

# CENSUS OF ENGLAND & WALES

## Dates, Content and Notes

This document sets out the dates upon which each of the censuses from 1801 to 1931 was carried out and describes the details recorded in each case.

### Census Return Images Online

When using the census returns, it must be borne in mind that the images you see on web sites such as ancestry and findmypast for all censuses up to and including 1901 are images of the enumeration books. These are copies of the information supplied by the head of each household on individual household schedules, which were copied by the census enumerator before the schedules were destroyed. They are therefore subject to errors and omissions introduced by the enumerator when making up his books.

From 1911 onwards, the enumeration forms were processed directly, so what you see is what the householder wrote.

### Learning More

Those wishing to learn more about the history of the census and the resulting records are advised to read *'Making Sense of the Census Revisited. A Handbook for Historical Researchers'*, by Edward Higgs. This third book by Higgs was published in 2005 so covers only the census up to 1901.

The latest issue of *'Census: The Expert Guide'* by Peter Christian and David Annal covers all the censuses up to and including 1911.

## Censuses 1801 – 1831

The census was established against the background of the Napoleonic Wars and the possibility of an invasion. Government was concerned to obtain information concerning the availability of manpower to recruit into the army in the event that the country had to be defended. There was also a more academic interest in whether the population was expanding or contracting.

A census was taken in 1801 and every ten years thereafter up to 1831, but it was not required that the names of those enumerated were to be recorded; only broad totals broken down by gender and age were of concern to the government. The census returns, while they survive, are therefore of little value to the family historian.

Some enumerators did, however, record the names of the head of each household. These include a number relating to Bolton and transcripts of these are available to MLFHS members in the member area of this web site.

The enumeration dates for these early censuses were:

27 May 1801 (Tuesday)

27 May 1811 (Monday)

28 May 1821 (Monday)

30 May 1831 (Monday)

# Census 6 June 1841 (Sunday)

The 1841 census was the first in which personal information, including names, was recorded.

## Details:

- Place (or street) [Note 1]
- Name
- Age (with separate columns for males and females) [Note 2]
- Profession or trade [Note 3]
- Where born [Note 4]

## Notes:

- 1 House numbers seldom appear. Houses were not necessarily numbered at this time.
- 2 Ages over 15 years were to be rounded down to the nearest 5 years (e.g. a 27 year old would be recorded as 25). This rule is sometimes broken and more precise ages appear.
- 3 Abbreviations are common. "Ag. Lab." For "Agricultural Labourer"; "MS" and "FS" for "Male/Female Servant". The term "Ind." Or "Independent" refers to "Independent Means", This does not necessarily imply prosperity, simply that the person has no occupation.
- 4 Birthplace is recorded only as:
  - Y Born in the same county
  - N Not born in the same county
  - I Born in Ireland
  - S Born in Scotland
  - F Born Overseas ("Foreign Parts")

It is important to recognise that relationships between those in the same household are not recorded. It should not be inferred, without checking from other sources, that (e.g.) a family headed by a 40 year old male and a 35 year old female with two male children aged 14 and 8 years are husband, wife and their offspring. The female may be the sister of the male and the children his nephews.

## Census 10 March 1851 (Sunday)

The 1851 census sets the pattern for all later censuses. The information is more extensive and more precise. Individually numbered schedules were distributed to each household to be completed by the head of the household. Completed schedules were copied by the enumerator into enumeration books. The original schedules were then destroyed.

### 1851 Unfilmed Census

The enumeration books for large parts of Manchester and Salford as well as part of Oldham were badly damaged by a flood while in storage and were consequently not filmed or available to the public. MLFHS volunteers, over a period of ten years, transcribed the readable parts of these returns and the resulting transcripts can be searched and viewed in the 1851 Unfilmed Census database in the member area of this web site. This material has also been filmed by [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) but the details recovered fall short of what was recovered during the MLFHS project.

### Details

- Schedule Number
- Place (or street)
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Condition as to marriage
- Age (with separate columns for males and females) [Note 1]
- Profession or trade
- Where born [Note 2]
- Whether Blind, Deaf or Dumb [Note 3]

### Notes:

- 1 Ages were to be recorded exactly in years for all ages except infants under one year (for whom months, weeks or days may be used). However, analysis of adult ages shows a distinct bunching around multiples of five years. It is possible that this is an overhang from the 1841 census but perhaps more likely that older people were unsure of their exact age and so were effectively saying "about 50 years".
- 2 The birthplace recorded may be the parish of birth rather than the precise place. This can be misleading if, for example, a person was born in Salford but (correctly) records their birthplace as "Manchester".
- 3 The disability will generally be written in full (e.g. "Blind"). Do not be confused by what looks like a tick mark in this column. These are usually marks made by the census analysts and bear no relation to the column heading.

## Census 7 April 1861 (Sunday)

The 1861 census follows the same pattern as for 1851. The information recorded is essentially the same. The only difference is that two additional columns are included in which each house is recorded whether occupied or not.

### Details

- Schedule Number
- Place (or street)
- Inhabited Houses (A number, usually 1, is entered for each inhabited house)
- Uninhabited Houses (Entered as "U" for uninhabited or "B" for houses under construction.)
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Condition as to marriage
- Age (with separate columns for males and females)
- Profession or trade
- Where born [Note 1]
- Whether Blind, Deaf or Dumb [Note 2]

### Notes:

1 The birthplace recorded may be the parish of birth rather than the precise place. This can be misleading if, for example, a person was born in Salford but (correctly) records their birthplace as "Manchester".

2 The disability will generally be written in full (e.g. "Blind"). Do not be confused by what looks like a tick mark in this column. These are usually marks made by the census analysts and bear no relation to the column heading.

## Census 2 April 1871 (Sunday)

The 1871 census follows the same pattern as for 1861. The information recorded is essentially the same. The only difference is that an additional infirmity is added to the final column.

### Details

- Schedule Number
- Place (or street)
- Inhabited Houses (A number, usually 1, is entered for each inhabited house)
- Uninhabited Houses (Entered as "U" for uninhabited or "B" for houses under construction.)
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Condition as to marriage
- Age (with separate columns for males and females)
- Profession or trade
- Where born [Note 1]
- Whether Deaf and Dumb, Blind, Imbecile or Idiot, or Lunatic [Notes 2, 3]

### Notes:

- 1 The birthplace recorded may be the parish of birth rather than the precise place. This can be misleading if, for example, a person was born in Salford but (correctly) records their birthplace as "Manchester".
- 2 The disability will generally be written in full (e.g. "Blind"). Do not be confused by what looks like a tick mark in this column. These are usually marks made by the census analysts and bear no relation to the column heading.
- 3 The differentiation between Imbecile, Idiot and Lunatic appears to have been vague at best.

## Census 3 April 1881 (Sunday)

The 1881 census follows the same pattern as for 1871. The information recorded is the same.

### Details

- Schedule Number
- Place (or street)
- Inhabited Houses (A number, usually 1, is entered for each inhabited house)
- Uninhabited Houses (Entered as "U" for uninhabited or "B" for houses under construction.)
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Condition as to marriage
- Age (with separate columns for males and females)
- Profession or trade
- Where born [Note 1]
- Whether Deaf and Dumb, Blind, Imbecile or Idiot, or Lunatic [Notes 2, 3]

### Notes:

- 1 The birthplace recorded may be the parish of birth rather than the precise place. This can be misleading if, for example, a person was born in Salford but (correctly) records their birthplace as "Manchester".
- 2 The disability will generally be written in full (e.g. "Blind"). Do not be confused by what looks like a tick mark in this column. These are usually marks made by the census analysts and bear no relation to the column heading.
- 3 The differentiation between Imbecile, Idiot and Lunatic appears to have been vague at best.

## Census 5 April 1891 (Sunday)

The 1891 census builds on the pattern of 1881. The personal information recorded is much the same but with the addition of three columns to identify respectively whether the individual is an employer, an employee or neither. A further column records the number of rooms occupied if fewer than five. This provides some insight into the living conditions of the household.

### Details

- Schedule Number
- Place (or street)
- Inhabited Houses (A number, usually 1, is entered for each inhabited house)
- Uninhabited Houses (Entered as "U" for uninhabited or "B" for houses under construction.)
- Number of rooms occupied
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Condition as to marriage
- Age (with separate columns for males and females)
- Profession or trade
- Whether an employer, an employee or neither
- Where born [Note 1]
- Whether Deaf and Dumb, Blind, Imbecile or Idiot, or Lunatic [Notes 2, 3]

### Notes:

- 1 The birthplace recorded may be the parish of birth rather than the precise place. This can be misleading if, for example, a person was born in Salford but (correctly) records their birthplace as "Manchester".
- 2 The disability will generally be written in full (e.g. "Blind"). Do not be confused by what looks like a tick mark in this column. These are usually marks made by the census analysts and bear no relation to the column heading.
- 3 The differentiation between Imbecile, Idiot and Lunatic appears to have been vague at best.



# Census 31 March 1901 (Sunday)

The 1901 census is substantially the same as for 1891 but with the addition of a further column to record whether individuals worked at home.

## Details

- Schedule Number
- Place (or street)
- Inhabited Houses (A number, usually 1, is entered for each inhabited house)
- Uninhabited Houses (Entered as "U" for uninhabited or "B" for houses under construction.)
- Number of rooms occupied
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Condition as to marriage
- Age (with separate columns for males and females)
- Profession or trade
- Whether an employer, an employee or neither
- Whether working from home
- Where born [Note 1]
- Whether Deaf and Dumb, Blind, Imbecile or Idiot, or Lunatic [Notes 2, 3]

## Notes:

- 1 The birthplace recorded may be the parish of birth rather than the precise place. This can be misleading if, for example, a person was born in Salford but (correctly) records their birthplace as "Manchester".
- 2 The disability will generally be written in full (e.g. "Blind"). Do not be confused by what looks like a tick mark in this column. These are usually marks made by the census analysts and bear no relation to the column heading.
- 3 The differentiation between Imbecile, Idiot and Lunatic appears to have been vague at best.

## Census 2 April 1911 (Sunday)

This was the first census to be analysed using an electro-mechanical calculator. Household schedules were returned to the analysts, who coded the information onto punched cards and the schedules were preserved, so what you see is the original form completed by the householder.

There are changes to the information requested, particularly the highly useful details of number of years married and of children living and dead.

### Details

- Address (on back of schedule)
- Schedule Number (in top margin of schedule)
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Condition as to marriage
- Age (with separate columns for males and females)
- Number of years married
- Number of children born alive
- Number of children still living
- Number of children died
- Profession or trade
- Industry or service with which worker is connected
- Whether an employer, an employee or working on own account
- Whether working from home
- Where born
- Nationality if born in a foreign country
- Whether Deaf and Dumb, Blind, Imbecile or Idiot, or Lunatic [Notes 1, 2]

### Notes:

- 1 The disability will generally be written in full (e.g. "Blind"). Do not be confused by what looks like a tick mark in this column. These are usually marks made by the census analysts and bear no relation to the column heading.
- 2 The differentiation between Imbecile, Idiot and Lunatic appears to have been vague at best. The householder is now asked at what age the individual became afflicted.

## Census 19 June 1921 (Sunday) (Postponed from 24 April)

Like the 1911 census, in 1921 the household returns were processed electro-mechanically. Household schedules were returned to the analysts, who coded the information onto punched cards and the schedules were preserved, so what you see is the original form completed by the householder.

The information collected is very similar to that in 1911 but the layout of the schedule is changed in several respects. The requirement to record disabilities has been dropped.

### Details

- Address (on back of schedule)
- Schedule Number (in top margin of schedule)
- Name
- Relation to head of household
- Age (to be recorded in separate columns for years and months)
- Sex (M or F)
- Condition as to marriage (the option of 'D' for Divorced included for the first time. Also whether the parents of children under 15 years old are alive or dead)
- Where born
- Nationality if born in a foreign country
- Personal Occupation (a separate column asks whether attending an educational institution full or part time)
- Industry or service with which worker is connected
- Whether an employer and if not, the name of the employer
- Place of work
- For children under 15 years, their age at last birthday in years (by ticking appropriate boxes)

### Notes:

## **Census 26 April 1931 (Sunday)**

The census returns for 1931 were lost in a fire during World War 2, though not as a result of enemy action..

## **Census 1941**

There was no census in 1941 owing to wartime conditions. However, the 1939 Register provides a useful substitute.