

Ireland's architectural history unfolds online

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is making strides with the development of an online inventory of historic buildings and gardens.

Anyone with an interest in Ireland's architectural heritage can now view details of significant buildings and gardens on the **BuildingsofIreland.ie** website, which was developed by the NIAH, a section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The site has been enjoying enormous popularity since launch; over the last year it has attracted 167,000 visitors, generating 3.5 million hits, from architects, local planners and property owners to schoolchildren, tourists and people with genealogical interests.

Users of the site can browse or search for notable structures and view a description and history of each site, along with photographs. The inventory includes everything from castles and cathedrals to thatched houses and even boat sheds. So far, 16 counties have been included in the online catalogue, with plans to bring the rest of the country online in the next five to ten years.

The latest addition to the site is the 'historic gardens and designed landscapes' section, which uses Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photography to offer visitors a glimpse into changes in the Irish countryside over the last 150 years, explains Willie Cumming, senior architect, NIAH. "For each site identified we have an extract from the first edition 6-inch Ordnance Survey map and, at the same scale, the most recent OS aerial photography, so you can compare and contrast the two," he says.

The NIAH also plans to use mapping to develop the site further, Cumming adds, outlining a project to link the site's architectural data to clickable maps, adding a new navigation tool to the site. "Let's say you want to search for places of interest in County Cavan. You'll be able to click on a map of Cavan and scale down to see historic structures in the area; alternatively you could choose to 'map this structure' to locate a building on a map." It is hoped that this project will be up and running by the end of the year.

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