



Careers & Training in Heritage Construction Skills

August 2024

What are heritage construction projects?

Heritage construction projects involve works to older and historic buildings. These buildings may be protected through listing or another statutory protection. Works could include maintenance, repair & renewal, restoration, or new work such as an extension. These projects need specialist skills, knowledge and materials to ensure that the original building keeps its special character and that the building fabric continues to work in the way that it was intended.

You might also use heritage construction skills on new build projects, particularly if the building is located in a conservation area, or for aesthetic or environmental reasons.

Why get involved in heritage construction?

There is a shortage of skilled heritage craftspeople working in the UK and Ireland; and there is also only a small number of accredited conservation professionals working in NI. Heritage construction is a rewarding career, which will provide continual opportunities to learn new skills and challenge you to find solutions. Craftspeople will have the opportunity to develop from an apprentice to experienced master craftsman, and craftspeople can continue to develop to become supervisors, academic experts, artists/sculptors, trainers, consultants and more.

What could I be doing?

As with general construction projects, heritage construction projects need a variety of different roles and skillsets, from specialist craftspeople to supervisors, engineers, electricians, plumbers, architects, and surveyors. Regardless of your role, every building project will be different, ranging from monuments, to cottages, castles to mills, and everything in-between. Each will have different construction methods, details and levels of historic significance that will offer unique opportunities and challenges.





Craft Profile: Traditional Roofing

Roofing an older or historic property is likely to require specialist skills and knowledge. From traditional slating to leadwork, or installing and repairing metal roofing such as copper, there are a variety of materials and specialisms needed to maintain our built environment.

There is a shortage in traditional roofers in Northern Ireland, and the need for traditional slating and leadwork is widespread from small cottages to large public buildings.

Craft Profile: Stonemasonry

Stonemasonry is the preparation and installation of stonework to a building or site, and these skills are in demand both on high-end modern buildings and older structures. Traditionally, banker masons would prepare and carve the stone whilst fixer masons would install the stone on site; however today stonemasons often are required to do both.

Stonemasons could be working on a variety of structures from boundary walls and more modest vernacular cottages using rubble stone, to monuments and grand historic buildings using ashlar blocks and undertaking inscriptions and carving.

Craft Profile: Heritage Carpentry & Joinery

Carpentry and joinery are both wood occupations, but carpentry is undertaken on-site, whilst joinery is workshop based. Heritage carpentry and joinery skills are often required on both bespoke new-build properties, and for repair of historic buildings with timber elements; from roof trusses to partitions, panelling, skirting boards, doors and window frames, and much more.

Craft Profile: Specialist Decorating & Interior Conservation

Older buildings require a knowledge of appropriate materials and methods, as well as quality workmanship. Decorating and conservation of interior finishes is needed, particularly in historic buildings, and includes many specialisms such as paint analysis, painting, gilding, wood graining, marbling and more.

Whilst there are specialist conservation institutions that provide degree level training, strong technical skills are required, which can be achieved through a Level 3 qualification in painting and decorating before seeking employment with specialist firms to continue to build your skills, or furthering your studies.

You can find out more about available apprenticeship training for these and additional occupations through our website <https://www.citbni.org.uk/Careers/Apprenticeships/Find-apprenticeship-training.aspx>



Training & Upskilling Opportunities

Bursaries & Upskilling Opportunities

If you are interested in gaining new skills for heritage construction, there are organisations that offer funded upskilling opportunities, and grants to fund training. Please note, the list below is not exhaustive and may be subject to change:

Heritage Crafts promotes traditional heritage crafts, and offers small grants to fund projects which support and promote endangered crafts. <https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/>

The Kings Foundation work with Department for Communities and the Heritage Council to deliver the All Ireland Skills Programme. It is a full-time funded programme which gives practical experience in heritage building skills and the opportunity to work towards a Level 3 NVQ in Heritage Skills. <https://www.kings-foundation.org/>

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) offer annual SPAB Fellowship opportunities. It is a full-time funded training programme for early career architects, surveyors and engineers to gain the skills and knowledge they need to work with traditional buildings. <https://www.spab.org.uk/>

Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QUEST) offers funding of up to £18,000 for training & education of craftspeople, including support for scholarships, apprenticeships, and emerging makers. <https://www.quest.org.uk/>

Institute of Conservator-Restorers in Ireland offers grants and bursaries for education and continued professional development in specialist skills. <https://www.icriconservation.ie/>

Livery Companies & Craft Guilds are professional trade associations which may offer training, apprenticeships or bursaries in your traditional craft. You can contact the livery company associated with your trade to find out more about opportunities. You can find a database of livery companies here: <https://liverycommittee.org/about/livery-companies-and-guilds/livery-companies-database/>

National Lottery Heritage Fund is actively promoting traditional skills training as part of the projects it funds. The Heritage Fund often share job opportunities through social media, or you could get in touch with the Heritage Fund in NI to find out about training opportunities that may be available in current projects. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/>

Recognising Prior-Learning

If you are a heritage craftsman who has gained skills and experience outside of colleges and training providers, you can recognise this learning through assessment to achieve an accredited qualification. The Historic Environment Division NI Heritage Skills Centre in Moira is an accredited assessment centre for a number of heritage occupations. You can contact centre manager Owen Mort on Owen.Mort@communities-ni.gov.uk to discuss opportunities for assessment.

Training

Professional construction occupations, such as engineers, architects and surveyors have conservation pathways within professional bodies that allow you to achieve conservation accreditation. You can contact the relevant professional bodies to find out more - a list of these and other useful contacts is available here: <https://www.citbni.org.uk/Links.aspx> please note that this list is not exhaustive.

If you are considering a career in a heritage craft occupation, such as painting and decorating, joinery or bricklaying, there are limited direct pathways to achieve a specialist accredited heritage qualification in Northern Ireland at this time. However, you can gain transferable skills and an accredited qualification through colleges and training providers offering similar occupations within the Apprenticeship NI Programme. All age apprenticeships are available, with no upper age limit to access learning. This will open up employment opportunities, and you can seek employment with a contractor that undertakes heritage work to build your skillset. Continuing your professional development and seeking out upskilling opportunities will help you to gain knowledge and skills to apply to heritage projects. You can find out more about apprenticeships and traineeships at <https://www.citbni.org.uk/Careers.aspx>

Alternatively, if you wish to travel to attend university, there are specialist Universities in Great Britain and the EU which deliver courses in crafts skills and conservation.

About CITB NI

As the Industry Training Board for construction CITB NI's role is to encourage the adequate training of those employed or intending to be employed in the construction industry, to improve the skills and productivity of the industry, and to deliver a safe, professional and fully qualified workforce across the whole of the construction industry in Northern Ireland. The organisation provides a range of services including identifying training needs, encouraging and advising on training, provision of training grants, research, standards & qualifications, careers information, and policy development.

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