

User Guide No. 4

A Beginner's Guide to Researching the History of a House

It is important to realise before you start that tracing the history of a house is a long and complicated process, involving a lot of research. It can be time-consuming, and the original sources you will be looking at are sometimes difficult to understand and interpret. However, tracing the history of a house can also be a fascinating and very rewarding process.

HOW DO I BEGIN?

- The best way to start is by obtaining a copy of the Title Deeds to the property, if possible. Usually these are held by the current owner of the property, or on their behalf by a solicitor or bank/building society. If you can obtain the deeds, they will provide the best available source of information to start with.
- Local history societies may have information about the property, or be able to assist with finding out more. A full list of societies in Flintshire is available on the Flintshire County Council website: www.flintshire.gov.uk in the 'Community Directory'.
- The National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW) is the national collection of information about the historic environment of Wales from the earliest cave dwellings to 21st-century windfarms. If the property in which you are interested is a listed building or of special historical interest, they may have information about it. You can visit their website at: www.rcahmw.gov.uk

ARCHITECTURAL EVIDENCE – THE HOUSE ITSELF

You may find that looking at the actual house itself, inside and out, will be a good source of architectural evidence relating to the date of its erection and later additions. The following books may assist you in interpreting this evidence:

Barley, M.W. *The English Farmhouse and Cottage*, 1961.

Iredale, D. *Discovering this Old House*. Shire Publications. 1968.

Other books containing general architectural information include:

Barley, M.W. *The House and Home*. 1963.

Bevan-Evans, M. *Farmhouses and Cottages* (an introduction to vernacular architecture in Flintshire). Flintshire Record Office. 1964.

Brunskill, R.W. *Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture*. 1970.

Smith, P. *Houses of the Welsh Countryside*. 1975.

Thirsk, J. (ed.) *Agrarian History in England and Wales*. Vol. IV, 1500-1640. Chapter XI: Rural Housing in Wales, by P. Smith.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE HELD AT FLINTSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

Once you have gathered as much background information as possible, and looked at the architectural evidence, you may wish to book an appointment at the Record Office to view any original records and secondary sources we may hold. **Please note that we largely hold only original records relating to the county of Flintshire.** If the

house in which you are interested is in another county, you will need to contact the relevant Record Office for that county.

The following is a brief description of some of the sources held at Flintshire Record Office which can be used to research the history of a house. We also have separate **Source Guides** giving more details on what is contained within some of these sources, and how you can use the information.

SECONDARY SOURCES

If the house is of historic interest, there may be reference to it in local history books or pamphlets which have been written about the parish, village or town where it is located. Flintshire Record Office holds a variety of secondary sources including books and pamphlets, arranged by village/town/parish. The following books give a comprehensive guide to sources for house history:

Alcock, N. Documenting the History of Houses. 2003.

Barratt, N. Tracing the History of your House, A Guide to Sources. 2001.

Harvey, J.H. Sources for the History of Houses. British Records Association. 1974.

Hubbard, E. The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd (Denbighshire and Flintshire). 1986.

The Record Office also holds a series of CADW (Welsh Historic Monuments Executive Agency) reports on buildings of special architectural or historic interest. These are arranged into the former Clwyd District Council areas of Delyn, Alyn & Deeside, Rhuddlan, and Wrexham Maelor. You can request these, using a document request slip, by asking for the 'Scheduled Buildings' reports for the relevant area.

PRIMARY SOURCES

When researching the history of a house it is advisable to first consult Ordnance Survey maps and other maps, as detailed below, to locate the house and gain an idea of its age. You could then look at the census to find out who was living there between 1841-1901 (see below for more details). Next, you could consult the **places index** available on open shelves in the searchroom. This will list available original sources relating to property in each parish. This index should be used as a guide to see if we have information on your particular property of interest. Make a note of any reference numbers given in these indexes. You should then look at the more detailed catalogues on the searchroom shelves, to get a clearer idea of what each item consists of and whether it is relevant to your search. Individual documents can be ordered using the document request slips, which are found in the middle of the searchroom desks. You must order each item individually using a separate document request slip.

The following is a brief description of some of the types of record held at Flintshire Record Office which may be useful to you when trying to research the history of a house:

MAPS AND PLANS

Ordnance Survey Maps are available for the county of Flintshire, dating back to the first edition of 1871. The later editions were created around 1897 (second edition) and 1912 (third edition). We hold both 6-inch and 25-inch Ordnance Survey maps (with some gaps). The 25-inch maps show all buildings and are therefore very useful in identifying a property. Even more detailed are the Town Plans, dated 1871, which we

hold for Holywell, Mold and Rhyl (Scale 1:500). These give detailed ground plans of all buildings, the names of some, and the use of commercial and industrial premises.

Tithe Maps and Apportionments are held for all parishes in Flintshire but are largely copies of the originals, which are held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (Ref: NT/M). They were drawn up under the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836. They show all the titheable land within a parish; and include houses and outbuildings. Each portion of land/property is given an individual reference number which corresponds to the apportionment. Apportionments are books of reference, which match up with the numbers given on the tithe map (these are held on microfilm). The apportionments give details of: owner; occupier; field names; nature of property; area; land use (e.g. arable, pasture, meadow); and rent payable for each parcel of titheable land.

Enclosure Maps and Awards: relate to the enclosure of waste or common land, or marshes on the Dee estuary, and are not primarily concerned with buildings. However, the accompanying maps may provide early evidence of a property's existence. At Flintshire Record Office we hold Enclosure Awards for various parishes, dated 1777-1870 (Ref: QS/DE/1-27). Commissioners' minutes are also available for some parishes but far fewer of these have survived (Ref: QS/DEM/1-4).

Estate Maps: Private estate maps were produced from the 17th century onwards, although there are relatively few before 1750 for Flintshire estates. They vary considerably in detail and accuracy, but may provide the earliest reference to both the existence and ground plan of a property. They are sometimes accompanied by a schedule giving the names of owners and occupiers. An index to maps, and a separate index to printed copies of early maps, is available in the search room.

Building Control Plans: We also hold a large number of building control plans for Flintshire which may be useful when researching a house history. These are to be found amongst the records of the former Urban District and Rural District Councils (Refs: UD/ and RD/).

THE CENSUS

Censuses are records of who lived in each household in Britain. A census has been taken every 10 years since 1801 but names were not given until 1841. The census was not taken in 1941, during World War II. All census records are closed for 100 years, and at present you can only view the returns for 1841-1901 (the 1911 census is due to be made available in January 2012 although an index is now online). The census gives the names of the members of every household, occupation and (from 1851) place of birth. The returns can be helpful in pinpointing the age of 19th-century buildings. However, please note that house numbers are a relatively recent development and may have changed over time. Therefore the house numbers in the census may not correspond to modern ones, which are likely to have changed as additional houses have been built.

ELECTORAL REGISTERS

Electoral registers are records compiled by local authorities. They list people who were entitled to vote at an election, at the time which the register was taken. Electoral registers can be used to find out who lived at an individual address through the years. Flintshire Record Office holds Electoral Registers for the years 1912 – 2001, although there are gaps in the registers during the First and Second World Wars when registers were not taken (we do not have registers for 1916-1917, or 1940-1944 inclusive).

TITLE DEEDS AND ASSOCIATED PAPERS

These are often considered to be the most valuable source in tracing a house's history. A series of title deeds can record the changes in ownership, name and extent of a property, and occasionally the date of its origin. The Record Office holds a vast collection of deeds, leases and associated papers from the 14th to the 20th centuries, many relating to properties on the larger estates in the county, such as Mostyn, Gwysaney, Plas Teg and Nerquis Hall. Deeds and leases in these collections are indexed by parish, and the catalogues provide a detailed description of each document. A very useful book is: *Old Title Deeds: A Guide for Local and Family Historians*, by N. Alcock, 1986, which gives a detailed description of each category of title deed and explains how to interpret the information.

RATES AND TAXATION RECORDS

Parochial rate assessments of various kinds sometimes survive within the parish records (Ref: P/). These can provide a list of occupiers of a property over a lengthy period. The parishes of Cilcain, Hawarden and Northop have good collections, that of Cilcain dating back to 1657. From 1862 to 1925, rate assessment was the responsibility of the Poor Law Unions, from whom it was transferred to the District Councils. The records of all the Unions (Ref: G/) and most of the District Councils (Refs: RD/ and UD/) in Flintshire are held at the Record Office, and most include rate books.

The records of central government taxation also provide lists of names of property owners and occupiers, but do not generally cover every property in a parish. The Flintshire Lay Subsidies, 1544-1628, and the Hearth Tax returns for Flintshire, 1666 and 1670, are on microfilm at Flintshire Record Office. If a property can be identified by its occupiers, the hearth tax returns can reveal its relative size within the parish, and suggest the number of rooms.

FINANCE ACT/VALUATION RECORDS

The Finance Act of 1910 required that a valuation map should be drawn up for each hereditament in England and Wales. The maps were accompanied by a field book or 'Domesday Book' giving information relating to the valuation of each property, owner, occupier, situation, description and extent. These valuation records (Ref: VR/), may be useful when researching a house history, although they will only give information relating to the period at which they were compiled, between 1910 and 1915.

WILLS AND PROBATE INVENTORIES

Wills are legal documents, recording the wishes of an individual in relation to their possessions after their death. Probate is the process in which the executor(s) of a will are appointed to administer the estate of the deceased. Many Flintshire wills are held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. However, we do hold some wills at Flintshire Record Office, mostly copies which have been deposited amongst larger collections, such as estate collections. They may be useful if they mention ownership of a particular family property, and how this was passed down through the generations. Accompanying inventories can also give details of what each room was used for, and the furniture and household items contained therein. There is a separate index to wills on open shelves in the searchroom.

TRADE DIRECTORIES AND GUIDE BOOKS

Flintshire Record Office holds a series of trade directories from 1822-1936 (incomplete series). These directories are organised by town/village, and list private residents and also commercial traders such as innkeepers, milliners or tailors. They may show the property in which you are interested being used for a business or trade purpose. Late 19th and early 20th century guide books to the larger towns sometimes include the names of the principal houses and their inhabitants, e.g. J.H. Austen's Companion to St Asaph, 1898.

SALE CATALOGUES

Flintshire Record Office holds a large amount of 19th and 20th century sale catalogues which give a detailed description of a property for sale. They are often accompanied by plans and sometimes by posters advertising the auction. Particularly good examples can contain photographs of the property's interior. Sale particulars may relate to a whole estate, including tenants' farms and cottages, but individual properties were also sold in this way. A large collection of 20th century sale catalogues and particulars from various Estate Agents in Flintshire, Denbighshire and the surrounding area, has been catalogued by town/parish (Ref: D/DM/760).

NEWSPAPERS

Properties were regularly advertised for sale in local newspapers from the late 18th century onwards, and detailed descriptions of interiors are sometimes given. Flintshire Record Office holds various local newspapers on microfilm, dating back to the mid-19th century.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Flintshire Record Office holds an ever-expanding collection of over 10,000 photographs and postcards, dating from the mid-19th century. These are indexed by parish. Many of these have now been digitised and can be viewed on the computers in the searchroom, whilst some of them are still originals which must be ordered using a document request slip. If you are able to find a photograph of the house in which you are interested, you can order a copy - but please be aware that the copyright situation must be checked before we can allow any copies to be made. This process takes time, so copies cannot be produced on demand.

PARTICULAR TYPES OF HOUSING

Further information on properties which have, or had in the past, a specialised use, may be available:

Ale houses were required to be licensed by Quarter Sessions, but no records of this survive for Flintshire. However, there is a very useful licensing record amongst the Flintshire County Council collection (Ref: FC/C/4/2/8) - Detailed returns of Fully Licensed Houses and Beer Houses, also licences granted by the magistrates to grocers, refreshment house keepers, dated 1892 and 1903.

Non-Conformist Meeting Houses were also licensed by Quarter Sessions from 1695-1852. Records of this may be found in the Minute Books (QS/MB) or in the Licensing Committee Minutes (Ref: QS/AC). We also hold various records of Non-Conformist chapels and meeting houses (Ref: N/).

Properties owned by Charities – information can be found in the Returns of Charitable Endowments (1819-1837 and 1897). These printed volumes are available on open shelves in the searchroom and are arranged by parish.

Parsonage Houses – many parish records (Ref: P/) contain a glebe terrier which may give a detailed description of the parsonage house or rectory.

Toll-houses – the minutes of the turnpike trusts can contain detailed information about these. We hold records of the Flint, Holywell and Mostyn District turnpike trusts at Flintshire Record Office (Ref: T/).

Former Railway Stations - information may be obtainable from station plans held in various collections at Flintshire Record Office. You will need to consult the subject index for Railways to identify any relevant information.

Further Information:

Before visiting Flintshire Record Office, you are advised to read our 'Beginner's Guide to Visiting the Record Office' (User Guide No. 1). It gives advice on how to prepare in advance for your visit, and what you need to bring with you. We also have a 'Beginner's Guide to Using the Searchroom' (User Guide No. 2), which explains what you will need to do when you visit the Record Office for the first time. You will need to make an appointment to view the records as we operate a booking system. Please contact the Record Office if you require further information or to make an appointment: **Tel. 01244 532364** or **e-mail: archives@flintshire.gov.uk**. You can also visit our website: www.flintshire.gov.uk/archives

We hope this guide will help you with your research, and look forward to welcoming you to Flintshire Record Office.

**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg. Cysylltwch â'r Archifdy i gael fersiwn Gymraeg.
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