

WDYT YA? Live! 2017

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'Townies' : six ways of looking for more about the lives of your ancestors in small provincial towns

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By the middle of the 19th century half the population of England lived in towns. Large industrial cities were growing fastest, and dominate our view of urban life. But throughout the country many people continued to live in small towns, with long histories as markets for the surrounding agricultural areas and as centres of food processing, trades and activities such as education and entertainment. This short talk provides six pointers to help you find out more about your ancestors who lived in these fascinating places.

1. Unearth some MAPS

Especially useful are the series of 1:500 town plans— amazing level of detail
Find them in libraries, record offices, and on <http://maps.nls.uk/> (where you will discover vast amounts of information about maps in general, as well as downloadable copies)

Different approach will be found at Historic Towns Atlas project. www.historictownsatlas.org.uk
[For both see *Local History News* 123 at www.balh.org.uk/publications/local-history-news]

2. DIRECTORIES are more than lists

These contain much more than lists of streets and their residents, and categories of business. Dig in to those lists more deeply:

Who were the neighbours?

Are houses and commercial premises mixed?

Where was the nearest pub/church/school?

Also included a description of the place at the time of publication and often something of its history, office holders, institutions, post and carriers, adverts. (NB this may all be omitted in digitised and photocopied versions.)

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/library/find/databases/h/historicaldirectories>

3. What was the INFRASTRUCTURE like: services and communications?

Pavements, street lighting, gas, electricity, water, post, buses, telephones, police, fire, hospital, library, parks ...

KEY THE

Use newspapers, advertisements, posters, diaries, council records, old photographs

4. Faces in the CROWD

In towns events often happened that were attended by large numbers of people, but we don't know exactly who. Sports, celebrations, meetings of all kinds Officials, and committee members, might be named in newspaper reports, minute books, programmes etc but not the audience.

5. Look up when you WALK the streets,

Above modern shop fronts there is often surviving evidence of what was there before, keep your eyes open.

6. LINKS

Making links between different sources is the key to the enjoyment of this

Some suggestions of sources:

A very useful, though elderly (pre internet), book is John West's *Town Records* (Phillimore 1983)

Increasingly people's own local work is appearing online:

Internet Sites for Local Historians: a directory by Jacquelené Fillmore, BALH

Search the website of the British Association for Local History for articles on particular places from *The Local Historian* or *Local History News*

www.balh.org.uk

Look for a copy of Maurice Rickards *The Public Notice: an Illustrated History*

If you are up for a challenge of some more tricky maps – try *Maps for Family and Local History* by Beech and Mitchell

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