

## C.4 Monuments

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## C.4 Monuments#

The term 'monuments' covers a diverse range of structures that vary widely in their nature, date, function and form. Even the legal definition included in the [Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979](#) is all encompassing and the [National Heritage Act 2002](#) amends the definition of 'ancient monuments' in the [National Heritage Act \(1983\)](#) and the [Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act \(1979\)](#) to include sites in, on or under the seabed:

- any building, structure or work, whether above or below the surface of the land or sea, and any cave or excavation
- any site comprising the remains of any such building, structure or work or of any cave or excavation
- any site comprising, or comprising the remains of, any vehicle, vessel, wreck, aircraft or other movable structure or part thereof which neither constitutes nor forms part of any work which is a monument defined above; and any machinery attached to a monument shall be regarded as part of the monument if it could not be detached without being dismantled.

Almost any structure or deposit of man-made origin can be classified as a monument, submerged, buried or standing proud. These take many forms, for example earthworks, standing structures, buildings, cropmarks, sub-surface deposits, industrial complexes, component features of buildings, elements of archaeological sites, artefacts, artefact scatters, find spots and destroyed sites known from documentary sources. As most places have a long history of use, monuments of different date may lie on top of or alongside one another and differential preservation across the site may mean that a monument survives in different forms. The process of monument recognition and how this process is recorded, is critical and a number of issues need to be considered when creating monument records.

### C.4.1 The level of detail at which records will be created#

HER officers need to decide to what extent the data will be 'lumped' together or 'split'. Will every single post-hole, pit and linear feature be recorded and cross-referenced to a main site record? Or will all features of all periods on a site or a plot of land be recorded on a single record? Some wreck and aircraft sites will be in a number of pieces and may have debris associated with them.

#### Lumping#

This approach derives from the need to identify points or areas of land on a map or chart where there are potential archaeological or historical issues to take into account in the planning process. A record

is created in the HER for each identified land parcel and remains of all periods are indexed on this record.

Issues to be considered:

- Over time new discoveries are likely to be made in areas that are adjacent to a land or sea parcel that has an existing record in the HER. Should a new record be created or the boundaries of the existing land parcel extended to include the new discoveries?
- Archaeological investigations of a site may find no traces of human activity using a given technique. How will such negative evidence be recorded?
- As remains of all periods are included on a single record, sites with deeply stratified remains and multiple phases of human activity are likely to be poorly represented in the HER. For this reason, this approach does not meet the recommended standard for UADs.

## **Splitting#**

This approach is based on the need to present information about the phases of activity on a site. One or more records will be created for each parcel of land or sea according to the information available about each distinct structure or phase of activity.

## **Issues to be considered#**

The two main issues are:

- very limited information may be available for some phases of activity on site. Presentation of the information to users of the HER may be improved by creating records for broad phases of activity rather than multiple records each containing minimal information.
- for some excavated sites or historical buildings very detailed information may be available. This may tend to lead to the creation of too many phase or component records and complicate the overall interpretation and presentation of information about the site.

In fact, lumping and splitting are not mutually exclusive. Most developed HERs divide up information about sites to improve its presentation and retrieval in some way. The approach recommended in this manual is to split the available information to create separate records for the major phases of activity on a site. A degree of 'lumping' of information will be involved and there is no rule of thumb for the extent to which separate records should be created. Decisions will be based on the amount of reliable information that is available about the site, local management issues and the interpretation to be presented to HER users. For example:

- for an historic village core, where all that is known is a reference in Domesday and the documented age of the church, anything more than a basic splitting of the data into two records is unnecessary. If significant new information were recorded during excavation new records would be created.
- with complicated archaeological landscapes a number of events may have produced large quantities of reliable data. Splitting this into separate records enables the component features of the landscape to be interpreted and their individual management needs taken into consideration.
- on an excavated site, it may be desirable to create separate records for both the elements (excavated features such as pits, post-holes, burnt patches, floor surfaces) and also an interpretation of the structure that these collectively represent (for example a hut).

These examples illustrate something of the complexity of the information available to describe the historic environment. On a day-to-day basis, HER officers assess the available sources and make complex decisions about how to divide this information up into records. This is an important process and HER officers are recommended to discuss the issues with their peers and develop consistent approaches where possible.

When considering the extent to which data should be split and record hierarchies created, it is important to remember that the HER database presents a summary and provides an index to the existence, quantity and quality of data and archives held elsewhere in the HER or in other organisations such as museums. HER officers are recommended to aim to provide a consistent standard of core index-data before creating an excessive number of detailed records.

### **C.4.2 Levels of interpretation: elements, monuments and landscapes#**

HER officers need to consider the degree to which information has been interpreted in the records that are being created. Maritime records and landscapes should be recorded to the same level of detail as terrestrial records.

#### **Element records#**

These may be created for features observed during an event which have been subject to minimal interpretation. For example, features observed during an excavation are recorded as they have been described in the excavation report by the excavator, such as a rubbish pit, a patch of dark earth, a burnt layer. This is equally true of the component features of a building observed during a survey, for example window, architrave, fireplace. These are features that survive in physical form and are part of a larger site, but individually do not represent an interpretation of the function of that site. It is particularly useful to create element records where investigations have revealed traces of human activity that cannot be interpreted with any certainty. As element records are used to record the investigator's observations they are generally regarded as a fixed part of the HER database. Thus if the features or the function of the site are subsequently re-interpreted the element records should remain unchanged, while the changing interpretation is reflected in the associated monument records.

#### **Monument records#**

These represent an interpretation of the function of a particular site based on the available evidence, including any elements, components or finds known from the site. For example, features surveyed in the field as earthworks or structures after excavation and the observation of the stratigraphy, finds and other elements may be interpreted as an Iron Age farmstead. New evidence from subsequent excavations may lead to a re-interpretation of the site at a later date.

#### **Landscape records#**

These represent a high-level interpretation that a series of different monuments constitutes a complex. For example, a prehistoric landscape is a high-level interpretation based on the recognition of settlements, field systems and trackways.

Elements, monuments and landscapes may be implemented as separate records or different types of monument record within HER databases. Whichever approach is taken, relational databases allow links to be created quickly and easily between records and hierarchical record structures to be created. Over time, as understanding develops, existing relationships between records may be discarded and new ones created. The advantage of linking separate records in a hierarchy is that it improves the way that information is presented and allows records to be retrieved either individually or collectively. Where appropriate, this functionality allows for parallel records to be created reflecting differing opinions of a site.

### **C.4.3 Relationships between records#**

In recent years, the discussions about the event-monument-source model have been paralleled by debate about how HERs should organise monument records within their databases. This debate

still continues and it is therefore difficult to give guidelines at this stage. However, some HERs have adopted 'hierarchical' systems in which related monuments and/or buildings are grouped together and assigned to levels.

For sites such as medieval towns or railways it may be possible to define levels. For example, Figure 14 has three levels: complex, monument and component features within the town have been assigned to the different levels. This approach promotes clarity and consistency as to the unit of record and is thought to improve use of the record by supporting navigation through levels of information. These hierarchies enable HER officers to model relationships between monument records, both in space and also in time and to improve the presentation of information.

### **Example Hierarchy #**

*Figure 12: Relationships between monument records.*

In practice, it is difficult to apply strictly defined levels in a hierarchy across the whole range of the historic environment. For example, in the earlier prehistoric periods monuments are less easy to define and the relationships between them less well understood. In many cases features may be recognised at lower levels in the hierarchy but there is insufficient information available to interpret what these represent at the complex or monument level. HER managers who are exploring record hierarchies are advised to be realistic in their goals. It is better to aim for consistency that is achievable.

It may also be particularly useful to record relationships between monuments which are related in their interpretation and significance, although not geographically contiguous, for example components of a World War Two defence line.

### **C.4.4 Artefacts and ecofacts#**

Recent years have seen growing agreement on the recording of monuments, sources, and events, but this not the case with the recording of archaeological finds and environmental information.

Some HERs have records of the locations at which thousands of archaeological objects were found and others, especially those in museums, record additional information describing the character of individual objects. Because of the way many HERs have developed primarily as development control tools the funding has not been available to record artefacts or environmental information in a way which allows consistent searching across the record. Most HERs contain records of find spots and find scatters in their areas and an interesting object found by itself in a field may be recorded separately. However, the position is less clear-cut when recording artefacts and ecofacts from archaeological excavations as a similar object found during an excavation may not even be indexed within the site record. Excavations can produce thousands of items and HER officers face the dilemma of deciding how this material should be entered into the HER database.

The push from government and the archaeological community to develop HERs as research and educational tools has emphasised the need for HERs to reconsider the recording of archaeological objects and environmental data in their records. The outputs of the Portable Antiquities Scheme has also prompted many HERs to reconsider how they record archaeological objects.

In the vast majority of cases it will be impractical for HERs to attempt to record every single artefact or ecofact but a consistent approach can be achieved by remembering that the HER is only an index to information. Finds and environmental indices can be created which allow rapid, consistent recording of groups of artefacts and ecofacts by broad type with additional information such as the existence of specialist reports. At present working parties sponsored by [Historic England](#) are developing systems and thesaurii for recording finds and environmental material within HERs. In

addition EH and ALGAO are working with the Portable Antiquities Scheme to ensure the transfer of information reported by metal detectorists into HERs.

In the meantime the following are offered as aids to achieving consistency:

- The HER's collecting policy should clearly state the approach an HER has adopted for recording environmental data, objects, find spots and find scatters.
- The marine cultural heritage should be included in the HER's collecting policy.
- The HER's recording guidelines should set out the level of detail at which artefacts and ecofacts will be recorded.
- Artefacts and ecofacts should be recorded to a consistent level of detail across the HER database; HER managers should decide upon detail that can be consistently maintained rather than recording some objects in great detail and others not at all.
- Recording the major categories of material and key objects found during archaeological excavations (for example Roman pottery, medieval metalwork) might be considered to offer a sustainable level of detail.
- The HER might signpost users to museums or other bodies that curate any objects or site archives by including catalogue numbers and museum references in databases.