Foreword#

The first version of this manual was published in 2000 and only covered Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) in England. At that time, SMRs were beginning to extend their coverage to include the various aspects of what has become to be known as the historic environment, in the process becoming known as Historic Environment Records (HERs). That development has continued, especially in England, partly as a consequence of the recent Heritage Protection Review. In view of this, and many other changes and developments, this second, revised edition has been prepared. Furthermore, the geographical coverage has also been extended, to Scotland and Wales, following the interest and willingness to become involved of the relevant organisations, SMRs and HERs.

The purpose of this manual is to provide a set of working guidelines appropriate to all HERs, large and small, and for all staff, volunteers and students involved in managing, running or supporting an HER.

The aim is not to prescribe rules or to describe every conceivable variation that might be encountered. Instead, this manual offers an overview of the standards, best practice, services and systems that are kept by everybody and highlights ideas and approaches being developed by a few. It shows the benefits of pooling ideas and using scarce resources to develop standards, systems and training that benefits all.

The guidelines that are being advocated here are compatible with the forthcoming MIDAS Heritage: The UK Historic Environment Information Standard. In England they support the recommendations being made for Historic Environment Records as part of the Heritage Protection Review.

HER managers may download and photocopy this document for use in their HER.

Introduction to the guidelines#

Historic Environment Records (HERs), as successors to Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs), are the primary source of information on the historic environment in Great Britain. They are fundamental to the conservation and management of the historic environment through the statutory planning system. They are also an increasingly valuable resource for education and the public enjoyment and understanding of the nation's heritage.

Between the mid-1960s and 2004, SMRs were established in local authorities across the UK to provide almost full national cover (with two exceptions in Scotland). This was driven largely by their role in land-use planning, which expanded after formal government guidance was issued in the early 1990s: in England by the Department of the Environment in 1990 in their Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16) (DoE 1990a), in Wales by PPG16 (Welsh Office 1991) replaced in 1996 by Planning Guidance Wales: Planning Policy (Welsh Office 1996a), and in 2011 by Planning Policy Wales (Edition 4, February 2011) and Welsh Office Circular 60/96: Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology; in Scotland in 1994 by National Planning Policy Guideline 5 (NPPG 5) and Planning Advice Note (PAN) 42 Archaeology - the Planning Process and Scheduled Monument Procedures (1994). The number of HERs has increased in recent years, with the emergence of Urban Archaeological Databases (UADs) in England, the creation of new unitary authorities following local government reorganisation in 1995-98 (England) and 1996 (Scotland), and the development of HERs by the National Trust and other landowners.

In 1998, the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO), the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) and English Heritage published *Unlocking the Past for the New Millennium*, a statement of co-operation on SMRs (RCHME, ALGAO and EH 1998). This document emphasised the importance of SMRs for the conservation and management of the historic environment and the development and implementation of sustainable

policies. The intention of the national organisations is to work toward a long-term vision of a series of locally maintained, computerised SMRs, compiled according to common data standards, accessible via networking to professionals and public alike. In Scotland the SMRs and the RCAHMS agreed a Co-Operation Statement in 2003 (published in 2005) under the auspices of the Scottish SMR Forum (SMR Forum (Scotland) 2003). In Wales the *Strategic Framework for Historic Environment Records in Wales* was produced jointly by Cadw, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, The National Museums and Galleries of Wales and The Welsh Archaeological Trusts in 2005.

Also in 1998, ALGAO (with financial support from the RCHME) commissioned an assessment of the condition and state of development of the SMRs maintained by local authorities in England (Baker 1999a) The survey was carried out by David Baker and forms the most comprehensive survey of its kind to date. A comparable survey of Scotland was also carried out in 1999, commissioned by RCAHMS (Baker 1999b). Baker also carried out an internal report for RCAHMW in 1996 (Baker 1996). These reports highlighted the achievements and potential for SMRs to become local environmental management systems and to provide a wide range of services directly to their communities, to research as well as to the planning process. However, the report also highlighted variations between SMRs in resources, work practices and standards and identified a need for support for the professional infrastructure for SMR staff.

To help provide such support, a project was initiated in 1999 to develop an SMR desk manual. This built directly on the work of the ALGAO, RCHME and English Heritage SMR steering committee and was intended to provide a platform for training and continuous professional development for SMR staff. The desk manual was produced in a partnership between English Heritage, ALGAO and the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). Regular consultation with SMR professionals was a key feature of the project and discussion was actively encouraged in both real and virtual forums. Since publication in 2000 there have been considerable developments in record systems, both technical and working practices, and government policy prompting this current revision whose scope has also been widened to better encompass Scotland and Wales. The revised 2nd edition also, like many SMRs already already had, adopted the term Historic Environment Records (HERs) to better reflect the breadth of these information resources. This further revised digital edition therefore, use 'HER' unless referring to specific actions from the past where it is clearly more appropriate to use 'SMR'. However, most of the guidance in this manual will still be applicable to records that still prefer to use the term 'SMR', for example in Scotland where both terms are used.

Our aim in producing a manual is to offer an overview of the standards, services and systems that are already in place in HERs and to share ideas about best working practices in the HERs of today. The guidelines we recommend in this manual are based on principles agreed in *Unlocking the Past for the New Millennium* (RCHME, ALGAO and EH 1998), and recording practices that are compatible with *MIDAS: A Manual and Data Standard - for Monument Inventories* (Lee 1998). They are also intended to help HERs in attaining the standards set out in *Historic Environment Records: Benchmarks for Good Practice* (Chitty 2002). In this way we hope to empower HER managers to realise the full potential of their records as information management systems for the historic environment. HERs will develop in the coming years and this manual will be maintained by an HER/SMR documentation group to reflect the introduction of new working practices and new ideas.