

Watercress Beds Website

Time Detectives - who lived here?

Teacher's Introduction

As part of the Watercress Beds to One-Way Streets project we have done extensive research about the development of the streets and houses in the project area – there is lots of information on the Places hotspots and Themes pages about this. And, just as importantly, we wanted to find out who came to live here. In particular we wanted to know who moved into the thousands of new houses that were built over only a few years at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The population of Walthamstow had been just over 11,000 in 1871 – by 1911 it was more than ten times as many, and the fastest growth in the Queen's Road area happened during the 1890s.

That time is now, of course, beyond living memory. There are some local residents whose grandparents were among those incomers, and from them we have pictures, letters and passed-on anecdotes about those particular people. There are also newspaper reports, advertisements and official reports about the area.

Another particularly good way of gaining information about a lot of people is by examining census returns. A national census has been taken every ten years since 1801 – the first three were essentially just head counts, but starting in 1841, the aim was to gather personal information about everyone in the country, including their whereabouts on the chosen day. Census returns are made publicly available after one hundred years, so the most recent information currently available dates from 1911.

All the census returns up to and including 1911 are now available to everyone, both online and in local museums.

It is possible to search for information on either a person or a place. For this resource, we have traced the inhabitants of a stretch of Chelmsford Road through three census returns, those of 1891, 1901 and 1911.

Census returns at that time contained many fewer questions than they do now. In 1891 and 1901 the forms were completed by a paid officer who went from house to house and was responsible for completing the forms. The design allowed for the returns for several households to appear on the same page. If a house was empty (whether unoccupied, uninhabited or in the process of being built) this was noted. For the houses where someone was in, the people who slept in the house on the night of the census date were included. Their names, ages, place of birth, marital status, occupations and relationship to the head of the household were all listed. There was also a question about some specific disabilities. The questions did not change between 1891 and 1901.

By 1911 the regulations had changed considerably. Each household had a separate form, which was supposed to be filled in by its head. And there were

now questions about the number of rooms in the home, nationality as well as place of birth and, for married women, the duration of their present marriage, the number of children born and whether any of them had died. With regard to occupations, there were also questions about the "industry or service with which worker is connected" and "whether employer, worker or working on own account".

So we can build up a picture of who came to live in our area, where they came from and what jobs they did. In the Queen's Road area of Walthamstow (see the Houses section on the website for more about this) much of the development was of three bedroom, terraced houses, many of them built to almost identical patterns. Perhaps nine out of ten of the new houses were bought by the "buy to let" landlords of the day, and rented out by the week or the quarter.

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

Number of Schedule 48
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after allotment)

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX	PARTICULARS AS TO MARRIAGE				PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION of Persons aged 10 years and upwards			BIRTHPLACE of every person	NATIONALITY of every Person Foreign Country	INFIRMITY
			State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of —	Children born alive to present Marriage. If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.	Personal Occupation	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employer, or Working on Own Account	Whether Working as Shop				
Edward H Smith	Head	40	Married	20	7	7	Taxidermist	Family	Private	London, Salwayton		
Ann Smith	Wife	38	Married							London, Westham		
James V. Smith	Son	15	Single				Engineer's Fitter	Printing	" "	London, Salwayton		
William C. Smith	Son	12	Single				Millwright	General Work	" "	London, Salwayton		
Arthur V. Smith	Son	10	Single				School		" "	London, Salwayton		
David C. Smith	Daughter	6	Single							Essex, Walthamstow		
Edith A. Smith	Son	4	Single							Essex, Walthamstow		
Stanley V. Smith	Son	4 weeks	Single							Essex, Walthamstow		

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

Total	Males	Females	Persons
3	5	3	8

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling)

Write below the **Number of Rooms** in this Dwelling (Garden, Terrace, or Apartment), Street, Kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor verandah, office, shop.

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

Signature: Edward H. Smith

Postal Address: 50 Chiltonford A

Chelmsford Road

In the Queen's Road area, Chelmsford Road had been in existence since the middle part of the nineteenth century, but had many houses added in the 1880s and 1890s. The cottages at the southern end of the road were earliest, and had provided accommodation for farm labourers. Unlike some other local roads, the development was piecemeal over at least thirty years. This contrasts with, for example, Belgrave Road, which did not exist in any form in 1891, but was virtually complete by 1901.

We have chosen a stretch of the older houses in Chelmsford Road, numbers 44-52. This resource includes images of the census returns for 1891, 1901 and 1911, together with questions and ideas for project work.

Six Houses in Chelmsford Road

Today, Chelmsford Road is a long road running from Queen's Road to Boundary Road. It has about 160 houses in it. Most of the houses were built about 120 years ago, and many of them have not been altered very much in the years since. Their first residents would certainly recognise them from the outside, although they might be surprised by the kitchens.

Anyone who lives in an old house has probably wondered who cooked in their kitchen and slept in their bedroom long ago.

Unless we are very lucky and have papers or letters to tell us, we need to become time detectives to find out. One of the ways we can do this is by looking at the census returns.

Ever since 1801, there has been a census taken every ten years, each time the date ends with a "1". The aim is for the government to find out exactly how many people are living in the country, where and when they were born, what jobs they do and whether they are in good health. The information is used to plan things like how many schools and hospitals are needed in different areas. The forms themselves are kept secret for a hundred years, as they contain personal information about people. Then they are published. So the census forms everyone completed in 2011 will not be published until 2111. And in 2011 the census returns for 1911 were published.

Time Detectives: how to read the clues

The first challenge is reading the handwriting!

In 1891 and 1901 an official went from house to house and wrote down what he was told by whoever came to the door. Then the results were checked by a senior officer who sometimes scribbled comments on the form.

In 1911 the forms were filled in by the residents in each house. Some people had beautiful, clear handwriting. Others did not – and not everyone could spell very well.

At this time everyone wrote with a pen and ink. If you were lucky you had a fountain pen – if not, you had to make do with a dip pen.

Task One: Get a pen and ink, and a piece of lined paper. Then write down your address. And, using a separate line for each person, write the names of each person who lives there. Start with the “head of the household”. This would usually be your father or mother. Then write that person’s age, whether or not they are married, where they were born and what they do for a living. You also need to write in whether they are the head of the household and if not, what relation they are to him/her.

For example, imagine a family of four. There is Daniel Wilkinson, aged 42, a plumber his wife Sayeda aged 38, a nurse, and their children Naomi, aged 12, and Benjamin, aged 9. Ben and Sayeda were both born in Bethnal Green, and the children in Walthamstow. Their form would look like this:

Daniel Wilkinson	Head	Married	42	Plumber	Bethnal Green
Sayeda Wilkinson	Wife	Married	38	Nurse	Bethnal Green
Naomi Wilkinson	Daughter	Single	12	School	Walthamstow
Benjamin Wilkinson	Son	Single	9	School	Walthamstow

Task Two Looking at the 1891 census, how many people live in each house? (Clue: one of the houses has two households living in it – this means that the house was divided into flats) Make a list of the houses and the numbers of people living in each one. Can you find the average number?

Then do the same for the 1901 census page (clue – in this year there is also a house that has two households in it. Is it the same one?) Again, can you find the average number of people living in each house?

Then do the same for 1911. You will need to look at several forms this time, because each household has a separate form to itself. Are any houses divided into flats this year? And again, find the average number of people living in each house.

Task Three: Make a list of the different occupations mentioned in each census return. (Clue: a scholar means a child is at school). How many different occupations are there? Are any of the occupations followed by more than one person, and if so, which?

Have you heard of all these occupations and do you know what the people did? There is lots of information about this on the Queen's Road Stories website

Task Four: Now we need to find out how many of the occupants moved on between each census date.

Use 48 Chelmsford Road as an example. First, look at the 1891 form. Who is listed in this house? Make a list of their names. Next, look at the 1901 form? List the names. Are there any of the same people? Finally, look at the 1911 form. Do you think these are the same people? If so, have any children been born since the 1901 census? And have any died

Task Five: Where did the people all come from? These were new houses in 1891. Looking at the census return for that year, list where the adults were born. Were any of them born in Walthamstow? How many different birth places are mentioned? Are any of them outside the London area?