

# Discover English Census Records

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## Defining a Population Census

The United Nations in its *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* available free at [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/docs/P&R\\_Rev2.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/docs/P&R_Rev2.pdf) defines a population census as – “... the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specified time, to all persons in a country or in a well delimited part of a country.” (Chap.2, A. 1.4)

The report continues by stating that “the essential features of a population and housing censuses are individual enumeration, universality within a defined territory, simultaneity and defined periodicity.” (Chap.2, B. 1.8)

Let’s look at the components of the census.

- Individual enumeration implies that every individual in every set of living quarters is recorded separately and identified by whatever information is being gathered for that census (age, place of birth, occupation, etc). This allows cross-classification of information between geographical areas, between occupations, and between censuses
- Universality within a defined territory implies that the census should cover a precisely defined territory, e.g. the entire county or a well-delimited part of it, and again include everyone.
- Simultaneity means that each set of living quarters should be enumerated as of the same well-defined point in time; with the goal of preventing double counting as people move while the census is being performed (this for example is common in 19C USA census returns).
- Defined periodicity implies that censuses should be taken at regular intervals, at least every ten years, so as to make “it possible to appraise the past, accurately describe the present and estimate the future” (Chap.2.B.1.12). This allows trends to be observed, like with the changes in the numbers of miners employed over time, illustrated later in the book.

## Census Background

The first national census was taken in England in 1801 to determine the size of the population, and especially to determine the number of available men for the Napoleonic Wars. A census has been taken every ten years since then, except for 1941 because of World War II. The 1801 to 1831 censuses were headcounts of the population and did not record information about individuals. However, some enumerators did record names in order to count the numbers of the males and females that were to be tabulated.

## How was the census taken and why is it important?

From 1841 to the present the census records the occupants of a location on one specific night varying between census years.

## Census Dates and PRO Class Numbers

<u>Year</u>	<u>Census Date</u>	<u>Class Number</u>
1801	10-30 April	
1811	24 Jun - 20 Jul	
1821	25 Jun - 21 Jul	
1831	30 May	
1841	7 June	HO 107
1851	31 March	HO 107
1861	8 April	RG 9
1871	3 April	RG 10
1881	4 April	RG 11
1891	6 April	RG 12
1901	1 April	RG 13
1911	2 April	RG14

## What will the census records tell me?

If you had ancestors born in England, Wales, or Scotland, from about 1770 onward, you should search for them or their relatives in the census returns of 1841 and later. Although the civil registration of births started in 1837, the census will get you back even earlier. It will tell you the age and birthplace of everyone recorded and will also tell you the names of

the parents of children living at home. British census records are genealogical goldmines!

The 1841 census lists each member of the household who was present on the census night and gives the exact age for children under age 15 and approximate ages rounded down to the nearest five for all others.

The 1851 and later censuses add the exact ages (as reported to the census taker) for each member of the household, the relationship to the head of the household, marital status, and exact place of birth (parish or town and county) for those who were not foreign born.

The 1891 also adds information about the house and employment.

The 1901 census took the same form as the 1891 census but care is needed as there were many boundary changes in the intervening decade. These changes are available on maps at The National Archives in RG18.

The 1911 census sought to address fertility concerns by asking how many years the present marriage has lasted, the number of children born alive to the present marriage (not just those living in the house) and how many had died. This can provide clues to missing children or additional marriages.

The census is one record that reconstructs and documents a family, not just individuals.

### Where to Start

This has changed drastically because of the easy access to online indexes and images.

### Accessing Indexes and Images of Originals

Census searching has changed drastically over the last few years, making access to indexes and originals easier with multiple options.

1. Local FHC
2. Online indexes
3. Online indexes with attached images
4. Published Indexes

**1. Local Family History Center (FHC)** - provides access to images of 1841 through 1891 census on microfilm or microfiche (1891). The 1901 and 1911 censuses are not available through the FHL. Access by

searching for the locality of interest in the Family History Library catalog. Some name indexes are available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City but they are rarely circulating copies. A complete transcript of the 1881 census is available online at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org).

### 2. Online indexes

[FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org) provides free access to the 1881 census index.

Free Census - at <http://freecen.rootsweb.com/> provides free indexes and transcriptions provided by volunteers. Coverage varies greatly by county and year.

Genuki - at [www.genuki.org.uk/](http://www.genuki.org.uk/) - check for each county under census to find other indexes.

Census Finder - at [www.censusfinder.com/](http://www.censusfinder.com/) probably provides the most comprehensive way to find local transcriptions, organized by county. The site also includes directories, parish registers, and tax lists.

### 3. Online Index with attached images

National Archives - at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) provides links to partners for different years. The 1911 census is provided by FindMyPast; the 1901 Census was originally provided by The National Archives but now links to GenesReunited. The earlier census years are provided by Ancestry.com. All are fee based.

Ancestry - at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) provides access to indexes with linked images for all census years, 1841 through 1911, including 1881 images.

FindMyPast - at [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com) provides access to complete index and images for 1841 through 1911. You can search on name of person, address or reference citation. On the advanced name search screen you have the added benefit of also being able to name another person in the same household. This is the only site that allows a citation reference search.

S & N Genealogy has two websites - The Genealogist and RootsUK - at [www.thegenealogist.co.uk](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk) and [www.RootsUK.com](http://www.RootsUK.com) respectively. The Genealogist provides access to the transcripts for 1841 through 1911, but not complete for all counties, while RootsUK provides access to census transcripts for

1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1891 and 1901. The census has linked images so the original pages can be viewed. You can also view the transcript of the household.

GenesReunited - at [www.genesreunited.co.uk](http://www.genesreunited.co.uk) incorporates the National Archives 1901 data set, plus has licensed the 1841-1871, and 1891 from The Genealogist.

#### 4. Published or CD-ROM Indexes

Daniel Morgan - at [www.mit.edu/~dfm/genealogy/census-chart.html](http://www.mit.edu/~dfm/genealogy/census-chart.html) has created a chart arranged by county for online and CD-ROM census indexes, not published in book form.

GenFair - at [www.genfair.co.uk](http://www.genfair.co.uk) provides access to over 15,000 items from over 100 suppliers of Family and Local History suppliers including most of the county family history societies.

Parish Chest - at [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com) - sells census CD-ROM from a variety of vendors.

Genuki - at [www.genuki.org.uk/](http://www.genuki.org.uk/) - check for each county under census to find other indexes. County FHS may sell through Genfair.

Society of Genealogists - at [www.sog.org.uk](http://www.sog.org.uk) - is the largest genealogical library in England. Search the catalog by place or subject to identify indexes published for the location of interest.

S & N Genealogy at [www.genealogysupplies.com](http://www.genealogysupplies.com) and its other sites British Data Archive - at [www.britishdataarchive.com](http://www.britishdataarchive.com) sell CD-ROM indexes searchable by surname, forename and age. Matching entries are displayed with a full reference so you can find the image on the British Data Archive CD-ROM sets. The index and the images are not linked together.

#### Online Census Searching

Focus here will be on Ancestry and FindMyPast that provide online indexes with attached images, but you should be aware of the alternatives.

[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)  
[www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)  
[www.1901censusonline.com](http://www.1901censusonline.com)  
[www.1911censusonline.com](http://www.1911censusonline.com)  
[www.thegenealogist.co.uk](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk)

#### Search all Census Years

Census records containing names are available for 1841 through 1911. Search for the family in all years. This process gives you details of family movement, plus clues to birth, marriage and death dates.

#### Cautions for using and interpreting census information

Remember:

- Any given piece of information may be incorrect.
- Be suspicious of ages.
- Names used by an individual may not be the same as those found in civil registration or church records.
- Names of places and people may be misspelled or spelled as they sound.
- Individuals missing from a household should be listed elsewhere in the census.
- Relationships should be stated to the head of household. Take care with visitors.
- Relationships may not be as we understand them today.

#### Citing Your Census

All census returns need to be accurately cited. If you provide an accurate citation then anyone in the world can replicate your search

##### 1841

1841 Census of England, [county], [city], [parish], [person]; TNA Class, Piece, Book, Folio, Page [access method - online which site, or FHL film number]

Example: 1841 Census of England, Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, St. Johns parish, Walter and Mary Talford; TNA HO 107/824/14 f. 9, p. 13. [accessed [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com) on 1 Jul 2015]

##### 1851-1901 format the same

1851 Census of England, [county], [city], [parish], [person]; TNA Class, Piece, Folio, Page [access method - online which site, or FHL film number]

Example (1851 census) - 1851 Census of England, Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Westgate, Mary Isabella Telford, TNA HO 107/ 2404, f 240, p. 37 [accessed [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com) on 1 Jul 2015]

1911 census returns are different and only available online.

The citation for Milner Reggue is

RG14PN3862 RG78PN147 RD45 SD2 ED7 SN117

Translated:

RG14 Registrar General records - household schedules  
PN3862 piece number  
RG78 Registrar General enumerator summary books  
PN147 piece number  
RD45 Registration District  
SD2 Registration Sub-District  
ED7 Enumeration District  
SN117 Schedule Number within the Household schedules RG14

Note that 117 - the schedule number is the only part of this reference that actually appears on the one page currently provided in the census search.

### Going Further - Online Historical Population Reports

At [www.histpop.org](http://www.histpop.org) providing over 200,000 pages of census and registration material for the British Isles.

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