Your Family Tree Series: 2

1901 Census

This leaflet will help you to use the microfilm copies of the 1901 census for the six counties of Northern Ireland that are held in the Self-Service Microfilm Room in PRONI under the reference **MIC354**.

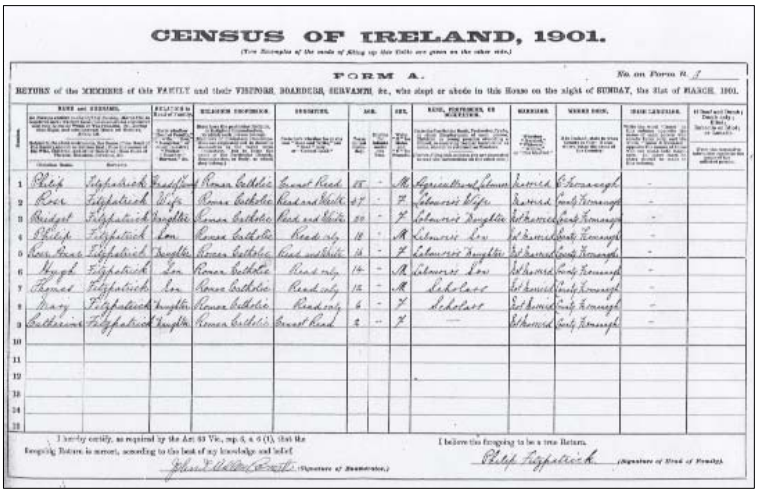
The first successfully completed census of Ireland took place in 1821. Unfortunately it, and almost all the census returns after that up until 1891, were destroyed, either by government order during the First World War or were lost in the destruction of the Public Record Office in Dublin in 1922. A few remnants remain of the 1821–1851 censuses, but that of 1901 is the earliest and most complete census of Ireland that survives.

If you know the location of your family in the late 19th century, the 1901 census can be an invaluable source of information and may contain the names of those who were born before the Great Famine. For those born before the introduction of Civil Registration in 1864, the census can be used to determine their date of birth. For example: someone aged 51 in 1901 would have been born in 1850 – fourteen years before birth certificates would have been available. This assumes, of course, that the person concerned knew what age they were when they filled in the form.

What is recorded?

All those in the house at the time were included on the form. This means that servants, lodgers, boarders and even visiting friends are included but those members of the family away from home on the day were not included with the other family members. The information was gathered on 31 March, and recorded the following:

- ***First (Christian)name***
- ***Surname***
- ***Relationship to the head of the household***
- ***Religious denomination***
- ***Literacy level***
- ***Age***
- ***Gender***
- ***Occupation***
- ***Marital status***
- ***Place of birth***
- ***Ability to speak or write Irish***
- ***If disabled, nature of disability***


CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1901.

FORM A.

*Extract from the 1901 Census (PRONI Reference **MIC354**)*

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
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How to find the microfilm reel number

The 1901 census returns are arranged by county, electoral division or ward and townland or, if in a town or city, by street. The poor law union, barony and parish are also noted on the forms. To use the census, you need to know where the person you are looking for was living in 1901 – the town or city, or if in a rural area, the name of the townland. To discover in which district electoral division the townland or town or city is situated you should consult the 1901 edition of the **Alphabetical Index to the Townlands and Towns, Parishes and Baronies of Ireland**, available on the Search Room shelves. This lists every townland/town/city mentioned in the census. Once you know the district electoral division you should then check the alphabetical listing of the microfilm reels by district electoral division or in the case of Belfast, the alphabetical list of streets. You will then note the **MIC** reference. For information:

MIC means the record is on microfilm
354 is the number allocated to the 1901 census material on microfilm
The next number refers to the county (***/1*** is County Antrim, ***/2*** is Armagh, ***/3*** Down, ***/4*** Fermanagh, ***/5*** Londonderry and ***/6*** Tyrone)
The next number is the reel number

As there will be several townlands within the district electoral division and several streets in a town you will need to consult the **MIC354** catalogue entry (catalogue colour green) to discover the whereabouts on the reel of the townland or street that you wish to view.

If your ancestors came from Belfast, and you do not know the name of the street, try locating them in the **Belfast and Ulster Street Directory**, available in the Search Room. This lists people alphabetically by name and, as well as giving their address, it gives their occupation and so making identification easier.

Using the 1901 census

The returns for each townland or street consist of:

> **Forms N, B1** and **B2.** These were filled in by the official taking the census, summarising the returns for that townland or street. These forms are normally at the beginning of each new street or townland and in the following order: **Form N** is the enumerator's abstract for a townland or street; **Form B1** summarises the houses and buildings; **Form B2** is a summary of the outhouses and farmsteads; and **Form B3** is a shipping return.
>
> **Form A** (pictured overleaf), was filled in by the head of each household, giving the names of all people in that household on census night and their age, occupation, religion and place of birth. There should be a separate form for every dwelling. Form A entries are arranged in numerical order by the number allocated to the building in Form B – the cross reference to the number on Form B will be found in the top right hand corner of Form A.

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Form H is a return of the military, Royal Irish Constabulary and Metropolitan Police in barracks; **Form E** is a return of inmates in the workhouse; **Form F** is a return of those in hospital; and **Form G** is a return of those at college and boarding school.

The National Archives of Ireland and online access

The original census returns for 1901 are held in the National Archives of Ireland (Bishop Street, Dublin) who, in partnership with Library and Archives Canada, have launched a project to index and digitise both the 1901 and 1911 census returns. The index and digitised images will be made available on-line without charge on a phased basis but the entire project will take 3 years to complete.

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