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#### Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses

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##### **Other business**

## **How the 1921 UK Census anticipated the 2020 Recommendations<sup>1</sup>**

### *Summary*

We are rapidly approaching the 2021 Census, which for many countries, is likely to prove to be innovative in many ways as they contemplate moving away from the traditional self-completion questionnaire approach to the use of unit record data held in administrative registers and linking these to create artificial census records, thereby following in the footsteps of many Scandinavian and other European neighbours. As the UN noted in its 2012 report by US Census Bureau on the 2010 World Program on Population and Housing Censuses:

*“Rapidly changing technologies, evolving census methodologies, privacy concerns and increasing needs for more timely data, in many countries of the world will significantly affect the approach to census taking during the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and beyond.”*

This paper briefly describes: the socio-demographic, economic and political backdrop to the 1921 Census in the UK\*; introduces some of the characters that were involved, both directly and indirectly; and reflects on some of the ideas germinating at that time that would ultimately lead (up to a century later) to radical changes in census methodology.

The disruption to statistical activities of the General Register Office in England and Wales (the grandparent of the current Office for National Statistics) caused by the Great

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Ian White, former member of the UK's Office for National Statistics now an independent international census consultant

War affected both the planning and design of the 1921 Census. New questions were asked and old topics dropped to reflect changing social condition and public attitudes. The use of electrical data processing, first adopted ten years earlier, was extended in an attempt to speed up the whole operation, and provided census takers with the means of further revising and refining the classification of occupations and their grouping into social classes. But not everything went well. Major political unrest in Ireland put paid to the opportunity to conduct a census throughout the UK, in keeping with the then well-established tradition, and a threatened industrial dispute led to the postponement of the Census, resulting in statistical consequences.

## I. Socio-historical context of the 1921 Census

1. But, before we look at the design itself, let us look at some of the events of 1920-1921 to help put the Census into some historical context. Liberal Prime Minister Lloyd George still lead a wartime coalition UK government. Warren G Harding became the 29<sup>th</sup> President of the USA - one of the shortest (and worst) US Presidencies. The first General Assembly of the League of Nations was convened on 15 November 1920 here in Geneva. Hitler became leader of the National Sociality German Workers Party. Airship R38 was launched on its maiden flight on 23 June 1921 at Cardington, Bedfordshire, but came to a disastrous end on its fourth flight two months later in the Humber estuary - only five of the 49 crew survived.
2. The 1921 FA Cup Final between Spurs and Wolves was staged at Stamford Bridge, at which attendance was 72,805. Spurs won 1-0 with a goal from Jimmy Dimmock. Some two weeks earlier, only 14 watched the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division match between Stockport Country and Leicester City played at Old Trafford because Stockport's ground had been closed – the lowest league attendance on record.
3. One in ten babies died before their first birthday. A boy born in 1921 could expect to live only 56 years, a girl 60 years, but life expectancy had been as low as 45 and 50 in 1917.

## II. 1920 Census Act

4. Until 1920, each decennial census in Great Britain had been carried out under its own piece of legislation, with separate legislation covering the census in Ireland. But by the end of the First World War, the persistence of the Royal Statistical Society and the Registrar General in seeking both the establishment of permanent census department within the General Register Office, and the provision to carry out the census more frequently, finally paid off. After a hundred years the decennial census had established itself as a regular and necessary institution, and its basic structure – in particular the method of enumeration and broad topic content - had changed very little over the previous four censuses.
5. So, the new Census Act secured the future of the census on a permanent footing, and enabled the Registrar General, particularly at a time of rapid demographic and social change after the First World War, to carry out a census every five years should the need arise. The particular difficulties that the GRO had experienced in completing the reports from the 1911 Census during the hostilities of 1914-1918 (in which many of its staff were actively involved), and which resulted in much of the data and analysis (particularly those relating to the new fertility enquiry) appearing more than ten years after the event, only emphasised the need for a dedicated long-term statistical organisation. Moreover, to meet

the need for census information that was often more acute in those parts of the country that were subject to greater degrees of change the new law also provide for a census to be taken locally at the request of a local authority – though to date this provision has never been enforced.

6. So enduring and robust has the 1920 Census Act proved to be, that its major provisions are still in force today, albeit with some minor amendments along the way, and ONS can still contemplate carrying out a radically different 2021 Census – a hundred years later - using the same legislation

### III. Previous census methodologies

7. In the consultation on the 1921 Census the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) had strongly recommended a reversion to the original practice adopted on the first census in 1801 carried out by John Rickman of using enumerators to make the census returns rather than relying on the householder to do so. They had argued that greater accuracy would ensue, and pointed to the commentary in the 1911 General Report for England and Wales in which the Registrar General Bernard Mallet had indeed given serious consideration to such a proposal along the lines that was then being employed in the Indian Census.



John Rickman

Sir Bernard Mallet

Sir Sylvanus Percival Vivian

8. The RSS cited the opinion of the US Census Director that the additional cost of such an arrangement would not be great, while ignoring the fact that it was the significant estimated increase in cost arising from the increase in the enumerators' duties that had dissuaded Mallet from putting forward such a proposal in 1911. The matter was not taken further. The traditional method of delivering the census questionnaire to each household before the census and collecting them immediately after census day that had been adopted since 1841 was continued, and indeed does so, in essence, to this day, though with more modern developments such as mail out and online response options, the role of the enumerator has now been reduced to just one of following-up, and providing assistance, in cases of non-response.

9. Interestingly, Sylvanus Vivian - who succeeded Bernard Mallet as Register General only a few months before the 1921 Census was taken - proposed a methodology aimed at reducing the costs of future censuses in a way that foresaw the eventual move away from the traditional field enumeration approach.

10. Earlier Mallet had considered; (a) using the facilities of Post Office for the delivery of forms but realised that the postal service was still not universally reliable throughout the country – it would not be until 2001 that this option would be acted on; (b) using the police authorities to collect the forms as had been successfully done in Ireland but which would not be publicly acceptable elsewhere; and (c) involving local authorities to organise the enumeration locally but feared that inconsistent approaches would seriously bias the results. But Vivian came up with a more radical idea.

11. One of the reasons for the delay in the publication of the 1911 Census reports was that much of the Registrar General's time during the Great War was taken up in devising and maintaining a National Registration system which was necessary to monitor conscription and food rationing during the war year. The Registrar General was again required to undertake the same responsibilities prior to World War II. Vivian had noted the relative failure of the earlier national registration scheme when the Government's interest in it quickly waned as soon as it had recruited the 1.4 million servicemen it needed to man the trenches. Thereafter, people's ID cards were either lost, left in pockets, or tucked away in the deepest recesses of cupboards and drawers never to be used again.

12. But Vivian recognised both the sensitivities and the benefits of a national registration system and endorsed its continued use in peace time, suggesting that it would be an essential component of post-war reconstruction, and envisaging a future (more than half a century ahead of his time) in which a range of administrative records could be linked and held together through the National Register. A hundred years, on the political and public continued distrust in an identity card system is a major barrier to the easy introduction and acceptability of a register-based census methodology in the UK.

#### **IV. Topic content**

13. The Royal Statistical Society's recommendation that it was no longer desirable to collect information on infirmities was heeded. A question on infirmities had first been included in the Census in 1851 at the insistence of the GRO's Superintendent of Statistics, William Farr, who saw the census as the best way to collect information on the health of the nation. But in 1871 the categories of 'lunatic' and 'imbecile' were added to the list of the infirm, and attempts were made to define and distinguish between the different types of mental illness as a result of Farr's interest in assessing the relationship between poverty and mental health. However, Farr's successor at the GRO – William Ogle - was inclined to believe that it was unsafe to accept the census returns as representing, with even approximate accuracy, the actual levels of idiocy or imbecility existing in the country. The General Report of the 1881 Census commented:

*“There can be no doubt whatsoever that the returns made by persons as to the mental capacity of their children or other relatives are far from trustworthy. In the earliest years of life this imperfection in the returns is unavoidable. It cannot be expected, for instance, that a mother will return her child as an ‘idiot’, however much in her own heart she may believe or fear this to be the case; for to acknowledge it as such would be to abandon all hope.”*

14. Though the question continued to be included, in deference to political correctness of the day, the term 'idiot' had, by 1901, been replaced with 'feeble minded'. But the then Registrar General William Dunbar recognised that such change in terminology would lead to a loss of comparability with the information collected from earlier censuses, though he believed that there would be an improvement in accuracy, since, harking back to tenor of Ogle's comment, he reported:

*“Although a parent might perhaps be forgiven for failure to brand as an idiot a child for whose recovery there remain some ray of hope – it can scarcely be imagined that he would willingly acknowledge the existence even of ‘feeble mindedness’ among his family to a greater extent than truthfulness would require.”*

15. It is difficult to know, however, what householders understood by such terms as ‘lunatic’, ‘imbecile’, ‘idiot’ or ‘feeble minded’, especially since even the medical profession was inconsistent as to the exact definitions in each case. It was not uncommon to find such vague answers as “not well”, “invalid for 8 years”, “rheumatic cripple”, “helpless”, “one leg” and “illness entire” recorded in response to the question. By the turn of the century enquiries into such infirmities were becoming less valued and in its report on the 1921 Census the RSS noted that:

*“Weighty evidence has been placed before the Committee to the effect that owing to difficulties of definition and unwillingness on the part of the householder to give information, the results obtained are inaccurate and misleading, and that information relating to infirmities is in fact better obtained from other sources...”*

16. It would be another 80 years before any census in the UK attempted to collect disability-related information again. Today, however, there is an increasing demand for the sort of information that only questions on disability can provide, and the problem of dementia is certainly an issue of particular current national interest. But it remains as difficult as it was a hundred years ago to include, on a self-completion form, questions on disability which yield relevant and accurate statistics. Consequently, despite the importance put on this topic by such bodies as the Washington Group, it has only been designated as non-core in the 2020 Recommendations.

17. The RSS made no recommendation on the matter of repeating the 1911 enquiry into fertility. The special enquiry into marriage and fertility in 1911 had resulted primarily from the concern at the time about the need to provide evidence on whether or not the poorer classes were having more children than those higher up the social scale. This reflected the concerns among eugenicists such as Francis Galton and Karl Pearson, who believed that this was leading to the genetic decline of the British ‘imperial race’ at a time of economic crisis. The eugenicists had argued that the lower classes were poor and sickly because they had bad genes, and that any provisions to improve public health would merely keep alive inferior physical specimens who would breed even more poor and sickly people. This was especially serious because the poorer levels of society were perceived to be out-breeding the ‘more intelligent’ middle classes.

18. In a lecture that Pearson gave to the Anthropological Institute in 1903 he proposed that:

*“The mentally better stock in the nation is not reproducing itself at the same rate as it did of old; the less able and the less energetic are more fertile than the better stocks. The only remedy, if one be possible at all, is to alter the relative fertility of the good and the bad stocks in the community. Let us have a census of the effective size of families among the intellectual classes now and a comparison with the effective size of families in the like classes in the first half of the century ... Compare in another such census the fertility of the more intelligent working man with that of the uneducated hard labourer. You will, I feel certain, find that grave changes have taken place in relative fertility during the last forty years. We stand, I venture to think, at the commencement of an epoch which will be marked by a great dearth of ability... intelligence can be trained, but no education can create it. You must breed it ...”*

19. There is not enough space in this paper to pursue the outcome of the innovative 1911 enquiry into fertility. But in view of the fact that not all the information collected at that

time had yet been published, and that, in any case, the UK had a very efficient vital registration system, the need to collect information on marriage and fertility (classified in the 2020 Recommendation only as non-core) was less pressing. However, at the RSS recommended that the question on marital status should now include, for the first time, a response category for 'divorced'.

20. It had been emphasised in the *General Report* of the 1911 Census that there was a practical limit to the number of questions which householders could reasonably be expected to answer, and around 25 was regarded at that time as very much the limit. But the removal of the questions on fertility and infirmity allowed room on the questionnaire for other topics which were at that time considered to be more relevant.

21. In particular, in the immediate post-war years there was growing need to be able measure commuter flows arising from the trend of people moving to live in suburban areas, particularly around London. This, and the need to obtain data in order to ascertain numbers of people working in particular occupations and industries in particular areas, led to the inclusion for the first time of a question on place of work. The information collected also enabled the Registrars General to report on day-time and night-time populations for which, in places such as the Inner London boroughs, there were significant differences. The name of employer was also recorded to enable industry to be better coded, and to allow a classification of industries, separate from that of occupations, to be devised. There were also first-time questions about full- or part-time education, following the development of secondary education at the start of the century. From 1921 onward the Census has asked increasingly detailed questions about educational level.

22. The RSS Committee's recommendation for a question on date of birth rather than exact age, in order to improve the accuracy of response was considered, but surprisingly was rejected and, indeed, would not be taken up until the 1966 Census. (But more about this below.) And neither was the proposal adopted to ask visitors staying at an address on Census night to state their usual address for the purpose of being able to determine both *de jure* and *de facto* populations (and thereby provide a population base that was consistent with the Registrar General's mid-year estimates). However, this decision was very soon to backfire badly. What happened was this:

## V. Residence, railwaymen and rogues

23. It had been intended to take the 1921 Census on 24 April, but, owing to conditions resulting from the infamous Black Friday strike - threatened by the triple alliance of coalminers, railwaymen and transport workers - it was decided to postpone this until 19 June - requiring an amendment to the census legislation. This has been the only occasion since the date of the 1841 Census was brought forward, that the date had had to be changed. The subsequent date was the latest in the year on which any census had previously been taken, and only the second time that it had been taken during the summer months. Indeed, the decision to postpone the Census was taken only days before the original date, by which time over 11½ million questionnaires had been printed and distributed, and these contained time-specific information about precisely when people were to answer the questions and hand them back to the enumerator.

24. The problem taxed the new Registrar General Vivian; either he had to reprint the schedules at a huge cost or provide supplementary information to each and every household. He was advised by Her Majesty's Stationery Office that, for a cost of just £2,000, he could have an amendment slip quickly produced showing the revised date, and, in order to save the taxpayers' money, it was suggested that advertising space on the back of the slip could be sold. Seizing the opportunity, Vivian realised that, with an estimated

potential revenue of some £9,000, not only could he off-set the cost of printing the leaflets but even some of the not inconsiderable costs incurred by the postponement of the Census itself.

25. Vivian's scheme was put the Government's Minister for Health, via one his senior civil servants, Sir Arthur Robinson, who perspicaciously warned that choosing the right advertisement would be difficult, and that:

*"...the selected advertisement would get a government cachet which might be embarrassing ..."*

26. And so it proved. Robinson had preferred some health-related propaganda, particularly in view of the recent virulent flu epidemic in 1918 but this was vetoed by the Treasury who, like Vivian, knew a money-spinning opportunity when they saw it. Unfortunately, the advertisement chosen was for the Sunday Illustrated - a new journalistic venture of the ultra-patriotic, but notorious, MP for Hackney South, Horatio Bottomley.



The Black Friday strike



Horatio Bottomley, MP

27. At the age of just 28 Bottomley had been the founding chairman of the Financial Times in 1888; went on to establish the racist journal John Bull in 1906, in which same year he became a Liberal MP; was thrown out of Parliament in 1912 for bankruptcy, only to be re-elected as an independent in 1918. He then created the John Bull Victory Club which purportedly provided a mechanism for small investors to lend money to the Government and receive prizes rather than dividends. Bottomley announced:

*"I will buy bonds and hand them over to trustees, and each year we will draw for accruing interest. Your capital will remain intact, or at any time, if you wish it, you may receive it back in full."*

28. Referring to him in an article in the Guardian in 1999, Matthew Engle wrote of Bottomley:

*"He was irredeemably, utterly, psychotically corrupt. He built a string of businesses on nothing more than fresh air: but there were always useful and distinguished idiots on the Board, so he could tell the shareholders' meeting: "I would love to pay you a dividend, but my directors won't let me."*



29. The Victory Club venture was, surprisingly, a runaway success - money poured in to the tune of £650,000 – an amount far beyond that which Bottomley had either envisaged or the capability of administering. The truth was, however, that no one was appointed as a trustee, and the main benefactor to the scheme was always intended to be Bottomley himself. Large amounts were siphoned off to pay off his significant gambling debts – he once lost £40,000 on a single bet by backing his own horse Aynsley to win the 1919 Manchester Cup.

30. The promotion for the new enterprise announced, rather enigmatically, on the back of Vivian’s flyer, a somewhat similar scam:

“It is not considered desirable at this stage to disclose many of the novel features which will be introduced, but it may be mentioned that they will include the provision of a huge sum for distribution amongst the readers of the journal, in connection with a scheme free from any element of gambling and involving no entrance fee, coupon or other formality”.

31. When the census leaflets appeared, serious concerns were expressed at the time, including a complaints to the Registrar General. One such from the Temperance and Social Welfare Department of the Wesleyan Methodists Church, that complained:

*“The fact that a Sunday Newspaper should be advertised on a government document seriously offends the conscience of a large number of people ..... and enumerators feel keenly the indignity of having to distribute an advertisement for a Sunday paper.”*

32. Ironically, earlier in the year Bottomley had written, rather audaciously, to Austen Chamberlain, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, offering the magnificent sum of £100,000 to advertise on the census schedules themselves, but this had been soundly rejected because (not surprisingly) there was not enough room on the form.

33. It was not long, however, before his deceit and mismanagement of the monies he was receiving from the Victory Club swindle were exposed, and in 1922 he was convicted of fraud, expelled from Parliament (again) and spent five years in Wormwood Scrubs. By this time he was an overweight, alcoholic, sixty-two year old, described by the prosecuting counsel at his trial as:

“... a drink-sodden creature whose brain would only be got to work by repeated doses of champagne.”

34. As a consequence of this chastening experience no advertising has been entertained on any census material since.

35. But what has this to do with de facto and de jure population counts?

36. In reporting on the 1921 Census, Vivian was aware that the delay in taking the census was likely to have had some effect on the numbers of non-residents enumerated in particular areas since, although the later date of 19 June avoided the main industrial holiday season, he feared that there would still be:

“... a certain amount of middle class holiday making...”.

37. Indeed, the new date fell on what turned out to be an unusually warm weekend and, as a result, many people were away from home at the time enjoying the sunshine. Without a question on usual residence included in the Census, estimates of the extent of such absences could only be made by analysing the responses to the question on relationship to the head of the household, which would indicate whether a person was a resident or a visitor. In those areas where the percentage of non-residents was small, the returns were accepted without further question, but in some areas, particularly the more popular holiday



resorts, this proportion exceeded 10 per cent. In such places, enquiries were made of the local census officers to find out if there had been any particular difficulties encountered during the enumeration which might have tended towards an undercount or overcount. This qualitative measure of error was then supplemented by a detailed analysis of the returns from a sample of some typical areas.

38. Vivian then listed in the *General Report* those boroughs where there was an estimated excess of visitors of 3 per cent or more. Some resorts, such as Barmouth in Wales, Margate in Kent and Portobello in Scotland had excesses of more than 40 per cent, and Skegness on Lincolnshire's bracing east coast more than half the enumerated population were reckoned to be non-residents. This was a key factor that led to the inclusion of a question on usual residence in the next census.



Holidaymakers enjoying the unexpected sunshine in Portobello on Census day

39. The issue of measuring usual residence has remained one of keen interest in preparing the decennial UNECE Recommendations.

40. Incidentally, a Mr Francis Gordon Pratt was the first person to be prosecuted under the new Act for failing to make a complete return. Described to the magistrate at Marylebone Police Court, according to a Times report dated 14 July 1921, as professional man with a wife, child and five servants, Mr Pratt of Orme Court, Bayswater, neglected to include on his census form the relevant particulars of the servants, and refused to allow the enumerator access to them in order to collect the requisite details. Instead, Pratt delivered a diatribe on the iniquity of the Census Act, and demanded that the enumerator leave the premises forthwith. He then wrote a four-page letter to the Registrar General, making a general attack on the Government and maintaining that he had no more time to discover the relevant particulars of his servants than he had to learn to play the piano.

41. In court, his defending solicitor pleaded that Pratt had acted:

*“...under a misapprehension as to his rights under the Act, in that he believed that he was not obliged to record particulars that he was not in a position to verify”.*

42. The solicitor added that Pratt was now willing to complete the census form and asked for an adjournment to enable him to do so. But the magistrate was unsympathetic and said that it was too late, and fined him £5 with four guineas costs.

## VI. Age or date of birth?

43. As noted above, the RSS was very keen to replace the existing question on age at the time of the census with a question on date of birth in order to improve data quality. It was a well known phenomenon that, in particular, many women at the time felt that the question relating to age was of a far too personal a nature. Information from the previous Census had suggested that women had adjusted their age upwards if they had married young and downwards if they had married later in life, and the problem pages in newspapers and magazines were flooded with *Dear Marge* letters from distraught women, fearful that their true age would become public knowledge.

44. Mind you, this was not a new phenomenon; William Ogle, commenting in the *General Report of the 1881 Census England and Wales* on the age distributions, noted that:

*“Many persons, notably women, desirous of being thought younger than they really are, return themselves as under 25 or as under 30 when their true age was even considerably beyond these limits. On the other hand, we find reason to believe that a not inconsiderable number of girls who are not yet fifteen return themselves as being of more advanced age, probably with the view of getting more readily taken as servants.”*

45. Punch magazine had been just as satirical in the 1861 Census:



46. And even earlier than that, George Cruikshank wryly commented on the results of the 1841 Census:

*“Ladies of a very certain age bridled up at being obliged to tell the number of summers that had passed over their heads – notwithstanding the loophole of the*

*'five years' which the gallantry of the Commissioners allowed them .... From the returns into which the Commissioners have allowed us to peep, it appears that of the middle aged population of these kingdoms, one in three has grown five years younger since the date of the last census; one in seven two years younger; one in twelve remains of the same age; one in thirty-eight is five years older than at the period referred to; and one in five hundred and sixty has attained the full age that might have been anticipated from the lapse of years. We believe it has been distinctly ascertained by these returns that the highest age among the unmarried ladies in this country is twenty-nine where the average age is twenty and seven-eighths. The widows willing to marry again are mostly quite juvenile; and it is a remarkable fact that many are younger now, as widows, than they appear to be in the previous return as wives. Indeed, the effect of the whole calculation is to show perhaps in compliment to our young Queen, that her subjects are the most decidedly juvenile people in Christendom."*<sup>257</sup>

47. It was ever thus. However, the existing question on age (in years) at the census was retained, and a question on date of birth was not included in the UK census for another 45 years.

## VII. Occupation and Social Class

48. A further key development in the 1921 Census – if not the most far reaching - was the further revision and refinement by the GRO's Superintendent of Statistics, T H C Stevenson, of the occupational classification and its grouping into social classes. The expanded enquiry into occupation, including the new question on name of employer, amplified and clarified the distinction between 'occupation' and 'industry', and the resulting information made it possible for Stephenson to create new and separate classifications which, in turn, led to the re-allocation of the new occupational groups into social classes.

49. The practice of officially classifying the population by occupation harked back to the very early Rickman censuses, and had been notably further developed by William Farr in 1851, but it was only in the 1911 Census that, the concepts of occupation and industry were separately recognised, and the General Report included then a summary of occupations designed to represent 'social grades'. These were later referred to as 'social classes'.

50. While Stevenson had, by 1911, conceived society as being divided into three basic social classes (the upper, middle and working classes), he produced in fact an eight-fold classification for the Census by introducing intermediate groups between these classes and adding three industrial groups for those working specifically in mining, textiles and agriculture. But in 1911 the distinction between the concept of 'occupation' (being the employment of the individual), and that of 'industry' (the business of the employing organisation or agency), was not always clear, and the classifications used then were only partly occupational and largely industrial.



T H C Stephenson

51. In 1921, however, a major revision of the class scheme was made possible by the introduction of the first proper classification of occupations with the encouragement of the RSS and in accordance with a resolution of the British Empire Statistical Conference of 1920. The three industrial social classes were re-allocated between the other classes and the new five class scheme was used primarily for the analysis of infant and occupational mortality and fertility. Thus were inaugurated the Registrar General's Social Classes:

- I Professional, etc, occupations
- II Intermediate occupations
- III Skilled occupations
- IV Partly skilled occupations
- V Unskilled occupations

52. The classification, so long cherished by users of mortality statistics, was re-named Social Class based on Occupation in 1990, but then totally revised in 2001, following a review of the classification by the Economic and Social Research Council to form the new National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). This is, of course, a classification that is specifically designed to meet to the requirements of UK users. This is in line with the 2020 recommendations notes:

53. "As there is no international standard classification of the population by socio-economic group, countries will usually adopt a classification designed to meet their own users' particular requirements".

## **VIII. Conclusions: Anticipating the 2020 Recommendations**

54. Although this paper has been able to discuss only a handful of the topics and methodological issues that were relevant to the 1921 UK Census, we can conclude by summarising the extent to which that census would have complied with the 2020 Recommendations (at least with respect to the core topics). One-to-one comparability is not possible because of the way that the questionnaire was designed and particularly because the information on housing and households was recorded separately by enumerators from their own observations and enquiries (in the way the John Rickman would have recognised).

55. The level of compliance is, in the circumstances reasonably high. Though, as we have seen, the population base was de facto there was some attempt to identity areas with

high levels of visitors, and all of the geographic and demographic characteristics were collected except for de facto marital status (but that has only become a core topic in the 2020 Recommendations). Similarly 'status in employment' would have been the only core economic topic on which information was not obtained. The core topic of educational attainment was not recognised but there was a first attempt to collect information on full- or part-time educational attendance.

56. Compliance with the recommendations on migration would have been poor with only questions on country and place of birth included, but then the comparatively low level of true migration during the period 1914-1920 would have been masked among the general disruption to the resident population during the war and immediate post-war years.

57. Information on many of the household and family characteristics except for tenure could have been derived, although detailed household and family type classifications had not yet been developed, and only counts of dwellings by type of dwelling and occupancy status would have been possible. Indeed, it was not until the 1951, when the characteristics of housing quality and amenities were required to assess the amount of damage caused during WWII, that many of the recommended core housing topics were included in the UK Census.

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