

Identify the key references and data resources that you use in your specialism to ensure that your work is properly informed, and critically evaluate their accessibility, currency, reliability and relevance.

Introduction

My specialism is in historic buildings. The work that I undertake usually results in the writing of reports stemming from the results of fieldwork. Such projects are usually historic building records (also referred to as HBRs) but I also undertake heritage impact assessments (also referred to as HIAs) and watching briefs.

Primary resources

The following is a list of the primary resources that I use in most projects that I undertake to inform and guide the results of the work. Some of these resources are guidance documents published by authorities, and others are academic books.

Authors	Title	Publisher	Date	Format	Page
Historic England	Understanding historic buildings	Historic England	2016	PDF	1
English Heritage	Conservation principles, policies and guidance	English Heritage	2008	PDF	3
Alcock and Hall	Fixtures and fittings in dated houses 1567-1763	Council for British Archaeology	1994	Book, PDF	3
Alcock <i>et al</i>	Recording timber framed buildings: an illustrated glossary	Council for British Archaeology	2018	Book	5
Cordingley	British historical roof types and their members: a classification	Ancient Monuments Society	1961	Article, PDF	5
Cornwall Archaeological Unit	Guidance notes for HIA and HBR	Cornwall Archaeological Unit	2017	Word	6
Cornwall Archaeological Unit	Report publication guidance	Cornwall Archaeological Unit	2018	Word	7

Understanding historic buildings

The primary resource used when undertaking historic building records is *Understanding historic buildings* by Historic England (2016). This document sets out the four levels of historic building recording that can be undertaken, and what these entail. Usually, when a condition is placed on a planning application which requires a HBR, the level of survey specified relates to the levels that are laid out in this document.

Accessibility

This document is readily available in PDF format from the Historic England website (2025a). This means that it can be downloaded by anyone wishing to read the document and it can be easily found via web searches.

The document has been designed to be navigable although this has perhaps not worked as well as the authors has intended. The document has some useful preamble regarding the rationale for recording and types of record, however the most important section in the document is Section 5 “Recording levels: a description” (Historic England, 2016, p. 25), which has hyperlinks within the document relating directly to the text following on from this section. When a contractor has been informed what level of survey is required from them, they can use this document to find out exactly what is needed for that level of survey. Section 5 lists out the four different levels of survey. For each recording level there are a few sub-sections, which give a brief overview, scope and then a section specifying what the survey will entail. An example of this is for Level 3, which is the most common level used, and states the following:

“drawing – normally item 2; sometimes one or more of items 3-12 (see numbered list in 4.3.3)

photography – items 1-9 (see numbered list in 4.4.8)

written account – items 1-3, 6-9, 11-13, 23; sometimes items 5, 14-16, 18-20, 22 & 24 (see numbered list in 4.5.1)” (Historic England, 2016, p. 26)

The ‘items’ that the description is referring to, are numbered points which are laid out in the document for the three aspects of recording (drawing, photography and written record). These lists of items are however located at a different, earlier part of the document, away from the section describing the numbered items needed. For example: the list of items used in drawings are located on page 14, photographs on page 19 and written record on page 22. This means that the user has to flick back and forth through the document to understand what is needed for the level of survey they are doing. This is partly aided by hyperlinked references within the document but this only works in going from the list of items required for a level to the details of the item, but it is then not possible to easily get back to the first list the user was referencing. Therefore a lot of searching through the document is required. Although it would result in the repetition of text, it would be far better to repeat and list the requirements for each level together with the description of each level, to minimise the need to search back and forth in the document.

As the document is in a PDF format it could be easily inserted into text to speech software for the visually impaired, which helps with its accessibility.

Currency

Although this document is now nearly 10 years old, it is still relevant to the undertaking of historic building records, and discusses modern techniques for survey such as laser scanning (Historic England, 2016, p. 15) and photogrammetry (Historic England, 2016, p. 21). It is still the document used as reference in planning conditions.

Reliability

This document is a publication by Historic England, who is “the public body that helps people care for, enjoy and celebrate England's spectacular historic environment” (Historic England, 2025b), and therefore this should be the most reliable and definitive document relating to

guidance on historic building recording, as it has been published by the public body which governs the historic environment.

Relevance

This document, despite being nearly a decade old, is still the most relevant and complete guidance to undertaking historic building recording in England. It is therefore a highly relevant and current document.

Conservation principles, policies and guidance

This document is the primary resource for setting out Historic England's philosophy on conservation. Practically, this document is primarily used as a reference guide when undertaking Heritage Impact Assessments.

Accessibility

Like the *Understanding historic buildings* document, this document is also available on the Historic England website (Historic England, 2025c) and readily available in search engine results.

The document itself is well laid out and easily accessible. The document is made particularly accessible with each section being uniquely colour coded to assist navigation of the document. This colour coding makes the document very easy to navigate and understand which section you are in, although may not work if the reader is colourblind. Like the *Understanding Historic Buildings* it is in a PDF format and could be easily inserted into text to speech software for the visually impaired.

Currency

This document requires updating. At the time of writing the document is 17 years old and was published by Historic England, which at the time was the relevant authority for the care of the historic environment, but is now no longer responsible for this function. There is a preceding page in the document which states that it "will be reviewed periodically" and "will in due course be re-branded as Historic England" (English Heritage, 2008), however this has not happened and the publication is well overdue being updated.

Reliability

As the document was published by English Heritage (the relevant authority at the time of publication), the document can be considered to be reliable. The advanced age of the document, however means that the reliability of the document can be brought into question as there is likely to be much information within the document that is now incorrect. This is especially relevant to the field of historic building conservation where new sciences and philosophies are always evolving, and so the fact that this document hasn't been updated since 2008, brings the reliability of this document into question.

Relevance

The document is highly relevant when undertaking Heritage Impact Assessments, however its relevance to other pieces of work such as Historic Building Records is limited. Historic England have stated on their website that they undertook consultation on the *Conservation Principles*

document in 2018, but as of writing this assessment, there has been no updated version of the document published (Historic England, 2025d)

Fixtures and fittings in dated houses 1567-1763

This book is used as a primary reference guide for dating features in historic buildings. The book features a number of different historic features such as balusters, doors, and hinges and is a very useful and informative resource.

Accessibility

Accessibility to this document would initially seem more limited than those which have been discussed above as it is an out of print physical publication: the book was published in 1994. However it has been uploaded to the Internet Archive (Internet Archive, 2025), and therefore a digitized copy can be borrowed and used. The book is easy to use, with a short introduction and distribution map, the main section of the book which is a series of illustrations, and an index at the back. Generally the illustrations in the book are well done and set in order going chronologically from left to right. An exception to this is the section on strings where the illustrations are set in a random order (Alcock and Hall, 1994, p. 7). As the document is in print format, and as scans online, it is not possible to put it into a text reader as easily as PDF documents, however some types of software are still able to pick out words from images, and so may still be accessed by someone visually impaired (Speechify, 2025)

Currency

Although the book is now over 30 years old, the content of the book discusses an entirely historic period of fixtures that have been dated. Therefore the book is still very much current and is not in need of an urgent update. There is unlikely to have been much in the way of academic or scientific advancements that would have made this book outdated.

Reliability

The book has been published by the Council for British Archaeology, and therefore it should be a reliable and honest academic resource. The book contains illustrations of actual parts of buildings and so it should be very accurate.

However, significantly, while the book shows important details like doors, mouldings and panelling, it does not include a section illustrating windows from the period covered. This is a significant omission which limits the reliability of the book for dating fixtures and fittings, as windows are highly diagnostic elements of a building. It is also limited by the time period it covers, which ends at the mid 18th century, and omits all of the 19th century.

Relevance

The book is very relevant when trying to date the fixtures and fittings which are included in the book, however some fixtures and fittings are better represented than others. For example the selection of newel posts only covers the period up to 1678 and does not include any 18th century examples (Alcock and Hall, 1994, p. 13). Elements such as handrails are very well represented with 40 illustrations dating from the 16th to 18th century (Alcock and Hall, 1994, p. 8) but then panelling, which is a very common element in buildings, only has 12 illustrations.

A flaw of the book is in its spatial coverage and biases that result from this. The book does not give a specific area that it covers, but in reality it only pertains to England and Wales; no data from Northern Ireland is included and only one record from Scotland. The majority of the data comes from specific localised regions in Britain. The Welsh Marches, Gloucestershire, Surrey, Sussex, southern Yorkshire and north Devon are particularly well represented, but other areas such as Cornwall, Hampshire, Staffordshire, Lincolnshire and Pembrokeshire have little to no representation in the record (Alcock and Hall, 1994, p. vii). This therefore limits its use in areas such as Cornwall and Pembrokeshire which have their own distinct vernacular styles and timelines.

Recording timber framed buildings

This book provides an illustrated guide to elements of timber buildings and a glossary of terms.

Accessibility

Like the *Fixtures and fittings* book (Alcock and Hall, 1994), the accessibility of this resource is again limited by the fact that it is a physical publication. Unlike the *Fixtures and fittings* book, which is available online via the Internet Archive (2025), this book is not available as an online or digital resources. As it is only available as a physical publication, this makes it one of the least accessible documents discussed here, especially to the visually impaired.

Currency

Although the book is not available online, it is not out of print like *Fixtures and fittings* (1994). At the time of writing it is available for purchase at the modest price of £8.00 or £1.60 for members of the Council for British Archaeology (2025). The book has been continually updated with re-runs in 1999, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2018. Therefore it can be assumed that the information within the book is current and kept up to date.

Reliability

As the book is published by the Council for British Archaeology it should be a reliable and informative resource. The information in the book was provided by a large team of experts (Alcock, et al, 2018, vii). Unlike the *Fixtures and fittings* guide (1994), this book does not give reference to where the illustrations depicted were taken from or when they date from, which would be particularly useful information and hinders the reliability of this resource.

Relevance

This work is somewhat limited in its relevance to historic buildings in Cornwall as there are only a very small number of timber framed buildings in the county. However, many of the terms illustrated in the book are applicable to many buildings which are not timber framed, as the same elements are still used in stone and brick buildings. For example, the roof trusses and details illustrated (pp. 8-13) are also replicated in non-timber framed buildings; internal features such as stairs, windows and doors are also illustrated (pp. 21-27). The guide is particularly useful where it shows intricate details of joints (pp. 28-30), and of chamfers and stops (p. 31).

British historical roof-types and their members

This article is an invaluable resource for understanding and describing roof trusses encountered during fieldwork. The scope of the resource is very narrow and can only be used in specific circumstances.

Accessibility

Unfortunately this publication is somewhat obscure in its physical form and is quite rare. It was originally published in the Ancient Monuments Society periodical however it was reprinted separately due to its importance. Cornwall Archaeological Unit (hereafter CAU) holds a physical copy of the book in its library. Only five copies of the reprinted book are currently available for sale globally (viaLibri, 2024), although in the past it has been impossible to obtain a copy of the work. This potential difficulty in obtaining the document has been counteracted by the Ancient Monuments Society, now known as Historic Buildings and Places making the text and illustrations available for free on their website (Historic Buildings and Places, 2025a). The resource itself is a very accessible document with illustrations laid out clearly and logically.

Currency

This resource is the oldest discussed in this essay, yet despite its age it is still more current than some of the other references and resources discussed. Similar to the other reference sources, despite its age, it is discussing historical building fabric which will not have changed since its authorship and therefore is still current. This level of currency is furthered by the fact that this has become the primary reference source for roof trusses.

Reliability

The work was published by the Ancient Monuments Society and it is expected that the document is a reliable source of information, as the purpose of the society, now called Historic Buildings and Places, is "to sustain, defend and promote historic buildings and places of every type and age for the benefit of all" (2025b).

Relevance

Despite its age this reference work is still relevant and invaluable when recording and describing roof trusses.

Guidance notes for HIA and HBR

This document is CAU's internal guidance for producing projects relating to historic buildings.

Accessibility

As the document is for internal use at CAU, it can only be accessed by CAU employees. Therefore its reach is very limited to a small number of people. The document is a simple word document that is easy to read and could be put into a text to speech reader if the user was visually impaired.

Currency

The document was last updated in 2017. While this is now eight years old, it is in line with the updates to the latest editions of Historic England's guidance (2008 and 2016). This means that the resource is still current.

Reliability

The document is reliable when undertaking work at CAU as it was produced by CAU, for CAU's use. The document does not address how to actually undertake a historic building record, despite its name – and the guidance for undertaking the work is summarised in one point “11. Carry out fieldwork.” (Cornwall Archaeological Unit, 2017, p. 2). In fact, CAU does not provide any guidance documentation for undertaking the fieldwork part of the process, and the document simply outlines the steps for undertaking the preliminary and finalising administration. This means that any member of staff wishing to find guidance on how to undertake buildings projects will be unable to find any in-house guidance and will have to refer to the guidance from Historic England.

Relevance

The relevance of this document is very specific to undertaking historic building records within CAU. It has no relevance or applicability to any other situation.

Report publication guidance

This document produced by CAU provides staff with information for producing reports in the house style. It covers formatting, content, length, context numbers, dates, abbreviations, referencing and graphics.

Accessibility

Just like the Guidance notes for HIA and HBR the document, in Word format, is only for internal use at CAU, and so has a very narrow reach, but it could be inserted into a text to speech program to assist with visual impairment.

Currency

The document was last updated in 2018, however CAU uses an annual license for Microsoft 365, and the latest version of Word was released in 2024 (Microsoft). Therefore this document is no longer current and should be updated, as it no longer applies to the current working version of the software that CAU uses.

Reliability

This lack of currency reduces the reliability of the document, however, it is still the working document used by CAU for its reports, and so it is still the *de facto* reference material. The document is reliable in the sense of its breadth and detail. It covers all of the questions that a new or existing staff member might have such as what font to use, how to describe contexts, how to present maps and figures, and how to use acronyms.

Relevance

The document is very relevant to anyone in CAU creating a report, however it has no use outside this context.

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