

Buildings History

Introduction

The study of the history of individual buildings is often a lengthy process of gathering pieces of information from a wide variety of sources. It may prove impossible to discover exactly when a house was built, the name of the builder or to trace the building's history before the end of the eighteenth century. However, studying the building's architectural features by reference to books on architecture may help to give an approximate date of building.

Useful books:

- *Tracing the History of your House*, N Barratt (2001)
- *How Old is Your House?*, P Cunnington (1988)
- *Devon Building*, P Beacham (1990)
- *Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture*, R W Brunskill (1987)
- *Discovering Cottage Architecture*, C Powell (1984)
- 'The Devonshire Cottage', B W Oliver, *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* (Vol. 81, 1949)
- *Devon's Traditional Buildings*, Devon County Council Planning Department (1978)
- *Devon's Heritage - Buildings and Landscape*, Devon County Council Planning Department (1982)
- *The Pattern of English Building*, A Clifton Taylor (1987)

Articles on local buildings in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, *Devon & Cornwall Notes and Queries* and the Devon Library Service newspaper cuttings files

An older building may be listed. The Local Studies Centre holds catalogues of listed buildings for many north Devon parishes. These contain details on the age and structure of each building described.

Title Deeds

A useful first step is to read the title deeds of the property. These may be in the owner's possession or that of their solicitor or building society. These will provide the names of the owners and sometimes the tenants of the property, as well as describing the property. Plans may be included.

Title deeds may also contain an abstract of title that details other, earlier deeds not transferred with the property.

The North Devon Record Office holds many collections of title deeds dating from the twelfth century to the twentieth century. Searchers will find details of these collections in the office's place index and the lists of collections which are kept in the searchroom area. An information leaflet explaining words used in title deeds and legal terms in property records is also available.

Useful books:

- *Old Title Deeds*, N W Alcock (1986)
- *Title Deeds: 13th - 19th Centuries*, A A Dibben (1971)

Maps and Plans (partly non-Record Office material)

It is useful to refer to successive editions of the Ordnance Survey maps of larger scales since block plans of buildings are shown. Alterations to the outline shape of a building may appear on different editions.

Available on microfiche are the Ordnance Survey first edition (c.1890) and second edition (c.1905) 25 inch to one mile maps (with some originals held by the North Devon Record Office), as well as first edition 6 inch to one mile maps for north Devon (c.1890). The Local Studies Centre also has more recent editions at both scales for north Devon, and a digital version of modern Ordnance Survey mapping for the county of Devon. The North Devon Athenaeum holds a number of other maps and plans of the area, including a set of the first edition 6 inch maps.

The Record Office holds microfiche of tithe maps with their apportionments, which date from c.1840 and cover whole parishes. The maps show the land of the parish divided up into numbered properties. The apportionments give details of owner, occupier, land use, etc. for each property. Tithe maps are available at the Record Office on microfiche for the whole county of Devon and the office also holds original tithe maps and apportionments for some north Devon parishes. Tithe maps and apportionment for the whole of Devon are also available online at www.devon.gov.uk/tithemaps.htm.

In addition, the Record Office holds several hundred maps and plans for particular estates and areas within parishes, as well as individual buildings, in north Devon and adjacent areas of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. Details of these maps will be found in the Office's place and subject indexes. A number of other maps, particularly of the Barnstaple area, are held by the North Devon Athenaeum.

Rate Books

The North Devon Record Office has various types of rate book among its collections of parish and local authority records. Rate books generally record the owners and the tenants of property and rates payable with a brief description of the property (usually a farm or estate name). It may not be possible to identify cottages or unnamed houses from the rate books and complete addresses (i.e. number and street in towns) may not be given before the later nineteenth century.

Trade Directories and Census Returns (non-Record Office material)

The Local Studies Centre holds published trade directories for Devon, 1830 - 1939. The directories list the wealthier residents and tradespeople in each parish and are useful for tracing the occupancy of farms, named houses and businesses in towns. They can be used in conjunction with the Census returns, 1841 - 1901, to give a complete picture of the inhabitants of a property at the time the census was taken. The returns, every ten years from 1841 to 1901, for north Devon are available on microfilm and/or microfiche. The censuses from 1841 – 1911 are also available online via Find My Past and Ancestry.com.

Electoral registers

Electoral registers (lists of voters) for the whole of Devon, 1832 - 1900, are held by the North Devon Record Office on microfilm. A full address is not usually given unless it is the name of a farm, and searchers should note that relatively few people (mostly men) were entitled to vote until the later nineteenth century.

Tax Assessments (partly non-Record Office material)

Land tax assessments for Devon parishes, 1780 - 1832, are held by the North Devon Record Office on microfilm. The returns give the names of owners and occupiers of property in each parish with a brief description of the property (for example the name of a farm). Properties in towns and villages are more difficult to identify if they have no name. The Devon hearth tax of 1674 has been published and is available in the Local Studies Library, but it does not give the addresses of buildings. Transcripts of other taxation records are available.

Estate and Manorial Records

A number of local estate records are held by the North Devon Record Office. These collections include estate rentals and surveys which list tenants and describe farms. There may also be family wills and settlements concerning property, estate accounts, deeds, leases and maps. Manorial records include manor court books and copy court rolls, which records leases to tenants of the lord of the manor. Some manorial records and deeds are written in Latin. Help with reading such documents is available from the North Devon Record Office staff.

Useful books

- *Manorial Records*, P D A. Harvey (1984)
- *Latin for Local History*, E A Gooder (1970)

Sale Catalogues

Sale catalogues describe buildings, farms and other property and often give the names of tenants and details of land use. They may also include maps. The North Devon Record Office holds numerous sale catalogues from the middle of the nineteenth century on and these are included in the Office's place index. The North Devon Athenaeum also holds some sale catalogues as well as an index to the North Devon Journal 1850 - c.1895, which includes details of advertisements for property sales and lettings.

Other Sources (partly non-Record Office material)

Illustrations of buildings are listed in the North Devon Record Office place index. Aerial photographs of the area are also available for consultation. There is also a place index to the Beaford Photographic Archive of over 8000 copies of old photographs of the north Devon area available online. Files of newspaper cuttings, including some twentieth century property sales and information about listed buildings in individual parishes, are maintained by the Library staff in the Local Studies Centre. The 'Domesday' valuation books compiled under the 1910 Finance Act list owners and occupiers of property in north Devon parishes.

Other collections that may be of interest to the historian of buildings include the records of several local businesses or societies, such as The Wheelwrights Museum, Dolton (ref. B267) whose records contain notes on Dolton buildings as well as sale catalogues, photographs etc.; the Planning Department of Devon County Council (ref. B289); the archives of local authorities (which may contain records of planning applications), including the County Surveyor, Northern Division (ref. 1925), HM District Valuer, North Devon Assessment Committee (ref. B101) and various charities, including the Bideford Bridge Trust (refs 4274, B68 and BBT).

Special Types of Building

Advice on sources for vicarages and rectories: toll houses; school houses; commercial and industrial buildings is available from staff. See also the North Devon Record Office guide to sources for the history of public houses.

North Devon Record Office
Library and Record Office
Tuly Street
Barnstaple
EX31 1EL

Tel: 01271 318792

Email: northdevon@swheritage.org.uk

Website: www.swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives

South West Heritage Trust is a charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in England.
Registered office: Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, Somerset TA2 6SF
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