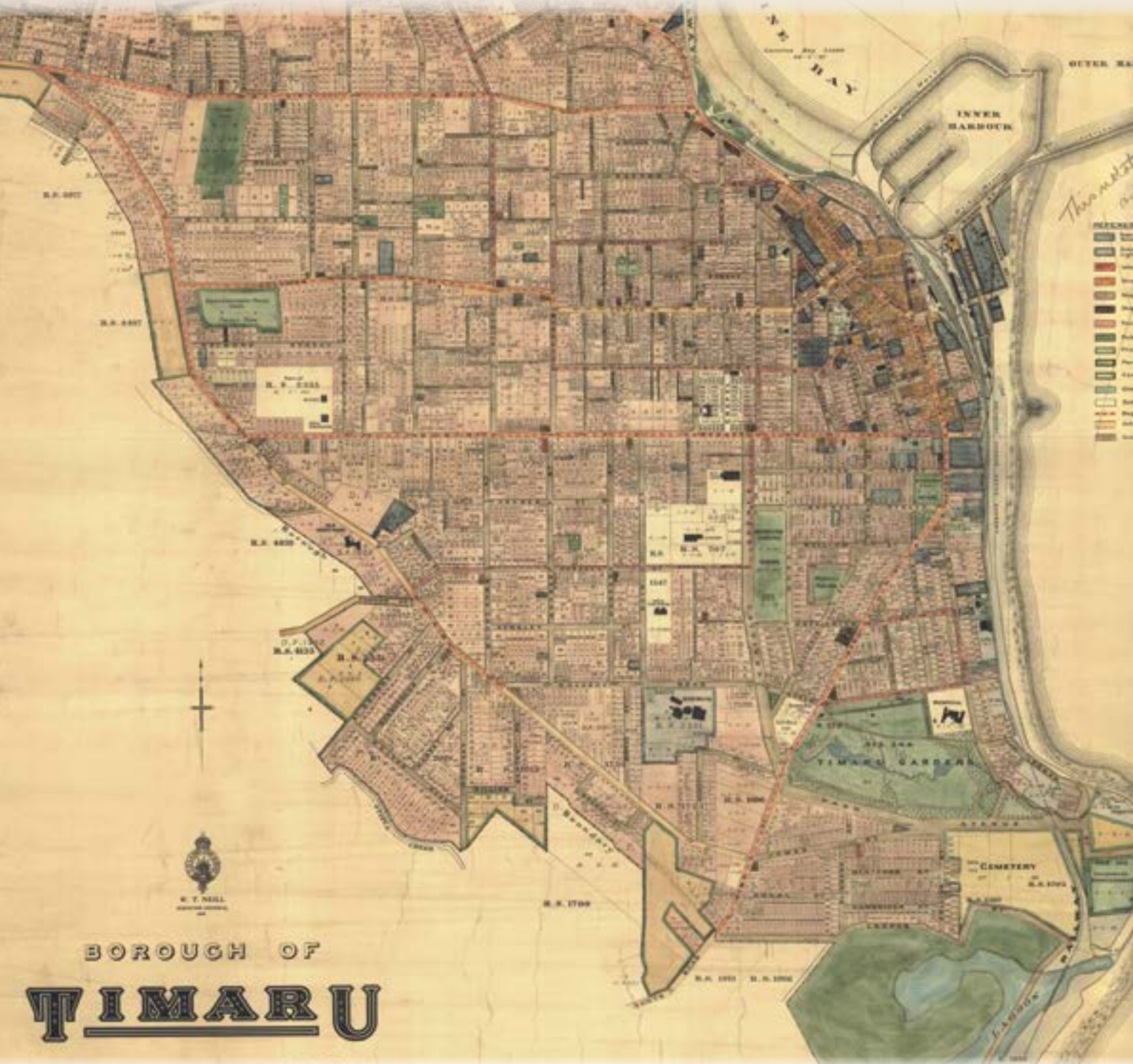


Research Guide

# Property Resources



**SOUTH CANTERBURY  
MUSEUM**  
**EXPLORE** our heritage

South Canterbury Museum  
PO Box 522, Timaru

W: [museum.timaru.govt.nz](http://museum.timaru.govt.nz)  
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# Exploring our Heritage

## Nau Mai Haere Mai ki te South Canterbury Museum Welcome to the South Canterbury Museum

### As you arrive at the Museum:

If you haven't visited before please ask at the front desk on arrival and our staff will direct you to the Museum's research room.

Please note as we aim to preserve the taonga we hold for future generations, and as we only have a relatively small space, we ask that you:

- *Leave bags (including laptop bags) in the lockers at reception*
- *Leave all food and drink (including water bottles) with your bags. If you have special needs in this regard, please discuss with staff so they can be kept ready for you to access at reception*
- *Bring any materials you need for research with you (but no pens please)*
- *Use pencils only in the research room – which can be supplied if you don't have one.*

### Beginning your research

Before visiting consider what you already know – this can save you time and help identify resources that could be useful to explore and discover material helpful to you.

This guide will introduce you to property resources that may assist your research. It is not intended to be comprehensive as our collections and the resources available are constantly evolving. Increasingly many of these resources, especially our pictorial and published collections, can be found listed on our Collections Online at <https://timdc.pastperfectonline.com/> - however there are still many collections not yet listed online. Please enquire with staff if you have a specific need or request.

All Museum collections can only be used in the research room and cannot be borrowed or loaned.

### Our hours

Check our hours on our website [here](#)

### Contact details

P: 03 6877212

E: [museum@timdc.govt.nz](mailto:museum@timdc.govt.nz)

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# Researching Property

Research into the history of a property is a common query. But there are multiple aspects to a property's history – this guide aims to assist with these common queries:

***1. How old is my house or building? Who owned it, worked or lived there in the past?***

***2. Where was my ancestors house/farm in South Canterbury?***

***3. What did this area look like in the past?***

The resources that follow offer a range of options to answer these questions. This is not an exhaustive list though and, depending on your query and the limitations of each resource, not all will necessarily apply to your particular needs.

Please note that a number of these resources are not accessible at the Museum. They can be extremely helpful though, so where to access them is explained in the 'Resources' section of this guide.

## Getting started

Consider what you know already and what you most want to know.

This guide is largely targeted at the three main questions above, aiming to help you understand what you will need and what can you expect to find.

***1. How old is my house or building? Who owned it, worked or lived there in the past?***

- a. You can expect to be able to find records of land purchase transfers through Land Information (LINZ)*
- b. You may be able to find who lived there (owners and those who may have rented the property) through rate records, street directories, and from electoral rolls or habitation indices.*
- c. More generally you can find more about the people who lived in these properties by consulting resources in the Museum's research room or searching for newspaper notices and stories that relate to these people in local newspapers through Paperspast.*

***2. Where was my ancestors house/farm in South Canterbury?***

- a. Using street directories you can expect to find a street address for the larger towns in the twentieth century, but rural and earlier records will*

*often list only a locality (especially pre-1900)*

- b. Rate rolls can provide an address and/or legal description of properties owned.*
- c. If you have a current or past legal description you may be able to locate this through a property search via LINZ or Canterbury Maps. Finding a historical map of the area with legal descriptions is also a possibility, but finding a suitable map and locating the correct land parcel can be very time consuming.*
- d. For mid to later twentieth century rural property some farm maps were produced by groups like Rotary, showing the location of farmhouses in Levels, Waimate, Temuka, Geraldine, and Mackenzie.*

### **3. What did this area look like in the past?**

- a. Historic maps are often limited in their detail, showing either limited topographical information or simple parcel boundaries. As well as the South Canterbury Museum's Collections Online, Archives New Zealand and Digital New Zealand can be good places to find digitised maps online.*
- b. Aerial photography can be a great resource from the mid-twentieth century (circa 1936) onward. A few photographs can be found on the Museum's Collections Online, but even more can be found through Digital New Zealand, Canterbury Maps, or Retrolens.*

Hopefully these comments help get you thinking about the resources that might be of use to your specific research. In the following section you can explore more about the specific resources that could be useful to you.

# The Resources

## Electoral Rolls & Habitation Indices

Electoral rolls can be useful for determining (at least) the general area where people lived. The best local source of Electoral Rolls is via [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) - available by subscription, or the library edition is available via public access computers at the Timaru Library and in the South Canterbury Museum research room. These cover 1853 to 1980, but some later local rolls are also available at the Museum, the Timaru District Library or via the South Canterbury Genealogical Society.

The Timaru District Library also holds some habitation indices for Timaru (1993), Aoraki (1998, 1999, 2001), Rangitata (2008, 2017, 2020), Waitaki (1993, 2008, 2017, & 2020); Te Tai Tonga (2017 & 2020) – these contain electors names, but entries are arranged by residential address.

## Street Directories

Directories are useful for locating people in a particular place and time. They consist of multiple sections including alphabetical, trades, commercial and geographical sections. In the case of larger towns, like Timaru, the geographical sections also list people in order as their property appears along a street, giving an indication of where on a block their property is located. The alphabetical section generally lists only the head of the household, but often gives their occupations as well. Note: In the case of Timaru most streets were renumbered in the early 1920s which can cause some confusion!

Directories were largely published by H Wise and Company (often as the NZPO Directory) and Stones of Dunedin. Wises typically cover the entire country, while Stones Directories were broken up into regional volumes. These can be found in many libraries across the country. Those held by the South Canterbury Museum include:

### Wises (National):

1878, 1887-88, 1890-91, 1927, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1946, 1958,

### Stones (Canterbury, Nelson, Marlborough & Westland volumes):

1921-22, 1928, 1931, 1945, 1947, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953

Again [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) also has a good collection of directories up to the mid 1950s, listed as “City and Area Directories”. If you don’t have a subscription these can be accessed in the Museum research room and the Timaru Public Library.

### Limitations of electoral rolls.

Only those who had a vote are listed - today that means every permanent resident in NZ aged 18 or older - but this was not always the case in the past (see [Voting rights](#) on Te Ara for more).

Essentially from the early days following the first election in 1853 voters (usually men) had to be 21 and own or rent property. Māori men only received the right to vote in 1867. Universal suffrage (the right to vote) was awarded to all men in 1881, women received the vote in 1893, and in 1969 the voting age was reduced to 20, then to 18 in 1974.

## Council Rate records and property files

If you recently purchased a property you may have paid for this information in the form of a LIM report. This can contain building plan changes etc, but is likely to be very sparse for older buildings as building regulations of only a few decades ago required far less paperwork than today. Sometimes though you can be lucky and find gems like copies of original house plans. Contact the appropriate council (Timaru, Waimate, or Mackenzie) to enquire about accessing property files and the relevant fees and charges.

Rate Records are another means of finding out who lived in or rented a property and can be accessed through local council archives. However, the further you go back you go, the fewer of these may have been retained - they are not kept by councils as a record of ownership, but are instead a contemporary tool used for rating properties to fund council activities. Contact the appropriate council to enquire about accessing rate records.

As in many places, in Timaru you need to keep in mind that the town was once much smaller than today – Gleniti for example only became part of Timaru in the 1960s. Some early rate records for Levels County (that controlled areas like Gleniti) just don't exist anymore.

The South Canterbury Museum has transcribed some nineteenth century rate records for Timaru and Geraldine County, which are available to view in the Museum's research room. These records include:

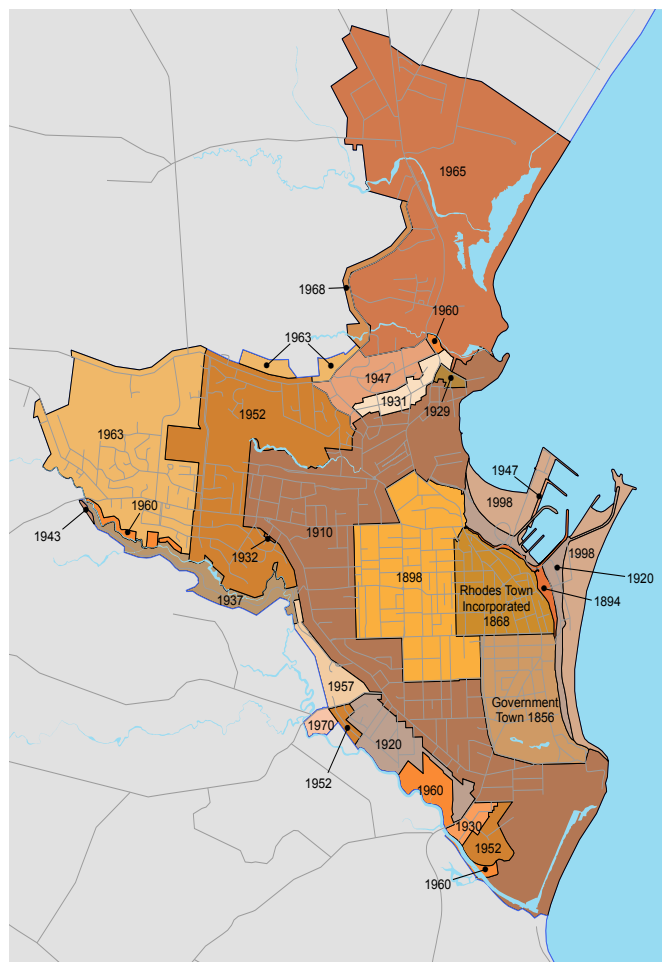
*Timaru: 1865, 1866, 1867, 1882, 1885, 1894 & 1895*

*Geraldine County: 1894-95, 1896-97, 1898-99, & 1899-1900*

The Waimate Archives is the repository for the Waimate District Council archives. Collections that are useful for property searches include:

*Waimate County Council Rate books from 1882*

*Waimate Borough Council Rate books from 1880*



*Above: Timaru boundary changes, 1856 to 1998. In the very early days of Timaru (prior to the formation of Levels County in 1894), much of present day Timaru was part of Geraldine County.*

## Historic titles – Land Information New Zealand (LINZ)

Historic titles, which can be ordered from LINZ will list the ownership transfers for the current deed of title. Unfortunately there is no index of land owners. Instead Land ownership is accessible via the legal description of the land. Usually you need to start with the current legal description and work backwards. If you know where the property is, but don't have that information, you can find it through Canterbury Maps.

These titles can be requested (for a small fee) through the [LINZ website](#) - alternately there are other third-party services that can do this for you too (search "Title Search NZ" online to find some). This should list owners back to the last subdivision of the property, but should have a reference or link to the title prior to this also (meaning that if the property has multiple titles or has been subdivided multiple times you may need to purchase multiple titles). The names listed may provide a means to research the people who used to live on the property and/or may be a way to connect to some of these people or their descendants who may have records, photographs, or memories of the property.

## Archives New Zealand

Archives New Zealand has handy [research guides](#) on their website including a guide to [Land records held in Christchurch](#)

You can also check their [digitised land records](#) which include (in the "Land" tab) the Canterbury District Roll plans that offer early plans of some [South Canterbury townships](#) and indexes to the Deeds records (the predecessors to Certificates of Title, phased out from c.1870). A number of digitised plans from Archives New Zealand and Land Information New Zealand can also be found on [New Zealand Heritage Maps](#)

The Christchurch office of Archives New Zealand also holds Valuation Department records from c1904 to 1985. Like today these generally record the name of the owner, occupier, situation and description of the land, the nature of improvements and land and capital values. If you are trying to determine how old a building is, a record from closer to the time of construction may offer a more accurate age of the building than a current one - i.e. a current record stating "100 years old" could be up to ten years out of date – a record stating it is five years old has less margin of error.

## Canterbury Maps - <https://canterburymaps.govt.nz/>

Councils across Canterbury have shared their resources to put their imagery into a single GIS resource that you can search. Search for your address and it should take you to a current aerial view of your property. Along the bottom of the page should be a 'slider' for Historical Imagery with highlighted (blue) dots representing the historical imagery available for your property. Some of this goes back to the 1930s and can provide quite an insight into how your neighbourhood has changed over the years.

## Retrolens

<https://retrolens.co.nz/>

Retrolens describes itself as “...a treasure trove of aerial photographs that have been taken since 1936 through to 2005.” Built by a partnership of LGGA and Linz it contains over 500,000 images, many of which are downloadable. The images can be searched by property address or you can search by exploring the map of New Zealand. Local images date from around 1938.

## Rural property - Farm plans

The South Canterbury Museum holds a number of farm plans showing the approximate locations of farmhouses in Levels, Waimate, Temuka, and Geraldine (other local Museums may also hold the same or similar maps). Some are poor quality copies and some are undated. These include:

*Geraldine: 1968, plus an undated issue (1980?)*

*Levels County: 1949 (revised 1956 & 1958), 1963*

*Mackenzie: 1965, 1972 (revised 1972 & 1977)*

*Timaru District: An undated plan (1980s?)*

*Waimate County: Undated (c.1960s?), 1970, 1973, 1974, 1976(?), 1980(?)*

NB: None of these plans are currently digitised (as at November 2021). Please make an appointment in advance if you wish to view these.

## Other resources:

These can provide context and answers, but often can be time-consuming or require information from some of the above resources first.

- **PapersPast** – <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers> - contains millions of pages of digitised historical newspapers including the *Timaru Herald* (1864-1945), the *Temuka Leader* (1878-1932), the *Waimate Advertiser* (1898-1929), *South Canterbury Times* (1879-1901) and others.

*NB: Using names from an historic title search (above) you can identify news about the owners of the property. If you know the builder or architect you can find information about them too, possibly even notices for things like tenders to build - but, these can take a bit to identify!*

- **Aerial photograph collections** – Some of our collection can be searched online. There are also some great searchable collections online (including ours) on Digital New Zealand (<https://digitalnz.org/>). For example using their search function a search of “Aerial Timaru” results in over 1,000 images

*(select the images tab to just view just these). Digital New Zealand is a amalgamated search that taps into a range of collections from museums and libraries like ourselves, Te Papa, Auckland City Libraries, Alexander Turnbull Library and many more. It might take some time to dig through these, but can result in some rewarding finds.*

## **Useful contacts:**

Several national organisations may hold records, and as our region also encompasses three district councils and a number of local history Museums, these may also be useful.

### **National:**

Archives New Zealand - <https://archives.govt.nz/about-us/contact-us>

Land Information New Zealand - <https://www.linz.govt.nz/>

### **Mackenzie District:**

Mackenzie District Council - <https://www.mackenzie.govt.nz/pages/contact>

Mackenzie District Archives - <https://fairlieheritagemuseum.co.nz/archives.html>

### **Timaru District:**

Geraldine Historical Society museum – E: [gdemuseum@xtra.co.nz](mailto:gdemuseum@xtra.co.nz)

Temuka Courthouse Museum – E: [temukamuseum@gmail.com](mailto:temukamuseum@gmail.com)

Timaru District Council - <https://www.timaru.govt.nz/tell-us/contact-us>

### **Waimate District**

Waimate District Council - <https://www.waimatedc.govt.nz/council/contact-us?ed-step=1>

Waimate Museum & Archives (repository for the Waimate District Council archives) - <http://www.waimatemuseumandarchives.org.nz/>