



Devon Family History Society
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CLYST ST GEORGE CENSUS

1821

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Family historians are skilled at using the census returns from 1841 to 1901 for their research, but many people do not realise that there are some surviving earlier censuses which, although providing less information, can often be just as useful.

A census bill proposing an annual census of the population was introduced in Parliament in 1753. It was opposed on the grounds that it would be costly and might lead to new taxation but although it was passed in the House of Commons, the session came to an end before the bill could be put before a committee of the whole house and so it lapsed. Despite this early enthusiasm, the first Census Act was not passed until 1800, leading to the taking of the first British census on 10th March 1801. Returns were compiled locally by the overseers of the poor in each parish of the numbers of males and females in the parish, their occupations classified under broad headings, and the numbers of inhabited and uninhabited houses. The returns were sent to the Home Office in London, population statistics were compiled from them and then they were destroyed. However, some parishes made a copy of the return and kept it. Often, population figures taken from the census were written up inside the covers of parish registers; sometimes the census enumerator made notes on each household while compiling the figures for the returns and these notes have survived among parish records. The incumbent of each parish also had to complete a return on the number of baptisms, marriages and burials in his parish, taken from the parish registers, and these were sent first to the bishop of the diocese and then to the Privy Council.

Clyst St George

This census for Clyst St George is a little note-book kept by the enumerator in May 1821. He entered in it the names of the members of every household, dividing them into columns for males and females to make it easier to add up population figures. He noted the employment of the head of the household because he had to submit figures for trades and occupations and he also noted ages because he had to work out the numbers of the population in ten year age bands. Once he had visited every household and written down these details, he compiled his statistics from them and noted them at the end of his book before completing the official form which had to be sent to London. The

book was stored with the rest of the parish records in Clyst St George church. It must have been used for reference by the parish officers because someone has made a note by people's names if they had died or left the parish and at the back of the book is a list of the names of those who moved into the parish after the census was taken.

Although no relationships are given to connect each person to the head of the household, this little note-book contains lots of information for the historian. It is unusual to have complete lists of all the inhabitants of the parish at this early date, especially as accurate ages are given, information which is not available generally until the census of 1851.