



Newsletter - March 8, 2009

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DECODING THE 1911 ENGLAND & WALES CENSUS

Have you ever wondered what all the numbers mean when you access a 1911 Census record? For example, when I looked up my great-grandparents, the reference given was:

RG14PN9571 RG78PN510A RD188 SD6 ED15 SN377

Phew! But it's not really as indecipherable as it looks - here's what the letters stand for:

RG = Registrar General (the person responsible for taking the censuses)

PN = Piece Number (a piece is usually a box or bundle of documents)

RD = Registration District

SD = Sub-District

ED = Enumeration District (the area that a single enumerator would cover)

SN = Schedule Number

I expect you're wondering why there are two RG numbers, RG14 and RG78. For the first time the schedules completed by individual householders were kept, and these are held in 34998 pieces under reference RG14. Also retained were the enumerators' summary books which list each of the properties in the enumeration district - there are 2015 pieces under reference RG78.

It's recently become possible to search the 1911 Census using these references - but why might you want to do this? Suppose that you are trying to track down a household, and you know where they were living, but have been unable to find them when searching either by name or by address (this is a common problem in villages where streets were often unnamed, or in locations where houses have names rather than numbers).

If you've found another household which you believe to be in the same enumeration district as the elusive relatives you're trying to find, you could make use of this information to find other households in the same district.

Note: in the Help information at the 1911 Census site it states that you can enter any combination of references, just so long as you leave a space between them. However, you can't enter the RG and SN references on their own, nor should you leave a space between them - because there are two RG and two SN references they should always be entered together, eg as RG14PN9571 or RG78PN510A.

By the way - did you know that you can search other England & Wales censuses using the references? See the article [Checking census data quickly!](#) below.

1911 TIPS

How do you search the 1911 Census? Do you simply go to the home page and fill in the form headed *Search the 1911 census*?

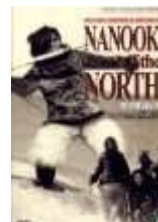
I don't do that. Instead I click the *Search the 1911 census* tab at the top left of the home page, which takes me to a more detailed Search form where I can not only specify a year of birth, but also a range, and which allows me to use *wildcards* and other clever features.

Don't forget that if you do use wildcards, you have to tick the appropriate box - otherwise you won't get any results. Be careful, too, if you use the *Keywords* field. The Help information at the 1911 site suggests that it can find data in any field, but in my experience that isn't always the case. I'll investigate further and let you know how it does actually work (it's worth checking the [Stop Press](#) section at the end of this newsletter).

MOVIE MEMORIES

What's the first picture you saw at the cinema? The first two films I remember seeing are *The Square Peg*, starring the incomparable Norman Wisdom, and *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, starring Ingrid Bergman. Both were released in 1958, and I was taken to see them by my maternal grandmother.

Have you ever asked your relatives about the films they remember from their childhood? Not long ago I asked my Dad (now nearly 93) about the first film he could remember seeing, and it was one I hadn't heard of - a documentary about an Eskimo called [Nanook of the North](#), released in 1922. I didn't think there was much chance of tracking down a copy after nearly 90 years, but would you believe it - I found a VHS copy on sale through Amazon in the US (I see it's now even available on DVD). Just imagine the memories it brought back when Dad watched it again, for the first time in 85 years!



[Felix the Cat](#) was another favourite from Dad's childhood - he also made his first appearance in 1922, and the more senior members among you may recall the most popular song of 1923, *Felix Kept on Walking*. Believe me, once you've heard that song it's almost impossible to get the tune out of your head!

I also managed to track down copies of Felix's early cartoons, once again at [Amazon](#). Live was so different before the advent of television - not that I remember it, because I was only 2 when my parents rented a TV to watch the Coronation. How did earlier generations of your family spend their leisure time, I wonder?

ONLINE NEWSLETTERS ARE HERE TO STAY

I wasn't sure how the experiment with the last newsletter would be received - but in the event, less than 1 member in 1000 expressed a preference for the old-style newsletters (and a far greater number wrote to say how much they liked the new system).

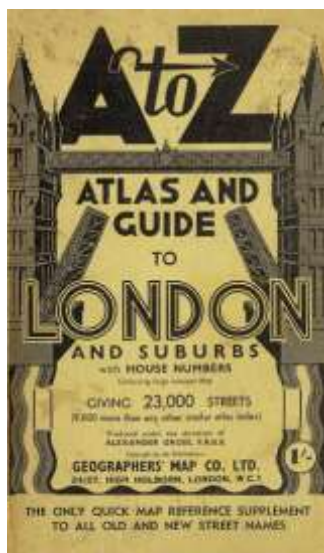
From now on, whenever there's a new edition available you'll receive a short email from me with links to the online newsletter. Past newsletters will remain on the website, so you don't need to keep a copy on your own computer, and I'll also be providing a global index so that you can easily find articles from past newsletters. From now on each newsletter will have a Stop Press section where I will post corrections and updates.

When last month's experiment began there was just one online version of the newsletter, in PDF format. PDF format provides the best presentation and produces the best print-outs - but it also has disadvantages, so I was delighted to follow the advice of a member who suggested also offering an HTML version (a regular web page, in other words).

A handful of members who still have dial-up Internet access were rightly concerned about the cost of reading the newsletter online. The simple answer is that you don't have to read it online - once the newsletter is on your screen you can log-off. Note that the PDF version is a much larger file - I'd recommend the HTML version if you are on dial-up.

Currently the newsletters aren't accessible from the website menu - you need to use the link in the emails I send out. This will change in time, but for now you'll have to put up with what an amateur like me can achieve!

MAP YOUR GREATER LONDON ANCESTORS



The story of Phyllis Pearsall, who tramped the streets of London in order to create the very first A-Z map in the mid-1930s is quite well-known, but did you know that it is now possible to buy a facsimile copy of the [1938 A-Z of London](#)? To see Greater London as it was before the Second World War, with street names and - in some cases - building numbers is quite an eye-opener. The coverage is extensive - it extends to the suburbs of Whetstone and Southgate in the north, Barking and Woolwich in the east, Croydon in the south, and in the west as far as Harrow, Hanwell, and Twickenham. Sadly it costs a little more than the original 1/- cover price, but it's still worth every penny.

Now, I'm not sure whether I can rightfully claim credit for this new publication, but I did write to the Geographers A-Z Map Company in 2005 suggesting that a facsimile would be invaluable for genealogists, so I'd like to think that I played some small part. By the way, you can also order [modern London maps](#) (and other UK maps) from their website.

For older maps of London (from 1520-1902) see the website of [Old House Books](#) (and if you do order from them, please mention LostCousins!).

COLOGNE ARCHIVES LOST IN BUILDING COLLAPSE

The collapse of the Historical Archive of Cologne on Tuesday was tragic not only because of the loss of life, but also the destruction of over 1000 years of documents. Large parts of the collection had been microfilmed, but sadly the film is reported to be of poor quality. To find out more see this [article](#) in the International online edition of Der Spiegel.

NEW ZEALAND BMD INDEXES ONLINE AT LAST

There are thousands of LostCousins members who live in New Zealand, and there must be many more who have relatives who migrated there - but until now there have been very few online records. I was therefore delighted to learn from Liz in New Zealand that [birth, marriage, and death indexes](#) are now available online.

As in many other countries access is restricted to protect the privacy of individuals, so you can only search for births that occurred over 100 years ago, marriages that took place over 80 years ago, or deaths

registered over 50 years ago (or where the individual was born over 80 years ago). Nevertheless, it's great to have such an important source online and - best of all - it's free to search the indexes.

NORTHERN IRELAND RECORDS ONLINE

The Public Records Office for Northern Ireland has several free indexes that you can search online. For example, you can search an index of [will calendar entries](#) from 1858-c1900 (note: a will calendar is a summary of grants of probate and letters of administration - see the PRONI website for an [example page](#)). In due course digital copies of the calendar entries and copy wills will also be available online, though I don't know whether they'll also be free.

Other free online indexes are the signatories to the [Ulster Covenant](#) (1912), and [Freeholders Records](#) (pre-1840). There's also an [eCatalogue](#) which contains over 1 million catalogue entries, many of which mention names.

UP AGAINST A 'BRICK WALL'?

No matter how experienced, all researchers hit 'brick walls' from time to time. When I hit a 'brick wall' I generally go off and research another part of my tree - and often when I go back to the original problem I see it differently, and am able to come up with a new line of attack.

But perhaps the most important tip is this: when you can't find what you're looking for, that's usually because you're looking in the wrong place (or in the wrong year, or for the wrong name). All too often we assume that our ancestors filled in the census forms correctly, when we know in our heart of hearts that very few actually did.

Perhaps the biggest mistake I made was assuming that marriage certificates showed the correct information - I've since realised that they are some of the least reliable documents we have at our disposal. We all know that 4-10% of Victorians were born out of wedlock, but how often do you see a marriage certificate where the father's name is missing? The fact is, nobody would want to admit on their wedding day, of all days, that they were illegitimate. Father's occupations are often upgraded - 'ag labs' became farmers, mariners became sea captains, and in one notable example an out of work labourer was described as a 'gentleman'. Factor in other discrepancies, such as ages being 'adjusted', and I reckon that up to half of marriage certificates contain at least one error.

When you're up against a 'brick wall' help from another researcher is invariably welcome - and, of course, the best people to help are your 'lost cousins', since they'll have been researching the same ancestors from a different perspective. They will almost certainly have heard different family stories, inherited different photographs and ephemera, and tackled their research from a different perspective.

To give yourself the best chance of finding your cousins be sure to enter as many as possible of the relatives you can find on the 1881 Census - and whilst any one of them could provide the vital link, remember that the relatives most likely to 'hit the jackpot' are the brothers and sisters who had families of their own by the time of the census.

EXPERT TIP: MANAGING MULTIPLE ACCOUNTS

Most family historians are also researching their spouse's ancestry, and as you probably know, this means having two LostCousins accounts. With one account you can choose to be permanently logged-in (which saves time and means you don't have to remember your password), but with two accounts and only one computer this isn't possible - or is it?

The good news is that if you have more than one web browser on your computer you can be logged in to more than one account at the same time. For example, if you have Internet Explorer and Firefox you could be logged-in to your own account on Internet Explorer, and to your spouse's account under Firefox. [Firefox](#) is my browser of choice, and can be downloaded free - as can Google's [Chrome](#) browser.

HOW DO YOU SIGN YOUR EMAILS?

Rosemarie wrote to me recently with a clever idea - every email she sends ends with:

I'm a Cousin - are you?

<http://www.lostcousins.com>

It's a great way to recruit new members. After all, anyone who has British ancestry is likely to have several cousins amongst our 70,000 members, and it could be all thanks to you that they make the vital connection!

Most email programs allow you to create a 'signature' that is automatically appended to every email you send. If you think Rosemarie's idea is a good one, send me an email showing *your* signature advertising LostCousins - the one I like best will earn the author a free subscription (entries by 14th March, please).

CHECKING CENSUS DATA QUICKLY!

If you record the references that define a specific census page it makes it very easy to call up that page in the future. For example, suppose you want to check that the information from the 1881 Census that you've entered on your My Ancestors page is correct - just go to findmypast.com and click the Census tab, which takes you to a page headed "Search England & Wales census records". Just above the list of censuses you'll see "census reference search". Click this link and select the 1881 Census (which is free at findmypast.com).

Census reference search



Census: *		
1881 (RG11)		
Piece: *	Folio: *	Page no.:
1354	34	4
CLEAR	SEARCH	

Simply enter the piece, folio, and page number for the household you'd like to check, and when you click SEARCH a list of the people on that page of the census will be displayed. Now click VIEW against any of your relatives in the list to see a transcription of the household that you can compare against the entries on your *My Ancestors* page.

It only takes a few seconds to check each household, so it's well worth doing, especially if the results you're getting have been disappointing. Everyone makes mistakes, so it's good to know that there's an easy way to spot them - and it's also very easy to amend an entry on your *My Ancestors* page. Just click on the person's name (no matter which part of the record you want to change), make the changes and click Submit. Once again, it only takes a few seconds - when you know how.

Going back to census references, although the example I gave was for the 1881 Census, you can use census references to bring up any census page from other England & Wales censuses, either at findmypast.com or Ancestry.

PETER'S TIPS



With interest rates on savings down to 2% or less, how does 10% tax-free sound? Royal Mail is increasing the cost of postage from April 6th, and it amounts to 3p extra for a standard letter, whether you send it 1st or 2nd class. I can't stop the prices going up, but what I can do is remind you that the books of stamps you can buy in the supermarket, or at petrol stations have NVI (no value indicated) stamps. In other words you can buy

stamps now at the old prices and use them after the price rise - that's equivalent to a 10% saving on 2nd class stamps, and nearly 8% for 1st class. At a time when interest rates are so low, an opportunity like this is too good to be missed - I've already bought all the stamps I'll need for the next year!

Is your broadband contract about to run out? Try calling them and asking for a MAC number (that's the number you'd need if you were planning to switch to a different supplier). I'd be surprised if they didn't put you through to a special department whose main role is to offer discounts in order to hang on to customers. According to a recent Which? survey of broadband users [O2](#) offers the best service, although to get the best price you need to have an O2 mobile phone.

Did you know that if you buy credits from [findmypast.com](#) they can also be used at the 1911 Census site? If you're not already a findmypast.com subscriber, why not use a few credits to find relatives from earlier censuses who *seem* to be missing from other censuses? Because different census sites have different search facilities as well as different transcriptions, someone who's missing at (say) [Ancestry](#) may well turn up at findmypast. I've certainly found that their transcriptions are better, and for the 1841 Census particularly, the ability to search for any two people in a household, or by address, is an enormous benefit.

News came in recently that [Switch with Which?](#), the free gas and electricity price comparison site run by the Consumers Association is now [Which? Switch](#). So what? Personally I was more interested in the revelation that people who used the site last year saved over £200 on average (since I was one of them).

Thinking of topping up your (British) state pension by buying additional contribution years? I understand that from April the cost will increase by nearly 50%, so you may need to act quickly (but please take advice first - everybody's circumstances are different).

I don't know about you, but I'm a big fan of *The Archers* (which is why I'm so proud to have Tim Bentinck, who plays David Archer, as a LostCousins member). For the past quarter of a century I've recorded the Omnibus edition on Sundays, and listened to it at my leisure - in recent years I've used a program called [Total Recorder](#) which costs just \$18 and will record any audio playing on my PC, whatever the source.

But that's not the tip - what I really wanted to say is that if I go away on holiday for more than a week I've had a problem, because the Omnibus edition is only available at the BBC website for 7 days. However, I realised recently that I can set up my Freeview DVD recorder to record radio programmes as well as TV programmes - and it works perfectly, even though there aren't any pictures. I gather you can also do this with a Sky Plus box, though I haven't tried it myself (we haven't succumbed to satellite yet).

STOP PRESS

This is where corrections and updates will appear - another of the advantages of having the newsletter online!

That's all for now - I hope you've found some of it relevant to you and your family tree. Please do keep sending in your comments and suggestions for future issues.

Peter Calver
Founder, LostCousins

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