The National Archives
Education Service

19th Century People

What can we learn from this photograph?

Advertisement for Hoe’s Celebrated Source 1892 (COPY 1/101 f.103)
Introduction

Lesson at a Glance

Suitable For: KS3

Time Period:
Victorians 1850-1901

Curriculum Link:
Ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain 1745-1901

➢ Britain as the first Industrial nation – the impact on society

Learning Objective:
To investigate the lifestyle of people in the 19th Century

To examine a census record to discover information about a person

Resources needed:
Printed sources

Early Photography

Looking at an old photograph is like looking through a window into the past. We look at the people and we wonder, ‘Who are they?’

Unfortunately, photographs by themselves cannot answer this question. We have to use other sources to figure out as much as we can about the people in photographs and their lives.

For example, look at the photograph below and find out: who the people are; what their names are; where they live; what they do; and whether they are rich or poor. Do not guess. The evidence is in the sources.

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Photography was invented in the 1820s, with the first photographs taking up to 8 hours per exposure. As photography evolved, images were taken onto plates of glass which would then be turned into photographs. This was a long and expensive process, and because of this, family photographs were mainly reserved for the rich upper classes. In 1884 however, technology evolved enough to allow photographers to use film in their cameras rather than photographic plates, reducing the cost and allowing more people to have photographs taken.

Photographs can be a useful source when looking for information about people. They can give us an idea of how people lived, although we have to consider why the photograph was taken in the first place. Families would not have had their own cameras, instead, they would have to sit for a photographer who would take the image for them.

James Lillywhite, the gentleman in the photograph, was best known as the first ever captain of the English cricket team, although he also went on to become an umpire and umpired all the test matches between Australia and England in the 1881–82 season. He came from a well known cricketing dynasty; his uncle was Fredrick Lillywhite, one of the most famous cricketers in the country, and his cousins were also heavily involved in the sport, either by playing, or as cricketing outfitters. His cousin Fred Lillywhite owned a cricketing outfitters warehouse near Euston Square in London, and this was the forerunner of the famous Lillywhites sports stores.

The census return also gives us a great deal of information. Not only does it tell us about James and his family, but by looking at the occupations of his neighbours, we can get an idea of what kind of an area he lived in. A national census has been taken every ten years since 1801. Everyone in Great Britain is counted on the same night. We fill in our own census forms today, but in Victorian times a census enumerator called at every house and filled in the census forms for them.
Photographs have immediate visual impact, and natural curiosity leads everyone to think ‘Who were these people? What were they called?’ The exercise aims to give pupils the opportunity to use two historical sources to answer these basic questions.

Photographs

As well as examining the contents of the photograph, children can be directed to think about the problems associated with this type of historical source. The camera does lie in several ways. Children need to be encouraged to find out why a photograph was taken, the circumstances in which it was taken, and if the contents are misleading in any way.

Census records

If the children are using census material for the first time, it will be helpful to let them become familiar with the layout and the sort of information it contains. They can be given the following questions:

- How many people are in the house?
- What are the children’s names?
- Who is the head of house?
- How old are the children?
- Are the people all from one family?
- How old are they?
- How many children are there?
- Where were the people born?

Work with census records can be extended further by creating an activity where the children compare a middle-class household with working-class one. Types of occupation can be discussed (especially those that no longer exist today), and numbers of people living at the same house, servants, working class women, family size, and working children. A number of further enquiries can be made when census sheets for streets or parts of a local area are used. For example:

- What sort of work was done by most people who lived in this area?
- Were these people mainly poor or wealthy?
- Did most of these people grow up here or did they move in from somewhere else?

Sources

Source 1: COPY 1/382

Source 2: RG 12/844
What can we learn from this photograph?

The photograph can tell us a lot about Victorian Britain – such as what the fashions at the time were, and the size of families. We can also get an idea about how wealthy these people were. Look at the photograph.

Can you find a cricket bat?

How many hats are there in the photograph?

Look carefully at the children. Count how many are boys and how many are girls.

Do you think these were wealthy people? Give your reasons why you think that.

How old do you think the children are in the photograph?

In what ways are the children’s clothes different to those worn today?

Do you think all the children belong to this one family?
What can we learn from this photograph?

Source Two
**Source Two - Transcript**

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<th>STREET, 8c and No. or NAME of HOUSE</th>
<th>Uninhabited House or Building (s)</th>
<th>Number of Rooms occupied if less than five</th>
<th>NAME and Surname of each Person</th>
<th>RELATION to Head of Family</th>
<th>CONDITION as to Marriages</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>PROFESSION or OCCUPATION</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Neither Employer nor Employed</th>
<th>WHERE BORN</th>
<th>IF (1) Deaf-and-Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic, Imbecile or Idiot</th>
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**Total of Houses and Tenement s with less than 5 rooms** 5 1

**Total of Males and Females** 17 9