



Linking people and places

The Nation's Census: "Address Custodians are our unsung heroes."

Our Address Custodians are a nationwide force to be reckoned with - and as experts in addressing, they're likely to be the unsung heroes of the 2021 Census.

It is a well-known fact, thousands of people nationwide declared their current religion as 'Jedi' in our most recent national Census. Ironically, the desire to do so in 2001 probably led to an improvement in the quality of that year's data in England and Wales. As a quasi-faith, it made 'Jedi' the fourth largest reported religion in the nation at the time.

Levity aside, we should not underestimate the value of such choices or these datasets, or the heroes who will now secure even more value for the Census as a whole: Address Custodians.

The quality of information reported in each decennial Census is essential. Its value and potential are increasing exponentially.

Perception is a complex thing. How people view a survey does have an impact on the way that it's completed. The number of people who said "I'm a Jedi" reveals something about citizens' views on privacy, and what they do (or don't) understand to be the importance and purpose of the Census itself. And 'alternative' responses are nothing new: in 1911, for example, one man reported 'Peter Tabby' as a resident in his house, listing nationality as 'Persian' and occupation as 'mouser' - amusing, but quite unhelpful.



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For over 200 years, the data collected in our Census has provided a colourful and at the same formative snapshot of Britain. In 1801, the rationale for collecting this data was explicit: the intimate knowledge of a country forms the rational basis of legislation and diplomacy.

That principle stands the test of time today and, with two exceptions (Ireland in 1921, and due to the outbreak of war in 1941), a comprehensive census has been taken once every ten years, ever since – although what we’ve collected and the way it’s collected has definitely evolved.

As our affinity with the value of geospatial information has increased, so too has the importance of accurately recording people’s connections with the places in which they live.

Our next Census takes place against a backdrop of social, political, and economic evolution, and The Force may indeed make its strength felt again in March 2021.

While the Office for National Statistics (ONS) did issue a press release in 2001 titled ‘390,000 Jedi there are’, today the ONS is depending on a new kind of hero to ensure the value of our Census data increases. Those heroes are our nation’s Address Custodians. People may move, but properties do not – and the ONS will use the National Address Gazetteer and OS AddressBase as the address register for the next census.

The Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) in the Gazetteer is the identifier that provides a comprehensive, complete, and consistent point of reference. In the next Census, UPRNs will put the spotlight on the work of local government Address Custodians for two reasons:

- The UPRNs recorded by Address Custodians will be vital when it comes to calculating the Revenue Support Grant that central government provides to individual councils: UPRNs provide robust interoperability – enabling organisations and government departments at all levels to make decisions with confidence for many years to come.

And:

- Address Custodians’ work will help enumerators (people taking the Census) to capture data from more complex properties in their area. Nursing homes, for example, where residents share one address. Care homes, halls of residence, and houses of multiple occupation.

We’ll be helping Address Custodians by...

- Working with other data suppliers such as the Care Quality Commission, Ordnance Survey and HM Land Registry to classify properties at a granular level
- Supplying Custodians with files they can import to update Classifications for Residential properties to a Tertiary level. This has been hugely popular and has led to millions of records being updated
- Continuing to work with ONS on the full list of communal establishments and supporting Custodians to reflect this in their gazetteers.



GeoPlace is a public sector limited liability partnership between the Local Government Association and Ordnance Survey

