

Exploring the UK Census

In trialling this package, children of all abilities from Year 3 upwards readily engaged with Victorian census returns.

The word 'census' itself bears explanation, coming as it does from the Latin for 'a hundred'. Pupils may have heard it related to the Christmas story – census surveys are not new! It certainly intrigues them to be told that the government takes a snapshot of us every ten years and that they may already be featured in census records (April 2011 being the latest one).

If you have time, try using yourself or one of your pupils as a guinea pig for filling in a simple census form on your whiteboard, using the headings in the 1891 census return as examples.

Only returns over 100 years old are publicly available. Those from 1841 to 1911 are accessible through many search engines. Your local library can help you find out them.

Each census has differed from previous ones, with different information sought and recorded. Here are the dates when each census was carried out:

Sunday 6 June 1841; Sunday 30 March 1851; Sunday 7 April 1861; Sunday 2 April 1871;
Sunday 3 April 1881; Sunday 5 April 1891; Sunday 31 March 1901; Sunday 2 April 1911

Analysing the History Hunters census returns

All sorts of information can be elicited from the data. The questions used on the History Hunt Step 3 sheets are there to guide enquiry. In the loan resources is a laminated set of the returns without the questions, which have been set out on a separate sheet. This format may suit you better. However don't regard the questions as exhaustive and ignore them if you wish.

The original returns are fascinating but are often hard for anyone to decipher, and pupils will need help particularly with understanding abbreviations. So we have transcribed and occasionally simplified or extracted details from the originals.

Here are some common abbreviations:

Ag. Lab - Agricultural labourer; Ap. – Apprentice; Do - ditto (the same); FS. - Female servant; Ind. - Independent - people living on their own means; M – married or male; MS - Male servant; S - single or servant; sch - scholar (should be attending school, though not all children did!); Serv – servant W - widow or widower.

Since mistakes were often made anyway by enumerators, the returns should not be regarded as perfectly correct. Eagle eyed pupils often pick up on such errors and should be congratulated! Apart from June 1841, all census surveys up to 1911 were undertaken in the spring. Since we do not have exact birth dates for our six people, this sometimes leads to age discrepancies when comparing sources (compounded it seems by people's own vagueness about their age). In fact children sometimes had their ages inflated because of the Factory Act and other child labour laws. Also many people gave as their place of birth their earliest remembered place of residence. However, local history is seldom a complete record of anyone, so be relaxed about this.

St James' Local History KS2 Learning Package: BACKGROUNDER 3

Don't forget trade directories

Another great source for local history information is the trade directory, a forerunner of phone directories. Newcastle City Library has these on open access and from them you can find out what businesses operated on West End streets and who owned and ran them. The Kelly and Ward directories for Newcastle and outlying villages show for example that in 1892 John Ferguson was running two farms – his new tenancy in Benwell and his previous one at Benton Bridge, close to Jesmond Dene. They also indicate that Thomas Alderson began his drapery business while still living in his parent's home in Rock Street, east of Newcastle city centre.

What happened next?

Sadly the family history trail is much less easy to follow after 1911 (public access is only allowed after 100 years) so information about what happened to our six people's families is sketchy. Here are some snippets we have picked up during research for the project. If you and your pupils come across any more, please let us know.

Grainger's legacy is all around us in Newcastle city centre but little is known about his children. His daughter Rachel Burns had a fountain erected in her parents' memory near Central Station. Another, Juliet, married an Irish landowner Thomas Nash. Family members are now very scattered. Ian Liddell Grainger, a great great grandson of Grainger's daughter Ann Amelia, is an MP in Somerset and very proud of his ancestor.

John Buddle and his nephew Robert Atkinson both had streets named after them (Atkinson road is on the route of the old Benwell Colliery waggonway). We have only touched upon Buddle's many interests and occupations. Among other things, he oversaw the building of Seaham Harbour. This photo site will tell you more. https://www.flickr.com/photos/a_responsibility_to_awe/sets/72157637107623636

Sowerby Glass can still be seen in the Laing and Shipley Galleries and is collected around the world. The latest information about John and his descendants has come from journalist Patricia Riley's book, *Looking for Githa*, about John's granddaughter. Githa made a name for herself, as a playwright. Her play *Rutherford and Sons*, based on her family's glass business, was revived by Northern Stage in Newcastle in 2009. You can now visit Tyne & Wear Archives and see the documents Pat found in her research.

One of Thomas **Alderson**'s daughters, Vera, was married in St James' and we know from the birthday honours list of 1951 that her husband was a Chairman of the famous Swan Hunters shipbuilders firm in the 1950s.

The **Fergusons** continued to farm until the land was sold for housing. But Ferguson's Lane still exists. Excelsior Academy and Scotswood Natural Community Garden are both on land that was probably once farmed by the Fergusons.

We know nothing about Joseph **Ryan**'s recent descendants but we do know that after he died, Jane married his older brother Daniel and moved to Kenton with her children. She and Daniel had at least one child.