

The HMAC is a Cork County Council committee consisting of a range of external members, elected representatives, and the relevant in-house staff. The HMAC is keen to promote an appreciation of the historic attributes of Cork County and provide advice and guidance through the production of Advisory leaflets. The following are a list that have been produced to date and are available on Councils web site:

- Care of Historic Stone Walls
- Care and Maintenance of Historic Ironwork
 - Care of Historic Graveyards
 - Care of Archaeological Monuments

This leaflet is 5th in the series and the first one to be accompanied by a short video which is available on the Council's YouTube channel.

Useful Contacts

Heritage Unit
021 427 6891
Cork County, Council, Floor 3,
County Hall, Cork. T12 R2NC.
www.corkcoco.ie/arts-heritage

National Monuments Service
Department of Housing, Local
Government and Heritage, Customs
House, Dublin 1. D01 W6X0.
www.archaeology.ie

The Heritage Council
056 777 0777
Church Lane, Kilkenny. R95 X264.
www.heritagecouncil.ie

Wall Tops: Water penetration of wall tops is a significant cause of deterioration in masonry buildings. Many ruins have a 'soft top or capping' - a natural growth of turf. This is beneficial, it absorbs water and insulates the wall head and supports wildlife. Where there is no protection or where growth is invasive, a very careful programme for sealing the wall top should be carried out either with soft capping or stonework to drain water away. Flaunching wall tops needs to be carefully done to avoid water puddling along the top of the wall.

Do

- Get permission from the owner at the very start
- Establish the legal status of the building and whatever conditions this entails
- Research and record the ruin. Retain all this information for easy retrieval
- Make a preliminary assessment of the condition of the ruin
- Trim back mature vegetation and remove small saplings and shoots, and reassess the ruins' condition
- If necessary, engage a suitably qualified and experienced conservation specialist
- Draw up a list of immediate conservation priorities
- Prepare a long-term management and maintenance plan in accordance with best practice and minimum intervention
- Outline the programme of works to achieve that plan

Do Not

- Do not use cement or concrete
- Do not make any alterations to the ruin beyond those absolutely necessary
- Do not remove well established ivy or other vegetation overgrowth until conservation works are imminent and along best conservation practice guidelines
- Do not employ any contractor to carry out works to the ruin that are not following best conservation practice guidelines

Professional Advice: When professional advice is required the services of a suitably qualified expert should be sought. Be this a qualified conservation architect, engineer, archaeologist or stone mason, the profession will depend on the conservation issues. They should have the necessary experience in dealing with heritage ruined buildings. They can provide a management plan and a long-term maintenance schedule. For any works proposed a method statement and material specifications should be sought and these should be compatible with best conservation practice as briefly outlined in this leaflet and the sources listed below.

Other sources

Cork County Council
(www.corkcoco.ie/arts-heritage)

Government of Ireland (2010) Ruins: The Conservation and Repair of Masonry Ruins
(www.buildingsofireland.ie/resources)

Historic Scotland
(www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-research/publications)

Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland
(www.riai.ie/work-with-an-architect/conservation-skills)

Engineers Ireland
(www.engineersireland.ie/Professionals/Community-Groups/Engineering-Divisions/Structures-and-Conservation/Conservation-Accreditation-for-Engineers)

Robert Kent (2003) Heritage in Ruins: the Maintenance and Preservation of Ruins
(www.buildingsconservation.com/articles/heritageruins/heritageruins.htm)

Cork County Council - Eamon Hunter 'Clean up your act- Maintenance and good practice for cleaning and clearing monuments.'
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ1B6S42Bdg>)

Care of Historic Ruins

Introduction

Historic ruins add character to the landscape and speak of past events and lives. They form an important component of the Cork's heritage. Ruins come in many types, from medieval abbeys churches and castles to old houses, farm buildings and industrial sites.

These are worth preserving for future generations for many reasons; social, cultural, archaeological, architectural and/or historical. Their care and maintenance should follow best conservation practice. Low-level intervention and maintenance is often enough, in some cases the age, importance and condition of the site will make professional expertise necessary. This leaflet has been prepared by the Historic Monuments Advisory Committee (HMAS) of Cork County Council as part of its advisory leaflet series, it is accompanied by a short video available on the Council website.



Church ruin

Legal Status

Before undertaking works it is important to establish whether a ruin is protected by legislation. Notifications, permissions and/or consents may be required. The building may be listed under the *National Monuments Acts* and entered in the *Record*

of Monuments and Places. In this case two months written notice must be given to the *Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage* before any works. Some ruins are *National Monuments*, and the consent of the *Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage* is required (forms are available www.housing.ie). These issues are dealt with in the HMAS's leaflet *Care of Archaeological Monuments*.

A historic ruin may be protected by the *Planning and Development Acts* if included in the *Record of Protected Structures (RPS)* or if in an *Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)*. These are listed in *Cork County Development Plan*. Advice on architectural heritage is available in the publication *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2004)*) and the council's own booklets on protected structures and ACAs.

Other relevant legislation including environmental, conservation, wildlife and health and safety legislation should be complied with.

Building Stone: Historically, masonry stone was sourced locally. In Cork the under-lying rock is mainly limestone and sandstone. Stone quality influenced construction style and appearance, and whether a building needed to be rendered.



Rubble wall of a medieval church

Historic Masonry Construction: It is important to understand the character and make up of masonry walls. The two main types of masonry construction are rubble (usually random rubble, sometimes roughly squared or shaped) and ashlar. Un-coursed random rubble construction is the most common. The stones are

laid in a bed of lime mortar which forms a cushion that allows the stonework to absorb movement. Most random rubble walls are double-skin, consisting of an inner and outer vertical face with the cavity filled with smaller stones, lime mortar and/or clay. They may be bonded by a through stone - a stone laid across the full width of the wall. Some random rubbles walls are coursed, the wall was built in a series of wide horizontal courses or lifts allowing the lower course to dry before the next course was built.

Ashlar consists of finely dressed stones cut square and having the same height within each course. It was used in the construction of more formal buildings. Ashlar joints are quite fine, which makes re-pointing difficult.

Conservation Principles: The aim of conservation is to prolong the life of a building in a way that protects its value and uniqueness. Minimum intervention is recommended - one should only carry out works that are necessary. A full understanding of the building is essential before tackling any work. This can be achieved by (a) gathering information from available historical sources (b) providing a written description, drawings, and photographs. Whether the building is a medieval ruin or one of a more recent date the same conservation principles apply.

Assessment: The first step in conserving a ruin is to make a full assessment of its current condition. Wind, rain and frost can wash out mortar and erode masonry leading to progressive collapse. Vegetation, especially woody plants, can cause structural damage. The assessment should record all issues, noting defects such as cracks, decayed/washed out masonry or leaning walls. It should detail the causes of defects and suggest solutions such as repointing, underpinning, soft topping or rendering. If the building is overgrown with ivy it should be reassessed after the ivy has been trimmed back.



Assessment of a ruin

Re-pointing: Re-pointing is needed when mortar in joints has been washed out. Use of lime mortar is essential, it is made up of a mix of lime, water, and aggregate (grit and sand) to reduce shrinkage. Three types of lime can be used - lime putty (fat lime), natural hydraulic



Repointing with lime mortar

lime (NHL) and quick lime (hot lime). Cement mortar is not suitable as it traps water and can cause cracking in stones because of its rigidity.

Where the original mortar has become loose and crumbly it should be raked out before re-pointing. New lime mortar will appear very white at first but will quickly weather to a more neutral tone. The repointing should be brushed back to leave slightly concave joints. During the repointing process loose stones or stones that have fallen can be refixed into the wall.

Vegetation: Where routine maintenance is lacking, woody vegetation can cause serious structural problems. Ivy is a major issue. It is a lime-loving plant whose roots can penetrate mortar joints, cracking masonry walls. The force of the wind on ivy is another factor likely to cause damage. Established vegetation, such as ivy or tree roots, should never be forcefully removed from a wall but pruned back close to the wall face. Vegetation should only be removed when funding is in place and conservation works are imminent. In addition no removal of vegetation should disturb protected species or take place during the bird-nesting season (March 1st and August 31st).