

10 TOP TIPS

# House history

May is Local and Community History Month, so we asked Paula Kitching of the Historical Association for tips on researching the history of where you live

## 1. GO TO YOUR LIBRARY

Your local library will usually have a local history section that can tell you about the area in which you live and for how long it has been inhabited. There has been rapid housing development over the past 100-150 years and you need to find out how long your house and street have been around.

## 2. VISIT YOUR LOCAL ARCHIVES

Local archives are different to the local library, though they are often housed together. Such archives can provide official information about your house, including ownership records, land and building disputes, and when building rights were granted or decided. You can search for your local archives at <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive> or ask at your library.

## 3. SEARCH THE LAND REGISTRY

Even if you don't own your house, someone does own it – which means its details will be listed officially with the Land Registry (check council planning departments or local archives). This listing will provide information on what type of land it was originally, and may show the builder's details. It may also reveal whether the house has been altered over the years, or if its purpose has changed.

## 4. LOOK AT OLD MAPS

Old maps in local libraries or archives can help you understand how your area has developed and even why a street has a certain name – for example, Well Street is most likely the site of a local well.



## 5. FIND OUT ABOUT HOUSEBUILDERS

Many small towns and villages have areas developed by one local builder, who may well have a street or estate named after them. If you can find this out – ask your local librarian – you'll discover a lot about the original style of the house and who it may have been built for.

## 6. CHECK OUT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The National Archives in Kew, west London, holds all major Government and national records (and some local records). Although information specific to your house is more likely to be in your local archives (unless you live in a historic mansion), you can find important documents relating to your area and possibly some wider context about how or why your house was built in that location and style.

## 7. GO THROUGH NEWSPAPER RECORDS

Newspapers from the past are often found at the local library or archive, and you can also find most of the UK's newspaper archives at the British Library ([www.bl.uk/collection-guides/newspapers](http://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/newspapers)). In the early- to mid-20th century most towns had at least one local paper and cities had two or three. Newspaper records might tell you if your house has been involved in any incidents, from crimes to households seeking lost pets.

## 8. VIEW THE CENSUS

Census data can reveal previous occupiers and other details such as whether your home has been converted from a business. You can view census data in person for free at the National Archives or online (for a fee) at [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) or [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk).

## 9. TRY ONLINE GENEALOGY SITES

Sites such as Ancestry, Find My Past and others (find them with an online search) have increased the amount of information they can provide. They are great for finding out who lived at your home or street before and what they did.

## 10. JOIN A LOCAL OR NATIONAL HISTORY GROUP

These often have members who already know a lot about your local area, or can advise on how to find out more. They may also have talks about local history that put your house into context.

## TAKE IT FURTHER

For more about local and community history, as well as Historical Association branches, visit [www.history.org.uk/historian/categories/local-community](http://www.history.org.uk/historian/categories/local-community)