
Tracing Property History at the Suffolk Record Office

Welcome to the Suffolk Record Office, the county archives, run by Suffolk County Council. If you wish to research the history of a property, please read this leaflet. It will show you the first steps to take, and help you avoid time-wasting mistakes.

HOW DO I BEGIN?

Begin by collecting as much information as you can on your property. The key things to find out are:

- who holds the deeds
- who owned/lived in the property before you
- an approximate date of the building
- was the property built for a specific purpose i.e. school, public house, vicarage, shop

Neighbours may be able to supply information on previous owners. If you have a Local History Recorder in your parish they may hold information on your property. Your bank, solicitor or building society may hold the current deeds. Modern deeds and abstracts will give a short description of the property, its position, the dimensions of the plot and names of recent previous owners. Registration of title is now compulsory. Pre-registration deeds, now not needed to prove title, have consequently often been lost or destroyed, but provide valuable information if they have survived. If they are not with the present deeds, they may have been lodged in the Record Office, or they may remain with the solicitor who acted for the vendor when you purchased. Under the Land Registration Act 1988, the Land Register is now open for public inspection. The office in Hull undertakes land registration for Suffolk. You can contact them for a copy of the information they hold on your property (see list of useful addresses at the end of the leaflet)

USING THE SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE

You can now begin using the resources of the Suffolk Record Office. Please bring all the information you have gathered with you and a sketch map showing the location of your property in relation to the local landmarks. Our staff are trained to advise you which records to use. Although lots of sources are listed in this leaflet we may not hold everything for your property.

HOW TO APPROACH YOUR RESEARCH

These basic principles will help you make the best use of your time. If you ignore them, you may find yourself going off on false trails.

First of all, researching the history of a property is **time-consuming**. It will take more than one visit to the Record Office to look through all the possible sources that could shed light on your property. It will require **patient searching** through different types of records which will often not be indexed.

Most important of all, you should always **work from the known to the unknown**. This means starting from the present day, and working methodically towards the past.

DATING A BUILDING

You are unlikely to find documentary evidence which will precisely date the building of your property. From written sources you can find out what the building was used for and who owned it. Sources tend to revolve around the people who lived in and owned the building rather than the fabric. A study of the architecture of the building may help you determine an approximate date for its construction. The bibliography includes books on architectural style to help you. The Department of the Environment produces **Lists of Buildings of architectural and historical interest**. These give a simple description of the style and features of 'listed' buildings. They are held in the search room for you to consult. **Maps** can also help to establish a time frame for the construction of your property.

WHERE TO START

Maps are a useful starting point for your research. You can start with the large scale **Ordnance Survey maps** at 25 inches and 6 inches to the mile. The earliest date from the 1880s. Suffolk Record Office has a good selection for the county ending in the 1920s for the 25 inch series and the 1950s for the 6 inch series. Larger plans on a scale of 50 inches to the mile were also published for some urban areas in the 1880s. There are also earlier smaller scale manuscript maps of the county in existence but although these indicate the existence of individual large properties, smaller houses may not be shown, and their accuracy cannot always be guaranteed. You can find out what is held by consulting the '**maps and plans**' index.

Tithe maps and apportionments are available for most individual parishes in Suffolk. They were produced between 1835 and 1848 and provide information on the size of site, owners and occupiers, field names etc. at the time of the survey. Earlier than the tithe maps are the **Enclosure maps and awards**. These date from the 18th and 19th century and are available for those parishes, which were enclosed by Act of Parliament. They are more difficult to use than the Tithe maps, but can contain useful information on land ownership.

OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS: AFTER 1840

County Directories cover the period 1844 to 1937, and **Street Directories** are also available for Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich and Lowestoft. **Census** returns are currently available for 1841 to 1901. These are held on film and/or fiche in the microform room or can be accessed for free through the Ancestry Library Edition website. The 1851 and 1881 censuses are indexed. **Wills** may give details of property and its disposal. Indexes to wills are held in the search room. **Electoral Registers** will list occupants. Before 1928 not everyone was qualified to vote so earlier lists (starting in 1832) should be used with care, remembering also that house names and numbers are not always noted. **Rating Records** can also help establish who owned or lived in a property. The so-called '**domesday books**' were records compiled by the Inland Revenue during the course of valuations made under the 1910 Finance Act. They are useful for discovering names of owners and occupiers as well as the situation and extent of individual properties. It is also worth checking the '**maps and plans index**' for any plans. These could exist for the building of the property or showing subsequent alterations to it. We also hold **sales particulars**, which are indexed in the search room. **Photographs** are another interesting source of information and again, these can be found by looking through various indexes in the search room. Just ask the staff to show you where to look.

OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS: BEFORE 1840

Information for this period can be harder to find. The following sources can be tried but they might not always prove fruitful. **Wills** can be useful in this earlier period (see above) while **Inventories** can also shed light on the number of rooms in the building and their contents. **Deeds** or other **estate papers** may refer to your house if it was once part of a large estate. Searchroom staff will be pleased to show you the indexes. **Parish rate books** rarely list properties by name, but where they do it might be possible to trace ownership back over a considerable period. Catalogues of parish records are in the search room. If the property was once part of a manor, there may be **manorial records** to help you. These consist mainly of books or rolls some dating back to the 16th century, occasionally earlier, which record the transfer and conveyance of mainly copyhold property through the manorial court. Rentals and surveys may also have survived. Early **taxation records** such as the Hearth Tax Return may also prove fruitful, especially if the property is substantial.

OTHER SOURCES

All the sources above are standard for any type of property, however, there are buildings which have been used for a specific purpose for which there will be additional special sources you may need to consult. The table below lists some of the sources most useful to researching these properties and indicates which branch holds them.

| | BURY RO | IPSWICH RO | LOWESTOFT RO |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| INNS & PUBLIC HOUSES | <p>Directories (1844 –1937) – name of landlord</p> <p>Petty session records – registers of licences</p> <p>Census returns (1841 –1901)</p> <p>Newspaper advertisements</p> | <p>Directories (1844 – 1937) – name of landlord</p> <p>Petty session records – registers of licences</p> <p>Census returns (1841 –1901)</p> <p>Newspaper advertisements</p> <p>Quarter sessions records - licensing records</p> | <p>Directories (1844 – 1937) – name of landlord</p> <p>Petty session records – registers of licences</p> <p>Census returns (1841 – 1901)</p> <p>Newspaper advertisements</p> |
| CHURCHES & CHAPELS | <p>Parish records (C of E)</p> <p>Non-Conformist records</p> <p>Church Guides (in Parish records or newspaper cuttings files)</p> <p>J Duncan pamphlets and books on Non-conformist Chapels</p> <p>Quarter Sessions records to check for Chapel Licences</p> <p>Archdeaconry records: for faculties for building and alteration</p> <p>Suffolk Local History Council Survey of nonconformist chapels, covers the whole County, but is incomplete (GC564)</p> | <p>Parish records (C of E)</p> <p>Non-Conformist records</p> <p>Church Guides (in Parish records or newspaper cuttings files)</p> <p>Quarter Sessions records to check for Chapel Licences</p> <p>Archdeaconry records: for faculties for building and alteration</p> | <p>Parish records (C of E)</p> <p>Non-Conformist records</p> <p>Church Guides (in Parish records or newspaper cuttings files)</p> |
| PARSONAGE HOUSES | <p>Parish Records</p> <p>Diocesan Records: papers re</p> | <p>Parish Records</p> <p>Diocesan Records: papers re</p> | <p>Parish Records</p> |

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| SCHOOLS | School records – including plans, log books and governor's minutes Photographs Newspaper cutting files Early 19 th Century newspaper indexes | School records – including plans, log books and governor's minutes Photographs Newspaper cutting files Early 19 th Century newspaper indexes Records of the County Education Authority | School records – including plans, log books and governor's minutes Photographs Newspaper cutting files Early 19 th Century newspaper indexes |
| SHOPS | Directories Newspaper adverts Photographs Business records Early 19 th Century newspaper indexes | Directories Newspaper adverts Photographs Business records Early 19 th Century newspaper indexes | Directories Newspaper adverts Photographs Business records Early 19 th Century newspaper indexes |
| MILLS | Directories Business records Estate papers Books on mills Study of Suffolk Windmills (HD2522) Photographic Collections | Directories Business records Estate papers Books on mills Suffolk Photographic Survey | Directories Business records Estate papers Books on mills Photographic Collections |
| LARGE COUNTRY HOUSES | Books on Country Houses (see Bibliography) Architects Plans (check Map & Plan index) Sales Particulars & Auction Catalogues | Books on Country Houses (see Bibliography) Architects Plans (check Map & Plan index) Sales Particulars & Auction Catalogues | Books on Country Houses (see Bibliography) Architects Plans (check Map & Plan index) Sales Particulars & Auction Catalogues |

THE SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE – HERE TO HELP YOU

The three branches of the Suffolk record Office are **open to everyone**. There is no charge for using our archives, books and other sources. (There are of course charges for services such as photocopying). The only formality is the CARN reader's ticket system. On your first visit please bring some official **identification** which gives your current address (such as a driving licence, medical card, new-style passport, or Suffolk County Council library card). We can then issue a CARN ticket. If you **telephone us before visiting**, we can make sure that a microfilm or microfiche machine is available for you if necessary (to check census returns, etc.) If you do not have time to visit us, our expert staff can carry out research for you for a fee, under the terms of our **Research Service**. Please ask for details, or see our Website. We have a **wide range of books** on different aspects of

the history of property. There are copies for reference and for sale. We also sell a data collection pack developed for the History of Property, which gives additional guidance on the available sources.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Kingston Upon Hull District Land Registry, Earle House, Portland Street, Hull, HU2 8JN
Tel: 01482 223244

Suffolk Historic Buildings Group, Christopher North, 113 High Street, Needham Market, Suffolk, IP6 8DQ

Suffolk Preservation Society, Mrs Marilyn Roper, Little Hall, Market Place, Lavenham, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 9QZ

Suffolk Mills Group, The Secretary, The Windmill, Upthorpe Road, Stanton, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP31 2AW

Suffolk Local History Council, Suffolk Community Resource Centre, Suffolk House, 2 Wharfdale Road, Ipswich, IP1 4JP

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The books listed below are either held in one of the Record Offices or are available in any library through the interlibrary loan service.

BOOKS ON PROPERTY HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE

Sue Andrews, *How to begin tracing the history of your home*, the author, nd
B Breckon, *Tracing the History of Houses*, Newbury Countryside Books, 1991
R J Brown, *Timber-framed Buildings of England*, Robert Hale Ltd, 1986
R W Brunskill, *Illustrated handbook of Vernacular Architecture*, Faber, 1971
P Bushell, *Tracing the History of your House*, Pavilion, 1989
L F Cave, *The Smaller English House Its History and Development*, Hale, 1981
P Cunnington, *How old is your House?*, Alphabooks, 1982
B Flint, *Suffolk Windmills*, Boydell Press, 1979
B Greysmith *Tracing the History of your house*, Headway, 1994
E Gray, *The British House: a concise Architectural History*, Barrie and Jenkins, 1994
S Hart, *Flint Architecture of East Anglia*, Giles de la Mare, 2000
N Harvey, *Old Farm Buildings*, Shire Publications, 1977
D Iredale, *Discovering your Old House*, Shire Publications, 1997
N Lloyd, *A History of the English House*, Omega, 1985
J McCann, *Clay and Cob Buildings*, Shire Publications, 1995
D Reagan, *Windmills of Suffolk*, the author, 1997
E Sandon, *Suffolk Houses*, Baron Publishing, 1977
T West, *The Timber-frame House in England*, David & Charles, 1971

BOOKS ON SOURCES USED TO TRACE THE HISTORY OF PROPERTY

A A Dibden, *Title deeds*, Historical Association, 1968
S Hollowell, *Enclosure Records for Historians*, Phillimore, 2000
Denis Stuart, *Manorial Records*, Phillimore, 1992
Patrick Palgrave-Moore, *How to locate and use Manorial Records*, Elvey Doves, 1985

Bury Record Office, 77 Raingate Street, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2AR

Telephone: 01284 741212

Email: bury.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Ipswich Record Office, Gatacre Road, Ipswich, IP1 2LQ

Telephone: 01473 584541

Fax: 01473 584533

Email: ipswich.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Lowestoft Record Office, Clapham Road, Lowestoft, NR32 1DR

Telephone: 01502 405357

Fax: 01502 405350

Email: lowestoft.ro@suffolk.gov.uk

Suffolk Record Office web site: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/sro>

Suffolk Heritage Direct website: <http://www.suffolkheritagedirect.org.uk>