

Down Your Street

Find out about the History of Buildings and Streets in Edinburgh:
A resource guide to records held by Edinburgh City Archives and
Edinburgh Central Library



Photograph: Gifford Park, Backland
(Accn 189, Bundle 9E Edinburgh City Archives)

Introduction

This resource guide will give you a brief outline of the resources available in Edinburgh City Archives and the Central Library, if you want to find out about the history of buildings in and around Edinburgh. You will find all relevant contact details at the end of the guide.

Where to Begin

There are lots of books about researching the history of your house which will help to get you off to a good start. One example is *How to Research your House* by Pamela Brooks, Oxford, 2007. Books such as these are available from your local library.

For anyone exploring the city's architecture, the Pevsner Architectural Guides are a good place to begin. Information on what the guidebooks cover and how they came into being can be found at: www.pevsner.co.uk. Copies of the Pevsner volumes covering Edinburgh and the Lothians can be found in the Fine Art Library. For further architectural information, www.scottisharchitects.org.uk is also useful.

Title Deeds

If you want to find out who previously owned or lived in your own property, then look at your title deeds as these indicate changes of ownership as well as the date of construction. For help and advice regarding title deeds contact the Registers of Scotland. See <http://www.ros.gov.uk> or telephone 0845 6070161. If your property is rented and the titles therefore unavailable to you see the section on valuation rolls below.

Post Office Directories

(In Edinburgh & Scottish Collection, Central Library and some at City Archives, City Chambers)

Post Office Directories are useful for tracing the owners/tenants of properties in the Edinburgh and Leith area, as well as what businesses and trades were in the area at certain times. You can search under the general directory listed alphabetically by surname or business name, as well as by street names listed in the street directory section. There is also a professional and trades section within the Directories where you can search for particular trades and find their locations. Be aware that people had to pay to be included in the directories until fairly recently, so the listings are not comprehensive.

Census returns

(In Edinburgh & Scottish Collection, Central Library or www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

Census returns hold a wealth of information, including names, ages, occupations, as well as the places of birth of all individuals residing at each property. The census returns are arranged by street names, not alphabetically by name. The Edinburgh Room holds these records with street indexes for 1841 through to 1901, as well as name indexes for 1881 and 1891 which previous researchers have compiled. You can search using names on the ScotlandsPeople website. Note that there is a 100 year closure on these so the latest currently available is 1911.

Maps

(In Edinburgh & Scottish Collection, Central Library and City Archives, City Chambers)

Maps show the layout of the City and you can identify individual properties and plots. Ordnance Survey maps are particularly helpful, and you will find these in various scales. The larger the scale, the more detailed information you will find. Smaller scale maps cover a larger area but with less detail. There are also extensive 18th and 19th century plans and drawings of Edinburgh which can provide an excellent picture of the development of the City.

Newspapers/Press cuttings

(In Edinburgh & Scottish Collection, Central Library)

Newspaper articles and images can also be very useful when investigating the history of buildings and areas of Edinburgh. You can find out when large buildings were constructed, or when areas of the City became residential. Newspaper reports also help to establish what living conditions would have been like in certain areas, as well as reporting any incidents or events that took place. The earliest newspaper in the Edinburgh Room dates from 1651, but a complete run of various local and national newspapers starts from 1753. Access to *The Scotsman* Digital Archive is available in the Edinburgh Room.

Valuation Rolls

(In Edinburgh & Scottish Collection, Central Library)

The Lands Valuation (Scotland) Act in 1854 established Assessors' offices in each county and Royal Burgh of Scotland. The Assessors produced annual rolls to show which properties were liable to pay local taxation (or domestic rates as they were commonly known). Their records are helpful to those researching the history of buildings as they record details of the type of property, the owner, tenants (sometimes sub-tenants), as well as the rateable value of the property. In addition, up until the mid-twentieth century, they usually recorded the occupations of owners/occupiers. From 1990 the valuation rolls only covered commercial properties.

Registers of Voters/Electoral Rolls

(In City Archives, City Chambers and Edinburgh & Scottish Collection, Central Library)

Registers of Voters in Parliamentary elections, or electoral rolls as they are also called, are another useful resource if you know where your ancestors lived. Before 1918 you will find details of the occupiers, their occupations, as well as details of their property. After this date it tends to be only the name of the person eligible to vote at a particular address which is recorded. It is important to remember that not everyone was eligible to vote. Registers of Voters for local elections included names of those eligible to vote locally, but not nationally. Please also note that neither institution holds registers for the war years. There was an Absent Voters Roll produced during this period and copies are available at the British Library.

Photographs

(In Edinburgh & Scottish Collection, Central Library and online at www.capitalcollections.org.uk)

Photographs can be extremely useful when researching the history of a building as they allow you to see what it used to look like, whether there have been external changes to the building, and/or changes in the vicinity of the building. Interior shots can show how the building was decorated, the purposes for which it was built or used and changes over time too.

Edinburgh Taxation records

(In City Archives, City Chambers)

The City Archives hold several different types of record which relate to local taxes collected from owners/tenants of properties:

- Edinburgh Poll Tax records of the late 17th century for which there is an index of all the names they include in the public search room.
- The Edinburgh Commissioners of Supply sederunt books contain information on the collection of land tax, or 'cess' as it was known, from local landowners between 1813 and 1862.
- Extent Rolls of Edinburgh show tax payable by named residents of Old Town quarters.

Note: These sources are most useful for building up a picture of whole streets and areas in the Old Town, and not for detailed information relating to one specific property.

Dean of Guild Court warrant drawings

(In City Archives, City Chambers)

One of the functions of the Dean of Guild Court was to regulate the construction and demolition of buildings within the City boundary. The archives hold petitions submitted to this body for approval which *usually* include architectural drawings of the proposed building. If alterations took place at a later date, architectural drawings would also have been submitted. It must be noted however, that until the latter half of the 19th century, there was no obligation to submit these drawings to the Court. Drawings exist for parts of Midlothian, as well as Leith before its incorporation into Edinburgh in 1920. Unfortunately, no Dean of Guild Court records survive for Portobello when it stood as a Burgh in its own right before 1896. The drawings provide useful pictorial evidence of what buildings looked like when they were first built, as well as detailing exterior and interior changes to the design of the building over the years. **Note that there is usually a charge for the retrieval of warrant drawings. Please call the Plan Store, 0131 529 4016, for charge details.**

Police Commissioners Rental records

(In City Archives, City Chambers)

The Police Commissioners were not just responsible for policing the streets of Edinburgh – they also supervised street cleaning, lighting and water. An Act of Parliament allowed them to collect rent to help towards the cost of carrying out their duties. Rental books survive for Leith between 1827 and 1862. They include details such as names, descriptions of the properties, the assessors' valuations, the sheriff authorising payments, and in some cases the decisions of the appeal committee. Unfortunately there are no surviving rental volumes of the Edinburgh Police Commissioners.

Police Commissioners Committee minutes

(In City Archives, City Chambers)

Edinburgh Police Commissioners (as explained above) were responsible for many aspects of public provisions in the City. Committee minute books provide detailed information relating to subjects such as poor drainage and the introduction of street lighting and gas. The records also contain evidence of the specifications of street naming and reports on sanitary conditions within buildings. Such records provide a unique picture of conditions in specific areas over time.

Architectural sources

(In Fine Art Library, Central Library)

Prospect is the quarterly publication from Architecture Scotland, with issues devoted to architectural developments in Edinburgh (nos.130 and 131), and other parts of the country. You can find further information on their website at: www.architecturescotland.co.uk

AHSS is the quarterly magazine of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, and provides information on the protection, preservation, study and appreciation of Scottish buildings. Further information is available at: www.ahss.org.uk .

Researchers can also find a guide to listed buildings from Historic Scotland. More information can be found at: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage/historicandlistedbuildings.htm

Interior design sources

(In Fine Art Library, Central Library)

There are several published resources within this section of the library to help you discover the history and developments of interior design of buildings. A good place to start is with *The Scottish Home* by Annette Carruthers (editor), Edinburgh, 1996. National Trust for Scotland publications on *Scottish Georgian interiors*, *Scottish Victorian interiors*, and *Scottish Edwardian interiors* are also useful.

Contact details

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Edinburgh & Scottish Collection

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