

Title Deeds

Background

Title deeds are a group of documents that are used to legally prove the ownership of a property or piece of land. They include conveyances, mortgages, “indentures”, and other documents. These documents were used to show the sale or transfer of property. When a property was sold the old deeds were passed to the new owner. If the property was mortgaged, the mortgage provider would hold on to the deeds until the mortgage was paid off. This still happens today.

From 1925 the owner of a property only needed to keep deeds showing the ownership of the property over the last 30 years. In 1970 this decreased to 15 years. Many deeds were destroyed as they were no longer needed.

The Land Registry was created in 1862 to register the ownership of land. It was not compulsory to register land until the late 20th century. It is estimated that only 70% of land is registered. Nowadays, land is registered or the register is updated when property is sold. Once the land is registered there is no business need to keep the old deeds, as their details are recorded by the registry.

If you are tracing the ownership of a property or piece of land you should try contacting the [Land Registry](#) first. Gloucestershire is covered by the Gloucester Office (Land Registry Gloucester Office, Twyver House, Bruton Way, Gloucester, GL1 1DQ Tel: 0300 006 0411).

What records are there and what information will they contain?

Gloucestershire Archives holds a wide variety of title deeds, relating to houses, mills, fields, estates, farms and much more. Many deeds have been deposited at Gloucestershire Archives in large solicitors' collections. Others have been deposited as part of with a family or estate collection.

The information that they will contain is usually very specific to the individual property. But you should be able to learn:

- The name of the buyer
- The name of the seller
- The date of sale
- A description of the property
- Description of land attached to the property
- Any conditions of the sale

The deeds may also tell you:

- The date of any earlier sales
- Names of previous owners
- Names of tenants or occupiers
- The date when any buildings or houses were built
- Field names

Be aware that title deeds are legal documents so they are written in legal language. They can be long, repetitive and difficult to read. Be prepared to spend some time looking at them.

How to Find the Records

A useful way to start is by searching our online catalogue. This can be found on our website at: <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/>. (For help with using our online catalogue, please see our online Help page & FAQs, or watch our YouTube tutorial)

Search suggestions:

- Start by searching for the name of the property.
- If you know that this has changed over the years, try searching on all the names.
- Also try different spellings as this may have changed too.
- If this is not successful, try searching for the name of the owner of the property.

A lot of large solicitors' collections which contain deeds have not been fully catalogued. The documents are sometimes sorted by place. To identify any relevant collections you should try searching for the place or parish name and the word *deeds*. Alternatively you can use the indexes available on site.

Remember there is no guarantee that the deeds to a property have survived. If they have survived they may not have been deposited at Gloucestershire Archives. If the owner used a solicitors firm which was not based in Gloucestershire their records may have been deposited elsewhere. They may also still be held by the descendant of a previous owner.

Further Reading

Here are a few suggestions from the many websites and books about title deeds:

A good guide by Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service:

https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Using_Our_Collections/Collection-Guides/Legal-Records/TitleDeeds.aspx

An overview to land ownership records and deeds:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/land-ownership-records-and-deeds-an-overview/>

An introduction to manorial records and the Manorial Documents Register:

[https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/finding-records-in-discovery-and-other-databases/manorial-documents-register/#:~:text=The%20Manorial%20Documents%20Register%20\(MDR,in%20public%20and%20private%20hands.](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/finding-records-in-discovery-and-other-databases/manorial-documents-register/#:~:text=The%20Manorial%20Documents%20Register%20(MDR,in%20public%20and%20private%20hands.)

Tracing the History of Your House by Nick Barratt is a useful book if you are researching the history of your house or another property. It is available on the open shelves in the Gloucestershire Archives Searchroom - **GAL/H2/50156GS**

Old Title Deeds by N W Alcock focuses on title deeds and explains the different types of documents that make up deeds. It is available on the open shelves in the Gloucestershire Archives Searchroom - **GAL/H2/51643GS**

An in depth, comprehensive resource including how to recognise different types of deeds

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/researchguidance/deeds/introduction.aspx>