

**Selecting a village or town of your choice: Using not less than four different types of historical documentation analyse the extent to which each one informs your knowledge of the landscape. Used together do they provide a better understanding?**

Ripley is a village in the parish of Send and Ripley in Surrey. Close to the River Wey and the current London to Portsmouth road it has a population of 1,697 (1991 census). Within this essay I hope to demonstrate the variety of sources that are available to gather information about the landscape of the village and how it has changed during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. I will also analyse how the sources provide information and whether it is better to use them together or independently. The main sources I have use are local maps – tithe and Ordnance Survey – Kelly's Directories, a book of photos published by the Send and Ripley Local History Society, some Francis Frith postcards, the Victoria County History for Surrey and the Census enumerator schedules for the village over a number of years.

The Victoria County History is an excellent place to begin research into any village or town within the UK. The VCH was begun in 1899 to collect and document the history of all the counties within the UK divided up by their hundreds. Although even now not all counties are completed. The Surrey edition has a number of entries for Ripley which details the village from Victorian times back to its origins. According to the VCH the earliest mention of Ripley is in 1279 when the Prior of Newark claimed to 'have suit' at Ripley and proclaimed his right to hold a market, which no one came to. It also states that the London to Guildford Road ran straight through Ripley, which suggests that the village grew up along this road to provide services to travellers. The Ripley entry also documents in detail the church within the village – St Mary the Virgin – which apparently dates from 1160 but was partially rebuilt in 1845-6. This kind of discrepancy between the date of the first mention of the village and the age of the church – over 100 years – is an interesting point which could inspire the researcher to investigate why the church was there and what kind of settlement was there originally. If the VCH has covered the area you are studying, it can give you a number of pointers to continue your research, but does not provide a complete history therefore it needs to be combined with alternative sources.

Kelly's Directories were published for each county since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Each entry has a brief historical description of a village, followed by a contemporary description, then a list of private inhabitants and local tradespeople. These directories are published every few years so can provide a valuable insight into the changes of building usage, business ownership and the growth of local families. The brief village history provides information about land type, landowners, religion, estates, fairs and markets, transport and population. Kelly's also lists the gentry or private residents within the village which can give you a clue as to who the landowners are.

An interesting point from the Kelly's Directory for Ripley in 1855 shows that there are 5 public houses listed within the 1855 directory – The Ship, The Talbot Inn, The Anchor, The Jovial Sailor and The White Hart. The Seven Stars appears in later directories. A number of the names are sea or sailing related – which seems strange for a landlocked village. One can only assume from the information we have that this is because the village is on the London to Portsmouth road and that the persons travelling on this road had seafaring intentions! All these pubs appear throughout the years and all still there today with the same names.

Although the directories list the traders that were operating within the village, there is no way to tell where within the village they were situated. This can be a useful fact as it can tell you the resources that may have been available only in certain areas. Another useful pointer is the description of transport available to the village and its frequency. This can help you discover how the village was linked to its neighbours and to the bigger, further away towns by investigating the transport infrastructure and seeing how this enabled the village to develop. Although Ripley was built on the main road and was close to the River Wey navigation system, the new A3 London to Portsmouth road bypassed the village and this may go some way in explaining the lack of development since that time.

The 1800 Census Act was created to ensure that a head count of the population was taken every 10 years starting from 1801. The information gathered was very basic in the beginning but from

1841 it became more detailed and was collected and collated by Enumerators in schedules. The accuracy of census data is often in dispute as the population was suspicious of the potential use of the data and may have bent the truth. Census enumerator forms can provide you with a lot of information that can be manipulated to demonstrate population development within the village. As well as names of families, their location within the village, details on the members of their family, their relation to the head and their professions, the forms also contain information about the birthplace which can enable migration analysis. A close study of enumerator forms covering a number of census years will tell you how far people travelled from their birthplaces to their current residences, most probably in the search for work.

Maps are a very valuable resource for investigating the landscape of any area. Formal mapping really only began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century with the Ordnance Survey embarking on a project to map the whole country. Maps can visually demonstrate a wide range of data covering areas such as geology, politics, population, wealth and leisure.

One of the earliest maps for the Ripley area was a map which, following the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, marked the land that was titheable. From the Tithe map you can plot the landowners and the use of the land which can be indicative of the resources available to the villagers and therefore the location of farms, houses and traders all contributing to the growth of the village. The maps of Ripley show the majority of the town grouped along the old London to Portsmouth road, so from this one can presume that Ripley is a street village – growing up along one street due to the demand of travellers.

If you take the Ordnance Survey maps covering about 100 years, you can follow the development of a village or town. It is possible to track the direction of growth – for example towards new railway stations or new industrial areas, to discover the change of usage of a building – for example, manors into schools or to see which man-made landmarks are no longer there – for example closure of mills and opening of factories. Maps often inspire the question “why?”, the

answer to which can sometimes be found within the map itself but more often leads you to other sources that complement the map.

With regard to the development of housing, maps only tell you whether a site was built on. They cannot tell you the type of property or its use. This is where photographs come in useful. There are plenty of books available with a pictorial history of villages and towns and one published by the Send & Ripley History Society offers pictures for Ripley in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These types of books are useful as they give you a visual guide to the development of the area. Often the pictures come with explanations and anecdotes from the people of the area providing a personal interpretation of events during the time period looked at. There may also be some emphasis on leisure activities which may not be found in any primary sources. For example, the Send & Ripley History Society publication mentions the cyclists who congregated in Ripley and turned it into the “Mecca of all good cyclists”. This in turn goes some way to explaining the development of the pubs, hotels and eating establishments in the area as there was a ready market for this type of visitor using the turnpike road. The book also suggests that Ripley is famous for cricket with the club being formed in 1743 and games still being played on the village green.

These books are very valuable to bring the historical village back to life but again only offer you a snippet. Also photographs are subject to interpretation especially the further back you go. They can be supported by documentation and historical evidence – for example newspaper photographs and their supporting stories – but often they are personal to the photographer and only show what was important to them. Historical facts can get lost as the attached memories to the photographs are recounted and distorted so it is worth checking the information given in these publications.

The Francis Frith collection was created by the photographers of F. Frith & Co Ltd between 1860 and 1970 and printed them as postcards for the populace to send to one another. I found 14 of

Ripley showing the High Street, The Anchor Hotel and Rose Lane amongst others. Using the photographs and the postcards and taking a walk around modern day Ripley it is surprising to see how many of buildings haven't changed and still retain their original facing.

As you can see, independently the sources I have looked at provide the reader with a huge amount of information about the area being studied. Standing alone they can offer statistical (qualitative and quantitative) and visual data that can give you an idea of the village history. The student of local history can interpret the information and manipulate the data from each source to describe the growth, and maybe the decline, of the village they are studying. You can plot statistical data on maps to bring static numbers to life. Lines on a map can be enhanced through the use of photographs. But each source only provides part of the picture. I believe that no single source can provide the definitive historical evidence and it is only when you combine sources, for example maps and directories, that the village begins to come to life.

**Bibliography**

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