

Developing Historic Environment Records for the 21st Century

HER21 18 months on (October 2012)

6003 The Historic Buildings of Worcestershire, Worcestershire County Council

The Historic Buildings of Worcestershire (HBW) Project aims to provide a comprehensive and consistent record of all surviving historic buildings in Worcestershire. For the purposes of this project, a building is defined as historic if it appears on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1882-89.

There are roughly 43,000 buildings in the county that date to the 19th century or earlier. 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. Only 6,500 of these buildings are listed, the rest being unrecorded and unprotected.

The project aims to create a simple photographic and written record of these buildings. This data is then integrated into the Worcestershire and Worcester City Historic Environment Records, to provide a long term repository for the data and allow it to be interrogated in conjunction with many other datasets.

The original pilot project funded by English Heritage in 2010 and further work by a number of staff and volunteers has allowed for 100% completion of Stage 1 of the project (mapping potential historic buildings) and 30% of the County to be completed to Stage 4 (full HER integration). The HER has not had the capacity to pursue the project over the last 12 months, either through staff time collecting the data or through the recruitment of volunteers. Now that we have moved into our new premises and settled, we have much greater capacity to progress with this project.

Despite only completing 30% of the County, the project is proving very useful, both in individual planning/LB applications and at a strategic level. Wyre Forest District Council started a list of locally significant historic buildings several years ago. Due to capacity issues, the list originally concentrated on the three historic towns of Stourport-on-Severn, Bewdley and Kidderminster, with the intention of expanding the methodology across the district when capacity allowed. The Conservation Officer is now expanding the list. Where HBW has been completed, the Conservation Officer can rapidly scan through an image of every historic building in the parish from his desk and decide within a few moments which buildings are worth visiting and considering for inclusion. A single image and brief description is not enough evidence for inclusion on a local list, but it gives the Conservation Officer an excellent starting point and ensures that he doesn't miss potentially significant buildings. The other districts in the County all have a desire to create a local list, or have a list already which is incomplete, and this project should save district Conservation Officers time and allow them to assess parishes more rapidly.

At a strategic level, the HER now has a record of around 12,000 historic buildings, around 28% of the potential 43,000 surviving historic buildings in the County. This is enough data to really start to understand local building materials and construction methods. We are also starting to see a clear picture of the survival and condition of

different building types across the County. This will allow us to assess risk and significance more easily and give better advice to district councils. Other strategic projects, such as the Traditional Farm Buildings Characterisation, can benefit from the information contained in the HER to help build up a picture of survival and condition across the County.