

Source Guide No. 2

THE CENSUS

WHAT IS THE CENSUS?

Censuses are records of who lived in each household in Britain, which have been taken every 10 years since 1801, with the exception of 1941, during World War II, when no Census was taken. Those from 1841 onwards are of use to family historians, as the earlier returns contain only limited statistical data (N.B. there are exceptions where the census information is missing). All census records are closed for 100 years, and at present you can only view the returns for 1841-1901 (the 1911 census index is due to be made available in 2011).

The 1841 census contains less detail than the later censuses, as it only records the full name, age, gender and occupation for each individual in every property on the day of the census. Ages in the 1841 census were rounded down to the nearest five years, so they are not exact.

From 1851, the full name, age and marital status of every person within each household is stated. You will also find their relationship to the head of household, their gender and their occupation, as well as the parish and county of birth for every person within each household.

For the purpose of the census, the country was divided into registration and sub-registration districts, and the process generated enumeration books that covered districts of several hundred houses.

WHAT CAN I FIND OUT FROM THE CENSUS?

The census can give information on a very wide range of subjects, for example:

- **Family history** – relationships between household members; ages and place of birth; which can be used in conjunction with parish registers to find baptisms, marriages and burials.
- **House history** – the census can tell you who lived in a particular property between 1841-1901. However, individual house names or addresses are not always stated so it may be difficult to pinpoint an exact property.
- **Economic history** – the census tells us about the types of occupations people had in the past and how they changed over time.
- **Landscape history** – the census can be used with maps to see how building and population increased.
- **Demography** – changes in sizes of families; how old people were when they died; migration of families to other areas (for example, in Buckley, Flintshire, the census shows a large number of people born in Staffordshire, who had moved from Stoke-on-Trent to Buckley seeking work in the Pottery industry).

HOW CAN I USE THE CENSUS AT FLINTSHIRE RECORD OFFICE? We have **indexes** on the shelves in the search-room, to streets and place names. If you do not know exactly where your ancestors lived, it would be advisable to consult the website www.ancestrylibrary.com which has an **online index** to the 1841-1901 censuses. We have a subscription to Ancestry so you do not need to pay to look at entries. **Please ask about booking a computer.**

Census records for Flintshire and Denbighshire are held on **microfilm** at Flintshire Record Office. You need to **book a microfilm reader in advance** as places are limited. The **indexes** to the census are on open shelves in the search-room. Use the index to find out which microfilm you need. The microfilms are kept in cabinets and are **self-service**. Take your **yellow marker** and put this in place of the microfilm you have taken out, so that you know where to put it back and other searchers can see who is using that reel.

ORDERING COPIES: When writing down references from the Census, please use the following format:

Microfilm Number; Home Office or TNA reference, e.g. HO107/3614 or RG13/2634 (usually printed down the right hand side of the page, sometimes printed in the centre at the bottom of the page); **folio number**, e.g. folio 54 (can be found at the right hand side of every other page); **page number**, e.g. page 4 (can be found in the top centre of the page). So, a full reference should look like this: Microfilm 55, RG13/2634, folio 54, page 4. Also, please state the address and surnames of people in the household you require.

SOME TIPS WHEN USING THE CENSUS: Work from known data, preferably backwards from the latest piece of information. Use the Ancestry website name indexes to narrow down the possibilities if you are uncertain of a place of residence. Use the census in conjunction with other sources, such as **parish registers** (see Source Guide No. 1) to confirm you have found the correct person. Treat all ages recorded in the census with care - not everyone would have known their exact date of birth. Not all family members will be listed - only those who were resident in the house on the night of the census. After 1851, details about place of birth can help you to find other census records, or parish registers. Census information can also help you to narrow down a search for a birth certificate. Beware of conflicting evidence from different censuses - you may need to check more than one listed place of birth. People's occupations also changed in different census years.

For further information, please consult the following book, on open shelves in the search-room: Higgs, E. Making Sense of the Census Revisited: Census Records for England and Wales, 1801-1901, A Handbook for Historical Researchers. London. 2005.

You can also visit the BBC family history website: www.bbc.co.uk/history/trail/familyhistory

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