

## **Developing Historic Environment Records for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **HER21 18 months on (October 2012)**

#### **6004 Worcester City Historic Buildings Data, Worcester City Council**

The Worcester City Historic Buildings Data Project aimed to digitally capture historic building application records for Worcester, dating from 1865-1948, and to assimilate them into the Worcester City Historic Environment Record. This was to enable fully-searchable (GIS-based) access to an important but under-used dataset to be provided to a broad spectrum of users. It was anticipated that this would allow local authority conservation, archaeological and planning officers to develop an enhanced understanding of Worcester's historic built fabric, further enabling its informed and intelligent management through plan-making and development management.

3000 groups of records, many of them very fragile, were digitally preserved, and the need to use the original documents removed. Digitisation of these records was undertaken by Worcestershire Record Office as a partner in the project, and this key relationship has been maintained, with further records captured in the intervening months. Since the project concluded, Worcestershire Record Office has been rebranded as the Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service and moved to their new location in The Hive, Worcester. Training sessions are shortly to be provided to staff on the use of the HER for access to this resource.

The documents captured during the project continue to enable the ongoing enhancement of HER monument records and have transformed the day to day working practices of our Conservation officers. Having rapid access to high quality historic building records has increased Conservation Officer use of the HER enormously, with records generated under the HER21 project scheme, being used several times daily. This has in turn, enabled better informed, more intelligent management of Worcester's historic built fabric, providing a higher level of detail on original building form and even in some cases, intended materials. Our Conservation team, now use the HER as a matter of course and this use is now embedded in every day working practices, with 2 HBSMR licences available to the wider Development Management team. The availability of this resource has also given rise to a change in building-specific HER search responses, with details of relevant historic building applications now included as part of the offer.

The project team recommend that the availability of historic building applications should be investigated on a national level, as a crucial, but likely to be diminishing resource, for management of the historic built environment.