

1911 Census Update

From our very own National Archives the latest information for the release of the forthcoming 1911 census - updated.

It really looks like that we are not in for an early treat, as some of us were expecting. As many know, we have been fighting for the earlier release. They keep on saying that "successive governments have consistently maintained that all census returns should be closed for a period of 100 years.

The following statement from the National Archives follows:

The National Archives is committed to making census data available online. We know from our own experience the huge excitement generated by the release of any new census and recognise the great historical and research value of census information. So we are already making plans to make the 1911 census available online in just under six years' time, on the first working day of 2012.

The release of the census returns after 100 years is determined by long-standing government policy. The 1911 census form included the following emphatic assurance to householders: 'The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict Care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons.' In 1966 the Lord Chancellor determined that ALL decennial census returns should be closed for a period of 100 years, on the grounds that they contained personal information supplied by citizens about themselves. Since then successive governments have consistently maintained this position, and from 1981 onwards there has been an explicit assurance on census forms that they will remain closed to the public for 100 years. This is the assurance that we all receive when we provide sensitive personal information in our completed census forms. The Government continues to believe that the 100-year closure period strikes the right balance between protecting confidential data about us as individual citizens and releasing the information, which is so valuable to researchers and historians alike. Under the Freedom of Information Act, The National Archives considers requests for access to information contained in the 1911 census returns in consultation with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as the department that transferred the record to us. On the specific enquiries received to date it has not been possible to release the information that has been sought, on the grounds that it is exempt under section 41 of the Act, which relates to information provided in confidence. The 1911 census is a huge document - more than 12 times the size of the 1901 census - with over 8 million schedules covering our 35 million ancestors: that's 35,000 volumes occupying some 2 kilometres of shelving. They are in good condition and suitable for scanning, with less than 5 per cent requiring more extensive conservation work to be scanned safely. In addition there are also 38,000 volumes of enumerators' summary books that are in excellent condition and provide valuable supporting information. By far the best option for providing access to the census is online delivery, making the returns available to the widest possible audience while preserving the integrity of the original records. Proposals are well underway to find a supplier to work with us in order to provide a good reliable service for millions of potential users. We are now at the stage of detailed discussions with a short list of potential suppliers. It is hoped that the contract for the service to deliver the 1911 census online will be awarded in December 2006/January 2007. Learning from previous experience and building on our current plans, The National Archives is eagerly looking forward to launching the 1911 census online in January 2012, which we are confident will rapidly become a major resource for family historians of British descent throughout the globe.