

transfer the information; experienced enumerators took pencils with them rather than controlling blotchy ink in all weathers. The problem with pencil is over time it fades, huge chunks of the census are now illegible, but it was probably a good idea at the time!

So here we have a fellow (and they were mostly men), traipsing about in all weathers, collecting forms he probably couldn't read and having to transfer the information to his book. What does he think? That name looks like Bute so let's enter John Bute when the name is John Batt. An easy mistake perhaps? Maybe but the consequences are enormous.

There are also other factors to consider when using the census to find ancestors. One is the level of education of those completing the form. Could they read and write efficiently? Did they know their actual ages or did they have a guess? Did they write where they remembered growing up rather than where they were actually born?

Factor number two is did they lie? Many people thought the government was spying on them so gave incorrect answers. Some lied about their family if it comprised of illegitimate children. They lied about their age and place of birth if they deserted the army, navy etc. They were untruthful about their professions for the sake of social climbing, e.g. a farmer when they were just agricultural labourers; an engineer when they were boiler makers and so on.

On top of all of the above there is the matter of handwriting. Since the popularity of genealogy has grown, there has been a movement to transcribe and index the census and other relevant documents. Unfortunately, many transcriptions and indexes were not created by individuals who have lived or who are living in the area covered by the census. These people know the landscape and all the local place names and surnames. Instead most indexes have been created by outsiders and so like a Chinese whisper little details gradually become misinterpreted until in the end, transcription errors become yet another millstone genealogists have to carry.

So Richard was probably in Newark briefly, after all he had returned to 3 Sussex Terrace to marry and in 1891 was recorded in Midhurst.

In 1893, his father Frederick Heath was named as one of the retiring directors of the Public Hall Company by the *Sussex Agricultural Express*:

Midhurst

'THE PUBLIC HALL.—The directors of the Public Hall Company, in submitting to the shareholders the balance-sheet for the year ending 31st December, 1892, have to report a net profit for the year of £56 11s. 3d., which, with the balance in hand of last year, brings the sum to the credit of the company £151 16s. 4d. Out of this sum the directors have, with the approval of the shareholders, paid off a further sum of £100, reducing the debenture loan to £600. The annual general meeting of the shareholders will be held at the Public Hall on February 6th. The directors retiring in rotation (eligible for re-election) are Charles Boughton, Frederick Allin, and William Gawen Gosden.'

Tuesday, 31st January, 1893

The Public Hall was built in 1882 and became the Orion Cinema before it was demolished in 1967.

Two years earlier, on 5th April 1891, ironmonger Frederick Heath Allin was recorded on the census at Knockhundred Row. As head of the household he was shown first with his occupation, his age given as fifty-one and his place of birth as Sandford on Thames, Oxfordshire. He was listed as an employer and clearly set his sons to work within the business. The eldest was John aged twenty, followed by Richard aged eighteen and both were ironmonger's assistants. The youngest child was George who was seven and at school.

Their mother was forty-seven year old Elizabeth Allin from Newark,

Nottinghamshire. While of no official occupation, she was of course a mother and a housewife.

Unfortunately, she lost her son George during the Great War when, after having joined the Royal Sussex Regiment, he was killed in action on 3rd April 1918. This was not her only loss though, the family had lost twin daughters Elizabeth and Edith in the spring of 1881.

On 17th October 1790, the *Sussex Agricultural Express* reported the news of an assault on her son Richard:

SUSSEX PLUCK.

'Wm. Follett, assistant to Mr. H. Pescod, grocer, of Midhurst, was charged with an assault upon Richard Allin, son of Mr. F. Allin, ironmonger.—Mr. Lucas appeared for the prosecutor, who stated that he was standing at the corner of North-street, when defendant knocked him down. After he got up he struck witness again in the nose, which made it bleed very much.—Corroborative evidence was given.—Defendant said that prosecutor came into the shop for the purpose of kicking up a row and had provocation for striking him.—Prosecutor, in answer to Mr. Lucas, said he went into the shop for some oxtail soup for his mother. Defendant raced him out. —Defendant was fined £1 5s., inclusive, the Chairman saying he ought to think himself fortunate he was not sent to prison.'

This article infers there was some previous aggravation between William Follett and Richard Allin and that perhaps this had been going on some time. Richard himself seemed to suggest innocence in claiming he went into the shop just to get Elizabeth the soup.

While he came out of the brawl relatively unscathed, his uncle and namesake had died in terrible circumstances.

Earlier in the year, the family must have received the tragic news regarding Frederick Heath Allin's brother. On 22nd February 1890, the *Reading Mercury* reported the circumstances of his death:

LITTLEMORE.

'Melancholy Occurrence at Littlemore.— A sad and fatal occurrence happened at Littlemore, near Oxford, early on Sunday morning to Mr. Richard Allin, farmer of that place. It appears that for some time past he had been very unwell, and had gone to Newport, Monmouthshire, to recruit his health. The deceased returned about three weeks since, and by his friends was believed to be convalescent. On the day named, however, he rose at his usual hour, about 7 o'clock, and was found in his house quarter of an-hour later with his face dreadfully mutilated, and suffering from injuries inflicted by a gun, which terminated fatally almost immediately afterwards. The inquest was held Monday. The jury returned a verdict of Accidental Death caused by a gun-shot wound.'

Seven years earlier the family received a visitor, if local gossip is to be believed, who would become a famous author. The following anecdote may be apocryphal and it has no documentary evidence to support it. In the summer of 1883, a young man visited Elizabeth Allin at the family business and asked her if she could help him gain a new post after he was sacked from his position at the local chemist. That young man was H. G. Wells.

It seems that Elizabeth obliged and she was able to secure him a post as assistant master at the Grammar School. However, Wells never mentioned Elizabeth in his autobiography as being the source of the job and the author¹ who unearthed the story poses some very pertinent questions:

1 Lane, Lisa M. Midhurst Mystery.

<https://lisahistoryblog.wordpress.com/2017/08/09/midhurst-mystery/>

'If Mrs. Allin (her given name was Elizabeth) had something to do with obtaining the teaching post for Wells, how did that occur? Did she know Horace Byatt and suggest to him that he hire Wells? How did she know Wells wanted out of his indenture? Did Wells write to her (there is no evidence of this) or did Byatt show her Wells' letter or tell her about it? Or had H.G. confided in her somehow before he left Midhurst the first time, when he was 14, in spring of 1881?'

Looking at H. G. Wells' ancestry there are no obvious family links to either of the Allin or the Sheppard families; it simply could have been the case that Wells was acquainted with Mrs Allin from purely patronising the Allin shop.



Allin Bros., Midhurst. Date unknown.

Just over two years before the H. G. Wells visit, if it did indeed occur, Frederick Heath Allin and family were recorded on the 1881 Census at Knockhundred Row where Frederick was a master ironmonger employing two boys. He was forty-one at the time and the only income earner for a family of five. His wife Elizabeth was thirty-five and their children John, Richard, and Frederick were all scholars.