

How to Find Out About the History of Your House

There are lots of records that can help you discover the history of your house. This leaflet gives you an introduction to some of the documents available. It is a complex subject. You can find more detailed information and guidance in our Local Studies Library.

Getting started

It is helpful if you have an idea about the date your house was built before you visit the Somerset Heritage Centre. If you have access to your deeds, they should give you lots of relevant information that you can bring with you on your visit. If your deeds are housed at the Heritage Centre (which is unlikely for most houses) you will be able to see them during your visit.

Maps

Depending on the age of your house, the following maps will help you pinpoint where it is in relation to its surroundings, and provide some dating information:

- **Ordnance Survey maps:** The major series comprise 1st edition (1882 to 1888), 2nd edition (1900 to 1903), and 2nd edition revised (about 1929 to 1931). We also have maps going up to 1970s or later, but only for some areas.
- **Printed maps:** Day and Masters' map of 1782 and Greenwood's map of 1822 are available in *Somerset Record Society* vol. 76. However, neither of them is very detailed.
- **Tithe maps and awards:** These maps mostly date from 1838 to 1842, and provide information about ownership, occupancy and the status of land and buildings for most Somerset parishes. (Ref. D/D/Rt)
- **Inclosure maps and awards:** Most of these were created between 1780 and 1830, and provide valuable dating information for properties on previously unenclosed land. (Ref. Q/RDe)
- **Deposited plans of public undertakings:** These are good sources for houses built beside railways, canals and turnpike roads from 1791. (Ref. Q/RUp)
- **Maps of highway diversions/closures:** These are in the Quarter Sessions papers from around 1790, and mark some properties on the routes of diversions. (Ref. Q/SR)
- **Estate and parish maps:** These are for certain estates or parishes, and are detailed in the map catalogues in the searchroom.

Taxation and Rating records

- **Land tax assessments:** These are available on microfiche for 1766, 1767 and 1780 to 1832 (with gaps), and give the names of owners and occupiers, and sometimes very brief property descriptions. They are useful if owners identified on the tithe award can then be found in the land tax returns. (Ref. Q/Rel)
- **Inland Revenue valuation records:** These provide a snapshot of land ownership and occupation in 1910, and consist of valuation books, with accompanying Ordnance Survey maps, although there are gaps in the series of maps. (Ref. DD\IR)
- **Parish rating records:** These are not all complete from the seventeenth century and are in parish collections (D\P), or local authority collections, including parish, borough, rural and urban and district councils. (Refs D\PC, D\B, D\R, D\U, D\DC)

- **Hearth tax:** The Heritage Centre has Dwelly's published copy of returns, which covers about 30% of Somerset parishes. It provides an occupier's name and some indication of the size of the property for properties known to date back to 1660.

Privately deposited records

Deeds, leases, and manorial and estate management papers will often be the only source of primary material after map sources have been exhausted. The Heritage Centre has the estate papers of most of the major landed families in the county, as well as for a number of solicitors and many private individuals. These collections may include court rolls recording surrenders and admissions by copyholders, surveys, rentals and deed bundles. There can be problems identifying property in deeds, particularly because names and numbers change over time. However, a good deed bundle may give details of the ownership of a property over several centuries, and include abstracts of title, sale particulars and wills.

If the principal family seat of a landed family with property in Somerset is outside the county boundaries, you will have to contact the appropriate record office for the county the seat is located in, to see whether they hold the records. You can find contact details at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon.

Other sources

- **Wills and inventories:** Where they survive, these may provide essential links with deeds to establish a chain of ownership. Inventories sometimes give detailed room-by-room descriptions of furnishings and fittings.
- **Listed building reports:** There are over 10,000 listed buildings in Somerset, and printed reports of some of the listings are available in the searchroom. Online access to all reports is available at www.imagesofengland.org.uk, and this site also contains an image of each building. You can also get up-to-date copies of listings from local district councils.
- **Somerset Vernacular Architecture Group reports:** This group surveys and produces detailed reports about the architectural features of Somerset buildings. Copies of all existing reports are available (Ref. DD\V). If you are interested in having your house surveyed by the group, please contact the Vernacular Architecture Group, c/o 4 Court Hey Orchard, Pitney, Langport, Somerset, TA10 9AE.
- **Newspapers:** Local newspapers contain many advertisements for letting and selling properties.
- **Other Quarter Sessions records:** These include enrolled deeds, 1537 to 1828 (Ref. Q/RDd); and registration of Papist (Roman Catholic) estates, 1717 to 1788 (Ref. Q/RRp). You can find Registrations of Protestant places of worship, which were often in private houses, in either the records of Quarter Sessions or in the Diocesan records.
- **Published sources:** Books, including the Victoria County History, may contain information about individual properties in a parish. Part of the Victoria County History of Somerset can be found online at www.british-history.ac.uk. Somerset's Local Studies Library is at the Heritage Centre: see the separate leaflet for more information on its holdings.
- **Particular categories of houses:** There are other sources for certain categories of houses, especially if they had a functional use before being converted to private housing. These include former parsonage houses, inns, schools, parish poor houses, charity properties, tollhouses and mills.
- **The Manor of Taunton Deane:** The Manor covered a wide area around Taunton, including all of Taunton, Bishops Hull, Kingston St. Mary and Pitminster. The collection records hundreds of deeds, and you can sometimes trace a piece of land back for

hundreds of years. Many records survive from 1550 to 1845, and there are some records for at least 100 years before 1550. (Ref. DD\SP)

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Registered office: Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, Somerset TA2 6SF
Company number: 09053532 Charity Number: 1158791 VAT Registration Number: 197221592