

Who do we think we are?

Exploring Family History Fact File

Canal & River
explorers

Supplied by: The Waterways Trust Archive



Where did your family come from?

My grandma was a boatwoman.

www.canalriverexplorers.org.uk

Who Do We Think We Are is an educational programme, supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, which encourages primary and secondary school pupils to explore identity, diversity and citizenship – in their schools, local communities and nationally.

It began with the high-profile Who Do We Think We Are Week in 2009 (www.wdwtwa.org.uk) which encouraged all schools to get involved in:

“... investigations and celebrations by schools of pupils’ histories and their community’s roots and of the national and global links that they can make.”

One of the themes of **Who Do We Think We Are** is ‘history and settlement’. Exploring pupils’ family links to local waterways can bring this theme alive.

Exploring waterway family history

There are many places in England closely connected to waterways. Some towns didn’t exist before the arrival of a canal – Stourport-on-Severn in Worcestershire, for example. Many people lived and worked on the waterways and some boaters had very distinct loyalties – for several generations, their family worked on one canal only, or carried goods only for one company.

Use May Robert’s research on her waterway family to help children conduct their own research.

Learning objectives – links to the KS2 English curriculum

History

- 1.a. Place events, people and changes in correct periods of time
- 2.d. To describe and make links between the main events, situations and changes within and across the different periods and societies studied.
- 4.a. How to find out about the events, people and changes studied from an appropriate range of sources of information, including ICT-based sources [for example, documents, printed sources, CD-ROMs, databases, pictures and photographs, music, artefacts, historic buildings and visits to museums, galleries and sites]
- 4.b. To ask and answer questions and to select and record information relevant to the focus of the enquiry.
- 5.a. Recall, select and organise historical information.
- 5.c. Communicate their knowledge and understanding of history in a variety of ways [for example, drawing, writing, by using ICT].

Citizenship

- 4.b. To think about the lives of people living in other places and times, and people with different values and customs.
- 4.c. To be aware of different types of relationship, including marriage and those between friends and families, and to develop the skills to be effective in relationships.

Why use this Exploring Family History Fact File?

This **Family History Fact File** aims to give children a sense of how sources can be used to **find out things about the past**. The tasks are designed to progress in difficulty as more sources are introduced, so that pupils will **gain confidence in drawing their own conclusions from the evidence**.

Mapping family history can be used to **develop chronological awareness**. By learning about what life could have been like for their ancestors, pupils can **learn about change and continuity** – how things change over time, but also how our lives now are linked to our past.

Looking at May Roberts' research will help in setting the scene for children's own research.

Key activity

The main research activity is one that children can complete with their parents or carers. Through the exercise, children will be encouraged to gain a sense of where they come from and how this links to where they are today.

Using sources via the internet and other external resources will be more suitable for older children. Once these external sources are introduced, pupils will need help from adults – the census and other documents can be quite difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, they can find lots of clues about what jobs their ancestors did and where they lived from family stories, documents and photographs, even without using external archives.

Follow-up activities

- create a scrapbook or website with all the information pupils have found about their family, which can be added to later and viewed by the family. Include any drawings or creative work inspired by the project.
- groups of pupils work on different sources and report back their findings to the rest of the class.
- write a biography of a member of their family.
- to write a short drama about a member of their family, or role-play an interview with him/her about their family life.
- create a timeline of their family, including important dates from history (or dates from another example such as William Towers from The National Archives' Victorian Family History exercise).
- use the sources as a stimulus for creative writing – for example, a diary of everyday life or a story about a member of their family.
- use family photographs or stories as a stimulus for artwork.
- choose some of the occupations of pupils, ancestors, and research them further.

Pack Leaders can use this Exploring Family History Fact File for new approaches to badges or challenges. Here are a few ideas to get you going!

Brownies

Culture Badge

Brownies could investigate and draw their own family tree and put together a collection of family photos, certificates and memorabilia.

Hobbies Badge

Brownies could investigate their family history as one of their hobbies and then write about it.

Cub Scouts

Artist Activity Badge

Why not use this pack as a starting point for making a video about someone's family history? They could include interviews, old photographs or even film.

Local Knowledge Activity Badge

Cubs could find out about a member of their family who has lived nearby and visit the places where they lived, worked or went to school. They could ask them about how things were different when they were young and draw a map to show the places they have talked about.

Creative Challenge

Cub Scouts could use this pack to help them complete the Creative Challenge, either drawing a family tree using information technology or writing a short story based on what they found out about their family.

Hobbies Activity Badge

This pack could form the basis of a longer-term hobby. Cub Scouts could collect information over a period of two months, drawing their own family tree and collecting photographs and copies of documents.



Where can I find the resources I need to research family history?

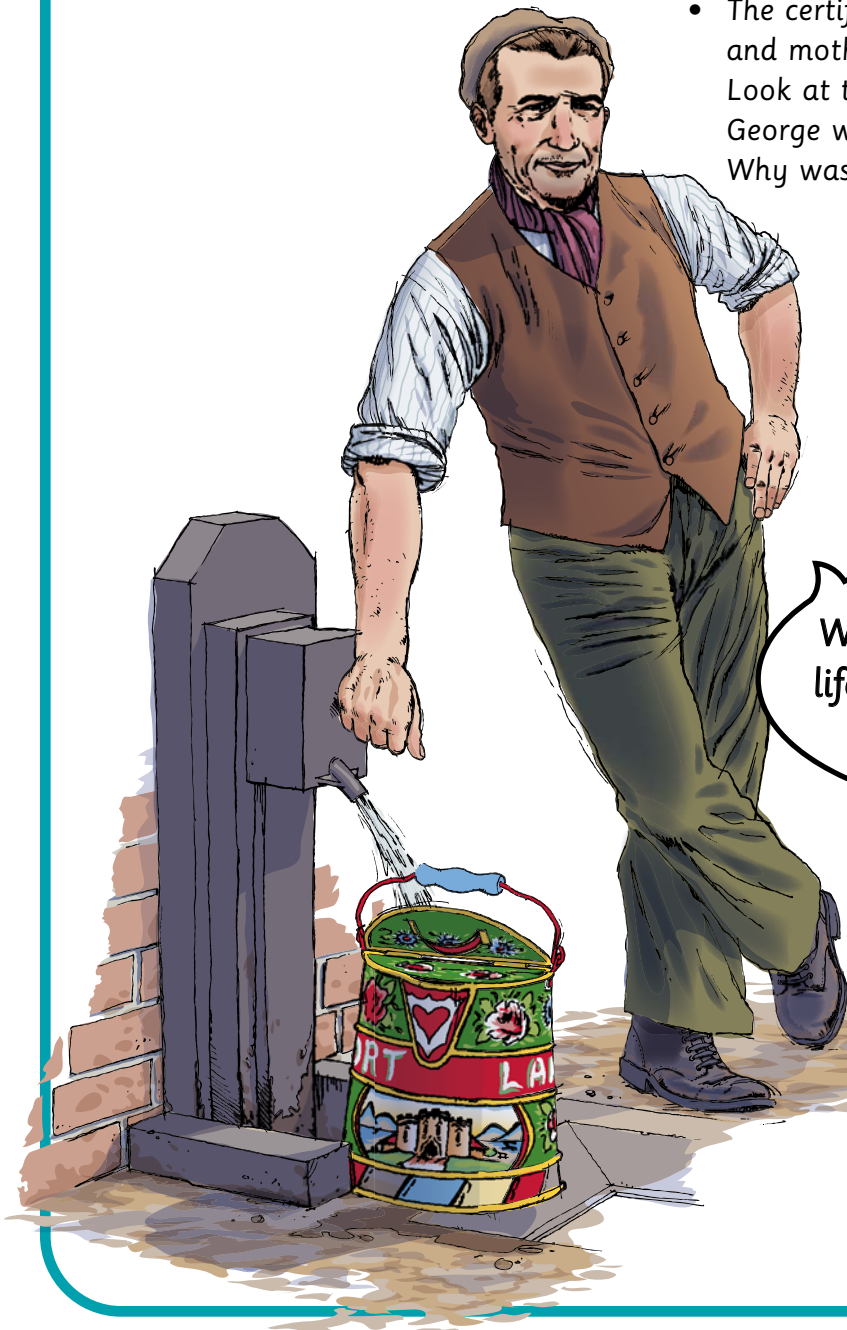
- **Life on the English Waterways** brings alive some of the issues for boaters and their families, such as working on the waterways, living conditions, schooling and health. The resource can be downloaded from www.canalriverexplorers.org.uk and includes photographs and original sources about life on the canals.
- You will find fact files about many of England's waterways on the explorers website www.canalriverexplorers.org.uk, including the Trent & Mersey Canal (the canal May Roberts' family worked and lived on).
- For more on finding out about the life of a Victorian child using family research, The National Archives education website features the Victorian Family History lesson. You may find it helpful to undertake such an exercise to help children understand the basics of research. The resource is available at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/lessons
- Use the resources of a local library or museum to help find information about the town and local families. Libraries can be particularly helpful in providing old maps and local census returns, while museums will help with the history of local waterways and industries in your town.
- There are many **online resources** available for researching family history. Note, however, that the majority of these sites make a charge for membership or searches. Sites include www.ancestry.co.uk, www.findmypast.co.uk and www.1911census.co.uk, which is available for use in many libraries for free. Although some online sources carry records of births, marriages and deaths, these are only the most basic listings and do not carry any detail. If you want to find out more it is necessary to send off for a copy of the original document. This again incurs a charge, so you need to be fairly sure that the individual concerned is a family member.
- The Waterways Trust Archive contains documents which relate to the running of the network of canals that criss-cross England. You will find catalogues or lists of resources on the Virtual Archive website www.virtualwaterways.co.uk However, the names of individual people may not appear on the website, and you may need to visit the Archive at Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, or Gloucester Docks so that you can see the documents.

Activities to do in your classroom

George Roberts' birth certificate

Have a look at the birth certificate on the next page – it records the date and place of birth of George Edward Roberts.

- On what date was George born?
- Was he born in a house?
- What was the name of the town where the canal boat 'Sarah' was moored?
- What was George's father's job?
- The certificate shows that George's father and mother lived in Longport, Staffordshire. Look at the canal map – can you find the place George was born, and his parents' home town? Why was George born so far from home?
- What do you think it would have been like to care for a tiny baby on a canal boat?



What can you learn about life on the waterways from original documents?

George Roberts' birth certificate

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE



Application Number 1370643-1

REGISTRATION DISTRICT **CHESTER** in the County of the City of Chester & in the County of Chester

1888 BIRTH in the Sub-district of **Chester Castle**

Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration

21	Ten-twelfth February 1888 Canal boat Edward "Star" off Queen Street S.S.D.	George	Boy	George Edward Roberts	Hannah Roberts formerly "Muirshill"	Canal Boat man.	G. E. Roberts Father Broadwell Street Longport Staffordshire	Third March 1888	G. S. Sawwell Registrar	
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CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the

29th day of

June

2009

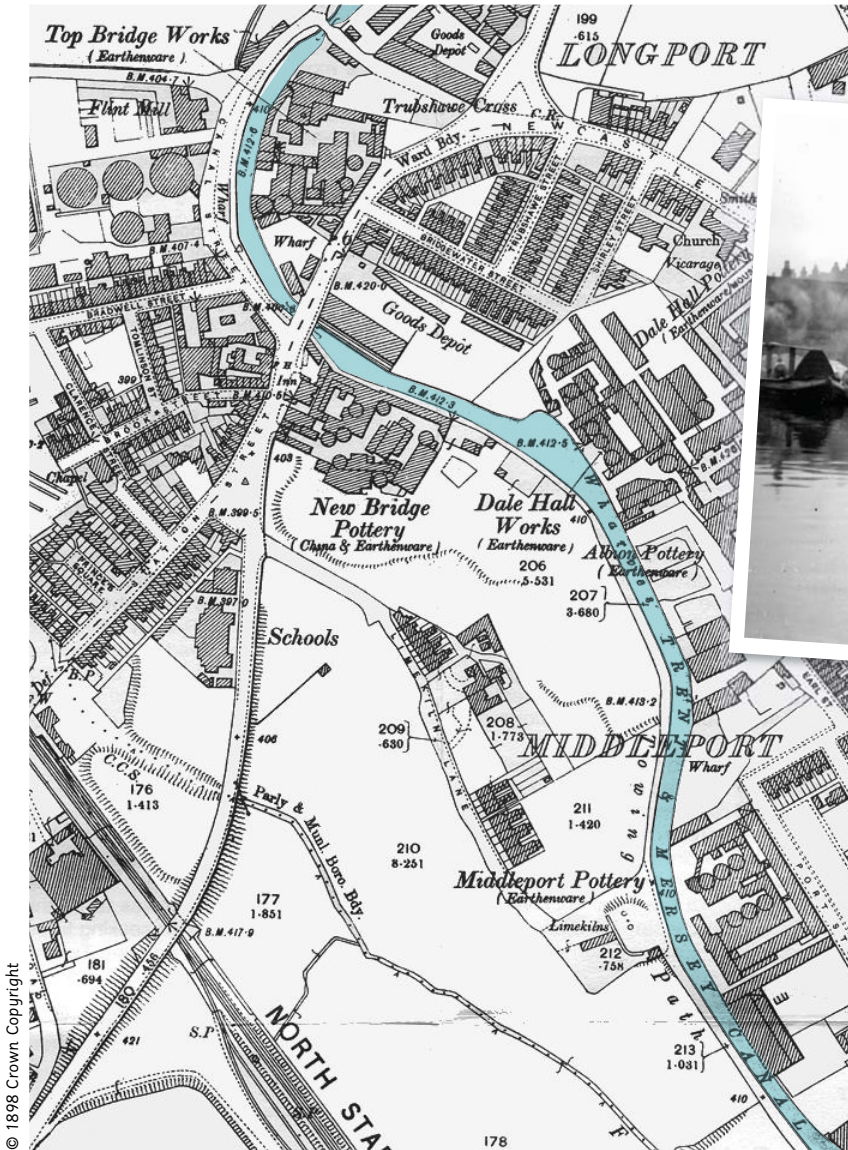


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WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

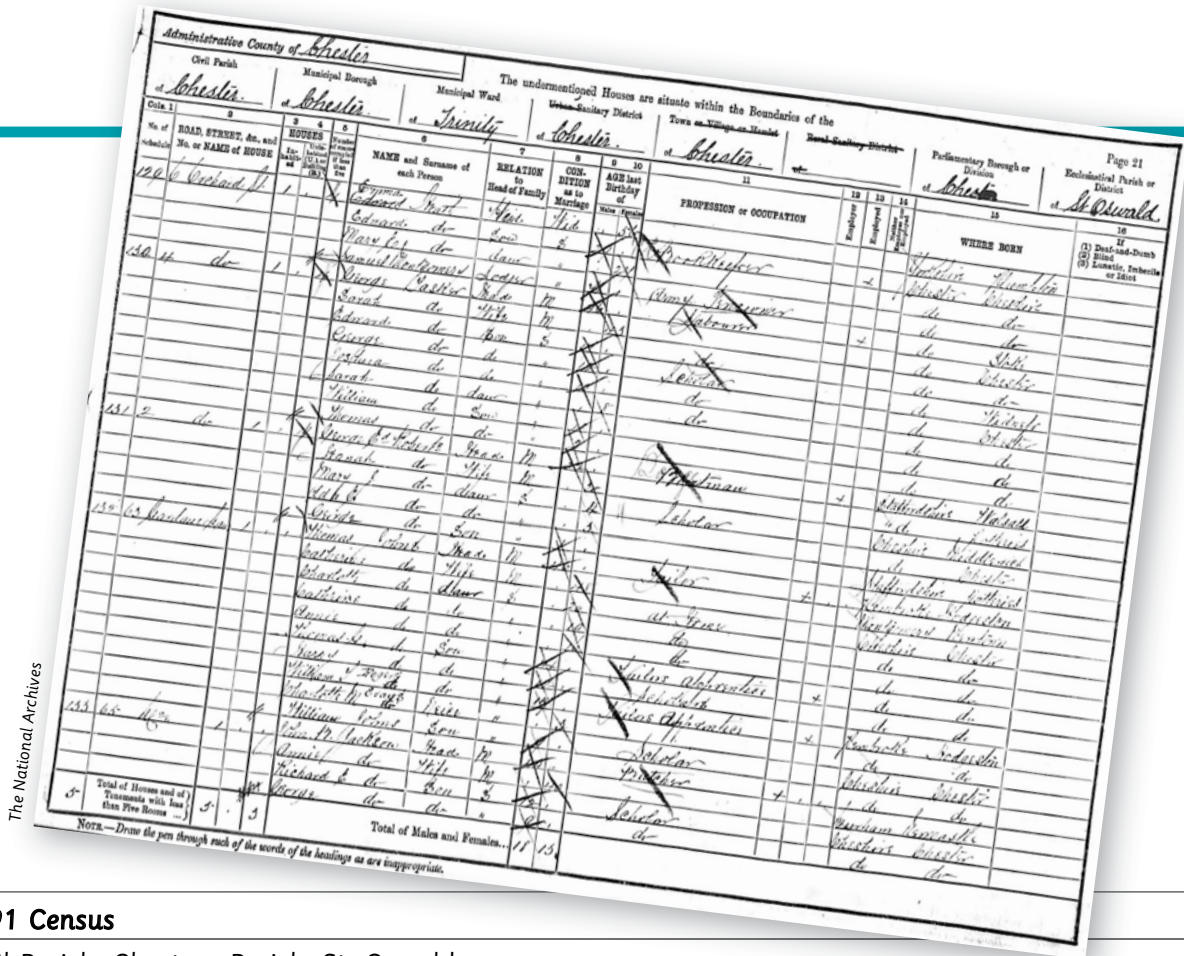


Photograph courtesy of The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

Narrowboats tied up after unloading limestone in the Potteries at Longport Wharf, opposite Bradwell Street.

Here is a photograph and map of Longport, where George Roberts' family lived in 1888. Longport is part of Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire. This area is known as the Potteries.

- What goods were made in the factories beside the canal? (Clue: Think about the name of the area!)
- The Trent & Mersey Canal helped to link Longport with the huge port of Liverpool. Why do you think the canal was a good way to move these goods to the port? (Clue: Were there any lorries in 1888? What do you think the roads were like?)
- Can you find Bradwell Street? Mark it with a highlighter or coloured pen.
- Why do you think George's family lived here? (Clue: Where's the canal?)



1891 Census							
Civil Parish: Chester. Parish: St. Oswald.							
2 Orchard St	George Ed Roberts	Head	M	32		Boatman	Staffordshire Walsall
	Hanah Roberts	Wife	M		34		Staffordshire Potteries
	Mary J Roberts	Daur	S		4	Scholar	Cheshire Middlewich
	Ada E Roberts	Daur	S		3		Cheshire Chester
	George Roberts	Son			1		Staffordshire Potteries

KEY: M = married S = single Daur = daughter

This is the record made in the 1891 Census which includes George when he was a toddler.

- Can you name the four other people in George's family?
- Where were all the family members born? Can you look up the place names on a map?
- Do you think original records like census returns are always correct? Imagine being the recorder for this census – he had to visit hundreds of houses and write down so many family details. Do you think you might get confused sometimes or write things in the wrong column? We think he made a mistake on this page – can you spot it? Remember, we know from George's birth certificate that he was born in 1888.*

*Did you spot the mistake? We think the recorder got Ada and George's details muddled up. In 1891, George would have been 3 – and he was born in Chester.

1911 Census return (shipping)

The 1911 census return is quite hard to read, so we've made this table with all the information that the recorder wrote down.

Name and surname	Relationship to person in charge of vessel	Age		Particulars as to Marriage					Occupation	Employer, worker or working on own account	Birthplace
		M	F	Married Single Widower or Widow	State for each married woman						
					Years in present marriage	Children born alive to present marriage					
		Alive	Living	Died							
George Edward Roberts	Master	23		Married					Master of canal boat	worker	Cheshire Chester
Edith Roberts	Wife		22	Married	3	2	2	–			Cheshire Wheelock
Ada Roberts	Daughter		2								Cheshire Hassall Green
Rhoda Roberts	Daughter		9m								Cheshire Wheelock

- This census record shows George when he grew up – he's now 23 years old. What are the names of the people in his family?
- What address are the family living at? Yes, trick question! Can you find the name of their vessel (boat)? The family probably lived full-time on their boat.
- Can you see what occupation or job George is doing now?
- By 1911, there was not as much cargo being moved on the canal, which meant there was less work for men like George than there had been for his father. Why do you think they lived full-time on a boat rather than in a house?
- As well as pottery, boats on the Trent & Mersey Canal had another regular cargo – salt. Salt was dug out of the ground (mined) at several places near the canal, including Middlewich and Wheelock. George's wife Edith was born at Wheelock.

Reg Date	Reg No	Reg Town	Name of vessel	Owner's surname	Owner's residence	Master's surname	Master's 1st name	Occupants	Notes
15/03/1879	75	chester	sarah	surcco	chester	roberts	john	1 cabin	fore cabin added, cert amended 19/11/1890 cut up 1910
15/03/1879	99	chester	ash	surcco	chester	roberts	thomas	1 cabin 7 people	amended cert 21/04/1885 persons 4/cut up 1925
15/04/1879	149	chester	sarah	surcco	chester	roberts	edward	1 cabin	cut up 1925
20/02/1883	286	chester	cupid	surcco	chester	roberts	geo	1 cabin	sold 12/1896
27/03/1884	316	chester	stephen	surcco	chester	roberts	edward	1 cabin	copy cert 02/09/1907
03/01/1893	454	chester	badger	surcco	chester	roberts	geo	1 cabin	re reg chester 454 by lms railway
31/03/1914	729	chester	starling	surcco	chester	roberts	geo	1 cabin	re reg chester 728 by lms railway
01/09/1914	737	chester	sardis	surcco	chester	roberts	alfred	1 cabin	cancelled 03/01/1922/re reg birmingham 1418
31/08/1915	770	chester	warsaw	surcco	chester	roberts	mary	2 cabins	copy cert 17/08/1922 / boat now hired by midland & coast canal carriers ltd, wolverhampton

Waterways Archive Health Registration database records

After 1877, each boat on the canal was registered with the local authority to control the number of people living on board, to ensure they had a healthy place to live.

This document shows records of who owned which boat and when. But if you read the details carefully they can tell you a lot more.

- Who owned the 'Sarah'? [Careful – the master wasn't necessarily the owner. The latter was often a company rather than a person]*
- How many people lived on 'Ash' in 1879 and 1885?
- Why do you think so many boats are listed as having been cut up?

* SURCCo stands for Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Carrying Company – it should be SURCCCo, but was often shortened.