

Local history sources in the Westcountry Studies Library

Factsheet 15

Introduction: research guides

Whether you are researching with a qualification or publication in mind, or you are simply curious about where you live, the Westcountry Studies Library can support your project from its vast and varied collection. To help you begin, the Library holds many guides to the study of Local History, such as *Local History in England* by W.G. Hoskins or *In Pursuit of Devon's History* by I. Maxted. Books such as these help to identify and explain the different sources available to both the beginner and the more experienced historian.



Making a start

In the online catalogue at www.devon.gov.uk/localstudies, browse by entering the place name in Keywords on the search page. Use the drop-down selection button to sort between books and pamphlets, illustrations, maps and periodical articles to gain an overview of what has already been written or produced. Most will be held in the Library stack; please ask for anything of interest, or alternatively contact us if you are browsing elsewhere and want further information.

Parish cuttings files

Files containing an assortment of newspaper cuttings and other notes for most Devon parishes have been compiled since the 1920s with much earlier material included. Please ask for these at the desk.

Maps

How has your region changed over the years? The Library's map collection includes historic atlases and county maps from the sixteenth century, geological and land use maps, Ordnance Survey surveyors' drafts for c.1803 and nineteenth century OS plans for the larger towns (1:500). The OS 1st and 2nd editions for c.1880 and 1905 are available for most of the county at 1:2500, with some 1930s revisions, particularly for the urban areas. Post-war maps at 1:2500, 1:10,000 and some at 1:1250 are also held. Some are available on fiche only, some in hard copy.

County and parish histories and local guide books

This section includes scholarly research, both ancient and modern, tourist guides and

personal reminiscences. While the majority are for Devon, there are well-stocked sections for Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset. These are shelved on the end wall, county histories first followed by local histories and guides alphabetically in order of place, with many more kept in the Library stack. If your locality does not have much written about it, a county history might help you understand how the area developed.

Directories

These are held for larger towns from 1783 onwards. From 1850 to 1939, the county directories have a separate entry for every parish in Devon giving, besides a list of residents and tradesmen, short historical and descriptive notes with details of public establishments and official bodies, particularly useful if your parish has not been researched. A selection is on the open shelves, but most are kept in the stack or are available on microfilm. Later directories are available for the larger towns.

Periodicals and community magazines

These are an important source for detailed studies of a locality. Search the catalogue under periodical title for details of titles and issues held. Many individual articles are also catalogued and can be searched for by place if desired. The collection ranges from erudite journals such as the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* (with an index to the first 100 volumes) to locally-produced parish magazines.

Newspapers

Local newspapers are available in the library, mainly on microfilm, for every year since 1737 with some coverage for the period 1715-31. The Exeter Flying Post runs from 1763 to 1917 and is indexed under subject, place and property up to 1885 and under name up to 1835. Devon Library members can also access 19th Century British Library Newspapers online, which include Trewman's Exeter Flying Post at www.devon.gov.uk/nineteenthcenturynews.

Illustrations

We hold a remarkably rich collection of illustrations showing places, people and events all over Devon from the eighteenth century onwards. This collection includes prints (engravings or lithographs), paintings, drawings and photographs. Since 2002, the Library has been engaged in a project to digitise these images and put them on its website. You can search the catalogue for pictures by place, by name and by subject. The Library also holds microfiches of the 15,000 early photographs in the Devon section of the Francis Frith Collection and a listing of these is available.

Demographics and inhabitant lists

Devon Census Statistics includes population figures for each parish for every ten years from 1801-1981 (except 1941) and various twentieth century census reports are also available. The census enumerators' returns for Devon are available on microfilm or fiche for 1841-1901. Other inhabitant lists available include a selection of parish register transcripts (1538-1837), protestation returns (1641), muster rolls (especially 1569) and tax and rate assessments.

Government publications

Government reports and returns often include sections relating to individual localities. The library has a list of local acts of Parliament, which are also included in the *Devon Union List* under the heading Local Acts. Other useful publications include a selection of House of Commons and Command Papers, Charity Commissioners' Reports and the 1873 return of owners of land. Check the computer catalogue for local government publications. We also hold summaries of Devon County Council minutes since 1905 and Exeter City Council since 1890.

Other useful sources

Internet access is available and is free for a range of local history websites. Useful sites include the National Archive website at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, which lists, among other things, the Devon Record Office holdings and other national depositories for archives and records. See also, at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/localhistory, a guide to the study of Local History. The census is available through the library subscription to www.ancestrylibrary.com via the Information and Reference section of the Devon Libraries website at www.devon.gov.uk/libraries. The online historical population reports website, www.histpop.org, provides online access to the complete British population reports for Britain and Ireland from 1801 to 1937. The Burnet Morris Index of Devon names and places was completed in 1940 and provides the local historian with references to many sources, some of which are held in Westcountry Studies or Exeter Central Reference Library.

Before visiting, please ring to check availability of stock and book microfilm readers

For a full list of our holdings, and to view many of our illustrations, see our online catalogue at www.devon.gov.uk/localstudies

Contact details

Westcountry Studies Library

Castle Street
Exeter
EX4 3PQ

Phone: 01392 384216

Email: westcountry.library@devon.gov.uk

Opening hours:

Monday:	9.30 - 6.00
Tuesday:	9.30 - 7.00
Wednesday:	10.00 - 5.00
Thursday:	9.30 - 7.00
Friday:	9.30 - 6.00
Saturday:	9.30 - 4.00

Different formats

If you would like a summary of this in a different format such as large print, Braille or tape, or in a different language, please contact our Customer Service Centre on 0845 155 1015 or email customer@devon.gov.uk

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