

Guide to Merseyside Historic Environment Record

The Merseyside HER is closed.

For further information please contact the planning department of the relevant local authority (Liverpool, Knowsley, St Helens, Sefton & Wirral which were formerly the county of Merseyside).

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Merseyside Historic Environment Record
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Introduction

The Merseyside Historic Environment Record (HER) is the central body of information on the historic urban and rural environment of Merseyside. It forms part of a comprehensive network of historic environment records containing information on England's past and our changing historic environment. There is a HER in each county/unitary or group of metropolitan local government areas of England, typically consisting of a database with attendant documentary and cartographic local research sources.

HERs are recognised by Government and in local policy plans as key records to assist in the identification, conservation, management and wider understanding of our historic environment.¹

Most HERs contain information on non-designated heritage assets predominantly of historic and archaeological interest in the form of individual sites and remains above/below ground/under water, buildings, artefacts, landscapes. HERs also include information on designated heritage assets². Mainly local authority based services; HERs are primarily used to assist in the conservation management of the historic environment as part of the planning and development management process. Other users are national and local organizations, historic environment professionals, researchers and members of the public and students. HERs management, maintenance and operation requires particular expertise, as does the interpretation of the information for providing specialist advice. The information in HERs is not static, as the results of new discoveries and investigations are added, thus increasing knowledge of an area and ability to share the information.

Merseyside HER

The Merseyside HER covers the five local government unitary authorities of Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens & Wirral (formerly the county of Merseyside). The HER (then known as 'Sites & Monuments Record') was established in 1977 within Merseyside County Museums under the auspices of Merseyside County Council with the University of Liverpool and Department of the Environment support. As a county strategic record, it was founded in recognition of the need for a central body of archaeological information to help identify those

¹ Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment. DCLG March 2010.

² As subject to the relevant legislation.

many known sites threatened by development and also help those areas where the potential for remains existed.

Following the abolition of the Merseyside County Council in 1986, the Trustees of National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside (hereafter NML) took on the responsibility for housing the HER. The HER has therefore been built up over a number of years, though it has not been worked on systematically throughout this period.

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Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service & the HER

From 1991 a post was created to assist fulfilling the requirements of protecting and managing the investigation of archaeological remains in line with government policy PPG16 'Planning & Archaeology' and initially financed for three years by the five unitary authorities, English Heritage and NML. There has never been a post dedicated solely to the operation, maintenance and development of the county HER.

Since the closure of the Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service (MAAS) there is not currently any resource for the management, maintenance and operation of the HER. The MAAS received information into the HER from historic environment investigations which were largely the result of the core planning development management function of the Service. Currently, the cyclical and inter-dependent planning advisory and HER role is not operating - development management requiring archaeological assessments and investigations, receiving reporting and archiving of the results, feeding back into the HER for a range of users. Likewise the ability to log public feedback and research information, act upon alerts to site and areas under threat or chance discoveries reported by public and during development site works.

Scope of the Merseyside HER

The Merseyside HER relates to a full range of information on the historic environment of Merseyside: terrestrial, inter-tidal, some marine sites and consist of known archaeological/historical sites, finds, buildings/structures documentary written evidence, photographs, excavation and survey details etc. Information is as diverse in range as in age. For instance, the periods cover evidence from the prehistoric to the more modern, e.g. information on a prehistoric flint tool artefact to an upstanding 19th century Listed Building.

The HER information is derived from a number of different sources. Initial compilation was based on 19th century historic maps, documentary research of a range of published and unpublished archives, fieldwork, enquirers' research, reports of chance discoveries etc. The accuracy and level of information varies between records, depending on the available sources. For instance, the exact location of possible sites of archaeological interest may be vague whereas others are derived from the exact locations of modern excavations or surveys.

Whilst the HER does have information relating to all Scheduled Monuments and other designated sites, all nationally held information can be accessed from the new National Heritage List for England (April 2011), an online database that can be consulted that includes: Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields, Protected Wreck Sites (World Heritage Site records have also been added to The National Heritage List for England, but are inscribed by UNESCO³). For further information:

'The Heritage List Frequently Asked Questions' document available at:
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/content/imported-docs/k-o/nat-heritage-list-faqs.pdf>

To search the list: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/list>

Format of Merseyside HER

Compiled largely from initial survey work (1977-1982) the resulting HER is based in National Museums Liverpool. At its core is a unique, irreplaceable hard copy archive, now detailing approximately 10,000 records. The HER consists:

- (a) Documentary archive - all detailed information regarding sites, features and finds, with further details on individual HER record sheets arranged according to historic township areas within each Local Authority. Record sheets are mainly hand written and the amount of information varies naturally depending on how much research has been carried out. Some records also include photographic prints attached to sheets, copies of articles, letters etc.

³ United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organisation

Each record has an 'index card' summarising only core data from the full HER record sheet. It was this basic information that was added to a database in the late 1980's and subsequently transferred to the existing digital HER system in 2001-3.

There are also dedicated archive research information files (compiled lists of local archive and record office holdings that relate to the townships investigated in the 1980s).

- (b) Map - the location of each HER site is on an Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 paper map overlay, located by national grid reference mapped as point data.
- (c) Digital - all HER record identification information is 'point data' and also held on a computer database (name, type of site, location, historic dates). The 'Historic Buildings Sites & Monuments Record' system [HBSMR] is used linked to Map Info GIS. However, with few exceptions, all the detailed site descriptions and source material for each record still has to be obtained from the paper HER record sheets. Also see Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project.
- (d) Reports of archaeological investigations carried out in Merseyside - The reference collection of reports predominantly resulting from developer funded professional archaeological investigations. Most date from 1991 and are the direct result of projects that have been required through the development planning advisory work of the Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service staff. All reports are in hard copy and the majority await full integration into the HER.
- (e) Additional sources and supporting information - copied at the time, and used to support compiling the HER. Includes: copies of paper first Edition OS maps for the area; some pre-OS Estate Maps, Tithe Maps, Bibliographic references, copies of published articles and journals, lists of historic maps, Tithe Awards, photographs and slides of some sites. The HER also has a small reference library. Additional digital medium has been built up by the Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service during the course of its planning advisory service work i.e. site monitoring visits from 1991 to March 2011.
- (f) Merseyside Historic Characterisation Project data

The initial digital data capture polygons have been integrated into the Historic Environment Record database. This has added a spatial historic environment dimension to what was individual site based HER records. This data has formed the basis for the subsequent analysis and reporting on the historic character of a large metropolitan conurbation running across the five district's local government boundaries. The project's core aim was to assist improved consideration of the historic environment in local authority spatial and

development planning, reporting on the historic character of a large metropolitan conurbation running across the five district's local government boundaries.

The key outputs are five individual reports for Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens Sefton and Wirral which document character change and survival and pro-forma settlement studies for each local authority, designed to assist in the identification of historic settlements and their survival potential in the landscape. The outputs are finalised into reports which are downloadable at

www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/collections/historic-characterisation-project/