# **House History in St Neots**

# a brief guide to documentary sources

This leaflet summarises the main types of records held at the County Record Office in Huntingdon. It concentrates on St Neots and the surrounding parishes of Little Paxton, Great Paxton, Toseland, Eynesbury, and Abbotsley. Please telephone the Record Office on 01480 375842 or email us at county.records.hunts@cambridgeshire.gov.uk for more details.

# Maps and plans

The earliest **Ordnance Survey maps** on a large enough scale to show individual buildings in urban areas date from 1885-89: they are on a 1:2500 scale. The OS revisited the county in 1899-1901 and again in 1924-27, although they did not re-survey the whole county during the 1920s. It is sometimes possible to reconstruct who was living in each house along a street in the late 19th century by using the **1891 census enumerators books** and a copy of the 1889 OS map.

The Inland Revenue's Land Values Duty survey of 1910 (using the 1900-1901 OS base maps) gives details of owners, occupiers, acreages and value at that date. The Record Office has the "working sheets" (draft maps) for Huntingdonshire but the coverage for the St Neots area is very patchy. The "record sheets" (top copy maps) are at the Public Record Office in Kew.

The Ordnance Survey's **Old Series** surveyors' draft maps (2 inches to each mile), drawn up during c. 1808-1821, are useful for showing isolated buildings in rural areas.

Enclosure maps and tithe maps usually show only the outlying fields and properties in each village. The Record Office has a copy of the St Neots enclosure map, dating from 1770, but not the original, as well as enclosure maps for Abbotsley 1838, Great Paxton 1811, Little Paxton 1812, Eynesbury 1800, Eaton Socon 1799 (photostat only), Toseland 1811; and tithe maps for Eynesbury (parts only) 1839-50, Little Paxton 1850.

**Estate plans** can sometimes show buildings. The Record Office has: a large collection of plans of various estates, all dating from 1757, which includes a coloured plan of properties on the northern side of the Market Square; plans of the Gorham estate in St Neots, Eynesbury and Eaton Socon, 1802; and many others.

Occasionally **architects' plans** survive and have been deposited at the Record Office, but these are for 20th century buildings eg plans of Paxton Mill 1960s. Note though that these usually show what a building was *planned* to look like, rather than how it was actually built.

# Deeds: freehold property

Title deeds help because they give people's names. There is no obligation upon individuals to deposit old deeds at Record Offices. For a handful of properties we may have deeds going back to the 1700s, but for most properties we will have nothing at all. **Abstracts of title** are the most useful sort of deed as they summarise relevant earlier deeds and skip the legal verbiage. **Twentieth century deeds** may include plans of the property, and often come with other documents too, such as sales particulars.

Many bundles of deeds include **fire insurance certificates**. Fire insurance became popular outside London from the 18th century and some metal fire marks are still affixed to buildings. The original fire insurance registers, at the Guildhall Library in London, note the address of the insured property, the owner's name and occupation, and give a handy description of the building itself. The Record Office has a microfiche index to the registers for the Royal Exchange Assurance (1775-1787) and the Sun Fire Office (1776-1787).

The introduction of land registration has meant the loss or destruction of many deeds. The Land Registry of England and Wales was set up in 1925 and it introduced a gradual roll-out of registration, so gradual in fact that it did not reach Huntingdonshire until the 1970s. In 1992 50% of all properties in England and Wales were still unregistered.

# Deeds: copyhold property

These were properties which belonged to the local manor. They could still be bought, sold, mortgaged etc in the same way as freehold property, but the documentation was different. The Record Office has records of the following St Neots area manors: Manor of Eynesbury Berkeley: court rolls and books 1704-1931; index to court rolls 1870-1931; minute books 1844-1913; quit rents 1849-1886; admissions and surrenders 1754-1931; custumal 1607. Manor of St Neots: court book 1561, 1563-65; minutes book 1873-1935; list of properties nd; surrenders 1777. Manor of Great Paxton: admissions and surrenders 1756-66; draft court rolls 1850, 1856. Manor of Little Paxton: minute book 1875-1893, 1931; quit rents 1852-1933. Manor of Toseland: court book 1815-1899; minute books 1750-1806; quit rents 1894-1913.

# Local authority records

District Council **rate books** give details of occupiers of houses and the rateable values (subject to certain exceptions, *occupiers* were subject to rates, not owners). We have rate books for St Neots Urban District Council for 1913-15, 1926-57, and 1959-65; and rate books for St Neots Rural District Council for 1938-1973. Earlier parish rate books usually do not list addresses.

Rates were determined by **valuation**: the local valuation officers would begin by estimating the "gross value" of an individual property, which was the rent which could be reasonably expected from the property if it was let over a year; then they would make any necessary deductions from the gross value (depending on how the property was used, for example) to arrive at the "net rateable value." We have valuation lists for about fifty Huntingdonshire parishes, dating from 1897-1929.

Councils often ran their own council houses. The 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act allowed Councils to subsidise the building of houses for the "working classes" only; it was not until 1949 that this condition was dropped. Large council estates began to appear after the First World War. We have some registers of tenants in St Neots UDC council homes. Various other Acts gave Councils powers to deal with overcrowding, insanitary conditions etc, so some buildings may be mentioned in the minute books of the relevant committee.

Planning permission is often confused with building byelaw approval, which also involve the submission of plans to local councils. Byelaw applications began in 1936 and are concerned with practical construction issues. In 1936 byelaw applications in this area were the responsibility of local UDCs and RDCs; since 1974 they have been the responsibility of Huntingdonshire District Council. No building byelaw plans have been given to the RO (though Cambridge RO has some for other District Council areas). Planning permission began only in 1947, when the Town and Country Planning Act introduced a comprehensive system for the control of development; since then (with some specific exceptions) no land owner has been entitled to carry out any development without

first obtaining the necessary planning permission. Again we have no records, though problem cases may be mentioned in the relevant UDC or RDC minute books, or in the records of the local parish council.

Some older properties are **listed**. A listed building is one which is included on the statutory List of buildings of special architectural interest, compiled currently by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Buildings are added to the list as a result of surveys initiated by local councils or they may be 'spot listed' individually, usually when there is a threat of demolition. Once added to the List a building is protected by law, and its demolition or alteration without consent is a criminal offence. There are about 3,500 listed buildings in Huntingdonshire. The Record Office has a set of the old (Department of the Environment) lists from the 1970s. More up-to-date information can be found at Huntingdonshire District Council. HDC also keeps a Register of Buildings at Risk (currently about 400 listed properties).

Twentieth century electoral registers give names of voters living at addresses.

Local government bodies do not keep registers of ghosts, hauntings or sites of murders.

#### Exteriors . . .

Tricky. **Postcards** and photographs survive from the 1870s showing houses, churches and shops in the middle of towns, or showing the homes of the aristocracy, but if your house is on the edge of a town or village, or is an isolated farm building, then the Record Office is less likely to be able to help. Occasionally, pre-19th century **topographical sketches** can give an indication of what a building looked like, but we do not have many for St Neots. Even old **road maps** (such as Ogilby's from 1674) can show little sketched depictions of buildings.

#### ... and interiors

Even trickier. **Photographs** of interiors tend to survive only for wealthier houses (like Hinchingbrooke House or Kimbolton Castle). If your house used to be a **shop** then you may get lucky, as we have a handful of photographs of shop interiors. **Sales particulars** can sometimes indicate what the interior of a building was like.

**Probate inventories** survive for some properties in Huntingdonshire from about 1618 to 1858. They list all the resaleable goods of a deceased person, and (for larger houses at least) are arranged room by room. This means they *may* give an indication of the layout of a house and of how each individual room was used. Pinning an inventory down to a specific surviving building is often impossible, though.

# Records relating to specific types of buildings

#### Schools

County primary schools were surveyed in 1946; the surviving surveys include photographs and sometimes plans of the buildings. There are surveys for four such primary schools in the town of St Neots alone (C of E Boys, C of E Girls, County Mixed, and County Infants), as well as schools in Eynesbury and the surrounding villages. The Record Office also has a large number of Hunts County Council Surveyors' Department plans of school buildings, dating from the 1950s and 1960s.

Some plans survive from the nineteenth century eg. six plans of St Neots Girls and Infants School (1841), ten plans of St Neots Wesleyan School (1857). There will also be references to school buildings in the Hunts County Council Education Dept minutes, in the headteacher's log books or the school board managers' minutes, and there may be photographs too.

#### **Pubs**

Pub licensing was the responsibility of Justices of the Peace. Each JP could exercise summary jurisdiction in licensing matters without having to wait for the next proper sitting of the Quarter Sessions. Over time this summary jurisdiction was formalised into **Petty Sessions courts**, which evolved into today's magistrate's courts. The St Neots area was covered by Toseland Petty Sessions Division, and we have the following records: register of licences 1887-1901; licensing files for some individual pubs 1915-1922; plans of *The Wool Pack* and *The Globe* pubs, St Neots, 1948.

Pub landlords were occasionally brought before the **Quarter Sessions court**, as well. Quarter Sessions records include accusations of selling liquor in vessels which were not the standard size, or for keeping unruly houses. Assaults and fights at specific pubs are mentioned too. **Directories** give the names of pubs and their landlords. 1:2500 **Ordnance Survey** maps sometimes include pub names. Pubs are mentioned in the **census enumerators returns**: we have them for 1841 to 1901. Many pubs appear on old **postcards** or photographs. We also have a series of photographs of pubs which belonged to **Huntingdon Breweries Ltd**, dating from the 1930s: these photographs include shots of the rears of the buildings, too. Other records of Huntingdon Breweries Ltd held at the Record Office include deeds of their properties 1679-1910.

## Chapels, churches and vicarages

Some houses are converted ecclesiastical buildings. There are often many records surviving for former *Church of England* properties, such as vicarages and rectories, as they may be mentioned on terriers of church land, or in records of Archdeacon's visitations; the notebook of Archdeacon Timothy Neve, 1747-1757, for instance, includes comments on the structural condition of all the parish buildings he inspected. Parish records and Archdiaconal records may include plans and specifications for proposed building work. The Record Office holds surviving documents of all parishes in the St Neots area. Fewer records survive for **nonconformist chapels**, however: there may be photographs of the building, but that is all.

# Top tips

- see if someone else has researched it all first
- it is easier to trace people than buildings
- it helps if your house has been something else in the past
- it also helps if your house is Kimbolton Castle

