

The decline of the vernacular heritage of Wicklow is progressing fast, and a great many houses are in imminent danger of disappearance. The decline in farming as a full time occupation has left many of the houses empty, and new houses have replaced many vernacular buildings. The survey found that houses retaining the most interesting features tend to be abandoned and in an advanced state of decay.

Today vernacular heritage is accepted as an essential part of our heritage and the occupants of traditional houses generally feel proud to live in buildings with so much history. Conservation is the means to keep these buildings, to ensure they have a place in the modern world.

Old buildings should be treated differently to new buildings and a sensitive approach is always needed. Alterations or improvements using modern materials can cause essential character to be lost. Simple, modest features even if irregular and old-fashioned contribute to the immense appeal of a vernacular building and should be carefully protected. Extensions should be sensitive to the heritage value of the buildings and should be well considered. Vernacular buildings are part of the beautiful Wicklow landscape and should always be considered in their settings, where walls and hedgerows, gates, paving, trees and views are of vital importance.

In conservation work "repair" is the key word. Modern copies of historic doors or windows do not have the authentic value and history of the genuine article. Old doors, windows, roofs and plaster finishes can all be repaired, even when it may not appear possible. Repairs should be made in the same material and manner of construction as the original. Traditional skills such as joinery, thatching, lime plastering, lime washing and stone walling are undergoing a revival and training courses are available in all of these areas. Grants are often available to encourage good conservation work, and there are many publications and groups who can assist and advise those who wish to conserve or restore vernacular buildings. The Heritage Office of Wicklow County Council can provide information on the range of information and advice available.



Unroofed stonecutter's house in a scenic location near Ballyknockan.

Grants Schemes:
Buildings At Risk Programme: The Heritage Council, Áras na hOidhreachta, Church Lane, Kilkenny
Tel. 056 7770777 (www.heritagecouncil.ie)
Wicklow County Council Conservation Grants (for protected structures only), contact Solomon Aroboto, 0404 20148 ext. 2145
REPS 4 Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme 2008: The Heritage Council, Áras na hOidhreachta, Church Lane, Kilkenny, Tel. 056 7770777 (www.heritagecouncil.ie)
Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, Housing Grants, Government Buildings, Ballina, Co. Mayo, Tel. 096 24200 (www.enviro.n.ie)
Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs, Na Forbacha, Gaillimh, 091 503700 (www.pobail.ie)



Derelict interior with dresser



A well restored house and farmyard in Co. Wexford



Restored vernacular house on a secluded Wicklow hillside



Traditional settle bed in a derelict house



Use of traditional lime plaster has been revived in recent years



Restored roof in a Wicklow farmhouse conserving original structure with traditionally jointed timbers

Traditional Building Skills Register of the Irish Georgian Society: www.igs.ie/Resources/Skills.aspx
Information on Thatch : www.buildingsofireland.ie/Resources/ThatchinIreland/

Further Reading :
F. H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout, *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, Cork 1998
Laura Bowen, Nicola Matthews, *Reusing Farm Buildings*, Kildare Co. Council, 2007
Kevin Danaher, *Ireland's Traditional Houses*, 1991
Jacqui Donnelly, *Maintenance: A Guide to the Care of Older Buildings*, The Stationery Office, Dublin 2007 (download from www.enviro.n.ie/en/Publications)
E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage: The Landscape, The People and Their Work*, Dundalgan Press, Dundalk 1977
Claudia Kinnmonth, *Irish Country Furniture, 1700-1950*, Yale University Press, 1993
Patrick McAfee, *Irish Stone Buildings, Conservation, Repair, Building*, O'Brien Press, Dublin 1998
Richard Oram, *Traditional Buildings in Ireland, Home Owners Handbook*, Mourne Heritage Trust, 2004
Barry O'Reilly, Colm Murray, *Traditional Buildings on Irish Farms*, Teagasc and the Heritage Council, 2007 (download from: www.heritagecouncil.ie)
Barry O'Reilly, *Living under Thatch, Vernacular Architecture in Co. Offaly*, 2002
Roberta Reeners, *A Wexford Farmstead: The Conservation of an 18th-century Farmstead at Mayglass*, The Heritage Council (website: www.mayglass-2000.ie)
Nessa Roche, *Windows: A Guide to the Repair of Historic Windows*, The Stationery Office, Dublin 2007 (download from www.enviro.n.ie/en/Publications)
Olive Sharkey, *Ways of Old, Traditional Life in Ireland*, O'Brien Press, Dublin 2000