

Researching the History of Your House

Before you start...

Write down what you know. Ask other people; family members and neighbours may be able to offer information about who lived there or any changes to the property. Draw up a timeline with this information about what you think has happened to the house and who lived in it.

Look at the building itself. Look for a date marker or is it in a particular style that gives away when it was built, e.g. mid-Victorian buildings are quite ornate and gothic, whereas 1930s buildings often have cleaner lines.

Sources to use

The information you can find will depend on the type and age of property. There is no set order to use these documents and you may end up jumping between them. This guide suggests some of the main sources you may wish to try looking at.

Directories

These are a great source of information. Generally they are split into three parts: General Directory, Street Directory and Trades Directory. For the purposes of house history the street directory is the most useful, as you can search by address. Usually only the head of the household is listed. Take note – you had to pay to be in a directory. So not everyone will be listed.

We hold directories for 1782-1974 (with gaps). Street directory sections only appear from 1861.

Maps

Maps are great as they give you an instant idea of what an area was like during the period they were created. They can show you the footprint of a building, the extent of the gardens, property boundaries, the surrounding buildings and road layout. Depending on the age of a property you might be able work out when it was built using maps. It might be present on one map but missing from an earlier one.

We hold Ordnance Survey Maps, Town Plans, Fire Insurance Maps and many more.

You can also view old maps online at <http://maps.nls.uk>. These have been digitised and made available by the National Library of Scotland. They cover the whole of Scotland, and in some cases England and Wales too.

Valuation Rolls

These list properties within a local authority area and the value of that property for the purpose of collecting rates (taxes). They started in 1855 and were created annually until 1990. Rolls are still made but do not cover residential properties.

Each roll will tell you the type of property, the owner's name, the tenant's name and occupation, the value of the property and the rates due. Only the head of the household or lease holder will be listed.

We hold valuation rolls for Dundee covering 1871 and 1895-1990

You can also access valuation rolls from 1855 at the Wellgate Local History Library (on microfilm) and at the National Records of Scotland.

Electoral Rolls

Electoral Rolls list everyone who was registered to vote. There is a volume for each constituency which is then split into wards. Within each ward names are listed by address. Rolls are produced annually. Before 1873 they are sorted by surname.

We hold registers for 1939 and 1951-2011. A full run of electoral registers from 1856 onwards can be found at the Wellgate Local History Library.

Register of Sasines

Since 1617 any property transaction in Scotland has been recorded in the Register of Sasines. There is one register for each county. Dundee, as a royal burgh, had its own register until 1809. After then Dundee was in the same register as Angus. Outlying areas of Dundee that were not within the boundaries of the royal burgh would have been in the Angus register before 1809 too. Abridgement Registers contain a summary of the sale.

There is no index to the registers so they can be tricky to use. You need to work out roughly when a sale took place – you can use the other sources listed above to get a rough idea of when a property changed hands. Previous sales are often referred to in the register or abridgments so you can use this to trace it back. For the earlier registers, the minute books can be used as a sort of index.

The NRS currently hold the Dundee Burgh registers for 1639-1809. We hold abridgements for the Angus registers for 1620-1984 (include Dundee after 1809). Full registers are held by the National Registers of Scotland.

Photographs

Photographs do not exist for every building. Usually there has to be a reason for the photograph to be taken and then to be kept. Not all photographs are available online but it is a good place to start.

Try our Flickr site: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dundeecityarchives/> or the library's photopolis site: <http://photopolis.dundeecity.gov.uk/> first to see if you can find any old photographs of the area you are interested in. Alternatively you can visit our searchroom

Building Control

After the 1871 Improvement Act if you were putting up a new building in Dundee you needed to get permission. Plans for buildings had to be submitted to the Police Commissioners, and later the Council, for approval. This was to stop cramped, badly-designed buildings being put up. Rooms had to be 9 feet tall and buildings could only be 4 storeys high. The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 required planning permission to be sought from the planning authority (the Council).

Copies of Building Control and Planning records can be obtained from copy.documents@dundeecity.gov.uk.

Newspapers

You will often find notices of sale, or articles about events involving properties and the people who live in them in the local newspapers. Copies of Dundee newspapers are held at the Wellgate Local History Library. However you can search some papers up to 1955 on the British Newspaper Archive:

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk. There is a charge to use this site but you can use it for free at Dundee City Archives or any Dundee Library.

Other Collections

Depending on the type of property you are investigating other collections might be of interest, including:

- **Estate and Family collections**
- **Church records** (if an ex-manse or church)
- **School Records** (if an ex head teacher or janitors house)
- **Architects papers**—take a look at www.scottisharchitects.org.uk to see if records survive and where they are held.

Visiting the Archives

The Search Room at 14 City Square, Dundee is open to the public Monday to Friday 9.30 am-4.30 pm. An appointment is not necessary but we do advise getting in touch with us before your visit to check that we hold the records you are looking for.

Callers should first report to City Chambers reception at 21 City Square. The Search Room is down a flight of stairs and at the end of a long corridor. Special arrangements can be made for members of the public with disabilities.

Contact Us

Dundee City Archives
14 City Square
Dundee,
DD1 3BY

Email: archives@dundeecity.gov.uk
Tel: 01382 434494
Website: www.dundeecity.gov.uk/archive

Key Sources and where to find them

Source	Dundee City Archives	Dundee Local History Library	Elsewhere	Online
Directories	✓	✓		✓ (NLS)
Maps	✓	✓		✓ (NLS)
Valuation Rolls	✓		✓ (NRS)	✓ (ScotlandsPeople)
Electoral Rolls	✓	✓		
Register of Sasines	✓		✓ (NRS)	
Photographs	✓	✓		✓ (various)
Building Control			✓ (Planning)	
Newspapers		✓		✓ (BNA)

NRS – National Records of Scotland

NLS – National Library of Scotland website

BNA – British Newspaper Archive

Please contact other repositories to find out more about the records they hold and how you can access them. Some of the online access options may require a subscription or purchase of credits before documents can be viewed.