

Using the 1841 to 1921 England & Wales Census

Mary McKee

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The history of the census in England and Wales

First census in Britain was the Domesday Book, 1086 – a survey of the land and then the associated landowners.

Debates around demographics, agricultural demands, military resource, etc.

1801-1831 – Victorian census. Only small percentage of local lists survive.

1841 – The modern census.

- Centralized effort through the General Registrar Office. Listing the names of every individual.
- Radical approach – provide household forms and then translate the forms into census enumerator books (1841-1901).
- A snapshot of the country – all forms completed on one night.
- With each year the process was more refined and wider data was captured.
- Before a census the questions are drafted and reviewed, the Royal Statistical Society, Parliament and other provide feedback. 'Simple' household forms are printed. Forms are delivered house to house by the enumerators and then collected again.
- Set for every ten years.

Census questions –

1841

- first name and surname
- age (rounded down to the nearest five years for those aged 15 or over)
- sex
- occupation
- whether they were born in the county where they were enumerated (Y or N)
- whether they were born in Scotland (S), Ireland (I) or Foreign Parts (P)

1851-1861

- first name, middle names (often just initials) and surname
- relationship to the head of the household
- marital status
- age (at last birthday)
- sex
- rank, profession or occupation
- where born – county and parish if born in England or Wales, country only if born outside England and Wales)
- whether blind, or deaf and dumb

1871-1881

- The last column now reads: 1. Blind 2. Deaf and Dumb 3. Imbecile or Idiot 4. Lunatic
- Enumerator wrote W to indicate Welsh

1891

- Employer, employee or self-employed
- Number of rooms
- Welsh language
- First female enumerators

1901

- 'Employer, Worker or Own account'
- a new column 'If working at home'
- language spoken (Isle of Man only)

1911-Original Household Forms

- The number of years of their present marriage,
- The number of children born of that marriage, the number still living, and the number that had died.
- The industry in which the person was employed. If employed by a government, municipal or other public body, the name of that body.
- Parish and county of birth for anyone born in the UK (which included all of Ireland). If born elsewhere in the British Empire, the colony or dependency, and the state or province.
- For anyone born outside England and Wales, whether they were resident or visitor in the country.
- Nationality of anyone born overseas whether British by parentage, British by naturalisation (including year of naturalisation) or, if a foreign national, of which country.
- In the Infirmity column, the age at which the person had become afflicted.

1921

- Age was asked for in years and months
- 'Divorced' was added as an option for marital status
- Name and business of each person's employer (in 1911 this was only required from those in public service), and the address of their place of work.
- For persons born outside the United Kingdom, country and state or province of birth; state or province was previously asked only of those born in the British Empire. Naturalised British subjects were no longer asked for their year of naturalization
- Orphanhood - for children under 15, whether both parents were alive, father dead, mother dead, or both dead
- Whether in full-time or part-time education
- Married men, widows and widowers were asked for the number and ages of their living children and step-children under 16