

Guide to researching the history of your house Canterbury Cathedral Archives

The best place to start when researching the history of your house is in the present day. Think about what you know of the house yourself and work backwards from there. If you own the house, clues about previous owners or recent work done to the house may well be in your deeds or the solicitor's searches. These will give you clues that you can follow backwards. Reading local history books for the relevant area will also detail historical events surrounding the house.

The history of a building can be tackled from two angles. There are events with the building itself such as an extension or alteration and then there is the history of the people who were living there which can be uncovered through standard genealogical research.

Secondary sources

Hasted, *History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*.

Victoria County History of Kent

Pevsner, *Architectural Guides to England, Ireland, Scotland & Wales*.

Village histories and local publications. These can be found in the Local Studies Libraries and local archive offices.

Material held nationally

Listed buildings

A current list of buildings deemed worthy of permanent preservation is issued by the Government. Copies of lists are held in the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone. A copy of the Canterbury list is held at Canterbury Cathedral Archives.

National Monuments Record, Swindon

This is a collection of several million photographs dating from the 1840s to the present day. It includes images of historic buildings, gardens and archaeological sites. There is also a database of plans, drawings and reports from archaeological sites.

You can visit the NMR in person or send in a query by post, fax or on line.

Telephone: 01793 414600

Website www.english-heritage.org.uk/

Material held locally

Directories

Street Directories by and large list streets alphabetically. The properties are then listed by number or name with the name of the principal householder. After the 1960s the name of the householder was omitted. They also give information on places, list main buildings and houses, and list private inhabitants and tradesmen.

Directories can be for the county, a town or a specific area. Directories from 1792 to 1938 are at the Centre for Kentish Studies and those from 1826 to 1967 (with gaps) are at Canterbury Cathedral Archives. They are also available on fiche at the main public libraries.

Maps – OS

Ordnance survey maps can be very useful for identifying the property you are researching. Some maps are more useful than others. Some show the numbers or names of dwellings or can reveal changes in street name or building shape.

1:2500 / 25" to 1 mile are the most useful. They were published between 1858-1873 and revised 1893 – 1897 and 1905 -1910.

Maps with the scale 6" to 1 mile are available for rural areas. They have similar dates to the 1:2500 maps.

The Centre for Kentish Studies, County Hall, Maidstone has all the maps of the 1905 - 1910 edition in both scales. The OS maps for the Canterbury area are held in the local studies library at the Beaney Institute.

Surveys of larger Kent towns were produced at 10' to 1 mile / 1:500

They are held in respective libraries and are for urban areas only

Tithe Maps

These were made in 1839 as a result of the Tithe Commutation Act, 1836. Tithes were commuted to money from being paid in kind.

Maps and accompanying apportionments show ownership and the amount due on each land parcel. They give the owner's names alphabetically, occupiers, property description, field names, acreage, and rent charges.

They do not include lands for which no tithes were payable.

Parishes in the Canterbury Diocese are held at Canterbury Cathedral Archives. The maps are now on CD and the apportionments are held in the respective archive offices.

Estate records

Sometimes it is possible to trace a house back to its manorial / estate roots. Originally most land was owned by manorial lords although it slowly entered into individual ownership as time went on. Estate records have no set format and each collection contains different documents. They are therefore a source that can be tackled towards the end of your research when you will have enough knowledge, for example of field names and occupants, to interpret what you find. The most useable records are maps and tenant rentals from the 16th-19th centuries. Most of the estate collections are held at the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone while East Kent Archives in Whitfield holds some of the East Kent estates and Canterbury Cathedral Archives holds the records of Canterbury Cathedral's estates. Many of the estate catalogues are listed on the Access to Archives website www.a2a.org.uk

Title Deeds

For some properties and lands title deeds have been deposited and often these are in solicitors collections. Many are held at the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone but they are sporadic as they only exist if an individual has chosen to deposit them.

Sales Catalogues

The Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone has a collection of estate agents brochures for historical properties coming onto the market.

Newspapers

These contain notices of house sales, development of areas and changes to streets. They are kept in respective archive and local studies collections.

Illustrations

Local studies libraries and archives have photographic collections that can be between 70 and 100 years old. These include postcards.

Census

The census is arranged geographically by registration district and then parish. The enumerator walked up and down each street listing each household as he came across it. The earlier census returns rarely include any house number. This source however contains many details of the family living within each house and is useful to build up a picture of the occupations and number of people living there. Canterbury Cathedral Archives holds microfilms of the returns for the districts of Canterbury, Faversham, Bridge and Blean. The census was taken every 10 years and the years 1841-1901 are currently available.

Electoral Registers

Registers of electors were maintained from 1832 as a requirement of the 1832 Electoral Reform Act. They only list people who were entitled to vote. Initially this was restricted to freeholders and significant property owners. Women over 30 were enfranchised in 1918. The registers are currently subject to a 30 year closure.

The main county set from 1918 is at the Centre for Kentish Studies. Registers for the Canterbury Constituency exist at Canterbury Cathedral Archives from 1945. Before 1832 some freeholders were entitled to vote and their names are recorded in the poll books.

Rate books

These list owners and occupiers of properties on which rates were payable. Those from the middle of the 19th century onwards usually list properties within each street thus making it easier to identify each property. Earlier books may just list the householder.

Rates were collected from 1600 onwards for poor relief, highway maintenance etc. They were collected in the parish and therefore exist in parish record collections.

After 1835 local authorities levied rates and rate books appear in the collections of Borough, Urban and Rural District Councils.

Valuation lists

These were compiled in the 19th and 20th Centuries. They are held in local government collections and with the records of the Guardians of Poor who were responsible for their compilation.

Probate

Wills are useful for looking at the family in the house. They list goods and lands passed to family members upon the testator's death. The inventories are more use for the house itself. They list all the goods in the house room by room. They are common for the 16th and 17th Centuries. Canterbury Cathedral Archives holds copies of many wills up to 1858. After 1858 wills were proved nationally rather than in local courts and indexes can be searched at the Family Records Centre in London and The National Archives at Kew.

Building Control Plans

Alterations carried out to buildings in the 20th century need permission from the local authority in terms of planning permission. Building control plans exist for the area of the current Canterbury district including Whitstable and Herne Bay. Those for Whitstable are fully searchable by property address.

Land tax assessments

These were established in 1692 and in 1780-1831 they were used as a voting qualification. Duplicates were lodged with the Clerk of Peace. There is an extensive collection at the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone and Canterbury Cathedral Archives holds the years 1752-1795.

Hearth Tax

This was levied in 1662 and abolished in 1688. It placed a tax upon the number of hearths in each house and so lists the name of the householders liable along with the number of hearths. The name of the property is not listed.

There is a good set for 1664 at the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone. Other years have not survived. There is also a published transcription at Canterbury Cathedral Archives called *Kent Hearth Tax* by Duncan Harrington, Sarah Pearson and Susan Rose (British Record Society, 2000).

Window Tax

This was imposed in 1696 and abolished in 1851.

The records give the name of the occupier and the number of windows. People who were exempt were those who did not pay church or poor rates.

Records for the Canterbury parishes are at Canterbury Cathedral Archives 1752-1788. Other parishes are at the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone and the East Kent Archives Centre at Whitfield near Dover.

Bibliography

Alcock, N, *Documenting the History of Houses* (British Records Association, Archives and the User No. 10)

Alcock, N, *Old Title Deeds* (Phillimore, 2001)

Barrat, Nick, *Tracing the History of Your House* (Public Record Office, 2001)

Bushell, P, *Tracing the History of Your House* (London, 1989)

Heritage Services Guide, *Your House and How to Trace its History* (Kent County Council)

Weblinks

Websites that give more guidance and information on tracing the history of your house include:

www.fdca.org.uk/househistory.pdf

www.history.uk.com/house_detectives

www.house-detectives.co.uk/about.htm

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/your_history/house_01.shtml

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/househistory

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/e&l/artslib/reference/househistory.html>

www.kentarchives.org.uk

www.a2a.org.uk

www.1901census.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Telephone numbers for further information

Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library

01227 865330

Canterbury Library/Local Studies Library

01227 463608

Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone

01622 694363

East Kent Archives Centre, Whitfield

01304 829306

