

# Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 36

## Tracing the History of Houses in King's Lynn

### 1. Introduction

These notes briefly describe some of the main sources available locally for tracing the history of a house or other property in King's Lynn. Information leaflet 9, *Tracing the History of Your House*, also published by the Norfolk Record Office, gives more general guidance. For information about consulting the King's Lynn Borough Archives, which are held in the Town Hall complex at Lynn: see Information Leaflet 34.

Identifying your property in older documents may be far from straightforward because precise postal addresses are quite a recent development. Even in urban areas like Lynn, house numbering was rarely used in records before the twentieth century, and sometimes the numbering has been changed. In some cases, the only clue to the location of a property is the name of its owner or occupier in relation to the names associated with neighbouring properties and its relationship to adjoining streets, fleets, rivers, and other features. Because of this it is essential to work systematically from the known to the unknown.

Documentary sources are likely to tell you more about the past owners and occupiers of the property than about the history of the building's structure, and if the building is more than 120 years old may not even help establish the date of its construction with any certainty. Looking at the building itself, its style, its method of construction, and its relationship with neighbouring properties may give you some clues.

### 2. Maps

Although there are some earlier maps of Lynn, notably Henry Bell's *Groundplatt of King's Lynn*, made c. 1670, the earliest map of the town which shows the outline of individual plots with some accuracy was made by William Raistrick in 1725. Both Bell's and Raistrick's maps have been reprinted many times, both as individual facsimiles and as book illustrations, and the latter is also true of some of the most useful 19th-century printed maps of the town. The first large-scale First Edition Ordnance Survey map of Lynn appeared in 1886, and the larger scale OS maps are indispensable for the 20th century. The OS maps and many other printed maps are available in King's Lynn Library (London Road, King's Lynn PE30 5EZ, telephone 01553 772568/761393). The Norfolk Record Office, too, has good copies of many of the printed maps among its holdings.

The Norfolk Record Office has both manuscript and printed maps for Lynn, although some of these either show the town on a small scale as part of a map of a larger area, or relate only to part of the town - sometimes only to the site of a single house. They include tithe maps for South Lynn, 1839, and for the parish of St Margaret, 1851, but these do not show the most densely built areas because they were not subject to tithes. More useful for the built-up

streets is a map made by William Newham for the Paving Commissioners in 1806: this is on a large scale and shows the boundaries of individual houses. Plans produced to accompany sale particulars are examples of maps showing only one property or one owner's estate. The county series of deposited plans, 1809-1952, may help if the property is adjacent to a present or former railway or docks or other public development, since they include names of owners (and sometimes occupiers) of land affected by the proposed schemes. There are very few original maps in the Borough Archives, but copies of some printed and manuscript maps are available for reference in the searchroom at King's Lynn Borough Archives.

### **3. Census Returns and Electoral Registers**

From 1841 onwards, the census returns (available at the Norfolk Record Office, King's Lynn Library and the Norfolk Heritage Centre in the Millennium Library, Norwich) name the occupants of each house on the night of the census. Registers of electors, mainly for local, not parliamentary, elections, 1834-1915, are in the King's Lynn Borough Archives; they are also on microfilm to 1901 in the Norfolk Record Office. From 1918, King's Lynn registers of electors are with the Norfolk County series in the Norfolk Record Office. King's Lynn Library also has a series of parliamentary electoral registers from 1846.

### **4. Tax Lists, Rentals and Rates**

Some tax assessments and rentals for various dates from the late 13th to the early 19th centuries are in the King's Lynn Borough Archives (there are some especially full tax assessments for 1689-1694 and 1702-1705 which are also on fiche at the Norfolk Record Office). Also available at the King's Lynn Borough Archives are indexed transcripts by Peter Sykes of rentals for 1604-1605, 1622-1623 and 1764 and the poll tax lists, 1689 and 1702, while his 'Notes on Houses in the Riverside Streets of King's Lynn and Their Known Owners and Tenants up to 1849' and his 'Notes on Houses in High Street, King's Lynn, and Their Known Owners and Tenants up to 1974' are invaluable for properties in the streets near the River Great Ouse and on the High Street.

The Norfolk Record Office has good series of poor rate books for St Margaret's parish, 1727-1899, and for South Lynn, 1820-1919: they are among the records of King's Lynn Poor Law Union, and are on microfilm up to the mid 19th century. The rate books are arranged by ward and do not include street names until the 1830s. After 1835, the location is given and from 1855 the arrangement is by street rather than by ratepayers' name. There are also church rate lists in St Margaret's parish records in the Norfolk Record Office. Registers of duties on land values, known as 'Domesday Books', c.1910, (Norfolk Record Office) provide an exceptionally comprehensive survey of property for a single year: they include a brief description of each property, the names of its owner and occupier and its value.

## **5. Title Deeds**

If you own the house, or know the owner, you may be able to see any deeds which pass with the property. Even if they do not go back very far they may include abstracts of title containing extracts from earlier documents. Deeds also survive in many different archives: deeds to the Borough's Corporate estates from the thirteenth century and some private deeds enrolled in the fourteenth century (in the Red Register) and in a separate series from 1571 are in the King's Lynn Borough Archives, and there are Lynn deeds from the medieval period onwards in several collections in the Norfolk Record Office, including the archives of Norwich Cathedral.

## **6. Wills and Probate Inventories**

Once you know the names of some of the families associated with the property, you can use the name indexes to wills and probate inventories to try identify any which might mention it. Inventories can be especially valuable because they list and value the household furnishings and other goods of the deceased, often room by room. Wills and inventories for the two local probate courts covering Lynn up to 1858 (Norwich Archdeaconry and Norwich Consistory Courts) are indexed by name and are available on microfilm in the Norfolk Record Office.

## **7. Architects' Plans**

It is quite rare to find architectural drawings for ordinary houses built before the late nineteenth century, when building control regulations required plans for new developments and major alterations to be submitted for approval to the local authority. Plans submitted to King's Lynn Borough Council, 1883-1959, and registers of them, 1883-1974, are in the King's Lynn Borough Archives.

## **8. Prints, Drawings, Paintings and Photographs**

Artists, illustrators and photographers have left an invaluable, if incomplete, visual record of the changing townscape. There are collections of photographs in the Libraries, and in Lynn Museum (Market Street, King's Lynn PE30 1NL, telephone 01553 **check this change from** 775001), which also has prints, drawings and some paintings of the town.

## **9. Listed Buildings and Other Special Cases**

For listed buildings, it may be worth consulting the National Monuments Record Centre at Swindon for photographic and other records. Buildings owned by the Corporation, the Church, or another large landowner are likely to be documented in the archives of the relevant body or person. Licensing records for public houses, 1872-1965, are at the Norfolk Record Office.

## 10. Published Sources

Directories, published intermittently for Norfolk from the early nineteenth century, include the addresses of many private residents and tradesmen: although they are selective, they can help to identify a street in records which do not name them. King's Lynn Library has a good series of directories, and many can also be seen in Norfolk Heritage Centre, Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich, NR2 1AW (tel. 01603 774740).

Vanessa Parker, *The Making of King's Lynn: secular buildings from the 11th to the 17th century* (1971) uses both documentary and archaeological evidence to interpret the history of Lynn's street layout and buildings. Although not infallible, the book is still a useful starting point. For information about other published works on Lynn and its buildings, see *A Bibliography of Norfolk History* (volumes I and II, 1975 and 1991) or consult the libraries at Lynn and Norwich.



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.

Produced by:

Norfolk Record Office  
The Archive Centre  
Martineau Lane  
Norwich  
NR1 2DQ

Tel: 01603 222599  
Fax: 01603 761885  
E-mail: [norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk)  
Website: <http://archives.norfolk.gov.uk/>



© Norfolk Record Office, May 2006