

WHAT IS VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE?

All traditional cultures have developed building forms suited to their natural environment, using building materials which are readily available to them. Sometimes simple, sometimes more elaborate, these buildings reflect the individual way of life of a people and are known as “vernacular”. This *foirgneamh na ndaoine* or “architecture of the people”, follows patterns developed over centuries which vary from region to region, and provide a unique built record of a traditional society.

The term “vernacular” originally refers to the language or dialect of a people, as opposed to official or academic language. Vernacular architecture, like everyday language, comes from the people. It is not designed or built by trained professionals, but by its occupants following established patterns and techniques whose reasons and origins may be long forgotten. Like language, vernacular buildings are an essential part of our heritage. They give us first-hand evidence of how our ancestors lived and are now widely recognised as important to our identity as a people.

Ireland no longer creates vernacular architecture. In today's industrialised society even the simplest of structures are consciously designed and owe their form to materials which are industrially produced. Our unique vernacular architecture is becoming a rare and endangered commodity. In 2007 the Heritage Office of Wicklow County Council commissioned Lotts Architecture to carry out a representative inventory of 150 vernacular buildings in the county, to better understand the individual characteristics particular to the county and to show how they are surviving in the changed social context of today.

This exhibition is based on the findings of the survey. It sets out to show the cultural importance of these modest and unassuming buildings and to interpret the rural vernacular architecture of the county. We hope this will help the viewer to appreciate this unique tradition and will encourage people to preserve what is left for the enjoyment of our children and for the benefit of future generations.



Typical vernacular style of northern Greece



Half-timbered barn in Germany, with a steep roof to throw off snow



Vernacular interior in Sweden



Plain agricultural buildings forming part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Sweden



Timber-clad vernacular village in Stockholm



Half-timbered houses in western England



Typical Tuscan farmhouse in Italy



Vernacular garden in Co. Laois



Typical vernacular houses like this are an essential part of the cultural heritage of Co. Wicklow



Estate cottages and houses built to standard designs are not vernacular, though sometimes similar in style



Vernacular bar-grocery in Co. Wexford