

Cadastral maps and registers in family history research by Jay Osborn

THE term “cadastre” is used to describe the registers and maps which record locations and features of real property in a country, together with information about a property’s owner and often its value.¹ Cadastral registration systems have been in use for 2,000 years and in many countries today form the basis for legal documentation of land and immovable property. The maps and registers are already well known for their potential in historical research of urban and rural economies, among a wide variety of other uses.²

Although not a primary source of genealogical data, historical cadastral maps link individuals and families to specific locations in towns and villages; they also identify neighbouring families, markets, community buildings, roads and waterways.³

When combined with vital records and other record types, this valuable information can also significantly enrich a genealogist’s understanding of family economic and social situations and networks. In areas where more than one cadastral survey was recorded, changes in a profile over time can be analysed to better understand the evolution of families, neighbourhoods, and the larger community.⁴

Cadastral land surveys were used in imperial Rome to tie ownership and tax responsibility to some properties gifted by its emperors but that system ended with the empire and no similar system was employed during medieval times.

In England and Wales, the Domesday Book is a remarkable early inventory and statistical record of property and its value, listed by place but largely without geographical descriptions within urban and rural areas. Even today, just 80 per cent of British land is registered, though maps of various styles have been used to settle land disputes since the 15th century and more systematic land surveys and registration began in the 19th century.⁵

Elsewhere in Europe, cadastral systems were developed in the 17th to the 19th centuries. Surveys and mapping of the vast domain of the Habsburg monarchy began with the Duchy of Milan in 1720, then a series of community and farm maps in 1747, followed by surveys and maps of productive land within municipal borders in a large portion of the realm in 1785.⁶

The first Habsburg survey

The first comprehensive survey with high-scale maps of the Austrian empire began in 1817 and swept across the realm for 35 years; a similar effort covered Hungary between 1856 and 1883.

It was a massive undertaking, covering more than 300,000 square kilometres, including more than 30,000 cadastral communities divided into some 50 million land parcels, each individually surveyed and mapped.⁷

Imperial orders required maintenance of the cadastral data and many towns and villages were surveyed and mapped two or more times in later years until the empire collapsed in World War I.

Historical cadastral maps and records have never lost their value to local and national governments, but the state to which an individual town belongs may have changed many times since World War I ended. Land surveys and claims continued under new authorities, sometimes using older cadastral records to resolve even 21st-century conflicts.

Historical cadastral records were preserved in archives of existing or new states. Paper maps and registers are currently managed in regional or local archives, libraries or offices but some were lost in the upheavals of the past century.

The surviving original 19th-century maps of the Habsburgs, a shared heritage of 12 modern European countries are now distributed among many archives, few with administrative controls to manage their cadastral maps as a centralised category.⁸ Countries outside the historical boundaries of the Habsburg lands face similar archive issues.

Conferences and workshops

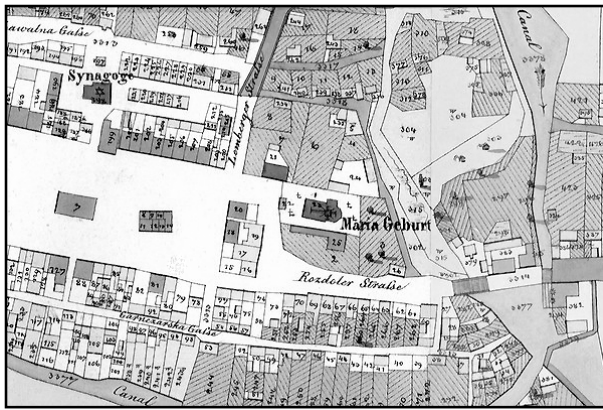
In 2010, an ongoing series of conferences and workshops began to enable networking between archives across Europe and to develop strategies for organisation, restoration, preservation, digitisation and publication of historical cadastral maps.

These activities, funded under the EU Cultural Programme and originally organised by Icarus (International Centre for Archival Research), the Budapest City Archives, and the National Archives of Hungary, should enable simple access to the maps and registers by all users. Given the different needs and advancement of the programme’s partners and the complexity of the map resources, significant progress visible to users will take years.

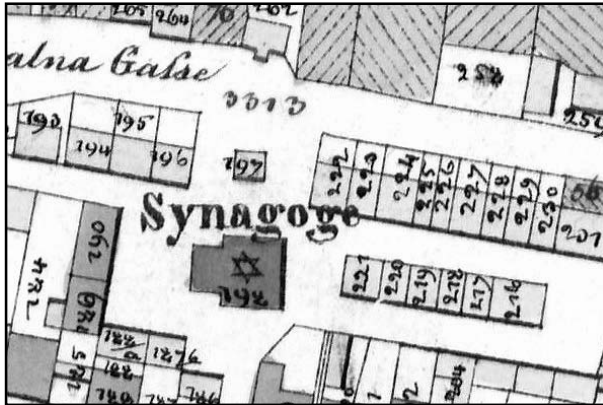
In the meantime, with some effort, many historical cadastral maps can be viewed now by researchers either in digital form online or hands-on in archives and the value of this resource can be appreciated immediately.

Often the first aspect one notices in historical cadastral maps is their beauty. Features are drafted with precision, crisply lithographed and filled with four to eight (or more) colours. Patterns in the mapped terrain, indicating different types of land use or characteristics, are defined in a legend.⁹

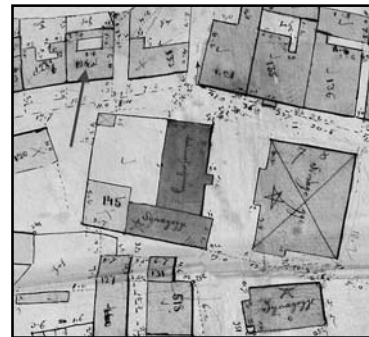
Even initial field sketches (*Feldskizzen*) made by surveyors and uncoloured intermediate drafts of the maps (*Indikationsskizzen*) can be gems of artistic worth. Images of excerpts from the 1853 cadastral map of Komarno (*see overleaf*), now in the L’viv *oblast* [Russ: administrative division or zone] of Ukraine, are typical.¹⁰



Der Geburt Urodzenia					Der Beschreibung oder Namen - Belegung Opisze nazw lub nadania imienna					Des Kindes Dziecięcia	
Tage Dni	Monat Miesiąc	Jahr Rok	Ort Miejscę	Quart. - Nr. Nr. domu	Tage Dni	Monat Miesiąc	Jahr Rok	Ort Miejscę	Quart. - Nr. Nr. domu	Name Imię	Ortfahrt Plec miejscę rodziny
13			Rohatyn	128				Rohatyn	128	Jonas Horn	1



What can a cadastral map tell us about this family? Only one map of Rohatyn is known to survive, the *Feldskizzen* from 1846, today preserved in the Ukraine Central State Historical Archive in L'viv.



However, the real value of the maps is in their detailed geographic data linking property owners to land parcels and buildings inside and outside a town's residential areas. Roads and streets were often unnamed in 19th-century towns but on the maps all buildings of value are numbered and many land parcels are both numbered and labelled with the name of the owner.

An excerpt from that map is presented here, showing the houses numbered 128a/b, adjacent to several (unnamed) synagogues in an area of town which the cadastral records tell us is predominantly Jewish.¹³

These property numbers relate to the bound registers where the owners (either individuals, communities or the state) are listed numerically by property or alphabetically.

Much of the town was destroyed in the two world wars, and the 19th-century houses here were lost but the roads remain. With this map, a few years ago my wife was able to walk where her Horn relatives had once lived in this Jewish quarter of Rohatyn.

Even without referring to the registers, inspection of the maps alone can reveal important features of the historical towns, such as a dense collection of synagogues and other Jewish community buildings adjacent to a market square, the development of waterways into reservoirs, canals, mills, etc, and the growth of "suburbs" away from an original town centre. Successive maps and registers of the same town a few decades apart can reveal much more about the changing fortunes of its residents.

The cadastral records can also provide clues to help extend genealogical research. An 1820 property register for which there is no map lists a Mendel Horn as owner of house 128.¹⁴ Many vital records are missing and my wife has none for known Horn family earlier than the Jozef listed above but the surname and house number here suggest a strong possible link.

How to find a family

Similarly, there are vital records for children born to an Isaak Horn, who also does not yet appear in my wife's tree, in house 128, in 1861 and 1866.¹⁵ Yet in the 1846 cadastral register associated with the map, the owner of house 128 is listed as "Mender Storn" and "Mender Storm". Is this the same Mendel Horn from 1820? Possibly. Elsewhere in the 1820 and 1846 cadastral records, the script "H" and "St" appear similar and a surveyor's field notes transcribed later may have introduced an error.

Locating a family within a town often begins with a vital record. In one example, birth records show several children born to Jozef and Rifke Horn in the town of Rohatyn (now in the Ivano-Frankivsk *oblast* in Ukraine) around the turn of the 20th century.

Cadastral maps can be even more useful for researching at the community level. Most towns and villages had a market square, visible on the maps with each building numbered. Where corresponding cadastral registers have survived, one can identify all the business owners on the

See the record for Jonas, born in 1898, (*above right*).¹¹ Like the other children, Jonas was born in house number 128. He was named a week after his birth in the "Old Bethlehem" synagogue; his younger sister Sime was named in the "Great" synagogue¹² but for some of the children only "synagogue" was recorded.

square, and virtually “re-populate” an entire town, as has been done for Rohatyn.¹⁶ Anyone researching Nagelbergs in that town would be interested to know that Asor and Abraham Nagelberg owned adjacent shops at the centre of the market.

Resources for map access

Unfortunately there is no coherent index to European cadastral maps and registers, in paper or digital form, although the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) and the Austrian Federal Office of Metrology and Surveying (BEV) are attempting to maintain a source index for maps of the 19th-century Habsburg surveys¹⁷ and the Icarus project described above will likely organise an index soon.

In some countries, state archives or land survey offices have digitised most of their historical cadastral maps and published them for free viewing. This is the case for the Czech Republic¹⁸ and Hungary.¹⁹ In England and Wales, major maps are held by the map division of the National Archives²⁰ but many records for towns are held locally.

In Poland and Ukraine, cadastral maps are divided between national and regional archives plus some libraries, with sometimes confusing overlap.

For the historical region of Galicia, a survey of Polish and Ukrainian map sources was published by the East European Genealogical Society in a series of articles in their newsletter²¹ and *Gesher Galicia* has been collecting and assembling map and record data from the region since 2007.²² For many other places access to cadastral maps and records will require some research but the rewards for that effort can be substantial.

● **The author created the *Gesher Galicia* online Map Room, assembling more than 40 digital cadastral maps of historical Galician towns to date and continues as volunteer co-ordinator of the site.**

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