THE 1891 CENSUS AND LOCAL POPULATION STUDIES

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Introduction

On Monday, April 6th 1891, 35,507 enumerators took to the streets of England and Wales in order to collect the census schedules – now completed – that they had delivered sometime during the previous week. Once the schedules for all the households in their enumeration district had been collected and checked, each enumerator then embarked upon the task of copying the information returned on the schedules into the enumeration book with which he had been supplied. As in previous census years, once this job had been completed both the householders' schedules and the enumeration books were sent to the local registrar of births, deaths and marriages who checked them for inaccuracies, and once satisfied, forwarded the schedules to the Census Office of the Registrar General and the enumeration books to the regional superintendent registrar who further examined them. After a further round of checking the enumeration books were also sent to the Census Office in London.

Now that a hundred years has elapsed since this series of events took place, at 9.30 on the morning of Thursday, January 2nd 1992 the Public Record Office will open its doors to the inevitable queue of people which by then will have gathered outside, waiting to examine the fruits of the enumerators' labours. Since the nineteenth-century census enumerators' books are probably the most popular and most used of all public records, the opening of the 1891 census – as with previous censuses – is sure to be a hectic occasion.

Access to the 1891 census

The manuscript returns of the 1891 census (in other words the enumerators' books) will be made available on microfilm at the PRO's Chancery Lane building. Despite more microfilm readers being made available, in the initial weeks of the new release it is likely that demand will exceed supply so some queueing should be expected. Microfilm readers are available on a first-come-first-served basis and as usual the Census Rooms will be open weekdays from 9.30am to 5.00pm, with the last request for films being at 4.30pm. However, having said this, before setting off for central London potential users of the 1891 census would do well to visit the reference section of their nearest public library in order to inspect the published census reports.

Although, unlike the manuscript returns, the published census reports became publicly available within a few years of a given census, local historians (demographers included) appear to have made comparatively little use of these
volumes. A full list of the census reports for 1891 is given as an appendix to this article, and from this a general idea of what the volumes contain can be gained. In the early 1950s L. M. Feery produced an authoritative, detailed guide to the published census reports and this has subsequently been updated, republished and substantially reproduced in other more accessible volumes. Reference to any of these guides, or to the census volumes themselves, will soon confirm that the information printed in these volumes changes from year to year. Much to the annoyance of the local demographer, this is particularly true of the geographical units for which information is tabulated. Yet despite these difficulties, the published census returns provide an invaluable source of information, if only in providing a much-needed broader regional framework for local studies. Populations are tabulated by age, sex and marital status, and analyses of occupation, birthplace, as well as other special subjects can be found.

In addition to providing much useful background information, an investigation of the census reports will also reveal the way the census material was administrated and organised. For the purpose of collecting the required information – births, deaths and marriages, as well as the decennial census undertaking – the General Registry Office (GRO) divided England and Wales into a series of administrative units. In descending hierarchical order these were Registration Divisions: Registration Counties; Registration Districts and Registration Sub-districts. The basic unit was the Registration District (RD), in 1891 there being 631 RDs in all, each being assigned a number accordingly. Since the PRO adopt the administrative system of the GRO in filming and cataloguing the manuscript census returns, knowing which RD and Sub-district a particular parish is located can help enormously when attempting to track down the appropriate microfilm, or the exact position required on the microfilm rolls. The composite enumeration books of each Registration Sub-district are defined by the PRO as one or more ‘pieces’. In all, the enumerators’ returns for the 1891 census are divided into 4701 pieces, referenced as RG12/1, through to RG12/4701. Since the order of pieces follows the exact order of RDs and Sub-districts as defined by the RGO, RG12/1 relates to St Mary Paddington, being the first sub-district of the first district (Paddington), while the enumerators’ books for the last Registration District, that of Holyhead, are to be found in RG12/4678-RG12/4681. Following these the last twenty pieces refer to ‘British Islands in the Sea’ – the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands – and the returns from ships of the Royal Navy.

First of all, the finding aids at the PRO enable the researcher to ascertain in what Registration District the parish of interest is located, and then secondly, which piece numbers cover the sub-district in question. For some urban areas, name and street indexes are also available to help the researcher pin-point the piece number required for specific locations. Once the necessary piece numbers have been ascertained, the required microfilm(s) can be obtained from the ‘open-access’ microfilm cabinets. The PRO will also provide researchers with a leaflet which details the finding aids available and describes the structure of the census records involved. Lastly, as with other census years, many local record offices and larger public libraries plan to obtain copies of the microfilms, together with the relevant finding aids. Some of these will become available as
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
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<td>Jane Doe</td>
<td>Wife</td>
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<td>Mark Johnson</td>
<td>Son</td>
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<td>Susan Lee</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Brown</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emily White</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
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soon as the census is released. Consequently, in order to avoid an unnecessary trip to London, it may be worthwhile contacting the Census Rooms at the PRO beforehand to ascertain if any microfilm copies have been supplied locally. The address and telephone number is given at the end of this article.

The form of the 1891 enumerators’ returns

Whether it be at the PRO or a local record office, when one sits down with the microfilm loaded in the reader, what should one expect to see? As with many microfilms of archival sources, the first few frames are usually blank and/or taken-up with internal administrative labelling. Once one finds the start of an enumeration book, as with the censuses of 1861-1881, the first six pages are pro forma pages devoted to a description of the enumeration district; directions to the enumerator on how to fill in the book; summary tables on the number of houses and persons enumerated; and declarations that the work was properly undertaken. Following these, comes the enumerator’s copy of the details recorded on the householders’ schedules that he would have collected earlier.

In comparison with microfilm copies of the 1881 census, the first thing a researcher may notice of the 1891 enumerators’ books is that they appear smaller and more compact. This is because the books are actually larger than those of previous years and therefore the ‘magnification’ required to reproduce a whole page on the screen of the microfilm reader is smaller. Equally, the 1891 enumeration books have thirty lines per page, while those of 1881 have only twenty-five. Most striking, however, as can be seen from Figure 1, will be the fact that the 1891 census enumerators’ books contain four extra columns in comparison to those of 1861-1881. The reason for these extra columns was due to the introduction of a new set of questions not previously asked on the census form. These new questions dealt with the number of rooms that the household occupied, and secondly, the occupational status of individuals. The enumeration books for Wales and Monmouthshire also include an extra final column concerned with the language spoken.

These new areas of inquiry will each be discussed in turn later in this article, yet before turning attention to these, let us return to the physical form of the 1891 census enumerators’ books. It will be no surprise that the general appearance of the books is not too dissimilar from previous census years. Some minor changes were made to the headings of columns common to previous census years. For example, for some reason the wording of the column relating to disabilities was changed from ‘(3) Imbecile or Idiot; (4) Lunatic’ to read ‘(3) Lunatic, Imbecile or Idiot’, while, as will be discussed at greater length in a later section, the column headed ‘Rank, Profession or OCCUPATION’ which had been used consistently since 1851 was changed to just ‘PROFESSION or OCCUPATION’. Equally, for the first time each of the columns was numbered, 1-16 in the case of English enumeration books and 1-17 for Welsh.

One entirely new feature is that at the top left-hand corner of every page a box is included for recording the Administrative County into which the particular enumeration district fell. This was added as a direct result of the Local Government Act of 1888 which created this new level of local administration.
The Act not only created the entirely new county of London, but also subdivided others, notably Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Sussex. Another confusion over Administrative Counties was that under the Local Government Act, County Boroughs which were estimated on June 1st 1888 to have had a population of 50,000 plus were deemed to be independent areas. This point clearly needs to be borne in mind if researchers use statistics relating to Administrative Counties drawn from the published census returns.

Moving to the main body of the page, the extra columns new to 1891 have already been mentioned. In order to understand why the 1891 census should see the introduction of various new questions, it is appropriate first to outline some of the issues being discussed within the GRO in an attempt to understand the events which lead to their inclusion on the householders schedules and therefore also the enumeration books. Following the untimely illness and subsequent death in August 1840 of John Rickman, the father of the first four British censuses, the administration of the census passed over to the newly-formed General Register Office (GRO), created as a result of the Births and Deaths Registration Act of 1836. Given that the primary task of the GRO was to collect, index and publish vital demographic statistics, it is hardly surprising that the main intellectual concern of the Office was in matters demographic. This position was undoubtedly strengthened by the presence of William Farr who held the post of superintendent of statistics from 1838 to 1880, a man of medical training who was particularly interested in differential rates of mortality and the public health movement. Thus for the first forty or so years of the GROs life its main concern beyond being a gatherer of statistical information was in socio-medical issues as typified by the Public Health movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Yet from the third quarter of the century this position more and more came into direct conflict with bodies outside the GRO who either wanted the census office to devote more time in pursuing inquiries into economic and social issues or wanted statistics produced in a form more suitable to the needs of local government and administration.

With Farr gone, matters finally came to a head in 1888, when on December 11th a deputation was made to 11 Downing Street. The deputation not only included several MPs, but was headed by one of the most eminent and respected economist of the day Professor Alfred Marshall, as well as the leading social statistician Charles Booth. The deputation was also very timely since in the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr Goschen, a former President of the Statistical Society, the members knew that they had an ally and sympathiser. The deputation called for the taking of a quinquennial census and argued for the ‘importance of having an occupational census of a genuine character’. Being fully aware of the financial implications of extending the scope of the census, the Chancellor – a politician through and through – responded by setting-up a Treasury Committee enquiry into the taking of the census. This body reported in the summer of 1890, just nine months before the census of 1891 was due to be taken.
The Treasury Committee of 1890

The Treasury Committee Report produced a series of recommendations for the GRO. Many of these could be categorised as organisational, relating to the internal administration of the census office and the production of the census reports, others were more concerned with the nature and scope of the census. Of the organisational recommendations the most important was clearly that a permanent census office be established. In addition a small number of procedural matters were recommended such as that the selection procedure of enumerators be reviewed and that the appointment of census clerks be by open competition. Interestingly, in relation to the production of the census reports, the committee also recommended the introduction of ‘mechanical appliances to aid the work of tabulation’. This was a direct reference to the fact that the United States census of 1890 had been analysed using an electrical card sorting and counting machine developed by Herman Hollerith, significantly reducing the time taken to produce the required tabulations. However, Hollerith’s offer to pay for a representative to inspect his operation was not accepted and the British census had to wait until 1911 for Hollerith’s process to be implemented.

In relation to the actual scope of the census, the most notable recommendation of the Treasury Committee was that there should be a quinquennial census. Yet this new enumeration, to take place midway between the regular decennial censuses, was not to be a full inquiry, but more of a head count, detailing just place of residence, name, sex and age. Alongside this, the report called for a rationalisation of the geographical and administrative units for which tables were generated in the published reports. Neither of these recommendations should be seen as particularly surprising given the representation on the Committee. A quinquennial census was not only high-up on the economist’s/social scientist’s shopping list, but was also of key importance to the representatives of Local Government. In the past the GRO’s mid-census population estimates had proved to be misleading and inadequate and this frustrated both the local Medical Officers of Health (MOH) attempts to calculate meaningful death rates and local authorities’ abilities to levy appropriate rateable values. Also, the fact that since 1888 County Boroughs were effectively defined by population size added another voice to the call for more regular surveys of the size of the nation’s population. But taking more frequent population counts is of little use unless the form in which the statistics are produced are appropriate to the user’s needs. Consequently, the production of tables in line with the administrative units adopted by local authorities (rather than those used by the GRO) was a high priority.

Regarding the actual questions asked on the census schedule, there were principally four recommendations. The first of these, requesting that information be collected on the number of rooms in each occupied dwelling, reflects the interests of both MOH and social inquirers to acquire data on levels of overcrowding in the localities with which they were concerned. The other three recommendations were all to do with the recording of occupation information and clearly reflect the interests of the Marshall-Booth lobby. The first of these was rather minor, being that the term ‘Rank’ be removed from the
heading of the column relating to occupation since it was deemed to be both offensive and misleading. The second recommendation was also rather minor, that those not gainfully employed but living off profits from investments and funds should be distinguished separately from other unoccupied individuals. The third recommendation, however, involved not an amendment to an existing question, but rather a whole new area of inquiry, directed at the heart of Marshall and Booth’s demand to find out more about the character of the British work force. This recommended that individuals be asked whether they were either an employer, an employee or worked on their own account, and it was this innovation that proved to be the most controversial when it came to taking and publishing the results from the 1891 census.

The aftermath of the Report

To what extent were the various recommendations of the Treasury Committee report implemented? Previously written surveys of the nineteenth-century censuses have tended to conclude that the recommendations were largely ignored. It is well known that Britain did not move over to the habit of conducting five-yearly censuses along the lines of some of her continental neighbours. Yet using this as a single yardstick is somewhat misleading. Clearly other recommendations were implemented. When one inspects the published reports for the 1891 census, it appears that some considerable effort was exerted in order to produce tabulations for the administrative units of local government in addition to those of the GRO, a point that was stressed in the opening pages of the General Report. The inclusion of the information concerning the Administrative County, discussed above, is another indication of this. But the clearest evidence of all is the introduction in 1891 of the additional questions on rooms and occupational status. It is these, together with the new question on language spoken which will now be addressed in detail.

Number of rooms occupied

When inspecting the enumerators’ returns of 1891 it will soon become clear that the first substantial change comes in column five, this being an entirely new column entitled, ‘Numbers of rooms occupied if less than five’. As with the census today, this question no doubt proved rather ambiguous. ‘When does a room become a room?’ may appear to be a rather naive question, but it is one that those filling in census questionnaires often find themselves asking. Is a hall or lobby a room, and what about a utility room or attic? Unfortunately, the 1891 census schedule gave the householder no help whatsoever on this matter, failing to define what constituted a room in any way. In the General Report of the 1891 census the authors were fairly open about this failure, pointing-out that since overcrowding was a criminal offence, ‘it is in the highest degree probable that a man, with a large family crowded into a small tenement, will in his schedule have given at any rate the widest possible interpretation to the word “room.”’. Yet despite this admission, they did not explain why a basic definition could not be given on the householder’s schedule, as was the case in later years.

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Irrespective of the difficulties over definition, it appears that this column was left blank – suggesting that five rooms or more were occupied – for 54.9 per cent of the entire population. As one might expect, this figure was higher in rural districts compared with urban districts, but the difference was quite small – 57.6 per cent compared with 53.8 per cent, respectively.\(^{22}\) Using as a convenient benchmark a measure of overcrowding where the mean number of persons per room was greater than two,\(^{23}\) it was calculated that 12.3 per cent of the population of urban districts lived in overcrowded conditions, compared to 8.5 per cent in rural districts, suggesting that overcrowding was far from absent in rural areas.\(^{24}\) At a local level the coal-mining districts of the north-east stands-out head and shoulders above the rest of the country in terms of overcrowding. In Hebburn, Felling, Jarrow, Bedlington and Gateshead upwards of 40 per cent of the population were recorded as living in overcrowded conditions; this compares to just 2.6 per cent for the whole of Hampshire and 2.2, 2.7 and 4.1 per cent respectively for the towns of Leicester, Derby and Preston.\(^{25}\)

At the foot of each page of the main body of the 1891 enumeration books, the information recorded in columns 3-5 should be aggregated and entered in the appropriate boxes headed: 'Total of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms'. Inadvertently, this introduces another feature new to the 1891 census. Ever since the census of 1851 the census authorities had been concerned with the issue of what constitutes a residential household and how such households relate to physical dwellings, i.e. houses. In particular, this concern manifested itself in the instructions as to how lodgers, boarders and other inmates attached to, but separate from, core households should be enumerated. Despite enumerators being given strict instructions as to whom enumeration schedules should be delivered, it seems clear that what was intended, and what was achieved, were two quite different things, in part because of the gap between the commonly perceived view of what constituted a household and the rigid definition of the census office.\(^{26}\) The introduction of the concept of a 'tenement' with the 1891 census was in part an attempt to clarify the situation and solve the problem. Unlike the situation with 'rooms' enumerators were given some guidance as to the definition of houses and tenements; the former being, 'all space within the external and party walls of a building', the latter 'any house or part of a house separately occupied by the owner or by a tenant'.\(^{27}\) However, it would seem that the introduction of these new definitions failed to solve the dilemma, indeed they may have exacerbated it. As the General Report admitted, the instructions to enumerators were 'by no means invariably observed, and it appears that the term "tenement" was especially the cause of much confusion'.\(^{28}\) It is clear that some enumerators did not appreciate the difference between the two, some thinking that the terms were interchangeable, others simply ignoring them. Yet equally, it would be wrong to place all of the blame with the enumerators. The definitions do appear to be misleading, especially when one considers the position of common lodging-houses which were to be returned as single tenements despite the fact the tenants residing in them may have occupied separate rooms.

Given the general ambiguity of the information relating to both rooms and tenements, it would appear that there is ample scope for the local historical
demographer to advance our understanding of how these issues were treated, and as a consequence evaluate how published findings should be interpreted. Where detailed local knowledge is available concerning the internal lay-out and organisation of houses, research may prove to be very fruitful. Pin-pointing the exact location of individual houses recorded in the census returns is not always easy, but where it is possible to consider this information alongside surviving building plans, a vital insight into the enumeration process may be gained, and with this an assessment of how accurate the picture presented by the enumerators' returns actually is. Given the nature of the census process, such issues can only be resolved at a local level.

**Employment status**

Following the new column relating to the number of rooms, the next five, referring respectively to name, relationship, marital condition and age (male and female), remain unchanged. The wording of the heading of the next column, that pertaining to occupation was slightly altered as has been discussed already. Equally, in line with the Treasury Committee's recommendations, the instructions printed on the schedule forms no longer required individuals to state the number and sex of persons employed by them, or whether they were regarded as a 'master' within their given occupation. Similarly, in line with the committee's recommendations, the householders schedule explicitly instructed those 'deriving their income from land, house, dividends or other private sources [to] return themselves as "Living on their own means"'. Yet the most significant change is the introduction of the three columns headed, 'Employer', 'Employed', 'Neither Employer nor Employed'. It seems clear that these questions were included on the census schedule as a direct result of Booth's request, who was himself a member of the Treasury Committee. Despite their introduction, the GRO never wanted the questions to be asked and argued against their inclusion on the householders schedule to the Treasury Committee. It was argued that due to the complex and specific nature of information concerning occupations and employment the census was not the best place for such questions to be asked. Rather, a separate industrial census was proposed with information being collected via factories and labour exchanges. Indeed, when one reads through the relevant passages of the General Report it would appear that the GRO was vindicated. The questions, the Report claims, were misunderstood and answers unusable. But to get the full flavour it is necessary to quote from the Report at length:

"A census, taken on the ordinary method, where the schedule is filled up by the householder himself or some member of his family, who, too commonly, neither cares for accuracy nor is capable of it, does not supply data which are suitable for minute classification, or admit of profitable examination in detail. The most that it is reasonable to expect from data so collected is that they shall give the means of drawing such a picture of the occupational distribution of the people as shall be fairly true in its main lines, though little value can be attached to the detailed features. It is not wise to demand from a material a result for the production of which it is unsuited. While, then, we fully sympathise with those economists who cry out for
fuller and more detailed information as to industrial organisation of
the country, we are distinctly of opinion that such information cannot
be obtained by the machinery of an ordinary census; and in this
judgement we are in agreement with those statisticians who have
been engaged in the censuses of foreign countries. Among other
criticisms of the occupational tables in the former English Census
volumes, the two most important are that distribution has not been
kept separate from production, and that masters have not been
distinguished from their workmen.

To meet the second criticism, that masters are not distinguished from
men, we were directed by the Local Government Board to adopt the
following plan. The householder's schedule as used in former
censuses had on the back an instruction that masters employing work-
people under them should state this fact in the occupation column,
and give the number of persons employed; but this instruction was
rarely followed. It was thought that, if special columns were placed
on the face of the schedule, better results might possibly be obtained,
and consequently three new columns were there placed, headed
respectively "employer," "employed," and "neither employer nor
employed," and an instruction was given that against the name of
each person engaged in any industrial occupation a cross should be
made in the appropriate column. In numerous instances, however, no
cross at all was made; in many others crosses were made in two or
even in all three columns, and even when only one cross was made,
there were often very strong reasons for believing that it had been
made in the wrong column.

It is, however, not necessary to suppose that the use of the wrong
column was always or generally intentional. Those who are
conversant with forms and schedules scarcely realise the difficulty
which persons, not so conversant, find in filling them up correctly.
We have abundant evidence that even educated men often make
extraordinary mistakes in this apparently simple operation; and
consequently it ought not to be a matter of surprise that, to an
ordinary working man or labourer, such a schedule as that of the
census with its complicated instructions and numerous columns
should present insuperable difficulties. It appears to us scarcely
reasonable to expect such a man laboriously to spell out the
instructions and, following them duly, to select out of three columns
the proper one in which to make his cross.

Although, therefore, we have not considered ourselves justified, after
the instructions given to us by the Local Government Board,
altogether to discard the statements as to employers and employed
from the census volumes, we hold them to be excessively
untrustworthy, and shall make no use whatsoever of them in our
remarks".31

Yet to what extent are their claims justified? Although the questions seem
straightforward enough this is not necessarily the case. In particular the new questions were meant to apply only to those occupied in trade or industry, but what constituted these categories was never clearly defined on the householders schedules. All that was produced in the published census reports for 1891 in terms of an analysis of the questions was one single table and this is rather difficult to digest. Raw figures are presented for the whole country for each occupation (men and women), yet no totals are given either for occupations or for the whole population, and none of the figures are converted into rates. When one adds up the many rows and columns of this lengthy table, it appears that in the case of occupied males, 9.6 per cent were employers, 76.3 per cent employed and 8.9 per cent working on their own account, leaving just 5.3 per cent listed as 'others' or recording no statement. For females, the numbers in this fourth, rogue, category were higher – the proportions being, respectively, 4.1, 67.8, 17.6 and 10.5 percent – but still they do not appear to be on a par with the levels suggested by the General Report. Equally, when one examines individual occupational groups, it is evident that some sectors had a greater tendency to mis-report than others: for example, the proportion of rogue entries was high for both sexes in the non-labouring agricultural occupations, as well as the category dealing with the 'Conveyance of men goods and messages'. It is also true that amongst the rogues, no distinction was made between those who crossed more than a single box and those who entered no cross at all. This is important since one can think of several occupations in which the practice of sub-contracting would imply that an individual could at the same time be both an employer and an employee. Indeed, rather than being a handicap, the practice of placing two or more crosses in the employment status boxes, may provide vital information on the structural organisation of various occupations.

A full evaluation of the accuracy of the claims made by the GRO on the trustworthiness of the employment status questions will only be forthcoming once the enumerator's returns of 1891 have been examined in detail. And it is not just the inaccuracies that need to be researched but also the patterns of those answering the question 'correctly'. The failure of the GRO to provide any meaningful analysis of the employment status questions in the published reports means that there are a host of research issues waiting to be addressed. What structural differences can be observed between occupational sectors? What were the gender differences? What were the age profiles of employers and employees and how did these vary between occupations? What regional differences can be observed? All of these questions require answers, and it is only through detailed analyses of the enumerators' books that a fuller understanding of the occupational status of the late nineteenth-century workforce will be gained.

Language spoken

In addition to the changes detailed above, brought about by the recommendations of the Treasury Committee report, those inspecting the enumeration books of Wales and Monmouthshire will soon notice that the final column of the page refers to language spoken. This relates to the return recorded on the householders' schedule in answer to the question "If only English [spoken], write 'English'; if only Welsh, write 'Welsh'; if English and
Welsh write 'Both'. In answer to the question 759,416 were recorded as speaking only English, compared to 508,036 speaking only Welsh and 402,253 speaking both. However, when the question is analysed in greater detail it would appear that all is not straight-forward. Despite the clarity of the question the GRO were at pains to point out that the returns were generally untrustworthy. The General Report, for example, noted that, 'abundant evidence was received by us that it was either misunderstood or set at naught by a large number of those Welshmen who could speak both languages, and that the word "Welsh" was very often returned, when the proper entry would have been "Both"; on the grounds, it may be presumed, that Welsh was the language spoken habitually or preferentially.' Pointing, in particular, to the language abilities of infants under two, and of schoolchildren in two Welsh parishes where English was known to be taught, it was suggested that the returns reflected more the language preferences of individuals and families rather than true language abilities, hinting at the possibility of nationalist tendencies affecting the accuracy of the returns.

Given the uncertainty with which the language question was answered and the wider issues it raises, the opening of the 1891 enumerators' books to public inspection should promote a series of investigations into the prevalence of Welsh speaking at a local level, in line with work already undertaken on Gaelic speaking in Scotland. Local studies will also broaden our understanding of how the question was answered, and therefore how it should be interpreted. Was the question generally misunderstood? Was it deliberately answered incorrectly? To what extent are the problems partly the result of the enumerators' over-enthusiasm for using dittos? To what extent was the language commonly spoken in the home recorded rather than what could be spoken? All of these questions can only be answered by in-depth local research, using the enumeration books in conjunction with other sources detailing education attainment, in particular school log-books and registers.

Conclusion

The census enumerators' books of 1891 provide the most significant changes to the form and scope of the decennial census since the changes introduced by the 1851 census. However, as has been detailed above, each of the new areas of inquiry have their problems. Much work on how these questions should be interpreted needs to be done, and this will be best achieved at a local level. The enumerators' books for those censuses already open to public inspection have probably been the single most used and researched of all historical sources. It seems there is nothing to suggest that this trend will not continue with the opening of the 1891 census.

NOTES

1. Throughout the nineteenth century census enumerators would predominantly have been male. I have yet to hear of a female enumerator in this period although the 1891 census guidelines specifically mentioned the hiring of female enumerators. For details of the hiring and qualities of census enumerators as well as for all other matters relating to the taking of the nineteenth-century censuses see E. Higgs, Making sense of the census: the manuscript returns for England and Wales, 1801-1901, London, 1989. See also the Miscellany published in this issue of the journal.
2. It should be pointed out that this article refers principally to the 1891 census returns for England
and Wales, and it is these which the PRO will release in 1992. Scottish census returns up to and including 1901 have already been available for several years and can be consulted at the Registry Office, Edinburgh. I should like to thank Dr E. Higgs of the PRO for his help in providing information for this section of the article.

3. Clearly not all public libraries hold the nineteenth-century published census volumes and therefore an initial enquiry is recommended beforehand.


6. The 1891 census enumerators' books measure 11 1/4" x 17" compared with 9 1/4" x 14 1/2" for the books of 1861-81. Higgs, Making Sense, pp.107-8.

7. Whereas there were fifty-four Ancient Counties in England and Wales, the provisions of the Local Government Act established sixty-two Administrative Counties. It should be pointed out that some difficulty existed over the status of the Scilly Isles. Although they had their own independent council, strictly speaking they did not form a separate Administrative County yet were commonly treated as such in respect to the tables generated by the Census Office, consequently giving 63 rather than 62 units. BPP 1893-5, CVI. Census of England and Wales, 1891, Vol. IV General Report, with summary, tables and appendices, p.9.

8. Of all the counties of England and Wales only fourteen of the new Administrative Counties covered exactly the same area as the Ancient Counties: Bedford, Buckingham, Cumberland, Dorset, Hereford, Rutland, Salop, Westmorland, Wilts, Anglesey, Carmarthen, Merioneth, Montgomery and Radnor. General Report, p.9.

9. Despite the fact he never became Registrar General, Farr's influence on the first forty years of the GRO was clearly immense. Not only did he shape the form of the Annual Reports of the Registrar General but he is also claimed to have written the General Reports of the censuses of 1851-71. For an assessment of his work see J. M. Eyler, Victorian social medicine: the ideas and methods of William Farr, London, 1979.

10. See both the 'Introduction' and 'The GRO and the public health movement in Britain 1837-1914', by S. Szreter in the excellent collection of essays published in Social History of Medicine, 1991 (forthcoming), both of which emphasise this point. See also E. Higgs The struggle for the occupational census, 1841-1911', in R.M. MacLeod, (ed), Government and expertise: specialists, administrators and professional, 1860-1914, Cambridge, 1988, pp.73-86.

11. Throughout the 1880s both the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science and the (later Royal) Statistical Society became lobbyists for changes to the census. See Lawton 'Introduction', in The census and social structure, p.19. See also the reports published in the Journal of the Statistical Society, 43, 1880, p.134; 52, 1889, p.456.


13. BPP 1890, LVIII, Report of the committee appointed by the Treasury to enquire into certain questions connected with the taking of the census with evidence an appendices, and the Treasury minute appointing the committee.

14. Although falling within the GRO, which in turn since 1871 had been part of the Local Government Board, the Census Office was only a temporary institution established each decade by individual acts of parliament specifically to administer the census.

15. For these and other recommendations see, BPP 1890, LVIII. Report of the Committee.

16. Concerned by the lengthy process of producing reports (the final report of the 1880 US Census was not published until 1888), the US Census Bureau held a contest in order to select a new system. Hollerith was the clear winner and his tabulating system was used by the US Census Bureau for the 1890 census, as well as for analysing the Austrian and Canadian censuses of the same year. Following this success, in 1896 Hollerith founded the Tabulating Machine Company, one of the four companies which later joined together to form the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company, better known in its re-organised form as IBM. See C. Eames and R. Eames, A Computer Perspective. Background to the Computer Age, London, 1990; G. Austrian, Herman Hollerith: Forgotten Giant of Information Processing, New York, 1982; M. J. Anderson, The American Census. A Social History, London, 1988; BPP 1911, CVII, General Report with Appendices, Appendix B.

17. The first point is made in Szreter, 'The GRO'.


19. It should be pointed out that for financial reasons the principal opposition to a five-yearly census came from the Treasury rather than the GRO. There was no objection to the GRO.
holding a quinquennial census, it was just that the Treasury refused to foot the bill. See Higgs, 'The struggle for an occupational census'. Indeed a quinquennial census was held in 1896 within the administrative County of London, paid for by the local authority. In line with the Treasury Committee recommendations this was only a summary enumeration and was undertaken via special legislation. Inquires carried out by the author of this article would seem to suggest that the enumerators' returns from this rather ad hoc census have, unfortunately, not survived. However, other researchers may have greater luck!

20. The actual question posed on the householder's schedule was: 'If you occupy less than five rooms write in this space the number of rooms occupied by you'. General Report, p.139.

23. Obviously, this measure could only be applied to houses and tenements where the number of rooms given was four or less.

26. This general problem is best summarized in Higgs, Making Sense, chapters 8 and 9.

30. Report of the committee appointed by the Treasury 1890. See also Higgs, 'The struggle for the occupational census'.

32. BPP 1893-4, CVI, Census of England and Wales, 1891, Vol III, Ages, conditions as to marriage, occupations, birthplaces, and infirmities, Table 5, pp.x-x xv.

34. General Report, p.82.
36. General Report, p.82; see also BPP 1894, LXIX, Letter of Registrar-General, relative to a complaint against remarks of his (on question of Welsh speaking population) in Census Report, 1891.
37. See, for example, C. W. J. Withers, Gaelic Scotland. The transformation of a culture region, London, 1988.

APPENDIX

The published census reports for England and Wales in 1891 are as follows:

Preliminary report and tables of population and houses enumerated in England and Wales and in islands in British seas on 6 April 1891. BPP 1890-1, XCIV.
Vol.I Area, houses and population: administrative and ancient counties. BPP 1893-4, CIV.
Vol.II Area, houses and population: registration areas and sanitary districts. BPP 1893-4, CV.
Vol.III Ages, conditions as to marriage, occupations, birthplaces, and infirmities. BPP 1893-4, CVI.
Vol.IV General report, with summary, tables and appendices. BPP 1893-4, CVI, 629-.
Index to population tables. BPP 1893-4, CIV. 519-.
Index to British seas; Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey etc. BPP 1893-4, CVII.
Letter to Registrar-General, relative to a complaint against remarks of his (on question of Welsh speaking population) in Census Report, 1891. BPP 1894, LXIX.

Information regarding access to the 1891 census can be obtained by writing to the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London, WC2A ILR or by telephoning the Office on 081 876 3444.