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## SUBJECT GUIDE 2 : SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF LOCAL HISTORY

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This leaflet describes some of the resources available for the study of local history in the Durham County Record Office, and it is geared specifically to County Durham's history and historical materials. Durham's history and records are, in many ways, unlike those of most English counties. The most obvious distinctive feature of its history is that, until 1836, the Prince Bishop exercised powers in the County Palatine much greater than those of the authorities in other counties. Another feature of County Durham's history which should be taken into account is the influence wielded by the Dean and Chapter of Durham through its extensive ownership of land and consequent participation in the development of the coal industry. The third significant characteristic of Durham's history is the rise and decline of the coalfield itself. These three features of the history of the county have also meant that the bodies responsible for the preservation of its records are unusually diverse: the records of the Palatinate are in London at The National Archives, those of the Bishopric and Dean and Chapter are cared for by the Archives and Special Collections Section of the University of Durham Library and the Durham County Record Office holds other local records. It is intended in this leaflet to describe only those records held in the County Record Office which are relevant to the study of the most usually researched topics. The Durham Record Office is situated in County Hall, Durham.

### Your House and Your Neighbours

What you can find out about your house depends greatly on its age. If it was built before 1939 it should be possible to find it on one of the four editions of the large-scale [1:2500] Ordnance Survey maps which the Record Office holds. The county was first surveyed at this scale in 1854-1857 and revisions took place in 1894-1897, 1912-1919 and the late 1930s. Should your house pre-date the first edition O.S. maps it may be possible to find it on a tithe plan. Such plans were made for most parishes in the late 1830s and early 1840s and show all fields and buildings and usually have attached a list of the owners and tenants. Three copies of each tithe plan were drawn and, although the Record Office does not hold a plan for every parish in the county, a comprehensive set is held in the Archives and Special Collections Section of Durham University Library.

The former inhabitants of any house may be traced in a variety of ways. There exist for large towns, usually from the late nineteenth century onwards, street directories which list most of the inhabitants.

Trade directories were published from the late 18th century onwards and list the tradesmen and more important inhabitants of each settlement. Most trade directories are, however,

selective in their lists and it is really quite unlikely that the inhabitants of a particular house will be shown. In addition, it is often difficult to identify the house of those people shown, especially in smaller settlements.

The Durham Record Office holds directories for 1827, 1828, 1829, 1834, 1848, 1851, 1855, 1865, 1879, 1890, 1902, 1910, 1914, 1921, 1925, 1929, 1934 and 1938 for the county. It also holds directories, including a street index, for Durham City for 1846-1915, 1931-1937, 1939 and 1951-1953.

Electoral registers, which list the names of all those entitled to vote house by house and street by street are also useful. It should be remembered, however, that although the series of electoral registers starts in 1832, all householders were not entitled to vote until 1867 and all men over 21 and women over 30 were not enfranchised until 1918. All women over 21 were entitled to vote from 1928. The Durham Record Office holds electoral registers for the County from 1832 to the present day.

If your house dates from before 1911 you could find its inhabitants by using the enumerators' returns for the 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 censuses. The returns show all the people in each house on census night, their relationship to each other, their ages, marital status, sex and place of birth. Of course there is a gap of 10 years between each census so it would not, by this means alone, be possible to build up a continuous picture of the inhabitants of a house. The census, in combination with directories and electoral registers may, however, enable you to do so. The census returns are closed to public inspection for a period of one hundred years, so this source can be used only for houses built before 1911. The original returns are held in London, but the Durham Record Office holds microfilm copies of the census returns for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 for the whole of the county. The Record Office also offers free access to census returns on the Ancestry Library website.

Rate books may also give some information on the inhabitants of each house. Before 1834 most property-holders were obliged to pay a rate to the parish for the upkeep of the poor. Accounts of rates paid were kept by the overseers of the poor of each parish. These were, however, usually just in the form of lists of names and amounts paid. During the nineteenth century the collection of the rate became the responsibility of the boards of guardians and ultimately this function passed to the district councils in 1925. The later rate books do give the owner's name and address of the property on which the rate was payable. The Record Office does not, however, possess complete sets of rate books for the authorities in County Durham.

A similar type of record is the Inland Revenue Valuation registers compiled in 1910. They include details of each property and names of each owner and occupier and a brief description of the property. These records are not held in the Durham Record Office for every settlement in the county.

## **Your High Street**

All the records and approaches described in the section on each individual house and its inhabitants can, of course, be used for more than one house and, thus, build up a complete picture of a street. The Ordnance Survey plans, and possibly tithe plans, show changes in buildings: the census, directories, electoral registers and rate books show changes in the people who lived there and what type of people lived in each house. It should, by using all the records mentioned above, be possible to tell when the street was built, what each building was used for, and when buildings were destroyed or changed their use. In some cases, it should

be possible to make this picture of the street more vivid by using old photographs. The Record Office has only a limited number of such photographs and usually, if at all, only for the main street of any village or town.

### **Your Village and Town**

The history of the settlements in County Durham differs in most cases from that characteristic of other English counties. Most other counties are either primarily agricultural and characterised by market towns and agricultural villages, or have been shaped by the development of large industrial towns. County Durham, however, enjoys a combination of pre-industrial villages and small mining villages, which developed very rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century. The history of the mining villages in County Durham is, therefore, comparatively short. Their physical expansion, which usually follows the opening of a colliery, can be seen by comparing successive editions of the O.S. plans. The consequent rapid increase in population can be traced by using the printed census statistics which are available for every 10 years from 1801. The Record Office holds these figures for every census except 1861. (It should be noted that no census was taken in 1941). If the village developed before 1891 the nature and place of origin of its population can be traced by using the census enumerators' returns which are available on microfilm.

The only corporate towns within the present county boundaries are Darlington and Durham and the records for both towns are held in the Record Office at County Hall.

The trade directories, especially that for the county which was published in 1894 by Francis Whellan, are useful in describing in brief the most important aspects of the history of each settlement and its schools, churches, administrative bodies and so on. More specialised aspects of a settlement's history can be traced by using log books (a diary kept by the headmaster of each school), records of the Church of England and Methodist and other non-conformist denominations. Also of use may be records of the boards of guardians (the poor relief authorities from 1834 to 1929) and district councils and their predecessors as local authorities (local boards of health and sanitary authorities). It should be stressed that records for all these institutions for every area have not necessarily survived. In addition, all records mentioned in connection with tracing the history of your house and High Street may be used in building up a picture of the village or town as a whole.

The records mentioned in connection with tracing the history of the mining villages so characteristic of Durham will also be useful in tracing the history of the longer-established villages. Their earlier history can be seen by using tithe maps and land tax returns which listed, by township, the owners and chief lessees of property worth more than £2 p.a. for the period 1759 to 1831. The land tax returns were made annually, but by no means have all survived. They do, however, give a good idea of the landownership and prosperity of many settlements from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. The registers of baptisms, marriages and burials which were kept from the sixteenth century by the Church of England are, until the introduction of civil registration in 1837, the main source for tracing the details of the size and rise and fall of population in any town or village.

It would be advisable, before consulting manuscript sources, to use the general histories of the county which provide a short description of each settlement. The standard histories of County Durham are William Hutchinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine*, 3 volumes, 1785-1794; Robert Surtees, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham*, 4 volumes, 1816-1840; William Fordyce, *The History and Antiquities of Durham*, 2 volumes, c.1855-1860; and *The Victoria County History of Durham*, 3 volumes, 1905-1928.

## The Countryside

The most obvious sources for the study of the countryside are maps and plans. The O.S. maps and tithe plans have been mentioned above. The tithe plans are especially useful in that they show the use of each field. One important factor in making the modern countryside was the enclosure of the mediæval pattern of common fields. Much of the enclosure of the lowland in Durham occurred at an early date and most of the enclosure awards made in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were of fell and wasteland. The Record Office possesses photocopies of seventeenth century enclosure awards, which are among the Palatinate records in the Public Record Office in London, and holds enclosure awards and plans for the later period of enclosure.

For those areas which formed part of a large estate, estate plans are also useful for constructing a picture of the countryside. The Record Office possesses some collections of estate records, including plans, but many others remain in private hands. It should also be borne in mind that the Dean and Chapter was a large landowner in the County.

Other estate records, such as account books, ledgers and even title deeds are important in building up a picture of the development of the landscape. In much of County Durham the landscape has been determined mainly by the coal trade - many villages owe their existence to this alone and many of the county's physical features still are a legacy of mining activity. Roads, waggonways and railways were built to serve the needs of the trade. Estate collections, especially the Londonderry and Strathmore Collections, and the records of the pre-vesting colliery companies deposited by the National Coal Board may be useful here.

Finally, it will be appreciated that most of the records described here may be used for the study of more than one of the aspects of local history covered by the series.