A GUIDE TO RESEARCHING PEOPLE AND BUILDINGS
ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you begin the search of the history of your house, or to find information about your ancestors.

CITY OF SWAN LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The City of Swan has an interesting and unique background, which is documented in our Local History Collection. Housed on the first floor of the Midland Public Library, the collection includes a large number of books, newspapers, reports, photographs, maps and oral history tapes and transcripts.

The collection is a fascinating and comprehensive source of information about the people, buildings, events and places covering the City’s early settlement days to the present.

Donations
The Local History Collection is constantly growing and donations are always welcome. We accept photographs, maps, research notes, books, letters, diaries, and sporting, church and business records. Any records related to the City of Swan which can be preserved are of interest to us.
INTRODUCTION

Uncovering the history of a house or building is more than just identifying when it was constructed. Buildings can be constructed, altered, moved, damaged, rebuilt and/or demolished.

There are also the stories of the people that lived in them, rented them, died in them or grew up in them. People and buildings are irrevocably linked and to tell the full story of a building, we must understand the history of both.

The resources available to research buildings and associated people are numerous. Many resources are now available online. With the growth of technology, resources are not limited to formal repositories or providers of information. The internet and social media have opened up new streams for acquiring and exchanging information.

This guide is limited to describing resources that are frequently used at City of Swan Local History. With this guide, we will help you begin your own search to uncover the story of your house or family.
There are two types of resources used to research the history of a building. These are resources that offer information about the building itself and resources that offer information about the people who are associated with that building. Some resources provide information on both.

Resources that might contain information about a building or property include:

- maps and subdivision posters,
- land titles,
- post office directories,
- council rate books,
- photographs, and
- newspaper articles and advertisements.

When seeking information about the people associated with a building or property, useful resources include some of those above, along with:

- online databases like www.ancestry.com
- ship passenger lists,
- electoral rolls,
- cemetery records,
- grey literature (unpublished writings), and
- births, deaths and marriages.
Maps and subdivision plans can provide information about what was once on a property. In some cases, they show that a piece of land was once part of a larger property. Some of the earliest maps and plans record the first transfers of Crown land to individuals and can provide a rough indication of dates of property ownership.

Resources like this may be found at:

- local history collections,
- Landgate,
- the J S Battye Library,
- historical societies, and
- The State Records Office.
Aerial images show physical changes to buildings and property over time.

Landgate’s Mapviewer tool displays current and historical aerial images, meaning you can compare images of the same area over different time intervals. Historical images go as far back as 1953.

This tool may identify:
- the birth of a subdivision,
- additions to a building, and
- the geographical history of land (e.g. a property might have once been swamp land or a quarry).

The Landgate Mapviewer can be accessed via their website www.landgate.wa.gov.au
Land titles record the transfer of property from one owner to another. By accessing the line of title deeds of a property, a complete record of the ownership of the property can be uncovered.

However, Land titles do not record improvements to a property, so they do not show buildings or changes to buildings.

Land titles can be accessed at Landgate.
The post office directories are available online through the State Library, whose webpage states that “the post office directories provide information by locality, individual surname, government service, and by trade or profession. The different sections enable the enquirer to see at a glance the householders or businesses in the State; and the businesses or individuals throughout Western Australia engaged in any trade or profession.”

The directories date from 1893 up to 1949 and by tracing through the years consecutively, the researcher may establish when a building was first constructed and/or who the various occupants of a building might have been.

Note: the directories list the occupants of properties, not the owners.
Rate books recorded the property taxes levied by local councils. The books recorded the name of the owner of a property, the address of a property and might also have captured information such as activities that occurred on a property. For example, a property might be described as a residence, a post office, an orchard, a piggery and so on.

In the case of properties that were rented out to tenants, the owner’s place of residence is also likely to be listed. Note: rate books list the owners of properties, not the occupants.

Rate books might be found at:
- local history collections,
- Council offices, and
- the State Records Office
Online databases such as Ancestry.com combine multiple sources so that you can search for information about people from one site. Ancestry.com is freely available online at public libraries including the State Library.

Some of the resources available via Ancestry.com are:

- electoral rolls,
- passenger lists,
- census information,
- family trees, and
- births (1841-1932), deaths (1841-1971) and marriages (1841-1936). These are also freely available at www.justice.wa.gov.au
The State Heritage Council website lists buildings that have State Heritage value. Local councils are required to have a municipal inventory that lists buildings of local heritage value. Sometimes buildings may be on both these registers.

Information on these registers includes date of construction, details on the construction, statement of significance and the level of protection that should be afforded to the building.

In Australia, inclusion on these registers does not guarantee protection to a building.
CEMETERY AND BURIAL RECORDS

Online cemetery and burial records provide information about the date of a person’s death and the location of their gravesite or memorial. The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board (MCB) holds records for most Perth cemeteries.

However, as MCB did not begin to take over management of metropolitan cemeteries until 1989, many older records are missing.

Websites such as ozburials.com can provide valuable information about older gravesites that may not be held by MCB.

They may also include an image of a gravesite which could provide further details of the person’s nearest family members.

For records not online, cemetery and burial records could be found in local history collections, at diocesan archives and historical societies.
Homes that are of historic value have often been the subject of books, reports, conservation plans, amateur studies, or writings that have not been published (grey literature). These items are frequently located in local history collections. Published items will be found at the State Library but more often than not, grey literature will only be found at the local level.

These items can also be a blend of information about the house and the people who have lived in, owned or interacted with the house. These items are often family histories.
Photographs are a useful source of information about houses and those who have lived in them. A group photograph in which the people are identified is one unexpected way in which researchers might find an image of someone who lived in the house that is of interest.

A house in the background of a photograph is another unexpected way that information about a house might come to light.

On occasion there might even be a specific photograph of an individual or a home.

Images such as these can be found at local history collections, historical societies, the J S Battye Library and many other locations.
Often, unexpected gems of information can be found in old newspaper articles or advertisements. An article might be an announcement of a birth, death or marriage in which information about a house address might be given. An event might have prompted the article and include information about the state of a house or the people who occupy or own the house.

Until the current era of preserving people’s privacy, information about people was freely mentioned in newspapers. Today such sources are far less likely to identify people or their addresses.

Many local newspapers can now be accessed online through the National Library website archive, trove.nla.gov.au
Social media like the Remember Midland page on Facebook provide a new kind of tool for researchers. Appeals for information and exchanges of information on Remember Midland are creating a unique collection and a community of people with the same desire to understand the history and social fabric of Midland and surrounding suburbs.
LIST of RESOURCES

Ancestry.com
Visit your local library or the State Library of WA for free access or visit www.ancestry.com.au

Battye Library
State Library of Western Australia
25 Francis Street
Perth Cultural Centre, Perth WA
9427 3111
slwa.wa.gov.au

City of Swan Local History
Midland Public Library
45 Helena Street, Midland
9267 9029
jude.carr@swan.wa.gov.au

City of Swan administration
For records/archives
2 Midland Square, Midland
9267 9267
www.swan.wa.gov.au

Department of Justice
Search births, deaths and marriages
Level 10, 141 St Georges Terrace, Perth
1300 305 021

Electoral rolls
Access through a database such as ancestry.com or visit the Battye Library

State Library of Western Australia
25 Francis Street
Perth Cultural Centre, Perth WA
9427 3111
www.slwa.wa.gov.au/find/guides/family_history/australia/western_australia/electoral_rolls

Landgate
1 Midland Square, Midland
9273 7373
www.landgate.wa.gov.au
Metro Cemeteries Board
PO Box 53, Claremont,
WA 6910
1300 793 109
www2.mcb.wa.gov.au/NameSearch

Post Office Directories
trove.nla.gov.au

Remember Midland Facebook
www.facebook.com/remembermidland

State Heritage Office
Level 2, 491 Wellington Street, Perth
6552 4000
inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/public

State Records Office
Alexander Library Building
James Street West Entrance
Perth Cultural Centre
9427 3661
sro@sro.wa.gov.au

Swan-Guildford Historical Society
119 Swan Street, Guildford
9379 1829
www.swanguildfordhistoricalsociety.org.au

Western Australian Genealogical Society Inc.
6/48 May Street, Bayswater
9271 4311
membership.wags.org.au

Midland and Districts Historical Society
0438 884 719
www.facebook.com/historymidland
historymidland@gmail.com
FURTHER READING


Tracing your family history in Australia: a national guide to sources by Nick Vine Hall. (Albert Park, Vic: N.V. Hall, 2002).


Finding families: the guide to the National Archives of Australia for genealogists compiled by Margaret Chambers. (Sydney, N.S.W.: Hale & Iremonger in association with the Archives, 1998).