

1 Background

Sylvanus Percival Vivian – Registrar General 1921-1945 driving force for 1921 and 1931 census. Preparations for 1941 census under way. He looked at problems of 1915 Register.

2 Reasons for 1939 Register

To organize resources on home front.

To issue ID cards to general populace.

Government workers and the military had their own.

British Army Barracks, Royal Navy Stations and RAF stations not included.

Needed up-to-date population statistics as there had been many changes since 1931.

Needed information to make best use of the man power to put in right place.

Enable calculations to allocate available food supplies.

To help re-establish contact when families separated.

Labour and food rationing needed to be managed.

List of soldiers to be conscripted.

Not a means of studying population as with a census.

3 Preparation

Had preparations for 1941 census as template for a future register.

On same day that war broke out the National Registration Bill read in House of Commons. 2 days later bill passed.

Friday, 29th Sept - Registration Day.

41 Million people recorded.

Creation of 14,000 administration districts with officer in charge.

Each given a 3 letter code starting in London with AAA.

Then larger area comprising group of 65,000 enumeration districts with an already trained enumerator.

Aim to have no more than 300 persons per enumerator. This indicated by 4th letter added to code.

4 Organization

Who included?

There were 3 Registers -

1. Civilians regardless of age or nationality
2. Those in the armed forces
3. Those born after 29th Sept (Registration Day)

41 million people in the UK.

Civilians who were on military bases.

Even foreign persons and members of embassies.

Not included members of the armed forces and Mercantile Marine.

5 Enumerators and Logistics

Instructions and form delivered week before the day.

Had to collect on following day. Keep going back if not in.

When got all forms these to be copied into books.

Images that we get are digital image of 7000 enumerator's books not the householder's schedule.

The original forms sent to local food office for the planned ration books. After this not survived.

Administrative districts were organized along local government boundaries rather than by districts because local government responsible for food rationing
Books sent to National Register Office. Now kept by NHS

6 Book Page

Top row: The 3 letter administrative district code and the 4th enumeration district code.

The name of the administrative district

The area code, these also seen in censuses

Next row: headings for columns

1. Address; 2. House schedule, (do not confuse with house number); 3. Person schedule; 4. Name (surname first then name known by and initials for 2nd name); 5. codes for people in institutions, officer, visitor, servant, patient, inmate; 6. Sex; 7. The date of birth; 8. The year of birth; 9. Marital status; 10. Occupation, this had to have an entry therefore have unpaid domestic duties and under school age.

Some occupations labelled "heavy work" this meant they received extra rations. People who travelled, e.g. lorry drivers issued with different ration books.

People were not to be "vague" or use indefinite terms for occupations

There were penalties for giving false information

The right hand page for most people the column 11, Comments like ARP Warden, Royal Observer Corp, Women's Volunteer service and Home Guard. An abbreviation is PWC which was Post War Credit which was a tax which was taken by government and paid back after the war.

Names crossed through means change of name. There are often women's names crossed through and a new name this means a marriage and sometime a number can indicate approximate time of marriage – time event reported Occasionally see note see "Bk 2" (or similar) This means there is another entry.

7 Searching

The register can be found on Find My Past (£)

Ancestry (£)

My Heritage (£) (transcription)

View for free at The National Archives (FMP)

Local library may have free access

If 2 surnames can usually search using either

Can search by name or address on FMP.

Start with broad search and narrow bit by bit.

Try various strategies to search, Christian and date of birth

There are boxes for NA refs; piece and item no. Make a note of all the refs for further research.

Search by address has fewer boxes,

Tips on FMP on search method if scroll below search box

8 Problems with Searching

It was war and enumerators not as careful with handwriting as could be. They used fountain pens which means blobs.

The black lines are the redacted names of people who still alive, under 100 years old.

Depending on when the company updates records, a person can be found on one but not on another.

Transcription: - Privacy very paranoid and a page was divided into columns and one transcriber only given one column they did not see the whole record. This also made it difficult as

transcriber could not see the whole of the handwriting for the whole person and sometimes the columns not put back together in right order.

Enumerators only wrote the last 2 digits of the year and this lead to wrong centuries in places. Postal addresses can be misleading because only Borough or district, not towns or villages and many towns have same street names.

Some addresses omitted when it went online.

Streets may have been renamed or renumbered.

9 ID cards

ID cards continued until 1952.

Article on abolition of ID cards - www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3129302.stm

Id cards plans as early as 1st Dec 1938 (on histpop site).

Discussion had taken place as to whether there should be discs or cards but in the National Registration Bill 4th Sept 1939 cards were stated.

To be carried at all times and if asked must be produced at police station within 48 hrs.

They were issued for identification purposes, to aid with call up and ration books.

Number created from string of administrative district number, enumeration district number, schedule number and sub schedule number.

The card to be carried at all times children's card kept by parents.

Several types: light brown 1939-1943 original style.

Light brown under 16.

Blue from 1943 replaced the buff coloured only for over 16.

Women's cards replaced on marriage.

The green NRID included a photo issued to government officials.

Had change of address section and responsibility to keep up to date.

The ID numbers became National Health number.

10 Rationing

Ration books showed National registration number as proof of ID.

Had to show id and ration book to get goods.

Items became rationed at various times starting with bacon, butter and sugar in Jan 1940.

People allocated an amount per week for basic groceries and longer periods for items like jam.

Clothes rationed. 60 coupons per year reduced to 48. Colour coded to say when could use.

Children had 10 extra.

Enumerator would indicate "heavy work" these people had extra rations. People engaged in travelling occupations had different ration books.

11 Evacuation

Even before the war began it was realized from bombing in conflicts in the 1930s that bombing would form a terrible part of the war and so evacuation of children was planned, "Operation Pied Piper".

The country divided into 3 sections, evacuation, reception and neutral.

At www.histpop.org documentation and list of areas and which category. Problem areas not specifically mentioned were reception.

Evacuation forms circulated to parents as early as May 1939.

Evacuation was not compulsory.

The mothers were given the option of going with the children. Children who are missing could have been evacuated or if there are strange children in your household they could be evacuees.

Checks could be made of the areas where they are found to see if a reception area or where they are missing was it an evacuation area. Some children were evacuated abroad but in Sept 1940 the SS City of Benares was torpedoed and many evacuees were drowned.

12 Using the 1939 in conjunction with other records

Finding a couple on the 1911 census and then their children which can be verified with Freebmd.

They can then be looked for in 1939 and the date of birth help confirm research.

Necessary to check other sources for relationship as not given in register.

The Register was taken in 1939 during the war many occupations changed, what happened to your ancestor during the war?

Were they in the military – check war diaries – military records.

Look at houses.

Look at fashion.

Reserved occupations.

13 Websites and useful references

If you are a member of Lost Cousins then Peter Calver has a special newsletter devoted to the 1939 Register (and many other useful topics). This is one of the best overall articles. Find My Past has various topics in its Articles section. The National Archives has a research guide, video and podcast and a speech read by an actor which broadcast on Registration Night.

The BBC history website has various articles.

The Imperial War Museum site has background, www.histpop.org also has a range of topics.

www.familyhistory.co.uk/national-registration-1915-1939

FMP www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/1939-registerenumeration-districts

<https://blog.findmypast.co.uk/1939-register-the-perfect-place-to-start-your-family-history-2518395209.html>

www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3129302.stm

www.1900s.org.uk/reserved-occupation.htm

<https://anguline.co.uk/Free/Reserved.pdf>

www.familyhistory.co.uk/1939-register

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/search/results/?_q=1939+register

www.primaryhomeworkhelp.co.uk/war/rationing

These sites did work when I originally wrote the fact sheet. The only one that is temperamental is the hispop site which sometimes says “busy”

*Ann Simcock
October 2020*

This and other useful record sheets, guidance notes and charts can be downloaded from the members section of the Midland Ancestors website www.midland-ancestors.uk