

Focus on... The Census

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Welcome to Focus On...The Census

This Focus On... will tell you all about this wonderful source of historical information and give you a chance to work with some original Census forms.

Use the menu above to go in and investigate the Census. Good luck.

**Introduction:
What is the Census?**



The Census is a count of all the people in the United Kingdom on one particular day and is normally taken every ten years. It provides wonderful information of what life was like on the day that the information was collected. As a result, Census information is brilliant for helping us to explore the past.

The first modern Census was taken in 1801 and there has been one every ten years since, apart from 1941 when British involvement in the Second World War stopped it taking place.

Between 1801 and 1831 the Census contains only general information relating to the population but from 1841 more details started to be kept. After this date, information on each person living in a household was recorded. Since each household in the country was asked the same questions, it allows comparisons between different areas to be made. This means that the Census is a very useful source of information for historians.



Since Census information has started to be collected, not everyone has been happy about providing his or her details. Census **enumerators** often had difficulties in collecting the forms and, as late as the 1950s, it was believed that some people were giving wrong information on the forms. To encourage people to provide the correct details, the government has always guaranteed that any personal information will not be made available to the public for 100 years. This means that the only Census returns that can be seen at the moment are those for 1841 to 1891. The 1901 Census is to be released in 2002 and will be available on the Internet.



How was the information collected?



From 1851 the Census has been taken in the same way. The country was divided into a number of districts, each with its own enumerator. Each household was given a form to fill in. On the day after the Census night, the enumerator visited all the houses in his area to collect the forms. If the form had not been filled in properly or if the householder was illiterate, the enumerator filled it in. The information on the forms was then copied into an enumerator's book, which was then sent to the Census Office in London.

At the Census Office, the information in the books was checked for accuracy. Other clerks then went through the books getting different kinds of information. For example, one clerk could get information on ages, another on jobs and another on birthplaces etc. This information was then put into tables and used in the Census Report.

The same basic way of collecting information is still in use today, although computers are now used to do the work.



Glossary

Enumerator Official name for the person who collects the Census.

Illiterate Unable to read or write

Census report A report which gives statistics covering the whole country

QUIZ.

1. How often is the Census taken?

- A. Once every year
- B. Once every ten years
- C. Once every fifty years

2. What happened if the householder could not fill in the Census form?

- A. They were not recorded in the Census
- B. They got a friend to fill it in for them
- C. The enumerator did it for them

3. Where would I go to view the Census?

- A. The Family Records Centre Islington, London
- B. Local Libraries and Record Offices
- C. On the Internet

Answers

1 = B Census has been taken every ten years since 1801.

2 = C The enumerator filled in the form for people who could not read or write.

3 = All three are correct, but only the 1901 Census will be available on the internet but not until 2002.