

Past papers 10 Mar 2005

Name	Sex	Age	Occupation
Charles Dickens	Male	35	Author
...

Census page showing where Charles Dickens lived in 1861. The entire 1861 Census has is available online. © Crown Copyright

A brand new on-line resource is now available for geography students to use. The entire 1861 Census has been up-loaded onto the internet. This massive data set records the name, age, address and occupation of nearly everyone alive in the UK almost 150 ago!

The Census is the main source of data for national population statistics, for which every household is surveyed. It has been conducted every 10 years since 1801, excluding 1941, when Britain was at war. The Census is more accurate than any other social survey because other research can only provide estimates based upon smaller surveys known as *samples*. By law, everyone must participate in the national Census, making it a more or less completely accurate picture of life in the UK. However, towards the end of each 10

year period the data can start to become inaccurate, as it will no longer reflect real life quite as well, particularly in urban areas that are experiencing rapid social and economic changes due to migration.

Before the Census began, the only data that were kept consisted of church records of burials, baptisms and marriages. These records are sometimes used by geographers researching changes in **population structure** occurring further back in time than 1801. However, researching more recent changes has been getting easier for several years now, thanks to the Internet. The results of past Censuses started appearing on-line a few years ago, when the 1901 data was made available. At first, so many people were trying to view the site that it had to be temporarily shut down! This was due to the huge interest in tracing family history that now exists in the UK.

How can the 1861 Census help GCSE geographers today?

Queen Victoria was nearly half-way through her reign and America was in the midst of a civil war when this data was originally collected. Population was still growing rapidly in the UK, transport was limited and the suburbs had yet to develop. In London, people lived at much higher residential densities than today; the sewer system had not been completed (although work had begun). As a result, cholera and tuberculosis outbreaks were still common. The 1861 Census provides a window into a world very different from today. GCSE geography students might be able to investigate the following themes, all of which are relevant to the courses that they are taking:

- *Population structure* was very different in 1861. It was a time when birth rates were still high but death rates had recently started falling due to better healthcare and hygiene. As a result, families present in the 1861 Census will probably have very large numbers of children by today's standards.
- *Life expectancy* was still a lot lower than today, however, with many people not living beyond 60. There will therefore be a relative lack of elderly people compared with the present day.
- *Working lives* were also very different. Most people worked in factories (secondary industry) or were still tied to the land as miners, stone masons or farmers (primary industry).

How do I get access to the 1861 Census?

To use the 1861 Census at www.1837online.com you will probably need the help of a parent or other adult possessing a credit card: you must **always** have the permission of the card-holder to use it. For a minimum fee of £5 it is then possible to buy 50 credits that can then be used to search up to 20

records of households or individuals. Names of individuals can be searched for, or actual addresses. If you had family living in the UK at that time, you can search using your surname (perhaps ask your grandparents if they can remember any old family names). If you did not have relatives living in the UK in 1861, then you can still have fun looking up the details of famous people that were alive at the time, such as Charles Dickens or Florence Nightingale. Also, if you live in a house or street that had already been built in 1861, you can search to see exactly who was living there nearly 150 years ago!

What about the 2001 Census?

The results of the most recent Census are also available to view on-line, but in a completely different form (they are also free to view, unlike 1861!). The older records for 1861 give details of people's names and where they lived. In contrast, the 2001 Census results show the characteristics of local districts but not of individual people. Typically, geographers will be interested in viewing population data at three different scales:

1. **The national level** How many people live in the UK? What are their ages? Where do they live?
2. **The regional or city level** Do some places have more old people than others? How does ethnicity vary between different towns? Are some parts of cities richer than others?
3. **The neighbourhood level** How noticeably does population vary between neighbouring **wards** where you live?

The 2001 Census is one of the very few data sources that comes close to counting everyone and therefore gives us a very detailed picture. [The RGS-IBG Local Learning Project](#), funded by the DfES, uses the 2001 Census to examine the topics of migration, employment and population structure using data from different small scale areas in England.

Also online: the historical geography of the English language

Last week it was also announced that a giant new archive of regional accents is now available on-line. Hundreds of recordings of conversations with 681 ordinary people from all across England were made in the 1940s. The British Library Sound Archive has made these recordings available to listen to. They capture forms of spoken English that are now disappearing in some cases. They provide a unique research opportunity for geographers who may have an interest in how language varies from place to place.

<http://www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive/nsa.html>

