

## TRACING THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE OR BUILDING

How do you bring your home's history to life? Have you ever wondered who lived in your house before you? Or how it has changed or altered over time?

There are a wide range of resources available to help you find out more about your house and the people who lived in it – in archives & libraries, on specialist websites and here at the local studies centre.

### Getting started

Try to see if you can answer these questions before you start looking for specific records in the archives or online – they will help you narrow down your searches.

1. **How old is the house or building?** Get a rough estimate of how old your house is – this may be obvious by the type of architecture; there may even be a date carved into it; or you may need to read a little about the local area.
2. **Is your house listed?** If so, [the National Heritage List for England](#) contains brief details for all listed buildings.
3. **Do you have copies of your title deeds?** These can often provide information about previous sales and owners, as well as changes to the land or plot boundaries. Copies of title registers and a title plan can be obtained from the [Land Registry](#) for a small fee. Older deeds may not have survived but sometimes end up in archive collections as part of a solicitor's collection or family/estate collection.
4. **What administrative area is/was your house in?** Try to find out what administrative area your house is in now – for example Mitcham, Morden, Wimbledon; and whether this might have been different in the past. Knowing the names of the county, registration district (for births, marriages & deaths) and parish will help you to find relevant local records. If you're not sure look in the indexes of local history books that we hold at the Local Studies Centre: Wimbledon books by Richard Milward; Mitcham books by Eric Montague; Merton & Morden books by J.Goodman and E.Jowett.

For businesses or major buildings / historic houses, it is **always worth doing a Google search** – type the name of the firm / building in quote marks into the search field and this will bring up any relevant links. Also try the Google IMAGES search, for pictures of the building / and or weblinks.

Doing some **general research about the history of the area** will help you when trying to find out about an individual house. A number of published resources such as the Survey of London and Victoria County History series (VCH) can be viewed for free online at [British History Online](#) (type in the area into the search box). The VCH *History of English Places* app is a smartphone based app (ios and Android) which includes information from the VCH books. At the Local Studies Centre we hold copies of Brayley's *Illustrated Surrey* and the *Victoria County History*.

This National Archives [research guide](#) also provides an overview of resources and recommended publications.

There is free access at Merton Libraries and the Local Studies Centre to the library edition of AncestryUK whose online collections (particularly of census records) can be used to search for information in addition to our own holdings. Access to Ancestry is currently accessible to library members for free via the [e-library](#) – login using your library membership card and PIN.

## [Sources of information at Merton Heritage & Local Studies Centre:](#)

### **Map collection**

The Local Studies Centre holds a range of maps including the Ordnance Survey series for the Merton area. By comparing different maps over time, you can get an idea of when a particular property was built / demolished.

- The 1:1250 O/S maps show property numbers. These can be used in conjunction with our trade directories to identify the site of a particular property and its plot. Find the relevant street in the directory – then using this, the relevant house numbers and any references to junctions with other streets, you can get your bearings on the 1:1250 map.



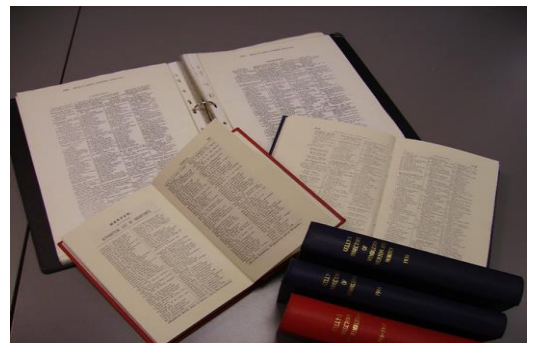
The National Library of Scotland has a large online collection of historical maps for all the UK, including history Ordnance Survey maps <https://maps.nls.uk/>. It is also worth googling 'old maps' and the name of the area you're interested in as there might be a local or regional projects that has digitised copies of old maps online.

The [\*\*Tithe Maps and accompanying Title Apportionment\*\*](#) records the land ownership of almost every landholding in the country in the middle of the C19th. Copies of all original tithe maps are held at The National Archives in Kew but have also been digitised. These are available to view free onsite or via subscription to [www.thegenealogist.com](http://www.thegenealogist.com). The Local Studies Centre collection includes copies of the tithe maps and schedules or apportionments for the parishes of Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham and Merton.

Another hugely valuable land ownership survey – taken in [\*\*1910 by the Inland Revenue's Valuation Office\*\*](#) is in the process of being digitised and made available on [thegenealogist.com](http://thegenealogist.com) – some areas are already available via its Map Explorer feature. Again originals can be viewed at The National Archives; and some copies of the maps are also held at Surrey History Centre.

### **Trade directories**

Find the relevant street and the directory entry will show the main occupant / head of household in that year. When searching for the history of a particular business, remember to check the commercial listings in the directories, as well as the a-z streets. There may also be adverts for particular businesses in the directory. As well as our own holdings, you can find directories for many areas in Leicester University's online collection of [\*\*Historic Directories\*\*](#) which is also accessible (with more search options) via [\*\*Ancestry\*\*](#).

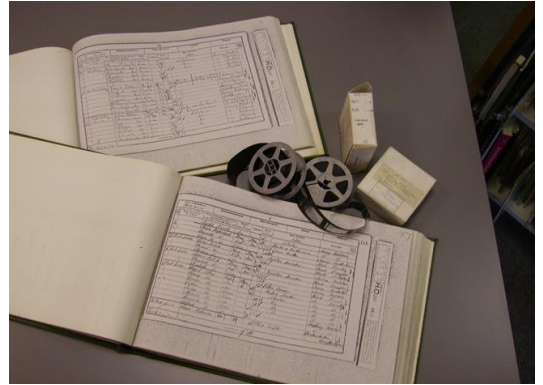


### **Electoral Registers**

If you can find the relevant street, you should be able to see a list of all those eligible to vote living at the relevant property. By looking through a run of trade directories and electoral registers, you can see when individuals moved in and when they left. Ancestry's online collection of electoral registers includes; [\*\*Sutton, Surrey, Electoral Registers, 1931-1970\*\*](#); [\*\*Surrey Electoral Registers 1832 -1862\*\*](#); [\*\*London Electoral Registers 1832-1865\*\*](#); [\*\*UK Electoral Registers, 2003-2010\*\*](#) and the [\*\*UK Poll Books and Electoral Registers 1538-1893\*\*](#)

## Census records

We hold hard copy volumes of the census from 1841-1871; and all census records up to 1911 are available via the Ancestry website. Depending on the age of the property, our collection can provide information on everyone living at a particular site from 1841 to 1871. Ancestry enables you to search by address / a person's name from 1841 to 1911. Ancestry also provides access to the 1939 Register taken on the eve of the WW2.



## Photographs

It is always worth checking our photographic collection for any images of the building in question. In addition to the albums showing major houses or local businesses, it is also worth looking at the A-Z street photos, in case the property appears within a general street scene. Images can also reveal changes in exterior décor and the layout of a building.

## Council minute & agenda books

Some of these volumes are indexed, in which case you can check entries for the relevant firm / building / street. Alternatively, the planning committee reports may contain details such as when a street was built, the architect responsible for designing houses and the costs/ builders involved.

## Card indexes

Check the House / building index in our card index. These cards carry information and book / newspaper references to particular houses / streets and buildings in the Wimbledon area.

## General Library stock

We have books on historic buildings in the borough at Class No. 728 and local industries at around 609. The Historical Society bulletins may also provide clues and information.



## Local Newspapers

Check the newspaper card indexes for references to relevant articles in the bound or microfilm versions of the local papers.

## Building plans and drainage plans

Drainage plans for many properties are usually held by local record offices and can provide evidence of what a property's footprint might have looked like as well as sometimes recording changes.

## Manorial Documents

These can be a hugely valuable resource for the house historian but can initially be tricky to navigate and not all survive. Those that do are usually in county record offices. The [Manorial Documents Register](#) lists the vast majority of known holdings. See also The National Archives [research guide](#) on the historic and legislative background to the manorial land-holding system.

## Other sources of information

Surrey History Centre in Woking <https://www.surreyarchives.org.uk/> - an increasing amount of its collection is online; and many records are also available at Ancestry.co.uk

Merton Historical Society (Mitcham, Merton & Morden)  
<http://www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk/about/Contact+us>

Wimbledon Society Museum of Local History (Wimbledon)  
<http://www.wimbledonmuseum.org.uk/>

John Innes Society (Merton Park enquiries) <https://www.johninnesociety.org.uk/>

If your property is near the boundary with another borough, it may also be worth contacting other local studies centres e.g. [Sutton](#), [Wandsworth](#), [Lambeth](#), [Croydon](#), [Kingston-upon-Thames](#).