Workshop Notes: Level 1 & Level 2 Building Surveys

Before selecting the level of record it is important to consider both the nature of the building and the purpose for which the record is intended. Each recording level represents a minimum specification to which additional elements may be added as required. There is usually a correlation between the scope of the written record and the degree of drawn or photographic detail which is used to support it. When surveying groups or complexes of buildings it is sometimes appropriate to record some structures at one level and some at another, depending on their relative interest. In such circumstances the value of the individual records may be materially enhanced by an account of the history and evolution of the complex as a whole.

Key Aspects of Recording Structures

Why Record?
Promote the understanding and appreciation of historic & key buildings

Prior to Recording

Previous records
- indicate what is currently known about the building – local knowledge, existing surveys
- identify the main areas in which understanding or information are lacking

The scope of the record
- Level 1 and/or Level 2 survey

Creating a Record
- Documentary research – National & local collections, planning offices/archives, local studies and local history publications
- Building investigation – Construction type, architecture, obvious changes in construction

The Level 1 Survey
Level 1 is essentially a basic visual record, supplemented by the minimum of information needed to identify the building’s location, age and type. This is the simplest record, and it will not normally be an end in itself, but will be contributory to a wider study. Typically it will be undertaken when the objective is to gather basic information about a large number of buildings – for statistical sampling, for area assessments to identify buildings for planning purposes, and whenever resources are limited and much ground has to be covered in a short time. It may also serve to identify buildings requiring more detailed attention at a later date.

Level 1 surveys will generally be of exteriors only, though the interior of a building may sometimes be seen in order to make a superficial inspection and to note significant features. Only if circumstances and objectives allow will any drawings be produced, and these are likely to take the form of sketches.

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A Level 1 record will typically consist of:

**Drawing**
- Sketched plan, section, elevation or detail drawings (when no more thorough drawn record is made). Sketches may be roughly dimensioned.

**Photography**
- A general view or views of the building (in its wider setting or landscape)
- The building’s external appearance. Typically a series of oblique views will show all external elevations of the building, and give an overall impression of its size and shape. Where individual elevations include complex historical information it may also be appropriate to take views at right-angles to the plane of the elevation.

**Written account**
- The precise location of the building as an address and in the form of a National Grid reference.
- A note of any statutory designation (that is, listing, scheduling, Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, conservation area). Information on statutory designations can be found on the Historic England website. Non-statutory designations (local lists) may be added.
- The date when the record was made, the name(s) of the recorder(s) and the location of any archive material.
- A summary statement (when no more detailed account is intended) describing the building’s type or purpose, historically and at present, its materials and possible date(s) so far as these are apparent from a superficial inspection.

**The Level 2 Survey**
This is a descriptive record, made in similar circumstances to Level 1 but when more information is needed. It may be made of a building which is judged not to require a more detailed record, or it may serve to gather data for a wider project. Both the exterior and interior of the building will be seen, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive and may be tailored to the scope of a wider project.

A Level 2 record will typically consist of:
**A drawn record**

Either
- a) Sketched plan, section, elevation or detail drawings (when no more thorough drawn record is made). Sketches may be roughly dimensioned.

Or
- b) Measured plans (to scale or fully dimensioned) as existing. These may extend to all floors, or they may be restricted to one or a selection. The latter option may be appropriate, for example, in a town-centre building where an upper floor has been little altered. Buildings
c) with a repetitive structure may also be planned on one floor, but a note or a sketch plan should be made to indicate the arrangement of other floors. Plans should show the form and location of any structural features of historic significance, such as blocked doorways, windows and fireplaces, masonry joints, ceiling beams and other changes in floor and ceiling levels, and any evidence for fixtures of significance.

And (where necessary or practicable)
- Measured drawings recording the form or location of other significant structural detail (for example timber or metal framing).
- Measured cross-sections or long-sections to illustrate the vertical relationships within a building (for example floor and ceiling heights, the form of roof trusses).
- Measured drawings to show the form of any architectural decoration (for example the moulding profiles of door surrounds, beams, mullions and cornices) or small-scale functional detail not easily captured by photography. A measured detail drawing is particularly valuable when the feature in question is an aid to dating.
- Measured elevations, where these are necessary to an understanding of the building’s design, development or function.
- A site plan relating the building to other structures and to any related topographical and landscape features.

Photography
- A general view or views of the building (in its wider setting or landscape).
- The building’s external appearance. Typically a series of oblique views will show all external elevations of the building, and give an overall impression of its size and shape. Where individual elevations include complex historical information it may also be appropriate to take views at right-angles to the plane of the elevation.
- The overall appearance of the principal rooms and circulation areas.

Written record
- The precise location of the building as an address and in the form of a National Grid reference.
- A note of any statutory designation (that is, listing, scheduling, Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, conservation area). Information on statutory designations can be found on the Historic England website. Non-statutory designations (local lists) may be added.
- The date when the record was made, the name(s) of the recorder(s) and the location of any archive material.
- A longer summary statement. This account should summarise the building’s form, function, date and sequence of development. The names of architects, builders, patrons and owners should be given if known. Its purpose is to describe the building when no fuller record is necessary. Alternatively it may serve as an introduction to the more detailed body of a record that may follow, for users who may need a summary of the report’s findings.
Suggested Field Equipment

- Camera
- Notebook/pencils
- GPS (or mobile ‘phone with GPS app installed)
- Graph paper
- Tape measure (20 m)