

Census 1926

Learning Resource



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

nationalarchives.ie

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Cover image: Portrait of the Becker family, Waterford, commissioned by Mrs Becker, taken by Arthur H. Poole on 12 August 1926. Three generations of the Becker family, and their dog, are visible in the photograph taken at their home in Ardagh, Lismore, Waterford.

National Library of Ireland, POOLEWP 3391

Introduction

On 18 April 1926 the first census of the Irish Free State was taken. It was by no means the first census on the island of Ireland, but it stood apart in one crucial way – it was the first taken in an independent Irish state.

The Irish Free State came into existence in December 1922, following years of conflict and political upheaval, and in the midst of civil war. Among the first major projects of the new government was a census of the population, which was an ambitious undertaking.

Under Irish law, census records must be kept from public view for 100 years. On 18 April 2026, exactly a century after census night, the household returns of the 1926 census were released to the public for the first time. These records offer a unique insight into the Ireland of 1926, its homes, families, occupations and languages, and into the lives of the people recorded in them. Each return captures a single household on a single night, giving students a direct encounter with the lived experience of people in the past.

This Learning Resource is designed to support students and teachers in bringing the census into the classroom: to explore the history of census-taking, to contextualise the Ireland of 1926, and above all to encourage you to search the records for yourself.

[Leenane, Co. Galway, c. 1920s.](#)

[National Library of Ireland, L_CAB_00346](#)



How To Use This Pack

The full learning resource has several parts: this pack, which explores the history of the census, the significance of the 1926 census, and what it can tell us about Irish life; a guidance note for teachers on using the census in the classroom; and suggested lesson plans for classroom use.

The pack is intended as a supplementary resource for use by teachers and students alongside their coursework. It gives students the opportunity to work directly with primary source material by supporting their engagement with the 1926 census.

Learning Outcomes

Junior Cycle

Using this resource at Junior Cycle can support students and teachers to achieve the following learning outcomes:

The nature of history	LO 1.1 Develop a sense of historical empathy by viewing people, issues and events encountered in their study of the past in their historical context. LO 1.8 Investigate a repository of historical evidence such as a museum, library, heritage centre, digital or other archive or exhibition. LO 1.9 Demonstrate awareness of the significance of the history of Ireland and of Europe and the wider world across various dimensions, including political, social, economic, religious, cultural and scientific. LO 1.11 Make connections and comparisons between people, issues and events in different places and historical eras.
The history of Ireland	LO 2.9 Explain how the experience of women in Irish society changed during the twentieth century.

Transition Year

Using this resource for Transition Year can support students and teachers to:

- Enhance their knowledge on this topic
- Work and debate in collective groups
- Further develop their research, analytical and communication skills

Senior Cycle

Using this resource at Senior Cycle can support students and teachers to achieve the following learning outcomes:

Strand 1: Historical Inquiry	LO 1.2 Locate and select relevant source material and resources and identify appropriate repositories. LO 1.6 Situate their sources within wider historical contexts, events, ideas, and processes. LO 1.7 Analyse the value and/or limitations of different primary and secondary sources in relation to their inquiry.
Strand 3: Ireland 1879–2009 Specified area of learning: Ireland, 1919–66	LO 3.5. Assess the role of individuals, groups and organisations on the events and processes of change. LO 3.6. Investigate how women experienced work, politics, and society. LO 3.7 Consider the lived experiences of minorities. LO 3.10 Explore the influence of economic factors on wider developments in this time period.

Message From the Director

The 1926 census was the first census of the Irish Free State, and its release in 2026 marked one of the most significant moments in the history of the National Archives. Taken just four years after independence, in the shadow of the Civil War, the census offered the young state its first statistical portrait of itself, of who its people were, where they lived, how they worked, and what their lives looked like as a new Ireland took shape.

For a century these returns remained closed to the public under Irish law. The release of the 1926 census in April 2026 was the culmination of a remarkable three-year programme of work at the National Archives, undertaken in close partnership with the Central Statistics Office and supported by dedicated government funding. Every one of the over 700,000 return forms from the twenty-six counties has been catalogued, conserved, digitised and transcribed so that this extraordinary record is freely and universally accessible to everyone.

What makes the 1926 census so special is not simply its scale, but its intimacy. These are not summary tables or official statistics – those were published long ago. These are the original forms, completed in people's own words and, very often, in their own handwriting. To turn those pages for the first time in a century, and to encounter the names, occupations and family circumstances of people living through the aftermath of revolution, has been a genuine privilege for all of us who worked on the project.

For students, the census is a gift. It is one of the richest primary sources we have of life in Ireland in the early years of independence, and it rewards exactly the skills that historical study seeks to develop, such as close reading, careful questioning, and the ability to move between an individual record and the bigger picture it belongs to. A single household return can open questions about work, housing, language, religion, migration and family life. Taken together, the returns invite students to think statistically as well as historically, to ask what the numbers reveal, and just as importantly, what they conceal. Why, for example, were only 5,793 return forms completed in Irish (less than 1%) in a state that had just declared Irish its national language? Questions like these have no single answer, and that is precisely what makes them worth asking.

Above all, the census belongs to everyone. It records ordinary lives in every townland, street and tenement of the Free State, and many students will find their own families, homes and communities within its pages. There is no more powerful way to discover that history is not something that happened to other people, somewhere else, rather that it is local and immediate.

I hope this learning resource helps students and teachers alike to explore the 1926 census with curiosity and imagination, and to find within it the story of the new Irish state, the story of us.



Orlaith McBride
Director, National Archives

About the National Archives of Ireland

The National Archives of Ireland is the official national **repository** for **public records** in Ireland. It was officially set up on 1 June 1988 and was formed when two older offices (the State Paper Office and the Public Record Office of Ireland) were brought together in one organisation. It collects, **preserves** and provides access to Ireland's **public records**, ensuring they are available as a resource for all citizens.



Chancery Pleading,
National Archives, CP/C/62

1702

What Was the State Paper Office?

The State Paper Office began way back in 1702. It was created to keep **official records** from the office of the Lord Lieutenant, who acted as the British monarch's representative in Ireland. Before this office was set up, each Lord Lieutenant used to take all their paperwork with them when they left the job!

For many years, the State Paper Office was based in Dublin Castle, right in the heart of the capital city, and it stayed there until 1990.

1867

What Was the Public Record Office?

The Public Record Office of Ireland was founded in 1867. Its job was to collect older government records – like those from the courts or from **public administration** – that were more than twenty years old.

In June 1922, at the outbreak of the Irish Civil War, the Public Record Office building at the Four Courts in Dublin was taken over and destroyed by fire during the Battle of the Four Courts. This fire wiped out many important documents, some going back to the 13th century.



Public Records Office Repository

1986

The Birth of the National Archives

After Ireland became an independent state in 1922, both the State Paper Office and the Public Record Office continued their work. In 1986 a new law called the National Archives Act was passed. This law brought both offices together to form what we now know as the National Archives.



Surface cleaning an architectural elevation



2026

What Does the National Archives Do Today?

Today, the National Archives holds more than 60 million documents, covering over 200 years of Irish history, that document many aspects of Irish life. People from Ireland and around the world use these records to learn about the country's past. These documents include court records, documents from governmental departments, and census records over 100 years old.

A team of expert **conservators** and **archivists** works hard to look after, organise and share these important records. Their work helps us all to understand Irish history better and ensures that **official records** are available for everyone to access, now and into the future.

As well as collecting, managing and preserving Ireland's **public records**, the National Archives also engages people and facilitates public engagement with the documents through guided visits and tours, exhibitions, lectures, podcasts and social media.

What Is a Census and What Can It Tell Us?

A census is a big national count of the population during which everyone in the country is recorded on a form. Basic details like your age, where you live, who lives with you, your job and your level of education are recorded on the form.

The main goal of the census is to help the government understand how many people live in the country, where they are, and what services they might need like schools, hospitals, housing and transport. By comparing the results from one census to the next, the government can see what has changed and plan better for the future.

While a census tells us a lot (like where someone lived, who their neighbours were, and what their job was) there are things it doesn't capture. It can't show how a person spoke, laughed or moved, or what their personality was like, but it does give a snapshot of life at a particular moment in time. When census data is combined with other historical records, we can build a fuller picture of what someone's life might have been like – their community, their connections and the times they lived in.

St. Anne's Montessori class,
Ursuline Convent, Waterford,
c. June 1927

National Library of Ireland,
POOLEWP 343



A History of the Census in Ireland

The first full census of the Irish population took place in 1821. From then until 1911 a census was carried out by the government every ten years. These censuses gave a detailed look at who was living in Ireland and what their lives were like.

Sadly, most of the records from these early censuses have been lost – some were recycled during the First World War to make paper, and others were destroyed during the Battle of the Four Courts during the Irish Civil War – but the 1901, 1911, and 1926 censuses have survived and are available to the public today. These important records give us a unique snapshot of life in Ireland at the time. The 1901 and 1911 censuses cover the whole island and were first made available to view in 1961, and were put online in 2009 so anyone could explore them from anywhere in the world.

The 1911 census was also the last one carried out while Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Because of the War of Independence and the political unrest that followed, there was no census in 1921, and the first full census of Ireland after independence took place on 18 April 1926.

Tailteann Games: Aonach Tailteann
Athletics, Croke Park, America v Ireland.

National Library of Ireland, IND H 0875



Ireland in 1926

Ireland in 1926 was a country experiencing great change; the Irish Free State was finding its way after gaining independence from Britain just four years earlier. It was still healing from the Civil War (1922–23) and the government faced major challenges (social, economic and political).

Most of the population in 1926 lived in rural areas, with only 32% of the population living in towns with over 1,500 people. Towns and cities were smaller and less industrialised than in neighbouring Britain. Farming life could be tough, especially in the west of Ireland, where poor land and frequent bad weather made life uncertain. Overcrowding was a serious issue in the Irish Free State and 110,138 dwellings were regarded as being overcrowded. Conditions were worst along the western seaboard and in Dublin and Kildare.

The census revealed that more than half the workforce (51.4%) worked in agriculture, making farming the most common job in Ireland. Manufacturing made up 14.2% of the workforce, and 9.8% of people worked as **domestic servants** (like cooks or cleaners in other people’s homes). Some people were employed in jobs that have disappeared or fallen in popularity such as coopers (making wooden barrels), telegraph operators, or biscuit finishers. This tells us a lot about the country’s economy and the types of work people did back then.

Living conditions varied depending on social class. Many poorer families lived in one-room or two-room homes, and slums were common in the cities. **Social welfare** was minimal, and charities often stepped in to help those most in need. However, the government did take some major steps towards modernisation when it invested in public services like sanitation, transport and electrification, including starting the Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme in 1925, one of the biggest engineering projects in Europe at the time.

A threshing machine in County Waterford, c. October 1923.

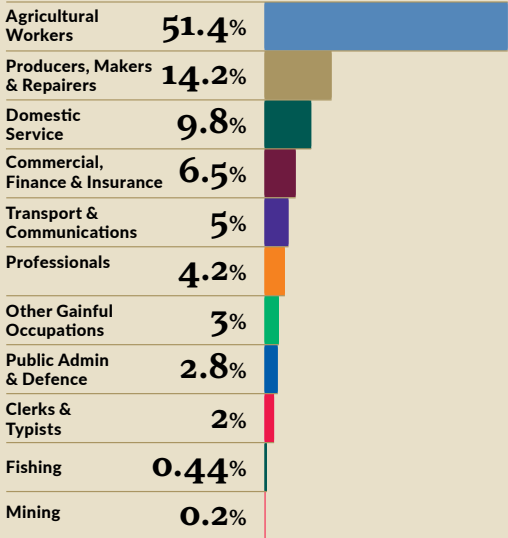
National Library of Ireland, POOLEWP 3130

EXPLORE AN AREA

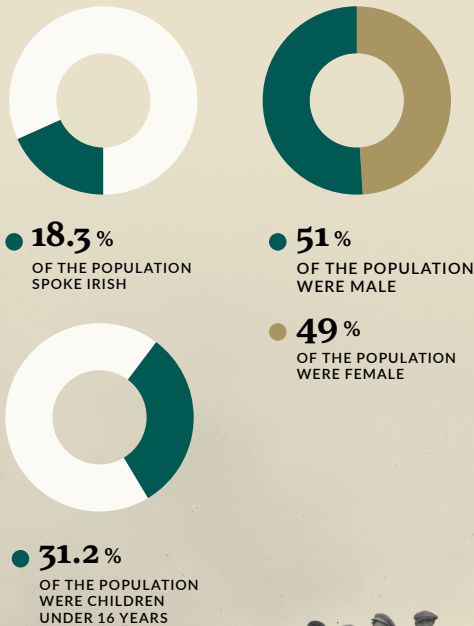
An integrated map feature supports browsing by geographical area, helping you to explore where people lived in 1926.



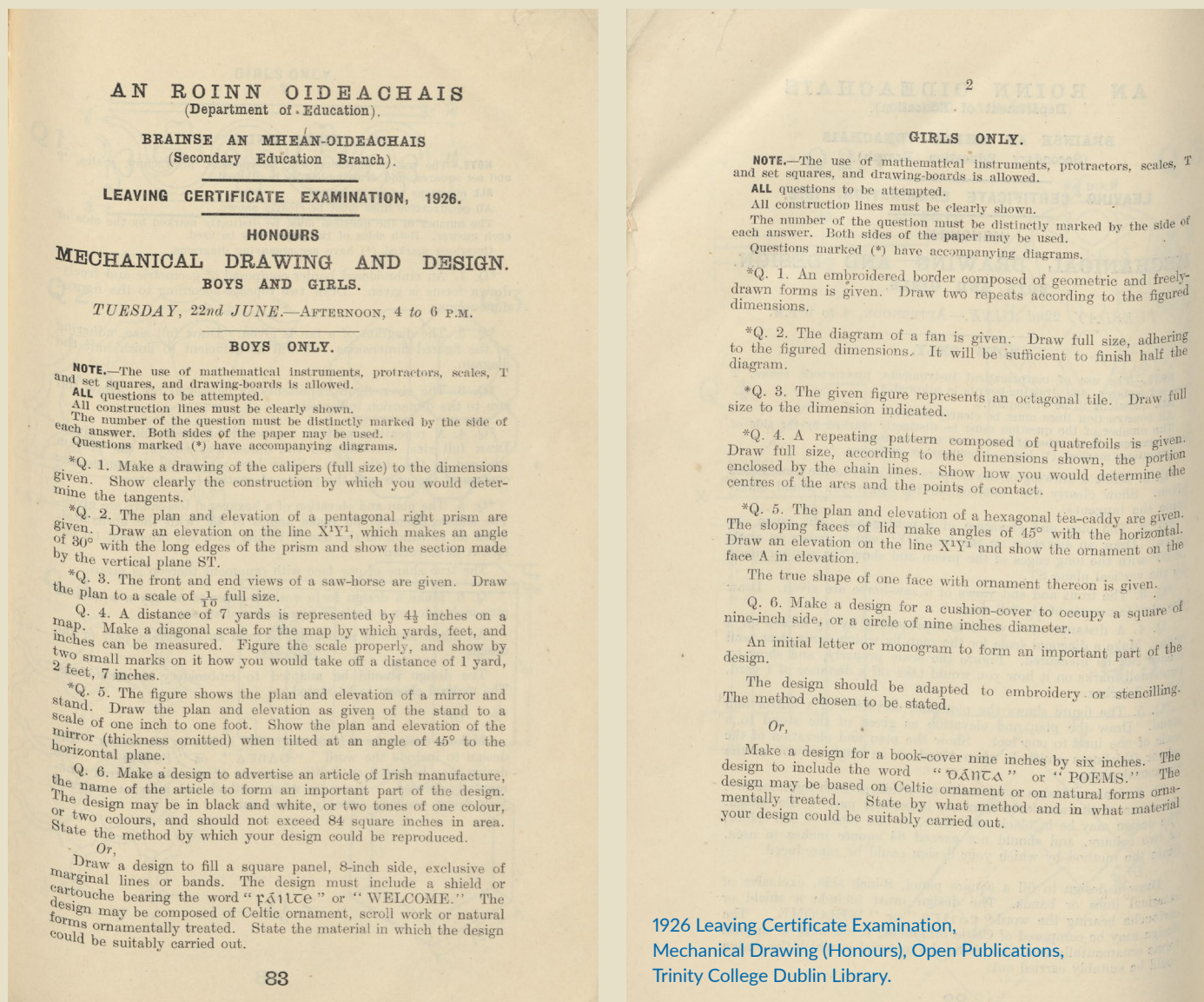
WORKFORCE



POPULATION



Education was shaped by religious and social divides. Primary education was free, but many children left school early. Secondary education, on the other hand, was fee-paying until 1968, which excluded many **working-class** students from staying in school. In 1926 the Leaving Certificate was only a year old, having been introduced in 1925, and in some subjects there were separate papers for boys and girls.



Culturally, Ireland was beginning to shape its own identity. While English was the main language spoken, the work of organisations such as the **Gaelic League** clearly had an impact, with 18.3% of the population, mostly in the west, indicating that they could speak Irish. The government promoted a Gaelic Irish culture, language and identity, introducing Irish in schools, publishing Irish-language books, and even establishing a national radio station, 2RN (later, RTÉ), which began broadcasting in 1926.

Religion played a big role in public life, with 92.6% of the population identifying as Roman Catholic. In the new state, social values were conservative. Divorce was illegal, and there was strict **censorship** of films and books considered immoral. Still, people found ways to enjoy themselves: going to the cinema, attending sports matches and listening to the new radio. Other religions recorded in the state include Anglicanism (Church of Ireland), Methodism, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Since the 1911 census the Protestant population in the state had dropped by 38.2%, mainly due to migration and the withdrawal of British troops from the Irish Free State.

Life for women in Ireland in 1926 was in a state of change. From 1925 married men in the civil service had begun to be paid higher wages than women and unmarried men. The following years would see significant legal changes that impacted women's lives. The 1927 Juries Act automatically exempted women from serving on juries, the 1935 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act criminalised the sale, importation and advertising of **contraception**, and the 1937 constitution asserted that a woman's place was in the home. In 1926 women in Ireland could vote and stand for election, but few held public office. While some women were expected to leave paid work on their marriage, 19.6% of women and girls worked outside the home, especially in **domestic service**, **retail**, teaching and nursing, while an additional 10.8% were employed in agriculture, quite often assisting on the family farm.

Educational and career opportunities were limited, and laws and social attitudes reinforced traditional gender roles. However, some women challenged the societal expectations of the time, and out of a total of 2,051 doctors in the state, 208, just over 10%, were women. Others lives were shaped by societal attitudes and values, especially the women and girls who were **incarcerated** in institutions for women who were pregnant outside of marriage or for '**deviant**' women, such as Mother and Baby homes or Magdalene Laundries. In 2021 the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes claimed that, for the period it reviewed (1922–98), the proportion of women who became pregnant outside of marriage in Ireland who were institutionalised was probably the highest in the world.

In 1926 the Irish Free State was still finding its feet, but the census from that year gives us a window into what life was like and how people lived, worked, the words people used, and how people saw the world in a state just beginning to shape its future.

The yard of William Power & Co. plant nursery at O'Connell Street, Waterford city, early twentieth century.

National Library of Ireland,
POOLEWP 3485



The 1926 Census

This census is especially important because it was the first official count of the Free State's population. It showed a country still recovering from war, emigration and economic difficulties. The total population recorded was 2,971,992, which was a drop of 5.3% since the previous census, in 1911. The information collected included age, gender, marital status, religion, and whether or not people could speak Irish. These details help us understand what Irish society looked like at the time.

Taking a census of an entire country was a massive undertaking, and it needed careful planning. In August 1925 the government of the Irish Free State, led by W. T. Cosgrave, decided that a full census would be held the following April. Every detail had to be worked out in advance, right down to precise definitions of words like 'family', 'dwelling' and 'town'. For example, a single rented room in a tenement counted as a dwelling, while a settlement needed at least twenty houses to count as a town.

The forms were printed in both Irish and English and delivered to every household in the state in the weeks before census night by the appointed enumerators. These enumerators, who had the job of delivering and collecting the forms, were around 2,000 members of An Garda Síochána. They were told to plan their routes using maps of the area, to be polite at all times, and to ensure that the information on the form was accurate. The head of each household was responsible for completing the form, and for anyone who couldn't write, the Garda enumerator would fill in the form and witness their mark instead. Once the forms were gathered in, the real number-crunching began. The statisticians working on the census examined every single form, marking each one with codes in green ink, and over 3.5 million punch cards were used to turn the answers into statistics by machine. The first results were published in August 1926, less than four months after census night, and made headlines not just in Ireland but in France and the United States too.

According to Irish law, census information must stay private for 100 years. That means the 1926 census only became available to the public on 18 April 2026. Like the earlier 1901 and 1911 censuses, it has been published online and is free to search. It contains over 700,000 return sheets that were stored in 1,299 boxes. A huge amount of work went into preparing it for release – you can find out more about that in the 'Bringing the Census to Life' section in this resource.

Guide to the Census Form (1926)

The 1926 Census contains only two forms; a household return form (Form A) which lists all individuals present in the house or institution on the 18 of April 1926, and an **enumerator's** abstract form (Form B), which contains a summary of information in each townland or street.

While the household return forms (Form A) tells us about individuals and family units, the **enumerator** returns form (Form B) tells us about the area as a whole – the **enumerators** recorded whether buildings were **private dwellings** or used for other purposes, the number of distinct families living in each house or building, and the number of rooms occupied by each household (among other things).

It is worth noting that census forms, as with any historical documents, reflect the times in which they were filled out. You might notice words or phrases that we would consider offensive or inappropriate today, particularly around disability, mental health, sexuality or institutionalisation. Language around diversity, equality and inclusion is constantly changing as our society and our understanding of ourselves changes. If talking about records that use this language in class or writing about them, you should contextualise the use of these words, make sure you use quotation marks to show that they appear in the document or use your own words. If you're unsure, ask your teacher for guidance.

Name and surname

Relationship to head of household

Sex

Age

Marriage or orphanhood: people aged 15 years and older had to declare whether they were single, married or widowed, while anyone under 15 had to declare whether their parents were alive or dead

Irish language

Religion

Occupation and employment: personal occupation and name of employer

Information regarding present marriage required from married women

Information regarding present and previous marriages required from married men, widowers and widows

Form A - CENSUS OF THE IRISH FREE STATE, 1926.

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Please read the Instructions and Examples shown on the accompanying Memorandum A, and then fill up the Schedule carefully and in ink.

This Return may be made in IRISH or ENGLISH. The Form is IRISH on the other side.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP TO HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD	AGE	SEX	MARRIAGE OR ORPHANHOOD	BIRTHPLACE	IRISH LANGUAGE	RELIGION	OCCUPATION AND EMPLOYMENT	Information regarding present marriage, required from Married Women	Information regarding present and previous marriages, required from Married Men, Widowers and Widows
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										

Questions (1) to (10) to be filled in by Head of Household after having filled in Columns (1) to (10) above.

State here the total area in statute acres of all agricultural holdings (if any) situated in the Irish Free State, of which persons usually resident in this household are the **tenant occupiers**. Include land held by tenant occupiers from persons usually resident in this household and whose names, surnames, are not given above. Holdings of persons who are not usually resident in this household should not be included. Holdings of persons who are not usually resident in this household should not be included.

In Statute Acres*

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature of Head of Household, etc.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Return (consisting of pages) is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature of Enumerator

Whether buildings are private dwelling houses or other buildings;

Name of the head of each household

Number of rooms occupied by each household

HOUSES

If a private dwelling-house, write 1 in the correct column below to indicate whether it is being built, or, if built, whether inhabited or uninhabited.

Built.

Whether inhabited or uninhabited

Built.

Inhabited.	Uninhabited.
(Col. 3)	(Col. 4)

65

Number of distinct families living in each house or building

Number of distinct families living in the house or building.

Number of distinct families living in the house or building.
--

Name of the Head of each distinct Family.

Number of females

Females.

Females.

(Col. 14)

Number of males

Males.

Males.

(Col. 13)

Total

Total.

Total.

(Col. 15)

The postal number or name of each listed building

Postal Number, Name, etc., of House (if any).

SAORSTÁT ÉIREANN, CENSUS 1926.
Form B.—House and Building Return.

Return of Houses and Buildings Inhabited or Uninhabited (including those in course of erection, etc.).

County or County Borough District Electoral Division or Ward Townland or Street
Urban District, Town or Village Enumeration District Sub-District

NOTE.—Where a Townland or Street is partly within and partly without an Urban District, Town, or Village, a separate Form B should be filled for each portion.

HOUSES AND BUILDINGS.				FAMILIES, ETC.											
Postal Number, Name, etc., of House (if any). (Column 1)	If a private dwelling-house, write 1 in the correct column below to indicate whether it is being built, or, if built, whether inhabited or uninhabited.			State Description—Whether a boarding-school, day-school, hospital, factory, warehouse, barracks, mental hospital, etc. (Column 5)	If not a private dwelling-house— Place 1 in correct column below to indicate whether building or whether, if built, it is inhabited or uninhabited.			Number of distinct families living in the house or building. (Col. 9)	Name of the Head of each distinct Family. (Column 10)	Date on which Form A collected (Col. 11)	Number of Persons in each Family (to be filled up to the barracks). (Col. 12)	Number of Persons in each Family (to be filled up to the barracks). (Col. 13) (Col. 14) (Col. 15)			Number of rooms occupied by each Family. (Col. 16)
	Building.	Inhabited.	Uninhabited.		Building.	Inhabited.	Uninhabited.					Males.	Females.	Total.	
Brought Forward. (Column 1)	(Col. 2)	(Col. 3)	(Col. 4)	(Column 5)	(Col. 6)	(Col. 7)	(Col. 8)	(Col. 9)	(Column 10)	(Col. 11)	(Col. 12)	(Col. 13)	(Col. 14)	(Col. 15)	(Col. 16)
No 33	-	-	-	Provision Store	-	-	-	1	Alice Dunne	1926 April	103	-	2	2	2
No 34	-	-	-	Drapery + Millinery shop	-	-	-	1	Thomas Ryan	29	104	1	3	4	5
No 35	-	-	-	Boarding house	-	-	-	1	Maryanna Rohan	"	105	4	4	8	7
No 36	-	-	-	Bakery + Provision Shop	-	-	-	1	Michael Gleeson	"	106	2	8	10	10
No 37-38 + 39	-	-	-	Hardware + Provision shop	-	-	-	1	Ellen Murray	"	107	-	3	3	9
No 40	-	-	-	Millinery + Draper Shop	-	-	-	1	James E. Cuddy	"	108	1	2	3	6
No 41	-	-	-	Victuallers shop	-	-	-	1	Margaret O'Brien	"	109	4	3	7	5
National Bank	-	-	-	National Bank	-	-	-	1	Henry W. Dodd	"	110	1	2	3	6
Brought Forward	-	37	-		-	-	-	23	Joseph Delere	"	111	1	4	5	4
												66	89	155	141
TOTALS												82	120	200	215

* If one room is occupied by more than one Family, the names of the Heads of Families so occupying it should be bracketed together in Col. 10 thus—John Jones } and the figure 1 entered in Col. 16 opposite the middle of a similar bracket }
Peter Murray } in col. 16.

(OVER)

If not a private

State Description—Whether a boarding-school, day-school, hospital, factory, warehouse, barracks, mental hospital, etc.

The function of each building (if not solely a home)

(Column 5)

Need help searching the 1926 census?

We have detailed guides on searching the 1926 census and using our map feature online.

[Finding people in the 1926 census](#)

[Census 1926 Map - explainer](#)

National Archives
STAT/1/27/138
Mitchel Street, Form B

Bringing the Census to Life

Imagine trying to read and organise over 700,000 old census forms by hand. That's exactly what a team at the National Archives of Ireland did to make the 1926 census available online. This massive project involved five main steps: **cataloguing, conservation, digitisation, transcription** and creating an online **database**. Here's how they brought the past back to life.

The first step was **cataloguing**. Think of it like creating a giant, super-detailed contents page. Every single form had to be checked to figure out where it came from and what it contained. There were two types of forms: one that listed everyone in each household (Form A), and another that gave a summary for each townland or street (Form B). The team recorded place names, the number of pages and even what language the form was written in. They also wrote notes about unusual returns, like forms from ships, tents or even circuses. This information helped make sure everything stayed in order and guided the rest of the work.

NAME	AGE	SEX	MARITAL STATUS	RELIGION	OCCUPATION
Charles Wordingham	45	M	Married	Roman Catholic	Master of SS Cornish Point
Charles Wordingham	20	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	17	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	14	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	11	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	8	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	5	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	2	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	1	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	1	F	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman
Charles Wordingham	1	F	Single	Roman Catholic	Boatman

An example of a census form from the SS Cornish Point, docked in Cork Harbour on 18 April 1926, captained by Charles Wordingham. National Archives STAT/1/6/108, Shipping in Cork Harbour, Charles Wordingham.

NAME	AGE	SEX	MARITAL STATUS	RELIGION	OCCUPATION
Michael O'Donnell	47	M	Married	Roman Catholic	Master of Caravan
Margaret O'Donnell	47	F	Married	Roman Catholic	Housewife
Maggie O'Donnell	13	F	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife
James O'Donnell	11	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife
Andrew O'Donnell	8	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife
Andrew O'Donnell	5	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife
Andrew O'Donnell	2	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife
Andrew O'Donnell	1	M	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife
Andrew O'Donnell	1	F	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife
Andrew O'Donnell	1	F	Single	Roman Catholic	Housewife

Enumerators counted every dwelling, even if it was not on their map. Here the O'Boyle household is listed at 'Caravan (off Mary's Road)'. National Archives STAT/1/10/52, Caravan (off Mary's Road).

Then came **conservation**, which means repairing and cleaning the forms so they wouldn't fall apart when handled. This was one of the hardest and most time-consuming parts of the whole project. The forms had been stored in big volumes tied together with old metal laces, which had to be removed. Each page was checked for rips, dirt, rusted pins or creases. Since the paper was really fragile, around 10% needed fixing. Instead of using glue, which takes a long time to dry, the team created a faster method using special Japanese tissue paper and a wheat paste. They cleaned the pages carefully and fixed any tears that might mess up the scanning. In total, the conservation team spent over 10,000 hours on this stage.

Next was **digitisation**, scanning the forms to create digital images. These digital versions are what you'll see when you search the census online. Two high-powered scanners were used to create around 1.5 million colour images at 400 dots per inch (DPI), so every detail could be seen clearly. The team scanned each form one by one, making sure nothing was missed. If anything looked off (like being sideways or blurry) they rescanned it. They also made back-up copies to protect the data in case anything ever goes wrong.



The next step was **transcription**, which means turning the handwritten info into searchable digital text. Manually typing out all the forms would've taken one person around eighteen years! So instead, the team used intelligent automation to read the scanned images. The system picked up names, ages, jobs, Irish language ability and more, however, computers make mistakes, so a team of people checked the most important details, especially names. The more the computer learned from each county, the better it got.

Finally, the team had to build a way for the public to actually access and use all of these digitised records through an online **database** and platform, letting anyone, anywhere, search the 45 million pieces of data contained in the records in seconds. In preparation for the 1926 census release the team rebuilt the database and interface for the 1901 and 1911 censuses, and upgraded the whole National Archives website, which was launched in February 2025. From there, the National Archives worked with teams across government and industry to build the digital infrastructure needed to link search terms to specific records and to handle huge numbers of visitors searching at once.

Before launch, the platform was tested for potential problems like heavy traffic and weaknesses hackers might exploit. Finally, it was tested by real people (genealogists, historians, and complete beginners alike) searching real records. When the records went live at midnight on 18 April 2026 years of hard work paid off when thousands of people accessed and searched the 1926 census for the first time. There were over 20 million visits to the site in the first the first weekend alone.

The finished project doesn't just help people trace their family tree, it also gives a snapshot of life in Ireland just a few years after independence. Thanks to this huge team effort and groundbreaking archival project, our past is more accessible than ever before, and completely free to search online from anywhere in the world.

To see in action the process of making the 1926 Census available online, watch the video below:



Resources

The census can tell us a lot about an individual, a household or an area, but to do more research on this period in Irish history you might want to look at these collections:

[Dictionary of Irish Biography](#): Ireland's national biographical dictionary, featuring biographies of Irish men and women who came to prominence at home or abroad, and those born abroad who had noteworthy careers in Ireland.

[Digital Repository of Ireland](#): an online repository for the preservation of Ireland's humanities, cultural heritage and social sciences digital data. One collection, UCC's [Irish Women at Work Oral History Project](#), focuses on the working lives of women (1930–60).

[Documents in Irish Foreign Policy](#): an online series that publishes a selection of documents relating to Irish foreign policy.

[Irish Community Archive Network \(iCAN\)](#): a network that supports communities across the country in sharing their collections online, with gateway links to local history archives and collections.

[IrishGenealogy.ie](#): for civil records on births, deaths and marriages for researching individuals.

[Irish Newspaper Archive](#): an online archive of local and national Irish newspapers from 1738 to the present day, free to access for teachers and students through [Scoilnet](#).

[National Folklore Collection](#): a UNESCO-recognised folklore archive that collects, preserves and makes available traditional knowledge and oral cultural heritage. Its [Schools' Collection](#) was compiled by primary school children between 1937 and 1939 and records local histories, myths and legends.

[National Library of Ireland](#): home to a rich and varied photographic collection, many images from which are freely available to browse via its [Flickr account](#).

[The Irish Film Institute Archive](#): an archive that collects, preserves and makes available Ireland's national moving image collection. Its [Irish Independence Film Collection](#) includes newsreels from 1900 to 1930, available to watch online.

[The Military Archives](#): an archive holding the records of the Irish Defence Forces, the Department of Defence and Ireland's Army Pensions Board. Online collections for this period include the [Military Service Pensions Collection](#) and the [Bureau of Military History](#).

[Scoilnet Maps](#): an online mapping tool giving teachers and students in Irish schools access to detailed Ordnance Survey Ireland maps and world mapping, along with a range of curriculum-relevant GIS data layers.

[Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland](#): a project reconstructing the archive of the Public Record Office, destroyed at the outset of the Civil War in 1922.

Local archives

Local archives are an incredibly rich resource for studying history, and many counties around Ireland have an archives service. The [online directory on the Archives & Records Association website](#) is a good starting point for finding local archives.

Glossary

agricultural holdings – Areas of land used for farming. The census form asked households to record the size (in acres) of any farmland they held.

archival – Relating to archives and the care of historical records. An 'archival project' is a project to organise, protect or share records (like preparing the 1926 census for release).

archivists – Experts who organise, describe and manage the records in an archive so that people can find and use them.

cataloguing – Creating a detailed list of everything in a collection and recording what each item is and where it came from, like making a giant contents page for the archive.

censorship – Official control over what can be published, shown or sold. In 1920s Ireland laws were introduced so that books and films considered immoral could be banned by the government.

conservation – The careful repair and protection of old or fragile documents so they don't fall apart and can survive into the future.

conservators – Specialists trained to physically repair, clean and protect historical documents and objects.

contraception – Methods used to prevent pregnancy. In 1935 the sale, importation and advertising of contraception was made illegal in Ireland.

database – an organised, digital collection of data stored electronically so that it can be easily accessed, managed, updated, and searched.

deviant – Describes behaviour that goes against what a society considers normal or acceptable at the time. What counts as 'deviant' changes as society's values change.

digitisation – Scanning physical documents to create high-quality digital images that can be viewed and searched online.

domestic service – Paid work carried out in someone else's home, such as being a cook, cleaner or maid. It was one of the most common jobs for women in 1926. People who were employed in this industry were known as domestic servants.

enumerators – The people responsible for delivering and collecting census forms and checking the information was accurate. In 1926 all the enumerators were members of An Garda Síochána, the new police force.

Gaelic League – An organisation founded in 1893 to revive and promote the Irish language and Irish culture through classes, publications and events.

head of household – The person recorded on the census as being in charge of the home. Everyone else in the house was listed by their relationship to this person (for example, wife, son, daughter, servant).

incarcerated – Confined or locked up in an institution, examples include prisons, industrial schools and asylums.

inhabited or uninhabited – Whether a building had people living in it (inhabited) or was empty (uninhabited) on census night.

occupation – A person's job or main type of work, such as farmer, teacher or telegraph operator.

official records – Documents created by the government or state bodies as part of their work, such as court records or department files.

orphanhood – Being an orphan (both parents are dead). The 1926 census asked for this information.

preserves – Keeps something safe from damage, loss or decay so that it survives for future generations.

private dwellings – Buildings used as people's homes, rather than for other purposes such as shops, schools or churches.

public administration – The day-to-day running of government departments and public services.

public records – Official documents that belong to the state and are kept so that citizens can access them.

rated occupiers – The people legally responsible for a property, who paid 'rates' (a type of local property tax) on it.

repository – A place where things are stored, protected and looked after. The National Archives is the official repository for Ireland's public records.

retail – The business of selling goods directly to customers, for example working in a shop.

social welfare – Support, such as payments for those who are unemployed, sick or elderly, provided by the state to people in need. In 1926 this support was minimal, and charities often helped instead.

State records – Official documents produced by the government and institutions of the state, preserved as part of the country's history.

transcription – Turning handwritten information into typed, searchable, digital text. For the 1926 census computer software did most of this work, with people checking the results.

widowers and widows – A widower is a man whose wife has died; a widow is a woman whose husband has died.

working-class – People who typically worked in manual or lower-paid jobs and often had less money and fewer opportunities than wealthier social classes.

Acknowledgements

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Excerpt from census Form B,
Marlborough Street, Dublin.

National Archives, STAT/1/10/52/
Marlborough Street/B/2

		(Col. 8)	(Col. 9)	(Column 10)	(Col. 11)	(Col. 12)	(Col. 13)
21							
	1	John Hayes.			5.5.26	20	
		Mary Bolger.			60	21	
	1	John Ryan.			60	22	
	4	Charles Malone			60	23	
		Jane Maher			60	24	
		Rose Reilly			60	25	
		Thomas Rochford			6.5.26	26	3
		William Walsh			60	27	7
		Malachy Creed			60	28	3
		Laurancee Murphy			60	29	2
	8	Thomas Finlay			60	30	3
		Terence Reilly			60	31	1
		Simon Reilly			60	32	1
		John Owens			60	33	1
34							63.8

I hereby certify that the foregoing Return is correct, according to the best of
and belief.



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