



02

HOW TO?

Record  
Heritage

*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.

This Heritage: How To? Guide covers some of the aspects you might want to consider before or while you are recording a heritage asset. We have provided some top tips and general guidance to help you on your recording journey.

When we want to record a heritage asset, it might be because we are fascinated by its history, its architectural style, what the building was used for or we may even just be curious about a small detail that we have noticed. You might be planning a research project, or wanting to undertake conservation or restoration works. In all cases, recording the historic structure is a good place to start, no matter how big or small.

Recording historic structures is important – it documents the building for future generations, and will further your understanding of the building and how it has evolved over time. It can also assist in conservation and repair, contributing to a wider sphere of knowledge, such as bettering our interpretation and understanding of how people used to live or work; or allowing us to analyse wider social, architectural or environmental trends.

*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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## 1 | Before you begin

### **What is your purpose in recording the heritage asset?**

Before you begin recording, you may want to think about the purpose in doing so; for example, are you looking at condition, would you like to research a building or do you want to undertake a restoration project? This will inform the methods you choose and how much detail you want or need to delve into. Thinking ahead will reduce the number of times you need to visit the property to get the information you need.

### **What condition is it in?**

If you are concerned about a building's condition, take photographs of the specific problems to illustrate the issues. This could be blocked or broken rainwater goods, signs of vandalism, fire damage or general disrepair. By recording the condition of buildings you can help track whether improvements and maintenance are carried out over time, or it can assist you in identifying problems, and also whether these problems are progressing.

## A picture is worth a thousand words

Photographing heritage is perhaps your first means of recording what you see, and almost everyone can take a photograph through their mobile device, tablet or camera.



## 2 | Recording methods

### Is it safe to record?

You need to make sure it is safe, and that you have the relevant permission to record the building or structure.

- Always tell someone where you are going.
- Gain the owners' permission before entering their land. By being open about what you are doing and discussing your interest with them, you may not only gain access to the building but also valuable local knowledge.
- Make sure it is safe to approach the building or structure, and be aware of your surroundings. There may be hidden dangers, such as concealed mill ponds, unguarded wells, rubble or debris. Do not enter a building unless it is safe to do so.
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) as required.

### Be as accurate as you can

This will depend on your purpose, however, to truly document the asset, you want to record it accurately, so that the information gleaned from it is also accurate. Record the asset in its entirety, don't ignore later additions or ugly bits! Don't make unnecessary assumptions—sometimes construction is assumed if, for example it is covered with wall or floor coverings; but if it is visible, take the time to look at it and record it properly.

### Photography

**Take many photographs**

**Light can really help you capture a shot**

### TOP TIPS FOR CAPTURING YOUR SHOT

Portrait, landscape, from the side, above, of all elements the building is composed of – don't limit yourself to one shot. The more taken, the more choice you have later.

Direct sunlight behind the heritage building can be tricky as it puts the asset in darkness. Most camera phones will allow you select where the light focuses by tapping at points around the screen. Alternatively, seek shade or come back at a time when the light is coming from another direction.

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

A smartphone, tablet or camera (although the cameras in tablets tend to be lower quality than a mobile phone).

<b>Framing a photograph</b>	Capturing the surrounding context can also help tell the story of a heritage building, but there may also be interesting ancillary buildings you want to include to get a complete picture of the place. Check for clutter in the frame of your photograph e.g. a wheelie bin, before snapping as these can be distracting.	<b>YOU MAY ALSO NEED</b>
<b>Hold steady</b>	Hold the camera close to your body to reduce shake or make use of any surfaces or a tripod to help you keep your shot steady.	
<b>Hold straight</b>	Use the grid on your camera where it divides the image into nine, pick a dominant straight line to help you line up the photograph. Most smart phones have this function, if it isn't automatically on, you can do an online search of your make and model for more advice.	
<b>Rule of thirds</b>	More interesting shots can be taken by placing the heritage subject in a third of the image and discouraging placement of the subject on the centre of the image for a more pleasing shot.	

<b>Chop check</b>	Make sure you get all the elements in the photograph by checking all the edges of your subject are present, for instance the top of a spire isn't missing on a church.	
<b>Avoid flash</b>	Sometimes flash is needed but it can bleach out a lot of details you are trying to capture. This is particularly true for details, such as reliefs, carvings, texture, and colours.	
<b>Draw/sketch it</b>	A photograph isn't always the best way of recording something. For example, the way a building element is constructed may be easier understood or communicated through a drawing, sketch or diagram. You may find it easier to capture the whole asset in its context through a drawing or sketch, or you may want to do a rough diagram showing how different buildings and structures work together, such as the layout of a farmyard, or a mill complex.	<b>WHAT YOU WILL NEED</b> A good quality sketch pad, drawing pens/pencils, sharpener, rubber, ruler.

**Make notes**

Will you remember what you have photographed?

Are there floor level changes, material changes, different construction methods you want to make a note of?

What is the condition like?

Sometimes what you can see on site isn't always clear on photographs when you get back home, or you might forget what part of the building you were photographing and when! Taking notes as you go along will help to jog your memory and make your drawings or photographs more meaningful. Notes on condition are very useful, as things can look better, or worse on a photograph than they do to the naked eye.

**Measure the Asset / Do Measured Drawings**

Depending on your purpose, you may wish to measure the building and perhaps make measured drawings. This can help you to document the building and understand the relationship between different building elements, compare it with similar structures; and understand the scale and proportion of the building as a whole, or elements within it.

Measured drawings have a practical purpose if, for example, you are undertaking a restoration project; however, the level of accuracy required will differ than if you were just looking at the building schematically; and will most likely require a specialist professional. A number of free to use floor plan creators are available online to help you make scale drawings, or you can draw them out by hand. Remember to measure the thickness of the walls as well as room sizes.

**WHAT YOU WILL NEED**

Surveyor's tape measure, notepad/sketchpad, pens/pencils, sharpener, rubber, ruler.

**YOU MAY ALSO NEED**

Laser distance measure, A3 drawing board, scale ruler, set square, drawing pens.

**Map in wider context**

With today's technology, it is easy to use your mobile device to pinpoint your exact location on an online map. You can also use the Hands-On Heritage recording app to record location. This is useful for a number of reasons, as it allows you to more easily locate the asset, both to find it again (especially if you have stumbled across it!) and to compare the location on historic maps, which can help you to date the building and see how it has changed over time. It also allows you to accurately look at topography and analyse trends.

You may wish to record the immediate context of the building in more detail, taking into account changing levels across the site, smaller natural features, landscape features or temporary structures which may not appear on larger scale maps. If this is the case, you can draw these or make notes on a blown-up map; or go a step further by undertaking or commissioning a full site survey, depending on your purpose.

**WHAT YOU WILL NEED**

Smartphone or tablet and internet access.

**YOU MAY ALSO NEED**

Surveyor's tape measure or measuring wheel, notepad/sketchpad, pens/pencils, sharpener, rubber, ruler.

### Oral history recording

Our heritage assets are not only important in their own right but also because of the personal stories they hold. Oral, and even anecdotal histories, are rapidly being lost; which form a large part of our cultural identity and sense of place and can bring places of special architectural or historical significance to life.

You can record an oral history of a family member or acquaintance by establishing a discussion topic around a memory or household item; or an event of the past is a great way to tease out those histories. An informal setting and a cup of tea can make someone feel at ease, where with their permission you could record their stories via video or voice note on your mobile device.

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Smartphone or tablet, or a voice recorder.



## 3 | What are you recording?

Now you have identified your purpose in recording, and looked at recording methods, where do you start in actually documenting a heritage asset? It may be useful for you to imagine that you would have to reconstruct the asset with just the documents you produce—what information do you think you would need?



Heritage assets don't just have to be buildings, they could be monuments, mausolea, infrastructure such as bridges, or street furniture such as telephone or post boxes. See the **How To? Read Heritage Guide** for more information on historic assets. What the asset is will frame how you record it, and potentially how much information you can gain from it. However, generally you can focus on the following:

Before you look in detail at the heritage asset, look around you. The context of the building or structure is very important, and can often be overlooked.

### CONTEXT

Take photographs of the asset in its setting. Record the location of the building or asset, with a full address (if known/ applicable) and any details which may help you understand the asset better or will assist you in later research.

#### Things to consider are:

- **Where is it?**  
Is it in a street, a square, or a field? Is it on the road, or set back, nestled into a side of a hill, or entirely exposed? Is it close to a river or lake?
- **Which direction is it facing?**
- **How does it fit in (or stand out) from neighbouring buildings?**  
Is it built in a similar style or with similar materials? Does it follow the line of the street? Does it form a group with other buildings?
- **Are there other structures associated with the building?**  
Garden gates, boundary walls, railings, fences, kilns, outbuildings or workshops?
- **Is there landscaping associated with the property?**  
Formal gardens, or a field system?
- **Is there anything else which contributes to the setting?**  
A telephone or post box at the boundary or nearby trees?

Take closer photographs of outbuildings and any architecturally significant details on the boundary or within the grounds.

Now you have looked at the heritage asset in its wider context, you can start to record the asset itself.

### THE ASSET

Take a photograph of the outside of the structure from all sides when possible, trying to frame the photograph in such a way where you can see the full elevation on each side.

Now it is time to zoom in again, and we can start from top to bottom. Take pictures of the chimneys and roof. Moving downwards, if there are any obvious faults such as leaky rainwater goods, spalled bricks or cracks in the structure, take a close-up photo of these to record their condition. Take photographs of any details such as decorative tiles, mouldings, bricks or vents. Take a close-up photo of windows and doors if they are architecturally significant.

Look towards the base of the structure and photograph any significant details, or elements in poor condition. Keep an eye out for things which may cause issues internally, such as blocked vents or raised ground levels.

Enter the building if it is safe to do so, and pay attention to where you are walking. Begin by taking a photograph of the room as a whole. Then look up to the ceiling and photograph any architectural details, such as cornices or ceiling roses and work your way down to the floor. Look out for any potential issues, such as rot, damp or structural movement, and for any interesting details or features, such as fireplaces or window shutters. Pay attention to the profile of skirting boards and architraves, doors and door furniture. Move through each room in this way. You may not need to photograph the details in every room if they are the same, but don't assume they are. Often a historic building will have been added to over decades or even centuries, and details will differ and carry clues as to the evolution of the building. As you go along, you can draw a rough plan of the building, and you can make notes as to where you saw interesting features or took photographs. You can also use this to note down measurements if needed.

### Talk to local people

Do not underestimate the power of local knowledge or legend. You can often be amazed by the inherent knowledge of a community, and by talking to local people and/or owners, you can discover new avenues to pursue in your research, more about the people who lived or worked there, ancient associations or even claims to fame. Sometimes, architectural details which don't make sense will suddenly become clear, when you discover that stone was reused from a local church or big house, windows were pinched from an older structure, or the building had previously served a whole other purpose. You can make an oral history recording or simply take notes. Try and record a provenance, which will help you explore different sources, and will assist future researchers.

### Consolidate your findings

Now you have recorded the building, you have a wealth of information; but what is the best way to present it? Again, this will depend on your purpose. The Hands-On Heritage app gives a platform for storing and organising your recording data and allows others to access and learn from it; but whichever way you choose to store your data, you will want to create a record.

Now you have recorded the building, what can you learn from it?

## 4 | Reading the building

Things to consider are:

### **Is what you are looking at historic?**

Sometimes historic buildings are disguised under modern exteriors, with replacement roofs, windows, doors and a new render, making them difficult to recognise. Unfortunately, sometimes heritage buildings can be demolished leaving behind a partial remnant of the building or structure, gap site or even replaced with a new building. Recording these changes to our historic environment allows us to monitor changes and where potential threats are becoming a trend.

### **Is it a vernacular building?**

Vernacular buildings are often simpler in form and decoration, although sometimes owners would add details copying architectural fashions of the time. Sometimes rural vernacular buildings are hard to date due to a lack of documentary evidence, and the fact that the local building traditions and materials did not see rapid change. You can find out more about dating a vernacular building in the **How To? Read** and **Research Heritage Guides**, however, clues as to the history and date of the building can still be found in the materials and construction methods used.



For more information on How To?  
**Record Heritage** visit the  
Hands-On Heritage website  
[www.handsonheritage-ni.org.uk](http://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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