



HER21: Recording Historic Buildings

Guidance for a rapid and consistent method of recording historic buildings into Historic Environment Records

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Our understanding of historic buildings is neither consistent nor comprehensive. There are around 375,000 Listed Building entries (LBs) in the country. These buildings are recognised as being of national importance and are given statutory protection, but there are probably at least 10 times as many buildings that date to the 19th century or earlier. It is these unlisted and unprotected buildings that define local distinctiveness. They are an integral part of the landscape, define the character of settlements and create a sense of place for the people living in them.

The methodology set out below suggests a way of consistently and rapidly recording these buildings into an Historic Environment Record. It is based on a pilot study carried out in Worcestershire and may need to be modified by other HERs to take account of, for example, differing GIS software. Recording of these buildings can never be quick, but it can be much faster than one might initially anticipate.

The project is set up in four stages (below). It is recommended that Stage 1 is completed for your entire area before Stages 2, 3 and 4 are planned. Completion of Stage 1 will allow you to assess reasonably accurately how long the other stages will take. Stage 1 is very rapid.

- **Stage 1:** The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping of the late 1800s 25" (1:2500) is overlaid on the modern OS mapping (ideally Mastermap) at an equivalent scale. Most HERs hold both modern OS mapping and a ¹georeferenced raster theme of the 1st Edition OS of c.1880-1890 (varies across the country). It is possible to make the 1st Edition OS map transparent and overlay it on the modern map (Figure 1). All buildings that appear to exist on **both** maps are identified in a GIS point theme. If in doubt, place a point on a building, as the fieldwork stage will confirm whether it is the same building on both maps. For HERs without access to digital 1st Edition mapping, this process must be done by comparing paper maps and will take longer.

No attribute data is added initially. Following Stage 2, the photograph number will be added to the theme, or a reason why there is no number e.g. Building not visible from a PRow.

The following attribute data can also be added if you think it will be useful and your GIS allows rapid querying of the data: whether the building is Listed (LB) or in a Conservation Area (CA). If you have LBs and CAs digitised as polygons in your HER, then it is a 5 minute job to populate the attribute table of the GIS

¹ Georeference- A method of locating mapped information geographically, i.e. associating each object on a map with a latitude and longitude so that they can be plotted and displayed against other maps/data in the same geographical location.

theme by selecting all points that fall within the polygons and inputting the data (using the 'calculate' button in ArcView 3.3). This is not essential, but if the theme is being sent to Conservation Officers who do not have direct access to the HER, then it can be helpful for them. If the relevant data is not available and the task has to be done manually, then it is probably not worth doing.

Production of this GIS theme is very rapid and offers a baseline evidence base. It will allow buildings of historic potential to be identified at an early stage. This theme can be added to the HER and District planning GIS software.

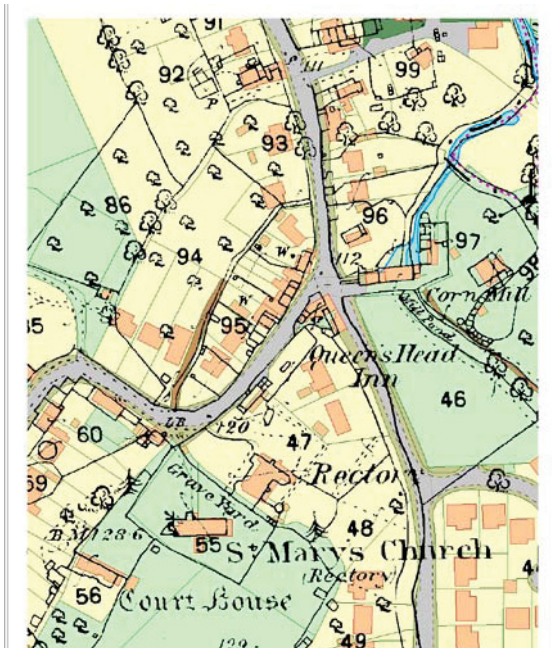


Figure 1. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey overlain on the modern map.

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It took around 15 days to cover the County of Worcestershire, which is around 17,000sq km. The resulting theme contained 43,000 'points' indicating the presence of potentially historic buildings.

Even with this level of data, a huge amount can be gleaned about the nature of the historic buildings without looking at the individual properties (see our HER21 report for project outcomes).

At a landscape scale, the settlement pattern can clearly be seen. A clearer picture of how long it will take to carry out Stage 2 can be estimated by looking at level of settlement nucleation. In parishes where all the potential historic buildings are confined to one village, it can take as little as 35 minutes to photograph the entire parish. In areas of dispersed settlement, where a lot of walking is required, it can take two days to photograph the same number of buildings.

The last part of Stage 1 is printing off the maps ready to take into the field for Stage 2. It takes a surprisingly long time to print out maps at the right scale. We used modern maps at 1:4000 or (1:2000 in densely populated areas). The modern maps also had the PRow and the Stage 1 point theme overlain. In some instances, it is also helpful to take the historic mapping out as well.

It took 1.5 days to create the GIS theme for the area covered in the HER21 pilot study, but 3 days to print out all the maps and prepare routes to cover the area in the shortest time possible.

- **Stage 2:** Those buildings that are visible from the PRow are photographed. Sometimes, modern buildings are built on the footprint of earlier structures. It is equally important to photograph these buildings as well, as this provides evidence to anyone conducting research into the area in future that the building that they can see on the map is not historic.

We also photographed Listed buildings. These buildings already have descriptions and, in many cases, photographs, but this project will provide evidence of current condition, which can be particularly useful for buildings that haven't been revisited since inclusion on the List. This has already proved useful in the case of an enforcement notice on a Listed building.

Photographs are taken using a digital camera that is capable of taking high quality shots and has optical rather than digital zoom. A mid-range, fully adjustable compact would be appropriate, although a DSLR would produce superior pictures as larger lenses give more light, which will result in a superior image capture and less distortion, and the faster shutter speeds will result in less camera shake. The lenses will generally also be of a higher quality, and the screens will probably allow a better assessment of the results.

It is recommended that the images are stored within the project as small JPEGs and then archived elsewhere as TIFFs. 12 megapixels is equivalent to photographic film, and is probably the ideal resolution to aim for. Working on a parish by parish basis and storing the images in this way tends to produce manageable folder sizes.

The resulting images will require a considerable amount of server space and it is advisable to consider this before starting Stage 2. Each original high resolution tiff image in the pilot study that Worcestershire carried out for the HER21 project was between 1.5MB and 1.8MB, with the entire pilot study archive totalling 8.5GB. Lower resolution versions of the images should be used in the reports, but the originals should be kept.

An adequate amount of money should be set aside for mileage/train fares/travel. This will form a considerable expense during the lifetime of the project. A useful way of cutting down on mileage costs is to employ more than one member of staff at the same time and car-share. In Worcestershire car-sharing saved around 20% of the travel budget in the area covered in the HER21 pilot study.

Each photograph should:

- show a view of two elevations of the building if possible.
- show the best view of the oldest part, if the building has been extended.
- not show personal items, such as children's toys or vehicles.
- be of high quality
- have the building fully in focus

- have adequate lighting (not to be taken fully towards the sun or in poor light)
- be taken using optical zoom, not digital as this causes pixilation.

It is inevitable that some vehicles will appear in photographs of the buildings, but their registration numbers should be obscured to avoid identification (this can be done easily in most photo editing software with a pixelate or blur tool).



Figure 2. A photograph of an unlisted historic building taken during the Pilot Study. © WCC/EH

Above is an example of a typical photograph. Obviously it is not always possible to see two elevations of a building or to avoid photographing cars etc. Photographs are only taken from public roads and footpaths unless permission is given by the owners for them to be taken inside the property boundary. It is possible to ask permission to take photographs on private property, but written permission should be obtained and there is always the issue that the person living in the house might not own it. English Heritage produced guidelines on this for the Images of England project. Deciding to ask permission for properties not visible from PRow will add a substantial amount of time to the project, although where a volunteer tried this in a parish (not part of the HER21 pilot study), he had a 100% success rate and was given a lot of extra useful information about the buildings.

Where there is a group of contemporary terraced houses, it is expected that a single photograph of the terrace will be taken rather than one for each home. A single image for each house within the terrace would only be taken if substantial alterations had occurred, giving the houses distinctive and separate character.

Where the owner does not want their building photographed, do not take a picture. Where the building is obscured by hedges or fencing take as much as is visible, where possible. Avoid taking pictures where children, or children's things (toys, garden play things etc.) are visible. If the building is not visible from close by and the camera has a good zoom facility, take pictures from a distance, where possible.

Record the photo number on the map, next to the dot or building or use a photo recording sheet if there are a lot of buildings in one area. Photo log fields could include: Map sheet/id, Building number, address, Photo number, time, date, file name. Be sure to use the file number not the internal camera number.

Where buildings are not visible, they can sometimes be identified using aerial photographic evidence (including oblique prints held in the HER), EH Listed building descriptions, Google Streetview, map data and occasionally estate agents' sale particulars. Third party images can be used to compile descriptions of buildings, but care should be taken about retaining images that are not your copyright.

In many cases, historic structures not identifiable from the map evidence will be encountered. These can be photographed as well and added in at Stage 3. Walls, sundials and milestones are examples of such structures. Often these will be made of local stone and will contribute significantly to the local character of an area.

- **Stage 3:** A report for each parish is produced that contains a single photograph of each building (or very occasionally two, if two elevations are very different) and a short description, similar to those created for Listed buildings but much less detailed (see English Heritage's *'Images of England'* Website www.imagesofengland.org.uk).

The Stage 3 reports are compiled by parish. This might not be appropriate for all areas. When we come to look at the larger towns and Worcester City, the reports will need to be broken down into more manageable areas, perhaps wards or perhaps by a grid system.

The idea of the Stage 3 building description is that it is a brief pointer on the type and date of the building. The description is not meant to be a full description, as might be expected in a List description. The HER Assistants and the Buildings' Archaeologist were asked to keep the descriptions to a maximum of three lines, otherwise the time taken to compile the reports can spiral.

As the pilot study project progressed, it was decided to change the format of the Word document to include a table with the photograph number and the HER reference (LB number if applicable). It was felt that it would be much harder to miss out these essential numbers if they were in a separate field and much easier to search on them afterwards. Originally we intended to number each photograph sequentially from 1 onwards, e.g. Clent001, as this looks neater. It was decided, on reflection, to leave the original photograph numbers. Although this does not look as neat, it is far quicker than re-numbering and it allows one to go back to the original field notes and cross-reference the numbers if there is any confusion. Of course using the default image file numbers could cause problems as different cameras could potentially create images with the same number. Consideration should be given to these factors when deciding how to name the images. Also, metadata on the location and other photo info should ideally be included in the file, at least for the archive versions (image properties). The Archaeology Data Service has excellent guidelines on metadata.

Image No	Building Description	HER Ref
<p>1 or camera file name e.g. P9170686</p>	<p>Description including brief address (house name/number, Road Name, Parish) for the title of the record in the HER.</p> <p>Description of the building in the following order (no more than three sentences/three lines in the HER record): whether listed (and grade) or unlisted, foundations (i.e. stone plinth), walls (i.e. red brick or timber framed with brick/rendered infill), roof (shape and description with any dormer windows and other features - ridge tiles etc), chimney (describe pots and decorations if any) and any other features (e.g. barge boards, gable ends, replacement/original windows) etc..</p> <p>For example: Grade II listed two storey cottage, red brick walls (bond?) with sash windows, plain tile roof with two dormer windows and decorative bargeboards and plain brick chimney with terracotta chimney pots.</p> <p>N.B. A terrace of buildings, built at the same time, needs only one building record.</p> <p>Add any reference that may help create the record (e.g. tithe maps, old photographs on websites, history society publications, information from local residents etc.)</p> <p>Describe the building using consistent terms (to be agreed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dentillated eaves (not dentilled - as in listed buildings description) ▪ More to be added as required... 	<p>HER_Ref and LBreference listed building reference (no spaces) if listed</p> <p>or None if no reference (where the photograph shows a modern building)</p>

Table 1. An example of the Stage 3 report.

- **Stage 4:** The data is added to the HER. Every building is mapped as a GIS polygon to its **modern** footprint as shown on the modern OS map. A brief description is added to the HER record with digital links to the source report produced in Stage 3. This includes building materials and building dates (as far as can reasonably be determined from the external appearance).

It is more efficient to complete Stages 3 and 4 in tandem. This may not be the case for other local authorities, but we found that creating the GIS polygon at the same time as writing the Stage 3 description made sense as it was necessary to check whether the building already existed in the HER, what the HER_REF number was (or allocate one for a new record), whether the building is subject to statutory designation and whether there was any pertinent information already in the HER that would inform the Stage 3 description. It is not an efficient use of time to copy the Stage 3 descriptions into the HER database immediately.

The finished Stage 3 reports are sent to a Buildings' Archaeologist and the District Council Conservation Officer. Once they have corrected any mistakes, then the descriptions are copied into the relevant HER records. Exporting the reports as stand-alone products, rather than through the HER, is quite difficult as the reports tend to be quite large. The easiest way around this is to supply the

reports digitally on a CD as a PDF of the Word document with hyperlinks from the descriptions to the image numbers.

We found that, on average, it takes around four times as long to complete Stages 3 and 4 as it took to complete Stage 2. This varies depending on how dispersed the settlement in the parish is, but on average 20 buildings were described, checked and added to the HER per day during the HER21 project. This average increased sharply towards the end of the project as the HER Assistants became used to the methodology and better at describing buildings.

Below is a table to aid other Counties in estimating project cost. Worcestershire county is around 17,000 sq kilometres.

Project Stage or Expense	Time Taken
Stage 1 mapping for Pilot Study Area (including printing out maps for Stage 2).	1.5 days (3 days)
Stage 1 mapping for the rest of Worcestershire	12 days
Stage 2 Field work in the Pilot Study Area	18 days
Stages 3 and 4 in the Pilot Study Area (report creation and integration into the HER)	77 days
Checking of reports by Buildings' Archaeologist	8 days
Checking of reports by Bromsgrove CO	2 days
Transport/mileage	686 miles (£321.73)
Camera/PPE	£259.28

Table 1. Breakdown of Stages.

For guidance on management of projects see

Lee, E. 2006 Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment The MoRPHE Project Managers Guide. English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk/morphe

For more in-depth coverage on building recording see

Menuge A. et al 2006 'Understanding Historic Buildings A guide to good recording practice' English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/understanding-historic-buildings. The surveys covered by the Historic Buildings recording guidance equate to extensive Level 1 surveys as set out in the English Heritage guidance.

For integration with development of Local Listing projects see

Wilson G. et al (forthcoming) Good Practice Guide for Local Listing. English Heritage
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/local/local-designations/>

For more on digital archiving see

May K. 2006 MoRPHE Technical Guide 1 Digital Archiving and Digital Dissemination
English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk/morphe