



Archifau  
**Gwent**  
Archives

**HOUSE HISTORY  
RESEARCH**

Gwent Archives  
Steelworks Road  
Ebbw Vale  
NP23 6AA

01495 353363

[enquiries@gwentarchives.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@gwentarchives.gov.uk)

[www.gwentarchives.gov.uk](http://www.gwentarchives.gov.uk)

## INTRODUCTION

Tracing the history of a property can be a rewarding and exciting pastime. Whether the property you are interested in is 50 or 500 years old, Gwent Archives will hold something of use. This step by step guide will give you some guidance on how to find out more.

## BEFORE YOU START

It is a good idea to decide exactly what it is you are hoping to find out about your house. You may wish to trace the age of the property, though finding an exact age is not always possible. Alternatively you may like to find out the house's history: who owned and occupied it, and what was there before it was built. It may well be the case that the older the house, then the more archival sources in which it appears.

## STEP 1: MAKING A START

The easiest way to carry out research is to start with what you know and work backwards in time. To help you trace a house amongst our records it is useful to know the following:

The Location: Properties have fallen within various administrative boundaries over time, whether these be parish, manor or modern day county borough. Ascertain which areas your property fell within. Also make a note of any known boundary changes to property over time.

Existing Title Deeds: You may hold these; if so, then they can provide a lot of information on previous owners and occupiers, and occasionally changes to a property. Title deeds can often be long and are couched in complicated legal terms. Be prepared to work your way through and not panic when faced with jargon.

Local Knowledge: Long-term neighbours may be able to provide further information. You may even know a previous owner or occupier, who is happy to share what they know.

## REMEMBER

To note down the sources you have consulted and their references, in case you need to refer back to them. It may be that once you find out more information, you need to revisit a source which was initially unsuccessful.

Put time aside to carry out your research. It is rare to just turn up and obtain instant results, sometimes hours can be spent for little or no gain; however, when that nugget is found it can feel completely worth it. The real fun is in searching original records and seeing what sort of information they contain.

Gwent Archives offers a paid research service. If you are unable to visit us in person, but would like to carry out research, then this can be done for a fee. Details of our service can be given on request.

If you choose to visit us, contact Gwent Archives in advance to reserve a space in our Research Room. Certain records are only available on a Microform machine or a computer, of which we only have a limited number.

Enjoy carrying out your research and remember our friendly Research Room team are available to provide help and advice.

**Wills:** If you know the name of the owner/occupier of a property, then it may be worth seeing whether they left a will. A will may assist in finding out the descent of the property and help in dating a house. Sometimes an inventory is attached to a will, which lists the contents of the house, occasionally room by room. Gwent Archives holds a collection of draft and copy wills. We also have an index of pre-1858 Wills held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

**Enclosure Awards:** When land was enclosed by an Act of Parliament, a survey was produced to indicate changes to ownership and boundaries. Private Acts were sought as early as 1750, whilst General Enclosure Acts began in 1801. The award sets out the disposition of the affected common, whilst any accompanying map will show where the enclosures are situated. *A Guide to Parliamentary Enclosures in Wales*, by John Chapman on the shelves in the Research Room details what Gwent Archives holds for the county.



**Estimated Age of the House:** Depending on the materials used on the house and the style of some of the features it may be possible to narrow down when a house (or parts of it) were constructed. The *Monmouthshire Houses* series by Fox and Raglan is a good guide on using architectural evidence for house history.

**Listed Buildings:** If the building is listed, then it may be worth contacting CADW in the first instance to see what they hold on it: CADW Listing Section, Welsh Assembly Government, Plas Carew, Unit 5/7 Cefn Coed, Parc Nantgarw, Cardiff CF15 7QQ.

## STEP 2: USING MAPS AND PLANS

These are a good place to start as they confirm that a house did or did not exist at a given point in time, and provide a historical context as to what was in the surrounding area.

**Ordnance Survey Plans:** Gwent Archives hold these detailed maps for the majority of the county. They can assist in locating your property within a given parish. Larger properties may well be named, and they are useful in seeing how house and street names change over time. Gwent Archives hold the first three editions of the County Series: 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (c1879), 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (c1900), 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (c1916). These are to the scales: 1:2500 and 1:10500. Gwent Archives have a revised edition of 1:2500 OS maps for the Newport area (c1937), and some Town Plans of Abergavenny (c1880), Monmouth (c1880) and Newport (c1882 and c1920), all at the scale 1:500. Most OS Maps are available only on microfiche.

**Valuation Records:** The 1910 Finance Act or 'Domesday' Survey took place between 1910-1915. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition OS Maps were used as a basis for the survey, with accompanying Valuation Books recording owners and occupiers of properties. Gwent Archives hold Maps for the majority of the county and Domesday Books for about half of it.

**Tithe Maps:** The Tithe Commutation Act was passed in 1836 and the resulting surveys tended to take place around the 1840s and 1850s. The survey came in two parts: a map with each plot numbered individually and an accompanying apportionment, which qualified the map by displaying who owned and occupied each plot. These are not as easy to use as OS maps, as the quality of maps varies considerably. Gwent Archives make Tithe Maps available as a mixture of originals, photocopies and microfiche. Tithe Apportionments are available usually as photocopies.

### STEP 3: USING LISTS OF INDIVIDUALS

Like maps these can provide a snapshot of a moment in time. It is also useful to be able to cross-reference the same names which appear in different sources.

**Census:** Since 1801 a Census has been taken every ten years. Since 1841 this has given names, ages and occupations of all the members of a household. The Census is available on the *FindMyPast* and *Ancestry* websites. There is a 100-year closure period with the Census, so at the time of going to press the latest Census to be available is the 1911 Census. Gwent Archives also hold copies of the 1841-1901 Censuses for the county on Microfiche with associated indexes.

**Electoral Registers:** Gwent Archives are very lucky to have an excellent collection of electoral registers running from 1832 right through to the 21<sup>st</sup> century covering the majority of the county. They were usually produced annually, occasionally twice a year, and show who was entitled to vote at a house. They are usually available as originals, although a few modern registers are available on Microfiche. Although Registers are open for the public to consult, only registers more than ten years old can be photographed or photocopied.

**Land Tax Records (Quarter Sessions):** As a precursor to Electoral Registers, these records provide details of ownership and occupation of given properties. The coverage is countywide, and indexed by parish. Although Land Tax was introduced in 1693, records at Gwent Archives only survive from around 1804-1831.

**Rate Books and Valuation Lists:** The biggest collection of these records comes within the District Council series, which ran from 1894-1974. They tend to provide details of ownership and occupation. Local taxation for public undertakings such as Highway maintenance and Poor Relief did exist before 1894, and there are examples of rate books being produced by Parishes, Boards of Guardians and Sanitation Authorities. Gwent Archives' holdings of Rate Books and Valuation Lists tends to be a bit sporadic. They are available often as large and cumbersome volumes. You have been warned!

**Directories:** These usually contained both commercial and private entries. The commercial entries give names, occupations and addresses; private entries names and addresses, usually of the head of household. It was not free to be listed in directories, so it is by no means a complete list for a place. Many directories also act as a useful gazetteer. Gwent Archives have a number of Directories from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; mostly kept in the Research Room.

### STEP 4: USING FURTHER SOURCES

Once you have exhausted the above sources, then it may be possible to expand your research by consulting records that are less uniformly available.

**Map Index:** This is arranged alphabetically by parish and includes miscellaneous maps such as Estate Maps or the maps from Title Deeds and Sales Particulars. The index is available in the Research Room in 3 Red Binders.

**Manorial and Estate Records:** Many parts of the county were at one time part of a large estate or manor. The Tithe Apportionment may help indicate if this were the case and on whose Manor or Estate the property was situated. Estate records may include rentals, leases, maps and accounts. These are usually listed in catalogues available in the Research Room. Manorial records may include Court Books, Surveys and Accounts. These are indexed in a card catalogue available in the Research Room. The records themselves can be difficult to use, but staff will be on hand to give guidance. The online Manorial Documents Register (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mdr/>) lists many of the Manorial Records throughout the country including Monmouthshire.

**Sales Particulars:** These were produced when a property or a larger estate went to auction. They name the property, provide maps and give detailed descriptions of what the property contains, e.g. stables, barn etc. An index of what we hold is to be found under the term *Sales Particulars* in the Subject Index.

**Title Deeds:** These have come into Gwent Archives from a number of different donators and depositors, mainly solicitors and estate offices. They are best traced by looking through the Place Index and Personal Names Index (if you know who owned or occupied the property at one time). Title Deeds are evidence of the transfer of property, give detailed descriptions of boundaries and occasionally provide maps.