

# Building Archaeological Research Brochure

## What does the buildings archaeologist do?

A building archaeological survey has two main pillars. Pillar one is the survey within the building, which involves making observations and making photographs, sketches and drawings. Pillar two is a study of the literature and archival research, during which process maps, (construction) drawings, photographs and written data are collected. In addition, the buildings archaeologist can compare your property to similar properties at other locations: for instance when it has special characteristics, was designed by an important architect or represents an important movement in architecture.

The buildings archaeologist records the results of the survey in a report. In this report, he communicates his findings in text and images, often including a cultural-historical value assessment. This value assessment describes the elements and aspects that contribute to the historical significance, the character and the readability of the construction history and the history of use. This value assessment can be read from coloured drawings.

You can ask the researcher to provide a verbal or written transfer protocol: an advice regarding the best way to use the survey results. He can also recommend further research for the benefit of the intended (construction) plan.

Where possible, the buildings archaeologist will publish his findings, particularly when the knowledge obtained can be of importance to the field and to other interested parties.

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For information about building and/or monument permits, you can contact your Municipality. The Municipality can also provide you with further information about possible financial compensations and subsidies.

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Building  
archaeological  
research offers a  
handle during  
renovations

## Investing in the new and the old

In many cases, human society is a mixture of the old and the new: four generations live side-by-side, with venerable ancient institutions and companies and the initiatives of yesterday and today. The genesis of our towns and villages goes a long way back and they are still developing as we speak. The future wants us to renew, the past wants us not to forget – and they are both worth looking into and investing in.

The old often has so much character that it defines the identity of a location or area and makes it attractive. But the old is also vulnerable and deserves attention and protection. The careful management of old – and new – buildings and environments is a task set for every owner and user. This brochure primarily deals with old buildings and how we can handle them with respect for their history. The same applies to other old elements in our surroundings: elements in the landscape, urbanistic structures, etc.

## The significance of old buildings

Old buildings have often fulfilled a variety of functions over time: they consequently show many traces of modification and renewal. They tell us how our ancestors lived there and utilised them. They show us forms and ideas from bygone ages. In our wider surroundings too, countless traces can be discovered of earlier interventions, both in the towns and villages and in the landscape.

The objective of buildings archaeology is to recover the story of old buildings and to reconstruct their history on the basis of what they show us today. We can use this information to make better decisions about what we will be doing with these buildings in the future. Which aspects are worth holding on to, and how do we integrate them within a new context?

## What can we learn about historic buildings?

Old buildings reveal their history through their architecture, through the constructions and the structure of the walls, floor joists and roofs, through the building materials used, their floor plans, through their interior finish and use of colour (including the underlying paint layers). From all these details, a buildings archaeologist can read the construction and renovation history, and sometimes also the building's history of use and inhabitation. Old construction and renovation drawings and photographs, deeds of sale, land registry details and tax collection registers can also often serve as important sources of information.

## Which aspects are of historical importance?

The historical study of an area or a building can take a number of different directions. For buildings archaeology, the form, the constructions, the material and the finish of the building itself are the most interesting aspects. Why is something constructed just so, and not differently? Why have the inhabitants changed some aspect? Architectural history is primarily concerned with a building's design ideas and architecture. The wider surroundings are the particular object of study of historical-geographical, urbanistic or garden-historical research: what happened at that location, what did people find important? And for the traces below the surface, there is archaeology. Interdisciplinary research, in which multiple aspects are involved simultaneously and brought in connection with one another, naturally produces the most detailed picture.



## Buildings as sources of historical information

As long as a building is standing somewhere, it bears the traces of its history. In virtually every new renovation and alteration project, historical information is lost, but at the same time, a new layer of history is added. Sometimes, renovated facades, roofs, retention walls and drop ceilings hide all manner of historical detail. Only when a building is torn down, are all tangible traces of its history lost forever.

It's a mistake to think that only protected monuments are of historical interest. On the contrary, virtually every building contains interesting information about our history. And this means all types of buildings: not just churches and castles, private dwellings and farmhouses, windmills and fortifications, but just as well factory buildings from the 19th and 20th century or buildings from the postwar reconstruction period (1945-1965).

## How much building history can be found in your property?

How do you know as a building's owner whether your property represents a 'historical interest'? You can find this out via a targeted survey. This is best carried out before you allow a plan for an alteration or restoration to be drawn up, so that its results can be incorporated in the design as effectively as possible. The best method for this is a building archaeological survey, preferably complete with an analysis and a comparison within a wide context (the 'cultural-historical value assessment'). A building archaeological researcher will be able to explain to you the significance of your property's cultural-historical values, and he or she can offer advice about its preservation, restoration and management.

A building archaeological survey can be a condition set by the Municipality before granting a monument permit or a building permit. To avoid delays in procedures, when you intend to work on your building, it's best to get in touch with the Municipality at an early stage, so that you know which requirements you should meet when applying for a permit.





## Roles and phases in the survey and the building plan

As the owner, you are the most important party: in principle, the 'fate' of the property lies in your hands – even when you only manage and maintain it. As the representative of the owner, the architect will translate your wishes and demands into a design for an alteration or restoration, working from the existing building and its surroundings. Solid building archaeological research starts with a Research Plan (RP) that describes the objective, the depth and the phasing of the survey as well as the report method. In the case of a minor intervention, the RP can have an extremely simple structure – sometimes it is nothing more than a checklist. But then too, if a building archaeological survey is a condition for obtaining a building or monument permit, it is a good idea to immediately present the RP to the responsible authority.

You then look for an independent buildings archaeologist (research bureau) on the basis of the RP. The selected buildings archaeologist carries out the survey, reports his findings and draws up the cultural-historical value assessment. His survey report forms your point of departure and source of inspiration for elaborating your alteration or restoration plans, or for giving shape to your maintenance and management programme. Where necessary, the buildings archaeologist can also provide you with advice in this process.

The Municipality makes use of the same survey report to assess the application for a building or monument permit.

Additional building archaeological research often takes place during the execution of your plan. If for example you order the removal of retention walls and drop ceilings, this will often reveal hidden details that provide even more clarity about the history of your property. If new perspectives arise, it can be desirable to make interim adaptations to the alteration plan. A detailed description of these procedures can be found in the *Guidelines for Building Archaeological Research* (2009).