



TRACING THE HISTORY OF YOUR HOUSE

1 GENERAL

Every house or property in the Isle of Man has a history, but the majority of the Island's 'older' housing stock dates from the 1840s period to the early part of the 20th century, when terraces of varied design, became a standard feature of Douglas and to a lesser extent, Ramsey and elsewhere in the Island. There are, however, many older houses and even converted buildings but the format for research is just the same.

Whether you live in a very old property or a more 'recent' one, this guide offers basic advice about which record types to consult to explore the history of your house.

Please note: this guide is aimed at Readers who are researching the history of their property as a leisure pursuit. If you are undertaking research for any legal purpose you are advised to seek the advice of a suitably qualified member of the Island's legal profession.

2 SOURCES

• Legal Records

Property owners in the Isle of Man hold an 'Abstract of Title' which comprises of copies of relevant deeds to their properties. This abstract need only go back 30 years to a conveyance or sale of the property, provided that the sale is 'for value', and is free from 'encumbrances' or other restrictions.

If no copies of the deeds to the property are available, then provided that the name of the present owner is known, a 'backwards' search should be made in the 'Grantees' index held at the General Registry, Douglas. These indices go back to 1911.

The Library holds property deeds from the late 17th century to 1910. These are indexed by Parish and then by name of the 'grantor' or seller.

Assuming that the property owner holds with their deeds, copies of former deeds going back c. 30 years, it is necessary to look at the 'entitlement clause' in the first deed. This will normally be found at the end of the deed under the heading 'schedule'. Having found the names of the parties and the date of the preceding sale, the number of that deed can be found in the 'Grantors' index for the relevant parish, for previous deeds. And so the search is on!

Because land and property rights go hand in glove it is necessary to say a word or two about 'Manorial Rolls'. These are held by the Library and date from 1511. They were kept for the purpose of recording rents and land transfer fees paid to the Lord of Man, and ended in 1911 upon the redemption of the 'Lord's Rent'.

As a rule, provided the property was recorded in 'Wood's Atlas', (see overleaf) which was published in 1867 and shows all the ownership of the Island at that date, it is perfectly possible to commence a 'manorial' search for any property on the Island.

The most useful are 'Liber Assedationis' - the books of assessments. 'Liber Assed' are books in which, at approximately 20 year intervals, the names of all the owners of land in every parish were recorded.

There is an index at the front of most of the 'Liber Assed' arranged by parish.

Changes in ownership through sale, inheritance, bankruptcy etc., are recorded in 'Libri Vastarum'.

Both these series are available at the Library on microfilm. There are also microfilm of separate records for land leased from the Lord Bishop and certain ecclesiastical baronies.

- **Wills**

Property is, and always has been, a prime possession. Wills, therefore, are a good source of information not only about real estate proper, but about possessions also, because these are often shown in an inventory of goods which sometimes accompanies a will.

The Library holds wills with index for the period c.1600 to 1916. Later wills may be consulted at the General Registry. Wills sometimes describe a property in useful terms; e.g. 'all my large house, formerly occupied by William Cubbon as a farm'.

Please note: if a transaction recorded in the Manorial Rolls arose from death of an owner, information will be recorded whether the property passed by will, by barganeirey (an heir's settlement), or to the heir on an intestacy.

- **Estate Papers**

A surprising number of properties were formerly part of a larger estate so estate papers, i.e. leases, rentals, surveys, notices of sale, etc., may help.

Please do bear in mind that the family concerned might still hold their papers privately.

- **Public Undertakings**

If you live in a former 'public' property such as a caretaker's house or station master's house, then it may be possible to search the surviving records of the original organisation for details about the property.

- **Maps and Plans**

- i) **Wood's Atlas**

As previously stated this 'atlas' was published in 1867 and shows most of the ownership of land at that date (some town areas are excluded). On the atlas land areas are colour coded; quarterland, for example, is red. The atlas records a number for individual parcels of land and the accompanying parish index gives the name of the proprietor of the land or property, relating to individual number(s).

Thus from Wood's Atlas, one has the parish, the Treen, the Quarterland (or Intack), the owner and the area, as at 1867, from which a search of the manorial records may be commenced.

- ii) **Ordnance Survey**

A survey of the Isle of Man was undertaken between 1866-1871 for Military purposes, by the British Government. These maps, to scale 25" to 1 mile, plot individual properties. The library also holds later editions of the 6" to 1 mile series and in certain cases maps to a scale of 1:500 and 1:1250.

- iii) **Tithe Plans**

These excellent reference aids are based on individual parishes and were produced as a result of the Tithe Commutation Act, 1839 which converted church tithes of kind, hay, pigs, cattle, etc., into money payments. These plans have been microfilmed and are available on microfiche in the library. They give full details of each property as it existed during the period around 1840.

- iv) **Asylum Plans**

These are similar to Tithe Plans. They were prepared in order to assess a rate or rateable value on properties to finance the building of the Lunatic Asylum at Ballamona, during the early 1860s.

- v) **Surveys**

Private land and property surveys usually pre-date the Ordnance Survey, and the majority were produced between c.1760 and c.1850. Copies of some of these surveys are held at the Library.

- vi) **Development Control Plans**

The Town and Country Planning Act, 1934, introduced 'Development Control' to the Island. Thereafter, individual planning applications were scrutinised. The Library holds the original applications, which include detailed plans, and microfilm copies thereof, for the period 1934 to 1974. Therefore if you live in a property built or altered between 1934 and 1974, it should be possible to consult the original application and architects' drawings.

vii) **Building Control Plans**

Planning bye-laws were introduced during the 1890s at Douglas, followed by Onchan, Peel, Ramsey, Castletown, Port Erin and Port St. Mary. Plans of properties built in these areas should be held by the respective Local Authorities.

viii) **Rates**

From the formation of Local Authorities, properties in their districts had to pay an annual rate as at present in order to fund the authority. Most local authorities still have their 'old' rate books and it is often possible to help date a property by the year in which it was first rated. This information is only available at certain local authorities by prior arrangement.

- **Newspapers**

For as long as newspapers have been printed, properties have been advertised for sale or rent. Manx newspapers date from the early 19th century (with some coverage in the Cumberland Pacquet from 1793), and are available at the Library on microfilm. They are partially indexed by name and subject from 1793 to c.1950 and from 1957 to 1994.

- **Photographs and Prints**

The Library holds a large collection of photographs many of which relate to Manx properties.

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OTHER SOURCES

Having gathered information about your property you may be curious about former owners, their families and occupations etc.

- **Census Returns**

Microfilm copies of the Isle of Man Census Returns for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 and microfiche of the 1891 enumeration are held by the Library. These returns are based on individual properties and record each person in each 'household', the relationship of every person to 'head of the household', their ages, occupations and places of birth.

The Manx National Heritage Library holds a wealth of various and extensive source material. Staff at the library and throughout Manx National Heritage, are always pleased to hear from anyone with an interest in Manx history.

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