



GHOSTS OF INDUSTRY

**How to record ghost signs
in Northamptonshire**



Introduction

Citizen scientists in Northamptonshire are recording historic painted shop and business signs, some that have survived for around 150 years, through Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record and MOLA's Ghosts of Industry project. The project is funded through the MOLA Impact Acceleration Account, made possible by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Now known as ghost signs - because the local industries and products they advertised often no longer exist - these were a common form of advertising during the 1800s and 1900s. Many survive today, some in plain sight and some harder to spot, but are very fragile and easy to overlook as an archaeological resource.

These signs can give us a glimpse into what life and work in our towns and villages used to be like. They also help us study changing trends in products, local industries and businesses - a layer of history that is less often recorded.

However, as they are painted, ghost signs are easily damaged and can often be lost through decay or development. Given the temporary nature of these signs, it is now vital that they are recorded archaeologically and analysed to see what we can learn about an area's past.

This is a step-by-step guide to fill out the Ghost Signs recording form. If you have any issues or questions, please email ghostsigns@mola.org.uk.

The Ghost Signs recording form has been designed by MOLA archaeologists, Charlotte Walker from the Historic Environment Record at West Northamptonshire County Council with support from Historic England and citizen scientists from Northamptonshire.

MOLA	
Ghost Sign Recording Form	
Required fields marked with *	
Volunteer Initials*	Date of record*
Sign location (building address) *	
Direction Sign is Facing*	
☐ N ☐ NE ☐ NW ☐ S	☐ SE ☐ SW ☐ E ☐ W
Condition of Sign (Tick all that apply):	
☐ Obstruction - man-made ☐ Obstruction - vegetation ☐ Surface cracking ☐ Surface loss	☐ Pollution / staining ☐ Graffiti / vandalism ☐ Restored/New sign ☐ Flaking paintwork
Legibility:	
1 - Very Poor ☐	2 - Poor ☐
3 - Fair ☐	4 - Good ☐
5 - Very Good ☐	
Overlapping Signs?	
Yes ☐	No ☐ Unsure ☐
Colour of sign	
Background 1:	R O Y G B P W BI Gr Br NONE
Background 2:	
Text 1:	
Text 2:	
Any other comments:	

Shape (tick all that apply)	
☐ Rectangle landscape ☐ Rectangle portrait ☐ Square ☐ Oval	☐ Circular ☐ Irregular ☐ Corners Indented ☐ Other - define if possible
Sign transcription	
Text type (tick all that apply):	
☐ Sans Serif ☐ Serif ☐ Italicised ☐ Capitals ☐ Sentence Case	
Building already recorded with HER? ☐ Yes ☐ No	HER Number:
Related industry/Business Type on the sign	
☐ Brewing ☐ Product ☐ Workshop / factory - define further if possible	☐ Service / merchant / business ☐ Shop ☐ Other industry:

Brief description of building	
Building material:	
Brick ☐ Stone ☐ Concrete ☐ Other ☐	
Roof material:	
Slate ☐ Tile ☐ Stone ☐ Thatch ☐ Metal ☐ Asbestos ☐ Other ☐	
Number of storeys:	
1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4+ ☐	
Current building use	
Industrial ☐ Factory ☐ Shoe factory ☐ Warehouse ☐ Engineering works ☐ Workshop ☐ Brewery ☐ Builders merchants ☐ Builders yard ☐ Other	Commercial ☐ Shop ☐ Cinema ☐ Bank ☐ Café ☐ Public House ☐ Other Domestic ☐ House ☐ Terrace ☐ Other Building Other:
Former building use	
Industrial ☐ Factory ☐ Shoe factory ☐ Warehouse ☐ Engineering works ☐ Workshop ☐ Brewery ☐ Builders merchants ☐ Builders yard ☐ Other	Commercial ☐ Shop ☐ Cinema ☐ Bank ☐ Café ☐ Public House ☐ Other Domestic ☐ House ☐ Terrace ☐ Other Building Other:



About the recording form

The recording form is available as:

- The paper version (first drafts) – you can request this via email for home-printing or check with your local Northamptonshire library (available depending on demand).
- The digital version (final drafts) – Access the digital form at ghosts.mola.org.uk. All data from the paper form must be uploaded to the digital form. Completed paper forms can be recycled.

Recommendations for recording

- Bring a friend - we recommend working in pairs so someone can keep an eye on traffic / obstacles etc.
- Bring a camera or smartphone for photos – take a good photograph and then fill form in a safe place (at home / in a café), and consult Google Maps for location information.

Working in public

If you are asked about the project, explain that this is a community project documenting Ghost Signs and direct them to the website ghosts.mola.org.uk for further information. If someone is not happy about having photographs taken of their property, respect this and be courteous. If necessary (e.g. you need to get closer to get a photograph), ask for permission.

Wear sensible shoes & weather appropriate clothing for outdoors.

Completing the paper form

Basic details

Initials + Date of recording - This can help us to contact you if there are any questions about the form. In the Digital Form there will be an option to give an email address.

Sign Location - Use the address for the building the sign sits on. This address can be gained through visual observation, Google Maps etc.

Direction sign is facing - Use cardinal points e.g. north, east, south or west, or intercardinal points e.g. north-east, south-east etc. You can use a map, compass or Google Maps to assess this orientation.

Initials*	Date of record*
Sign location (building address) *	
Direction Sign is Facing*	
☐ N ☐ NE ☐ NW ☐ S	☐ SE ☐ SW ☐ E ☐ W

Condition and legibility

Condition - Are there obstructions in front of the signs? Is the wall or paintwork crumbling or flaking away? Tick all that apply.

Legibility - How visible is the sign at time of recording? Use the examples below to score it 1 (very poor to 5 (very good).

Overlapping signs - Are there previous Ghost Signs underneath a newer one? Depending on detail available you might need 2 forms.

Condition of Sign (Tick all that apply):				
☐ Obstruction – man-made ☐ Obstruction- vegetation ☐ Surface cracking ☐ Surface loss	☐ Pollution / <u>staining</u> ; ☐ Graffiti / vandalism ☐ Restored/New sign ☐ Flaking paintwork			
Legibility*:				
1 – Very Poor ☐	2- Poor ☐	3 – Fair ☐	4- Good ☐	5 - Very Good ☐
Overlapping Signs?				
<u>Yes</u> ☐ No ☐ Unsure ☐				

Legibility 1 – very poor



This is the example of a very poor, totally illegible ghost sign. There's some very patchy faded grey paintwork and an indication of a block of paler brickwork.

Legibility 2 – poor

This is an example of a poorly preserved sign as you can only make out one word or a few letters (bear in mind that most ghost signs have at least three words).



Legibility 3 – fair

This is at least partially legible. You can clearly see some of the words, but not all due to flaking paint.



Legibility 4 – good

This is an example of a good legibility ghost sign. You can see multiple words can make out what it says. But there is flaking paintwork so not every letter can be seen clearly.

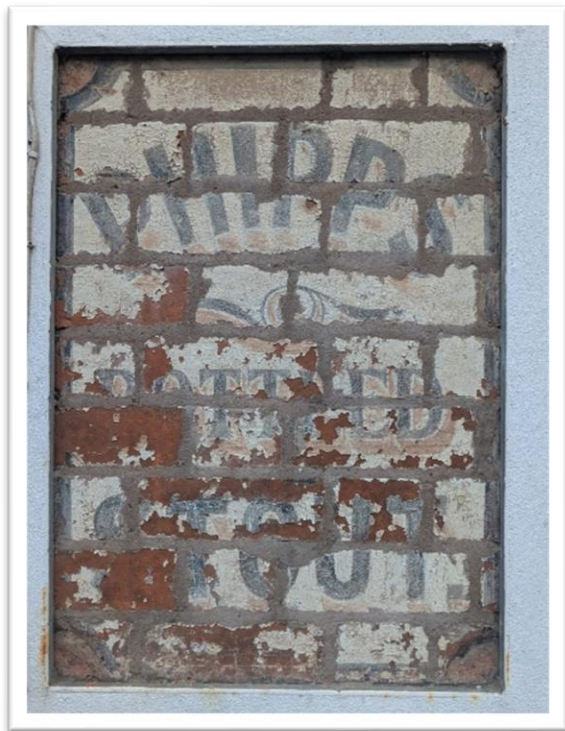


Legibility 5 – very good

This example is very good in terms of legibility because it is a restored ghost sign.



Colour



	Colour of sign										
	R	O	Y	G	B	P	W	Bl	Gr	Br	NONE
Background 1:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Background 2:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Text 1:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Text 2:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Any other comments:											

Selecting which colours make up the ghost signs is a somewhat interpretative exercise. On the paper form you can circle the colours, in the digital form you just need to select the name of the colours.

If you feel the writing would have been black even though it's grey now, just make clear that that's your interpretation. Account fully and as accurately as possible for what you see and then add comments for what you think. This is best done in pairs or a group to select the most accurate colours and this can be checked from the photographs as well.

Shape, Text & Transcription

There might be some very distinctive shapes – if it is too complicated put MISCELLANEOUS (MISC) in the comments box. Photographs will support this further.

For the transcriptions: Use a question mark in brackets to indicate damaged or uncertain text, such as: Rob(?ert) Smit(?h) – use question marks when you are not sure.

Use square brackets to indicate missing but inferred text, such as missing text that can be guessed with certainty based on the surviving text, or your own knowledge for example: [D]ied on th[e] 21st of Novemb[er] 1884.

For text style: Use the tick boxes to indicate any text types:

● Sans serif

- Serif
- *Italicised*
- CAPITALS
- Sentence Case



Shape (tick all that apply)	
☐ Rectangle landscape ☐ Rectangle portrait ☒ Square ☐ Oval	☐ Circular ☐ Irregular ☐ Corners Indented ☒ Other – define if possible
Sign transcription	
PHIPPS [Decorative motif] [B]OTT[L]ED [S]TOUT	
Text Type (tick all that apply):	
☐ Sans Serif ☒ Serif ☐ Italicised ☐ Capitals ☒ Sentence Case	

Finding the HER number

You can check if the building is already recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER) at her.northamptonshire.gov.uk/map

Use the search function to look for the address (such as Overstone Rd).



Northamptonshire's Historic Environment Record

[Home](#) [Search](#) [Map](#) [Resources](#) [Projects](#) [Contact](#)

[Home](#) > Search

Search

Select which type of record you wish to search, then enter a search term and click the Search button.

☒ Monuments ☐ Events ☐ Designations ☐ Sources

Enter search text

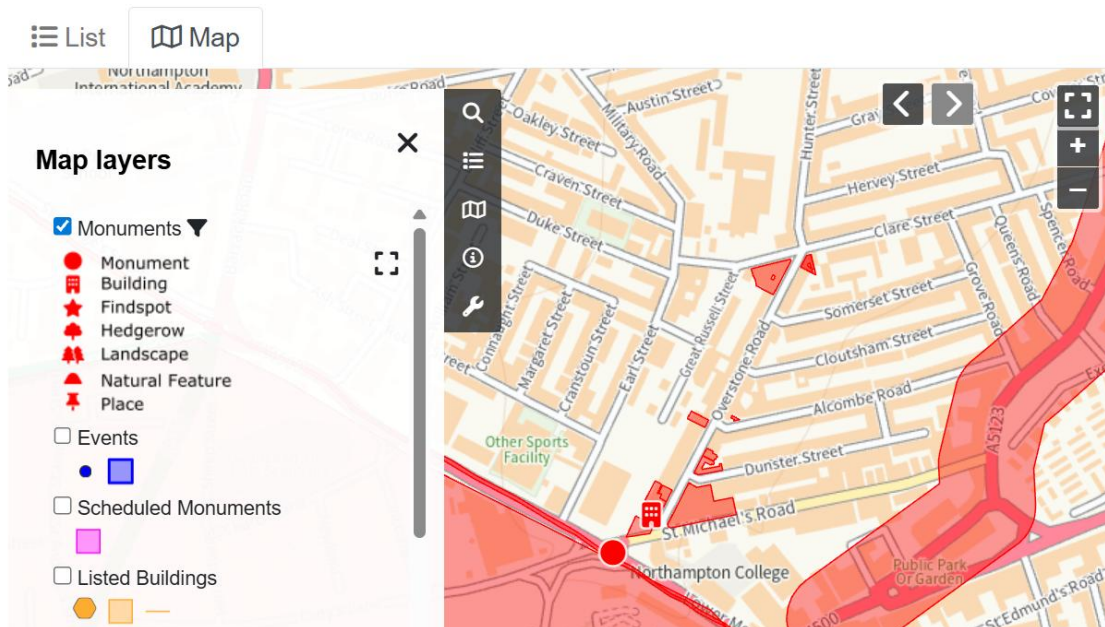


☐ Exact match only?

For more complex searches then you can use our [Advanced Search page](#).

If you get lots of results, filter to 'monuments' and then switch to the map view.

Here you can double check whether the building on which your ghost sign is painted is on the HER. If it is, this will be indicated by a red polygon, which you can click.



From here you can select the record, see the building's Record Number and the record itself.

In this case the HER number is 1160/64 and this can be recorded into the form. You can also note some interesting facts about the building.



Northamptonshire's Historic Environment Record

[Home](#)[Search](#)[Map](#)[Resources](#)[Projects](#)[Contact](#)

Building record 1160/64 - Former G.T. Hawkins 'Waukerz' Factory, Hornby & West Shoe Factory

[Print](#)

Please read our [guidance about the use of Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record data](#).

Summary

Former boot and shoe factory, at present vacant. Built in several phases by two different



Related industry or business type

This section is for recording the type of industry or business the sign is advertising.

‘Service / merchant / business’ could include, for example, a decorator, plumber, or tool maker.

If the sign does not fit into the defined categories, please use the ‘Other industry’ and provide a written description of the sign’s related industry or business type.

There should be space for you to give other comments, or you can add them to the notes section at the end.

The building

This section is for recording information about the building.

The building - what materials is the building made from?

Roof material - might be better discerned from a photograph afterwards or using Google maps street view.

Number of storeys - can be discerned from a photo.

Current building use - what is the building being used as today?

Former building use - may require research - you could investigate this in the comfort of your own home or in a café or library using the Internet. The HER map may be helpful. Map regression can be used to add additional information to your records. The National Library of Scotland website provides everything you need: maps.nls.uk/geo/ - we recommend looking at the Georeferenced maps which allow you to overlay historic maps on top of modern maps.

Further notes / research - please include any historic notes including those on Facebook pages that or links to posts on Facebook that have have details or memories about the building - anything that is in the public domain.

Please don’t share if from a private group and ask permission where possible. If people are intrigued but don’t want to share to you directly, we recommend you direct them to the Ghost Signs project website ghosts.mola.org.uk – they may like to record it themselves.



Brief description of building	
Building material: Brick ☐ Stone ☐ Concrete ☐ Other ☐	
Roof material: Slate ☐ Tile ☐ Stone ☐ Thatch ☐ Metal ☐ Asbestos ☐ Other ☐	
Number of storeys: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4+ ☐	
Current building use	
<i>Industrial</i> ☐ Factory ☐ Shoe factory ☐ Warehouse ☐ Engineering works ☐ Workshop ☐ Brewery ☐ <u>Builders</u> merchants ☐ Builders yard ☐ Other	<i>Commercial</i> ☐ Shop ☐ Cinema ☐ Bank ☐ Café ☐ Public House ☐ Other <i>Domestic</i> ☐ House ☐ Terrace ☐ Other Building Other:
Former building use	
<i>Industrial</i> ☐ Factory ☐ Shoe factory ☐ Warehouse ☐ Engineering works ☐ Workshop ☐ Brewery ☐ <u>Builders</u> merchants ☐ Builders yard ☐ Other	<i>Commercial</i> ☐ Shop ☐ Cinema ☐ Bank ☐ Café ☐ Public House ☐ Other <i>Domestic</i> ☐ House ☐ Terrace ☐ Other Building Other:

Completing the digital form

Find it online: ghosts.mola.org.uk

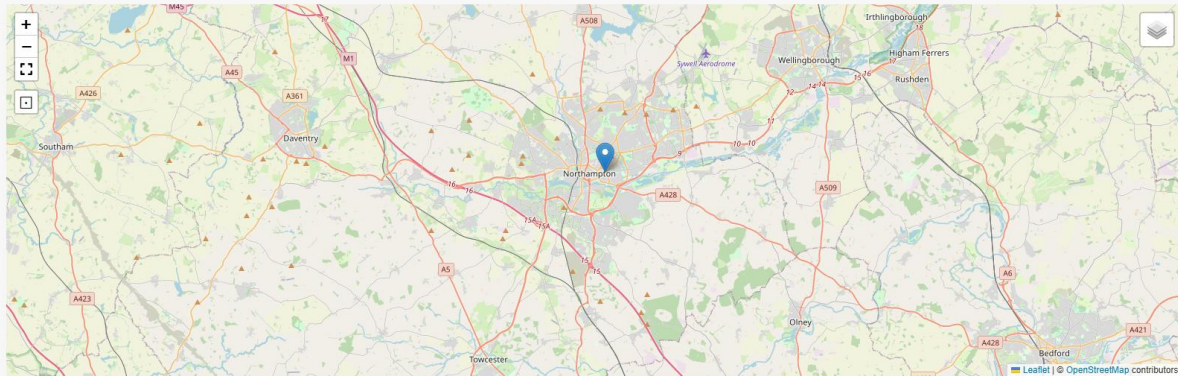
Ghosts of Industry

[Home](#) [Submit New Record](#)

Home

Welcome to the volunteers website for the Ghosts of Industry project. To contribute new data for the project please click on the Submit New Record menu option above.

This website is only for the use of volunteers on the project, to view the final data please use the [Northamptonshire HER](#).



Use the digital form to collate your data to be uploaded to the HER.

On the digital form, you can pinpoint where the ghost sign is so that others can see it has already been recorded.

Any photographs that you've taken can be uploaded here too. You can do this on your smartphone. If you are not able to use the digital form for any reason, please just let us know via email at ghostsigns@mola.org.uk.

How to find ghost signs

- Finding Ghost Signs might be a case of looking around your local area, there are also some on the Historic England map to get you started: <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/features/ghost-signs/>.
- Keep an eye on the Ghost Signs website in case the sign you are looking at has already been recorded.
- And after the project is over, look out for them on the HER map: <https://her.northamptonshire.gov.uk/map>.
- If you encounter any issues, please do let us know via email ghostsigns@mola.org.uk