

Exploring house history

Are you curious about who lived in your house in the past?

Any house, however grand or humble, has seen many people pass through its doors but who were these people and what did they do? This article explores the resources available to help you discover more about the history of your home and uses Royd House, built around 1826, as an example of what you can find out about previous residents of a property. The picture shows Royd House

The first place to look is census records. Although censuses are taken only every ten years they contain a wealth of information about people: their relationship to the head of household, age, marital status, birthplace and occupation and in 1911 how long a couple had been married and how many children they had.

In 1851 Sarah Mitchell a 53 year old landed proprietor is living at Royd House with her three daughters Mary, Sarah and Susannah aged 20, 18, and 16, a governess and two servants. By 1861 Sarah Mitchell junior, aged 28, is the head of household and her sisters both aged 26 are living with her: Susannah who was living there in 1851 and Hannah who was not there 10 years previously. All three are described as gentlewomen and landed proprietors. A cook and a general servant complete the household.

In 1871 the Mitchells have left Royd House and John Shackleton a 54 year old fustian manufacturer and widower is living there with his unmarried son Thomas who is aged 31 and also a fustian manufacturer. They too have live-in servants. Ten years later it looks as though John Shackleton has died as Thomas is now head of household at Royd House and is described as an annuitant, as is his wife Emma Jane and their visitor Elizabeth Jane Bowker. They have a nurse and a cook living with them.

By 1891 the house has changed hands again and Elizabeth Cheetham a 55 year old widow is living there with her sons John and James Cheetham who are fustian merchants and wholesale clothiers. Elizabeth's daughter Florence, aged 26, and her niece Sarah White aged 16 are also living there, as is one servant.

In 1901 new occupiers are at Royd House: Edward Jones Crossley a 39 year old cotton manufacturer is living there with his wife Ada and their daughter Phyllis along with a cook, a maid and a waiting maid. Edward Jones Crossley is still at Royd House in 1911 with his wife Ada Marianne and their daughter Muriel aged 24 and a cook, housemaid and waiting maid. Edward and Ada have been married 24 years and have had 3 children one of whom has died. The census return shows that Royd House has 10 rooms.

To fill in the gaps between censuses electoral registers are very useful. Although they only give a name and address, they do tell you how long someone has lived at a particular property. Not everyone will be listed as the eligibility for voting varied over time. They show us that Edward Jones Crossley was first listed at Royd House in 1898 and remained there until at least 1915 but was no longer living there after the war ended.

Directories can be useful: they provide a name and address and sometimes an occupation. *The Kelly's Directory of the West Riding 1893* shows us that Edward Jones Crossley was living at Crossley Terrace in Hebden Bridge in 1893, before he moved to Royd House. Directories also give a description of the locality and set some context for the house being researched.

The person living in a house may not necessarily have owned the house and many more people rented then than now. The West Riding Tax Valuation of 1910 shows that Edward Jones Crossley did not own the property but instead rented it from John A Ingham Solicitors of Todmorden. The gross annual value of the property was £65 (just over £5,000 in today's money) and the rateable value was £55 10s.

Newspapers are invaluable for delving deeper into the lives of previous inhabitants. A search on the name of the house in the British Newspaper Archive turns up two very different stories. *The Todmorden and District News* of 13 September 1889 tells us that on 10 September John Cheetham aged 53 of Royd House, Hebden Bridge died. He must have been Elizabeth Cheetham's husband as she is a widow in 1891. There is a report of a happier event the previous year when Miss Mary Sophia Cross of Royd House married Mr Joseph Croad of Hangingroyd Lane at Slack Chapel on 5 December 1888. It is likely that Mary Sophia was a servant.

To go into more detail about the families who lived at your home, it's possible to use parish registers and other records to construct family trees much as you would with the history of a family.

This short summary shows how much information can be discovered using some standard resources which are available on Ancestry and FindMyPast and can be accessed at libraries. It leaves some intriguing questions for further research: how did the house come to be owned by John A Ingham Solicitors? Why was Thomas Shackleton an annuitant rather than a fustian manufacturer in 1881? Where is Phyllis, daughter of Edward and Ada Crossley in 1911?

There are many more resources available to make exciting discoveries about your home. If you'd like to learn more about how to research the history of your house, the South Pennines History Group is running a study day on 12 October 9:15 to 4:45 which will look in more detail at the sources you can use to discover who lived in your house, who owned it and how it developed over time. For more information and how to book, see our advert.

Sources

- Ancestry, UK censuses
- Ancestry, West Yorkshire, England, Electoral Registers, 1840-1962
- Ancestry, West Yorkshire, England, Tax Valuation, 1910
- FindMyPast, British Newspaper Archive