

Newsletter

Vol

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Editorial

I wonder how many of you have been put out by the new opening times for the City Archives, I know I have. It was my own fault because I went on a Tuesday and when I got there I remembered that it was now closed on Tuesdays. I spent all day on the Wednesday trying to find out who is buried in four burial vaults we have found under the floorboards in Bethesda Chapel in Hanley. On Thursday I transferred all my notes to read in some type of order but there seemed a bit missing so on the following Friday I popped up to visit the archives after lunch to check my information and forgot it now closes at 2.00 pm. Just in case you do not know the new opening times for Stoke on Trent City Archives I have put them in this Newsletter.

Summer is here and lets hope it stays a bit longer than last year. This is just the weather to get out and about so why not contact Rob to see if your local graveyard monumental inscriptions have been recorded. If not please get involved with your Family History Society and help us in our quest to record all the monumental inscriptions in North Staffordshire graveyards.

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Scotland 1911 Census Release

The 1911 census was released on **Tuesday 5 April 2011**. This census details information collected from more than 4.7 million Scots – marking a century since the data was first gathered.

The records include the name, address, age, occupation, birthplace and marital status of everyone counted in the 1911 census, as well as details about their children. For the first time, the census data is presented in full colour rather than black and white.

It costs 1 credit to view an index entry for the 1911 census. An image costs 5 credits. Unlike previous censuses, the image spans two pages due to the additional questions that were asked about the fertility of marriage and the profession or occupation. Each page measures 34 cm long by 43 cm high so the images are best viewed on your computer screen or if printed, on size A3 paper.

Unlike previous censuses there are no plans in the immediate future to relocate the enumeration books to New Register House in Edinburgh because the books need 73.5 metres of shelving.

By kind permission of Scotland's People.

Stoke on Trent City Archives

From 1 April 2011 the opening hours of Stoke-on-Trent City Archives will be:

Monday	Closed
Tuesday	Closed
Wednesday	10.00 - 7.00 p.m.
Thursday	10.00 - 2.00 p.m.
Friday	10.00 - 2.00 p.m.
Saturday	10.00 - 2.00 p.m.

Stoke-on-Trent City Archives,
Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 3RS

Tel. 01782 238420

Fax. 01782 238499

Email: stoke.archives@stoke.gov.uk

Archive Service website
staffordshire.gov.uk/archives
City Council website
stoke.gov.uk

[Bank Holiday Closures](#)

Please note that, to avoid a wasted journey, it is essential that you make an appointment to visit the office, ensure that we hold the records that you are interested in, and bring acceptable proof of identity and address for reader registration. Our reading room is open to all members of the public without charge. An Archive Service reader's ticket is required for use of the reading room.

Chris Latimer. City Archives

Finding birth certificates

It's very frustrating when you can't find an ancestor's birth certificate - but often the 'brick wall' only exists in our imagination. Let's look at some of the key reasons why a certificate can't be found....

- **The forename you know your ancestor by may not be the one on the birth certificate:** Sometimes the name (s) given at the time of baptism would differ from the name(s) given to the registrar of births; sometimes a middle name was preferred, perhaps to avoid confusion.
 - **Middle names come and go:** at the beginning of the 19th century it was rare to have a middle name, but by the beginning of the 20th century it was unusual not to have one. Some people invented middle names, some people dropped middle names they didn't like, and sometimes people simply forgot what was on the birth certificate.
 - **The surname on the certificate may not be the one you expect:** if the parents weren't married at the time of the birth then usually (but not always) the birth will be recorded under the mother's maiden name. Of course, some mother's didn't admit that they weren't married to the father. Other possibilities are adoption - including adoption by a stepfather.
 - **You're looking for the wrong father:** often the best clue you have to the identity of your ancestor's father is the information on his or her marriage certificate. Unfortunately marriage certificates are often incorrect - the father's name and/or occupation may be wrong. This is particularly likely if your ancestor never knew his or her father, whether as a result of early death or illegitimacy. Not many people admit to being illegitimate on their wedding day - and in Victorian Britain illegitimacy was frowned upon, so single mothers often made up stories to tell their children (as well as the neighbours).
 - **You may be looking in the wrong place:** a child's birthplace is likely to be shown correctly when he or she is living at home, but could well be incorrect after leaving home. Many people simply didn't know where they were born, and simply assumed it was the place they remembered growing up.
 - **You may be looking in the wrong period:** ages on censuses are often wrong, as are the ages shown on marriage certificates - especially if there is an age gap. Sometimes people didn't know how old they were, and ages on death certificates can be little more than guesses. Remember too that births could be registered up to 42 days afterwards without penalty, so many will be recorded in the following quarter - and they could be registered up to 365 days afterwards on payment of a fine.
 - **The birth was not registered at all:** this is the least likely situation, but it did happen occasionally - most often in the first few years of registration, though it wasn't until 1874 that there was a penalty for failing to register a birth.
- The GRO indexes are wrong:** this is also quite rare, but did happen occasionally despite the checks that were carried out.

How can you overcome these problems? First and foremost keep an open mind - be prepared to accept that the information you already have may be wrong. Obtain all the other information that you can from censuses, certificates, and other sources (such as Army records): the less information you can find, the more likely it is that the little you already have is wrong or misleading in some way. For example, if you can't find your ancestor on any censuses prior to his marriage, you can be pretty certain that the information on the marriage certificate and later censuses is wrong in some material way.

Consider how and why the information you have might be wrong by working your way through the list above - then come up with a strategy to deal with each possibility. Sometimes it's as easy as ordering the birth certificate for a sibling to find out the mother's maiden name; often finding when the parents married is a vital clue.

If you can't find your ancestor on the census with his or her parents then you should be particularly suspicious of the information you have - it's very likely that some element is wrong, and it is quite conceivable that it is ALL wrong.

Middle names that could also be surnames often indicate illegitimacy - it was usually the only way to get the father's name on the birth certificate. Unusual middle names can provide clues - I remember helping one member find an ancestor who birth was under a completely different surname by taking advantage of the fact that his middle name was Ptolemy!

Make use of local BMD indexes (start at [UKBMD](#)), and also look for your ancestor's baptism - sometimes we forget that parents continued to have their children baptised after Civil Registration began. Consider the possibility that one of the parents died when your ancestor was young - perhaps there will evidence in workhouse records. Could the witnesses to your ancestor's marriage be relatives? Have you looked for wills?

Don't forget that whilst FreeBMD has virtually complete indexes for the period up to 1935, it's possible that your ancestor's entry has been omitted or mistranscribed - so check the original index pages as well. It takes longer, but it's something you only have to do once.