C.5 Monument records#

This section of the manual will look at the way in which information is recorded in monument records in more detail.

C.5.1 HER numbers and other identifiers#

Monument records may have originated as records in a card-index system, which were recast as computer records on flat file databases and subsequently migrated to one of the new generation of relational databases. HER numbers generally provide a link between a computer record and paper files, photographs and record maps. However, numbering systems designed for card indexes and record maps may be less suitable for relational databases. For example, the system designed by the OS was based on a 1:10,000 sheet map reference followed by a running number. Numbers were manually allocated and duplicate numbers were sometimes created by mistake. As computer systems require each record to have a unique reference number, migration often means that monument records retain an HER number from an earlier system and also have a unique ID number automatically generated by the system.

HERs will usually have a reference number (MIDAS unit of information Primary Reference Number (PRN)) for each of the records held in their card index or database. In a database this number can be automatically assigned upon the creation of a record, ensuring that there is no duplication and that the number is unique. To minimise the possibility for confusion, once a number has been assigned it should remain unique to that record and should not be reused even if the original record has been deleted.

As well as an HER using its own reference number for each record it holds, it is often necessary to make cross-references to other inventories or archives which hold records or finds relating to those in the HER. The process of cross-referencing between HERs and other inventories (like the NRHE) is an important aid to retrieval of information (MIDAS unit of information External Cross-Reference Other Inventory Number). Where a monument is afforded statutory protection (for example Scheduled Monuments or Listed Building), cross-references should be made to the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) which is maintained by Historic England on behalf of the DCMS.

C.5.2 Core data for monument records#

Core data is the minimum level of information that should always be recorded to make sure that retrieval is efficient and effective. HER managers are recommended to consider carefully what information is core to their record and should aim to ensure that this information is always recorded in a consistent way throughout the HER database.

HER managers should distinguish between information that is mandatory (such as the HER number) and that which is highly desirable (for example an accurate grid reference may not be obtainable from historical sources or verbal reports). A further distinction may be made for information that is normally considered optional, but is mandatory for certain types of site: for example a street address would be mandatory for an historic buildings record but not for an archaeological site.

The minimum amount of information recommended for monument records is:

- **HER number**: a number which uniquely identifies the monument record in the HER
- **Other identifiers**: reference numbers for the monument in external records, for example Scheduled Monument (SM) number
- **Monument name**: a descriptive name by which the monument can be identified
- **Monument type**: an index to the type or character of the monument represented on the site
- **Evidence**: physical or documentary evidence for the existence of the monument
- **Period/date**: the maximum and minimum dates/periods of the monument being described
- **Grid reference**: an OS grid co-ordinate locating the monument
- **Administrative unit**: the administrative area in which the monument falls, for example county/ district/parish
- **Description**: a text description about the monument
- **Monument status**: a reference to any protection status that the monument has, for example II* Listed
- **Event number**: monuments should be linked to relevant event records
- **Source number**: all monuments should have at least one link to a source record.

C.5.3 A typical monument record#

This case study is included to show how a monument may be recorded in a MIDAS- compliant database (in this case exeGesIS SDM Ltd's HBSMR software). Waltham Abbey is typical of many historic towns. It has a medieval core with a market place, a moot hall and mills, an abbey church with associated monastic precinct, there are also various industrial and other components of the post-medieval period, and finds and features of the prehistoric and Roman periods. Individual structures within the abbey church and monastic precinct are recorded separately in the HER, for example the church, cloister, chapter house. The sample record shows how one of these elements, the chapter house, has been recorded (Figure 15).

Figure 13: The monument record for the chapter house at Waltham Abbey displayed in exeGesIS SDM Ltd HBSMR software. (© Essex County Council and exeGesiS SDM Ltd. 2012).

- **Computer generated number**: MEX607, uniquely identifies the record for the chapter house.
- **HER preferred reference number (normally the PRN): identifies the record in the HER's system and provides a link to other digital and paper files and record maps.**
- **Name**: provides a useful way of identifying the site, and the record on computer listings.
- **Summary**: offers a brief explanation of the features present on the site and their current interpretation. This also allows for quick checking of the record, and is especially useful in index printouts.
- **Description**: a free text memo field allows for a full description of the current and past interpretations of the chapter house and its development. A link between this text and additional reference material is provided by including source numbers in brackets within the text.
- **Sources**: links to a separate catalogue of sources and a specific reference allow for details of the relevant sections of journals and other reference sources to be identified. This is especially useful as it allows users to find out more about the monument and to revisit and re-interpret source materials in the light of current understanding. (In this example software, 'sources' can be entered through the 'description' free text memo field.)

- **Location: the administrative area (county, district and parish) in which the chapter house lies are recorded.**
- **Site-status or coding system information.. allows any statutory designations or cross-references to external organisations' record-numbering systems to be recorded. In this case, the chapter house is scheduled and a surviving wall is also listed.**
- **NGR**: the National Grid Reference and height of the site are recorded in both the text database and GIS.
- **Monument types**: a repeating field allows the character of the monument and the features represented to be fully indexed. In this case, the building itself, an interesting extant wall and an inhumation burial known from the chapter house excavations are all indexed (Figure 16). This is useful for retrieval and is linked to the Thesaurus of Monument Types.
- **Period**: a direct link between the monument type and its period of use is allowed for the three features described for the chapter house all being indexed as being medieval in date.
- **Evidence**: this allows for the physical or documentary evidence by which the monument is known. This information allows monuments that survive in a visible form to be distinguished from those which survive only in documentary records.
- **Building materials**: this allows for materials that have been used to construct the walls and roofs of buildings to be indexed and is a useful retrieval tool for architectural conservation.
- **Land use/Geology**: the software allows for land use, soils and geology on or around the site of the monument to be recorded.
- **Activity information**: allows links to be made between the monument record and any event records and other on-site activities relating to the investigation, interpretation or management of the monument. In this case, a salvage excavation of the chapter house has been recorded (Figure 17).
- **Contacts**: a wide range of individuals and organisations may have some form of association with the monument. These include the current owners or occupiers of the site and also interesting historical figures such as architects or famous individuals who are associated with it.
- **Finds**: this allows for objects found on the site to be indexed, using the Archaeological Objects Thesaurus, with their material, date and (where known) catalogue references and the name of the museum currently holding the object. (In this example software, 'finds' can be entered on the separate 'Find' sub-page.)
- **Condition**: information that is useful in managing the site includes records, where available, of its current condition or assessments made under scoring schemes such as the Monument Protection Programme. (In this example software, 'condition' is entered on the 'Name and score' sub-page.)
- **Name of creator and/or updater**: the system automatically records the name and date of the person who created the record as well as details of the person who most recently updated it. This information is invaluable in programmes of work to quality-assure records, to provide performance statistics and to monitor the work of new staff.

Fig 14: The monument record for the chapter house at Waltham Abbey. (© Essex County Council and exeGesiS SDM Ltd. 2012).

C.5.4 Indexing monument records#

When reading a site report each person will have his or her own idea of what the monuments described within the text are. Most people, if shown a picture of a church, would probably call it a church. What happens if they are shown a picture of a barrow? Is it a tumulus, round barrow, long barrow, mound, burial mound or natural feature?

It is possible that a complex site, investigated on several occasions, has been described using any of the above terms. Consider for example the following fictional site:

A Bronze Age Round Barrow, excavated by University of Westshire in 1977, Scheduled. First mentioned by the Reverend Herbert James in his book Perambulations about the Parish of Long Stanton. Two amateur excavations were carried out around the turn of the century by local antiquarians. ,Most recently excavated by students from the University of Westshire in 1977.

The interpretations given by the investigators are as follows:

- 1875 Documentary source - Tumulus
- 1890 Amateur excavation - Burial Mound
- 1910 Amateur excavation - Barrow
- 1977 Trial excavation by University of Westshire - Round Barrow
- 1978 Scheduled - Round Barrow.

It is essential that when it comes to entering the record on to a database, the information is entered consistently and that the way the information will be retrieved is carefully considered.

Previous or uncertain interpretations#

The example above is an illustration of how terminology changes over the course of time. For many sites the current understanding can be very different from that of earlier times, for example a mound may have been interpreted as a barrow but later evidence may suggest that it is in fact a windmill mound. Often interpretations have a measure of uncertainty, for example a possible Roman road may be suggested from the line of hedge boundaries marked on maps or visible from aerial photographs but the interpretation will be uncertain.

HER officers need to consider how they will index monument records to reflect changing or uncertain site interpretations. The latest interpretation must always be included ROUND BARROW in the example above. Where there are alternative interpretations for the site these should be included in the indexing with some indication of their uncertainty, for example ROUND BARROW (?) or MOUND (?). Past interpretations of the site may also be indexed, although an indication of the limited confidence that can be placed on this interpretation must be included, for example ROAD (?) or LINEAR FEATURE.

The monument record's descriptive text should include a discussion of the site's interpretation, past and present, which reflects any changes in thinking and uncertainties of understanding.

Changes in form and function#

The function of a monument can change significantly over time. A church was given above as an,example of a type of monument that is easy to recognise. However, through time many churches have been added to, altered, used.by different denominations or even converted for other uses, for example into houses. Many other buildings have undergone similar changes in use. When recording buildings it may be necessary to index both the form of the building and its later functions. Consider this example:

The church of St Peter and St Paul is a medieval church with later additions and alterations. The earliest part of the church is the nave and the aisle, which dates to c.1120. The west bays of the nave and the west front of the church date to c. 1300. The Lady Chapel and undercroft were added to the church in the first quarter of the 14th Century and the west tower in 1662. The main body of the church was restored 1859-60 by Fothergill Watson. At this time the church was reroofed and the east window, with stained glass by A W N Pugin, was installed. The Lady Chapel was restored 1876.

Within the church is a 14th-century wall painting of the Last Judgement. There are also memorial brasses of 1560 and 1586, an alabaster table tomb by the Nottingham School dating to 1459 and a wall monument to the Williams family dating to 1815. The church contains the remains of the Norman Choir dating to the first half of the 12th century.

The church would normally be recorded on a single monument record. Panel 9 shows how the following monument type and phases of use might be indexed:

Panel 9: Example of type and phase monument recording#

MONUMENT TYPE	FROM	TO	DESCRIPTIVE DATE	EVIDENCE
Church	1100	1140	*c*1120	Documentary
Church	1280	1320	*c*1300	Documentary
Church	1859	1860	Restored 1859-60	Documentary
Lady Chapel	1300	1324	early 14th century	Building
Lady Chapel	1876	1876	Restored 1876	Documentary
Tower	1662	1662		Building

With buildings, HER managers are recommended to index the separate phases of building, re-building and restoration within a single monument record. In the example given above, evidence for the phases in which the church and chapel were built is available from both documentary sources and in the fabric of the building itself. This approach improves information retrieval, as it is possible to distinguish, for example, medieval churches that were restored in the Victorian period from those which survive in their original form. Detailed phase indexing within the same monument record should not affect the ability to count the total numbers of a given monument type in an area. This is because the total number of records will be counted not the number of uses of an index term.

Panel 10 shows how in addition to the monument type and date indexing the following attributes might also be indexed:

Panel 10: Example of additional attributes for monument recording#

OBJECT TYPE	FROM	TO	OBJECT MATERIAL
Commemorative Brass	1560	1560	Brass
Commemorative Brass	1586	1586	Brass
Table Tomb	1459	1459	Stone
Plaque	1815	1815	

HISTORICAL PERSON	ROLE	FROM	TO
Fothergill Watson	Architect	1859	1860
A W N Pugin	Architect	1859	1860