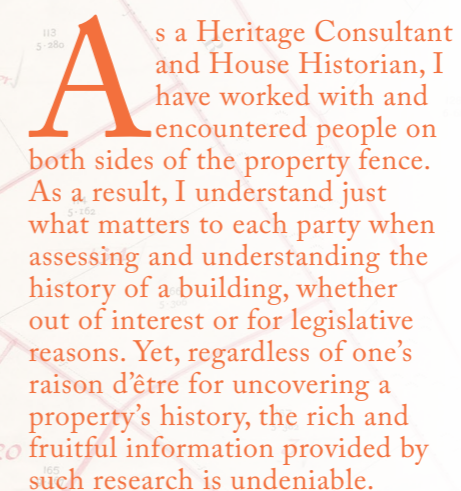




# *The Importance of Knowing the History of a Listed Property*



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As English Heritage's (EH) 'Conservation Principles, Policies & Guidance' states: *To identify the cultural and natural heritage values of a place, its history, fabric and character must first be understood... Its history of ownership may be relevant, not only to its heritage values, but also to its current state... The study of material remains alone will rarely provide sufficient understanding of a place.*

In March 2012, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) redefined the guidance on planning policy for the historic environment. Together with legislation and policy produced by EH, besides sustainability, the primary focus of the guidance was on understanding the significance of a heritage asset. Knowing the architectural history of your home, its inhabitants, surrounding locale/context and therefore what is important about it, are what define its historic significance. Such information is crucial when owning a listed property, as it is required for both planning permission and listed building consent.

In order to make a sound decision, the NPPF states that planning authorities need to understand from the applicant the significance of any heritage asset affected (paragraph 128). EH's 'Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice' provides information on the proper way to record and analyse historic buildings, illustrating the strong need for research to inform the planning process, but also as a way of taking action to understand the historic environment so that we may manage it appropriately for future generations.

A fundamental part of this is the gathering, analysis and interpretation of evidence embodied in the fabric of extant buildings and in a wide range of sources. While the majority of this information is held at local authority archives, some is available for consultation via the National Monuments Record, local HERs, and libraries. Historic maps, plans and views are also crucial for dating evidence, while title deeds, newspapers, sale particulars, census

records, electoral rolls, etc. can provide a great deal of information on past inhabitants. And evidence should not be limited to documentation – visual sources such as photographs can also be fundamental in assessing how a building has changed – as an accumulation provides a most comprehensive history that may then be usefully understood and used.

Moreover, heritage statements are required for all applications affecting listed buildings. These documents should explain how proposed developments to a site would affect and impact its character and significance, and therefore must justify why the work is necessary/desirable. In order to assess significance and character, an understanding of the building's development over time must be learned. New work or alterations are normally acceptable if there is sufficient information to understand the impacts of

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the proposal on the significance. As such, to gain this permission, you will need to show that any changes will be sympathetic to its character and surroundings, which can only be learned through proper research and analysis. For example, the use of materials or techniques closely matched to those being repaired or replaced tend to carry a lower risk of future harm, premature failure or rejection by the planning officer or the fabric itself.

Such research is not only crucial to carrying out alterations and developments, but also daily maintenance and repair; and even for tackling a building's energy efficiency. As many older buildings will have been added to or adapted over their lifetime, some of the additions may be built from different materials or other methods of construction than the majority. Knowing what materials your house is made of and the techniques used to construct it, will help you to maintain and change it efficiently. Older houses can also vary greatly in their energy efficiency depending on how they are built and maintained. Understanding a property's construction history can therefore help to improve thermal performance, so important in these harsh economic times.

Once you have addressed the research of your property for its practical use, you can then move on to uncovering possible tales of intrigue, passion or scandal, or simply to solve, once and for all, the legend of the hallway ghost or account that a King or Queen once stayed in the house.

All such information is likely to be of interest to current and future generations – many house histories are passed down as family



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heirlooms! Furthermore, if thinking of selling your home in the future, the history of a dwelling can have an unlimited potential economic and personal value. Stories describing the names and lives of people who previously lived in the property and walked under the same wooden beams or warmed in front of the same inglenook fireplace are often extremely appealing to a buyer and many examples exist that have significantly increased a property's sale value!

It is clear that not only do our nation's historic buildings have much to tell about the everyday lives of past generations - where we live, how we live, and how we came to create our modern built heritage - but we can also learn how buildings were constructed and

ornamented, the traditions they embodied and the aspirations they expressed. They are living records of our social, economic, environmental and even artistic history, as well as being influential contributors to our local, regional and national identities; our sense of place and community.

So, dig out those documents and investigate that fabric – who knows what you might find...

*Dr Emma Wells is a heritage consultant and house historian who researches and investigates historic buildings for building/conservation professionals and private homeowners throughout the UK. Emma is a Practitioner member of the IfA and Affiliate member of the IHBC. *