

# URBAN SPACES: HISTORY



*These materials contain ideas for field work in urban spaces and public gardens. The materials were originally developed for primary schools in central London as part of the Gordon & Woburn Squares primary project, but can be used in most urban parks and gardens.*

This section can form part of a *Local Study and/or Victorian Britain* at key stage 2. For key stage 1, it can be used to study the way of life of people in the past who lived in the local area, including a famous person.

Public spaces offer a range of opportunities for children's learning, and can enable children to investigate, observe, wonder, record and create. Questioning and speaking and listening are therefore at the heart of these materials.

Learning is essentially a process of enquiry. This material is based around two key questions:

- What is your area like now, and how is it used?
- What was it like in the past, and how was it used then?

Many of the suggested activities in this section can be adapted for use with either key stage 1 or key stage 2 children. We have indicated where an activity is suitable for a particular key stage.

## KS1 TIME WALK – FINDING CLUES TO THE PAST

**Resources:** Digital cameras, clipboards, and pencils.

Classic street furniture: pictures : download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

### At school before the walk

With the class, take a good look at the school grounds and buildings, and encourage the children to talk about features of both. Introduce a variety of words to develop the children's vocabulary, e.g. pane, handle, lock, key, fanlight, panel, glass, wood, metal, paving stone, railings, kerbstone.

Tell the children that they are going for a walk around a nearby area. Ask them to be history detectives, looking out for clues about the past.

### Walking round the area

First of all, walk round the area at a leisurely pace so the class can familiarise themselves with the overall shape, size and atmosphere of the place. Encourage the children to look closely at details, to ask questions, and to discuss similarities and differences.

This will develop children's skills of observation, their vocabulary and their sense of continuity with the past.

### Questions to consider

- Q What kinds of buildings can we see in the area?
- Q Are they all built in the same style?
- Q Do they all look the same age?
- Q What shapes are the doors, windows, roofs?
- Q What materials are the roofs, walls, railings, windows and doors made of?
- Q Do the buildings have any decoration on them? If so, what?
- Q Were the houses built for rich or poor people?
- Q If there's a church/mosque/temple or other public building, how is it different from the houses? – pitch of roof, shape of doors, windows, decoration, materials.

### Activities

When you reach the most attractive or interesting houses in the area you are visiting, form the children into pairs. Give each pair one house front to examine and photograph, using a digital camera. Allow each child to take a picture of the façade of their house – encourage them to take one of the whole façade, and the other of the front door.

Each child could now take just one additional photograph of any feature that they particularly like: at the front of the houses, on the pavement, in the street or in the gardens.

The children could also sketch their house fronts. Emphasise close observation, and the careful recording of details like letter boxes and knockers.

At the end of the walk, stop in a suitable place and ask the children to:

- 1 Look – is there anything they can see that might be more than 100 years old? What is modern?
- 2 Listen – what sounds can they hear?
- 3 Smell – sniff the air. What can they smell?

### Back in the classroom

Print the children's digital pictures. Create a wall frieze with the pictures, lined up in order as they appear in the road. Discuss and compare features of the houses such as the following:

**Doors:** colour, bell, knocker, handle, keyhole, fanlight

**Letterboxes:** position, material, size

**Windows:** shape, type, number of panes, any ornamentation, material of frame.

**At the front:** do they have railings? Do they have basements? Do any have balconies on the first floor, or other special features?

Also discuss street furniture and other features the children have photographed.

**Q** Are the features old or new? Or replicas/refurbishments of old features, such as benches, paths and railings?

**Q** What were/are the features used for?

**Q** What is our opinion of them?

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## **KS2 TIME WALK – FINDING CLUES TO THE PAST**

**Resources:** Digital cameras, clipboards, and pencils.

- Ideally find some historical photos of the area
- ‘Your house’ recording frame: download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)
- Street furniture: pictures: download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

Take your class on a time walk round the area. First of all, walk round at a leisurely pace so the class can familiarise themselves with the shape, size, style, features and general atmosphere of the place.

If there’s a church/mosque/temple or other public building, look closely at this.

If there’s a public garden walk into this and ask the children to speculate about how it might have changed since the area was developed.

### **Questions to consider**

**Q** How similar are the houses to each other? If they are roughly the same, why do you think this is so? If they are very different, why is this?

**Q** What general shapes are the doors, windows, roofs?

**Q** What materials are the roofs, walls, railings, windows and doors made of? Are there any other distinctive features on the buildings? – e.g. porticos .

**Q** Were the houses built for rich or poor people?

**Q** Do some houses or other buildings seem to have been built more recently than the rest?

If yes, what do you think could have happened to the original houses? What are the new ones for?

**Q** Why do you think the church /mosque/temple [if there is one] is built in such a different style from the houses?

How does the design of the church /mosque/temple differ from that of the other buildings in the road?

- Q Would the lighting, the pavements and the road surface have been the same 50 or 100 years ago? What might they have been like in those days?
- Q What are most of the buildings used for now?
- Q Would they have had the same use in Victorian times / the 1930s / 1960s/ the time they were originally built?
- Q How can we find out?

### **Making a record**

Stop in the most interesting part of your area. Form the class into pairs and give each pair of children one house front to examine closely. If you are going to do census work, stop where this work is focused.

Using a digital camera, one child in each pair can photograph the facade. Restrict the number of shots to two at the most – this will help the children to focus on what is important. The second child in each pair can choose to photograph a feature spotted earlier. It must be one that they think is a clue to the past. The children could also sketch their house fronts.

### **Activities back in the classroom**

Print out the children's pictures and display them on the classroom wall. You could add the pictures included in the pack.

The children can now fill in their record sheets: *Your house in [name of road]*.

Using the record sheets and the photographs as reference points, return to the questions raised during the time walk.

### **How can we find the answers to our questions?**

Here you could set the children to research topic books and the internet. For architectural styles, the children could research architecture of the period when your area was built.

Afterwards, if you've got a good range, hold a class discussion about features of the different architectural styles. You could compare the late Georgian/early Victorian, later Victorian Gothic architecture, and post-World War II styles, then ask the children to choose a specific building and write an architectural report on it. (This activity can be done in a literacy lesson.)

The *This is your life!* activity below follows on naturally from the Time Walk.

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## THE STORY OF YOUR URBAN SPACE – THIS IS YOUR LIFE!

*Try to find a historical map or photographs of your area. A public library may be able to help.*

### Instructions and questions

**1** Look at any maps and plans you've got.

**Q** How have the designs of the roads and garden if any changed over time?

What has stayed the same?

Which do you prefer, and why?

**2** Examine any historical photographs.

**Q** Are they all from the same time? If not, can you sequence them?

What clues about life in the past can we see?

What further information do we need?

Where could we look for it?

**3** The class should now have enough historical information about the area to create a class timeline, in the format of *This is your life!*

The class could also use the information from the time walk and timeline activities to devise a history trail or hunt for younger classes when they visit the area. Teachers will obviously need to carry out a risk assessment on what is suggested.

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## PLANTS AND WHERE THEY COME FROM

### A science and history cross-curricular activity

In British cities, up to 40% of plants have been introduced from elsewhere in the past. Many of them have become naturalised, and are thought of as native plants. The same is true of many animals; for example, the grey squirrel we can see in urban gardens all over Britain comes originally from North America.

Plants from all over the world have been brought to Britain by humans since Neolithic times. The various origins of plants and animals '*means that cities are not only multicultural in terms of their human inhabitants, they are multicultural in terms of their plant and animal residents*' (Agyeman, J, 1995, *People, Plants and Places*, Southgate Publishers).

Where do the plants in your local public park or garden, or urban space come from?

Children can use keys and other resources to identify and record trees, shrubs and other plants in the urban space. See the 'Urban spaces: science' notes for more on this (download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)).

Then children research the plants' origins.

**Q** Which are native plants, originating in Britain?

**Q** Which are exotic, originally from other countries?  
When did the exotics arrive in Britain?

**Q** Which have become naturalised?  
Where did they come from?  
Who might have brought them? Why? How?

The children can research the plant origins on the internet – simply type the name into a search engine (e.g. Google) and several useful sites giving information about plants and their origins should be listed. (For instance yuccas are striking plants with interesting origins.)

The children can now mark the origins of the trees and shrubs on an outline map of the world. You could also create a wall display of the origins of the garden's plants. Plot them from the children's maps onto a large world map, and illustrate it with pictures of the trees and shrubs, their leaves, seeds and bark.

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## **GARDENS AND PARKS 100 YEARS AGO – WHAT DID PEOPLE DO THERE?**

This activity assumes that your local public garden or open space existed 100 years ago!

Try a public library, or see the English Heritage NMR website to find historical photographs of children in a public garden or park somewhere near you.

Go to <http://viewfinder.english-heritage.org.uk>

Go to 'Search picture gallery'. Then in the Search box, type Children. Below this select 'Gardens and parks'. Type in your town or, for a wider choice, select your county in the box below. See what comes up.

Print and give one picture to each group of children in the class.

## **Questions for discussion**

**Q** How many adults are in the picture?  
How many children?

**Q** What are the adults doing?  
What are the children doing?

**Q** What are they wearing?

**Q** What are they carrying?

**Q** What is different from today?

**Q** Pool and record the children's answers to the questions.

Drawing on the clues in the old photographs, ask each group to make a list of all the activities that might have taken place in your local public park, garden, or other open space a century ago.

We build on this investigation when we use the 1881 census to meet the people who lived in the area, and role-play how they might have used the gardens.

*See the Art and Design section for suggestions for observing and recording activities a public garden today. Download the Activities record sheet. Both of these are on [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)*

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## WHO LIVED IN THE ROAD? CENSUS DETECTIVES

*These activities depend on your being able to acquire census data for your area.* Try your public library, or perhaps buy material from <http://www.genealogysupplies.com/> or <http://www.1901censusonline.com/>

### A Introducing the census

We have looked at the area in the present: now to turn to our second question: *What was the area like in the past?* What kinds of people lived here over 125 years ago, in 1881? We can find out from census returns. What can the census tell us about their lives, what they did, where they fitted into society?

And - how might they have used the area?

#### *Questions for discussion*

- Q** How does the Government know how many people live in Britain?
- Q** How does it know how many are men, how many are women, and how many are children?
- Q** How does the Government know what the people's jobs are?
- Q** How does the Government know if the people are living in the same place as where they were born?

Continue the discussion, telling the class why censuses are taken, when the first national census was taken in Britain (1801), and how often they are taken (every 10 years).

Ask the class to suggest what questions the government might ask the people when they take a census. What do they want to know? From the questions we can work out what the headings might be on a census form. Collect suggestions from the children for census headings.

Nowadays we receive printed forms, but in the 19th century a census enumerator visited each house and wrote by hand everyone who was inside each house.

Victorian handwriting was far more elaborate than ours. Ask the class: Do you think you can read the handwriting on a census form from 1901, over 100 years ago? It's very difficult to read. The challenge should intrigue the children and motivate them to try to decipher the Victorian script.

## **B Examining handwritten sheets from the 1901 census**

You should be able to get census returns from a local history library, or perhaps buy material from <http://www.genealogysupplies.com/> or <http://www.1901censusonline.com/>

### **Resources:**

'Cracking the census code': download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

Hand round copies of the pages from the census of 1901. Read the headings – how do they compare with the headings the children suggested? Carefully explain what the headings and terms used on the form mean. Alternatively, the children could work them out themselves, using the sheet: *Cracking the census code*.

Now ask the children to look hard for clues as to what kind of people lived in the road. Prompt them to look particularly at the number of people in each house, the occupation/s of the inhabitants, their roles, and where they were born.

The children will find deciphering the crossed-through words and elaborate handwriting difficult. Do encourage them to persevere, though – it is very rewarding for children to 'crack the code', even if only partially. We are not expecting them to decipher every word, simply to gain some sense of what the census was and what information the government collected.

## **C Filling in personal census entries**

### **Resource:**

- Blank census sheet : download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

Some children may not yet fully understand how a census works.

Filling in their own census should help children to develop a thorough understanding of both process and content. Give out blank 'census' forms, using the 19th century census headings, and ask the children to fill them in for the previous night: to record all the people who were present in their house that night.

Either ask the class to take the forms home and fill them in there, or give them time in class to complete the forms. You may need to reassure them and their parents or carers that no-one else will look at the forms – they will not be made public.

## D Examining the 1881 census

**Resource:** You need to print copies of the 1881 census before the lesson – you can get this from [www.genealogysupplies.com](http://www.genealogysupplies.com).

Now it's time to look at what the census can tell us about who lived in your area over 125 years ago, in 1881. You could choose a different road from the 1901 census.

Distribute printouts of the 1881 census for your chosen road, one per pair of children. Give out highlighters and ask each pair of children to highlight 'their' house (the one they photographed on the time walk) and its occupants. Give the children several minutes to absorb all the details.

### Questions to discuss

- Q Were all the people in the house from the same family?
- Q How many people lived there?  
What did they do? – occupations.  
Where were they born?
- Q Did everyone recorded actually live in the house?
- Q Was the head of the household a man or a woman?  
Was he or she married or unmarried?
- Q Are there any children in the household?
- Q How many people in the house were servants?
- Q Does anything surprise you?
- Q Is this information reliable?
- Q Does it in fact list everyone who lived in your chosen road?  
*[No – people who were out are not listed, and some children may have been left out too.]*

**2** Now move on to discuss the following questions, with all the children looking over the whole of the census for your road to find answers. This investigation provides excellent practice in the literacy skills of skimming and scanning.

- Q Which are the five most popular names for girls/women?  
Which are the five most popular boys'/men's names?
- Q How many heads of household are retired?  
How many are women?  
How many are unmarried?
- Q Which house has the most people in it?
- Q Which has the most servants?  
Which has the fewest servants?  
Does any household have more servants than non-servants?  
Does any household have no servants?

**Q** How many houses have lodgers living there?

**Q** How many have people visiting?

**Q** Which families have children under 16?

How many of these have a governess to teach their children?

**Q** How many children under 16 were working?

Note that in the previous year, the Elementary Education Act of 1880 had made education free for 5 to 10 year-olds, and was also made compulsory for that age group. However, children over 10 could, and did, work. Today children must stay at school until they are 16.

**Q** How many people were born in your town? –*the census enumerator may not have been consistent in how he has recorded places.*

**Q** How many people were born outside Britain?

Which countries were they born in?

How many of the above are British subjects?

How many are foreign?

How many are naturalised?

And finally:

**Q** What picture does the census give us of the people living in your road?

**3** Pool and record on the flipchart the occupations of the inhabitants of your road. Do the children have at least some idea what these occupations were? Discuss them and compare them with the occupations of people in the road you looked at for the 1901 census. Did the same kinds of people live in each place? Look, too, at the number and types of servants in the two areas. Was one area wealthier than the other?

## **E Using ICT to investigate the census**

Should you wish to purchase an electronic copy of the full 1881 census, it is available from [www.genealogysupplies.com](http://www.genealogysupplies.com)

## **F Telling a story in role: Living in a big house, and a suffragette adventure**

### **Resources:**

- ‘Upstairs Downstairs’: download the story of Frances as told to Rose, from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

Tell the story of Frances, the child who went on a suffragette march 100 years ago. Frances was born at the end of an era – the Victorian. She lived at the start of a new century of social reform, equality for women, technological advance and devastating war. See the story supplied.

Frances was a real child who lived at 28 Bedford Square in London, and so was her friend Kathleen Coleman, who lived nearby in Woburn Square.

Note that although both Frances and Kathleen were real children living at this time, we have imagined many of the details of the story. However, we

know that Frances did truly go on a suffragette march. We have made up the details about Kathleen, as all know for sure about her is that she lived in Woburn Square – we found her in the 1901 census

You can find more information about the suffragettes on:  
[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/women](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/women)

Frances's story gives a well-off London child's perspective on life. What were the lives of the many servants who lived in the houses like?

## G A domestic servant's life

**Resources:** Use the BBC '*Landmarks*' video if you've got it (see below)

Explain to the class that domestic service was the major form of employment in late-Victorian Britain: approximately 1.25 million people worked as domestic servants.

In the early days of the National Curriculum a good *Landmarks* video was made for history. See the third programme on the video: 'Victorian Britain 3: Home life', about the life of a domestic servant and a working-class family. You may have a copy at school; otherwise you can order it through [www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk) (it's on page 101 of the catalogue).

*If you use the Landmarks video:*

Tell the children that they are going to look at life from the perspective of poorer people. Ask them to concentrate particularly on the domestic servant's story, as the servants living in your area would probably have had similar lives to hers. Watch the video sequence, then ask the class what they have learnt about life in late Victorian times, from both Frances's story and the video. Pool and record their observations on the flipchart.

## H Documentary evidence – the work of a housemaid

**Resources:**

'Upstairs Downstairs': at the end is 'The housemaid's work in summer' (from *Mrs Beeton's Household Management*). Download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

A young Victorian wife, Mrs Isabella Beeton, wrote a book about how to manage a household. In the book, she wrote pages and pages about the duties of various servants (Visit [www.mrsbeeton.com](http://www.mrsbeeton.com) and choose Chapter 41 from the list of chapter headings on the left-hand side of the screen.) Just one page taken from her instructions is supplied in this pack. It tells us what a housemaid had to do in the early morning, up until the end of breakfast.

Give each child or pair of children the extract from Mrs Beeton: *The duties of the housemaid*. Read it aloud, acting out the chores as you come to them. The children should follow on their copies. They will be amazed at all the chores to be done just in the short time before breakfast.

Give out the highlighters and ask the children, in pairs, to highlight all the jobs the housemaid had to do by the end of breakfast. When they have finished, ask them to tell you all the tasks the housemaid had to carry out. Write their contributions on the flipchart. The list will fill an entire sheet.

The children will now have perspectives from both 'upstairs' (the story of Frances) and 'downstairs' (the housemaid).

## **I Sir Frederick Treves, the famous surgeon who saved the King**

**Resources:** 'Story of Sir Frederick Treves ': download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

Sir Frederick Treves was a famous person who lived in Gordon Square in central London in late Victorian times. He developed life-saving surgery for appendicitis. You could tell the class his story. Then discuss:

**Q** Why was Sir Frederick Treves famous?

How do we know he was a good teacher of surgery?

Why was his work as a surgeon so important?

**Q** How many monarchs did he treat?

**Q** Was he brave to stand up to King Edward VII in 1902?

**Q** Should he have worn his glasses (spectacles) when he was operating on his patients?

If a famous person lived in your area, you could construct a story about him/her, and tell it to your class instead.

## **I Role play**

**Resources:** What you need depends on what you do.

How might the people in the census have used the local open space? The people in the census will become more real to the children if they have an opportunity to take on their roles. Decide what form the role-play might take:

Perhaps the children could all be servants, and gather in your local public garden or other open space on their Sunday afternoon off.

Or, you could hold a Victorian birthday party or picnic for one of the children in the census. This option offers a wider selection of roles, as it would involve children, parents and servants.

Note that the Nuffield Primary History website carries a full account of a similar role play based on the 1881 census of a square in Leeds. You may wish to read it for details of how the role play was set up and carried out. See 'Urban spaces' on [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)

Every child should have a real identity, taken from the 1881 census.

Discuss with the children their characters; ask them to think hard about them, about what kind of person they were. Give the children the six historical pictures of people in parks. If you have Victorian topic books in class the children can consult them too. The internet could also be useful for researching roles.

Over the next few days, give the children time to develop their roles, drawing on what they have learnt from all the sources for life in late Victorian times.

The children could write individual character profiles for their 1881 character.

## **Health & Safety**

Follow your school or local authority guidelines about taking children out of school. Carry out a risk assessment before allowing children into different areas of the park, gardens, urban space, or before touching anything in the area. See the Science section of 'Urban spaces' for more detailed notes – download from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org).

### **Nuffield Primary History: Urban spaces cross-curricular project**

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