

GUIDE TO TRACING THE HISTORY OF MY VILLAGE

This is a guide on how to get started and identify the main materials that you might look at. It is not fully comprehensive, and there are other things to look at that depending on the village. Throughout this guide you will find local record offices referred to see their full titles and contacts

<https://hampshirearchivestrust.co.uk/about-hampshire-archives-trust/strategic-partners/>

This project is a combination of the history of houses and people, and so a lot of the guidance offered here is the same or very similar to the guidance contained in our guides on how to trace your family tree, your house, and your school. So, check those guides out too.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU START

- What are you hoping to do? For example, do you want to trace back for a specific time period, find how the village has grown, find out what was there before, find out about the people who lived there or discover everything you can find out?
- Is there a history of your village or area already?
- Is there a local history society covering the area? If so, they may have a lot of information for you ready to go.

WHERE DO I START? (assuming the village or area is in Hampshire)

- The Hampshire Victoria County History volumes published 1908 in 4 volumes arranged by hundreds (a hundred is an ancient grouping of parishes) and some is now available online. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/hants/vol3>. The VCH covered many counties in England and was a tribute to Queen Victoria. The books followed a set format with the information available at the time. They usually start with volumes dedicated to topography and ecclesiastical history before turning to areas of the county. They are clearly out of date, but they are an excellent starting point.
- Kelly's directories from the mid to late 19th century and early 20th century give a little potted biography and list major landowners.
- For the architectural perspective, look at Pevsner- Hampshire edition in the Buildings of England series.
- There is a lot available online through ancestry or find my past like the census records, and parish records. These sites often offer a free trial but there is a cost after that.

MAPPING THE GROWTH OF THE VILLAGE OR REGION

In all cases, original material is in the relevant local record office, printed material will be available in your local reference library.

- Ordnance Survey maps in various scales from c. 1801-to date. (For more detail, see our guide on how to trace the history of your house).
- Enclosure and Tithe maps and schedules – usually early 19th century – these have what we would call an index to properties with the name of landowner and occupier listed. (For more detail, see our guide on how to trace the history of your house guide for more detail)
- Early county maps – these are generally less accurate than the OS maps but can be useful as they pre-date the OS.
- Estate maps – if your village or area was or in within the lands owned by a major landowner then they may have surviving estate records or maps, often now to be found at your local record office.

ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN THE VILLAGE

Benjamin Franklin was famously quoted as saying: “but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except **death and taxes**”. With that in mind these sources will be helpful:

- WW1 and WW2 dead – see the village war memorial. It will list all known names and show the impact of war on the community in terms of ‘lost’ people.
- See the memorials in the local church – this gives a start to notable families in the village.
- Schools may also have memorials to those who died from that school – again underlining the impact of the wars on the community.
- Headstones in the cemetery or churchyard – these will show lots of villagers and you can see which names are still around.
- Taxes – The Hearth Tax was levied between 1662 and 1689 on each householder according to the number of hearths in the dwelling. The Hampshire Hearth Tax Assessment 1665 was published in an edition by E Hughes and P White (1991) in the Hampshire Records, so it’s easy to find the information. In general, the more hearths the bigger the building. There were other taxes levied at other times for specific purposes, but these are generally not held locally but at the National Archives: www.nationalarchives.org
- Wills – before 1858 these are among the Bishop’s (or another ecclesiastic court). Records after 1859 are with the probate authorities. See this useful guide: <https://www.familyhistory.co.uk/wills-probate-archive-records/> to find out what is where and where there is online free access. These are great for seeing the wealth of the individual (and it was generally the better off who made wills) in terms of land, possessions and money, and connections to family, dependents and friends by the bequests they make.
- Census from 1841 to 1921 (it is taken every 10 years but is closed for 100 years). There is a useful guide to using census records on the Family Tree website: <https://www.family-tree.co.uk> – here all those living in the house (family, servants and anyone else) will be listed with their age, their relationships to one another and where they were born.

Longstanding local residents may be able to help you with your research too but don’t forget to fact check, and do check for a local history society or group or individual who may have done something similar on all or part of the story and may be happy to share their information.