

## GUIDE ON HOW TO TRACE THE HISTORY OF YOUR HOUSE

This can be a lot easier than tracing people ... houses don't move! The assumption behind this guidance is that the house is in Hampshire.

### SOME STARTER QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

- Does the house itself tell you anything? There are some distinct housing styles which can really help with this. For example, the 1930s semi-detached. If you don't know about this, try a google search. This one is useful but there are loads out there:  
<https://www.housebeautiful.com/uk/renovate/design/news/a104/homes-through-the-ages>
- What about the road or street name? Street names can often indicate when a street was first built on and, therefore, a house. They might be named after events or great people (e.g. "Wellington Street") who were prominent around the time of street building. They might indicate what was there before (e.g. "Orchard Street")
- Do the property owners have the deeds? Deeds will list all the owners, and the price paid! Also, do they have any maps, plans, or photographs relating to the house? Remember that houses often had different owners and tenants, so the person living in a house may not have been the person who owned it.
- How far do you want to take your research? For example, are you interested in what was there before the house was built?

### MAIN MAP SOURCES FOR THE BUILDING ITSELF from c.1945

Maps are great for establishing when your house first appears and for showing the area around it. The Ordnance Survey is a good place to start.

- From 1953 in a 1:500 (or 50 inch series) they appear at irregular intervals.

The scale of the map is the distance or measure on the map and what that covers in terms of distance or the measure on the ground. The maps do not have any information about who lived there, but they sometimes give house or pub names, topographical features and, of course, road names. Ordnance Survey maps have the big advantage of being reasonably accurate. From 1953 onwards, maps give house numbers. Remember, though, whole streets are sometimes renumbered if the road is extended with new housing.

### MAIN MAP SOURCES FOR BUILDINGS 1867-1945

- From 1867-1933 (and a few later years in some areas) every area of England and Wales was mapped in a large scale map series 1:2500 (or 25") by the Ordnance Survey. These are all out of crown copyright so there is no problem photographing them.
- Most record offices and local reference libraries will have them for you to see. For the 25" expect editions for 1867, 1897, 1910, 1933 (some areas have more). From these you can see enough detail to build up a picture of the development of the area where the house is, or the village, or area of a town.

### MAIN SOURCES FOR HOUSES EARLIER THAN 1867

There is smaller scale series of Ordnance Survey maps that may be helpful too, they date from around 1801. If your house is older than 1867 then other maps come into the picture. A warning here: maps were expensive to produce and usually had a purpose which is reflected by what appears. They also have no interest in north being the top of the map (more about the effective use of the parchment or paper on linen they use), so do check where the north point is facing, and also what scale is being used! Always have a map with you with your house on it so that you can identify road layouts and other features – it is often the only way to find your property. Enclosures and tithe maps for your area are to be found in the relevant local record office. As official documents

prepared under Acts of Parliament a central copy was also kept and can now be found at the National Archives at Kew <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

- Enclosure maps – these are for the parish affected only.

The majority of enclosures of open land took place from around the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, under an act of parliament. They do not exist for every area. This changed open strip farming to the sort of fields we see today. Find more if you would like to at [www.enclosuremaps.data-archive.ac.uk/](http://www.enclosuremaps.data-archive.ac.uk/)

The maps record all sorts of things but the value to the house researcher is when you find the property it will have a reference number on it. The reference number leads you to a schedule, and that schedule tells you the owner, occupier, size of plot and so on.

The National Archives has produced a guide to the records they hold: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/enclosure-awards/>

- Tithe maps – these are for the parish affected only.

Pretty much all land used to require the owner or tenant to pay 10% of its produce to the church. The Tithe Commutation Acts from 1836 allowed the payment of cash instead of produce. As with an enclosure map, a tithe map has a series of reference numbers (different numbers to the enclosure – no standardisation here), and a schedule which gives the names of all owners and occupiers of land, size of plot and amount of tithe to be paid. Individual tithe owners sometimes prepared maps for their own use to show who owned which land. It is usually a parish map, but sometimes individual (usually major) landowners would have one drawn just for their property.

The National Archives has produced a guide to the tithe maps they hold: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/tithes/>

## OTHER MAPS

- Many counties have earlier county maps, with varying scales and accuracy. Ask at your local library or record office. In Hampshire, there is a published reproduction book or portfolio grandly names “250 years of maps making in Hampshire 1575-1826”. Otherwise look for county maps by Greenwood c. 1820, or Speed around 1617; but there are many others. Please note, though, that county maps may be of limited value in terms of finding out about the history of a house. They may help, though, in telling you about the area may have changed or developed.
- Maps were often drawn for specific purposes. So, if your house was on an historic estate like the Fleming estate in Southampton, ask at your library or record office if they have maps for these areas.
- Planning applications for new build or alterations to houses. This starts for sanitation around 1872 (with the urban sanitary authority for which this is major health concern, or the rural sanitary authority created in 1872) and for planning more as we know it in 1895. The survival of the documentation is patchy so do ask at the local record office.

## TRACING THE PEOPLE LIVING IN THE HOUSE

So, you have found your house on the maps and have a good idea of how old it is. What's next? For the last 40-50 years you could ask elderly neighbours for their thoughts on who lived there. The best way to trace a house and its history is often through the people who lived in the house. You may want to refer to our family history guide which could help you identify people who lived in the house.

In addition to the enclosure and tithe map and schedule mentioned above, you can find out who was living there from sources like these:

- Census – these name all those living at a particular address from 1841-1921 (and more recent too but they are closed under privacy laws). These are a relatedly easy source. They are arranged by address and list all occupants. Even if the house number changes, there is a well-trodden path door to door in order down the street. They are available online too (see the how to trace my family history for more).
- Directories – especially in urban areas. In urban areas, you can expect to find directories from c.1820-1960; in rural areas around 1883-1933. Many directories have been digitised and are freely available through the University of Leicester: <https://le.ac.uk/library/special-collections/explore/historical-directories>

- And (but not for the faint hearted or those with little time) rate books; these can be useful but are huge and somewhat impenetrable!

## **THE FINANCE ACT, 1910**

One of the most important projects related to mapping captured Britain on the eve of the First World War. The 1910 Finance Act introduced the possibility of a new tax based on the increased value of land. It was therefore necessary to discover who owned land, and this necessitated a survey of all property in England, Wales and Scotland. The Inland Revenue set up the Valuation Office and using large scale (1: 25,000) Ordnance Survey maps it created records on thousands of properties. The National Archives holds the Field Books which contain the most detail whilst local archives around the country hold the more basic Valuation Books. We can see how many rooms a property contained, the date of erection, the state of repair, and details of the tenancy. The survey also included public buildings such as churches, schools and police stations and business premises such as hotels and factories. You can read more about these records here: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/valuation-office-survey-land-value-ownership-1910-1915/>

## **THE NATIONAL FARM SURVEY**

A generation later the National Farm Survey was undertaken during the Second World War by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) to maximise the production of home-grown food. They appointed the County War Agricultural Executive Committees or 'War Ag Committees' in each county. This wielded considerable power, telling farmers what to grow, how to use dormant land and even repossessed land which was not being well-managed. The records consist of forms completed by anybody responsible for more than five acres of land including farmers, small-holders and market gardeners, along with annotated large scale Ordnance Survey Maps. The farmers' forms record in detail the types and quantities of produce, the labour and engines available, the rent paid and the length of occupancy. The maps show boundaries and are helpful in locating properties. The records from this survey are also kept at The National Archives who have a handy guide here: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/national-farm-survey-england-wales-1941-1943/>