



## Old English Censuses

Read the article below which comes from a magazine called “Government Computing” (<http://www.kablenet.com>) and then answer the following questions.

### From Malthus to microfilm

The earliest English census was of course the *Domesday Book* of Norman times (though the Babylonian and Chinese civilisations counted their populations in antiquity). The *Domesday* survey, completed in 1086 took many years to compile. It was 700 years before the next national census.

In 1798 Thomas Malthus; *Essay on the Principle of Population* caused a national controversy. He claimed that population growth would soon outstrip supplies of food and other resources with opponents such as William Cobbett arguing that the population was falling. (His theory was based on the observation that most village churches were disproportionately large.)

In 1800, Parliament passed an act authorising a census. The count, in March 1801, found that the population of Great Britain was 9 million. Since then, a census has taken place every 10 years apart from 1941.

The Office for National Statistics dates the era of modern censuses from 1841 when, for the first time, the head of each household was issued with a form to fill in on behalf of the household on a certain day.

Data processing technology made its appearance in 1911, when punched cards and mechanical sorting were introduced. Electronic computers arrived in 1961.

The Public Record Office ([www.pro.gov.uk](http://www.pro.gov.uk)) makes census forms available after 100 years. The most recent forms currently available date from 1891.

The 1901 census will be opened to researchers on the web site on 2 January 2002. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) are currently digitising the images of forms under a PFI contract. Data from about 32 million people on 1.5 million pages will be searchable with software from Sopheon. Users will pay a fee depending on the amount.

1. When was the earliest English census? (Find out more about it at <http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/FocusOn/Domesday/default.htm> )
2. Why did Great Britain not have a census in 1941?
3. In your own words explain the argument between Malthus and William Corbett put forward in 1798. Find out more about Malthus on <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/malthus.html>
4. What methods will be used on the 2011 Census?  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/index.html>

On the CensusAtSchool website there are 1881 census forms for [Queen Victoria](#) and [Charles Darwin](#) with some questions and websites to explore. Also there is a worksheet asking you to devise a [Victorian](#) version of CensusAtSchool. These worksheets can be found in curriculum activities under history.