



BUILDING BIOGRAPHIES

Researching the Country Houses of Galloway

The completion of their build was only the beginning of their story

Whether abandoned, recently renovated or long since demolished, those large country houses that have stood watch over our countryside each have their story to tell, and we want your help in hunting them out.

Built as extravagant homes displaying the wealth of their owners, these buildings would soon reflect much larger changes in Scottish society. Originating in the heyday of the class system in Britain, their initial design represented ideas of segregation between family and servant. The onset of social change triggered by the First and Second World Wars transformed the political and economic climate and saw many country estates go into decline. Often their survival depended on their re-invention and, from schools to war hospitals, these symbols of status and exclusivity would soon become defined by a mix of local community and national need.

For those that didn't find a new purpose, many were to be abandoned and even deliberately de-roofed to avoid taxes. It was a rare country house that managed to survive

these changes and still be used as a family home.

In researching these country estates, this project hopes to reveal their origins, their varying uses over the years and how this was often embodied in the physical changes to the architecture of the houses themselves. Their stories will give insights into the individuals brought together under their roof, their evolving role in the minds of the local community and how larger changes in our society echoed in their halls.

WHY COUNTRY HOUSES?

From doocots to factories, every building has something to tell us through its architecture and history, and all types of structures are studied within archaeology. We've chosen country houses as the subject in this instance, but we hope that that you can go on to make use of these resources to research any structures which take your interest.

As for country houses though, our interest stems from their longevity and assorted histories. Their status, and often sheer size, has led to many surviving



"These country houses employed a great number of servants for all the various detailed domestic functions. Additionally, if all the outside staff and their families were counted then the country house was a substantial community often reaching as many as one hundred people. Even country houses without a large working estate or agricultural base, would have a significant level of servants (at least ten) to keep the property running smoothly. Though the worlds of master and servant were artificially apart in the name of privacy, the two classes were actually overlapping and almost totally inter-dependent on one another."

Country Houses of Scotland (1995)
by JRA Connachan-Holmes



through re-invention, serving as an adaptable resource over a century or more of significant change.

Today, many are protected in recognition of their value, but throughout the 20th century a number of houses were lost through demolition, and those that survive vary in condition – while some have been given a new lease of life, others stand as roofless ruins. Recording and sharing the history of these buildings will preserve them before any further losses occur.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

We will assign you a house that will be yours exclusively to research. We will give you the house's name, what parish it sits in and a grid reference for its location. This should allow you to find it on a map and start researching its history.

We have lots of resources listed below for you to use in your search, and a checklist of the main ones to get you started. You're then free to look through the resources at your own pace and see how much information you can gather. This will vary and you might find some resources more helpful than others, but every little piece will uncover one more piece of the puzzle, no matter how small.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

Everything! Okay, that's not quite true – we'll sleep easy not knowing the intricate details of every nook, cranny, window frame and skew putt to have adorned your house through the decades. A basic description of the house and its estate, along with some photographs, would be great as a starting point but you don't have to go into all the details. Hopefully, you'll come across a description in one of the resources that you can use. If it's listed, include what category it is and, if you can, what is it about the house that makes it significant – usually outlined in the listed building record.

It would then be great to have a timeline for your house.

- Start by telling us when the house was built, who the architect was and, if possible, who commissioned its construction. You could include additional details about the architect themselves, where they were based and their other projects.
- You could investigate the client in more detail as well – what is their background and how did they fund the house's build?
- Maybe there's some interesting facts about the architecture of the house

“the First, and then the Second World Wars altered British society and social outlook entirely. The forces of social change gathered pace as War acted as a focusing catalyst.”

**Country Houses of Scotland (1995)
by JRA Connachan-Holmes**



In the early 1700s, a number of country houses would have contained a state apartment in their design – “that suite of rooms (dining room, drawing room and bedchamber) supposedly for use only in the highly improbable event of a royal visit but considered necessary in any nobleman's or laird's house soon after the Restoration.”

The Buildings of Scotland: Dumfries and Galloway (1996) by John Gifford



ANY QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions at all throughout the project (or even some tips that we could forward on) then just send us an email at contact@rathmell-arch.co.uk and pop 'Building Biographies' into the subject title.

The first (and most important) piece of advice given when you start in archaeology is to 'always ask' – we're here to help and if we don't have the answer right away, then we will endeavour to hunt it out for you!

We're also more than happy if you'd rather have a chat over zoom – this can be good for screen sharing if you'd like a session on how to use any of the online resources. Just let us know in an email and we'll set it up!

itself – were they aiming for a specific style or décor, were there particular influences in its design or maybe there were some eccentricities in its layout? And include the surrounding grounds as well, did the house sit at the centre of a larger designed landscape and were there any ancillary buildings such as stables, gatehouses or even an ice house?

- You could list some of the different people who resided in your house over the years – families, servants and lodgers – adding in any details about them that you find of interest. You can also include the dates for any major periods of repair or refurbishment to the house, or if it was ever badly damaged as the result of a fire or a bad storm?
- We're keen to know of any changes of use. Has your house always been a private residence, or has it seen other uses in its time? If so, when did this happen and why? Can you go into some more detail for its other uses and

whether they required any modifications to the building itself? Did it have any effect on the surrounding grounds?

- If your house was abandoned, de-roofed or demolished, when was this and can you find any information on why? Do any of the surrounding structures or gardens still survive? Do you know what happened to the people who lived and worked in the house and on the estate?
- If the house is still standing (even as a ruin), then feel free to continue its timeline right up to how it's still having an impact today. We're interested in any tales relating to your house even from recent years (these are also part of its story). Is it still a private residence? Or maybe it's been renovated or become a popular tourist spot?

HOW DO I SUBMIT MY RESULTS?

Once you've collected all the information that you can on the story of your house, then all you need to do is type up a summary and email it through

TIP: As you go through, there will be areas which catch your interest and you will naturally go into more detail for these. Please feel free to follow the topics that you find interesting – it will make it a more rewarding project for yourself and will likely be of interest to others as well. Add in additional details relating to people associated with your house, any events which might have affected it or even the wider social, economic or political landscape that played a role in its fate.



to **contact@rathmell-arch.co.uk** with 'Building Biographies' included in the subject title. You can type your summary directly into the email or attach it as a separate document written in Word, Google Docs, Libre Office or an equivalent.

Title your text with the house's name and parish. You can make your summary as simple or as detailed as you like. You can write it up as paragraphs or as a list of bullet points, add images into the text or attach them separately, and, if you want, you can also attach any documents that you find – how you lay it out is up to yourself!

Feel free to submit your results at any point throughout the project, but we'd ask for all findings to be submitted by **Wednesday 31st May** at the latest.

And if you finish your building early then just let us know if you'd like another one to research – there's plenty to go round!

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH MY FINDINGS?

We're very keen to share any knowledge that we gather, so we'll be sending the results through to local societies for their archives and to remain as a future resource. If there are any groups that you think would be interested, just let us know – the more the merrier. We'll also add your findings to Can You Dig It's **online resources** and share little snippets from your research on the Can You Dig It social media (@gglparchaeology on both Facebook and Twitter) throughout the year – let us know if you'd rather your name was left off of the final results.

WHERE DO I START?

There are many resources available for researching the history of your building. The next few pages give a list of the main ones that we've come across – you can break your research up by trying a new one each time. We've included a checklist below to highlight the main ones to get you started. Feel free to share any tips or other resources that you come across and we'll forward them on to your fellow researchers.

TIP: It might be an idea to type up pieces of information as you uncover them – and the sources where you found them – this will hopefully stop you from having a major typing up exercise at the end!

CHECKLIST:

- Have you checked **Pastmap** for a physical description of your building, either on Canmore or the Listed Building record?
- Does it appear in the **Buildings at Risk Register**?
- Does the **Dictionary of Scottish Architects** list who designed the house and where they were based?
- Is there an **estate map** available on the NLS website which covers your location?
- Is there is an historical description of your property on either **Scotlands Places** or in the **Statistical Accounts of Scotland**?
- Does your building appear in any articles or adverts within the **British Newspaper Archive**?
- Have you managed to find an **old photograph** of your house? And maybe a more recent one if it's still standing?
- Can you find any of its inhabitants listed in the **census returns**?

PASTMAP

Pastmap is a great first stop when researching the heritage sites of Scotland. Using an interactive map, you can zoom into a specific location and see sites from 10 different categories including Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments, as well as both the National (Canmore) and Local Historic Environment Records.

This is a great place to start to see if they hold some basic information about your house.

Type the NGR location that we've given you into the search box at the top left and it will take you right to where your house sits on modern mapping – this will let you see how it's laid out today. The more you zoom in, the more detailed the mapping.

You can then turn on layers on the left side bar to find out what the records hold. Feel free to turn on all of them and see what comes up but be sure to specifically look at both the Canmore (blue dot) and Listed Building (red dot) entries. Click on the dot over your house and then select the link which appears in the left side bar under 'Details (opens a new window)'.

The records will vary in how much detail they hold, but you might find the date it was built, any associated structures on its estate and architectural details on its form – take notes or simply copy and paste the relevant information into a separate document.

The Canmore entry might also have some photographs so that you can see your house and download them as part of your findings.

Check out Pastmap's **Introduction video** if it's your first time using it.

BUILDINGS AT RISK REGISTER

The **Buildings at Risk Register** is maintained by Historic Environment Scotland and gives information on properties of architectural or historic merit considered to be at risk.

If your house is currently sitting vacant and is suffering from poor maintenance or structural problems, then you will likely find it in this list. Here you will be able to find updates on its condition from recent years, alongside photographs and sometimes information on its ownership.

There is also a 'Bibliography' section which could point you to other potentially helpful sources of information.

DICTIONARY OF SCOTTISH ARCHITECTS

The **Dictionary of Scottish Architects** is a free online database containing biographical information and job lists for all architects who worked in the period 1660-1980. It is searchable by name or location of the architect, practice or building, as well as by client.

Your best bet is probably to use the 'Building Search' tab along the top menu where you can search for your house under 'What is the building's name or type'.

The results should hopefully give you dates for its construction and any later repairs, allowing you to start putting together a timeline for the physical changes that your house went through. It should also give the name of the architects involved in its design – you can then click on their name to see where they were based and what other building projects they were involved in.

Be sure to also scan the 'References' section which might provide possible resources for further research.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND'S MAP IMAGES

The **National Library of Scotland** has an amazing collection of historical mapping online that you can search for free. There are several ways to search through the available mapping and it's worth exploring other options once you feel more comfortable. But a great place to start is the '**Explore georeferenced maps**' option – here you can enter your house's grid reference into the 'Search by National Grid Reference' box and it will take you straight to the location of your building.

Under '1. Select a category' – choose 'Scotland'. Then work your way through the mapping and see how far back your building or its name appears. You can also note down any significant changes in its layout which could point at periods of modification or extension. It might be helpful to take screen shots and save them to your computer for future reference.

As with elsewhere, remember to keep a note of any alternative spellings that you come across which could prove helpful in later research.

Before leaving though, have a look at their estate maps section – see below for how best to do that.

ESTATE MAPS

The NLS website holds over 1,200 estate maps in their online collection. These maps were produced throughout the 1700s and early 1800s and, as the name suggests, were designed to illustrate all aspects of the commissioning estate's lands to inform their management. For many rural areas, they are often the most detailed maps to have been created before the Ordnance Survey.

The NLS has a massive collection of estate maps available online for Dumfries and Galloway thanks to the great work of DAMP (**Dumfries Archival Mapping Group**) but they might not all show up in the geo-referenced search option. Instead head to the specific 'Estate Maps' section and select '**Browse Estate Maps of Scotland using a graphic index**' – you will then be able to enter your coordinates again and zoom into your location. In this instance the relevant estate maps will appear in a menu at the right-hand side, and you can click on them to view them in more detail.

TIP: Keep a note of where your information comes from as you go as it will be helpful to mention your sources in your final summary – you can either include them in the text, as footnotes, or create a 'References' section at the end.

TIP: Consider getting in touch with the current owners of your house as they might well hold a lot of information on its history and layout. You can then offer to share your findings with them in return.

SCOTLANDS PLACES

ScotlandsPlaces is a free resource that lets you explore thousands of records simply by searching for a place name, clicking on a map or typing in your postcode. Search results bring together the collections of Historic Environment Scotland, the National Records of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland so that you can easily find maps, photographs and written records about your chosen site.

The website gives you access to tax rolls and the Ordnance Survey Name Books, as well as photographs, archaeological records, drawings and publications.

Just type your house's name into the search bar and see what comes up! If it appears on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map in the mid-19th century then it should have a Name Book entry – be sure to check this out as it will give you a description of the property at that time and might also include some other details such as the owner's name and alternate spellings for the property.

You might also find valuation rolls and tax records which can give additional snippets of information – all sorts of items used to be taxed including servants, horses, dogs, carts and even watches!

STATISTICAL ACCOUNTS OF SCOTLAND

Aimed at collecting information about the economy, social activities and natural resources of Scotland, the **Statistical Accounts of Scotland** represent a collection of facts based on responses by ministers in each of the 938 parishes of Scotland. They were compiled on three different occasions, named the 'Old' in the 1790s, the 'New' in the 1830s and the 'Third' in the latter half of the 20th century.

Both the Old and New Statistical Accounts are available to read online for free, and they can give some great overviews about each parish from these periods (alongside some insights into the personality of each author!). You might well find mention of some of the larger estates within these overviews so it's worth a look.

You can search either for the parish to read the full overview or specifically for your house's name. Note that the Old and New accounts are shortened to OSA and NSA in the results list.

TAKE CARE: If you decide to visit your house, please remember not to enter any derelict structures but to instead view them from a safe distance. Sections of loose masonry will fall eventually and you are unlikely to get much warning!

It's also important to remember that you are likely entering private land – note that the 'Right to Roam' doesn't include houses and gardens. This might be a great opportunity to get in touch with the owners though and start sharing information.

TAKE CARE: Undertaking research can be a very rewarding task, but it can also become frustrating if your search is coming up empty.

Don't be disheartened – if you find yourself hitting a wall, then maybe it's time to have a break or try a new resource from the list. You can also use us as a sounding board if you need to.

Whatever information you manage to uncover, however scant, is still creating a record which will make sure your building is included in the results – anything you uncover will reveal an unknown fact about local history!

BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE

Old newspapers are a great resource, they can transport you back to the past in a way that few other archives can. Your building might appear in stories or adverts, and might mention the names of owners or specific events that occurred there.

There are some newspapers available in the NLS [online resources](#), including the Scotsman, but the best online resource for newspapers is the [British Newspaper Archive \(BNA\)](#). The BNA stems from a partnership between the British Library and Findmypast to digitise the Library's vast newspaper archive dating back to the 17th century.

You can search the BNA website for free and use the filters on the left to narrow your results by date and area. It's also worth trying out different search terms or adding in extra words, such as wider terms or different spellings, to help.

To be able to view the articles you will need to register for an account. Some of them might be 'Free to View' (also an option in the filters) but as part of this project we will gift you a one month subscription – this will let you view and download as many articles as you want within that month.

The month will start from the date that you activate the gift code, so it might be worth holding off until you have some initial research to help with your search and also for a month when you know you will have more time to sit and look through it all. We'd just ask that you activate by **30th April** at the latest to be sure you have enough time before the submission deadline.

TIP: It's always worth doing a general internet search for the house you are researching. There is a wealth of local online resources from community websites to personal blogs, or even recent news stories. If the house is still in use, then you might find that it even has its own website which could contain some facts about its history.

TIP: Be sure to download any images of your house as you come across them and save them into a folder – they can be great for comparing with any changes visible on mapping but also for adding into your findings when it comes to finally submitting them.

NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND

The **National Records of Scotland** is a department of the Scottish Government which aims to “collect, preserve and produce information about Scotland’s people and history and make it available to inform current and future generations.” It contains a variety of records from the 12th through to the 21st century and these include listing any court cases which your house might have a mention in.

Although seeing the records in full usually requires a trip to Edinburgh, you are able to search through their catalogue **online** and can often get snippets of information from their online descriptions.

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OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

There are many sources online for finding old photographs and these can help you to understand the changes to your building over time. It is worth doing a general internet search for your building and clicking on the results in the ‘Images’ tab. As well as photographs, old postcards and even paintings are worth looking through for depictions of how your house once looked.

There are some specific websites you can also have a look at for photographs though – have a look at the Dumfries & Galloway Heritage Service’s **online photographic collection**, **SCRAN** and the University of St Andrew’s **online collections**.

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LOCAL HERITAGE GROUPS

Dumfries & Galloway has a wealth of local heritage societies who do a great job of collecting archival material and sharing it on their websites – these sources often hold special insights that only locals can give.

There are way too many across the region to name them all here, but we’ll list the ones we know of in our area (and even if they don’t have what you’re looking for on their website, they are more than happy to offer advice if you send them an email):

Balmaclellan Heritage Group, **Carsphairn Archive**, **Crossmichael Heritage Centre**, **Kirkcudbright History Society** and **Local Initiatives of New Galloway**.

You might also want to get in touch with the **Dumfries Historic Buildings Trust** and the **Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland** who have a group based in Dumfries & Galloway.

Lastly, there is also the Galloway Glens **Place-Names Database** which includes over 2,500 names from across seven parishes.

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LOCAL LIBRARIES

This project is primarily an online one but if you do have access to a local library and fancy a visit, then you might find that many of their local and historic resources contain information on your house or its estate. Dumfries and Galloway Council even has a specially dedicated **Heritage Service** based in the Ewart Library, Dumfries. They can help point you to what collections they hold and will also be able to offer advice and tips for your research.

CENSUS RETURNS

The census began in 1801 and was repeated every tenth year (with the exception of 1941) collecting information on households across the country. This can include a person's age, birthplace, occupation and marital status at the time the census was taken. Very little information about individuals survives for 1801 to 1831, but you will be able to find census information from 1841 to 1911 online – a 100-year secrecy rule is in place, with the 1921 census return only recently becoming available. The census returns might allow you to trace some of the people who lived at your house over the years.

Thanks to the Friends of the Archives of Dumfries and Galloway and several volunteers, you can access the returns of the 1851 census for Dumfriesshire, Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire for free on the [Dumfries and Galloway Council website](#).

You are also able to access some of the census returns for free through [FreeCen](#) and, if your main address is in Scotland, by registering online with the [National Library of Scotland](#).

The census records are also available through a subscription to [Scotland's People](#).

INTERNET ARCHIVE

There are many books out there that might contain some information on your house, and if you're able, then it might be worth visiting your local library for a hunt. Or if there is a specific book you can't access then let us know and we'll see if we can find it for you.

But one book that is worth checking is *The Buildings of Scotland: Dumfries and Galloway* by John Gifford, which you can access for free on the [Internet Archive](#). This might give you some more information on the layout and architecture of your building.

It might also be worth searching the rest of this website for other resources which could feature your house, and also do a quick search on [Google Scholar](#) – another free online resource for books.

