RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE IN BEDFORDSHIRE

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

2. BEFORE YOU VISIT THE ARCHIVES SERVICE

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.1 Maps
- 3.1.1 Ordnance Survey
- 3.1.2 Early printed maps
- 3.1.3 Enclosure maps & awards
- 3.1.4 Tithe maps & apportionments
- 3.1.5 Estate maps

3.2 New estates (Bedford Borough)
3.3 Aerial photographs
3.4 Illustrations
3.5 Deeds

4 STRAW, STICKS OR BRICKS?

4.1 Local authority building plans
4.2 Architects' drawings
4.3 Auction and estate agents records
4.4 Rating valuations

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.1 Registers of electors
5.2 Printed directories
5.3 Census returns
5.4 Rating records
- 5.4.1 1925 Valuation Act records
- 5.4.2 1910 Finance Act records
- 5.4.3 Rural & Urban District Council rate books & valuations
- 5.4.4 Poor Law Union rate books & valuations
- 5.4.5 Parish rate books
- 5.4.6 Further rating records

5.5 Land tax
5.6 Earlier owners and occupiers

6. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? - RESEARCHING BUILDINGS & THEIR USES

7. FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, Updated 2023

HOW TO RESEARCH THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE IN BEDFORDSHIRE

1. INTRODUCTION

Tracing the history of a house or building is one of the most popular subjects for users of Bedfordshire Archives. Searches take several forms:

- some people are interested in the history of the site,
- some merely wish to find the age of a property,
- some wish to see if it has had any unusual uses (a blacksmith's shop or pub for example);
- some wish to find out more about those who lived there.

Of course, many researchers are interested in several of the aspects above or, indeed all of them.

This guide aims to introduce the types of records most commonly used to research aspects of the history of buildings in Bedfordshire and how to find what is available at Bedfordshire Archives. We recommend ways to search our online catalogue. Transferring our old catalogues to the online catalogue has taken many years and many staff have been involved. Unfortunately, this sometimes means that we have rethought how to index certain things and inconsistencies have crept in.

Hopefully you will find the search process as stimulating as the fruits of it and will discover many things you did not previously know. Researching a house history can be very rewarding, but it can also be time consuming and frustrating; you should be prepared for disappointments as well as rewards.

If your property turns out to be over 125 years old it will be difficult to come up with an exact date for when it was built and documentation may be hard to find. If this is the case, you may still be able to tell much from the physical evidence; specialist publications on vernacular architecture will help you here. A word of warning, do not be misled by features such as half timbering or thatching - these were common building techniques into the nineteenth century and do not mean that the house is necessarily older than that, despite estate agents' descriptions to the contrary!

House history is the most popular subject of property research, however there are many other types of building that may be of interest. For example: farms, inns, schools, churches and shops. The method of research is the same, however more varied sources may be available.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

2. BEFORE YOU VISIT THE ARCHIVES SERVICE

Taking time to prepare before visiting the archives service will help you to complete your study as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- Establish what you aim to achieve, and how much time you can, or want, to spend on research. On average researchers require at least half a day to make a preliminary search of key sources.
- Be sure you can identify your property on a modern Ordnance Survey map to get the process started.
- Make notes of what you know already including how you know it; bring these notes with you when you visit the archives service.
- Consult any title deeds to the property that you have and, if possible, bring them with you. You may need to access records held by the Land Registry if the original deeds are not accessible. Title deeds may begin with a fairly modern document called an Abstract of Title - this is very important as, despite its modern date, it may describe other deeds, which may no longer exist, going back much further. We hold some title deeds, found among estate archives, family papers and solicitors' papers. The majority of these are pre-twentieth century, and therefore the current deeds are important in providing a 'link' to earlier records.
- Consider the architecture of your house; its design and construction will provide clues as to its age. What materials is it constructed from? What are its basic structural elements? Are there any date stones in the building? Be aware that houses are often more recent than they look, especially those which have external and/or internal alterations.
- Consult any books or secondary sources about the area where the building is; they may give clues such as how the building looked in old photographs.
- Check our website in case you find that we have already provided a potted history or references relating to your building on our *Community Histories* pages https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/Community-Histories.aspx
- Use the tips given below to search our online catalogue to identify the references of documents you would like to see when you visit the archives service.

Is your property listed? If it is then it may be that research on the property has already been done and may save you a lot of time. Search https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/ to see if there is a listing and what clues it gives for your research. You could also search using https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/

Always work backwards from what you know to what you don't know.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Knowing the location of the property is always helpful. At the very least you need to know which parish it was in. Almost all the records held by Bedfordshire Archives are indexed or arranged by parish, the smallest area of administration. Parish boundaries may change over time but for most places the parish in which they are located will be reasonably clear and any changes can be worked out as your research continues.

In towns there will be more properties and more changes than in rural areas and the number of records available will reflect this; that doesn't always make it easier to trace an urban property!

As well as knowing the parish you may then need to understand something of the higher levels of local administration. These administrative bodies will have been responsible for creating many records that could be useful for your research. Unfortunately, not all records survive for all areas. Local administration can seem complicated because in the last two hundred years there have been a lot of changes in how it has been arranged. Don't worry, there are various tools available at the archive service to help you and staff are used to being able to identify and guide people through the changes.

It is also useful to know whether the area you are interested in was once part of a landed estate. The Russell family at one time owned more than a third of the whole county but there were other major landowners too. Estates produced records of land ownership and administration, which could be useful in your research. We have a guide to show which estate records relate to which parishes.

3.1 Maps

Finding your house, or the site of your house, on a map is the best place to begin any historical enquiry. It is a comparatively easy exercise to locate your house on the most modern map available then look at preceding maps to see if the house changes shape over time or if it disappears indicating that it was built at some time after the map was compiled.

It is important to remember, when looking at maps, that simply because there is a house shown on the site it does not mean that this is your current house - the house shown may have been demolished and a new one built after the map was compiled.

Maps may also show you how the land was used before the building was built and who owned and occupied it.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.1.1 Ordnance Survey

Digitised maps are available via https://maps.nls.uk/os/

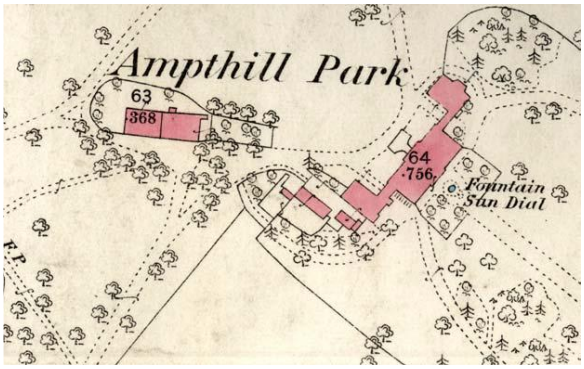
Bedfordshire Archives holds an extensive series of original maps. They provide the starting point for house history research, particularly the 25" to 1 mile and 6" to 1 mile, as they provide accurate and detailed information. All the following maps are detailed in the **green Maps 1 catalogue** in the searchroom.

25 inches to 1 mile (1:2,500) from 1878-1970s

The most used and useful overall series for the county, Bedfordshire Archives has a very good coverage but does not necessarily have each edition for each part of the county (a guide is available in the searchroom). The maps are ordered from the stackroom.

Bedfordshire was surveyed and published from 1878-1882 working south to north therefore Luton and Dunstable are earlier in survey date than Bedford. 1 square inch is nearly equal to one acre. Each sheet covers an area 1.5 miles West to East and 1 mile South to North.

New editions for Bedfordshire were issued in 1899-1900 (2nd edition), and 1922-25 (3rd edition). Whole county revision was abandoned in 1922 and only areas with a lot of development had revised editions in the late 1930s.



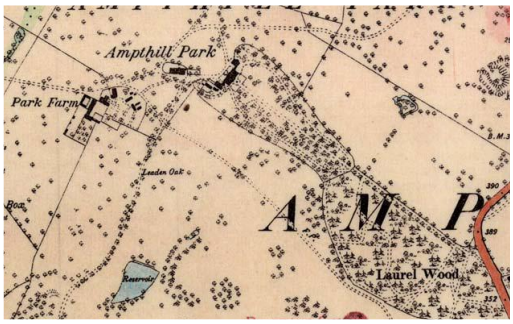
- First Edition 1879-1884;
- Second Edition 1900-1904;
- Third Edition 1923-1926;
- Revised Edition 1937-1939;
- National Grid 1x1 or 2x1 km.

In 1968 the Ordnance survey changed to a different grid system. This was partly based on aerial photographs and we hold some of the photographs used for some parts of the county. This series was continually updated and paper printouts were only issued after 300 units of change for urban areas or 450 units of change for rural areas. We have a set for the whole county from the 1970s and some update sheets through to the early 1990s.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

6 inches to 1 mile (1:10,560) from 1878 to 1960

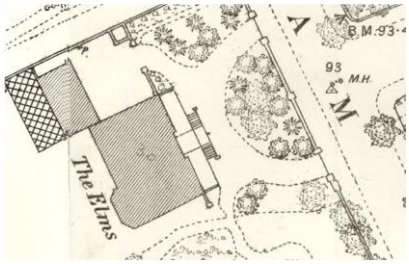


Maps are held in the searchroom and provide a quick way to find the area you are interested in over a period of time. The following series, with some intermediate selective revised issues.
- First Edition 1878-1892;
- Second Edition 1901-1903;
- Third Edition 1958-1960

The remaining series of Ordnance Survey maps listed in order of usefulness for building history research.

50 inches to 1 mile (1:1,250) (our reference MC1/5)

This scale includes house numbers and is available for the following towns at the following dates:
- Bedford & Kempston 1964-1968;
- Dunstable 1963-1973;
- Leighton-Linslade 1968-1970;
- Luton 1961-1980 (includes a revision)



127 inches to 1 mile (1:500) from 1878 to 1884 (our reference MC1/4)

This series is available only for the following towns: Bedford; Biggleswade; Dunstable; Leighton Buzzard; Luton.

2½ inches to 1 mile (1:25,000) from 1946 (our reference MC1/2/1-3)

In the following series:
- Edition of 1946-1955;
- Edition of 1948-1961

2 inches to 1 mile (1:31,680) from 1804 to 1815 (our reference MC1/0)

These were the maps from which the first edition 1 inch to 1 mile maps were prepared.

1 inch to 1 mile (1:63,360) from 1834 to 1972 (our reference MC1/1)

There are a number of series including the following:
- Old Series (1834-1900);
- New Series (1874-1920s);
- Popular Series (1920s-1945);
- Coloured Series (1920s-1945);
- New Series (1945-1972)

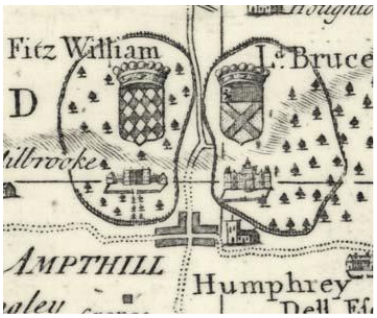
1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.1.2 Early Printed Maps

The early printed maps are often not relevant to house history research as they do not show properties in detail. Those that show properties, but not in detail, are as follows (copies of these are available in the searchroom):

William Gordon's Map of Bedfordshire of 1736 is useful for its accurate thumbnail sketches of principal seats of the gentry.



Thomas Jefferys' Map of Bedfordshire of 1765 indicates the area of building but does not mark individual houses.



Andrew Bryant's map of Bedfordshire of 1826 indicates the area of building but does not mark individual houses.



For a complete list of Bedfordshire printed maps, see the *Bedfordshire Historical Record Society*'s Volume 62.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.1.3 Enclosure Maps & Awards

Enclosure maps and awards are very important when researching land in Bedfordshire. Most parishes in Bedfordshire were subject to parliamentary enclosure, the earliest parish being Aspley Guise in 1761 and the latest Totternhoe in 1891.

Until the late 18th century most agricultural land in Bedfordshire consisted of strips scattered in large open fields, with some ancient enclosed fields. The widespread enclosure of land by local Acts of Parliament divided the open fields up into smaller fields and everyone who held a strip or strips was allotted one or more plots of land.

Four parishes, Little Barford, Bolnhurst, Sutton and Whipsnade were inclosed by private agreement or by parliamentary act without an Award. Those parishes that were not subject to enclosure were subject to Tithe Apportionment (see Section 3.3).

The main sources are:

- an Enclosure Award, setting out the size and boundaries of allotments to each individual,
- an accompanying map, delineating the new allotments, (see illustration no.1). Numbers on the map usually refer to the schedule of owners given either on the map itself or in the schedule to the Award; occasionally they refer to a schedule made by the surveyor and map maker for his own use which has not survived. Not all parishes had maps.

Although very important for researching land Enclosure maps and awards have drawbacks when researching buildings.

- Houses and other buildings are marked on most Enclosure maps but always in the area of old enclosures. The awards were not concerned with old enclosures and so they are often not listed and even if they are listed, little information is given. Nevertheless, even if the old enclosures are not listed their owners may be found by checking the description of new enclosures abutting them (for example "…abutting east on old enclosure of Jonathan Flint")
- Any house appearing on what had been open fields must have been built after enclosure.

Inclosure or Enclosure? Today enclosure is considered the correct spelling and inclosure an archaic spelling. However, the Inclosure Acts were a series of Acts of Parliament that empowered enclosure of open fields and common land, creating legal property rights and therefore, at Bedfordshire Archives, we have tended to use inclosure to refer to the legal process, which produced the records, and enclosure to refer to how the land was actually managed.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION



No. 1: Stanbridge Inclosure Map dated 1840. Note the buildings (shown in brown) on the old enclosures, (reference MA60)

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

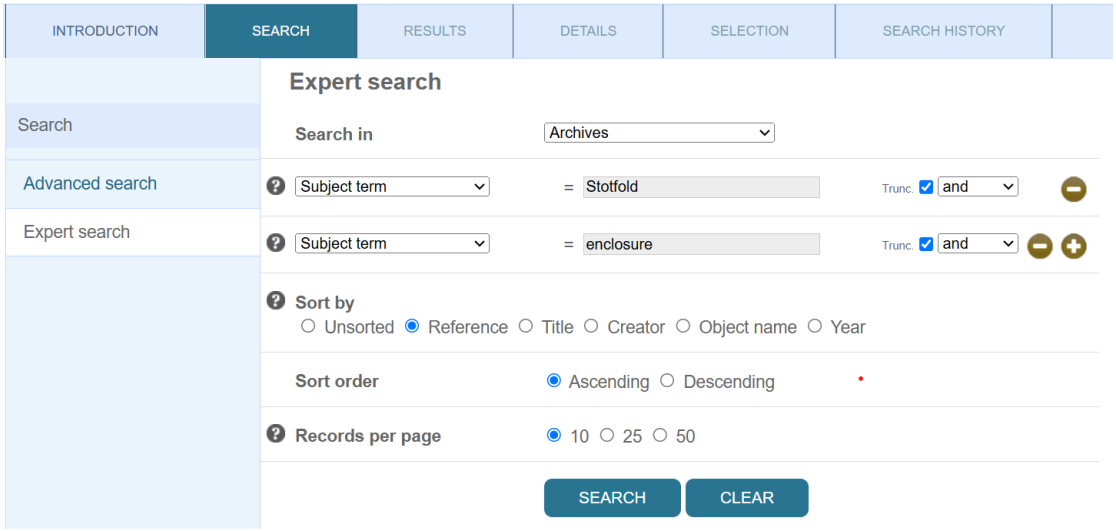
3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Finding enclosure records at Bedfordshire Archives

For parishes subject to enclosure and reference numbers, see the brown **Parliamentary Inclosure** catalogue in the searchroom or our Inclosure conspectus online: https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Using_Our_Collections/Collection-Guides/Maps-and-Land-Records/Inclosure-Records/InclosureRecordsConspectus.aspx.

The majority of our references for enclosure records begin Award (for the award) or MA (for the map). In most cases these are the best documents to use however enclosure records can appear in other collections too.

To search our online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ for enclosure records for a particular parish we recommend using expert search and searching for subject = name of parish AND subject = enclosure.



You can refine this search by, for example, adding AND subject = maps or AND reference = MA

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.1.4 Tithe Maps & Apportionments

Those parishes not subject to parliamentary enclosure were subject to a Tithe Apportionment, with its accompanying map, drawn up from the 1830s to the 1850s. A tithe was often extinguished at parliamentary enclosure but not always and a number of Bedfordshire parishes subject to an Inclosure Award were also subject to Tithe Apportionment. In some parishes Corn Rent was converted to tithe rentcharge and again an Apportionment and accompanying map were produced. It is worth checking availability of both enclosure and tithe records for the parish your property is in, but don't be surprised if there are few or no tithe records.

Each Apportionment contains a schedule referring to the map and giving the name of the owner and occupier of all property shown, arranged alphabetically by landowner. Apportionments give vital clues about property ownership and occupancy but do not give details about the property itself. The maps may allow you to pinpoint dwellings and, where your property was yet to be built, who owned the land it was later to occupy.

Finding tithe records at Bedfordshire Archives

For Apportionment and Map reference numbers see the brown **Tithe Apportionment** catalogue in the searchroom, or our introduction to Tithe Records online:
https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Using_Our_Collections/Collection-Guides/Maps-and-Land-Records/Tithe-Records/TitheRecordsIntroduction.aspx

The majority of our references for tithe records begin AT (for the apportionment) or MAT (for the map). The map reference will be the same as the apportionment but with an M in front e.g. AT41/1 and MAT41/1 are the 1847 apportionment and accompanying map for Stotfold. Some maps are attached to the apportionment but others have been separated for ease of use and storage.

To search our online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ for tithe maps for a particular parish we recommend using expert search and searching for subject = name of parish AND reference = MAT

We recommend just looking for the map and apportionment first.
Tithes were in existence for centuries and if you search for
subject = parish AND subject = tithe
you will get a lot of references to tithes being owed, paid, not paid and generally discussed for anywhere in the parish.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.1.5 Estate Maps

Where these exist, they are usually hand-drawn maps and plans belonging to the major landowners and estates. A few are from as early as 1581 but the majority were produced after 1750.

The maps are normally marked only with property held by the estate concerned. There may be a reference book to accompany the map. Property once owned by the Dukes of Bedford is particularly well documented, and tenants' names may be found by searching estate rentals.

Finding estate maps at Bedfordshire Archives

To search our online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ for estate maps we recommend using expert search and searching for subject = name of parish AND subject = maps. You may then refine your search by reference if you know which estate records are most likely to be relevant.

Please note there are copying restrictions on some of our estate maps. Staff will advise you of these restrictions.



1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.2 New estates

If you are researching an estate that was developed since the 1970s in Bedford Borough you may find that we have details of when the development took place. Bedford Borough Council notify the archive service of new developments that required new numbering and postcode areas. The plans deposited allocate postal house numbers to plot numbers and so give an indication of the date of building construction. These have the reference BorBPC.

Unfortunately, we have not received information for locations outside of the area covered by Bedford Borough. For these areas planning records held by the current planning authorities may be the best available source (see section 4.1).

3.3 Aerial photographs

Bedfordshire Archives holds some series of aerial photographs. These vary in scale, date and coverage. There is a conspectus of aerial photographs in the green folder on top of the index cards in the searchroom. You can also search our online catalogue using Expert search for
Subject = aerial photographs AND subject = name of place
e.g. subject = aerial photographs AND subject = Stotfold

The Historical Environment Record holds a better selection of aerial photographs than Bedfordshire Archives (see section 7.1).

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.4 Illustrations

You may wish to know what your property looked like in the past and illustrations can also help to record changes to the building such as extensions, changes to windows and doors or conversion from one property to two or two properties to one.

The Bedfordshire Archives has a large collection of illustrations, including:

- photographs (1860s-1990s),
- prints, drawings, and watercolours
- postcard views (1902-1940s but mostly 1902-1920)

However, the chances of finding illustrations of a particular building depend on why it may have been photographed or drawn. Was it grand, in a pretty location, in the centre of a town, a business needing to advertise…? Even if an image exists the catalogue may not identify your property within an overall street scene.

Finding illustrations at Bedfordshire Archives

To search our online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ for illustrations of properties try Expert search to combine the place your property is in with the type of illustration you are hoping to find.
E.gs.: subject = Regent Street, Stotfold AND subject = photograph
subject = Stratton Park AND subject = postcards
subject = Astwick AND subject = postcards AND subject = photographs



Please note that if you are searching for works by a particular photographer search for the photographer under subject. E.g. subject = Sweetland, Frank, as it is their business as a photographer that is being indexed rather than something about them as a person.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

3.5 Title deeds

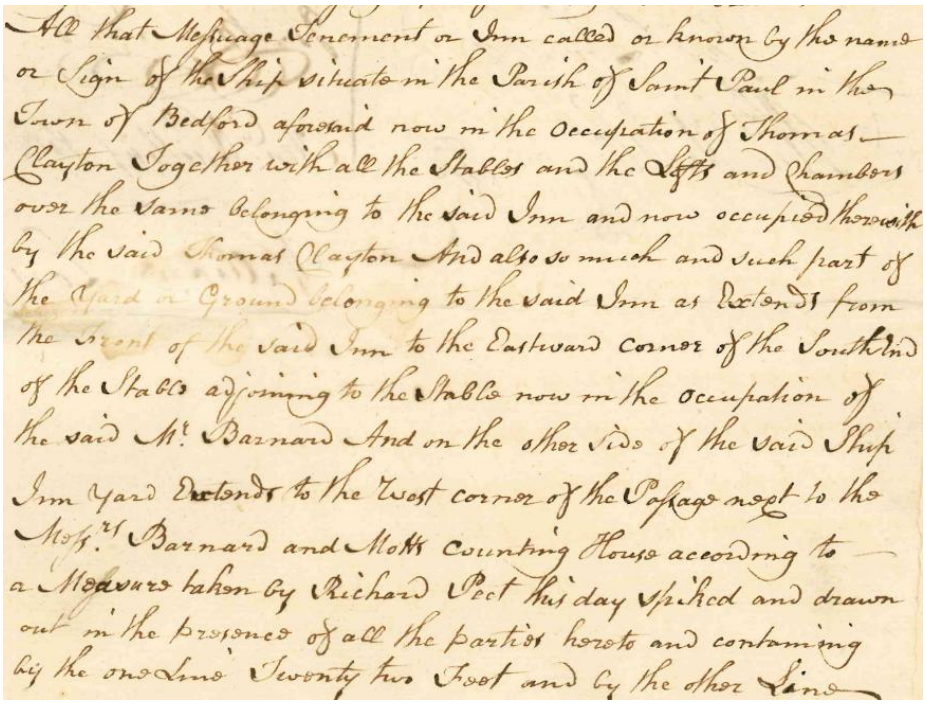
Title deeds are legal documents relating to the transfer and ownership of land. They can be very useful when researching house history. They may tell you:

- who owned the land and the buildings on it,
- how that land has changed hands in the past,
- who occupies it and possibly who occupied it before them
- how big the land is and where it is situated including the owners and occupiers around it
- whether a property has been split up or joined together
- whether the property was used for a particular purpose.

Unfortunately, title deeds also have their drawbacks.

- They can be difficult to find, many will be in private hands and others may have been lost.
- Only properties that changed hands or were subject to mortgages are likely to have a good set of title deeds.
- They are legal documents and can be long and difficult to get to grips with both physically and intellectually
- Earlier deeds may be written in Latin

The good news is that Bedfordshire Archives usually catalogues deeds in a lot of detail so that the catalogue entry includes a summary of the deed. This may be so detailed that you can get all the information you need from our summary and do not need to struggle with the original document.


All that Messuage Tenement or Inn called or known by the name or Sign of the Ship situate in the Parish of Saint Paul in the Town of Bedford aforesaid now in the occupation of Thomas Clayton Together with all the Stables and the Lofts and Chambers over the same belonging to the said Inn and now occupied therewith by the said Thomas Clayton And also so much and such part of the Yard or Ground belonging to the said Inn as Extends from the Front of the said Inn to the Eastward Corner of the Southend of the Stable adjoining to the Stable now in the occupation of the said Mr. Barnard And on the other side of the said Ship Inn Yard Extends to the West corner of the Passage next to the Mssrs. Barnard and Mott Counting House according to a Measure taken by Richard Peet this day Pricked and drawn out in the presence of all the parties hereto and containing by the one Line Twenty two Feet and by the other Line

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Finding title deeds at Bedfordshire Archives

We hold title deeds in many different collections. These include: estate collections, solicitors' collections; business collections (particularly for public houses owned by breweries).

The best way to find deeds is generally by parish but it is difficult to be specific about the property unless you have other details such as the people who may have been involved in the transaction, or the name of a public house.

For urban areas you should be able to narrow your search to the street name e.g. Cauldwell Street, Bedford.

For all areas you may need to restrict the results by saying what you do not want.
For example: use Expert Search to search
Subject = Cauldwell Street, Bedford AND NOT photograph AND NOT maps AND NOT sales particulars

In the above example, a search for *Cauldwell Street, Bedford* would have produced over 500 results, taking out photographs, maps and sale particulars reduces this to just over 400 results – not all of which will be deeds. This sounds rather daunting but once you get used to scanning through the results it is quite manageable to look through this number to spot the ones you are interested in provided you set the number of results per page to 50 before you start the search!

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

4. STRAW, STICKS OR BRICKS? – RESEARCHING CONSTRUCTION

4.1 LOCAL AUTHORITY BUILDING PLANS

For more than one hundred years there have been various planning laws which have required house builders to submit (at first) outline plans of the site showing water supply and drainage, and (later) detailed plans and elevations of the proposed building to ensure that all the various local regulations were met.

Local regulation began at different dates for different areas, for example Bedford town required the submission of plans from the 1860s but the rural areas didn't require plans until the 1890s. The survival is patchy; some plans start much later than the end of the nineteenth century, and others have not survived at all.

It is worth noting that present local authorities may have an online system that can help locate plans submitted to former authorities as well as recent applications made to them.
For Bedford Borough see
http://www.bedford.gov.uk/environment_and_planning/planning_town_and_country/search_plans_page.aspx
For Central Bedfordshire see
https://plantech.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/PLANTECH/DCWebPages/AcolNetCGI.gov
For Luton Borough Council see
https://planning.luton.gov.uk/online-applications/search.do?action=simple&searchType=Application

Finding local authority building plans at Bedfordshire Archives

We hold some building plans from several local authorities including Bedford and Dunstable Borough Councils, Ampthill, Bedford and Leighton-Linslade District Councils. Unfortunately, because there are many thousands of plans, not all of them are catalogued yet.

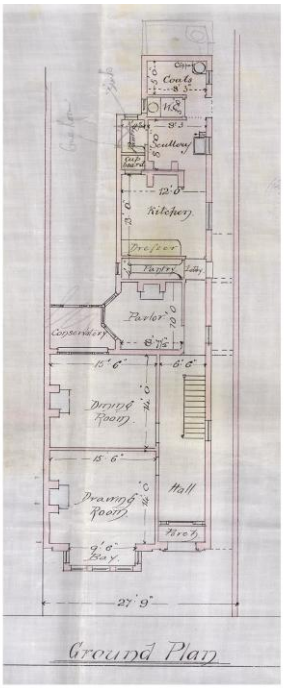
The first thing you need is an idea of where and when a property was built; this will determine the local authority to which the plan would have been submitted.
For more details see
https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Using_Our_Collections/Collection-Guides/Planning-and-Property-Records/Planning-and-Property-Records.aspx

Catalogue entries for the plans of certain local authorities are available on our online catalogue so do check there. Cataloguing continues each week. However, for some places, such as Bedford town 1921-1948 we currently rely on paper indexes available only in the searchroom.

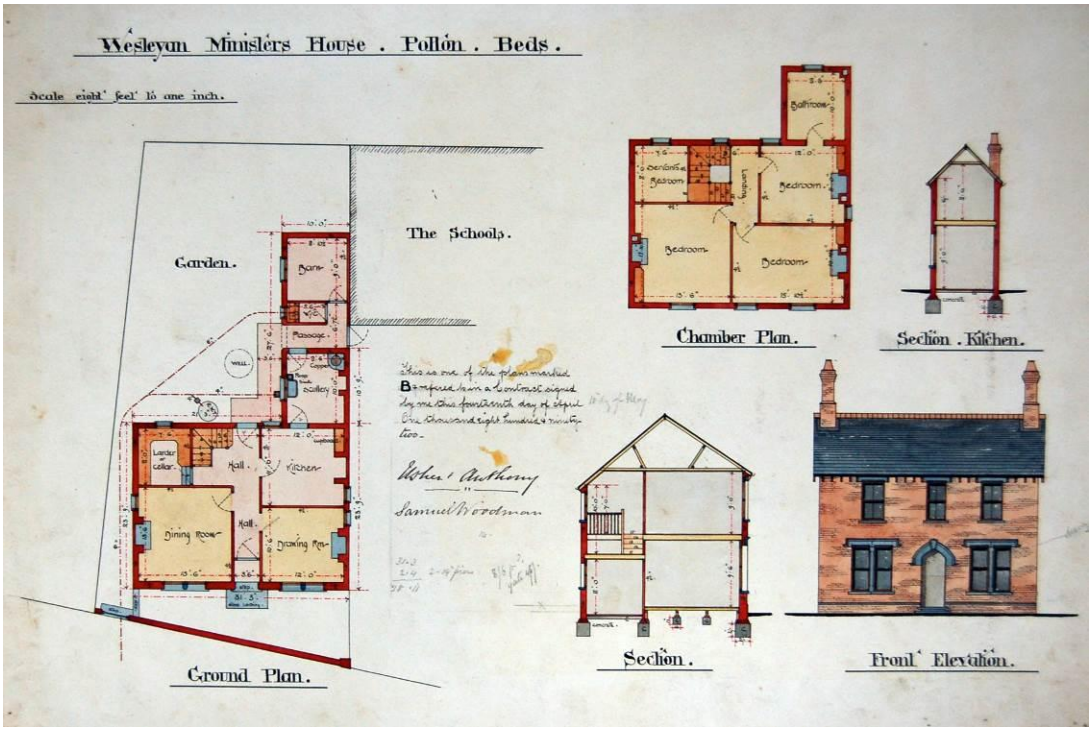
1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

4. STRAW, STICKS OR BRICKS? – RESEARCHING CONSTRUCTION





Bedford Borough Deposited Building Plan reference BorBP1913. Front elevation and ground plan of a proposed house for Mr F.T. Mercer in Castle Road, dated Nov 1888.



Contract plan signed by architects Usher & Anthony and Samuel Woodman, Scale 1 inch to 8 feet. Contract signed 14 April 1892. (Reference CDE161/4)

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

4. STRAW, STICKS OR BRICKS? – RESEARCHING CONSTRUCTION

4.2 Architects' drawings

Most buildings before the middle of the 19th century would not have been designed by an architect or, if they were, it is unlikely that any drawings will survive.

Many buildings built before it was usual to employ an architect may have had later alterations designed by one. Drawings made for these alterations may be helpful for understanding changes in layout and use, including living conditions.

If your property was designed or altered by one of the local architects who have deposited drawings with Bedfordshire Archives, it is possible that you may find drawings relevant to your research within our collections.

A good set of architect's drawings may tell you a lot including:

- changes to the design from initial concept to the final contract,
- details of fixtures and fittings,
- construction details
- layout and dimensions

Unfortunately, a set of drawings may be incomplete – some drawings may have gone to the original owner who paid for them or to the contractor who was responsible for construction. It is very unlikely that you will find a drawing of how the property was finally built. Drawings may be damaged and difficult to handle.

Finding architects drawings at Bedfordshire Archives

We have several major collections of 20th century architects and one collection that goes back to the 1850s. Not all of these collections are fully catalogued but staff can help to find out whether a property you are interested in is held within the uncatalogued material.

For the catalogued material where you do not know who the architect was the best online Expert search is subject = place AND subject = building plans

This may also bring up local authority plans (see 4.1) but it is a start. If you know who the architect was then search by subject = place AND subject = name of architect
E.g. subject = Cauldwell Street, Bedford AND subject = Usher

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

4. STRAW, STICKS OR BRICKS? – RESEARCHING CONSTRUCTION

4.3 Auction and estate agents' records

The majority of properties have been sold at some point in their history, either by auction or private sale. The records of local auctioneers and estate agents generally include sales particulars, also known as sales catalogues. These provide details of the occupation, location and description of a property, often with location plans. Sales notices provide similar information but fewer details.

The description of the property can be particularly useful in telling you about construction, layout and sanitation. You may also find sales of contents and stock showing you how the property had been furnished or used.

A vast number of properties in this country used to form part of large estates and such records are particularly valuable for the period in which great estates were being broken up and sold off after the First World War.

Finding auction and estate agents records at Bedfordshire Archives

Searching the online catalogue use expert search to combine subject = place AND subject = sale particulars

Auctioneers and estate agents may also have acted as valuers for probate, land disputes, or as letting agents for furnished houses. Correspondence and valuer's notebooks may give an interesting glimpse of the property at a point in time. This type of record is likely to come up in a general search by place but you can refine it by date, people or to the reference of a particular collection e.g. subject = Cauldwell Street, Bedford AND reference = BMB

In this case BMB is the reference for the collection of Brown & Merry of Bedford. Other collections are:
BML – Brown & Merry of Leighton Buzzard,
PK – Peacock,
SF – Swaffield of Ampthill,
Z938 – McConnells of Bedford.



LOT 10.

THAT DESIRABLE FREEHOLD

FAMILY RESIDENCE,

SITUATE ON

HART HILL,

KNOWN AS

"THE TOWER."

THE HOUSE, standing in its own GROUNDS, abutting on the DRIVE, HART HILL, is of PLEASING ELEVATION, MOST SUBSTANTIALLY BUILT WITH HOLLOW WALLS OF RED BRICK WITH STONE DRESSINGS AND TILED.

It has a South-West aspect; is situated in a most healthy and elevated position, commanding extensive views of the town and surrounding country; is within five minutes of the Midland, Great Northern, and London and North Western Stations, from which London is reached in 40 minutes.

THE HOUSE CONTAINS:

ON GROUND FLOOR—Breakfast Room, Kitchen, Pantry and Larder;
ON FIRST FLOOR—Spacious Entrance Hall and handsome Pitch Pine Staircase;
Drawing Room, 22ft. by 15ft., with Music Room or Study leading therefrom;
Dining Room, 16ft. 6in. by 13ft., China Closet, Cloak Room fitted with lavatory basin;
W.C.

ON SECOND FLOOR—Large Light Landing, THREE Principal Bed Rooms, Dressing Room,
Bath Room, fitted with Bath and Housemaid's Sink.

ON THIRD FLOOR—Two Large and Airy Bed Rooms, Light Landings, and in Turret of Tower a Smoking Room.

IN GARDEN, adjoining the house, is Coal Barn, Tool House, and W.C.

The House is fitted throughout with Register Grates, Marble and other Mantel Pieces, and Tiled Hearths. The Rooms are Lofty and well proportioned, and have Plate Glass Windows to Ground and First Floors.

Gas and Water are laid on from the Companies' Mains, and there is an inexhaustible supply of Soft Water.

THE PROPERTY HAS A FRONTAGE TO THE DRIVE OF 136 FEET, AND CONTAINS 30 POLES (MORE OR LESS).

LATE IN THE OCCUPATION OF THE PROPRIETOR, AND IS OF THE

ESTIMATED RENTAL VALUE OF £60 PER ANNUM.

NOTE.—A portion of the Bank or Bank on the opposite side of The Drive, co-extensive with the Frontage, belongs to and is sold with the property.

The Purchaser of this Lot will be required to enter into the usual covenants as to repairing and maintaining roads, &c., on the Hart Hill Estate, full particulars of which will be read at the time of sale.

POSSESSION ON COMPLETION.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

4. STRAW, STICKS OR BRICKS? – RESEARCHING CONSTRUCTION

4.4 Rating valuations

Most rating valuations do not give much detail about the construction of the property. They are useful for other things, and we will look at them in more detail in section 5.

However, one valuation is very informative because Bedfordshire Archives holds the original notebooks written at the time the property was inspected. Although written in pencil in a very abbreviated form, these can give very good detail of the layout and condition of the property at the time and subsequent changes.

The 1925 Valuation Act required a survey of all property for rating purposes. This led to the creation of a set of maps (our reference DV2) and reference books (our reference DV1); the maps were constantly in use, as amendments to original valuations and new valuations were required, until 1950. More details can be found here Hosted By Bedford Borough Council: The 1925 to 1927 Rating Valuation Maps

The reference books give the owner, occupier, brief description and area of properties. The new valuations or alterations were recorded in 'extra' books.

Unfortunately, not all the notebooks survive.

Begin by finding your property on the appropriate DV2 map. All the maps have been digitised and are available to view online http://apps.bedford.gov.uk/vma/#1926%20Rating%20Valuation%20Maps

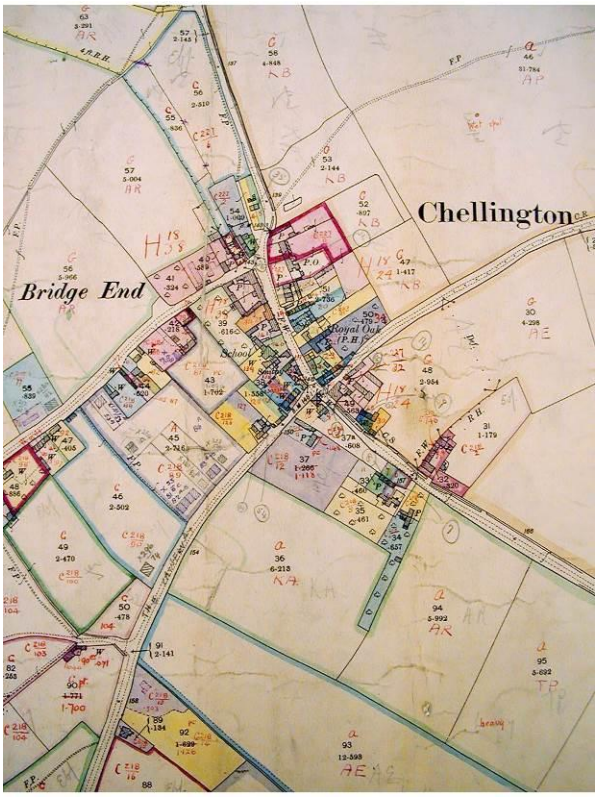
Once you have found your property on the map make a note of the number written next to it – this could look like C127/40 the first part is the original reference of the notebook and the second part is the page number within the notebook therefore to order the notebook from the stacks you need to order DV1/C127 and when the document arrives look at page 40 where the description of the property will begin.

Properties built between the original valuation and 1948 are drawn onto the maps in ink and descriptions usually appear in the notebooks referenced DV1/X. This can be useful in telling you when a property was first valued for rates giving a rough indication of completion.

Registers of final decisions on valuations prepared by the District Valuer have also been deposited, continuing until 1972, although these do not have accompanying maps.

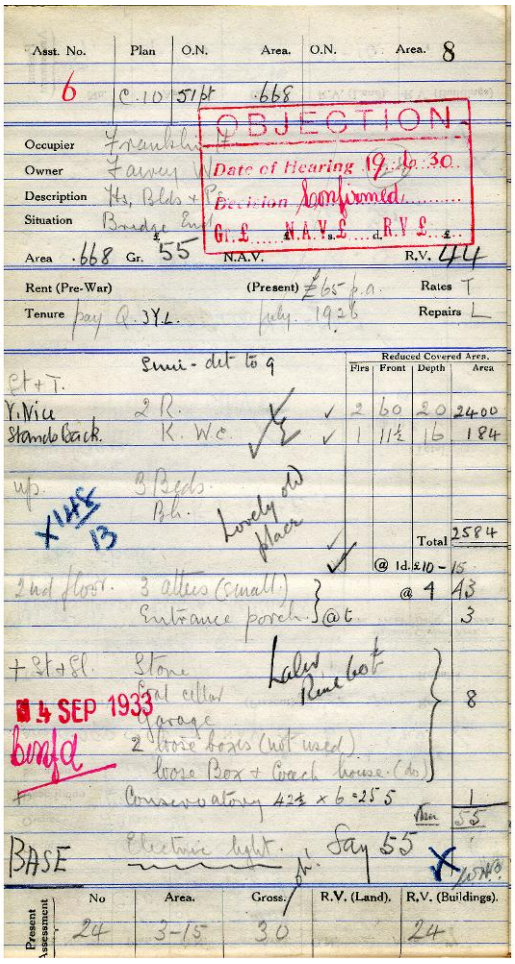
1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

4. STRAW, STICKS OR BRICKS? – RESEARCHING CONSTRUCTION



1925 Valuation Act map, showing Chellington. Chellington House is edged in red and numbered C227/8, (reference DV2/C10).

1925 Valuation Act Reference or 'Field' book entry for Chellington House, (reference DV1/C227) Note the cross reference to X148/13 indicating that DV1/X148 may provide a later update.



5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

Discovering the owner of a property is a substantial help in discovering more about the age and history of that property since it may be possible to find historical documents such as deeds in a family archive.

Not all properties are lived in by the people who own them therefore you are likely to find records that give owners or occupiers or both. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to establish the property to which the record relates but by using a variety of sources you should be able to make progress.

As usual work backwards – earlier records are less likely to give full addresses making it difficult to make sure you have the right property unless that property is very particular.

5.1 Registers of Electors

Registers of electors were compiled for each borough and county after 1832. Modern registers of electors are arranged by address. The only problem can of course be that the numbering of a road or name of a house might have changed from time to time. However, you should be able to work your way back from a recent register to earlier registers and, by matching occupants who do not change, spot any renumbering issues as you go.

Before the mid-20th century registers of very rural areas do not always give addresses but instead list electors in alphabetical order.

Registers of electors only list those who qualify and who are registered to vote. Before 1928, property was one of the ways people qualified to be eligible to vote, and this is noted on the register. Therefore, the fact of their being on the register can tell you something about the person.

Our holdings are listed in a brown catalogue in the searchroom, under **RC**, **RE** and **REL**.

Our registers of electors from 1832-1986 are available via the Ancestry subscription website, (accessible for free from our searchroom computer). Using our online catalogue to find which parishes are within which constituency can be useful if trying to find an address rather than a person when using the registers on Ancestry.
On our online catalogue use Expert search subject = place AND reference = RE

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.2 Printed directories

From the late nineteenth century there have been printed street directories for larger towns, including Bedford and Luton. Sometimes these form part of a county directory, sometimes they are a separate publication for that particular place.

The leading series was published by Kelly's Directories from 1799 to 1939 in county or city volumes. The directories provide information about local gentry, residents, trades, public buildings and services. For newly developed areas of housing directories can indicate the date and order the houses were built in; for older areas they show house occupiers and use. Remember a house's street number may not be constant, and people had to pay to be included in some directories.

For smaller parishes there are usually lists of commercial and private residents in alphabetical order in the county directories, these may give some clues as to occupations and locations of the owners and occupiers you are interested in.

The majority of the printed directories are on the library shelves in the searchroom. We also hold copies on microfiche.

Directories are also available at Bedford and Luton Central Libraries and online. The website of the University of Leicester special collections http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16445coll4 provide access to their collection however they have entered into an agreement with Ancestry and recommend https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=3145 as an alternative way to view them.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.3.1 Census returns

Census returns are held by the National Archives; they are central government sources. However, once the data is 100 years old it can be released and this means that, beginning with the first full census in 1841 and currently ending with the census of 1921, it is possible to see a snapshot of who was in a particular house on a particular night once every ten years.

Under each household the original schedule gives the name of the occupier, their profession or occupation, and details of family members. If the property is easily identifiable because it is an inn, blacksmiths' shop, farmhouse etc., this can help to establish the occupants' names. It is difficult to identify a property if it is a cottage, as house numbers were only given in towns. Knowing the layout of the surrounding streets may help to establish the enumerator's route from house to house.

The easiest way to access census returns if you are looking for a name is via either Ancestry or FindMyPast – both are available via the public computers in the searchroom.

The census returns for 1841-1901 are also on microfilm in the searchroom.

5.3.2 1939 Register

The 1931 census was destroyed by bombing during WW2 and there was no census taken in 1941 and so neither can be accessed. However, in 1939 an emergency register was taken to capture details of the civilian population. This is available on both Ancestry and FindMyPast websites. Laid out by street for each village / town it can be searched by a person's name or by street name / address. Unlike the national census returns it gives specific dates of birth. It also gives occupations, which are sometimes annotated if war work is carried out. Anyone listed on it who is not known to have died and who would be less than 100 years old has their details redacted (crossed out in black). The register continued to be updated by the NHS from 1948 to 1991. This explains why many young, unmarried women have their later married names and dates of marriage written next to their names.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.4 RATING RECORDS

Rate books and valuation lists usually provide the following information: name of owner, occupier, and value. Generally, those created after the mid-nineteenth century also provide the location (i.e. road, street, lane etc.) and a brief description of a property, for example, house and garden, cottage, shop or beerhouse. The house name or number is not usually provided, therefore, when using these records it is useful to know the owner/occupier's name.

5.4.1 1925 Valuation Act Records (Reference DV)

See section 4.4 above.

5.4.2 1910 Finance Act Records (Reference DBV)

The 1910 Finance Act was a mechanism devised for the levying of rates, through the assessment of land value. Under the provisions of Part I of the Finance (1909-10) Act 1910, the first full and detailed survey of landownership in the United Kingdom as of April 1909 was carried out. This became known as the Lloyd George 'Domesday' Survey, forming one element of his famous 'People's Budget' of 1909. The main sources are a map and a reference book (or Domesday Book) giving the owner, occupier, brief description and area of all properties.

For further details, see the collection level entry on our online catalogue
http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/Details/archive/110432765

Unlike the 1925 records, we have not digitised the maps and therefore you will need to order the map from the stacks in order to find the number of the property as it appears in the reference book. To order maps see the brown **DBV** catalogue in the searchroom. Alternatively, try the following in Expert search: Subject = *name of parish* AND Reference = DBV3. This combined search will narrow down the map for your area.

.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.4.3 Rural & Urban District Council rate books & valuations

The rating records of the Rural and Urban District Councils include the poor rate, sanitary rate and lighting rate, which date from the early nineteenth century through to the 1970s. Those we hold are as follows:

Bedford Rural District (see **RDB**): Rate Books: 1927-1956

Luton Rural District (see **RDL**): Rate Books: 1808-1962

Leighton-Linslade Urban District Council
(see **UDLLF**): Valuation Lists: 1892-1970 & Rate Books: 1909-1970

Sandy Urban District Council
(see **UDS**):Valuation Lists: 1909-1956 & Rate Books: 1909-1961

5.4.4 Rate books & valuations, 1837-1950

These books were mainly received from the Poor Law Unions. The numbers surviving vary considerably from parish to parish. The rates include poor relief, highway, lighting, sanitation and special expenses. The rate books are catalogued on the online catalogue as reference RB/name of the parish, e.g. RB/Ampthill.

The valuation lists (reference VL) are arranged by poor law union, date and parish. Survival is patchy. The VL collection is available on Ancestry and if you have a name to search for this is the easiest method of access.

5.4.5 Parish rate books

Rates or 'levies' survive among the documents from individual parishes from the seventeenth century, for example, collections for the poor and levies for the maintenance of the local highway. Rates may therefore be found in the records of churchwardens, overseers of the poor, and (occasionally) surveyors of the highways. Also, in the nineteenth century new properties are sometimes mentioned in the vestry minutes when they were rated for the first time. Poor rates normally end in 1835 but may continue later; churchwardens' and surveyors' rates may go on after 1850. A series of records, rather than a single year, is helpful in establishing the identity of a house, its owner and occupier. These rate books are generally found in the collections of Church of England parishes, (reference P)

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.4.6 Further rating records

Further rating and taxation records can be found in county and borough records.

The Rate Basis Committee Returns (reference RBC/R) were compiled for the collection of the County Rate for the relief of the Poor. These seem to be those in force at the moment, but made at different dates, and to have been sent to the committee in 1860.

5.5 LAND TAX

Land tax was a tax on the yearly value of land payable by the occupiers. The tax was paid into the Exchequer.

5.5.1 1797-1832

Duplicates of the land tax returns made were deposited with the Clerk of the Peace and used as evidence of qualification of the right to vote, i.e. of possession of freehold land to the value of 40s per annum. The annual returns give the names of the owner and occupier, rent and amount of tax, with little or no description of the property.

The land tax returns are reference **QDL** and ordered by parish. They are also available via Ancestry.

5.5.2 Post 1832 Land Tax

The Reform Act of 1832 led to the creation of registers of electors so land tax returns were no longer required for this purpose and were no longer deposited with the Clerk of the Peace. However, the records were maintained by the Land Tax Commissioners and at various dates these were deposited with the archives service by the clerks to the Commissioners, usually local solicitors. The records provide the same information as the pre-1832 returns (for which see 5.5.1)

Reference is **LX** and the records are ordered by parish. They are also available via Ancestry.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.6 FINDING DETAILS OF EARLIER OWNERS & OCCUPIERS

When you find the name of an owner via an enclosure or tithe award or rating valuation you can search for additional information in the following places. Try searching for the person on our catalogue e.g. person = Smith, Joseph Not every result may be for the particular person you are looking for, narrowing by date or location may help to pinpoint the right person e.g. person = Smith, Joseph AND subject = Stotfold

5.6.1 Deeds (see also 3.5)

If you are lucky, deeds may record not only how land was sold, leased or mortgaged, but dates of death, details of inheritance, and family connections such as names of wives, siblings, parents and children.

5.6.2 Wills

A will can reveal to whom property was left, from whom a property was purchased and whether the property was copyhold (see 5.6.3). However, don't expect all property owned by the testator to be mentioned specifically. You may be lucky and the testator may leave specific properties to particular people e.g. to my son the house where I now live, but in many cases all the land the testator possesses will be left in one phrase to one person.

Unfortunately, Bedfordshire Archives holds very few of the inventories that would originally have been produced as part of the probate procedure.

Bedfordshire Archives holds wills proved in Bedfordshire between the late 15th century and 1857. Not all wills before 1857 were proved locally so remember to check elsewhere, particularly The Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) wills at The National Archives.

After 1857 wills were proved nationally https://www.gov.uk/wills-probate-inheritance/searching-for-probate-records

You may also find wills or drafts of wills within solicitors' collections. Search our online catalogue for person/institution = surname, first name AND subject = wills

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

5. WHO LIVED IN A HOUSE LIKE THIS? – RESEARCHING OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS

5.6.3 Manorial Court Rolls

If the property you are interested in is described as copyhold land then you may be able to trace its ownership through manorial court records. Copyhold land had certain obligations to the lord or lady of the manor attached to it and transfer between family members and sale was controlled by recording the transaction at a manor court.

Later court rolls are often in indexed books making them easier to use. Until 1734 these rolls are usually written in Latin.

Manorial Documents Register: To find what manorial records survive for the parish where your property is the best place to start is http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search

5.6.4 **Parish Registers**: will give details of baptism, marriage and burial of the people concerned if they were Anglicans. Bedfordshire Archives also has some birth/baptism, marriage and burial records from other sources such as Baptist, Methodist and Moravian churches, Quaker meetings, Poor Law Union records and cemetery records.

5.6.5 **Other Parish Records**: perhaps the best other source in parish records are records of Overseers of the Poor giving names of persons contributing to the Poor Rate and revealing if the named person was impoverished, involved in the birth of a bastard or involved in an apprenticeship. Churchwardens accounts and accounts of the Surveyors of the Highways frequently mention tradesmen and artisans as well as people contributing to the respective rates levied by those officers. Charity records name trustees and individuals in receipt of charity. Unfortunately, they are not indexed by name.

5.6.6 Quarter Sessions rolls (reference QSR)

Evidence given during trials at the Quarter Sessions court can reveal amazing details of houses and the lives within them. Count yourself lucky if you find a case related to your house or its occupants.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

6. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? – BUILDINGS AND THEIR USES

If your property had a particular past function, such as a public house or a parsonage, you may be able to find more records about it than for a property that has always only been a private residence.

6.1 Farms

Often part of bigger landed estates, subject to being sold and leased, and subject to particular practices of management. It may be possible to find details of crops, values, inventories, sale catalogues of live and dead stock and even farm diaries giving a day-to-day account of life on the farm – it may not always be easy to find details about the farmhouse.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ search subject = farm name, place e.g. Manor Farm, Stotfold

Other sources – farms survey at The National Archives http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/national-farm-survey-england-wales-1941-1943/

6.2 Public houses and beer houses

Many public houses were not free houses but tied to a particular brewery. The records of the brewery companies such as Greene King (GK) and Whitbread Breweries (WB) are likely to be a good source; they often contain deeds and photographs. The history of breweries can be complicated by buy outs and take overs, which produce records such as sale catalogues for the entire business.

Many crimes took place in 19th century drinking establishments but they could also be places where inquests were heard and auction sales held, which means you may find lots of records where the house plays only a small but interesting part in the proceedings. Many occupiers who ran pubs or beer houses also ran other businesses from the premises, such as butchers or smiths.

Licensing records and surveys of licensed premises can be useful places to start. Public houses are often easily identified in picture postcard scenes.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ search subject = sign name, parish e.g. Black Lion, Stotfold

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

6. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? – BUILDINGS AND THEIR USES

6.3 Manor houses

Not every village had a manor house and some had more than one. It is also true that houses now called *The Manor* may not have ever been a manor house! The Victoria County History gives a reasonably reliable history of each manor in the county and its manor house (if it had one) down to the beginning of the 20th century.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ search:
subject = manor house, place e.g. Manor House, Swineshead
You may also need to try subject = Manor of Swineshead and Swineshead Manor. [The Manor of …. and …. Manor should indicate the whole administrative unit of the manor rather than just the manor house where the manor court was held but we have to admit that our indexing may not be consistent here and it is best to check all variations.]

6.4 Parsonages, (rectories and vicarages)

Many parsonages have either been replaced or sold off over time as the needs of the church and the clergy changed. Older parsonages appear regularly in glebe terriers and a conspectus of all glebe terriers for the county can be found in the Archdeaconry of Bedford catalogue (ABE)

Records of parsonages are also found in the parish catalogues.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ use expert search subject = name of parish AND subject = parsonages, e.g. Stotfold AND parsonages



1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

6. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? – BUILDINGS AND THEIR USES

6.5 Schools

Many schools built in villages in the 19th century had a house for the school mistress or master built next to them. Plans for schools that were built or extended using grants from the Department of Education & Science Building Grant between 1831-71 can be found at reference: AD3865. Other information may be found in parish records (usually under section 25 – church administered charity schools or 29 – national schools), school board records (usually reference SB) and the records of the schools themselves (usually found under reference SD).

Reorganisations of the education system during the 20th and 21st centuries can mean that names of schools have changed over time to reflect the type of education the school then provided. Many new schools were built during the 20th century by Bedfordshire County Council, and the Education department (E) and County Architect's department records (CA) can be of use here.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ search subject = name of the school.
In most cases this will find references to the school under any of its former names however where schools have combined or become co-educational this may not be the case. For village schools try typing the name of the village into the subject term box and then use the binoculars to check the list of available search terms – this will often reveal a variety of school names from which you can choose.

For example, the list for Arlesey suggests the council school, the sidings school and St Peter's.



1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

6. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? – BUILDINGS AND THEIR USES

6.6 Police stations

These are noted regularly in Petty Sessions records (reference PS) for the 19th and early to mid 20th century and in Quarter Sessions executive estate records (reference QEE) mostly for the mid to late 19th century.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ use expert search subject = place AND subject = police stations

6.7 Children's homes

References are arranged alphabetically by parish. Records referring purely to the buildings may be seen but all records concerning children living at the home are subject to Data Protection legislation.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ subject = name of the home. You could also search by the road it was located in.

6.8 Post offices

Many rural post offices were run from houses that were also shops and residential properties. Information about post offices can also be found in trade directories such as Kellys.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ use expert search subject = place AND subject = post offices



1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

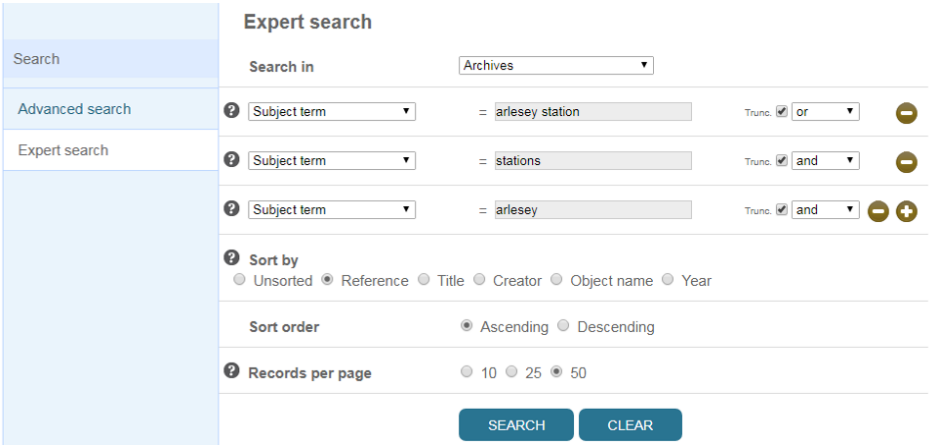
6. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? – BUILDINGS AND THEIR USES

6.9 Railway station houses

The records come mainly from a schedule and plan of property on the proposed railway line deposited with the Clerk of the Peace, which gives owners and tenants. There will be no details of any station house, unless it appears on a later plan of a proposed alteration, but you will see the site and get an approximate date for construction.

It is also worth looking at *Railways in Bedfordshire Planned but not Built* by F.G. Cockman (CRT161/23) to see if a deposited plan of an unbuilt railway touched the site of your property. We may also have photographs showing the property. However, for more detail you may need to use The National Archives or specialist repositories.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ use expert search subject = place station OR subject = stations AND subject = place. For example subject = Arlesey station OR subject = stations AND subject = Arlesey. This should take account of most discrepancies in the way we have indexed stations by name or railway.



1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

6. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? – BUILDINGS AND THEIR USES

6.10 Shops and industrial premises

In rural areas many shops and industrial premises such as blacksmiths were often part of a residential property. They may subsequently have been converted into part of the residence. Sometimes these records may be useful for the history of the site of your house before it was built.

Online catalogue http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/ there are various ways that relevant documents may have been indexed depending on the nature of the record. The easiest thing is always to start with the place – the parish and/or the street - and then refine this search by either the type of trade e.g. butchers, or the name of the company [always try the name of the company under person/institution and subject to take account of any discrepancies in our indexing].



1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026

7. FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

7.1 Historic Environment Record

The Historic Environment Record (HER) is a useful resource. Each local authority in England maintains or has access to an HER, an electronic and physical database linked to GIS mapping. The HERs for Central Bedfordshire, Luton Borough and Bedford Borough Councils contain information and images relating to archaeological sites, historic buildings and historic landscape features. All periods are represented, from earliest human activity to the 21st century, including stray finds, buried remains, historic parks and gardens, demolished buildings and industrial sites. Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest are also recorded.

HER for Central Bedfordshire and Luton,
Historic Environment Record | Archaeology, Heritage & Conservation

HER for Bedford Borough
Bedford Borough Historic Environment Record | Bedford Borough Council

Both HERs also publish their electronic database via the Heritage Gateway https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/default.aspx

7.2 Land Registry

The Land Registry https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/land-registry guarantees the title and records the ownership and interests in registered land in England and Wales.

The Land Registry should initially be consulted regarding current land ownership issues. It may also be possible to obtain copies of scanned title deeds (the land registry does not store original deeds, only scans).

Compulsory registration of land being transferred to new ownership began at different times depending on the local authority i.e.

Bedford municipal borough and Kempston Urban District = 1 Oct 1969
Luton Borough = 1 Oct 1969
Dunstable Urban District = 1 Oct 1969
Bedford Rural District = 1 Sept 1974
Leighton Linslade Urban District and Luton Rural District = 1 Sept 1974
Mid Bedfordshire and its predecessors = 1 Nov 1985

Where land is unregistered, our holdings may be relevant. The Land Registry does not hold information about interests in unregistered land.

1st edition 2001, 2nd edition 2018, rev. 2023 and 2026