

Bilsington 1901 to 2001

What was Bilsington like one hundred years ago? Who lived here? How did they earn a living? How does it compare with Bilsington today? These questions can be partially answered by downloading from the web, page by page, the full handwritten details of the 1901 Census and comparing it with the 2001 Census. Due to confidentiality issues the 2001 Census is only available in summary statistics and refers to the whole of the Saxon Shore Ward, of which, Bilsington is a typical part. The 2004 Electoral Roll also provides further data on Bilsington today.

What was the population like, has it expanded? Not at all. In 1901 the population was 139 men, 140 women making a total of 279 of which 107 were under the age of 16. They lived in 71 residences, 23 of which had less than 5 rooms. The electoral roll of 2004 records 235 residents of voting age plus an estimated 30 children, making 265 in all who now live in 116 homes. So we have similar populations but living in more homes.

The 2001 census provides a breakdown of the age range which can be compared to 1901.

Age range	1901 -%	2001 - %
Under 16	38.4	18.9
16 - 19	5.4	4.6
20 - 29	11.8	7.5
30 - 59	31.5	45.8
60 - 74	8.2	15.2
75 and over	4.7	8.1
Average age	29.3	41.8

This shows dramatically that the population is now much older, the percentage of children has halved and the average age has increased by nearly 13 years.

Where were people born? The 1901 census records birthplaces showing that the population was very static, nearly 80% (220) were born within 5 miles of Bilsington whereas today this percentage is estimated to be nearer to 15%.

Where Born in 1901	Number
In Bilsington	102
Kent (locally, within 5 miles)	118
Kent (over 5 miles)	28
Outside Kent	30
Outside England	1
Total	279

How did people earn their living? The employment of Bilsington's residents reflects that it was a community that was heavily dependent upon agriculture – but very self sufficient. Four dressmakers for 140 women and two shops! The 1901 census records:

Agriculture Labourer	41
Baker	2
Blacksmith	1
Bricklayer	1
Carpenter	2
Domestic Servant / Cook / Housekeeper	6
Dressmaker	4
Farmer/ Farmers Son or Daughter	21
Gamekeeper	1
Ploughman	1

Publican	1
Quarryman	1
Surveyor	1
Schoolmistress	2
Shepherd	2
Shoemaker	1
Shop Keeper / Assistant	5
Traction Engine Proprietor / Driver	2
Waggoner	4
Wheelwright	2
School	52
Pensioner / Own Means	5
Parish Relief	4

Five residents were of independent means, 10 were employers, 64 were workers, 20 were self-employed and 6 were domestics. There was little 'social security' in 1901, 4 residents (all aged over 67) were in receipt of Parish Relief, and the remainder continued working into old age or were supported by their families.

The 2001 census summary does not record occupations in such detail:

	%
Employed	68.2
Unemployed	1.7
Students	5.9
Retired	14.8
Sick / Disabled / Carer	9.4

What about the family? Much the same percentage was married in 1901 as in 2001, slightly more were widows or widowers and a lot more were single. Nobody in 1901 is recorded as divorced or separated.

Age range	1901 - %	2001 - %
Married	61.1	64.4
Widowed	10.5	7.3
Single	28.4	20.1
Divorced		6.2
Separated		2.1

Data sources and further information.

Web sites:

- For the 1901 census – <http://www.census.pro.gov.uk>
- For the 2001 census - <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

Electoral Roll- Ashford Library

If you would like hard copies of the 1901 Census, the summary of the 2001 Census for the Saxon Shore Ward or an Excel listing of the 1901 Census contact Peter Porter (01233 720233).