Finding Nineteenth Century Census Returns.

Dear Sir,

I am at present doing some research into the movements of enterprising young men from rural areas of Yorkshire and East Anglia coming to the lively township of Manchester in the last century. Would it be possible for the Public Record Office to supply copies of the census returns for certain specific areas of Manchester? The Town Clerk's Department at Manchester is unable to tell me where such returns could be inspected or even whether they exist.

Yours faithfully,

Susan Marshall (Mrs).
Lea Gate,
Red Lane,
Disley, Cheshire.

The taking of the censuses was under the control of the Registrar General and his District Registrars; the local authorities had no hand in them and this is why the Town Clerk's office responded to Mrs. Marshall's enquiry in the way it did.

The censuses of 1841, 1851, 1861 are described in M.W. Beresford, Amateur Historian, v. 8 and in his pamphlet, *The Unprinted Census Returns for 1841, 1851 and 1861* (Phillimore Handbooks No. 6) 1966. Briefly, the enumerators' books are copies of schedules compiled by the householders. Books and schedules were sent to the Registrar General's office: the schedules were destroyed but the books were preserved and eventually transferred to the Public Record Office where they may be inspected. The P.R.O. now has a special Search Room for Census Documents on the ground floor of the Land Registry building, in the South East corner of Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W.C.2. Enquiries for a Reader's Ticket should be addressed to The Secretary, The Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London W.C.2.

Requests for copies of the enumerators' books may be addressed
to The Secretary: these copies are usually made by the Xerox process, The P.R.O. is prepared to make copies for the whole census of any specifically named place though a small search fee is usually payable for the service in addition to the cost of the copies. It would be an advantage to check the arrangement of the census for the place concerned in the appropriate printed Census Report; these are usually available in the reference departments of the larger local libraries. In the population tables in the Reports places are arranged under District, Sub-district and Parish numbers and it would probably be helpful to quote these numbers when writing to the P.R.O.

Where the whole of the enumeration for a place is required, there is thus little or no difficulty. But when it comes to large agglomerations of population like Manchester the P.R.O. cannot undertake the search for individual streets or districts without special arrangements being made, for the task may often be a long and complicated one. Sheffield, for example, has 139 enumeration districts in 1851 and streets are often split between districts; moreover individual requirements may only become apparent as the books are searched. In such cases the enquirer has three choices. He may visit the P.R.O. to look at the lists and street-indexes and the books themselves and order his copies on the spot. Secondly he may pay a special fee for the search to be done for him at the P.R.O. (who will advise him about this on request). Or, finally, he may attempt to find a microfilm (or now sometimes a Xerox) of the censuses in his local reference library.

For many purposes the existence of a local copy will be sufficient. But where a personal copy is essential (and it should be noticed that, for copyright reasons, the local library cannot make a copy of its own copy) the exact reference can be obtained and sent to the P.R.O. Such references, which always appear on P.R.O. copies, must specify three things. First, the class reference of the document (H.O. 107 for 1841 and 1851; R.G. 9 for 1861); this must be followed by the bundle or box number (thus Scunthorpe in Lincolnshire is H.O. 107/633 for 1841 and H.O. 107/2117 for 1851; and R.G. 9/2401 for 1861). Thirdly, one must specify the actual enumeration book and pages required. The best way to do this is to quote the number of the enumeration district which is found in a box at the top right-hand corner of the first page of each book and follow this by the page numbers required. The page numbers, however, offer a trap for the unwary; each book was numbered individually at the head of each page in the centre but since this numbering is the same in each book it is not used for reference purposes. The page numbering required is that given to the books when they were collected together, each district series being numbered in the top right-hand
corner of the page and covering not only the pages of enumeration but the summary tables and other preliminary matter. This numbering is by folios, not pages, so that page 1, for example, is both the front and the back of that sheet. (When copied on single Xerox sheets it is only every other page that bears a number, the unnumbered page representing the back). This a house in Wilkinson Street, Sheffield, in 1851 appears on H.O. 107/2337/District 1G page 781 back.

The charge for each Xerox copy is at present 1s.3d.; the small search fee already mentioned is usually payable together with a charge for postage and packing. There is room for recording 25 persons to each page of the books for 1841 and 1861 and 20 for 1851; in estimating costs for a given population an allowance should be made for a proportion of partly-filled pages and for the four sheets of summary tables and preliminary matter that appear at the front of each enumeration book and which should always be obtained. There are also some pages of instructions to the enumerators with examples and these are common to each book; it might be wise to obtain them once and thereafter ask that they should be omitted. The books for 1841 were often written in pencil; as a consequence they do not always reproduce very clearly by Xerox process and the P.R.O. may advise the enquirer to have conventional photo-copies which are more expensive.

The way in which the enumeration books may be used to study the migration in which Mrs. Marshall is interested will be the subject of a comment in another issue.

P.M. Tillott