



## **Press Release**

13 December 2006

### **The National Archives receives information commissioner's report on 1911 census**

The National Archives (England and Wales) has received a Decision Notice from the Information Commissioner to address a Freedom of Information request to see an entry from the 1911 Census.

The effect of the Information Commissioner's decision is that The National Archives will seek to supply specific information from the 1911 Census in response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. However, the Information Commissioner's ruling also means that to protect personally sensitive information the 1911 Census must remain closed as a whole document until 2012. The Government is concerned that it should maintain its long-standing commitment to keeping census records closed for 100 years following their creation, on the grounds that this closure period strikes an appropriate balance between the right of census respondents to have information they provide kept confidential, and the access interests of family historians. Information collected during 1921 and in later censuses will be treated in line with this commitment.

The 1911 Census is a huge document; only one copy of it exists, on paper, in the handwriting of those who completed the census. The National Archives has already made significant plans to digitise the 1911 census for the first working day of 2012 and as a result of the Information Commissioner's decision, The National Archives is seeking to fast-track this process. A partner will be selected, and the contract awarded in the spring 2007, to develop an online census that is searchable by address and name. This process is not quick, as the whole census needs to be digitised, and searchable indices created. The National Archives hopes to start to offer a searchable service in early 2009, with key sensitive information withheld until 2012. This service will enable most researchers to find the information that they want, through a simple search.

The National Archives recognises that the Information Commissioner's decision means it needs to respond to requests that arrive before 2009. A special FOI service to deal with requests for information contained in the 1911 census before the online service commences, is expected to be launched on 17 January 2007. As the 1911 census is currently only on paper, searching it is not simple, so The National Archives has to limit searches to those where the address of the individual is known. (The 1911 census does not have a name index.) Researchers using this service will currently be charged a non-refundable research fee of £45 that will cover the costs of each search. For more information on the 1911 Census FOI research service please visit: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/1911census](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/1911census)

Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive of The National Archives, said: 'Having received the Information Commissioner's decision, The National Archives has worked hard to find the best way to allow people to get the information that they want, whilst protecting key confidential information as advised by the Information Commissioner. We recognise the popularity of family history and census data and will digitise the 1911 census as quickly as we can, once a partner for the digitisation has been selected and the contract awarded. We will start to offer a searchable online

service in 2009; the 1911 census will be fully available in 2012. Meanwhile, our new 1911 FOI research service will deliver, from 17 January 2007, the decisions made by the Information Commissioner.'

**For more information, please contact:**

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**Notes to editors:**

[The National Archives](#) is a government department; and also an executive agency of the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs. Over 600 staff work in Kew, in Norwich, at Admiralty Arch in central London and at the Family Records Centre in Islington. The National Archives brings together the Public Record Office, Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Office of Public Sector Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. See also [www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk)

**The National Archives is at the heart of information policy** – setting standards and supporting innovation in information and records management across the UK, and providing a practical framework of best practice for opening up and encouraging the re-use of public sector information. This work helps inform today's decisions and ensure that they become tomorrow's permanent record. **The National Archives is also the UK government's official archive**, containing 900 years of history from Domesday Book to the present, with records ranging from parchment and paper scrolls through to recently created digital files and archived websites. Increasingly, these records are being put online, making them universally accessible.

**The vision of The National Archives is to:**

- Lead and transform information management
- Guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow
- Bring history to life for everyone