**Historic Environment Records: unlocking the potential**

**What are HERs?**

* Historic Environment Records (HERs) represent the most complete record of known archaeological and historic sites in their respective counties.
* Planning guidance states that local planning authorities should at least have access to, if not maintain, an HER that covers their administrative area.

HERs contain information on everything from the Palaeolithic era right through to the 20th century; including:

* **Buried archaeological remains.** These are often discovered as a result of professional archaeological investigations that are undertaken as part of the planning process, but also includes community and research excavations. (Inhumations found during an archaeological evaluation that was carried out in St Wystan’s Churchyard in Repton in 2009. The evaluation was undertaken in order to provide an indication of what may be encountered during the excavation of a proposed pipe trench for new welfare facilities).
* **Upstanding earthworks and cropmark sites**, which are often identified from aerial photography. The distinctive reverse S-shaped ridge and furrow earthworks shown here were created by the system of ploughing used in medieval open field systems. Earthworks show up particularly well on aerial photographs when the sun is low in the sky, which creates the longer shadows necessary to pick out their relatively low profiles. Cropmarks are visible from the air due to the differential growth of crops depending on soil depth and fertility, which can be affected by the presence of below-ground archaeological remains (eg. Less crop growth above a wall; greater crop growth above ditches containing more fertile soil).
* **Designated heritage assets**, such as Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings. The National Heritage List for England, which is maintained by Historic England, is the definitive list for designated heritage assets and can be accessed via this web link: <http://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>. The HER can also hold additional information on these assets other than the list description. (Arbor Low Neolithic henge).
* **Non-designated heritage assets**, such as unlisted historic buildings, industrial heritage remains, guide posts, bridges and other assets that add to the historic character of an area. These assets are considered to be locally or regionally important rather than nationally important (Limekilns at Bullbridge, 1960s, some remains still extant).
* **Conservation Areas and Locally Listed Buildings**. These datasets are created and managed by the relevant District Councils, but we hold a copy of the data at the HER. (Bridge Mills in Long Eaton, opened in 1902 as a tenement lace factory, on the Erewash Local List).
* **Designed historic landscapes**, which include registered and non-registered parks and gardens. (2nd edition OS map of c.1900 of Alderwasley Park – former deer park with medieval origins, enclosed within its present boundaries in the early 18th century. Recent Parkland Management Plan undertaken as part of a Higher Level Stewardship application).
* **Findspots**; usually flint objects recovered by walkers or metal objects discovered by metal detectorists. (Bronze Age flint barbed and tanged arrowhead that was picked up by a walker near Kinder Downfall).
* **Artefact/flint scatters,** which can indicate the survival of buried archaeological remains, and are recorded as a result of systematic field walking.

**Heritage Gateway**

* Information on these Historic Environment sites is held in a digital relational database, with accompanying spatial information allowing the records to be viewed on digital maps.
* Much of this digital information can be accessed via the Heritage Gateway website, which is a resource that is maintained by Historic England and pulls together a variety of national, regional and local datasets in to one place.

**Archaeological events**

* In addition, HERs contain detailed information on archaeological events that have occurred in the county, such as excavations, watching briefs, historic building recording, and desk-based assessments.
* Most of these events will have occurred as a result of the planning process; and the resultant reports make up an extensive ‘grey literature’ library that is held by the HER.
* Local societies and research groups also make an important contribution to this library.

**Historic Landscape Characterisation**

* HERs often contain information on Historic Landscape Characterisation projects, which aim to characterise and record landscapes on a broad, usually county-based, scale. Types of landscape are characterised based on the way in which they were formed, their current and earlier land uses, and their physical appearance.
* HLC projects recognise that the landscape itself can be of historic importance (in addition to historic features within it). Interpreting and recording the historic character of a landscape is intended to allow the landscape itself to be managed and protected within the [planning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town_and_country_planning_in_the_United_Kingdom) process.
* Can also be used on a more strategic level.

**Why do HERs exist?**

* HERs are public resources which have a wide range of uses: e.g. land use planning, conservation, research, education and general interest. They are free to use to members of the public.
* They are an important tool within the planning process. HERs are used by Development Control Archaeologists, who monitor planning applications and developments within their respective local authorities. Entries in to the HER database will flag up any potential areas of archaeological/historic interest to the DC Archaeologist.
* As more and more built heritage features get added to the HER, Conservation Officers are also starting to use HERs in a similar way.
* Archaeological contractors and heritage consultants often use HERs as a first port of call for desk-based research, to inform investigations that are required as planning conditions.
* **In doing all this, HERs aim to help protect and inform future management, and enjoyment, of the historic environment.**

**Derbyshire HER:**

* Derbyshire HER covers the whole of Derbyshire and the City of Derby, including the areas of Derbyshire that fall within the Peak District National Park.
* We have fairly good coverage of registered and non-registered parks and gardens within the HER, but with varying amounts of information contained within the records. It would be really great to enhance these records with additional content and research.

**Contacting your local HER:**

* Sometimes National Parks have their own HERs, as do large cities – the best place to find out which HER covers a particular area is by checking on the Heritage Gateway website.
* Here you can find contact details and opening times of all the HERs in England.