



England & Wales Census Records 1841-1911 & Indexes

Craig L. Foster, A.G.

fostercl@familysearch.org

Census records are one of the best ways to locate your ancestors at a given place and time. By following ancestors through every available census, you can learn about their parents and siblings, their spouse and children, occupational changes, and where they lived and when they died. Censuses are a backbone of 19th century English research.

BACKGROUND

A census is a statistical count of the population of a country taken for the purpose of: Accurate government representation.

- Tax collection.
- Military purposes.

The first government census was taken in 1801. The census records from 1801-1831 contain mostly statistical information. A few of them include names. See Colin Chapman's book *Pre-1841 Censuses and Population listings*. *FHL 942 X27cc*

The first census listing people by name was taken in 1841 and taken every ten years since, except for 1941 due to WWII. Census records are released 100 years after the census is taken. Knowing when a census was taken is important as it will reflect a person's age as reported in the census.

1841 – June 7	1851 – March 31	1861 – April 8	1871 – April 3
1881 – April 4	1891 – April 6	1901 – April 1	1911 – April 2

WHAT INFORMATION DO CENSUS RECORDS CONTAIN?

1841 Census:

- Names
- Ages (rounded down to nearest 5 years for those over age 15)
- Sex
- Residing in at time of census or no residence
- Occupations
- Whether born in same county as living

1851-1901 Censuses:

- Residence
- Name

- Age
- Sex
- Relationship to head of household
- Marital status
- Occupation
- Birth place (parish!)

1911 Census:

- Name
- Age & Sex
- Relationship to head of household
- Marital status
- Children born alive to present marriage
- Children still living
- Children who have died
- Occupation
- Birth place (parish!)
- Residence
- Nationality

Census records after 1911:

- 1921- Will be released in 2021
- 1931- Was destroyed during World War II
- 1941- Wasn't taken due to World War II

HOW TO ACCESS CENSUS RECORDS

1. Choose a website which contains census records for the British Isles
2. Search their online index
3. View the original image

Online Census Web sites:

- (Free) www.familysearch.org > Click United Kingdom and Ireland
- (\$) www.ancestry.co.uk > UK Census Collection
- (\$) www.findmypast.co.uk > Search records > Census, land & Surveys
- (\$) www.thegenealogist.co.uk > within: All Records – Beta! > Census
- (\$) www.1911census.co.uk

Subscription websites may be accessible at FamilySearch centers

Other Useful Websites

- Try www.freecen.org.uk for free census transcriptions.
- Check www.censusfinder.com for your country and county to see what is available in the way of individual transcriptions and indexes.
- Try a Google search on the Internet. Use keywords like [Parish] or [County] [Census Year] Census, for example-- *Cambridgeshire 1841 Census*.
- Many census indexes and some with images of the census can be purchased through family history societies or genealogical companies. Use www.genuki.org.uk and go to your country and then county and then the topic "Societies" to find the Web site for the family history society in your ancestral area.

USING THE CENSUS

- When using census records don't make assumptions solely based on the census. Collaborate with other records for verification and missing information.
- Ages and birth places are not always accurate.
- Information is as good as the informant.
- When searching the census remember that ancestors may not always be where we expect them to be. For example if your ancestor was visiting relatives on the night of the census he or she will be recorded in the relatives' household.
- Relationships given are based on their relationship to the head of household.
- Relationships may not be expressed in terms we understand today.
- After finding an ancestor in the census, proceed to find him or her in every available census. Each census will help give further clues about the ancestor and his or her family. Just searching one census won't paint a more complete picture of your ancestor. Below are some tips when searching the censuses.
- Occupations can help identify an ancestor.
- Pages may be unreadable.
- Jurisdictions changed. New parishes were created out of ancient, existing parishes
- Notice the birthplaces given in the 1851-1911 censuses. These can help you find the baptismal records of your ancestors.

SEARCH TECHNIQUES

Searching for an ancestor in a census is an art and science. There is no one right way to search, but a few general guidelines may help:

- When searching don't fill in every piece of information on your ancestor
- Use exact matches (without exact matches you will be searching through hundreds or thousands of search results).
- Use wildcards: '*', or '?' Names may have been misspelled or shortened in the indexes. i.e. 'Frederick Hansen' could be searched as 'Fred* Hans?n. The question mark will search all Hansen's or Hanson's
- Try searching for a nickname: i.e. 'Lottie' is a nickname for Charlotte
 - For a list of nicknames see: Wiki.familysearch.org and type: "Traditional Nicknames"
- Try searing for different variations of your ancestor's name
- A parent search might help you find your common name ancestor (remember
- You might find your ancestor quicker by searching for a sibling. Uncommon sibling names can be very helpful in searching for your common name ancestor.
- Keep refining and tweaking the search results if no results appear.
- If you don't find your ancestors using one website than try searching another one.

- Remember different people indexed the different websites. One surname may be misspelled on one site and spelled correctly on another.
- First try searching with the given name, surname, and county of residence. If this returns too many matches, narrow it down by age. Remember that ages as reported in the census are not always reliable, so search for a range of years instead of an exact year. Children's ages tend to be more reliable than adult's ages.
- If needed, further narrow the search down by the exact parish of residence, if known (be careful, the spelling may be different than you're anticipating). Narrow it down by the place of birth (if known) only as a last resort, as the place of birth is often indexed incorrectly or not as you expect.
- An ancestor's name may have been misspelled in the indexing process. Be creative! Try looking at everyone with that surname in the parish of residence.
- Search for everyone with that given name (leave the surname field blank) in the parish of residence who is near the age you are expecting. You can scroll through the results and will likely spot the person whose name has been misspelled or incorrectly indexed.
- If you can't find what you want using a "Ranked search", try using the "Exact search", and vice versa. (Some people feel that "Exact search" is easier to use and produces better results.)
- When all else fails, try searching the census microfilm at the Family History Library which includes indexes from 1841-1891.

FREE HELP TOOLS ONLINE AT FAMILYSEARCH

There are great free online resources at FamilySearch.org for increasing your knowledge. These include the following:

- The **Search** tab:
 - The Catalog: This is the key to accessing microfilmed records from all over the world at the Family History Library.
 - Digitized Records: See what England records are accessible online.
 - Research Wiki: includes articles and information on many England research topics. Type 'England Census' in the search field. (wiki.familysearch.org)
 - Free online video courses: Includes three free training videos on census records as well as countless over records.
- The **Home** page:
 - FamilySearch Centers: There are over 4,500 FamilySearch Centers all over the world. Microfilm from the Family History Library can be sent to a center near you.
 - Indexing: Help index digitized records so many can find their ancestors online!