

Tracing the history of a house – a general guide

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Introduction

This leaflet is designed to guide you through the major sources available in the Reading Room. The booklet *How to Trace the History of Your House*, which is now out of print, gives more detailed information and is available in the Reference Room.

As a first step **consult your title deeds** (and if possible bring them with you) because even if they are not old, there may be abstracts of title which summarise earlier ones and information in recent deeds may help you to identify your house in records available here.

Remember that if you live in a town it is more difficult to trace the history of your house (for example tithe maps do not usually cover urban areas).

Don't forget to use our website (www.thekeep.info).

As part of our Research Service you can pay for up to two hours research to provide an introduction to the history of your house, but you **must** include detailed plan showing the location of the property. Please ask for details.

Sources for houses built after about 1850

- 1 Look at the relevant Ordnance Survey 6 and 25-inch sheets; the maps were published in c1875, c1898, c1910, 1920s and 1930s. late 18th and early 19th-century Ordnance Survey and other printed maps are available but are on such a small scale it may be difficult to identify your house.
- 2 Having discovered the approximate date of your house, see if there are local authority building control plans. The plans show the initial construction and subsequent alterations and date from the latter part of the 19th century.

First order the building plan indexes (see list in *Guide to sources for properties* - available in the Reference Room) for the district in which your property lay (if you do not know then consult the maps of former district boundaries).

Note down the number of any plans relating to your house, work out the full reference number and order.

- 3 Trade directories, census returns, electoral registers, the 1910 Valuation Act valuation books and rate books can be used to obtain further information about the former owners or occupiers of your property.

Sources for houses built before about 1850

- 4 Check if there is a tenement analysis for your parish; this will contain details of the former owners and occupiers before about 1840. There are currently ones for Alfriston, Ashburnham, Bexhill, Brightling, Catsfield, Crowhurst, Dallington, Etchingham, Herstmonceux, Hooe, Iden, Lewes (centre only), Litlington, Lullington, Mayfield town, Mountfield, Ninfield, Playden, Penhurst, Warbleton, Wartling, Westdean. These are in the Reference Room.
- 5 Ask to see the terrier sheet. If your house is within an area outlined in coloured pencil then there is an estate map which you can order by the reference number written on the terrier. Some have been scanned and are available on the map viewers in the Reference Room on which you can print-out your own copies.
- 6 Look at the tithe map (compiled between 1837-1848) for the parish in which your house is situated. The tithe maps have been scanned and are available on the map viewers in the Reference Room on which you can print-out your own copies.

As most tithe maps have no place names on them and are often not aligned north-south, you may find the first edition 6-inch Ordnance Survey map (c1875) helpful in locating your house.

Having identified your house, note down the number written on or near it. Houses are usually coloured red and outbuildings and barns coloured grey.

Look up the number in the apportionment which is available on the same public access terminal. Note down the date, the name of the owner and occupier and if you are interested, surrounding field names etc.

If there is no tithe map for your parish (or if your house is in a town) you will need to use your own title deeds, directories, census enumerators' returns or electoral registers to obtain the names of the owner or occupiers. Match this information with entries in the land tax assessments for the same dates and then go to section 8.

- 7 Order the land tax assessments for your parish (see list in *Guide to sources for properties*).

Look at the assessment for the same year (or as near as possible) as the tithe map and identify the owner and occupier you noted from the tithe schedule.

Trace these people back through previous years and when they are no longer listed, note the rental value of the house in the last assessment in which they did appear and connect it with a property of the same rental value in the

previous years. If there are several properties with the same rental, you will have to identify yours by a process of elimination.

Trace back systematically, noting all changes in ownership and occupation and their dates. Trace forward in the same manner if you are interested in more recent owners and occupiers.

If the land tax assessments for your parish are deficient, you may find that there are rate books which give you the same information (see the *Guide to records of rating and taxation* - available in the Reference Room). You may also find that the rates survive for a period earlier than the land tax and therefore enable you to trace owners and occupiers back still further, by the same process.

- 8 If you know that your property was copyhold of a particular manor, then look in the manorial card index to see what records are available. If you do not know which manor is involved look up the parish in the section at the front of the manorial card index, and decide which is the likely manor. Turn to the card for that manor and note down the references to the documents.

The court books record the changes in ownership of properties while the rentals list all the tenants of that manor; later rentals may give page-references to court books.

It is best to first order any 19th-century court books and rentals as these will be easy to read and there may be indexes to tenants which will enable you to look up the names you have collected from other sources.

- 9 If you wish to find out more about the people who lived in your house, you may like to see if there are wills and probate inventories of their belongings (see leaflet *How to find a will*).

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