

Northern Ireland

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Developing a strategy for Archaeology

Mp  A

Northern Ireland's rich cultural diversity

Northern Ireland has a distinct historic environment; steeped in nine millennia of human occupation, its history is very different from that of England, Wales and Scotland. This is evident in its rich archaeological heritage, its buildings, its landscapes and above all its people. Whilst its landscape is as varied and dramatic as any in Ireland, its archaeological and historical character remains largely unknown and unexplored by the wider public. A new Archaeology and Historic Environment Strategy has therefore been prepared for Northern Ireland to help deepen our understanding of its past and act as a catalyst for informing conservation, further interpretation and more opportunities for learning and voluntary involvement.

National Trust ownership reflects the diversity of Northern Ireland's historic environment, from the great houses and pleasure grounds of the very rich, right down to the ruined hovels and allotment plots of the very poor. Every National Trust property is an historic landscape, most notably the great demesnes of Castle Ward, Castle Coole and Mount Stewart, but also the open countryside properties on the North Derry, Antrim and South Down coasts. Even places that are today valued for their natural splendour and wildlife, such as the Giant's Causeway, have been touched by some kind of human activity in the past, which now forms part of their historic environment.

Coastal properties on the north coast

The north coast properties are particularly rich,

Dunseverick Castle, Co Antrim.

M. HYDE/NT



The Coal Quay at Castle Ward Estate.

MIKE WILLIAMS/NTPL

but relatively unexplored, historic landscapes. The most notable features are the remains of Dunseverick Castle, the hollow shell of Downhill House, the iconic Mussenden Temple, the salmon fisheries at Carrick-a-Rede and the ruined castle and standing stones at Cushenden. Just as deeply engrained, however, is the evidence for prehistoric settlement buried beneath the sand hills at White Park Bay and on the exposed uplands of Fairhead and Cushleake Mountains. Elsewhere are the ruins of small farmsteads, or clachans, and their abandoned field systems, notably those at Avish and Ballyconagan. Small-scale industry, such as lime burning and coal mining, can be found at Murlough Bay and Larrybane, as well as kelp drying and heather

View over White park Bay, Co Antrim.

M. HYDE/NT



kilns on Rathlin Island. Around the Giant's Causeway the Gaelic place-names echo the past, particularly Port-na-Spaniagh - the site of the wreck of the Girona, a Spanish Armada vessel sunk in 1588 and Northern Ireland's only Protected Historic Wreck.

Strangford Lough- from neolithic log boats to monastic sites

The whole of Strangford Lough is an important historic landscape, revealing evidence for activity not only on land and sea, but also on the foreshore (intertidal zone). A recent survey by the Environment & Heritage Service (EHS) has revealed extensive archaeological evidence for several thousands of years of activity, including an early medieval log boat found within Trust ownership in 1999. Particularly indicative of past use of the foreshore are the numerous medieval fish traps that can be found up and down the shore, notably that at Greyabbey, also within Trust ownership. Mount Stewart and Castle Ward are also part of that landscape, holding within their boundaries evidence of earlier land use, notably the Anglo-Norman motte and early medieval rath at Mount Stewart, and the relict formal gardens at Castle Ward. Greater recognition of the archaeological potential may help increase protection of this extraordinary landscape.



Crom Castle and the Boat House from Inisherik Island.

JOE CORNISH/NTPL

The demesnes of County Fermanagh

National Trust ownership in County Fermanagh includes the three great demesnes of Castle Coole, Florence Court and the Crom Estate. The relict earthwork remains of the early eighteenth-century formal gardens at Castle Coole are of particular archaeological importance. The development of the later 'naturalised' landscape park encapsulated the remains of other, earlier archaeological sites, including six early Christian period raths and the possible site of a crannog, a defended man-made island, in Lough Coole. Florence Court retains much of its working estate buildings, notably the sawmill and walled garden, although much of the earlier designed landscape has been covered by modern forestry. Old Crom Castle on the Crom Estate on Upper Lough Erne is a reminder of the early seventeenth-century Plantation of English and Scots settlers. Built in 1610, it was the scene of two sieges during the wars of 1689, the second of which saw the Jacobite withdrawal to Newtownbutler and the final demise of James II's hopes for Ulster.

Belfast and South Down - prehistoric & early Christian sites, local industry and the liquor saloon

Dundrum Bay (South Down) is particularly rich in archaeological remains. Buried beneath the sand dunes of Murlough Bay lie the remains of early prehistoric settlement, including scatters of Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery, and evidence of early Christian and medieval activity.



Crown Liquor Saloon, exterior of the Victorian saloon showing coloured glass, detailed gatework, decorative wood and saloon name.

WILL WEBSTER/NTPL



Guided tour of Patterson's Spade Mill, Co Antrim.

M. HYDE/NT

Overlooking the bay are the twin peaks of Slieve Donard and Slieve Commedagh, the highest peaks in the Mourne Mountains, topped by prehistoric cairns, those on Slieve Donard associated with St Domangard, a disciple of St Patrick. Other sites of interest include Clough Castle, an Anglo-Norman motte and bailey and St Mary's Ballagharnary, the remains of an early Christian church alongside the Mourne Coastal Path.

National Trust ownership also includes remnants of the small-scale industries that shaped the Northern Ireland landscape. Patterson's Spade Mill is a working reminder of the intensity of manufacture and the skills required to produce something as simple as a peat cutter. The spades produced at Patterson's and elsewhere turned the sods that made the lazy beds that fed the poor in the clachans of north Antrim and south Down. Each blast of the furnace and turn of the cogs

breathes life into the social history of the landscape. Similarly, the Wellbrook Beeting Mill was only one aspect of a complex process of linen manufacture. The Crown Liquor Saloon in Belfast is a particularly important survivor of the age of industrial expansion, and retains an important social purpose today.

The need for further archaeological research & assessment

This diversity of sites, buildings and landscapes can be pieced together to help tell the story of the region's past, and in turn allow us to decide what is significant and what we want to take with us into the future. Not all of it is fully understood, however, and more research is needed to inform conservation and interpretation, as well as to help people share in their past. The Archaeology and Historic Environment Strategy aims to prioritise a new programme of Historic Landscape Survey, Sites & Monuments Record enhancement, interpretation and presentation, as well as opportunities for learning, education and community involvement.