

## Searching Census Records

A census has been taken across the UK every year since 1801. Unfortunately, the early censuses (1801-1831) were just head-counts and do not typically contain details of individuals.

The census records which are currently available and are used for genealogical purposes are those for 1841-1911. These provide a snapshot of each household every 10 years. Details of the information contained in the various censuses is given in the Annex.

The 1921 census will be released after 100 years – 2021 – so not too long to wait!

[Using censuses in your research.](#)

Taking your family tree, you should aim to locate each of your ancestors in each of the censuses for which they were alive.

Moving forward in time you may see each ancestor living with their parents and siblings, then with their spouse and children. In old age they may be with their spouse, with one of their children, alone or even in a workhouse or other institution. All this information can be added to your family history.

Combining the information in the censuses with that in the BMD records allows you to extend your family tree back in time. As census information includes place of birth this can be very useful when ancestors moved around the country – you might need to look for a birth registration in an unexpected place.

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### *The Bradshaw Family*

*My Bradshaw ancestors were itinerant potters, moving regularly about the country following the work. This is reflected in the places of birth of family members on the census records. Looking at Auntie Winnie and her family in the 1911 census shows that my Great-grandfather was born in Lancaster, Lancashire, my Great-grandmother was born in North Shields, Northumberland, my Grandfather was born in Castleford, Yorkshire and Auntie Winnie herself was born in Sutton Oak, Lancashire!*

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Thus, when looking for my Great-grandmother with her parents I needed to look in Northumberland, rather than the traditional Bradshaw territory of Lancashire.

### Where to find census information:

There are many places to locate census information, however the easiest place to start in using a computer.

Websites for accessing the census records include:

Website	Cost	
<a href="http://www.FreeCen.org.uk">www.FreeCen.org.uk</a>	Free.	Sister site to FreeBMD. Transcript only Check coverage of area and year of interest as not complete
<a href="http://www.FamilySearch.org">www.FamilySearch.org</a>	Free	Transcript only Link to images at FindMyPast (££) Free access to images at a Family History Center.
<a href="http://www.Ancestry.co.uk">www.Ancestry.co.uk</a>	££	Transcript and images
<a href="http://www.FindMyPast.co.uk">www.FindMyPast.co.uk</a>	££	Transcript and images
<a href="http://www.TheGenealogist.co.uk">www.TheGenealogist.co.uk</a>	££	Transcript and images

Local libraries and County Record Offices (CRO) often have the census records for their area on microfiche or microfilm.

If you don't have a computer, you may be able to access the free sites at your local library. Many libraries and CROs also have Ancestry subscriptions which you can use for free on their premises.

Note: Family History Centers are branches of the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, the producers of FamilySearch. They are free to use, open to all and are available across the globe. The following link can be used to find your nearest Center:

<https://www.familysearch.org/locations/>

### Searching census records:

You will usually start searching the Census records using a name – remember to allow for spelling variations. For a very unusual name this might give you the correct person. However, you will often need to qualify your search by one of more of:

- an approximate year of birth.
  - Always use a range as this data can be inaccurate
- place of birth
  - This can vary between the censuses so again broaden or narrow the search as necessary
  - Typically, the further people moved from their place of birth the less accurate the birth location. For example, if someone was living in the North East they might give “Walker” as their place of birth whereas if they had moved away they might say “Newcastle-upon-Tyne”.
  - People may not always have known where they were born – particularly if the family had moved when they were very young
- place of residence
  - this is where the person was living at the time of the census
  - people frequently moved between censuses, sometimes in the local area, sometimes significant distances
  - not everyone was at home on census night – they could be visiting friends or family, away working or even in prison or the workhouse.
- Names of family members
  - This can be useful to locate particular families with common surnames

A search for Thomas Tulip born in Gateshead in 1856 gives two likely candidates in the 1861 census<sup>1</sup>:

- Thomas, born ca. 1857, son of William and Mary E. Tulip, living in Walker, Northumberland.
  - Two siblings
- Thomas, born ca. 1858, son of Robert and Isabella Tulip, living in Heworth, Durham.
  - Ten siblings, including the wonderfully named Friend Septimus Tulip.

Checking the birth indexes on the GRO site for the siblings of the two Thomas' for a mother's maiden name of Thompson confirms that the former is correct. The information in this census record is as follows<sup>2</sup>:

Low Walker, Northumberland						
Name	Relationship	Condition	Age	Year of birth (Calcd.)	Occupation	Place of birth
William Tulip	Head	Married	29	1832	Foreman of timber yard	Whickham, Durham
Mary E. Tulip	Wife	Married	29	1832		All Saints, Newcastle, Northumberland
Mary A. Tulip	Daughter		7	1854	Scholar	Whickham, Durham
Thomas Tulip	Son		4	1857	Scholar	Gateshead, Durham
Elizabeth Tulip	Daughter		2	1859		St. John's, Newcastle, Northumberland

Thomas can then be followed through the later censuses, taking care to watch out for the "other" Thomas Tulip... There is also plenty of information to start researching Thomas' parents: William Tulip and Mary E. Thompson, starting with looking for their marriage.

#### Hints and Tips

- The census records are full of errors – both in the original records and in the indexes. Be flexible with your search criteria.
- If you can't find the person you are looking for in a census, try looking for a sibling or parent, particularly if there is one with an unusual forename.
- If you can't find a person using one website, try another as the indexing can be different.
- You will find a lot of use of "do" or "ditto" in the census records. This was shorthand to copy the same information from one line to the next. In some cases, this was used incorrectly. For example, it could be used to give the same surname or place of birth to everyone in a household, when actually some of the values should have been different.
- Institutions may have listed inmates only by their initials, which means that they will not be found under their full names.
- Some people managed to avoid the census enumerators!
- People may appear under a different name to the one you expect:
  - Nicknames could be used instead of forenames.
  - Middle names could be used instead of first names.
  - A woman's surname would change each time she married.
  - If a couple were living together, the woman would often use the man's surname, even if they weren't actually married.
  - Children frequently adopted the surname of a stepfather.

<sup>1</sup> [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) 17/1/2019

<sup>2</sup> Class: RG 9; Piece: 3845; Folio: 9; Page: 12; GSU roll: 543195 [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) 17/1/2019

- Immigrants often anglicized their names.
- People could just change their name, either because they wanted to hide their identity or as a matter of choice.
- If a person doesn't appear in a census, this could be because:
  - They have died – look for a death registration.
  - A woman has married/remarried – look for a marriage and look for her under her married surname.
  - They may have emigrated.
- Some children were born and died between censuses and so will not appear. Searching for a combination of surname and mother's maiden name in the birth registration indexes on [www.gro.gov.uk](http://www.gro.gov.uk) may allow you to identify such missing children.
- To confirm you have the correct family, check the maiden names of the children on [www.gro.gov.uk](http://www.gro.gov.uk)
  - Remember people frequently remarried quite quickly after a bereavement, particularly if there were young children to be cared for.

*Disclaimer: This document is intended as a guide to get you started with researching your family history. It is not intended to be comprehensive and Cameo Family History does not accept responsibility for errors and omissions.*

## Annex

### 1841 Census

Contained limited information as compared to later censuses:

- Ages of adults given in 5 year bands
- Relationships of people in households was not specified
- Place of birth was limited to whether or not born in county of residence
- Date: 6 June

### 1851-1901 Censuses

Contained:

- Names, ages and occupations
- Relationship to head of household
- Address
- Place of birth
- Whether married, widowed or single
- Dates:
  - 1851: 30 March
  - 1861: 7 April
  - 1871: 2 April
  - 1881: 3 April
  - 1891: 5 April
  - 1901: 31 March

### 1911 Census

Latest census currently publicly available.

Images of original census sheets as completed by householders are available. This includes signatures of heads of household.

Included how long couples have been married, how many children they had had born alive and how many were still living at the time of the census.

- Date: 2 April