head of the Family.

Have a look at this Census return, can you make out the descriptions of all the people?

Age Last Birthday

AGE last brthday of Males	AGE last birthday of Females
46	48
17	21
6	8
23	4
49	43
12	22
54	48
40	

Recorded here is the age that people gave. It can tell us all sorts of things, such as what age people began work, how long they lived, at what age people got married and how long sons and daughters stayed living at home.

Have a look at this Census return, can you make out the ages of all the people?

Problems?

This is the area on the Census form where most mistakes occur. In the early days of the Census people often only had a rough idea of their birth. Children's ages may have been increased so that they could leave school and get a job, older people may have increased their age to get access to better rates of poor relief. There was also a belief that some women lied about their ages so that they appeared younger.

Profession or occupation

PROFESSION or OCCUPATION
Painter (house)
Domestic Servant
Porter
Scholar
Scholar
Scholar
Painter (house)
Car-Driver (Groom)
Dressmaker
Scholar
Plasterer
Laundress (Wash)
General Dealer (Hawke)

Recorded here are the professions (jobs) that people did. This is one of the most interesting parts of the Census as you can find out what kind of lives the people would have had. You can begin to tell if they were rich or poor by the type of job they had.

Problems?

Using the occupation field of the Census can be very difficult and it is this area which poses most problems to historians. Many of the jobs are no longer in existence and it is not always easy to find out what these jobs involved. Some jobs were given different titles according to which area of the country the person was living in, whilst some jobs with the same description could involve work of a completely different nature according to the locality.

Perhaps more importantly for historians, the work of women and children was often un- or under-recorded. Domestic work was often not seen by the enumerators as a 'profession' or 'occupation' and was, therefore, not included.

Employer, Employed Neither Employer or Employed

Employer	Employed	Neither Employer or Employed
	y	
	y	
	y	
	y	
	y	
		y

This is where it was recorded if someone else employed the person, was an employer of other people or neither of these. If they were not either of these then it often meant they were self employed. If none of the columns had a cross then the person did not work. If a person employed other people this usually meant they were quite well off.

Where Born

WHERE BORN	
Brompton, London	
do	do
do	do
do	do
Chelsea	do
Chelsea	do
Fulham	do
City Road	do
Scotland	
do	
do	
Surrey Battersea	
Chelsea, London	
Westminster, do	
Chelsea, London	

Recorded here is where people said that they were born. This is very good information as you can find out about the movement of people in 1891. Now it is very common for people to live in different areas and move when they get older. Was it the same in the Victorian age?

Have a look at this Census return, can you make out the places where the people were born?

Problems

The place of birth column is very important to historians who study migration patterns (population movements) and to family historians but the information is not always accurate. A lack of geographical knowledge could prevent people from recording the correct answer and some people simply entered the first place they could remember living, rather than where they were born. Poor spelling of place names can also mislead historians.

Where can I see the Census?

- The national set of Census returns for England, Wales and the Channel Islands for the period 1841-1891 are held at the Family Records Centre in Islington, London. They are on Microfilm and can be searched on site.
- <http://www.pro.gov.uk/about/frc>
Family Records Centre
1 Myddelton Street
London EC1R 1UW
Tel 020 8392 5300 (general enquiries)
- Similar copies are also widely available in family history centres of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
<http://www.lds.org/familyhistory/>
185 Penns Lane
Sutton Coldfield
West Midlands B76 1JU
Tel 0121 384 2028



Local studies libraries and county record offices may hold the returns for their own area. Local record offices sometimes prepare their own indexes to microfilm copies covering their area. Visit this web site which lists the Census material available to you locally.

<http://www.earl.org.uk/familia/libraries.html>

- The 1901 Census is due for release in January 2002 and is being made available over the Internet.

<http://www.pro.gov.uk/Census/>

- Scottish Census returns are held by the Registrar General for Scotland. (A computerised index to the 1881 and 1891 Census of Scotland is available at the Family Record Centre.) Also see below for online access to Scottish Census information.

<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/>

Ladywell House
Ladywell Road
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH12 7TF

- <http://www.origins.net/GRO/>

Scots Origins is the official, Governmental source of genealogical data for Scotland. It is an online "pay-per-view" database of indexes from the genealogical records of the General Register Office for Scotland including the index to Census records for 1891. The index to 1881 Census data will be provided later this year (2000).

- Ireland: The National Archives. No manuscript returns survive for 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891. (The 1901 Census of Leitrim and Roscommon is available on the web)

Visit the Web site for more details

<http://www.nationalarchives.ie/Censusrtns.html>

National Archives of Ireland

Bishop Street

Dublin 8

Tel 00 35 31 4072300

How do I look for the place I want to find?

The Census is listed by place-name, be it part of a city, a town or village. At The Family Records Centre there are street indexes to many of the larger towns and cities, whilst a number of returns have been copied and published or surname-indexed. A national personal name index to the 1881 Census, containing almost twenty-six million names of English, Welsh and Scottish residents, is available on CDROM at The Family Records Centre and elsewhere. You can also search the personal name indexes county by county, or for the whole of England and Wales, Channel Islands and Isle of Man on microfiche at the FRC, local record offices and libraries.

Are there any photographs of the area I want to investigate?

There is no guarantee you can find old photographs of the area you want to look at. However, you will often find that your local archive or library may have a collection of some sort. Also check bookshops for local history books. The place we used to get the photographs for the *Your Turn* [Hyper link] Investigation was the The National Monuments Record (English Heritage), who have an amazing collection of photographs from all over the country.

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/knowledge/nmr/holdings/index.html>
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Great Western Village
Kemble Drive
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