



01

HOW TO?

Read
Heritage

In this How To? Guide,
Ulster Architectural Heritage seeks to equip
you with the eyes to see and understand
Ulster's historic environment.

*Supported by The National
Lottery Heritage Fund, the
Hands-On Heritage Project
NI is a project that combines
traditional heritage engagement
and outreach with the
introduction of a range of new
digital engagement technologies,
better connecting people and
communities with built heritage.*



This is one of ten Heritage:
How To? Guides, covering a
broad spectrum of ideas in
relation to Northern Ireland's
historic environment.

Human ingenuity, endeavour and the combining of man-made and natural elements; the historic environment has been shaped by a complex and continuously changing set of factors: economic, environmental, political and societal. As a result, Ulster's architectural heritage can be read as a catalogue of architectural ambition; with a variety of architectural styles, periods and structures from the humblest dwelling or traditional farmhouse to the grandest church or castle. Towns and villages, collections of buildings which have grown up over time, are also of interest to the overall image of Ulster's architectural heritage.

How to: read a historic building

Take a closer look at:

1. Architectural style
2. Building type
3. Decorative features
4. Construction
5. Materials
6. Proportion, scale, massing
7. Phased development
8. Context
9. Fixtures

Throughout our Heritage: How To? Guides we refer to heritage assets as buildings and monuments.

Thank you to David Bunting @ImagesNI for providing a selection of images for this guide.



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Architectural styles have gone in and out of fashion, and can help us to date a building in terms of architectural ambition and influence.

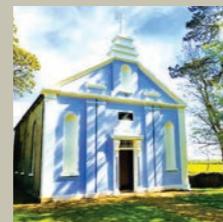
1 | Architectural style

Dating the building or monument

In Northern Ireland we are blessed with a wide range of heritage assets dating from the Neolithic to the Modern era. Generally, construction and use of building materials have become more sophisticated over time. Identifying different surviving features can help you to roughly date the building, which will help you narrow down your research.

1.1 | Architectural Timeline

PERIOD	NEOLITHIC 4000 – 2400 BC	BRONZE AGE 2400 – 500 BC	IRON AGE 500 BC – 400 AD	EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD 400 AD – 1160 AD	NORMAN PERIOD 1160 AD – 1500 AD	PLANTATION ERA 1500 AD – 1714 AD	GEORGIAN PERIOD 1714 AD – 1837 AD	VICTORIAN PERIOD 1837 AD – 1901 AD	EDWARDIAN PERIOD 1901 AD – 1914 AD	MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY PERIOD 1914 AD – PRESENT
WHAT TO LOOK FOR	Megalithic structures: Portal tombs (dolmens), passage tombs, court tombs and wedge tombs.	Hill fort building Territorial boundaries and burial markings: standing stones and stone circles.	Carved stone Iron work Ringforts fortification Linear earth works	Settlements reflected the nomadic lifestyle of the people. Local materials and temporary in nature. Simple stone churches and monastic settlements.	More formalized methods of shaping materials and construction. Large earthwork and stone castles. Fortifications	English and Scottish settlers brought new styles and craftsmen. Defensive buildings including bawns, walled courtyards, battlements and corner towers.	Industrial and agricultural development. Large country houses influenced by European grand tours. Simple and symmetrical styles.	Rebuilding of plantation towns, development of estates, estate villages and market towns. Development of industrial towns and mill villages. Suburbanisation of areas. Polychromatic brickwork. Imported stone. A variety of architectural styles including Neoclassical, Italianate, Gothic Revival, Celtic Revival, Scottish Baronial and Ruskinian Gothic.	Wide availability of imported stone and materials. Prefabrication. Eclectic style (or Arts & Crafts) incorporating elements of Queen Anne classical revival, Dutch gables and elements of the arts and crafts style.	International style influence. Rectilinear forms. Stripped of ornamentation. Structural innovation. Use of new materials. Progressive move away from craft skills to 'ready made' building construction.
EXAMPLES	 The Giant's Ring, Belfast	 Beaghmore Stone Circles, Cookstown	 Navan Fort, Armagh	 Devenish Island, Enniskillen	 Carrickfergus Castle, Co. Antrim	 Bellaghy Bawn and Castle, Magherafelt	 Florence Court House, Enniskillen	 The Palm House, Belfast	 Scottish Mutual Building, Belfast	 Ardhowne Theatre, Enniskillen
	Ballykeel Dolmen, Newry The Giant's Ring, Belfast The Kilfeaghan Dolmen, Warrenpoint	Beaghmore Stone Circles, Cookstown	Navan Fort, Armagh The Dorsey, Co. Armagh	Devenish Island, Enniskillen Killeavey Old Churches, Newry	Carrickfergus Castle Clough Castle, Co. Down	Bellaghy Bawn and Castle, Magherafelt	Florence Court House, Enniskillen	The Palm House, Botanic Gardens, Belfast Belfast City Hall	Austin's, Derry/ Londonderry Scottish Mutual Building, Belfast	Ardhowne Theatre, Enniskillen The King's Hall, Belfast



2 | Building 'type'

In identifying a building 'type', numerous other factors can be considered when reading a building. These include a basic plan form including room configuration and structural layout, materials used, construction period and architectural style.

BUILDING TYPE	RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL	EDUCATIONAL	INDUSTRIAL	ECCLESIASTICAL
EXAMPLE					
Villas Country Houses Terraced Housing Vernacular cottages	Chemist Butchers Public House Grocers	Schools Universities Colleges	Mills Plants Storage spaces Distribution centres Dockyards	A variety of shapes, sizes, forms and religious denominations including Gothic, Medieval and 20th Century Modern.	

BUILDING TYPE	AGRICULTURAL	GOVERNMENT	CIVIC	MONUMENT	DEFENCE
EXAMPLE					
Barns Sheds Grain stores	City Hall Courthouses Parliament buildings Assembly rooms	Town halls Libraries Engineering and infrastructure (e.g. bridges)	Sculptures Statues Gravestones Busts Mausolea	Castles Bawns Town Walls	

3 | Materials

Ulster is blessed with a rich variety of geology, producing fine stone for construction. Until the 19th century, Ulster relied heavily on its own resources when sourcing building materials, as well as those from neighbouring provinces. The 19th century and the industrial revolution enabled the importation of materials from farther afield, making for cheaper building materials and construction costs.

Materials can make and/or change a building's character. This is evident through material ageing, weathering and/or the addition of texture to material surfaces.

Do you need help to identify materials?

BRICK

Predominantly used for:
Wall construction
Chimney construction
Decorative surrounds



COPPER

Predominantly used for:
Pipes
Roofs (Green patina)
Decorative elements



LIME

RENDER
HARLING
WASH COATING
Predominantly used for:
Rendered walls



STONE ASHLAR

Predominantly used for:
Wall construction
Stone surrounds



CORRUGATED IRON

TIN
Predominantly used for:
Wall construction
Roof covering



LIMESTONE

Predominantly used for:
Wall construction



THATCH

Predominantly used for:
Roof covering



CAST IRON

Predominantly used for:
Railings
Decorative features
Machinery, stoves,
gutters & downpipes etc.
Structural frames



GLASS

Predominantly used for:
Windows
Fixtures and fittings



STONE

RANDOM RUBBLE
COURSED RUBBLE
Predominantly used for:
Wall construction
Boundary construction



WROUGHT IRON

Predominantly used for:
Railings
Decorative features
Fixtures and fixings



CLAY TILES

Predominantly used for:
Roof coverings
Decorative finishes



LEAD

Predominantly used for:
Roofing



STONE

RUBBLE
DRESSED
SAWN
CARVED
Predominantly used for:
Wall construction





4 | Details

Everyone knows the basic parts of a house, for example—walls, roof, doors and windows—but the sizes and shapes of these features can vary enormously from one part of the world to another. Even within a small place like Northern Ireland these features can vary greatly and the type of material used can have a regional significance. We can sometimes be overwhelmed by the terminology used to describe the different elements a building is composed of, but gaining an understanding of terminology may assist you in your research, and in documenting the building.

Architectural details are small elements that add up to paint a whole picture. Details add personality to a building, whether it be through the owner's choice, architectural style or fashion of the time.

Windows and doors, including the type of glass, size and shape of openings and surrounds can offer a clue as to the age of the property. There may also be other features, for example bread ovens, tiles, remnants of machinery or mechanisms, which may be able to help you date the building, or let you know that it was in operation at a certain point in time.

Below are a few examples of features that add character to a historic building.

BAY WINDOW	BARGEBOARDS	CHIMNEYS POTS STACKS FINIALS	DOORS PANELLED CARRIAGEWAYS FANLIGHTS SIDELIGHTS	DORMERS
ENTABLATURE	FINIALS	GUTTERS	KEYSTONES	PEDIMENTS
SIGNAGE	SURROUNDS BRICK STONE	SURROUNDS CLASSICAL	QUOINS	WINDOWS SASH AND CASE 6 OVER 6 PANES CASEMENT BAY SEGMENTAL ORIEL STAINED GLASS

Below are a number of easy to access pictorial guides to help you identify and understand this language.

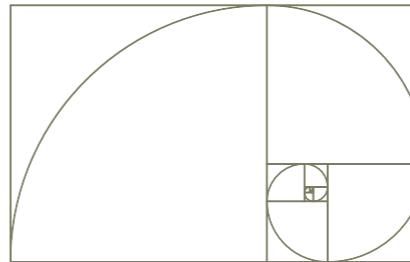
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5 | Construction

Looking at materials and method of construction can help you narrow down a date. For example, sizes and colours of bricks differ depending on their age and where they were made. Bricks only adopted the current industry standard size in the UK in the mid-20th Century. Likewise, if it is a formal building made of stone, when did the quarry operate? Can you identify a construction method which was in favour during a certain period?



6 | Proportion, scale and massing

Different periods and movements emphasised the vertical or the horizontal, and had different approaches to proportion. For example, Georgian styles tended towards symmetry, and sometimes followed the golden ratio (pleasing proportions), with taller ground floor height decreasing incrementally to a lower top floor height, emphasising the verticality of the building. In contrast, dwellings from the late 1920s to modern day often emphasise the horizontal, with horizontal bands of windows and a more rectilinear form.



Phased development

We often mistakenly think that heritage buildings are stuck in a certain time period and haven't changed since they were constructed, but in many/most cases when we delve deeper we can uncover historic and modern changes, or additions. Modern additions can be easier to read, for example if an extension has been added to the building, but there are other clues such as shape or size of windows and doors or changes in materials which can indicate historic changes. This reading of the building can sometimes be supported by documentary evidence. For example, by comparing historic maps we can sometimes see where a building has developed over time. You can find out more in the **How To? Research Heritage Guide**.

What to look for:

Are there different building or decorative styles?

A change in style suggests additions or alterations have been made at a later date (although this isn't always the case, see Castle Ward!).

Is there a return added to the building?

Are there portions of the building of different heights, or with abutting roofs?

Is the building symmetrical?

An asymmetrical building can sometimes indicate an extension has been added at a later date.

Are different materials used in different areas of the building?

You may be able to see where doors or windows have been blocked or opened up using different materials, or repairs made. There may be an entire block or storey of the building constructed in a different way, suggesting an earlier building or later extension.

Do levels change within the building?

This can also suggest portions were constructed at different times. Likewise, heights of doors and ceiling heights can be lower in older portions of the building.

What can you tell from the landscaping and surrounding context?

Is there evidence of a former use or an older building on the site? Is there remains of a formal garden? Are there archaeological features on the site? Are these linked to what stands today or are they to be considered separately?

Looking at the evidence in front of you, try and see areas of the building which have been potentially altered, if any, and when. By doing this, when you come to examine historic maps or descriptions in your research, you will have a clearer idea of the shape of building which existed at that time, for you to compare with documentary evidence. On historic maps, it is not always possible to ascertain if the building recorded is definitely the one which stands today. However, by familiarizing yourself with the building's alterations, it is sometimes possible to see corresponding changes when comparing historic maps which support the physical evidence, and allows you to make a judgement as to whether it is likely to be the same building. Archive aerial photography can be a valuable source, although as it is a 20th century innovation, it may only help to identify later changes.



7 | Context

If you are struggling to find identifying features on your building, you can turn back to context to give you clues. You may be able to see that construction materials and methods are very similar or very different from other local buildings. You may find that the road dog-legs around the building, suggesting that the road may have been built later. Both these things may seem insignificant, however, if there is a known date for the construction of another nearby building, or of the road, it can help you to narrow down your search further.

Within a contextual landscape, there are many types of settlement styles. The most obvious being dispersed, linear and nucleated. The best way to track the progression of your settlement is through historic maps and aerial photography.





For more information on How To?
Read Heritage visit the
Hands-On Heritage website
www.handsonheritage-ni.org.uk
where you can access related
Heritage: How To? Guides.

Promotion – Protection – Conservation – **Regeneration**

Ulster Architectural Heritage (UAH) works to promote the historic built environment, its protection, conservation and heritage-led regeneration, through advice and support, advocacy, publications, events, and projects delivery. Since its formation in 1967, the UAH has established itself as the lead independent voice for the historic built environment across the nine counties of Ulster, a fearless campaigner for historic buildings, a generous resource of information on local architecture and a source of advice on conservation.

UAH has had much success in influencing public opinion in favour of conservation of our historic built environment. UAH carries out reports, assessments, monitoring of the historic built environment and makes representations relating to planning and policy. UAH educates, engages and informs on built heritage through a wide range of events, publications and projects.



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