

RootsTech 2025

Examining the Irish Census

Daniel Loftus

Links: <https://danielloftus.carrrd.co> | Email: dansgenealogy@gmail.com

NOTE: On February 5th, 2025 – a new site for the National Archives has launched so the site screenshots you see in my slides might be slightly out of date! Here's an in-depth look I did for my YouTube channel here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eomszTOccO4&ab_channel=DanielLoftusGenealogy

Background to the Census

While many may think that the first ever census in 1821 was the first of its kind, people might not have been aware that there had been previous attempts to do a census. Prior to the 1800s, there had been population estimates for Ireland, going back to 1672 where the population was stated to be 1,100,000 and 1804 where it was estimated at 5,395,436.

There had been an unsuccessful attempt made to take a census in 1813 – but the first official census of Ireland was in 1821. The information recorded on the forms were written by enumerators on notebooks that they were given, later transferred into the census forms. The next census in 1831 was done in a similar way.

We still have fragments of the 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 surviving. Below is what is available (on a county level) for those years.

1821	Antrim, Carlow, Cavan, Dublin, Fermanagh, Galway, Kilkenny, Kings County (Offaly), Limerick, Mayo & Meath.
1831	Antrim & Londonderry (Derry).
1841	Antrim, Carlow, Cavan, Cork, Dublin, Fermanagh, Limerick, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan, Queen's County (Laois), Tyrone, Westmeath & Wicklow.
1851	Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Clare, Donegal, Down, Dublin, Fermanagh, Kerry, Kildare, Leitrim, Limerick, Londonderry, Longford, Mayo, Meath, Monaghan, Queen's County (Laois), Roscommon, Sligo, Tipperary, Tyrone, Waterford, Wexford & Wicklow.

For censuses between 1861 to 1891, none survive. For 1861 and 1871 – we don't have them anymore as they had been destroyed shortly after they were taken. For 1881 and 1891 – during World War I, there had been a paper shortage as a result of that it led to those two censuses were pulped.

For the 1901 and 1911 censuses – they are the only two complete* ones we have. That being said, not all of it is online. Genealogist, John Grenham had posted a list of information relating

to ‘missing’ entries for the 1901 and 1911 censuses. For information relating to ‘missing’ returns for the 1901 census, refer to: https://www.johngrenham.com/browse/missing_1901.php and for the 1911 census, refer to: https://www.johngrenham.com/browse/missing_1911.php

* majority of it is online, but some of it isn’t online and isn’t microfilmed.

Searching the Census

There are numerous places to look up the census, however some search functions are better on certain sites, but chances are you have a site you prefer to use for one reason or another. You can look at the censuses on the following sites (in no particular order), adapt the URL to your local site if needed.

<u>Site / Source</u>	<u>Links to collections & specified years</u>
National Archives of Ireland	1821-1851: https://nationalarchives.ie/collections/search-the-census-c19/ 1901-1911: https://nationalarchives.ie/collections/search-the-census/
FindMyPast	1821-1851: https://search.findmypast.ie/search-worldrecords/ireland-census-1821-1851 1841 & 1851 Census Search Forms: https://search.findmypast.ie/search-world-records/ireland-censussearch-forms-1841-and-1851 1901: https://search.findmypast.ie/search-world-records/irelandcensus-1901 1911: https://search.findmypast.ie/search-world-records/irelandcensus-1911
MyHeritage	1901: https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10199/1901ireland-census 1911: https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10198/1911ireland-census
Ancestry	1821-1851: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62025/ 1841 & 1851 Census Search Forms: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62026/ 1901: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/70667/ 1911: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/70564/

Types of Returns

These are the types of returns you can expect to find when looking at censuses.

- Form A: Household Return – record of all people residing in the household on census night.

- Form B1: House & Buildings Return – provides you with details about dwellings / buildings, describing its state: what kind of walls, roof, number of rooms etc.
- Form B2: Return of Out-Offices & Farm Steadings: Any details about extra buildings that are attached to a dwelling such as stables, coach houses, piggeries etc.
- Form B3: Shipping Return
- Form C: Return of sick at their own homes
- Form D: Returns of lunatics and idiots not in institutions
- Form E: Workhouse return
- Form F: Hospital Return
- Form G: College and Boarding School Return
- Form H: Barrack Return
- Form I: Return of idiots and lunatics in institutions
- Form K: Prison return
- Form N: Enumerators Return – gives details of number of houses in total on a street, with occupants broken down by number of men and women. Form also details religious denominations present.

Search Tips

Here are some things to bear in mind when searching the census:

- Ages are not always accurate, with the Old Age Pension Act in 1908, the scheme beginning in January 1909, it may have resulted in some alterations with their ages. To avail of this non-contributory pension, they had to be 70 years of age or over and of ‘good character’. Due to the fact that civil registration began in 1864, for those who would be approaching that age, they did not have official documentation to prove their age.
- The names on the search results may be reversed, so it could be recorded in the search as Last Name: John, First Name: Smith.
- Names could also be in Irish as well, so Patrick O’Sullivan could be written as Pádraig O Súilleabháin.
- Use the more search options on the National Archives’ website to refine results down to ones that are more plausible.
- Institutional returns such as mental asylums had names shortened, sometimes to initials or abbreviated. For example, an ancestor of mine was Mary Fraher. She was recorded as Fraher M. on the 1901 census and F. M. on the 1911 Census. More often than not, they will be identified through other information supplied on the return, i.e. marital status, children information (if applicable), approximate age, occupation.

1926 Census

Census night was April 18th, 1926. The 1926 Census for the Irish Free State will be released online publicly for free on **April 18th, 2026**. There is no surviving 1926 Census for Northern Ireland as those returns were lost, thought to have been destroyed sometime around World War II. More information on that loss from this article from the BBC covering the matter here:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-22848416>

The 1926 Census is the first in 15 years, and includes a change to the form to record information about orphanhood for children under the age of 15. Additionally, the place of birth – instead of solely being just a county, it will refine it down to the townland / town and county of birth. This will give us even more detail to help us find where people may have been from. You can see a blank Form A and Form B from the 1926 Census by selecting the section of the Volume 10 report on the Central Statistics Office's website entitled 'Appendix B' on this page here: <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/censusvolumes1926to1991/historicalreports/census1926reports/census1926volume10-generalreports/> – unlike the 1911 Census, the number of children a couple lost, is not recorded as part of the return.

You can read reports made about the 1926 Census analysing the responses received here:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/census/censusvolumes1926to1991/historicalreports/census1926reports/>

Tools

A handy tool to use when browsing the 1901 and 1911 census returns is using Shane Wilson's tool to browse them easier. You can find that tool here:

https://www.swilson.info/tools/census_nav2.php