



Guide to Census Returns

What is a Census?

A census is a count of the inhabitants of a country. It records information on the country's population and has been taken every ten years since 1801, with the exception of 1941. The returns of most use to the family historian are those from 1841 onwards as these were the first to list the names of every individual. From 1861, the gathering of Scottish census material has been the responsibility of the National Records of Scotland.

Census records in one form or another have been taken by kings, empires and governments for thousands of years and the word 'census' originates from the Latin word 'censere' which means estimate. The word is perfect to describe the census, especially in the early years as they were not always 100% accurate. The Romans used the census to raise taxes and this tax raising aspect may explain why some people have traditionally been suspicious of them.

The census is essentially a snapshot of the people in a household on a given night and can provide details of a particular family and anyone else who happens to be in the house at the time, for example, servants, lodgers and visitors. Although information can at times be inaccurate, it is a valuable source of family history information, particularly when used in conjunction with other records.

Census records may only be inspected after 100 years in Scotland so **the records currently available for inspection are 1841 – 1911.**

The Scottish Census

The first Scottish census was taken in 1801. For the purposes of family history however the censuses of most use range in date from 1841 – 1911.

Parish of *Grassburgh*

1		2		3	4	
PLACE	HOUSES	NAME and SURNAME, SEX and AGE, of each Person who abode in each House on the Night of 6th June.		OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	
Here insert Name of Village, Street, Square, Close, Court, &c.	Uninhabited or Partly Inhabited	NAME and SURNAME		Of what Profession, Trade, Employment, or whether of Independent Means.	If born in Scotland, state whether in County, or otherwise	
		AGE				
		Male	Female		Whether Foreign born, or whether born in England, Ireland, or Scotland.	
<i>Commercial Street</i>	1	<i>William Campbell</i>		<i>Mason</i>	<i>Y</i>	
			<i>25</i>			
		<i>Mary</i>	<i>do</i>			<i>25</i>
			<i>1</i>		<i>Y</i>	

1841 Census extract

Questions in Census records

The questions varied from place to place and year to year. You can find information like names of household members, ages, birthplace, residence, occupation, marriage information, military service and more.

The table below summarises the exact dates the Scottish censuses were taken from 1841 – 1911 and the varying questions that were asked with each new census.

Year	Day & Month	Questions	Total Population
1841	6 th June	Place; Name; Age; Sex; Occupation; Where born	2 594 717
1851	30 th March	**New questions Relation to head of family; Marital status; Rank/ Profession/ Occupation; Whether blind, deaf or dumb	2 912 840
1861	7 th April	No. of children 5-13 attending school; No. of rooms in house with one or more windows	3 062 857
1871	2 nd April	**New question Whether blind, deaf or dumb, imbecile or lunatic	3 365 759
1881	3 rd April	As above	3 728 099
1891	5 th April	**New questions Whether employer or employed or working on own account; Whether speaks Gaelic or Gaelic and English	3 973 948
1901	31 st March	As above	4 470 512
1911	2 nd April	**New questions Marital status; duration of marriage; children born alive; children still living; Industry or service with which worker is connected; Nationality if born in a foreign country; Whether totally deaf or deaf and dumb, totally blind, lunatic, imbecile or feeble minded	4 759 445

Information found in Census records

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the [Page 51

Civil Parish of		Parish Ward of		Ecclesiastical Parish of		Quoad-Sacro-Parish of		School Board District of		Parliamentary Burgh of		Parliamentary Division of			
Aberdeen		Torry		Torry		Torry		Aberdeen		Aberdeen		County of Kincardine			
Royal Burgh of		Municipal Burgh of		Police Burgh of		Burgh Ward of		Town of		Village or Hamlet of		Island of			
Aberdeen		Aberdeen		Aberdeen		Torry		Aberdeen							
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE.	HOUSES.		NAME and Surname of each Person.	RELATION to Head of Family.	CONDITION as to Marriage.	AGE (last Birthday).		PROFESSION or OCCUPATION.	Employer, Worker, or on Own Account.	If Working at Home.	WHERE BORN.	Gaelic, or G. & E.	Whether 1. Deaf and dumb, 2. Blind, 3. Lame, 4. Imbecile, feeble-minded.	Rooms with One or more Windows.
		In.	Un-occupied (U) or Vacant (V).				Male	Female							
255	9, Walker Road	1		Andrew Smith	Head	Mar.	64		Salmon Fisher	Worker		Huntly, Kincardineshire			2
				Margaret D.	Wife	Mar.	62					Huntly, Kincardineshire			
				George McRivie	Grand Son		12		Schooler			Kincardineshire, Torry			
				Alice Clyne	Boarder	S.	18		Iron Worker	Worker		Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen			
				Wilhelmina McPherson	Boarder	S.	20					Huntly, Kincardineshire			
				Isabella Clyne	Boarder	S.	19					Huntly, Kincardineshire			

Sample Census - 1901

Address

Name

Age & Gender

Profession/ Occupation

Birthplace

Some of the key points of information to be found on any census are marked on the above extract from the 1901 census.

Scotland was divided into enumeration districts for the purposes of collecting information. Census enumerators were responsible for designated areas. At the beginning of each enumeration book, the enumerator described in detail the area covered by the book.

Access to the Scottish Census

Transcripts of the Scottish censuses 1841 – 1901 are available to search on www.ancestrylibrary.com. Copies of the original documents are not held on this database.

The majority of Local Studies libraries hold microfilm copies of their own districts of the Scottish censuses from 1841 – 1901. Family historians must know the exact address to make use of this resource. It also helps to know the enumeration district. This information is provided on Ancestry.

1901 Scotland Census about Andrew Smith	
Name:	Andrew Smith
Age:	64
Estimated Birth Year:	abt 1837
Relationship:	Head
Spouse's name :	Margaret Smith
Gender:	Male
Where born:	Cellardyke, fifehire
Registration number:	266/2
Registration district:	Nigg Burgh
Civil parish:	Aberdeen
Town:	Aberdeen
County:	Kincardineshire
Address:	9, Walker Road
Occupation:	Salmon Fisher
ED:	7
Household schedule number:	255
Line:	1

Unfortunately, we are unable to display the accompanying images of this census at present, despite extensive negotiation with the General Register Office for Scotland. Permission from them has not, as yet, been forthcoming. For this reason, and to enable you to continue with your family history research, Ancestry has heavily transcribed the Scottish Census records to ensure you have access to all key areas of information contained within this collection.

The 1911 census was released to public viewing in April 2011. This census is only available on www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk as the Register General for Scotland has made the decision not to release it to public libraries. Payment is required to use this resource but it contains digital images of all the censuses from 1841 – 1911.