

The 1939 Register

What is it?

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 key in the issuing of identity cards and ration books as well as organising conscription and, after the war, creating the NHS. To gather this information, they took a National Register. On September 29th, 1939, the personal details – including names, dates of birth, occupations and marital status - of 41 million individuals were recorded.

There are in fact three different registers

- The Main register (which is the one that we see)
- The next covers those who were serving in the forces (this one they are trying to see if they can release)
- The last covers those who were born after 29 September 1939

Also what we see covers only England and Wales

For those living in Scotland at the time you need to contact the National Records of Scotland www.nrscotland.gov.uk

For those living in Northern Ireland contact the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland www.proni.gov.uk

Was it updated?

Its initial use was the issue of ID Cards and ration books

If you were born before 29th September 1939 you might well have yours or maybe you have your parents or another family members.

It was kept up to date with name changes and deaths during the war

Later in the 1940's it was used for the creation of the health service

And stopped being updated in 1990!

Why is it so significant?

We need to look at the others records from the time and also bear in mind the information that it contains

- Currently we have the 1921 Census
- The 1931 was destroyed in WW2
- The 1941 wasn't taken
- And then 1951

What does it contain?

The records list the following information: address, schedule number, sub number, surname, first name(s), sex, date of birth, marital status and occupation.

Additionally for institutions only: OVSPi - (Officer, Visitor, Servant, Patient, Inmate)

However only those people who were born more than 100 years ago or have a proven date of death are open - the others are redacted

How was it transcribed?

Owing to privacy concerns the transcription was done in the UK by Findmypast where it was originally available.

It is now available as well on Ancestry but they only have a set of redacted images from FMP

The FMP transcribers did not see the whole page as is normal but each transcribed a single column

The resultant 11 data files were then stitched together – sadly it appears that certain checks were not made

You can find the answers to most of the questions you have (if they aren't here!) at <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/frequently-asked-questions/answer/what-is-the--register>

It is only available on www.findmypast.co.uk – will it appear on Ancestry? Personally I think not.

There are a number of helpful webinars and videos on the FMP website – start with <https://blog.findmypast.co.uk/1939-register-the-perfect-place-to-start-your-family-history-2518395209.html>

Also check out Audrey Collins at <http://bit.ly/1939-register-video> from here you can access many of the other videos on the findmypast youtube channel.

Beyond the Search Screens

Like so many of the things with websites there is more than just the search screens and most people miss them. The 1939 is no exception. So look below the search screen and you will see links to

The missing pieces – details what is known to be missing

The Enumeration districts – details how they are organised and the starting code letters.

Browse the images – this lets you do what is says on the tin – browse through each of the images for a place or area. This can be useful if you know where something should be but can't find it in the index.

You can even see the original forms at <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/articles/world-records/full-list-of-united-kingdom-records/census-land-and-surveys/1939-register-original-forms>

From all of us who attended, many thanks to Tricia Pepper for such a detailed and informative approach to the gems that are to be found in the 1939 Register. We may well revisit subject.

Tricia Pepper

Margaret Gott, Evacuee

Our thanks to Margaret for sharing her personal experiences of her evacuation as a very young child and other aspects of wartime. We had the chance for many of us to be reacquainted with the Identity Card, which had to be renewed with every change of address. We learned/were reminded that under 16s were not allowed to carry cards so were kept safely at home.

Margaret's personal journey was from a station, Upney, near Barking Essex and the closest railway station to her school via Paddington for the long journey to Weston-super-Mare. Longer still as the coaches were compartments without corridors and the children had to remain in them for the entire journey. Thoughtfully the powers that be gave the children nothing to drink, obviating the need to go to the toilet. Well, that's one way of solving the problem! Margaret returned home for Christmas as this was the period of the phoney war, not much bombing. She couldn't return to Somerset though because there was an outbreak of scarlet fever, so stayed at home. Home soon moved to a village near Alton, Hants and eventually to Ash Vale on the Hants/Surrey border.

Anderson shelters were considered essential, all houses seemed to have them, and it was a community effort to create them in each back garden. Mother had a bag by the kitchen door containing identity details, and this was picked up along with Margaret and baby sister when the air raid sirens started up, which happened a lot in Barking. A sister arrived in September 1940, the day before the Battle of Britain began. Still in East London, she told us that the maternity hospital had a safety policy of keeping the new babies under their mothers' beds. Her mother could see, from her bed, the night sky lit by the effects of the first bombing raids.

As her parents had a car, father would disconnect the battery and bring it into the Anderson shelter and connect it to the radio, to hear the news. Initially he was commuting from East London to Wimbledon to support the war effort as a sheet metal worker, making aircraft fuel tanks. Hence the move to Hampshire, closer to work and safer. Father also joined the Auxiliary Fire Service, being born in 1902, too young for the Great War and too old to be conscripted during WWII. Just like my own father. Unlike mine, he saw fire fighting in London too.

Margaret's talk was illustrated with some family photos and her identity card from the Ash Vale address. This sparked a great deal of discussion about others' experiences, and brought back memories of rationing, ration cards, shortages, vegetable gardens and allotments. A most interesting and thought provoking session, particularly as we empathise with the Ukrainian people in their darkest hours.

Our thanks to you, Margaret.