Blog post

I got involved with the Census 2021 project because, as a historian, I am interested in public engagement with history. The project involved using the 1911 census data, the most recent available, as a tool for increasing historical understanding in local schools.

Before taking part, I and the other Student Ambassadors attended an information and training session where we ourselves learnt a lot about the 1911 census and what it reveals about life over a century ago. For example, the women’s suffrage movement used the 1911 census to stage a ‘No Vote, No Census’ protest, in which individuals spoiled their census return or abstained to signal their support for the movement.

As part of the project, I worked with a Year 1 teacher from a local school to plan some lessons for her class based on the 1911 census. It was a challenge to make it accessible to 5-6 year olds, but a very interesting experience. We decided to take a local history approach, so I identified two local children on the 1911 census, a boy and a girl, for the class to learn about, with the idea that they would be able to relate to the children’s lives. As well as the classroom activities we devised, the teacher planned to take the class on a walk to the houses that the children lived in in 1911 to really bring the past to life.

I really enjoyed working on the project and feel that it is important that universities should be connected to the local community, using knowledge and research skills to engage and enthuse.