

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 9

Tracing the History of Your House

1. Introduction

Finding out about your house's history can be fascinating and very rewarding. Historical sources may tell you about:

- the history of the building's structure
- the use of the building
- the owners and occupants of the building
- the site, before the house was built.

Be prepared to find that research is time consuming and that some historical sources may be quite complicated to use and interpret.

Street numbering is a relatively recent development. Often the only way that you can identify a property is by the names of owners or occupiers, or by a description of its site in relation to neighbouring landmarks. For this reason, it is important to collect information about adjoining features, such as roads and rivers. Start with known facts and work backwards in time.

Most of the sources mentioned below are held by the Norfolk Record Office (**NRO**) or the Norfolk Heritage Centre (**NHC**), Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich, NR2 1AW (email <norfolk.studies.lib@norfolk.gov.uk> tel. 01603 774740).

We produce a free leaflet containing general information about using the Record Office. This information is also available on our website. Some records held by the NRO are available on microfilm or fiche. Otherwise, you can usually see the original documents in the manuscript section of our searchroom. We advise you to book a map table in advance of your visit if you wish to look at maps or other very large documents. We do not have a booking system for microfilm and fiche readers.

You can search many of the **NRO**'s catalogues online *via* our website <<http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>>.

2. Preliminary steps

Start by asking neighbours whether they know anything about the history of your house. Then look at the property itself. Documentary sources are unlikely to tell you exactly when it was built, or when major alterations took place, but architectural features may help you to answer these questions. Some of the books mentioned in section 10 include chapters on architecture. The Norfolk Heritage Explorer website <<http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk>> has a section on tracing the history of houses, including advice on how to date a building from building materials and styles. From the home page, select 'click here to explore more' and then 'how to...' from the left hand menu.

Members of the Norfolk Historic Buildings Group <<http://www.nhbg.fsnet.co.uk/>> are keen to survey historic buildings in the county and can provide reports interpreting their histories. You can contact the group through the website or c/o Dr Adam Longcroft, Centre for Continuing Education, UEA, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, telephone 01603 592261.

Check whether there is any published information about the property. The **NHC** has many local history books. If the building is of special historical or architectural interest, consult Pevsner's *Buildings of England* (**NRO** and **NHC**) and the Department of the Environment's *Lists of Buildings of Architectural or Historical Interest*, which should be held by your local District Council.

There may be information about an historic building at the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER). The NHER's Secondary Files include detailed reports, photographs and other records and can be consulted by prior appointment during normal office hours. Contact NHER at Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, Union House, Gressenhall, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 4DR, telephone 01362 869282, email archaeology+environment@norfolk.gov.uk An online public access version of the NHER, Norfolk Heritage Explorer, is available online at <www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk>. This will tell you whether any information about a house or building is held by the NHER.

The National Monuments Records Centre holds descriptions of listed buildings in England, as well as thousands of photographs of buildings, 1860s to the present; aerial photographs, 1930s to the present; and survey reports on specific buildings. Contact the Centre at Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon, SN2 2GZ (tel. 01793 414600, website <<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/nmr>> email <nmrinfo@english-heritage.org.uk>).

3. Title deeds

Read through the deeds to the property, if you can gain access to them. They should include short descriptions of the property and its location and will also name former owners and occupiers. Bundles of deeds may include abstracts of title, which may contain extracts from earlier deeds which no longer survive. There may also be an enfranchisement deed or other evidence that the building was once copyhold (i.e., that it belonged to a manor). In this case earlier records of ownership may be in the manor court rolls and books, described in section 6. The books by Dibben, Alcock and Barratt, (listed in section 10) will help you to interpret your deeds.

The **NRO** holds thousands of title deeds, but many relate to estates presently or formerly owned by large public, private, or ecclesiastical landowners. References to them are in the places card index in the searchroom and in our online catalogue. Deeds enrolled before the Clerk of the Peace or the courts of the city of Norwich or the boroughs of King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth survive for various dates from 1280 to 1887; please ask for details.

About two thirds of property titles in England and Wales are registered with the Land Registry. The information on the register includes a note of the location and extent of the property, the current owner's name and address, and details of any mortgages or rights of way. Copies of title plans and

registers held in electronic format can be downloaded from the Land Registry's website <<http://www.landreg.gov.uk>>. A fee is charged for this service. Alternatively, contact the Kingston-Upon-Hull District Land Registry, Earle House, Portland Street, Hull, HU2 8JN (tel. 01482 223244) for a copy of the information on the register.

4. Maps

By checking maps of different dates to see if your property is marked, you may be able to work out roughly when it was built. Changes in the size and shape of the building may also be shown. Some maps also include names of owners and occupiers.

- 4.1 **Ordnance survey maps (NHC)**. Work back through successive editions – the earliest generally date from the mid to late nineteenth century. Copies of these and other relevant printed maps (**NHC**) may help you to interpret older manuscript maps, which often have few landmarks recognisable today.
- 4.2 **Tithe maps, 1836-c.1850, (NRO)** show individual buildings and field boundaries and usually cover the whole parish. They come with an apportionment, which gives the names of the owners and occupiers of each property. They survive for almost every parish. Most are available on microfilm.
- 4.3 **Enclosure maps and awards, c.1750-1850, (NRO)** are also large scale plans, which give details of land ownership, highways, footpaths and boundaries. They do not exist for all parishes and may not cover the whole parish.
- 4.4 **Private estate maps (NRO)** survive for some parishes from the sixteenth century onwards. They generally cover property belonging to one individual only, but sometimes mention owners of adjoining properties as well.
- 4.5 **Road order maps, 1773 onwards, and deposited plans, 1809-1952 (NRO)**. Road orders were made to close or divert roads and footpaths, whilst deposited plans show land affected by Parliamentary Bills concerning railways, canals, turnpike roads etc. These records include names of owners (and sometimes occupiers) of land affected by the proposed schemes.
- 4.6 **Sale particulars, c.1800 onwards, (NRO and NHC)** describe properties for sale. They often contain maps and some include photographs.

For all **NRO** maps and sale particulars, check the online catalogue at <<http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>>. For maps, click on the 'maps' link from the 'set searches' pull down menu. For sale particulars, select the 'advanced search' and try a combined search on the parish name (e.g., Diss) in the 'anytext field', selecting 'sale particulars' from the 'category' pull down menu. Some catalogues are not yet included in the electronic catalogue, so for maps you

should also check the map card index in the searchroom, whilst for sale particulars, see also the places card index.

You can look at eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Norfolk maps and twentieth-century aerial photographs of Norfolk online *via* the Norfolk E-Map Explorer website <<http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk>>. This site enables you to view and compare first edition Ordnance Survey maps and other printed maps of the county; tithe maps; some enclosure maps; and aerial photographs from surveys made of the county in 1946 and 1988.

5. Compiling a list of owners and occupiers

Try to identify the names of owners and occupiers for key dates, e.g. by checking the tithe map of the 1830s-1840s or the registers of duties on land values, c.1910 (described in no. 5.4, below). Work forwards and backwards from these dates to build up a list of inhabitants, using the following sources:

- 5.1 Directories (NHC and NRO)** were published intermittently for Norfolk from the early nineteenth century onwards and for Norwich from 1783. They include selective lists of the principal residents and tradesmen of each place. They are most useful for urban areas, where street names and numbering make it easier to identify a particular property. You can see many Norfolk directories online at <<http://www.norfolksources.norfolk.gov.uk>>
- 5.2 Census records, 1841-1901 (NRO and NHC)** list the names and occupations of those present in the building on census night. They are arranged by place and then by street. The Norfolk censuses are available on microfilm at **NRO** and **NHC**. You can also search the 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 censuses at <www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census/> and <www.ancestry.co.uk>. Initial searching is free of charge and will give you a transcript of (usually) limited information from the original entry. You will need to subscribe to download images of original entries. Alternatively, you can access the Ancestry website free of charge *via* computers at the Norfolk Record Office and at Norfolk libraries (including the Norfolk Heritage Centre).
- 5.3 Electoral registers** begin in the 1830s and record the names of people qualified to vote. They are arranged by electoral division, polling district and then either alphabetically by voter or by street. The **NRO** has the following electoral registers:
- ◇ Norfolk County, 1845-1975
(all on microform)
 - ◇ Norwich, 1832, 1920-80
(original registers; see list N/TC 66).
 - ◇ King's Lynn, 1834-1901, 1918-75
(on microform; King's Lynn is included in the Norfolk County electoral registers from 1918 onwards).

- ◇ Great Yarmouth, 1832-1975
(on microform, 1832-1915, 1949-75. For original registers, 1918-39, see list Y/TC 20. Yarmouth is included in the Norfolk County electoral registers from 1949 onwards).

The **NRO** holds electoral registers for the county, 1974 to the present (see list DC). These include Yarmouth, but not King's Lynn and West Norfolk, nor Norwich. However, the post 1974 registers have not been bound into volumes, so it is easier to use the copies at the **NHC**. The **NHC** has Norwich registers, 1834 to the present and county registers, 1832 to the present. King's Lynn Library holds Lynn registers, 1846 to the present.

5.4 Taxation and rating records may help you to establish when different individuals lived in the house. Changes in the assessment levied on the property may reflect the extension or division of the building. Consult the following sources:

- **Land tax records (NRO)** are arranged by parish and list the names of owners and occupiers and the amount of tax paid. However, from 1798 onwards, land tax could be redeemed on payment of a lump sum, so the records may not include all properties. The NRO has the following land tax returns:
 - ◇ Norfolk County, 1767-1832
(on microfiche; see list of County Land Tax records on microfiche).
 - ◇ Norwich, 1710-1832
(on microfiche; see list of Norwich City Records on microfilm/fiche case 23).
 - ◇ King's Lynn, 1693, 1702-5
(on microfiche; see list of King's Lynn Borough Records on microfilm/fiche).
 - ◇ Great Yarmouth various dates, 1750-1949
(not on microfilm/fiche; see *Guide to the Great Yarmouth Borough records* p.53).
- **Registers of duties on land values** (also called the 'Domesday Books') c.1910 (**NRO**). Under the 1910 Finance Act, a valuation was made of all properties in England and Wales. The Domesday Books give a brief description of each property, the names of its owner and occupier and a note of its value. Properties are shown on large scale Ordnance Survey maps, but these are only available for the western half of the county. For more information, see list P/DLV. More detailed records and maps are held by The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office), Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, TW9 4DU (tel. 020 8876 3444, website <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>>. For more information, see The National Archives's research guide, *Valuation Office Records: The Finance (1909-1910) Act* available online at <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/researchguidesindex.asp?j=1>>

- **Rate assessments (NRO)** survive for some places from the late seventeenth century until the mid twentieth century. They are mainly found amongst parish records. Early poor rate lists generally record only the occupier's name and the sum assessed. Descriptions of properties may not be given, and, even in later rate books, may be imprecise. After 1834, the names of owners appear and rate assessments are commonly entered in separate books. Rate books may be arranged alphabetically by owner or street: the latter is more common from the late nineteenth century. For further information see lists for Norwich City, Great Yarmouth Borough, Poor Law Unions, District Councils, Parish Councils and Parish records.
- **Hearth tax assessments** survive for various dates between 1662 and 1674. For each parish, they list the names of each householder and the number of hearths in the house. The records are held by The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office), Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, TW9 4DU (website <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>> tel. 020 8876 3444). The **NRO** holds copies of the Norfolk hearth tax returns on microfilms MF 1525-1527. A 1671 assessment for Norwich is on microfilm MF/RO 416/8. The returns for 1664 and 1666 are published in *Norfolk Genealogy* volumes 15 and 20, available in the **NRO's** searchroom. Hearth tax exemption certificates for Norwich, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Thetford, 1670-4, are published in *Norfolk Hearth Tax*, eds. Peter Seaman, John Pound and Robert Smith (British Record Society and Norfolk Record Society, 2001). This volume is available on the **NRO's** searchroom shelves with the Norfolk Record Society series.

6. Copyhold property

Manor court rolls or books record the transfer of copyhold land, by sale or by inheritance, from person to person. The records may begin as early as the mid-thirteenth century. They commonly survive from the seventeenth century up to the abolition of copyhold property in 1925. Before 1733 they are usually in Latin. Entries describe the property, giving the names of the new and the previous tenant, as well as the date when the previous tenant was admitted. It is therefore possible to trace the property back, owner by owner. Many manor court rolls and books are on microfilm.

Other records of a manor may include surveys which describe the land belonging to the manor, plot by plot. Rentals (lists of tenants and the rents they pay) may also describe individual properties.

All manorial records held by the **NRO** should be listed in the places card index or in the draft list of Norfolk Manors ('Mandy') in the searchroom. Many are included in the online catalogue <<http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>>. On the advanced search page, try a combined search on parish name in the anytext field, selecting 'manorial records' from the category pull down menu. Some manorial records are still in private hands. The Manorial Documents Register contains information on the whereabouts of many manor court rolls and books. The register is maintained by the National Register of Archives,

now part of The National Archives (tel. 020 7242 1198.) You can search the register for Norfolk online at <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mdr/>>.

7. Wills and probate inventories

Bequests in wills may mention houses or other property. Probate inventories list and value household furnishings and other goods of the deceased, often room by room. The **NRO** holds registered copies of wills proved locally, 1370-1941, and inventories submitted to local courts, 1553-1849. Pre-1926 records are on microfilm. Digital images of wills proved in Norfolk, 1800-57, are also available online at <<http://www.norfolksources.norfolk.gov.uk>>. There are printed name indexes to probate records, 1370-1858, on the NRO searchroom shelves. We are in the process of adding these name indexes to our online catalogue <<http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>>. About a third of them have been included so far.

8. Plans and architectural drawings

8.1 Architectural drawings. The **NRO** holds some collections of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century architects' drawings, notably those of H.C. Boardman. References to these are in the online catalogue at <<http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>>. On the search page, try a combined search on parish or architect's name in the 'anytext field', selecting 'architectural/building plans' from the 'category' pull down menu. Also check the places, map and architects' names card indexes; the subject card index under 'architectural drawings'; and the persons card index under the architect's name. Plans survive for few buildings erected before the late 1800s.

8.2 Building control plans and planning applications. Since the late nineteenth century, new buildings and major alterations to existing properties have required local authority approval. Plans and supporting papers may have been lodged with the local building control or planning departments. We hold plans for the following districts (for other areas, please contact the relevant district council):

- **Norwich City Council.** The NRO has Norwich City Council building control plans, 1877-1988 (see list N/EN 12) and planning applications, 1949-76, 1980-6 (see list N/P 2).

We have the following finding aids to these very large series:

- ◇ Indexed registers to building control plans, 1893-1952 (see list N/EN 31, available on microfilms MF 977-978)
- ◇ Indexes to building control plans, 1877-1927, 1937-66 (see list N/EN 12. A typescript list and index of plans, 1877-94, is on the searchroom shelves with list N/EN 12.)
- ◇ Indexed registers to planning applications, 1949-74 (available on microfilms MF/X/281-283).

For indexes after these dates, contact CNC Building Control Consultancy and Norwich City Council's Planning Department (addresses are given later in this section).

From 1967 onwards, the NRO has only a selection of city building control plans and planning applications, but this selection does include the plans of most new buildings. All plans from May 1967 to the present day (with a very few exceptions) have been microfilmed by Norwich City Council.

You can consult microfiche copies of the building control plans by making an appointment at CNC Building Control Consultancy, Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Norwich (tel. 01603 430100). For microfiche copies of planning applications, make an appointment with the Planning Department, City Hall, Norwich (tel. 01603 212506/7 for buildings inside the city walls and 01603 212503/4 for buildings outside the city walls). The microfiche copies of building control plans numbered 32941-44825 (May 1967-March 1974) were filmed with the planning applications and are available at the Planning Department rather than at CNC Building Control Consultancy.

- **North Norfolk District Council.** The **NRO** has building control plans, c.1898-1974, and planning applications, 1949-74, for the former Urban and Rural District Councils which now comprise North Norfolk District Council: Cromer U.D.C., Erpingham R.D.C., Sheringham U.D.C., Smallburgh R.D.C., North Walsham U.D.C., Walsingham R.D.C. and Wells U.D.C. There are indexed registers to all the districts (except North Walsham U.D.C.) on microfilms MF 526-540. For North Walsham, you will need to consult the original registers (see list DC 21/4/1-10).
- **Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk.** King's Lynn building control plans, 1883-1962, and a small number of plans for Docking Rural District, 1937-47, and Downham Rural District, 1912-47, are held at the King's Lynn Borough Archives. They may be seen there by arrangement with the Norfolk Record Office.
- **Great Yarmouth Borough Council.** The **NRO** has Great Yarmouth County Borough building control plans, 1885-1989 (accession ACC 2004/317; for plans, 1947-59, see accession ACC Great Yarmouth BCP). The plans are not yet catalogued and at least one week's advance notice is needed to see them. We have the following finding aid to these very large series: building control application registers which give the plan number, along with the address, landowner and builder (see list Y/TPL 3/1-19). Registers after this date are still held by the Planning and Development Department, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, Maltings House, Malthouse Lane, Gorleston, Great Yarmouth, NR31 0GY (telephone 01493 846396). The NRO also has building application registers for areas merged into the borough in 1974: Blofield and Flegg RDC, 1973-4, and Mutford and Lothingland RDC, 1971-4 (see list Y/TPL 3/20-22).

9. Photographs

The **NHC** has a large collection of local photographs, dating from the nineteenth century onwards. Some of these photographs are available online *via* the Picture Norfolk database of local photographs. You can access the database by searching the Norfolk Online Access to Heritage website <<http://www.noah.norfolk.gov.uk>>. The **NRO** has a relatively small collection of photographs.

The **NHC** also has aerial photographs taken in 1988, which cover most of the county, except King's Lynn, Thetford and Yarmouth. The local studies departments at King's Lynn, Thetford and Yarmouth Libraries have the 1988 aerial photographs for their own towns, as well as other photographs of their respective areas.

There may be aerial photographs of an historic building in the Norfolk Air Photo Library. This is maintained at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse by the Norfolk Landscape Archaeology Section of the Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service. Contact Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, Union House, Gressenhall, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 4DR, telephone 01362 869282, website: <<http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk>>.

There are relatively few aerial photographs of individual buildings, but two countywide vertical surveys, in 1946 and 1988, are available online via the Norfolk E-Map Explorer website <<http://www.historic-maps.norfolk.gov.uk>>.

10. For further information see:

A. Adolph, *Tracing your Home's History* (Collins, 2006) ISBN 10 0 00 721140 6

N. Barratt, *Tracing the History of your House* (Public Record Office, 2001) ISBN 1903365228

A.A. Dibben, *Title Deeds* (Historical Association, 1997) ISBN 0852780788

N.W. Alcock, *Old Title Deeds* (Phillimore, 2nd edition, 2001) ISBN 1 86077 160 2

D. Iredale & J. Barrett, *Discovering your old House* (Shire Publications 4th edition, 2001) ISBN 0747804982

N. Curren-Briggs, *Debrett's Guide to your House* (Headline Book Publishing, 1993)

N.W. Alcock, *Documenting the History of Houses* (British Records Association, Archives and the User 10, 2003) ISBN 0900222 14 X



If you need this leaflet in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the County Archivist on 01603 222599 and we will do our best to help.

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