

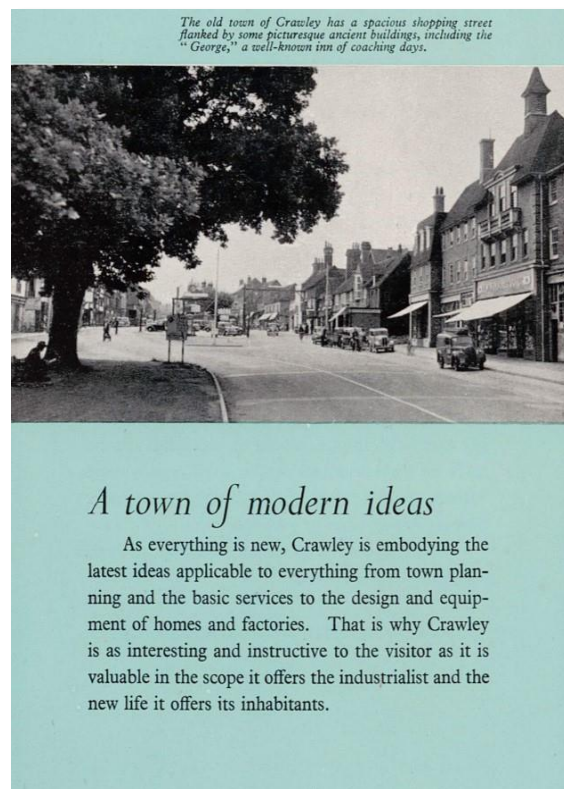
# Crawley New Town



**This guide will help you start exploring the Crawley New Town Archive held by West Sussex Record Office.**

## Introduction

Crawley was part of the New Town movement to help rebuild the country after World War Two. New Towns were a key element of the 'New Jerusalem'; created by a reforming Government which also founded the NHS. During the Second World War, the strain on London's housing stock increased and it became apparent that the situation was untenable. The Government began to seek out ways to lessen this strain. One of the ideas came from Lord Abercrombie and was called The Greater London Plan; this sought to build satellite developments for Londoners within the Greater London boundary. Whilst this plan didn't progress, it did spark a lot of interest. Soon afterwards Lord Reith established the Reith Committee and they developed a report which led to the 1946 New Town Act. The Act proposed building several new towns across the country which migrants from London would be able to move to. The first town to be designated was Stevenage in 1946 followed by Crawley in 1947. The New Town movement sought to provide residents with all essential amenities in easy reach; green spaces; modern and comfortable homes; excellent schools; plentiful employment; and state-of-the-art healthcare.



*Promotional material (CNT 3/88/8)*

## 1. [Overview of the Crawley New Town collection at WSRO](#)

At West Sussex Record Office (WSRO) we hold the records of Crawley Development Corporation with additional records created by associated organisations. This material has been combined into one collection – the Crawley New Town (CNT) Archive. Much of the archive is made up of the working records of the Development Corporation which had been established by the Government to carry out the work of building the new town. As a result, there is a wide range of record types including minutes, board papers,

reports, maps and plans, photographs, and publicity material.

The CNT Archive comprises c3700 discrete items stored on shelves and across 238 boxes. This includes 103 volumes of minutes, 64 volumes of board papers, 767 files of administrative papers, 559 photographs and negatives, and 269 glass plate negatives.

Records which provide a good overview of Crawley New Town:

- CNT/2/1/1 – Annual Reports 1949-1962
- CNT/4/1/1/11 – A Master Plan for Crawley New Town (report) 1949

## 2. [What can I find in the collection?](#)

There is enormous potential for research using the CNT Archive, covering many different aspects of Crawley New Town, the new town movement, and twentieth century social history more broadly.

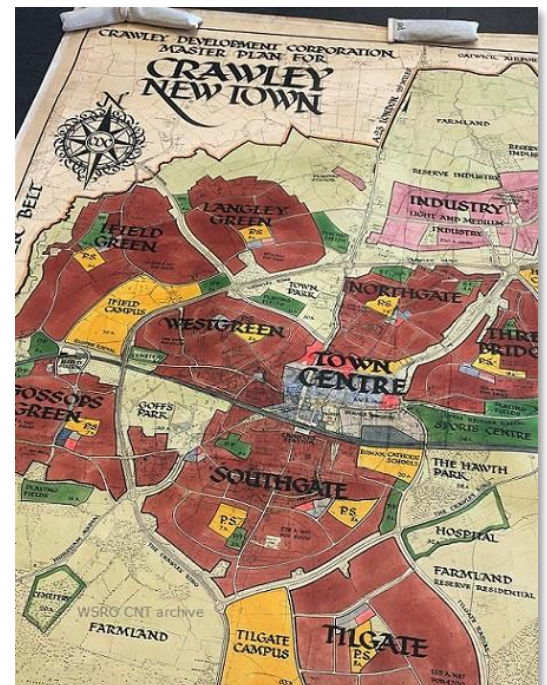
Some examples of subjects you might be interested in:

### Urban planning

The records for Crawley New Town may help with understanding the decision-making processes and developments associated with the planning of the new town. Crawley was one of several large-scale urban planning projects outlined by the 1946 New Town Act, the scale of which had never been seen before in the UK. The approaches taken in Crawley are uniquely relevant to anyone involved in the design and planning of new communities today.

Records relating to urban planning include:

- CNT/1/1-3 – Minutes of Advisory Committee
- CNT/1/2/1-15 – Minutes of Development Corporation
- CNT/1/3/1-64 – Board Papers and Reports
- CNT/3/1/1-121 – Administrative files (those pertaining to urban planning)
- CNT/4/1/1 – Master Plan and Maps



*Crawley New Town Master Plan, June 1947  
(CNT 4/1/1/12)*

## Housing

Crawley Development Corporation was particularly focused on designing and building a variety of different homes for incoming Londoners.

The records reveal the types of dwellings they planned, in what numbers, and how they were laid out, alongside details on materials, contracts and costings.

Records relating to housing include:

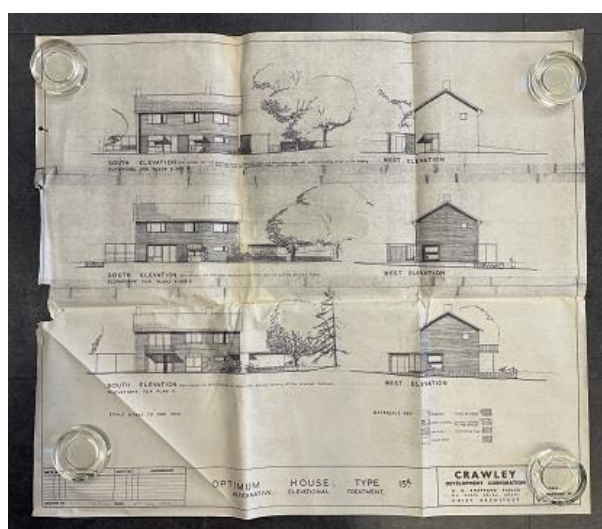
- CNT/1/3/1-64 – Board Papers and Reports (*especially those submitted by the Chief Architect and Chief Finance Officer*)
- CNT/3/52/1-88 – Housing files
- CNT/4/1/2/1-78 – Architectural Plans and Drawings

## Architecture

The new town movement attracted a lot of interest from the most prolific architects of the twentieth century. Some of them worked on and even led the Crawley development plans, including Sir Anthony Minoprio who formulated the Master Plan, Sir Thomas Penberthy Bennett the Chairman of the Corporation, and Alwyn Sheppard Fidler and H. S. Howgrave-Graham, the Chief Architects. The archive contains records relating to technical guidelines, building materials, adjustments to designs, plans and drawings, and photographs.

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*Optimum House plan, H S Howgrave Graham  
(CNT/1/3/10)*

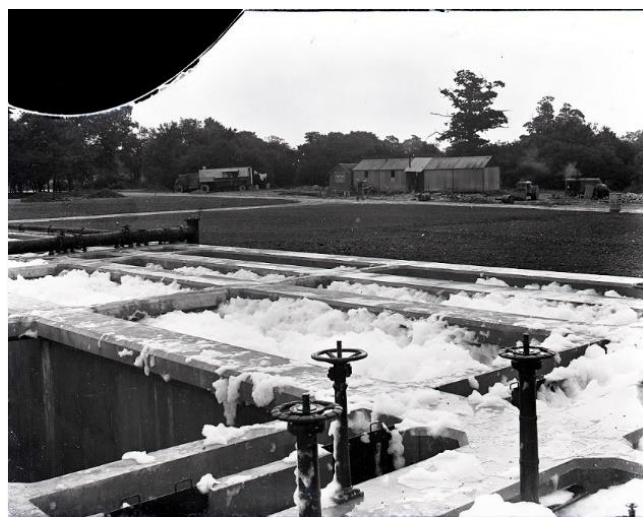


## Engineering

Although the CNT Archive doesn't include a discrete series of records created by the Corporation's Engineering Department, there are some items which may be of interest to those researching highways, construction methods, electricity supply, water supply, drainage and sewerage, and streetlighting. Additionally, Corporation board member and electrical engineer Dame Caroline Haslett had a significant impact on the planning of the new town; no doubt her pioneering attitudes to electrical engineering is evident throughout the archive.

Records relating to engineering include:

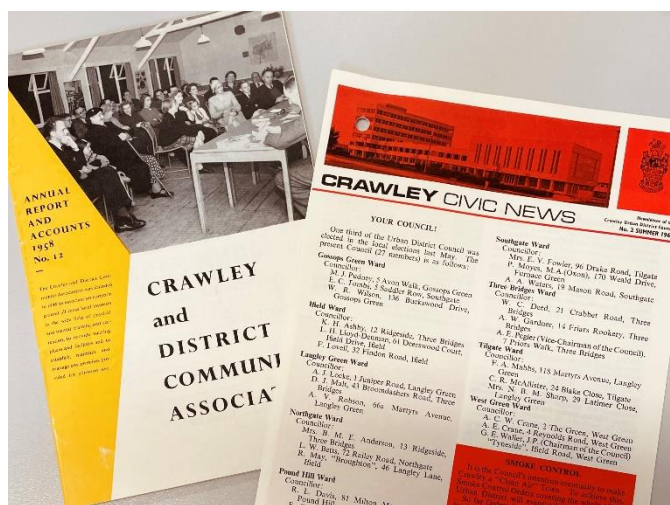
- CNT/1/11 – Weir Wood Water Board minutes
- CNT/1/12 – Working Party on Street Lighting minutes
- CNT/3/33 – Drainage files
- CNT/3/36 – Electricity files
- CNT/3/45 – Gas files
- CNT/3/69 - Roads, Bridges, Subways and Overbridges files
- CNT/3/115 – Water files



*Sewage Works (CNT 8/1/18/4)*

## Public buildings and community life

Building public amenities to a high standard was a crucial part of planning the new towns. Besides housing, the Development Corporation also designed shops, schools, churches, marketplaces, public houses, sports centres, and community centres. Life in Crawley New Town offered a wide range of clubs, societies, and events that residents could get involved with.



*Community newsletters, (CNT 3/17)*

Records relating to public buildings and community life include:

- CNT/3/34 – Schools files
- CNT/3/113 – Trader's Market files
- CNT/3/90 – Recreational Facilities files
- CNT/3/120 – Youth Services files
- CNT/3/101 – Social Organisations files
- CNT/3/111 – Tilgate Social Centre files
- CNT/3/17 – Community Centre files
- CNT/3/12 – Churches files

## Green spaces and landscaping

From the outset, the Master Plan for Crawley included provision for green spaces. Easy access to nature for leisure and exercise was an important aspect of the new town movement and was seen as a vital contributor to a better standard of living. Old Crawley had many ancient trees, many of which were preserved throughout the development.

Records relating to green spaces and landscaping include:

- CNT/3/60 – Landscaping files
- CNT/3/42 – Forestry files
- CNT/3/89 – Public Rights of Way files



*Landscaping work around an existing tree, 1950  
(CNT 8/1/14/2)*

## A healthy place to live

In addition to plenty of green spaces, the Development Corporation designed new doctors and dental surgeries, a hospital, and made provision for social welfare.

Records relating to health and social care include:

- CNT/1/3 – Board Papers (includes plans for surgeries etc.)
- CNT/3/51 – Hospital files
- CNT/3/71 – Nursery Schools files
- CNT/3/87 – Public Health files
- CNT/3/100 - Social Surveys



*Crawley Factory Estate (CNT/8/2/3/2)*

## Working in the New Town

A major draw of the new town was employment. Many of the first migrants from London followed their employers who had moved from the City to Crawley's industrial park, Manor Royal. Light industrial companies based at Manor Royal became significant employers to new town residents.

Records relating to work in the new town include:

- CNT/3/39 – Factories files
- CNT/3/54 – Industry files
- CNT/3/98 – Service Industry files

- CNT/4/1/2 – Plans and Drawings (includes those of factories, offices and shops)

### 3. How to access the collection

On WSRO's website, you can use the search bar at the top of the page to search the catalogue; make sure you select 'Archive Catalogue Only'. A handy guide to searching our catalogues can be found on our website here: <https://www.wsro.org.uk/searching-the-catalogue/>

The catalogue reference for the Crawley New Town Archive is CNT. Use key words, such as place names or the type of document you are interested in, e.g., Crawley new town photographs or Crawley new town industry. Personal names will only find results when a person is mentioned in a catalogue description.

You will need to visit the West Sussex Record Office in Chichester to consult original documents. Information about visiting can be found on our website: <https://www.wsro.org.uk/visiting-the-record-office/>.

### 4. Associated collections at WSRO

There are other collections of records held at the Record Office which can be used to supplement the Crawley New Town Archive and enrich your research into the new town. These include records created by:

- Crawley Borough Council (ref: BO/CR)
- Crawley Urban District Council (ref: UD/CR)
- Crawley Community Association (ref: AM 1795)

If you are interested in Gatwick Airport, you may also find the Sir Freddie Laker Archive useful (ref: Laker). It contains the records of Laker Airways, which was based at Gatwick from 1966 until its demise in 1982. It also has material relating to Sir Freddie's involvement with British United Airways which was also based at Gatwick between 1964 and 1970.

### 5. Other new towns in the UK and Ireland

Crawley is just one of the new towns built after World War Two. The New Jerusalem Project website is a useful resource for information on several other new towns in England: <https://www.newjerusalems.info/>. For researchers, this opens up the potential for studies that compare several towns. For heritage, arts and cultural organisations, you can get inspiration and share ideas from the ways other new towns have used the archives.



## 6. Further reading and other resources

At WSRO, there is an extensive local studies reference library holding many books relating to Crawley old town and Crawley New Town. You can search for items of interest on <https://www.wsro.org.uk>.

One particular title is **Old Town, New Town** by Professor Fred Grey (Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex, 1983). Features transcripts of interviews with several Crawley residents and their experiences of the development of the new town.

**New Towns: the rise, fall and rebirth.** By Katy Lock and Hugh Ellis. RIBA publishing. 2020. A good starting point for those interested in post-war new towns in the UK. The book sets out to challenge many of the negative preconceptions associated with the new town movement.

**Screen Archive South East.** Archive footage of Crawley and Gatwick Airport can be found in the collections of the Screen Archive. <https://screenarchive.brighton.ac.uk/> You can also watch a joint talk from the Screen Archive and WSRO about Crawley New Town on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnWUQZdUvAY>

**Crawley Museum's** collection is another important source of information for understanding the development of the new town. <https://crawleymuseums.org/>

**Town and Country Planning Association.** The historical issues of the journal, which includes articles about the development of Crawley can be accessed here: <https://archive.tcpa.org.uk/archive/journals>

**Royal Institute of British Architects.** Their catalogue contains the working papers and drawings of architects, photographs, and architectural journals and books. The catalogue is online and can be searched for material related to Crawley. <https://www.architecture.com/contact-and-visit/riba-library>

**National Government papers.** The reports, letters, and other working documents created by civil servants are held in The National Archives (TNA) in Kew. These are mostly catalogued as HLG (Ministry of Town and Country Planning) [discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C147]. The National Archives also holds the corporate archives of the Commission for the New Towns [discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16387] and its successor English Partnerships. There is a guide on 'How to look for records of towns and cities' available here: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/towns-and-cities/>

**British Newspaper Archive.** Editions of the Crawley and District Observer have been digitized and are available to search on the BNA website. These are an excellent resource for opinions and reports around the development of the new town.



<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

**WSRO's blog.** To read more about Crawley New Town and the archive, you can find several blog posts on our blog site here: <https://westsussexrecordofficeblog.com/new-jeruselems-crawley/>