

## Tracing the history of your house

Finding out about the history of a property can sometimes be difficult. Houses during their lifetime often have a number of uses or may be converted from other types of property such as inns or farms. Conversions of a house often make it difficult to imagine what the original property may have looked like.

### Observation

The first sign of the possible age of a house can be found by looking at the house itself and at the other buildings round about. Books on the history of the area can often give an approximate date for the house and the streets nearby. Background books on building styles and architectural methods may also help.

### Title deeds and wills

These are normally held by the current owner of the property, or on his/her behalf by a solicitor, bank or building society. They are likely to be the most useful source of information you will find.

Deeds produced in this century should include building plans with the builder's name, and a ground plan showing the shape and extent of the house and the property boundary.

Earlier deeds are written in Latin rather than in English, and contain less detailed plans and builder information. Some deeds are held by the Derbyshire Record Office. Some deeds also include copies of the wills of previous owners, which provide further information on the house. The [Derbyshire Record Office](#) holds copies of wills dating from 1858 to 1928. Wills made before 1858 are held at [Lichfield Record Office](#) :

Lichfield Record Office  
The Friary  
Lichfield  
WS13 6QG  
Tel: 01543 510720  
email: [lichfield.record.office@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:lichfield.record.office@staffordshire.gov.uk)

For those owners who are not Derbyshire natives, wills after 1858 are kept centrally at:

First Avenue House  
42-49 High Holborn  
London  
WC1V 6NP  
Tel: 020 7947 7000

Further information may be found on the web site of [Her Majesty's Court Services](#)

A useful guide to the whereabouts of pre 1858 wills is:

"Probate Jurisdictions: where to look for wills" by J. Gibson and E. Churchill published by the Federation of Family History Societies 2002. ISBN 1860061524

### Maps

Several different types of maps can be used to trace the history of a house.

### Ordnance Survey maps

The Old County series at the scale 25" to 1 mile are very useful in establishing when houses appeared and showing changes to the ground plan over the years. A complete set of 1st (from 1876), 2nd (1898-1901) and 3rd (1914-1920s) editions on microfilm, which covers the whole of Derbyshire, are held at Chesterfield and County Hall Local Studies libraries.

These maps may show the shapes of buildings, gardens etc and the existence of boundary fences/walls but will not identify owners of the properties.

### Tithe maps

These maps, which date mainly from around 1840, exist for most parishes in the county. Field names are given as well as owners and occupiers of land. (If not shown on the maps themselves, these details may be obtained from the "awards" or "terriers" accompanying them.)

Chesterfield Local Studies Library holds some tithe maps and awards on microfilm. The originals for these, and other tithe maps, are held by the Derbyshire Record Office.

### Enclosure maps

These maps, often dated around 1800, exist for some parishes. Similar information to that provided by tithe maps also appears in the enclosure maps, e.g. owners and occupiers of land. A list of Tithe and Enclosure maps available for consultation may be obtained from the Derbyshire Record Office.

There are several other types of map available, for example early maps of Chesterfield and some estate maps relating to the Hunloke family of Wingerworth Hall can be seen at Chesterfield Library.

## **Census**

Census enumerators returns are held on microfilm for the years 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901.

These show the members of each household who were present on the night the census was taken, with their ages, occupations and places of birth. (In the 1841 census the information is more limited.)

These are a source well worth investigating but the address information is frequently inadequate, particularly in smaller communities. It is therefore often impossible to identify a particular property with any certainty unless you know from other sources who was living in it at the time of the census.

## **Directories**

A set of trade directories is held from 1808 to 1973 on microfiche, and a smaller selection is available in book form. Telephone directories are also available and can be helpful for the more recent past. Those directories compiled between 1840 and 1941 usually give a brief history of the town or village, with lists of private residents and established trades. They can be very helpful used in conjunction with the census returns.

## **Property sales catalogues**

There are a large number of these in Chesterfield and County Hall Local Studies collections, including a separate collection of older items donated to Chesterfield

by a local estate agent. For larger properties these may include plans, a brief history of the property, and in some cases even illustrations. Smaller modern houses may have only a single page of description.

### **Electoral registers**

Chesterfield Local Studies Library holds Burgess Lists and Electoral Registers for the Borough of Chesterfield from 1836 to 1914, and from 1925 to the present, and Poll Books for Derbyshire for the years 1837, 1857 and 1868 but the Derbyshire Record Office holds the main collection for the county.

Early registers are alphabetical lists of property-owning residents, and may not give full addresses. Also bear in mind that house numbers, names and street names may change over a period of time.

### **Photographs and engravings**

The collection of over 16,000 photographs held by Chesterfield Local Studies library refers mainly to Chesterfield itself, but there is also some coverage of other villages in Derbyshire. Many Derbyshire libraries have collections of photos for their area and a whole county collection is held at County Hall although coverage is patchy. The photographs are usually of street scenes, public events, or group portraits, with some individual buildings such as churches and inns. The oldest of the photographs date back to the 1880s.

Engravings usually show individual buildings such as churches and country houses, although there are a number of views. Over 20,000 Derbyshire library photographs can be seen online at [www.picturethepast.org.uk](http://www.picturethepast.org.uk)

### **Taxation and rating records.**

Hearth tax returns for Derbyshire 1662-1670 have been printed, and show the names of residents in a particular parish, with numbers of hearths.

Land tax assessments for the period 1780-1832 are held on microfilm by the Derbyshire Record Office; these name both owners and occupiers, but provide less details on individual properties.

Rating books, compiled for poor relief or for local authorities in the 19th century, give details of ownership and the rateable value of the property. Unfortunately, many rate records have been lost, and only a few have been passed on to the Derbyshire Record Office. It is possible, if the property has changed hands in the last 25 years or so, that further information may be obtained by writing to the [Land Registry](http://www.landregistry.gov.uk). A fee is charged for searches of their records. Offices are located throughout the country including [Nottingham West](http://www.landregistry.gov.uk) where Derbyshire records are held. The head office in London may be contacted at:

Land Registry, Head Office  
32 Lincoln's Inn Fields  
London  
WC2A 3PH  
Tel: 020 7917 8888  
Fax: 020 7955 0110

### **Catalogues and indexes**

A search of catalogues and indexes in the library may lead you to other, less obvious, useful items. Older properties may, for example, feature in village or town histories. It is also advisable to contact the Derbyshire Record Office at Matlock, who hold estate papers, manorial records, and court rolls, which might take your search a step further.

The following titles may help you in your research:

- BARRATT, Nick, Tracing the history of your house. Public Record Office, 2002. ISBN 1903365228
- BRECKON, Bill and PARKER, Jeffrey, Tracing the history of houses. Countryside, 2000. ISBN 1853066443
- BUSHELL, Peter, Tracing the history of your house. Pavilion, 1989. ISBN 1851453156
- DERBYSHIRE RECORD OFFICE, Your house's history: how to find out about old buildings, a beginner's guide. Derbyshire County Council, 1994.

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Visit the [Peakland Heritage website](#) for a fascinating study in how to research house history by Elizabeth Wildgoose.