



Access to information in the 1911 census

Request for information in the 1911 census pertaining to two addresses in Birmingham.

Information provided

Unfortunately, all of the information that you are looking for is covered by an exemption. This means that we are unable to give you any of the information. Details of which exemption we have applied and why are set out below.

The section 41 exemption has been applied to all of the information you seek in the 1911 census returns. This section exempts information obtained from any other person if its disclosure would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that or any other person.

Unfortunately we are unable to release information in the 1911 census because Decennial Census returns contain personal information supplied by citizens about themselves, the disclosure of which would constitute a breach of good faith. The 1911 census form contained the following emphatic undertaking to Householders: 'The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons'. Since 1981 there has been an explicit assurance on census forms that they will not be released to the public for a period of 100 years. The 1999 White Paper on the 2001 census clearly stated that 'it is not intended that ...proposals for a Freedom of Information Act should affect the current period of closure for census records'.

If the Government were suddenly to reduce the closure period of 100 years in relation to the 1911 census, this would result in a reduction of public confidence in the explicit assurances given by the Government that later census returns will be closed for 100 years. The Government believes that a closure period of 100 years strikes the right balance between the access interests of family historians and other researchers and the right of citizens to have their personal information kept confidential. As a Department for Constitutional Affairs Minister explained in the House of Commons on 29 March 2004 'the Government believe that maintaining the security and confidentiality of the information that citizens supply about themselves in their census returns is of paramount importance. It is strongly in the national interest that public confidence in these confidentiality assurances be maintained'

All requests to view information contained in the 1911 census returns will be considered on a case by case basis. However, we should make you aware that none of the requests received so far under the FOI Act has been granted, because the S.41 exemption, relating to information supplied in confidence, has been applied. In addition, the Minister at the Department of Constitutional Affairs has recently reaffirmed, in a written parliamentary answer, that it remains government policy to make census returns publicly available after a period of 100 years (Hansard, 12 July 2005, 869W).
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm050712/text/50712w07.htm#50712w07.html_sbhd2

In accordance with the 100 year closure period that applies to census returns, the National Archives is developing plans to make the 1911 census available online to a worldwide audience in the year 2012.

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