

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

THE 1891 CENSUS IN SPITALFIELDS

Diana Rau

A database using Lotus 1-2-3 has been compiled, from the census enumerators' returns of the population of an area of Spitalfields in the East End of London in 1891. The project was set up by the Jewish Historical Society and the Board of Deputies Community Research Unit.

The area contains a total population of 7,500 on 1,350 schedules. Nine enumerators worked on the area – bounded by Brushfield Street, Sandys Row/Middlesex Street, Wentworth Street and Commercial Street – and their districts are listed in separate sections. The area was chosen because of its high concentration of Jewish population as shown on the Russell and Lewis **Jewish East End London** map of 1901. The total population of the area has been included in the database, as this was considered more useful for wider research than just extracting the estimated Jewish population, and the database has been deposited with the ESRC Data Archive at the University of Essex.

As well as the enumerated details, some coding has been added to facilitate rapid analysis of the data, although this obviously presents certain problems: interpretation is not always straightforward and categories are not always clear-cut. Each individual has a separate four-part number indicating numeric order, enumerator, schedule and order in household. There is also an (estimated) non-Jewish classification; an occupational classification under two schemes; and a birthplace classification. An index of Heads of Families has also been prepared. There is a wealth of information in this source, and a variety of ways of using it; a seminar in April will discuss its applications in research. Some preliminary analysis has been carried out on the general characteristics of the area and its population, family and household structure, and I have given a paper on the database as a source for migration, concentrating on those born abroad.

Over the whole area about a third of the total population was born abroad, and just over half of the heads of family were born abroad. Of these heads, 89 per cent were from the four areas of Holland, Poland, Russia and Russia/Poland, with 34 per cent of foreign heads born in Holland.

We can look in particular at the wives and children of heads born abroad and estimate the length of time since migration, using the birthplace of children. From the data on occupation and birthplace, the main occupational structure can be seen, with the predominance of heads from Holland in tobacco manufacture, and migrants from eastern Europe in other manufacturing, especially clothing and shoes.

The database can be used for comparisons with other Jewish immigrant areas in other major cities in Britain, America and elsewhere, and with other immigrant groups. It can also be compared with earlier census material, and in ten years' time, that of 1901. In preparation for the 1891 census project, a pilot project using the 1881 census was carried out and a database for this area was compiled, completing five of the nine districts.

The area may be studied in relation to the wider London or national picture, and other records can, of course, be used in conjunction with the enumerators' returns. I was lucky enough to find the sales details for a part of our area, which was sold by auction in 1878, listing details of accommodation, rent and tenants, and with a detailed plan showing the physical layout.

The census database may also be of considerable interest to those working in fields other than historical demography, such as geography, sociology and statistics, and ideas for using this source will be welcome.