

Discovering Old Welsh Houses

A guide to researching the history of a house

1. Researching a house can be in three parts:
 - the House, the Owners, and the Occupiers – these can be worked on at the same time.
 - Notes can be stored in a loose leaf file, for the convenience of a researcher or on a computer.
 - NB Write details of venue, date of visit and reference/code/number of all material gathered during research. References and quotations must be included throughout.
 - Include records of searches that have not disclosed anything. (Avoids future repeats)
 - Primary sources – are actual /original documents and materials.
 - Secondary sources are books, previous research materials etc.

2. A visit to the house – may be advantageous early, during or later in the research. Careful consideration must be given to such a visit and the occasion handled sensitively.
 - If the residents are Welsh speaking, it can be helpful to take a Welsh speaker along on the visit.
 - Ask if the occupiers have any material relating to the house history.
 - Ask if you may take notes relating to documents
 - Ask for permission to borrow or photograph any relevant material
 - Books written by The Royal Commission for a Shire or County may have an architect's plan and a general description of the house.
 - Consult Peter Smith's book “Houses of the Welsh Countryside”

3. The census 1841 – 1911 can be an useful starting point.
 - Census records are available to view free of charge at record offices and libraries.
 - Ancestry records are available at www.ancestry.co.uk
 - Find my past www.findmypast.co.uk
 - Address searches are not available in rural areas, only in cities.
 - Microfilm and microfiches in local record offices can be a good source of information. (1911 was digitised, but is not on microfilm)
 - Relevant documents can be emailed to home computers for later perusal.
 - Printouts can be made on site for a small charge.
 - Alternatively copy out details.

4. The location of the House.
 - Consult Ordnance Survey (OS) maps – contemporary and earlier, tithe maps, aerial photographs and record present day grid reference.
 - Farm houses, estate houses and their lands and field boundaries may change during the centuries and can be relevant to changes of ownership/tenancy.
 - Tithe maps and apportionments (1840s – exact dates vary) Copies can be found in archives and some are now on line at <http://cynefin.archiveswales.org.uk>
 - Coflein – visit www.coflein.gov.uk for plans, drawings, photographs etc. This is a project still under development.

5. Estate collections
 - Estate collections such as Mostyn or Penrhyn are rich sources of information covering all aspects of house history
 - These are found in local Record/ Archive Offices or the National Library of

Wales, Aberystwth.

6. Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths

- Registration was required by the government from 1837 onwards.
- BMD records can be found free on line at www.freebmd.org.uk
- The Ancestry web site has a different format for recording BMDs

7. Parish Registers

- Information can be available from 1530's onwards
- Early registers may be in Latin, English or Welsh
- The patronymic naming system, peculiar to Wales, may be in use. (See later notes)
- Archives may have paper transcriptions of parish registers.
- Check surrounding parishes.

8. Ecclesiastical parish records

- Registers and vestry minutes and many disparate records may be found
- Chapel records of varying detail are available in record offices or from various denomination headquarters
- Pre-census era, the registers can sometimes give house names to help identify parishioners.
- In Wales people, up until the 17th or 18th centuries, were referred to as “of the township” in which they resided making the names of particular houses unclear.
- Conwy archives' earliest record for a Conwy parish is dated 1541.
- Llanrwst parish 18th and 19th century records are on a database.

9. Electoral Rolls –

- These may be found at Record/Archive offices

10. Poor Law

- Returns of local church wardens re collection and disbursement of relief can be found in civil parish collections
- They may give names and addresses.

11. Wills

- If an estate owner had property in England and Wales the will had to be proved at Canterbury, so records of such wills can be found in the national Archive, Kew website. Access to wills on this site costs £3.50 (07/2015).
- Owners of property lying entirely in Wales have their wills stored at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. At www.llgc.org.uk It is possible to read copies of the actual wills on screen and transcribe them or you can make screenshots.
- Screen shot for PCs: Hold down the 'Alt' key (or Fn or Ctrl) and press Prt Sc. (Print Screen key).
- For MAC computers – Hold 'cmd +shift+3' or to select a specific area 'cmd+shift+4'.

12. Local taxation and payments

- Land tax. Conwy and parts of Caernarfon are on microfilm
- Hearth Tax – records are available at Caernarfon and Ruthin
- Window tax. Available at some Archive Offices.
- Rent Books – estates may have these
- Local government records – can include rentals

13 Sale Catalogues

- Auctioneer's records e.g. Roberts & Rogers Jones Auctioneers of Llanrwst are available at Llandudno archive.
- Estates being sold off in late 19th and 20th centuries resulted in the sale of many farms small holdings and cottages. Catalogues of 'lots' on sale often give names of tenants, plans and prices paid.

14. Photographs

- Sources are updating on line catalogues to include photographic collections across Wales.

15. Building Control Plans – late 19th and early 20th centuries.

- Extensions to existing houses are shown as well as new builds.

16. Solicitors' Records

- These may include conveyances, leases, tenancies, wills and many other legal agreements affecting all aspects of people's lives
- In the Conwy Archive searchable online catalogue check out CX191 and CD4 – The web site is www.conwy.gov.uk/archives

17. Archives – general comments.

- Archives/Record offices are great sources of information
- They hold collections of books, transactions, maps estate papers, birth marriages and death registers, parish records, photographs, newspaper articles, journals and microfilm/microfiche records.

18. Writing up the house history.

- Name the property with photograph, OS map reference, dendrochronology results and architectural plan.
- Give a general description of the property
- Write a brief background history of the era in which the house was built, and describe later historical events relevant to the house history.
- Allocate a chapter to each following century.
- In chronological order, record the information gathered from all sources.
- References MUST be included and are written, bracketed, immediately after the information quoted or they can be added as footnotes.
- Appendices may include family lineages, wills, etc.
- Another member of the Group should proof read the house history. This is useful in spotting errors, grammatical and spelling errors etc.
- The final digital document can be sent to Margaret Dunn & Peter Masters.
- Printed copies are eventually made available to the researchers, home owners, local Archives and the RCAHMW.