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# Using the Census in the Suffolk Record Office

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## INTRODUCTION

A census of the population of England, Wales and Scotland has been taken every 10 years since 1801 (except 1941). Its purpose has always been to provide population statistics, and it was not until 1841, when the method of taking the census was revised, that the names of individuals began to be included. To ensure that there were no omissions or double counting of heads, the census was taken everywhere at the same time.

The count included all individual households, plus institutions such as prisons, workhouses, naval vessels and merchant vessels. It also attempted to make an approximate count of the homeless. Each census is closed for 100 years, with the exception of the 1911 census, part of which has been released early.

The country was divided into registration districts (in the 1841 census ancient divisions of hundreds, wapentakes, sokes or liberties were used). These were then sub-divided into enumeration districts, in which an appointed enumerator collected details from every household. These were then copied on to the large forms that today's family historians search, mainly on the Internet but also on microfiche.

Bear in mind, though, that people did not always tell the truth or were inaccurate as to place of birth, and mistakes could be made by enumerators and later by transcribers. Surnames were often interpreted phonetically, so if your ancestor's name appears to be missing, think about how it sounds when spoken and how the enumerator could have spelled it.

The census forms show the street in which each house stood; the house number or its name may also be given. Each household had a Schedule number – this should not be mistaken for the house number. Divisions between buildings are indicated by //, and divisions between families within a building are marked / to the left of the names. However, the latter does not necessarily mean that there are two separate families within a building – it could just indicate that the people listed underneath are not immediate family, i.e. they could be a visiting grandmother or sister.

## RESOURCES IN THE SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE

### Internet

The introduction of the census on the Internet has revolutionised family history research and is now the preferred method of search. Suffolk Libraries and Suffolk Record Office have subscribed to the Library Edition of the website **Ancestry.co.uk**, which has a wealth of resources including transcribed census records from 1841 to 1901. This website can be accessed at a computer terminal in any Suffolk library or record office with a valid Suffolk library card. There is a small charge for printouts.

## **Microfiche**

The three branches of the Record Office hold copies of the Suffolk census 1841 to 1901 on microfiche, which is especially useful for those who wish to browse through specific parishes or areas. Street indexes are available for some of the larger towns in Suffolk for some of the years.

## **CENSUS RETURNS 1841–1911: a brief description**

### **1841 census**

The 1841 census was taken on the night of **6/7 June** and is more limited in its information than later censuses. Names and occupations are given, but marital status and relationship to the head of the household are not. Ages were rounded down to the nearest 5 for adults (for example, someone aged 58 would be entered as 55), although ages for children under 15 were supposed to be exact.

*Actual places of birth are not recorded.* In the 1851 census and thereafter there is a column that states where a person was born. In 1841, Individuals answered 'yes' or 'no' as to whether they were born in the same county in which they were spending that particular census night. A further column asked whether that person was born in Scotland, Ireland, or Foreign Parts and this was answered by 'S', 'I' or 'F'.

### **1851 census**

This census was collected on the night of **30/31 March**. Note that this date coincided with Mothering Sunday and many people, especially female servants, may be found at home with their parents instead of at their place of work. Much more information appears on it, with columns for address, names, age, relationship to the head of the household, marital status, occupation, place of birth and whether blind or deaf and dumb.

### **1861 census**

Taken on the night of **7/8 April**, it contains the same type of information as the 1851 census.

### **1871 census**

This was taken on the night of **2/3 April**. In addition to the details on the 1851 there were two further categories of disability to record whether the person was an imbecile or idiot and whether he/she was a lunatic.

### **1881 census**

This was taken on the night of **3/4 April** and contained exactly the same type of information as the 1871 census.

### **1891 census**

Taken on the night of **5/6 April**, it had two additional parts: the number of rooms occupied if less than five, and whether an individual was an employer, employed, or neither employer nor employed.

### **1901 census**

This was taken on the night of **31 March/1 April** and the questions asked were the same as those for the 1891 census.

### **1911 census**

This was taken on the night of Sunday, 2 April. To the delight of family historians, this census has been released a few years earlier than expected. The 1911 census did not fall under the 1920 Census Act and is now partially available on the Internet on the pay-to-view website [www.1911census.co.uk](http://www.1911census.co.uk). Certain sensitive information, such as infirmity and other health-related issues, has not been released early.

## SHIPS' CREWS

The 1841 census recorded the total number of men on Royal Navy and Merchant ships, but not their names and details. From 1861, men on ships at sea should have been enumerated in full, but this did not always happen. Vessels on rivers, in ports and coastal waters were usually included at the end of the schedules for the registration district in which the river, port or waters was situated.

For example, James Burwood, age 17, born in Lowestoft, Suffolk, was found in the 1861 census as part of the crew of the Lowestoft-registered vessel *Champion*, which was in Seaham Dock, Durham on the night of the census.

## ECCLESIASTICAL CENSUS 1851

Particularly useful for those who wish to research the history of their church, this was another census taken on Sunday, 30 March 1851 and was arranged by registration district. It recorded the name and denomination of all churches, chapels, meeting houses etc, their ages or dates of consecration, the number of worshippers on that date and the average during the previous year. However, it does not usually list the names of the worshippers.

Microfilm of Ecclesiastical Census for the east Suffolk area is held at the Ipswich Record Office. An edited transcription has been published by the Suffolk Records Society and is available in record office searchrooms and can also be used at Suffolk Libraries.

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

### National Archives

Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU  
Telephone: 020 8876 3444

**Bury Record Office**, 77 Raingate Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2AR

Telephone: 01284 741212

Email: [bury.ro@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:bury.ro@suffolk.gov.uk)

**Ipswich Record Office**, Gatacre Road, Ipswich, IP1 2LQ

Telephone: 01473 584541

Fax: 01473 584533

Email: [ipswich.ro@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:ipswich.ro@suffolk.gov.uk)

**Lowestoft Record Office**, Clapham Road, Lowestoft, NR32 1DR

Telephone: 01502 405357

Fax: 01502 405350

Email: [lowestoft.ro@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:lowestoft.ro@suffolk.gov.uk)

Suffolk Record Office web site: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/sro>

Suffolk Heritage Direct website: <http://www.suffolkheritagedirect.org.uk>