

Acknowledgements

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The Introduction

The aim of a Heritage Audit is to examine and record the heritage features of a local area as they appear on the landscape. In order to do this it is recommended that a systematic field survey is undertaken and the findings are documented in the form of maps and descriptive accounts.

This will result in a comprehensive database of information on local heritage which can be utilised for research, educational and planning purposes.

The information gathered should then be supplemented with documentary and/or oral data about the history of the feature. This involves secondary research of documents and primary research, including talking to local inhabitants, historians and specialists.

The benefits to a Local Community Heritage Group who undertake such an audit include:

- A comprehensive record of the heritage features of the local landscape;
- A focus for future projects and development of a strategic plan;
- Creation of a knowledge and awareness of the local environment among the people who carry out the survey;
- A heightening of the observational and interpretational skills of the members of the group.

This handbook is divided into four sections –

1. Planning a Strategy
2. Carrying out the Audit
3. Features to Note
4. Compiling and Documenting the Information

Each section carries practical advice on the technique of heritage audit. Some examples are provided from a practical pilot project which was undertaken by the author with the Heritage Steering Group of Eyrecourt and District Development Co. Ltd. in 2005 under the auspices of the Galway County Heritage Forum and Galway County Council.

Section One

Planning a Strategy

Your first step should be to plan your approach. Remember you don't have to record every aspect of your local heritage all in one go. It is best to plan your approach in achievable phases.

(a) Objectives

Discuss and decide within the group your objectives. Ask yourselves the following questions and record the answers in writing:

- why do we want to do this audit?
- how big an area do we want to cover?
- what do we wish to achieve at the end?

It is important that the answers and the objectives are recorded in writing during this planning phase as this creates the basis for a strategy document to which the group can refer as the survey progresses. The study of local heritage is interesting, varied and absorbing, facilitating our ability to go off on a tangent. It is this temptation to wander that often leads to local community groups failing to complete an audit. Lured away from their original focus, the task becomes overwhelming and motivation diminishes. The purpose of developing a strategy document is to constantly remind you of your original focus. You can wander later!

The answers you supply to the questions above will direct your approach to the audit. For example if the group should decide that they want to have a record of all the graveyards in their area at the end of the audit, this aspect of heritage should be the focus of their audit in the first instance. While undertaking this first 'Graveyard' phase they are likely to encounter many other aspects of their local heritage resources during their field work and such discoveries will fuel the interest for future phases.

(b) The Area to be Audited

In general community groups readily identify with their local parish. However there are different types of parishes e.g. the Civil Parish, the Church of Ireland Parish and the Roman Catholic Parish and they vary in size and origin.

Civil parishes are the oldest parochial division, believed to originate from the medieval parish network. They were used as civil territorial divisions in the land surveys of the 17th century and in the censuses, maps and valuation programmes of the 19th century. The Church of Ireland parochial system is also based on the medieval parish network. It was during the 19th century that most of the present day Catholic parish network was drawn up based on towns and villages.

If the group decide that the parish will be their unit for audit, they should first decide which parish they are referring to and record this as the unit within their strategy document.

However it is not always desirable to demarcate your local area in terms of the parish. You could simply decide to take a two mile radius around the central village for example.

Whatever area you decide to survey it is likely to consist of several townlands. The townland is the smallest administrative unit in Ireland and all other territorial divisions are collections of townlands. The origin of the townland may relate to the bally betagh of Gaelic medieval Ireland or to other ancient land divisions. It became standardised as a basic territorial division in the 17th century. The 6 inch townland maps of the Ordnance Survey provide the best record of townland names, shapes and sizes as they existed in the early 19th century. The townland is an excellent basic unit on which to carry out your survey.

In the case of the Eyrecourt Pilot Project, three Civil Parishes cover the area of interest. The group decided to concentrate their initial efforts on the smallest Civil Parish i.e. Meelick.





Planning a Strategy

(c) Creating Timeframes

Remember don't overstretch yourselves. Decide on an area that can be surveyed within your timeframe. A large area can be broken down into smaller areas for different phases of the survey – each of which is assigned a specific timeframe.

Table 1: Survey Timeframe for the Parish of Meelick. Phase 1. April to June

Townlands	Survey Timeframe
Reaskmore	April
Tully	April
Carrownafinnoge	May
Lisnafadda	May
Derry	June
Moyower	June

Decide on short-term and long-term goals. In the example provided the short-term goal for the Parish of Meelick is to survey 6 townlands between April and June. The long-term goal is to survey 12 townlands in 6 months and 24 within the first year.

Be realistic when planning your timeframes. Be aware of the size of the various townlands, some may consist of 40 hectares and others of 400 hectares and they will also vary in terms of terrain and how easy it is to get around. Because of these factors some townlands will take longer than others to survey. Also consider the human factor - do the group take a summer break? Is it advisable to schedule work for the month of August for example?

It is very important to set goals that are achievable, otherwise everyone loses the plot and gets demoralised and it's very hard to revitalise a project that has already been attempted and never quite made its targets.

(d) Utilising the Skills within the Group

Many of us have skills that we allow to go unrecognised even by ourselves. Skills such as being able to:

- read a map
- sketch a building
- take a photograph
- research a local story
- talk to older people and record their stories
- write up field notes
- identify local plants
- use a computer

can be utilised during the heritage audit.

Examine the skills and interests within your group. Have any of your members experience or interest in the type of activities outlined above? If so, these members can be assigned specific tasks for the purpose of the audit e.g. a member with artistic skills may become the illustrator of the local heritage features you encounter. The member who is a good map reader may teach others this skill for the purpose of field survey.

(e) Recording your Plans and Progress

Record all the above planning decisions in your strategy document – a hard backed notebook will suffice. This document will guide you through your planned phases of operation. Plan achievable small tasks at first (e.g. plan to survey a small number of townlands within a certain timeframe) and build on these tasks to achieve your longer-term goals e.g. the survey of the parish.

As the group move through the process, items will continuously be added to the strategy document e.g. during the planning of field survey townlands will be assigned to certain individuals and dates for group meetings will need to be included in the timeframe for various reasons. The strategy document is therefore a working and growing document throughout the process and should be in continuous use.

Remember:

- Plan your approach
- Record your decisions.
- Decide on your area of survey
- Set out achievable phases one at a time.
- Utilise the skills and interests of the group
- Keep focussed.

Section Two

Carrying Out the Audit

(a) Preparing for Field Survey

Obtain a copy of the most recent 6 inch Ordnance Survey (OS) map of the relevant area you have chosen for audit. This will become your base map to record all information during your field survey. Make copies of the map for rough work and field work and keep the originals safe. It is recommended to use this map for fieldwork as it is an appropriate size for local study. The OS Discovery Series maps (1:50000) will provide a more recent picture of the landscape and can be used for comparison purposes to determine whether some of the features indicated on the 6 inch maps are still present.

Prior to field work, examine the maps and become familiar with the symbols and what they represent. Mark out the features of interest shown on the map. Mark out the townland boundaries.

Consult local history books and any relevant documentary sources you and your group may possess to obtain information on features of interest within the area. For example, the Archaeological Inventory of the County is always an invaluable source of information on the archaeological features in your area as is the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP). All archaeological sites recorded on the 6 inch OS maps are highlighted and described through the RMP. The Record of Protected Structures (RPS) drawn up by the Local Authority and usually available on their website provides information on important architectural features in the county. Check out the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) website (www.heritagedata.ie) for information on designated protected natural heritage sites within your area.

Visit the local library (and county library) and become familiar with your local history section.



(b) Practice Field Survey Run

For your first attempt at Field Survey the group should undergo a series of practice sessions, visiting two or three townlands, allowing all members to become familiar with map reading and the process of recognising and recording features of interest. The following procedure should be followed:

- Select a townland, which has easy access and a number of features of likely interest.
- Obtain permission to enter the land from the landowners and ask about any hidden dangers e.g. bulls, electric fences etc.
- Obey the Farmland Code of Conduct at all times.
- Don't forget to dress appropriately – you could meet some mucky spots, streams, bad weather etc.
- Each member of the group should be equipped with a field notebook, a copy of the 6 inch townland map, pencil and pens.
- Complete a preliminary walkover first to familiarise yourself with the terrain, boundaries and divisions of the townland and how to read the map.
- Then take a closer look at items of interest, you have identified through your desk map work.
- Walk the townland recording all features of interest, as outlined in Section Three.
- Record the features of these items through photography, sketching, measurement and note taking.
- If you already possess information about these items include it in your notes. Your field notebook should contain an accurate, carefully kept summary of your observations and impressions – don't rely on your memory!
- Mark the position of all features of interest on the copy of the townland map. Use a sharp pencil – if your map gets wet ink will run. Remember the 6 inch OS map you carry does not record the landscape of today. It can date back to between the 1890s and the 1940s depending on the edition you are using. You should note the changes between the map and what is on the ground today and record those changes. Remember the map is a very incomplete picture of what is on the ground – it is just an outline and your task is to fill in the missing detail.