

## 1939 Register

At the outbreak of World War II, the government urgently needed to know everything it could about the civil population of England and Wales. This information would be the key in issuing identity cards and ration books as well as organizing conscription and, after the war, creating the N.H.S.

To gather this information, they took a National Register. On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1939, the personal details, including names, dates of birth, occupations, and marital statuses, of 41 million individuals were recorded.

65,000 enumerators issued households with registration forms to be completed on September 29<sup>th</sup> 1939.

The following week, enumerators visited each household to check and collect the forms and to issue the identity cards to anyone who had been present in that house or institution on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1939.

The records were used to provide up-to-date population statistics and create identity cards, and later to facilitate the issuing of ration cards once rationing was introduced in January 1940. Information in the Register was also used to administer conscription and the direction of labour, and to monitor and control the movement of the population caused by military mobilisation and mass evacuation.

The Register only contains records of the civilian population for England and Wales, not the whole of the United Kingdom. Records for the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not included.

The 1939 Register was designed to capture the whereabouts of the civilian population on a specific date. Members of the armed services were not included in the register. The Register was not meant to record members of the armed forces and the records do not feature:

- British Army barracks
- Royal Navy stations
- Royal Air Force stations
- Members of the armed forces billeted in homes, including their own homes

The records do include members of the armed services on leave and civilians on military bases.

However, since conscription did not begin in earnest until January 1940, most people who subsequently served in the armed forces during the Second World War were still civilians in September 1939.

Information is arranged by:

- enumeration district – each enumeration district has a unique four- or five-letter code, and large enumeration districts may comprise more than one book. The codes for Hoxne were TX1H and TX1I, the code for Denham was TX1L, for Wingfield TX1F and for Syleham TX1G.
- household or institution – each household or institution is represented by a schedule number. A large institution such as a hospital may be an enumeration district in its own right
- national registration number – each person is represented by a sub-number within the household or institution

Numbers on the National Registration Identity Cards and ration books, and on pre-1991 NHS Medical Cards included the enumeration district code ('ED Letter Code'), a four- or five-letter code followed by two numbers (these two numbers are the schedule number and the sub-number).

When preparing the Register, the General Register Office used the plans already in place for what would have been the 1941 Census. It was based on registration districts and sub-districts, and was administered by Superintendent Registrars and Registrars of Births and Deaths.

The enumeration districts used for the Register were based broadly on those used for the 1931 Census, adjusted to account for the population movements since 1931. They were sub-divided into smaller units for National Registration purposes. The general rule was that an enumeration district should contain no more than 300 households, not counting institutions.

The final arrangement of the Register was not by registration district, as in a census, but according to the boundaries of local government units. These were the bodies responsible for the Local National Registration Offices and Food

Offices, who maintained and updated information in the Register. These were County Boroughs, Municipal Boroughs, Urban Districts and Rural Districts, except in London which was made up of Metropolitan Boroughs and the Cities of London and Westminster.

Individuals' records remain closed for 100 years from their date of birth (100 year rule) unless they have died and their death has been notified and recorded. If someone was born less than 100 years ago, and has died, their record may still be closed if their death was not notified and recorded in the register. Deaths that occurred outside the United Kingdom are unlikely to have been notified. These include the majority of Second World War deaths.

As more records become open as a result of the 100 year rule, more records will become available to search and view online.

The Register was continually updated while National Registration was in force, when it was a legal requirement to notify the registration authorities of any change of name or address. This ended in 1952, but since 1948 the Register had also been used by the National Health Service, who continued updating the records until 1991, when paper-based record keeping was discontinued.

Changes of name for any reason were recorded; in practice this was mostly when women changed their surnames on marriage or re-marriage, but also includes changes of name for any other reason, such as by deed poll.

By 29 September 1939 there had already been mass evacuations of the population so many people may be listed in an entirely different location to the rest of their family. Many seasonal workers, such as hop-pickers, were still in the countryside when the Register was taken, and not at their normal home addresses in urban areas.

'Reception areas' were rural counties where evacuees were sent.

The whole of the following counties and areas were designated 'Reception Areas': - Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumberland, Dorset, Herefordshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Rutland, Shropshire, Suffolk, Sussex, Westmorland, Wiltshire, the Isle of Wight, the Isle of Ely, the Soke of Peterborough and the Holland and Kesteven divisions of Lincolnshire.

The 1939 Register is one of the most important documents of modern British history. It captures a world on the eve of war, and is a great resource for anyone wanting to find out about their family at the start of World War II.

In addition, owing to the fact that the War destroyed the 1931 census and prevented the 1941 census ever being taken, the 1939 Register is the only surviving record of the population of England and Wales between 1921 and 1951. The 1921 Census will not be available for a number of years, so the 1939 Register provides a unique opportunity to expand genealogical research and is a great resource for family, social and local historians.

From the 1939 Register for Hoxne it is possible to locate some of the evacuees billeted there. Most were from West Ham or East Ham, then part of Essex, others were from London. There were many mothers with young children and some children on their own.

Mrs Douglas Hamilton, who lived at Oakley House in Oakley, had purchased The Gardens in Hoxne in 1938 and several evacuees were residing there in 1939.