

West Sussex Record Office



Searchroom Leaflet No 5:

How to Research the History of Your House

This leaflet is a guide to records and printed sources which may provide information on the history of a building or house. More detailed help is given in *Mini-Guide No 10: House History* and the draft text of *Where Do You Live?* (see Searchroom Supervisor)

Printed sources

General information on the history of the parish in which a property is located can be obtained from our large collection of parish histories and guides, all of which are indexed by place, subject and author, or from the *Victoria County History*. Some older houses or farms may already have been written about in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, *Sussex Notes and Queries*, the *Sussex County Magazine* and volumes of the *Sussex Record Society*. We have complete sets of each in the searchroom, and full indexes.

Title deeds

Title deeds contain descriptions of a property and the names of its previous owners, and often include one or more abstracts of title, which provide a handy summary of the property's history. You may have the deeds yourself, or they may be with your solicitor, building society or landlord. Sometimes, packets of deeds may have been deposited at the Record Office by previous owners or solicitors. If they have been catalogued it should be possible to find them by searching our catalogues online through our website. Many of them will also be included in our general card index of places.

If the house or farm formed part of one of the large estates, such as Cowdray, Goodwood, Petworth, or Wiston, some of the deeds will probably be catalogued and indexed

among the relevant estate archives.

Maps

Maps will indicate whether a property existed at a particular date, and sometimes provide information on how the property was laid out and who owned or occupied it. We hold large-scale Ordnance Survey maps for the whole county, dating back to the 1870s. Tithe Maps were produced following the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, and date from the late 1830s to the early 1850s. Their apportionments give names of land owners and occupiers, and the title, description, acreage, state of cultivation and rent charge of each property. Estate maps, which date back to the late 16th century, can also be useful. Enclosure maps, produced for parliamentary enclosure of commons and waste, and deposited plans of canals, turnpikes and railways may also contain information on a particular building. Key maps in the searchroom show the geographical area covered by most of the maps in our custody.

Building plans

If your house was built after the late 19th century, we may have original plans among the relevant Rural or Urban District Council records, which we hold for following dates:

Arundel Borough c1898-1948
 Bognor Regis UDC 1883-1948
 Burgess Hill UDC 1880-1948
 Chanctonbury RDC 1928-1948
 Chichester City 1923-1948
 Chichester RDC 1924-1948
 Cuckfield RDC 1882-1948
 Cuckfield UDC 1878-1948
 East Grinstead RDC 1907-1934
 East Grinstead UDC 1886-1948
 Haywards Heath UDC 1878-1934
 Horsham RDC 1923-1948
 Horsham UDC plan register only 1878-1922 (no plans)
 Littlehampton UDC 1865-1948
 Midhurst RDC 1900-1948
 East Preston RDC 1899-1933
 [there are no surviving plans for Petworth RDC]
 Shoreham UDC c1883-1903 and c1928-1933
 Steyning West RDC 1927-1933
 Thakeham RDC 1928-1933
 Westbourne RDC 1919-1933
 Westhampnett RDC 1924-1933
 Worthing Borough c1865-1966
 Worthing RDC 1933-1949

Please note that for some areas not all plans have survived, and for other areas we have the plans but there is no surviving register or index. Locating the house on a 6" Ordnance Survey map of the relevant date is useful for confirming which district council it would have come under, and also which parish. There were major changes in the boundaries and names of district councils as a result of the Local Government Review of 1933. The district council catalogues give further details, and include lists of the parishes in each district at the front of each section.

Census returns

Ten-yearly census returns for West Sussex 1841-1921, and for the whole of England and Wales, are available on the Ancestry and Findmypast websites on the public access computers.

The census returns give, house by house, the name, occupation, age and place of birth of every individual present on the night of the census. However, in rural areas in particular, addresses are often vague or even non-existent.

Directories and voters' lists

County Directories, available in the searchroom on microfiche 1792-1938, list by parish a selection of wealthier residents and their addresses, and tradespeople. For towns, street directories list heads of household and tradespeople by address and surname. Our holdings, mostly on microfiche, include:

Arundel 1886, 1910-70
 Bognor 1886, 1900-72
 Brighton and Hove (with Shoreham and Southwick) 1890-1974
 Chichester 1784-1974
 East Grinstead 1793, 1799, 1872-1963
 Horsham and Crawley 1816-1975
 Littlehampton 1871-1970
 Mid-Sussex 1883-1967
 Selsey 1905-50
 Worthing 1919-75

We also hold parliamentary electoral registers from 1832 onwards; up to 1903 they are available on microfilm and **electoral registers 1832-1963, for East and West Sussex, are on Ancestry**. Electoral registers before 1974 for parishes in Mid Sussex (formerly in the County of East Sussex) are held at East Sussex Record Office in Lewes. In the 19th century, the electorate was relatively small - all adult males were only included from 1918, and all adult females from 1928 - and voters were listed, by parish, in alphabetical order. Listing by address was introduced in 1918 for built up areas.

Sale particulars

If a property has in the past been sold or auctioned by an estate agent, we may have a copy of the original particulars of sale, which sometimes include plans or photographs. Any such documents should be listed in our catalogues, which can be searched online through our website. Most of them will also be included, under the relevant parish name, in our general card index of places.

Land Tax returns

Annual Land Tax Assessments survive for each parish for the period 1780-1832, and are available on microfilm in the searchroom. They record assessments for

each property, usually naming the landowner and occupier, and sometimes identify the property itself. We also have Land Tax Assessments for some parishes for other dates and these are listed in our catalogues.

Rate books

Records of the payment of Poor Rates, Churchwardens' Rates and Surveyors' Rates also identify property owners in many parishes and can be found amongst the relevant parish records. From the late nineteenth century onwards the new borough and urban district councils, such as Worthing, Bognor and Littlehampton, levied their own rates, and after the 1925 Rating and Valuation Act, rural district councils (rather than parishes) were responsible for collecting local rates in rural areas. For most areas, an incomplete run of rate books survives, listing by address property owners and occupiers. District council records also include valuation books, which give similar information to the rate books. As far as the City of Chichester is concerned, the earliest rate book is dated c1824 and there are later rate books dated 1877 and 1914.

Inland Revenue Land Valuation Records 1911

Inland Revenue Land Valuation "Domesday Books" and Forms created under the 1910 Finance Act also give owners and occupiers of individual properties, and their rateable values, and are listed in the Inland Revenue Catalogue. Those for the western end of West Sussex, including Bognor, Chichester and Midhurst, have not survived. In addition to the "Domesday Books" we also have detailed reports on properties in Felpham and Middleton based on the official Field Books held at the National Archives.

Probate records

If you have identified a former owner of a property, his or her will may tell you to whom it was bequeathed. We hold locally proved wills from the 15th century to 1928, all of which are indexed. Pre-1858 wills for

East and West Sussex will be published on Ancestry in 2023.

Wills of wealthier individuals are more likely to have been proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) and these can be accessed on Ancestry, which is free to use on our public access computers (or for a small fee on The National Archives website: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

For wills after 1858, you can search the National Probate Calendars on Ancestry. It gives basic details of all wills proved in England and Wales 1858-1966, 1973-1995. You can also use the search facility on the Government's website at <https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate> which will also enable you to order copies.

We also have the probate inventories for nearly 12,000 testators in West Sussex for the period 1521-1834. They provide a detailed list and valuation, usually room by room, of the goods and chattels remaining at the home of the deceased, and in doing so give valuable information about the building itself. There is a microfiche index to probate inventories in the searchroom. Probate inventories for many parishes have now been transcribed and these can be found by searching our online catalogues or using the card index. Sussex Clergy Inventories 1600-1750 have been transcribed and published in *Sussex Record Society* Volume 93.

Manorial records

If a property belonged to a particular manor, it had to be bought, leased or conveyed in any other way in the manorial court. Court books and rolls recording such transfers of property have survived for many of the county's manors, and are listed in a card index, arranged by name of manor, in the searchroom. Manorial rentals, listing tenants, can also be useful. If you don't know the name of the manor to which your property belonged, consult the *Victoria County History of Sussex*, which lists all the manors for the parishes it covers. During the nineteenth century many manorial properties were enfranchised, or converted into freehold. If such enfranchisement deeds survive, they will also help to identify the relevant manorial records for your property.

Notes

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A large-print version of this leaflet is available in a special folder in the searchroom