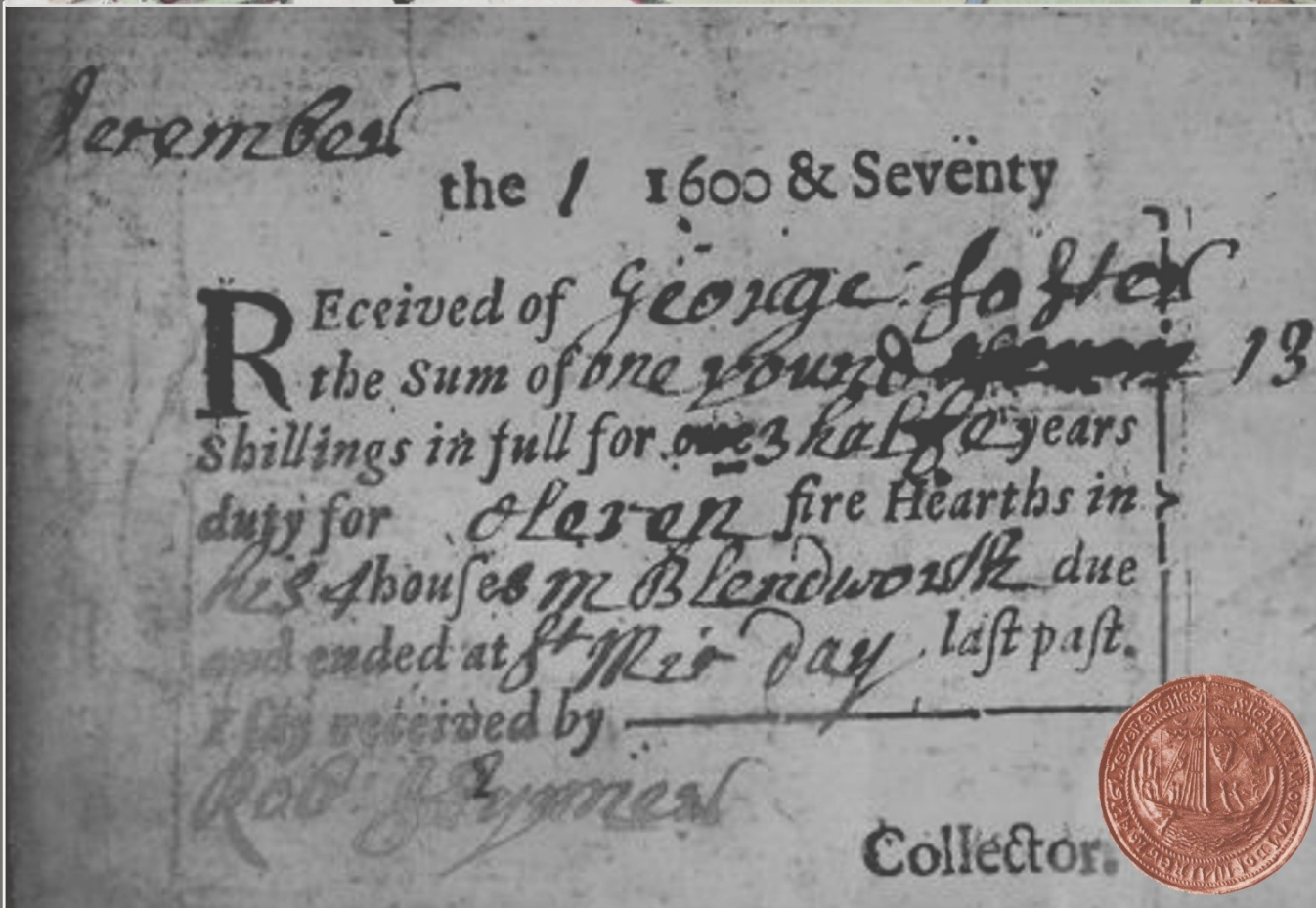


Guidance for Historic Buildings

Guide No. 3. Archival research



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Guide No.3. Archival Research

Detailed background research can be produced for any building using volunteer help, guided by a more experienced historian or archivist. Initial work can be easily undertaken and this fact sheet gives some basic guidance along with some useful web-site addresses. Research can begin by asking some simple questions, a good starting point would be:

- Does the building still have any archives on the premises?
- Does anyone have memories of living or working in the building (social media pages are useful)?
- Are there any postcards/images/leaflets related to the building, street or locality on auction sites?
- Google the address of your building or the names of the people associated with it

Visit local History Centres or Records Offices in person, as well as other archives and museums and make direct enquiries. In addition, local reference sections of libraries can prove useful and some centres offer online collections. Local archives can be searched; see <https://www.gov.uk/search-local-archives> for England and Wales and for Scotland: <https://www.scottisharchives.org.uk/explore/family-history/> whilst Northern Ireland is accessed at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/archives-family-and-local-history> . Other online archives are available at <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/> for England only. Local History Centres can provide the following information:

- Property deeds and plans
- Street and trade directories, 18th-20th centuries, both local and city-wide
- Census returns, 1841-1911 and 1921 (also available on Find My Past and Ancestry.com)
- Electoral registers, 1832 onwards
- Parish rate books, survival varies according to borough, 18th-20th centuries
- Birth (and baptism), marriage, death and burial records
- Wills, Inventories, probate, taxation and insurance records
- Hearth and window tax records; these can help identify the size of a building at one point in time, with total windows and fireplaces recorded
- Newspapers, 18th-20th centuries
- Photographs, postcards, drawings and paintings
- Tithe maps and apportionments (also available online at <https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/> but a subscription is needed)
- Estate maps are also available in person at local records office

Bomb damage maps are available for London at: <https://www.layersoflondon.org/map/overlays/bomb-damage-1945> but it is worth checking other archives. A Nationwide map was available but has since been withdrawn.

Local history societies can be very useful, with journals and newsletters available as well as lectures. Sometimes they have social media pages which are useful for sourcing old photos and reminiscences, see: <https://www.local-history.co.uk/> which is a useful site for finding local sources and groups.

The National Archives at Kew, Richmond, Surrey are the Country's largest archive where you can register for a free reader's ticket which needs to be booked in advance and is valid for three years. Here you can browse the Discovery catalogue, which also searches 2500 other archives; <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>. Some of their sources are available online but most archives will need to be visited in person.

The Historic England Archive based at the Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon can be visited in person only, with a million items searched online: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/>.

Ancestry online offers a substantial database for family and property history at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> but a subscription is needed. Find My Past and the Genealogist are other online family history archives where a subscription is needed: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/> and <https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>.

Maps and Plans are one of the most important sources for buildings in particular. A wide range of historic Ordnance Survey maps are available for the whole of the UK via the National Library of Scotland Maps: <https://maps.nls.uk/>. Early draft Ordnance Surveyors maps are available online at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ordnance_Survey_Drawings then click on the 4th link down from the top 'Bounding boxes of drawings' then left click on the bounding box that you are interested in, and select the 'library georeferencer' link within the pop up. Other historic maps to look for include John Speed: <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/maps/digital-maps/john-speed-proof-maps>, Yeakell and Gardiner for Sussex: <https://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A80922> and John Cary for England and Wales: <https://www.antiquemapsandprints.com/categories/maps-by-cartographer/cary-john>.

The Charles Goad Fire Insurance Plans of Scottish Towns are very detailed maps, drawn between the 1880s-1940s and are available online at: <https://maps.nls.uk/towns/goad/>.

The British Library houses the extensive King George III's Topographical Collection, which contains some 50,000 items, dating back from 1824 to around 1500 including maps, drawings and prints as well as letters available online at: <https://www.bl.uk/projects/kings-topographical-collection-cataloguing-and-digitisation>.

Aerial photographs dating back to the Second World War can be inspected at: <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/> as well as: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/> and also: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/>.

The Victoria County Histories list important buildings and gives encyclopaedic histories of each county, including archaeological records as well as information on the built environment, topography and landscapes across England. Copies are often available at local libraries: <https://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history>.

How to record your research: top tips

- Search the catalogue before visiting an archive in person
- It is important to know that property names sometimes change over time, so look for potential alternatives rather than searching only the current name
- Remember to take pencils and paper with you to the archives: pens are usually not allowed

- Use your phone/camera to photograph documents and images you consult in the archives (check you are allowed first; some centres will charge for a photography licence for this). Digital copies save time and paper and are more flexible than print-outs.
- Photograph or write down the reference and source of every document or image of interest as you look at them; there is nothing more frustrating than having to retrace your steps. It is important to always cite your source for copyright purposes.
- Try to get into good habits of keeping track of your research from the start by setting up a Word document for your research and save any information into the document, by transcribing, cutting and pasting or using the snipping tool: PCs: Windows logo+Shift+S or Apple: Shift + Command + 3.
- Set up a folder for each subject so that you can save files straight into the folder, both photos you have taken and downloadable files and use the source as your title caption when saving.
- Don't expect to find everything you are looking for and be prepared for sources to contradict each other.

Permissions and reproduction of sources

ALL archives and libraries have policies about the use and re-use of digital copies of items in their collections. When accessing the collections, you agree to follow the policies and always ASK if you are unsure. For example, here is the policy of The National Archives:

Digital copies of documents

- *The use of copies of records downloaded from our website using Discovery is subject to the following conditions.*

Digital copies of documents may only be used for:

- *private study or research for a non-commercial purpose*
- *education purposes; in the course of instruction or examination, or in preparation for instruction or examination (by either the giver or receiver of instruction). Copies may be used, and further copies of those copies may be made for this purpose.*
- *Applications for permission for any other use should be addressed to the image library.*

Useful Books

David Olusoga and Melanie Backe-Hansen, *A House Through Time* (2020) Emily Cole, ed.

Nikolaus Pevsner Architectural Guides; *Buildings of England*. These are available for individual counties and usually list important and designated buildings in the area.

Nick Barrett, *Tracing the History of your House* (2004).

Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments: Principles and Practice, English Heritage (2010).

Gibson, J.S.W, *The Hearth Tax, Other Later Stuart Tax Lists and the Association Oath Rolls*, Federation of Family History Societies, 1996.

Grannum, K., and Taylor, N., *Wills and Probate Records: A Guide for Family Historians*, The National Archives, 2009.