

# The 1939 Register reveals unprecedented insight into lives, households and communities

41 million people recorded in one day on the eve of WWII

5th November, 2015 – Sydney, Australia: On 2 November 2015, the newly digitised records of the 1939 Register were launched online by Findmypast.com.au, a world leader in family history, in association with The National Archives. Dubbed 'The Wartime Domesday Book', The 1939 Register is the most comprehensive survey of the population of England and Wales ever taken. In September 1939, WWII had just broken out. 65,000 enumerators were employed to visit every house in England and Wales to take stock of the civil population. The information that they recorded was used to issue Identity Cards, plan mass evacuations, establish rationing and co-ordinate other war-time provisions. In the longer term, the 1939 Register would go on to play a central role in the establishment of post-war services like the NHS.

The most recent comparative online release was that of the 1911 census in 2009. The 1931 census was destroyed during the war and the 1941 census was never taken. The 1939 Register is therefore the only surviving record of the population between 1921 and 1951, bridging a 30-year gap in history.

Comprising 1.2 million pages in 7,000 volumes and documenting the lives of 41 million people, the 1939 Register opens a window to a world on the brink of cataclysmic change. Each record includes the names of inhabitants at each address, their date of birth, marital status and occupation.

Andrew Marr, writer and broadcaster says: "The 1939 Register is one of the most important documents in recent British history. A comprehensive record of the civil population on the outbreak of war, it captures a people whose lives were about to change forever. It records streets that within months, under the assault of the Luftwaffe, were to disappear; families that would be separated by the events of war: evacuation, conscription and sometimes worse. This fascinating resource allows us to discover our past and that of our families in ways never before possible."

## LIFE IN 1939

- Mr and Mrs 1939: The typical 1939 woman was Mary Smith, 35 years old. She was married to the average 1939 man, John or William, 33 years old. The chance of them divorcing was just 0.1%
- John or William and Mary were the most common first names with Smith, Jones and Williams the top 3 most popular surnames. The city with highest number of Marys was Liverpool (36,000) followed by Manchester and Birmingham. The most Williams were living in Birmingham (39,000) while every 7th male in Liverpool was called John (37,000 of 247,000)
- Taken within weeks of the mass evacuation of children to the country, the Register shows an almost entire adult population in some London boroughs, with just 2% being children under age of 10 years old
- The Register also reveals how jobs have changed. The typing pool has disappeared today but in 1939 typist was the 7th most popular occupation for women
- Delving deep in to the Register, the team at Findmypast has unearthed some surprising facts about some of the well-known figures of the day and the families of today's celebrities. James Bond creator Ian Fleming stated his main occupation as 'Stockbroker' despite an alternative career in Naval Intelligence, whilst the grandfather of Victoria Beckham was working on the London Docks and living in Tottenham.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

### General

- The estimated population of England and Wales in 1939 was 41 million, living in 12 million households, with an average of 3 people living in one household
- The average age in cities ranged between 30-39
- The divorce rate was 0.1% (just two years after the 1937 Matrimonial Causes Act), compared to 46.2% being married, 45.6% single and 6.5%

widowed

#### Age

- The average age was 33 for men and 35 for women, compared to the median age for men 38 and women 40 of the 2011 census
- The population is equally spread amongst different age groups with a marked decline of people aged 60+
- There were only 111 people that were over 100 years old when the Register was taken compared to 12,320 aged 100+ years in 2013

#### Names

- The top 3 most popular surnames were Smith, Jones and Williams
- 10 most popular female names were: Mary, Margaret, Elizabeth, Annie, Florence, Edith, Alice, Dorothy, Sarah and Jane
- 10 most popular male names were: John, William, George, Charles, Frederick, Thomas, David, Arthur, Joseph and Robert
- The city with highest number of Marys was Liverpool (36,000 of 291,000), followed by Manchester (26,000 of 249,000) and Birmingham (20,000 of 508,000)
- The most Williams were living in Birmingham (39,000 of 462,000) while every 7th male in Liverpool was called John (37,000 of 247,000)

#### Occupations

##### Men

- The top 10 occupations registered for the 19 million men were:  
#1 retired #2 clerk (from railway to civil service), #3 motor vehicle driver (from lorry driver to chauffeur), #4 farm worker #5 general labourer, #6 fitter (from gas to machine), #7 engineer (from radio service to aircraft engineer), #8 coalminer /hewer, #9 shop owner/worker, #10 railway worker
- 595 people registered as butlers, with Westminster topping the butler chart with 247. The next highest is Marylebone with 121 and Chelsea with 77

##### Women

- Almost half of the 22 million women were performing domestic work, with the majority of those unpaid
- The top 10 occupations registered for women were:  
#1 unpaid domestic duties, #2 shop owner/worker, #3 clerk /administrative duties, #4 paid domestic duties, #5 retired, #6 machinist, #7 typist, #8 incapacitated, #9 private means, #10 housekeeper
- One can already spot industries in the top ten female occupations that would later become very popular amongst women: office, fashion, retail and education
- In Leicester and Leeds, more women were working in the fashion industry than any other, as a tailor, dress maker or hosiery knitter

#### The 1939 Register puts numbers to London's evacuations

- At the beginning of September 1939, under the threat of German bombing, 1.5 million children, women and disabled were evacuated. The 1939 Register, which was taken at the end of September, shows only 2% of the population in London was aged 0-10 (national average 14%) and 8% was aged 10-19 (national average 16%)
- The city of London is the only place where the gender split is 60% male to 40% female. The national average shows that 47% were male and 53% were female

#### Other

- Top league of retirement districts: Tavistock, Glastonbury, Looe, Newquay, Woodstock, Brixham, Torpoint, Knighton, Hearne Bay, Dawlish

#### FAMOUS LIVES

The real life M – As Spectre looms large at the box office and the world wonders if James Bond will escape another tight scrape, the real life inspirations for the Bond books can be found in the 1939 Register on the eve of war. Hugh Sinclair (given the codename 'Quex') was director of British Intelligence and set up the Secret Intelligence Service (also known as MI6). He bought Bletchley Park with his own money and set up a wartime intelligence station. Although in 1939, (listed as a retired Admiral with no mention of his intelligence work), he was suffering from cancer which he would die of a month later, the year before he reported on Adolf Hitler to the Prime Minister, describing him as a dangerous megalomaniac not to be trusted. The report was buried because it didn't align with appeasement policies of the time.

Ian Fleming – Already in September 1939, Ian Fleming had been recruited into Naval Intelligence, where he would gain much of the inspiration for his

James Bond novels. He lived in Westminster, listing his primary occupation as 'Stockbroker' with only an extra column revealing his work as a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve at the Admiralty building.

Oswald Mosley – The leader of the British Union of Fascists can be found at his Mayfair home with a conspicuous omission of his notorious position as head of the British Blackshirt movement, instead harking back to former glories as a military officer, MP and government minister. Less than a year later he was interned as a potential enemy of the state and spent most of the war living with his family in the grounds of Holloway Prison.

Future Prime Ministers – Although a year away from becoming Prime Minister, Winston Churchill was listed living as first lord of the admiralty in central London. Later additions to the 1939 Register, as a living document have seen his old occupation lined through and 'Prime Minister' added.

Barnes Wallis – Already working on aircraft and bomb design by the time of the 1939 Register, Barnes Wallis, the inventor of the 'bouncing bomb' famous in its use for the Dambusters raids was listed with his wife, children and children's nurse near Guildford. Barnes loved the area so much that he spent most of his adult life there, becoming a parish councillor and being buried in the local church.

Herman Goering - Although the President of the Reichstag and head of the Luftwaffe had his hands full directing waves of aircraft to attack British shores, an unfortunately named Birmingham born and based doppelganger made an honest living as a jewellery case maker in 1939. Sadly he didn't live to see out the end of the war though his namesake didn't last till much long after it, being sentenced to death for his part in the war crimes of the Nazi regime.

Joseph Kennedy – The special relationship between Britain and the United States is underlined with these records. The father of President John F. Kennedy, Joseph was in the UK at the time of the 1939 Register, with the future President himself present in the House of Commons during speeches endorsing British entry into the war just before the register was taken. Joseph Kennedy is listed as ambassador to the United Kingdom at the time. Perhaps lacking the attributes that made his son such an iconic leader he would later resign from his post in November 1940 due to his defeatist attitude, reputedly prompting a British civil servant to say "I thought my daffodils were yellow until I met Joe Kennedy".

#### FAMILIES OF CELEBRITIES

The Beckhams – Victoria Beckham's life today is a world away from her maternal grandfather George Cannon who was working on the London Docks and living in Tottenham, with her paternal grandfather not so far away in Edmonton earning his keep as a French polisher.

David Beckham- may have inherited his skill on his feet from his great grandfather Edward Charles Beckham's sea legs, he was listed in the 1939 Register with his wife, living in Wood Green and serving in the navy. Further records on Findmypast give a full physical description of Great Grandfather Beckham, showing he was 5 foot 3¾4 foot tall with fair hair, blue eyes and fresh complexion.

Fearne Cotton – Perhaps in a foreshadowing of her own career, the 1939 Register reveals the great great uncle of Fearne Cotton in Poole, listed as a 'Musical Director & Dance Band Leader'. William Edward or 'Billy' Cotton toured to entertain the troops during the Second World War and presented a popular BBC radio show from 1949 to 1968.

Anthony Hopkins – Famously attached to his Welsh roots and known to visit the house he grew up in when he returns to the UK from his home in the United States, his 1939 Port Talbot home can be found in the register where his parents the baker Richard and housewife Muriel lived.

Britney Spears – The grandmother of pop singer Britney Spears was listed in the 1939 Register with her parents George & Lillian Portell in Finchley, London. She would later become a 'GI Bride', marrying an American soldier and leaving the UK at the end of the war for a new life in Louisiana.

Simon Cowell – The paternal grandparents of Simon Cowell were living in Chigwell on the eve of the Second World War.

Bill Nighy – Although not yet born in 1939, the young parents of Bill Nighy, Catherine and Alfred were married and living in Surrey.

Eddie Redmayne – The great grandfather of Eddie Redmayne, the illustrious Sir Richard Augustine Studdert Redmayne was a civil engineer, modestly listing his role as a leading light in improving the working practices and safety of miners throughout the UK as being a 'mining consultant'.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- The 1939 Register collected information based on self-definition, allowing the majority of occupations to be recorded without supervision or standardisation. This created an extraordinarily detailed and rich record of the population, with over 12 million unique occupations recorded. The statistics presented here were created through Boolean searches based on the most common terms for each occupation and are intended to be indicative rather than definitive.
- Spokespeople and experts are available for interview through Frank PR
- Images available through Frank PR
- Please contact us if you require specific statistics or stories

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About Findmypast

Findmypast (previously DC Thomson Family History) is a British-owned world leader in online family history. It has an unrivalled record of online innovation in the field and 18 million registered users across its family of online brands, which includes Lives of the First World War, The British Newspaper Archive and Genes Reunited, amongst others.

Its lead brand, also called Findmypast, is a searchable online archive of over four billion family history records, ranging from parish records and censuses to migration records, military collections, historical newspapers and lots more. For members around the world, the site is a crucial resource for building family trees and conducting detailed historical research.

In April 2003, Findmypast was the first online genealogy site to provide access to the complete birth, marriage, and death indexes for England & Wales, winning the Queen's Award for Innovation. Since that time, the company has digitised records from across the globe, including the 1911 Census which they digitised in association with The National Archives.

[www.findmypast.com.au](http://www.findmypast.com.au)

About The National Archives

The National Archives is one of the world's most valuable resources for research. As the official archive and publisher for the UK government, and England and Wales they are the guardians of some of the UK's most iconic national documents, dating back over 1,000 years. Their role is to collect and secure the future of the government record, both digital and physical, to preserve it for generations to come, and to make it as accessible and available as possible. The National Archives brings together the skills and specialisms needed to conserve some of the oldest historic documents as well as leading digital archive practices to manage and preserve government information past, present and future.

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