

Those numbers on the 1911 census

The 1911 Census is valuable in Family History research because it asked more questions than earlier censuses and also because we can see the actual forms filled in by our ancestors, so we see their handwriting, signatures and mistakes. Sometimes they have corrected the mistakes themselves and sometimes the enumerators or statisticians have made corrections but thankfully the original entries can still be read.

Any of you who have found the 1911 Census record for your ancestors may have been puzzled by some of the numbers and details shown particularly regarding the number of children in the family. A large number of the mistakes on these forms are in columns 6-9.

The form was to be completed giving details of everyone in the household present on the night of Sunday 2nd April 1911 this sometimes results in someone being missed off the census or entered twice if they were working overnight. Even when completed correctly this can leave you puzzled — I have found a case where the householder completed and signed the form but appeared to have omitted himself from the list, but this made sense when I found him recorded at his place of work where he was the night-watchman that night.

The next instruction relating to columns 6-9 is shown in the extract here, even now many people would probably read this more than once to be sure they understood, in 1911 people were much less used to filling in forms and so they often struggled with this. In the example shown here the figures were recorded against the husband and have then been deleted and re-entered correctly against the wife. Examples of the situations that could cause errors and uncertainty in how to answer are:-

State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of :—			
Completed years the present Marriage has lasted. If less than one year write "under one."	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7).		
	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.
6.	7.	8.	9.
12	7	7	Nil
41	7	7	Nil

- The columns are completed for a widow, widower or unmarried woman. In these cases the figures will have been crossed out and the number of years of marriage may be either the length of the marriage or possibly how long ago the marriage took place.
- A child born to the couple before marriage, step children, foster or adopted children all may or may not be included in the figures
- As the number of deceased children was requested some people included the dead children in the list of occupants
- Likewise some listed the names of all of their children even if they no longer lived with the parents

I have not worked out how two households I have researched arrived at the numbers they showed, the original couple had split up and although still married (divorce being very difficult and expensive at the time) were both 'living in sin' what we would now refer to as a common law marriage. When they separated some children lived with the father and some with the mother and both parents had more children in their new relationships. How would you decide what numbers to give in these circumstances?

The saddest error I have seen is where the child was living in a school for the deaf and dumb and he has apparently not been counted when his parents completed their census form.

My previous articles can now be read on www.unicornfamilyhistoryresearch.co.uk

Mary Wright 2015

