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Typ.ologies: Reframing Ireland's vernacular letterform through the lens of heritage

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Typ.ologies: Reframing Ireland's vernacular letterform through the lens of heritage

Tip.ologias: Reenquadrando a forma vernácula das letras da Irlanda através das lentes do patrimônio

Dee Maher Ring

signwriting, vernacular letterforms, graphic heritage, critical heritage studies, heritage value

Since the late 1800s, vernacular letterforms have been vital components of the traditional shopfronts of Ireland, enlivening, place-making, and inspiring dialogue with streetscapes. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage identifies, records, and evaluates Ireland's post-1700 architectural heritage. While the state initiative appraises architecturally significant shopfronts, it typically overlooks the critical signage element. This research aims to bridge this gap by documenting, mapping, and interpreting the existing vernacular letterforms in Kilkenny as a paradigm. Through the lens of heritage, the study seeks to construct a case for preserving, promoting, and advocating for vernacular letterforms and the traditional craft of signwriting. Signwriting straddles art, craft, and design dissolving creative hierarchies yet remains academically underexplored. Raising awareness and advancing the craft's criticality may influence local and national policy. With the current economic climate threatening to permanently alter Ireland's typographic landscapes, academic scrutiny of this rich graphic heritage has never been more crucial.

escrita de sinais, formas de letras vernáculas, patrimônio gráfico, estudos críticos de patrimônio, valor patrimonial

Desde o final de 1800, as letras vernáculas têm sido componentes vitais das vitrines tradicionais da Irlanda, animando, criando lugares e inspirando o diálogo com as paisagens urbanas. O Inventário Nacional do Patrimônio Arquitetônico identifica, registra e avalia o patrimônio arquitetônico da Irlanda pós-1700. Embora a iniciativa estatal avalie fachadas de lojas arquitetonicamente significativas, normalmente ignora o elemento crítico de sinalização. Esta pesquisa visa preencher essa lacuna documentando, mapeando e interpretando as formas de letras vernáculas existentes em Kilkenny como um paradigma. Através das lentes do património, o estudo procura construir um caso para preservar, promover e defender as formas das letras vernáculas e a arte tradicional da escrita de sinais. A sinalização abrange arte, artesanato e design, dissolvendo hierarquias criativas, mas permanece academicamente pouco explorada. Aumentar a consciencialização e aumentar a criticidade do artesanato pode influenciar a política local e nacional. Com o actual clima económico ameaçando alterar permanentemente as paisagens tipográficas da Irlanda, o escrutínio académico deste rico património gráfico nunca foi tão crucial.

1 Introduction

Since the late 1800s, vernacular letterforms have been an integral part of Ireland's traditional shopfronts, enlivening, place-making, and enticing dialogue with streetscapes (Rothery, 1978). Established in 1990, The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is tasked with the identification, documentation, and evaluation of the "...post 1700 architectural heritage of Ireland" (Buildings of Ireland, 2023). Despite the appraisal of architecturally significant shopfronts, the critical signage component is typically overlooked. To address this gap, my doctoral research aims to document, map, analyse, and interpret the extant vernacular letterforms in Kilkenny City[1] as a paradigm.

In this short paper, the first section will attempt to establish the context for my PhD research,[2] while the second will cover field research initiatives undertaken in Kilkenny (Ireland), that offer a microcosm of the broader issues at play. Finally, I intend to articulate how project discoveries are shaping the development of an emergent theoretical framework.

My research was driven by the demise of Kilkenny's vernacular lettering on traditional shopfronts.[3] This trend has been precipitated by factors such as the influx of high street chains, technological advancements (Rothery, 1978), typographic homogenisation (Järlehed & Jaworski, 2015), and the current economic climate. What I argue is that the forfeiture of this graphic legacy could be lessened, if not prevented, by building a case to safeguard, preserve, advocate for, and better understand their value as cultural artefacts and heritage assets while they still exist. In conjunction with determining the status of vernacular letterforms, my thesis will present a historiography of Kilkenny signwriting, documenting the craft and the artisans, from the turn of the 20th century to the present.

Despite their potential to be understood as part of a broader design heritage (Farias, 2021), these unique letterforms and the associated craft have never been more at risk (Finizola et al., 2013). The retired London Signwriter Richard Gregory states that "...while not quite extinct, Signwriters are effectively an endangered species." (Gregory, n.d.) Baines and Dixon declare that "...the signwriters themselves have all but disappeared..." (Baines & Dixon, 2003, p. 143). Similarly, Farias considers "...the eventual disappearance of people who have mastered original lettering styles" (Farias, 2021, p. 249).

Environmental lettering is a field observed by design and typography scholars since the 1960s, stemming from the pioneering work of Nicolete Gray, who declared unequivocally "We need to show [them] what good lettering is, and the ways in which it can enrich, rather than deface, our surroundings" (Gray, 1974, pp. 251–252). Furthermore, Gray asserted that vernacular letterforms socially enrich the environment "...through a creative variety of all appropriate letter styles" (Gray, 1974, p. 247). Pertinent research for further analysis lies in the work of Alan Bartram (1976, 1978), Jock Kinneir (1980), Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon (2003) and as previously cited, Nicolete Gray (1960, 1974, 1986).[4]

1 Kilkenny is a city in the province of Leinster in Ireland's South East. The current population is c. 22,000, home to the Design & Craft Council Ireland, Kilkenny Design Workshops (1963–1988) and one of Europe's World Craft Council Craft cities.

2 Maher Ring, Dee. Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship award: Towards a methodology for documenting Ireland's graphic heritage of vernacular shopfront lettering: A Case Study of Kilkenny Signwriting (2022–2026).

3 Lettering that is located primarily on the fascia or signboard that typically houses the proprietor's or business name.

4 More recent key texts: Robert G. Harland (Harland, 2015; Harland & Xu, 2021; Pan et al., 2022), Anna Paula Silva Gouveia et al. (2009), Fatima Finizola et al. (Finizola & Coutinho, 2009; Finizola et al., 2013; Finizola et al., 2018), Fernanda Martins (2017), Priscila L. Farias (Gouveia et al., 2009; Farias et al., 2018; Farias & Aynsley, 2021; Farias, 2014; Farias, 2021), Kwok (2021).

Although the subject of traditional shopfront architecture has been examined to some extent in Ireland (Rothery, 1978; Murphy, 2019), the signs and letterforms remain academically unexplored. As the current volatile economic climate threatens to permanently alter Ireland's streetscapes, academic scrutiny of this rich vernacular graphic legacy has never been more crucial.

Several projects exalt the splendour of vernacular Irish shopfronts and letterforms, namely the *Kells Type Trail*[5] and Trevor Finnegan's *Our Type*[6] photographic documentation project, whereas James Kelly redraws encountered vernacular letterforms through his project *Irish Type*.[7] My research, however, aims to present a systematic, standardised methodology for recording and interrogating these artefacts to facilitate comparative analyses and better understand their significance as design heritage.

Seldom has the vernacular letterform been systematically documented and critically examined from the perspective of heritage, which is what my research will do. Past studies have scrutinised the typographic visual form (Baines & Dixon, 2003), nomenclature and methods of organising (Marshall, 2020), for example, but rarely the heritage significance. This lack of broader heritage understanding may have resulted in the loss of significant assets critical to determining the history of extant artefacts in addition to appreciating their relevance within Ireland's cultural legacy (Farias, 2020).

1.1 The Case of Kilkenny City Signage

The demise of Kilkenny's rich heritage of hand-crafted fascia signs, together with the customary lamentation on the Kilkenny Down Memory Lane Facebook[8] page, prompted a study to uncover the truth surrounding this loss.

In August 2020, several factors converged to inspire the notion to preserve, promote and advocate for vernacular letterforms on Kilkenny's streetscapes. Restrictive Covid-19 pandemic measures prompted reassessments, where the quotidian was observed in a new light, periodically with new-found consciousness. Beyond the immediacy of home, social media platforms provided a social network lifeline.

A serendipitous Facebook interaction with the Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan TD,[9] resulted in a written proposal in September 2020. Apprehensive that the letterforms alone would not merit documentation, my letter emphasised the architectural shopfront attributes, anticipating that this approach would lend gravitas to my proposal.

> As many of these treasures have already been lost in the name of progress and modernity, it is imperative that we do our utmost to document, preserve and conserve that which remains. The significance of these vernacular, traditional shopfronts from a heritage, architectural,

5 HOME – Kellstypetrail.Com (n.d.). Annual type and lettering festival founded by Mark Smith of Kells County Meath in 2010.
6 Our Type (n.d.).
7 Irish Type (@irishtype) | Instagram (n.d.).

8 Kilkenny Down Memory Lane | Facebook (n.d.).

9 Teachta Dála abbr. TD, is a member of Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament).

streetscape and visual culture perspective should not be underestimated (Letter to Minister Noonan, 16/09/20).

Fortunately, the Minister responded positively and offered his support. The challenge now was to devise a strategy to accomplish this objective.

Subsequently, I approached Kilkenny County Council's Heritage Officer and proposed a systematic audit to record the status of vernacular lettering to potentially demonstrate the tangible issues contributing to its disappearance. With an effectively designed methodological framework, I anticipated the gathered data could potentially demonstrate this in quantifiable terms.

Local authority policy documents, from Ireland and the United Kingdom, were instrumental in devising the pilot audit system. Since this was the first project of its kind in Ireland, my doctoral research thus far has looked to comparable international studies and scholarship to contextualise and substantiate this work.

Amongst the questions that prompted and directed the project data collection particulars were; Was it possible to develop a system for cataloguing and appraising vernacular letterforms to address the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage interstice? What specific factors were contributing to the decline of traditional letterforms? How many hand-crafted signs remained? Who were the artisans that crafted these signs? Was there an archetypal Kilkenny letterform?

2 KTSSP (Kilkenny Traditional Shopfront Signage Project) 2021

10 Maher Ring (2021, unpublished).

11 Kilkenny Traditional Shopfronts Project – Creative Ireland Programme (n.d.).

12 2019 Kilkenny County Council initiatives include the Heritage Office's commissioned "A Photographic Audit of Kilkenny City's Traditional Shopfronts" and the "Shopfronts Through the Ages Kilkenny Digital Archive" (c. 1987–2018). The "Streetscapes of Kilkenny City" photographic survey was possibly conducted by Bolton Street students c. 1969.

13 Type and typology provided a lens through which to examine the built environment, allowing for the identification of distinctions and connections between artefacts.

Following an initial, written proposal and subsequent consultation, Kilkenny County Council's former Heritage Officer, Dearbhala Ledwidge commissioned the "Kilkenny Traditional Shopfront Signage Project"[10] pilot audit in April 2021. This project was supported by the Creative Ireland Programme of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media,[11] further endorsing the notion that this unique, overlooked element of Ireland's cultural, social, and built heritage merited documentation.[12]

Once the project scope and deliverables were established with the Heritage Officer, I then devised the standardised project datasets, data fields, and appraisal criteria for recording and analysis for approval before commencing fieldwork. Given the absence of an exemplar, past heritage-led surveys were scrutinised to guide and delineate the data collection process.

The audit objectives were to design and test a pilot methodology for the collection of shopfront signage data, including the identification of appraisal criteria and development of a database template. Furthermore, to identify, document, and classify the traditional, historic shopfront signs on 53 shopfronts in Kilkenny City by employing the pilot methodology to generate data and establish a typology[13] that could potentially inform future Council policy on shopfront signage.

Data was captured and generated per address by means of *Fascia Signage Classification*, which included incised and gilded, hand painted and digitally output, for instance. Additionally, *Principal Lettering Classification* comprised categories of Serif, Sans Serif, Decorative and Calligraphic to include Script, Blackletter and Gaelic. The *Signage Appraisal* endeavoured to methodically analyse the current fascia lettering and sign with formulated *Standardised Appraisal Criteria* which included identification of letterform style, anatomy analysis, manufacturing method, spacing, and scale contrasted with fascia and shopfront.

The pilot survey sampled 53 locations, and with the easing of Government Covid-19 travel restrictions, fieldwork began in May 2021. A rudimentary database was established in the approved Microsoft Excel format, with one datasheet record generated per location and linked to the main index for ease of navigation. The standardised data fields included *Name*, *Address*, ITM *Coordinates*, *Current Use*, *Signage Language*, and *Manufacturing Method*, for example. Each datasheet comprised an appraisal of the current signage and links to images from the Planning Department photographic surveys (1987–2018) on the "Kilkenny Shopfronts Through the Ages"[14] digital repository. To further enrich the dataset, NIAH and local authority Record of Protected Structure specifics were captured, in addition to hyperlinks to Kilkenny Archaeological Society "Streets of Kilkenny"[15] records.

3 KTSSP findings

In this sample study, 53 shopfronts were audited, interpreted, and recorded. The project ran from April to August 2021, with site visits in May and August to collect photographic data, make observations, and investigate the materiality of signs in situ. The main objective of this work programme was to develop and test a standardised methodology for cataloguing traditional shopfront signage. This included a searchable record into which the identified units and associated data could be inputted into standardised datasheets, along with supplementary sources, to produce a rich and comprehensive heritage record.

The observed signs were diverse in form and materiality, with a high prevalence of applied/raised, modern typographic letterforms. Given the County Council's previous efforts to highlight Kilkenny's rich heritage of historic shopfronts, this finding was unexpected, as was the vacancy rate of 13.2%.

Kilkenny Signwriting remains undocumented apart from The Kilkenny Signwriting Project[16] brochure, the 1978 Kilkenny Arts Festival initiative led by the Kilkenny Design Workshops[17] Vice Chair Gerald Tyler, which "…hoped to act as a catalyst to conserve the character of the Irish town". This discovery prompted Oral History Network of Ireland workshop attendance to develop key skills for conducting primary research to address this deficiency.

14 Kilkenny County Library (2019).

15 Kilkenny Archaeological Society (n.d.). "The People and the businesses of the city of Kilkenny in the 1950 to 1980s are brought back to life in a series of articles originally published in the Old Kilkenny Review. They are written record of how the streets must have appeared in the 1960s and can be used as a Street Directory. They also record the living memory of that period, the street lore, the stories that everyone knew."

16 The Kilkenny Signwriting Project – Kilkenny Arts Week (1978).

17 Our Story | Kilkenny Design (n.d.).

For generations, the Quigley family name was synonymous with the craft of signwriting in Kilkenny. Although principally retired from the craft today, several of their hand-crafted signs remain on Kilkenny's streetscapes. One such sign is the gold, casual script of Godfrey T. Greene, at 1 John's Bridge (otherwise named Horseleap Slip and Bateman Quay), originally hand-painted by Pat Quigley circa 1987 (Figure 1).


Figure 1 Godfrey T. Greene, 1 John's Bridge, Eircode R95 N678 © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2021).

One of Kilkenny's most prolific and skilled signwriters, the late Eoin Quigley, achieved international acclaim. Quigley and Eugene McGuinness' Kilkenny Sign Company created several of the city's extant applied lettering fascias from the 1980s and 1990s. The applied, gilded, PVC uppercase, extended serif letterforms at M Bambrick, Troysgate House is one example (Figure 2).


Figure 2 M. Bambrick, Troysgate House, 1–2 Troy's Gate, Eircode R95 AD60 © Dee Maher Ring (2022).

Another noteworthy specimen crafted during this partnership c. 1985, consisting of incised and gilded, capital serif letterforms, and reverse glass gilded serif letters, with a rare instance of mahogany wood graining technique, can be seen at Kearns, 6 Ballybought Street (Figure 3).
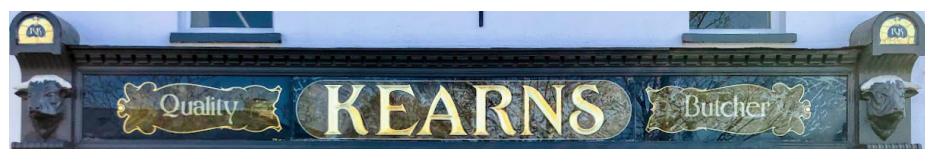
Figure 3 Kearns, 6 Ballybought Street, Eircode R95 Y771 © Dee Maher Ring (2022)

At the time of this survey, Kilkenny had but one known practising signwriter, Sos Alaverdyan, whose work can be seen at Tynan's Bridge House Bar (Figure 4). This façade was extensively refurbished in November 2021, with the original letterforms repainted onto the new
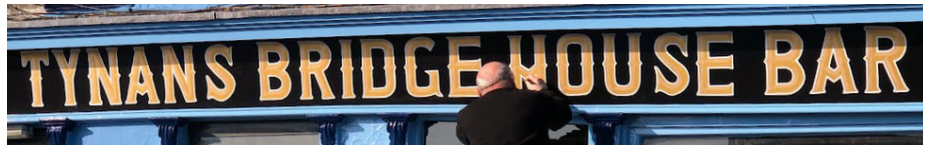
Figure 4 Tynan's Bridge House Bar, 2 John's Bridge, Eircode R95 WY88
© Dee Maher Ring (2022).

18 gov.ie – Minister Noonan Announces €8m in Funding for Built Heritage Projects (n.d.).

19 Gaelic letterforms are calligraphic, derived from Insular scripts found in mediaeval manuscripts. The Cló Gaelach family of Gaelic typefaces were used in printing almost all published texts in the Irish language up to the mid-20th century.

fascia board, which was supported by the pilot Shopfront Stream of the Government's Historic Structures Fund.[18]

Although intermittently observed, it is not standard practice in Ireland for signwriters to sign their work. As a result, establishing authorship is rarely accomplished through onsite observation. The most effective way to elicit this data is by contacting local signwriters or building proprietors. Nonetheless, pandemic closures and travel restrictions impeded this data-collection strategy.

Hand painted fascia signs accounted for 10 of the 53 shopfronts surveyed, with one instance in the Irish language ("as Gaeilge") at O'Riada, 25 Parliament Street. Moreover, O'Riada was one of only three instances of Chló Gaelach[19] signs surveyed (Figure 5).

Figure 5 O'Riada, 25 Parliament Street, Eircode R95 CH79 © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2021).

20 Illuminations similar to those adorning the Book of Kells.

Various treatments such as shadow types, gilding styles, and supplemental graphic elements, like O'Riada's manuscript-style[20] animals for example, could potentially enrich signage interpretation if extracted into individually assigned data fields. Although recorded in the appraisal data field, such separation would facilitate more extensive quantitative data and comparative analysis. Furthermore, the observed letterforms frequently fit into more than one category, indicating that classifications could be expanded, with patterns revealed through more extensive and rigorous visual analysis.

The highest recorded instances in the *Principal Fascia Signage Classification* data field were Digital Raised Letters at 12 (Figure 6) and extant Original Raised Letters at 11 (Figure 7) with Sans Serif and Serif being the predominant letterform styles.

More recent research has revealed that the *Raised Lettering* category could be enhanced by inserting a sub-category of applied lettering (Lennie, 2010). This would assist in differentiating between carved or moulded letterforms made of render, for example, as opposed to timber, metal, plastic, or ceramic letterforms applied to the fascia board.

Figure 6 Paris Texas, 92 High Street, Eircode R95 V6TE © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2021).

Figure 7 GL Ryan, 71 High Street, Eircode R95 AX54 © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2021).

The idiosyncratic nature of the vernacular letterforms was particularly visible in the hand painted exemplars. One case at Lenehan's, 10 Castlecomer Road revealed six variations of the uppercase letter E (Figure 8). Nonetheless, all letterforms exist on one building and, to the best of my current knowledge, are the work of the late artisan Eoin Quigley.

Figure 8 Lenehan, 10 Castlecomer Road, Eircode R95 N622 © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2021).

21 The Kilkenny Woodworkers – Kilkenny Archaeological Society (n.d.); The Kilkenny Signwriting Project – Kilkenny Arts Week (1978).

22 The Kilkenny Signwriting Project – Kilkenny Arts Week (1978).

The *Signage Appraisal Criteria* data field revealed that early 1900s carved signboards attributed to the Kilkenny Woodworkers[21] could be readily dated since this is recorded in NIAH listings, with similar data intermittently recorded for the original raised, moulded, and carved letterforms.

According to the 1978 Arts Week brochure, one example of the Kilkenny Woodworkers' craft is the iconic carved, gilded timber sign of The Marble City Bar c. 1908 (Figure 9). Signwriter Tom Timmins restored the letterforms in 1954 and 1970,[22] with Eoin Quigley regilding it in the 1980s. Conversely, the 2004 NIAH survey describes the sign as having "glazed fascia over having brass lettering", which undoubtedly merits further investigation.

Figure 9 The Marble City Bar, 66 High Street, Eircode R95 TY24
© Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2021).

Manufacturers of original, applied stock letterforms were challenging to discern. Nonetheless, the atypical, Victorian cast-iron letterforms on Andrew Ryan's pub of Friary Street (Figure 10) can be attributed to Walter MacFarlane & Co's Saracen Foundry, Glasgow, Scotland (Bartram, 1978).

Figure 10 Andrew Ryan, 3 Friary Street, Eircode R95 X932
© Dee Maher Ring (2021)

23 Ordnance Survey Ireland is responsible for the State's official mapping records.

24 Irish Transverse Mercator (ITM) is the geographic coordinate system for Ireland used by Ordinance Survey Ireland.

25 The Council has outlined a three-strand strategy on shopfronts and fascia signage, however only points 1. Awareness & Promotion and 2. Policy & Guidance are listed, with section 3. Enforcement nil. Furthermore, the link to Shopfront Design Guidance under Section 2 is broken (accessed 22/02/21), and this information may aid more accurate compliance.

The original, iterative research process necessitated constant questioning, readapting, and problem-solving, all of which took considerable time. As a result, the anticipated visual database, archival image analysis, and Arc GIS mapping objectives were not accomplished within the project timeframe. Nonetheless, a functional system was developed, incorporating an Excel database, standardised datasheets, and signage appraisals, supporting image folders per unit surveyed, and an illustrated 10,000-word project report with findings and recommendations.

The intended Unique Identifier numbering system, based on the OSi[23] townland identifiers, to align with previous Kilkenny County Council heritage audits, was instead substituted with the unit postcode and ITM[24] coordinates. Pointedly, the research revealed a disconnect between the County Council guidelines and the survey findings, which warrants further scrutiny, and emphasises the need for this research and external audits of policy.[25]

4 CASSP (Callan Audit of Shopfront Signage Project) 2022

26 Callan is the second largest town in County Kilkenny and is located 16 km south of Kilkenny City.

In October 2022, an audit of Callan[26] shopfront signage was commissioned by Kilkenny County Council's outgoing Heritage Officer, Dearbhala Ledwidge, in advance of funding distribution. The *Callan Audit of Shopfront Signage Project* (CASSP) originated from the Callan Health Check 2018 Report recommendation to "Undertake a Shopfront Audit

27 "Town Health Checks and Plans – Kilkenny County Council" (n.d.); Callan Health Check (2018, p. 29).

of the traditional shopfronts in Callan to be used to inform a Local Area Plan shopfront policy".[27]

The survey sought to determine the status of vernacular signage and shopfronts along Upper and Lower Bridge Street in Callan. The study focused primarily on fascia lettering, however the appraisal extended to additional significant letterforms on the façade. This survey would form the basis for recommendations on the heritage significance of the shopfront signage. Additionally, the audit outcomes would help to raise awareness of this aspect of Callan's built heritage and inform future signage on traditional shopfronts.

Given the short time allocated for this project, it was agreed that this audit would form the first phase of work. Fieldwork commenced in September 2022 which included two site visits to conduct an inspection of the signs, capture photographic data and observations, with a total of 27 premises identified, surveyed, and recorded presented in the final project report.

Individual audit report sheets contained the following data fields, *Name*, *Address*, *Eircode*, *Signage and Shopfront Appraisal*, *Recommendation*, *Significance of Sign* and where applicable, details from the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage listing specific to the shopfront architecture and signage. A minimum of three images per datasheet were inserted into the 63-page project report comprising the façade, the main fascia sign, and a close-up of the letterforms.

Following is a sample project report datasheet No. 4.26 for Keogh's Model Bakery (Figure 11), Lower Bridge Street, Callan. Kilkenny County Council selected this visual report format, rather than the KTSSP datasheets, in order to facilitate simultaneous discussion of textual data analysis and images during meetings.

5 CASSP findings

During this first phase, 27 premises were surveyed and recorded. Both the signage and letterforms encountered were diverse, with varying degrees of sensitivity to the existing building architecture and streetscape. The gathered data was solely based on observation of the exterior.

Observation No. 5 from the report relates to the case of Jack's Antiques (Figure 12), Dunne's Bakery (Figure 13), and Tea Shop (Figure 14), at Nos. 7, 8 and 9 Upper Bridge Street respectively, where each unit was assessed according to the prescribed criteria. According to a local resident on the scene, the interiors had been demolished. External investigation could not have yielded such information.

As noted in Observation No. 4: "A mere 3 units on Lower Bridge Street are recorded on the NIAH." Many buildings have similar architectural characteristics however all are not listed.

Signs dating from the late 1990s onwards, were created by local traditional signwriters Stephen Quigley and his son Donal. In recent years, they have been influential in maintaining the c. 1933 Brilliant Signs Company sign and shopfront on Keogh's Model Bakery (Established 1838).

4.26	
Name	**Keogh's Model Bakery**
Address	**Lower Bridge Street, Mill Lane, CALLAN SOUTH, Callan, KILKENNY**
Eircode	**R95 WV81**
NIAH	"Wrap-around shopfront to ground floor with three-quarter fluted pilasters, decorative glazed clay tile intermediary panels, fixed-pane timber display windows, glazed timber panelled double doors on mosaic-tiled threshold having over light, timber panelled door to house having over light, glazed fascia over having inscribed brass lettering, and lined coping. Interior with decorative carved timber display shelving to ground floor, and timber panelled reveals/shutters to window openings to first floor." "A very fine shopfront manufactured and imported by the Brilliant Sign Company of England enhances the visibility and street presence of the site in Lower Bridge Street: pretty glazed and mosaic tile work identifies the artistic design distinction of the composition while an early-surviving commercial interior displays profiled joinery exhibiting high quality craftsmanship." *https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/12314047/keoghs-model-bakery-lower-bridge-street-mill-lane-callan-south-callan-kilkenny*
Signage & Shopfront Appraisal	Metal, gilded, capital serif letterforms on main fascia that wraps around the building from elevation on Lower Bridge Street to Mill Lane. Script lettering Keogh's over the main entrance door is in a poor state of repair following a tip with a lorry. This requires immediate attention to prevent the elements from degrading the signboard further (see photos). The fascia glazing on the main fascia sign onto Lower Bridge Street requires remediation on the upper left corner for the same reasons. The pilaster to the right of the main entrance door is showing signs of weathering, where the wood appears to be crumbling. This too will require specialist intervention to preserve as much of the original fabric of this shopfront architecture. Other elements of note are the green tiles with pictorial elements, and particularly the mosaic tiled threshold baring the monogram WK, William Keogh, exhibiting high quality craftsmanship. This is further complimented by the continuation of tiling on the interior of the shop floor. Shopfront installed in 1933 designed by The Brilliant Sign Company, London and installed by local artisans. Verified by Ash Bishop, current proprietor of Brilliant Signs. Maintained in recent years by Stephen & Donal Quigley, local Signwriters. Italian tilers, installation approximately same time as the Church and Bank of Ireland. *(Information gathered from Proprietor Billy Keogh on 16/09/22.)*
Recommendation	Make appropriate, specialist repairs to damaged areas to preserve.
Significance of Sign(s)	Highly significant historic shopfront and sign with an exceptional, surviving mosaic threshold.

Figure 11 (a) Keogh's Model Bakery, Lr Bridge St., Callan R95 WV81
© Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2022).

4.26 Contd.,	
Image #1 Lower Bridge Street	
Image #2 Lower Bridge Street	
Image #3 Lower Bridge Street	

Figure 11 (b) Keogh's Model Bakery, Lr Bridge St., Callan R95 WV81
© Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2022).

Figure 12 Jack's Antiques, 7 Upr Bridge Street, Callan R95 X061 © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2022).

Figure 13 Dunne's Bakery, 8 Upr Bridge Street, Callan R95 H727 © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2022).

Figure 14 Tea Shop, 9 Upr Bridge Street, Callan R95 Y2D0 © Dee Maher Ring and Kilkenny County Council (2022).

A recurring observation was the ineffectiveness of this predominantly quantitative audit in evaluating the signs' significance to the community. General Recommendation No. 1 outlines that "A more comprehensive Phase 2 audit should be conducted to establish and verify the social and community value of the vernacular signs." Qualitative data such as this, could potentially be revealed through focus-group discussion with local residents and the Callan Town Team.

Community is a persistent theme in heritage studies however, Smith suggests that while the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage has indeed raised awareness, it "...has not yet provided a framework that privileges the community/sub-national orientation of intangible heritage." (Smith, 2015, p. 141) Furthermore, Smith proposes that the distinction between intangible and tangible heritage must be reconsidered, positing "...all heritage is intangible" (Smith, 2015, p. 141).

6 Conclusion

The drive to discover why Kilkenny's rich tradition of hand-painted fascia signs was disappearing prompted an examination of their value as design heritage. Thus far, an interdisciplinary, exploratory approach has been critical in contextualising this research through a variety of fields of scholarship such as visual and material culture, critical heritage studies, digital humanities, and oral history studies.

Critical Heritage Studies argues that the field of heritage has long been concerned with western notions of modernity (Winter, 2014). Indeed, it has been suggested that a shift in focus from the centrality of the West to a post-Western perspective is crucial for a more global approach, along with the increasing acknowledgement of the significance of society (Winter, 2013). A comparable shift has been observed in type classification, with ATypi de-adopting the Vox-ATypi system in 2021.[28] In the absence of an internationally recognised system, and until such a system is established, the existing methodology will facilitate new additions.

The value of establishing connections through ethnographic research methods to gain knowledge of current practice cannot be overstated. Observing signwriters at work, continuous interaction, in addition to attending events such as the "Burds of the Brush Glasgow 2022"[29] signwriter meet-up as a participant-observer, has provided exclusive perspectives on the artisan's beliefs, values, and practices. The significance of social media transmission on Instagram @signwriteire[30] has been fundamental for understanding the current state of the craft, as well as recognising new sources, knowledge, and data channels.

Pricilia L. Farias questions, "...could the conservation and restoration principles expressed in the Venice Charter and other international heritage documents be applied to typography and lettering as heritage assets?" (Farias, 2021, pp. 253–254). The cultural significance of these

28 Carolina Laudon, "Atypi de-adopts the Vox-Atypi Typeface Classification System," ATypI, October 13, 2022. https://atypi.org/2022/08/31/atypi-de-adopted-the-vox-atypi-typeface-classification-system/

29 Burds of the Brush | SWG3 Studio Warehouse, Glasgow, SC | February 26 to February 27 (n.d.).

30 Dee Maher Ring (@signwriteire) | Instagram Photos and Videos, (n.d.).

vernacular letterforms and signwriting as intangible heritage will be investigated in accordance with the values of established international organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, alongside the Burra Charter.

With the exception of some SignCraft[31] magazine articles, my attempt to document and historicise Kilkenny Signwriting could inspire a national history of the craft, as little has been written since the chapter in the 1987 publication Dublin's Vanishing Craftsmen: In Search of the Old Masters (Corrigan Kearns, 1987).

The Kilkenny audit originally set out to capture quantified data and develop a methodology in the style of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, however, the resulting datasheets fell short of the envisioned model. Moreover, such registers have been criticised as static, non-changing, fossilised sites that are inaccessible to the general public (Wells, 2016). Although the basic system successfully captures data, facilitates additions and data extraction, and comparative analysis, a more visual, living, user-friendly platform will be explored, which may enable image contributions to enrich the data and facilitate collaboration with a larger, more diverse community.

Through case studies and themes observed in the public realm, Critical Heritage Studies and Authorised Heritage Discourse theory will analyse local authority policy and citizens' perspectives in heritage decision-making processes. It is anticipated that by examining notions of power, democratisation of heritage, value, and care through the lens of critical heritage studies, underpinned by empirical research and discourse analysis, a new theoretical framework will emerge to better understand the significance of Ireland's vernacular letters to the wider public.

Notably, the nascent framework will serve to argue a case for the preservation, promotion, and advocacy of vernacular letterforms and the traditional craft of signwriting. Furthermore, by contributing considered strategies for future signage on traditional shopfronts it may impact local and potentially national policy. Ultimately, it is anticipated that the artisans, their intangible traditional practices, and the long-overlooked tangible artefacts of their creative output will be recognised as valuable components of Ireland's graphic cultural heritage.

31 "Since 1980, SignCraft has delivered the straightforward, hard-to-find information that sign people need, not only to survive, but to succeed in this competitive, changing industry." (https://www.facebook.com/signcraftmag/)

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