

Some thoughts on Transcripts

Very often when people mention that there is a mistake in one of the transcribed census or parish records, it turns out that it is not a mistake at all but is exactly as it is in the original record.

A transcript is a reproduction of material originally presented in another medium. For instance if the original record clearly shows a surname as WALKINS and we know it really should be WATKINS, it is tempting to change what is written, but if we do that we are not doing a true transcript of the record.

Another point to remember is that many of our ancestors were unable to read or write and so they would give their name verbally to the clergy or enumerator and their name would be written down with the spelling of what they believed to be correct, another person could spell their name in a different way. An example of this is with some of my own ancestors whose surname was WOAR but it has also been written with variations of WOOR, WOORE and HOARE on the original records.

So next time you look at a census or parish record and start to blame the transcriber because a surname is not spelled how you think it should be, give some thought to other reasons why it is spelled the way it is.

As with any transcript, please use the data as a finding aid only, and NOT as a definitive source. Therefore, if you find some information of interest, it is strongly recommended you check the original source for yourself to verify that the information is correct.

David Watkins

Forest of Dean Family History
<http://www.forest-of-dean.net/>

26 May 2007