

NOTES AND QUERIES

AN IRISH STORY

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Readers of **LPS**, long aware of the tortuous negotiations concerning access to English civil registers of births, marriages and deaths, Church of England parish registers and census enumerators' returns, may spare a thought for historians and genealogists in Northern Ireland who have recently had snatched from them the 1901 and 1911 census returns.

Since the 1960s, the 1901 and 1911 census enumerators' returns for **all** of Ireland have been available for inspection at the Public Records Office in Dublin. In the 1970s the Genealogical Society of the Church of the Latter Day Saints microfilmed the 1901 returns so making them widely available. The Northern Ireland Public Record Office, anxious to encourage the study of the returns relating to Northern Ireland, bought 400 reels and, as they were accessioned, gradually made them available. The Education Department in Northern Ireland encouraged schools to use them. Computers were bought and programs written. Then, suddenly in October 1980, the microfilmed returns were withdrawn by the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland. Somebody (who one wonders?) had spotted that Paragraph (2) of Section 6 of the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 passed by Stormont read:

'Information obtained for the purpose of a census **under any Act passed before the passing** of this Act shall not be used otherwise than in the manner in which information obtained for the purpose of a Census under this Act may be used.'

So the 1901 and 1911 census enumerators' returns for Northern Ireland are not **officially** available in Northern Ireland until 2001 and 2011 respectively, the present government having now decided to apply the 100 year rule, operative in England, to them. Of course there is nothing to prevent anyone buying a copy of the 1901 microfilmed returns from the Public Records Office in Dublin and requesting a microfilm to be made of the 1911 returns, though in the latter case a long wait is likely as rumour has it that the Public Records Office in Dublin only has one microfilm camera. If the returns apply to any part of Ireland other than Northern Ireland one presumes there is no problem in bringing them into the United Kingdom. Otherwise one must smuggle them in. The penalty for so doing is not known at the time we go to press.