

British Parish Registers & Census Records

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Important Dates for British Research

- 1215 - Calling of the "Banns"
 - The church stated the practice of the calling of the banns
 - In order to be considered valid, marriage banns must be read or called during services on three Sundays before the wedding in the parish church of the bride and the groom.
 - If the wedding is being held outside the parish of the bride or groom, the marriage banns must be read in that church as well.
 - The banns are considered valid for three months after the last reading.
 - Typically, the marriage banns state the name and parish of both bride and groom, and indicate that individuals with objections to the marriage should make those objections known before the wedding day.
 - The religious official calling the marriage banns will also indicate how many times the banns have been read.
- 1300's – Marriage Licenses were Introduced
 - This negated the calling of the banns.
 - There was no waiting period.
 - There was payment of a fee involved along with a sworn declaration that there was not legal impediment to the marriage.
- 1534 – The "Act of Supremacy"
 - This act acknowledged the king as "the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England."
- 1538 – Parish Registers Begin
 - Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's Vicar General, ordered that each parish priest must keep a book with all the baptisms, marriages and burials from the previous week.
- 1598 – Parish Register Edict
 - Parish records were to be kept in 'great decent books of parchment' and copies or 'Bishop's Transcripts' of new entries were to be sent each month to the diocesan center.
- 1643 to 1647 – British Civil War
 - During the English Civil War and in the following Commonwealth period (1648-1660), records were poorly kept and many are now missing after being destroyed or hidden by the clergy.
- 1653 to 1660 – Questionable Record Keeping
 - From 1653–1660 the registering of births, marriages and deaths was taken over by civil officers (confusingly called Parish Registers), but the registers were returned to the churches following the Restoration in 1660.
- 1694 – Costs Increase
 - The costs of each entry were drastically increased in order to finance a war against France.
- 1754 – Lord Hardwick's Marriage Act
 - This act created separate Marriage Register that was to be kept and Banns were enforced and Secret Marriages made illegal.
 - Under this Act, a marriage is only legally valid if the reading of "the banns" has taken place, or a marriage license has been obtained.
- 1763 – Minimum Age for Marriages
 - In 1763 the minimum age for marriage was fixed at 16 (earlier only with a License from the Bishop) and parental consent was needed for anyone under 21.
- 1812 – Better Regulation for Parish Registers
 - In 1812 an "Act for the better regulating and preserving Parish and other Registers of Birth, Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, in England" was passed.
 - It stated that "amending the Manner and Form of keeping and of preserving Registers of Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials of His Majesty's Subjects in the several Parishes and Places in England, will greatly facilitate the Proof of Pedigrees of Persons claiming to be entitled to Real or Personal Estates, and otherwise of great public Benefit and Advantage".
 - Separate, printed registers were to be supplied by the King's Printer, and used for baptisms, marriages and burials.
 - These are more or less unchanged to this day.
- 1837 – Civil Registration was Created
 - On July 1, 1837 civil registrations of births, marriages, and deaths was begun.
 - There were actually two separate Acts created.
 - The Registration Act set up a system for the registration of births and deaths
 - The driving force for the Registration Act was the problem that under English law only the registers of the Church of England could be used as evidence in court cases.
 - This created all sorts of difficulties for non-conformists, particularly in relation to inheritance.
 - Parish registers recorded the dates of baptisms and burials, and not necessarily the dates of births and deaths.
 - The Marriage Act provided for civil marriages.
 - So far as marriages were concerned there was a slightly different problem.
 - Since Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act came into effect in 1754 the only marriages legally recognized had been those that took place under the auspices of the Church of England.
 - This meant that, for their children to be regarded as legitimate, non-conformists and Roman Catholics had to marry in a church whose beliefs differed from their own.
- 1853 – Cemetery Act
 - In 1853 the Cemetery Act allowed for civic cemeteries because many church graveyards were full to overflowing.

Parish Registers - A "Parish Register" is a book, normally kept in a parish church, where details of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials are recorded.

- Where are Parish Registers Kept Today?
 - Originals - Usually in vaults somewhere within the county where the records were recorded or at the British National Archives
 - Copies - Most, but **NOT** all have been microfilmed
 - Transcriptions – IGI, and on Line. Check the county that you are researching.
- International Genealogical Index
 - The International Genealogical Index (IGI) is a database of genealogical records, compiled from a variety of different sources, and maintained by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
 - Originally created in 1969, the index was intended to help track the performance of temple ordinances for the deceased.
 - The IGI contains many duplicate names, accumulated over time from many sources, so all data retrieved from the index should be checked carefully, and compared with similar entries.
 - The IGI is a great starting point, BUT it must be CONFIRMED!
 - The IGI is the largest repository for translated British Parish Registers.
- How to Trace Your Ancestors Using Parish Registers
 - Typically, birthdates were not recorded but children were generally baptised within 2 to 3 months of their birth.
 - The baptism records will usually give the name of the child's parents and their 'abode'.
 - You can then use this information to find the marriage record of the parents.
 - The marriage record will usually tell you the name of both parties and their parents names (but not always).
 - Use that to find the baptism records of the parents, and so on.
- Try to Get a Feeling of How Your Ancestors Lived – Use Old Maps. Sketches. Photos.
- **Baptism Registers**
 - Normally you are given is the following: The date of the baptism, the parish church where baptised, the name of the person being baptised, Father, Mother, Their Abode. However, sometimes you get more, and sometimes you get less.....
- **Marriage Registers**
 - Normally all you are given is the following: The date of the marriage, The parish church where baptised, The names of the husband and wife, Their "Condition", i.e. bachelor, spinster, widow, Of this Parish?, Type of Marriage, bans or license, Their abode. However, sometimes you get less, and sometimes you get more.....
- **Burial Registers**
 - Normally you will find: The date of the Burial, NOT the death date; The church where the person is buried; The name of the person being buried; Where the person lived when they died; Most Burial Registers are NOT on the IGI

British Census

- Every 10 years, since 1801, the British Government has taken a Census - details of everyone living in the country on one particular day. This snapshot is intended to provide vital statistical information for forward planning, and gradually over the years the complexity of the information collected has increased.
- Except for the 1911 Census, the following is true:
 - There are no "Original Census Records".
 - What were called "Household Schedules" were delivered to each household a few days before the census date.
 - A person called an Enumerator then collected the schedules in the days after the census date.
 - What we are left with are the "Census Returns".
 - These are the Enumerator's "Interpretation" of what the householder wrote on the household schedules.
- The first Census in England and Wales was held in 1801. There had been earlier attempts, but these had failed due to religious and libertarian objections. The information collected in the first 4 census from 1801 to 1831 was of very limited scope. The Census Returns for these years were all officially destroyed once the statistical information had been extracted.
- 1841 is the first year for which Census Returns survive for the whole country. In this and subsequent years the Census was taken on a Sunday evening.
- The Census dates were:

1841 - June 6,	1881 - April 3
1851 - March 30	1891 - April 5
1861 - April 7	1901 - March 31
1871 - April 2	1911 - April 2
- All the 1841 to 1911 Census records are now available to the public.
- There was no Census in 1941 because of World War II.
- **Mistakes Made in Producing Census Returns**
 - In many cases, the original schedule was filled in by a child rather than by the head of household. The reason is simple. During the 1800's, the children went to school and learned to read and write, whereas parents could often not read and write.
 - Many persons are missed from all census returns, sometimes the enumerator did not collect the form, or if the householder was not in when the enumerator called, he did not call back.
 - The quality of Enumerators varied a great deal.

- Often the householders would be illiterate, in which case the Enumerator had to write what he was told. Errors, such as "White" being entered as Whyte, Wite, Wight, etc. More mistakes could creep in as the Enumerator copied the schedules into his "enumerators' book", now called the Census Returns.
- Enumerators often entered a birth place on the first line of his book, then "ditto" all the way to the bottom of the page. They also did the same in the address column, or in villages or hamlets, they just entered "Village".
- People would enter their earliest recollection of where they lived as their birthplace, which may not have been correct.
- In farming communities, it is also common for a person's birth place to be entered as the name of the farm where they worked, or owned. Many people also did not know their exact age.
- The districts used by the Enumerators may not be the same as modern boundaries. The enumeration districts were based on "Hundreds" or "Poor Law Unions" which, no longer exist. Boundary changes may have moved to a different town or even another county.

• **Why Your Ancestors are Missing from the Census**

- They may have:
 - Not been at home.
 - Working away from home
 - Travelling or on vacation (they should have been recorded where they were staying.)
- In 1841, night-workers not at home on the Sunday evening were not included.
- Crews of ships in port and boats on inland waterways were not recorded in 1841.
- There was a widespread belief that very young infants, particularly those not yet baptized, should not be included. As a result up to 6% of children may have gone unrecorded.
- Families would deliberately deceive the Enumerator as to the number of their children because they were afraid of being accused of domestic overcrowding.
- Older children were not recorded because they had left home to work as domestic servants.
- Children of re-married widows or illegitimate children are often found recorded with their step father's surname. They were also often described as "in-laws".
- In the 1841, 1851, 1861, and 1871 census listings, there are several know "problems". Most of these relate to missing census folios. To get a complete listing of what areas are affected, see Ancestry.com's explanations.
- For each Census return, the top portion has the following information:

Headings	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
City or Borough of	X	X	X	X	X			X
Municipal Borough of						X	X	X
Parish or Township of	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ecclesiastical District of		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Town of		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Village of		X	X	X				
Municipal Ward of			X	X	X	X	X	
Parliamentary Borough of			X	X	X	X	X	X
Local Board, or Impr. District of				X				X
Urban Sanitary District of					X	X		X
Rural Sanitary District of					X	X	X	X
Boundary of Enumeration District								X
Contents of Enumeration District								X
Registration District								X
Registration Sub-District								X
Enumeration District								X
Parliamentary Borough or Division								X

• **Questions Asked on the British Census**

Questions Asked	Sub-Heading	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
No. of Householder's Schedule			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Name of Street or # of House		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Houses - Uninhabited or Inhabited		X		X	X	X	X		
Number of Rooms	Occupied if less than 5						X		
Houses	Inhabited							X	X
Houses	Uninhabited - In Occupation							X	X
Houses	Number in Occupation							X	X
Houses	Building							X	X
Names of each person	Surname and Given Name	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relation to Head of Family			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Condition	Married or Unmarried		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Age	Split Male & Female	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Profession, Trade, Employment		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Employer							X		
Employed							X		
Neither Employer or Employed							X		
Employer, worker, or Own Account								X	X
If Working at Home								X	X
Where Born	In Same County (Yes or No)	X							
Where Born	Scotland, Ireland, or Foreign Parts	X							
Where Born	County, City, Parish		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whether Blind, Deaf & Dumb			X	X					
Whether Deaf & Dumb, Blind, Imbecile, Lunatic					X	X	X	X	X

- 1841 Census Anomalies
 - The 1841 Census provides rather less information than later ones, and some of it can be a little confusing. In 1841 the Census Enumerator asked the head of each household to record:
 - The address
 - Names of all persons present in the household
 - Their ages
 - This had to be the exact age for children up to 15, but, for whatever reason, ages over 15 were rounded **down** to the nearest 5 years so people could be conveniently recorded in 'age bands' for statistical purposes.
 - For example, a person recorded as 30 years old could be 30, 31, 32, 33 or 34!
 - Occupations of everyone in the house - children were often recorded as scholars.
 - Is the individual now living in the county of their birth?
 - The answer was either yes "Y" or no "N", or "S" for Scotland, "I" for Ireland or "F" for a foreign country.
- **1911 Census**
 - The surviving 1911 census pages consist of the original household pages and the enumerators' summary books.
 - The household schedules were the forms completed by each household. Every person who stayed in the house that night (household members and guests) in theory was included on the form
 - Enumerators' summary books (ESBs) were the books completed by each enumerator from the information provided in the household schedules
 - The ESBs contain summaries of several households on one page – usually on the same street.
- **How complete are the 1911 census records?**
 - The collection of household schedules is complete, although around five per cent sustained water damage many years ago. All records have been scanned and transcribed, though inevitably the water-damaged documents are of poorer quality.
 - A small portion of the enumerators' summary books are missing from the archives and therefore will never be available to view online.
- **Other Key Sources for Verification**
 - The best sources of information available for verification:
 - Parish Registers – from about 1538
 - Birth, Marriage, and Death Certificates – from June 1837
 - FreeBMD website (you can also get these listings on Ancestry).
 - With this site you get the year and within a specific quarter of a BMD.

Useful Links for Parish Register Research

Family Search - www.familysearch.org

England IGI Batch Numbers - <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hughwallis/>

Lancashire On Line Parish Clerks - www.lan-opc.org.uk/indexp.html

Rootsweb Parish Register Project - www.freereg.rootsweb.com/

British-Genealogy Web site - www.british-genealogy.com/resources/registers/indexf.htm

For individual parishes or counties, do a Google search.....

Useful Links for British Census Research

www.ancestry.com – Pay site

www.findmypast.com – Pay site

www.TheGenealogist.co.uk – Pay site

www.RootsUK.com – Pay site

www.FamilySearch.org – Free

www.freebmd.com – Free

www.CensusTools.com - Excel Spreadsheets

www.british-genealogy.com/resources/census/index.htm#census-dates – Free General Information

<http://genealogy.about.com/od/england/a/census.htm> – Free General Information