Northern Ireland Moravian Settlement achieves World Heritage Site status

*The small Moravian village of Gracehill in County Antrim has become Northern Ireland’s first cultural UNESCO World Heritage Site.*

[Gracehill](https://gracehillvillage.org/), the only complete Moravian Settlement on the island of Ireland, has been designated as part of the transnational Moravian Church Settlements by UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee. It joins Bethlehem, (Pennsylvania, USA), Herrnhut (Germany) and Christiansfeld (Denmark) on the listing.

The Moravian Church is one of the oldest Protestant denominations of Christianity and arrived in the UK and Ireland from central Europe in the early 18th century. The village of Gracehill was founded in 1759 as a Moravian Settlement and still has a Moravian community with its own bishop.

The layout of the village is significant as it reflects the Moravian values of education, equality, industry, tolerance and spirituality. It has several historic listed buildings including the church, central square and the burial ground or God’s Acre as it is known. Gracehill stands out as having been constructed in a grid plan with a very clear and complete ‘gender axis’ having a sisters’ side and a brothers’ side that directly relates to the fundamental structure of Moravian society.

Guided tours of the village are available and reveal its fascinating history. The tour starts in the Old School Room and features a walk around The Square, where the principal Moravian buildings are found, and a visit to the church and Old Shop. It passes by the Brothers’ Walk along which males would go to enter the church, and the Sisters’ Walk which took females into the church via a separate entrance.

The World Heritage Site designation recognises not only the physical attributes of the village but also its history, archives, and living culture and faith. The church is home to The Moravian Archive of Ireland dating back over 250 years, which acts as a memory bank of cultural tradition.

Since its foundation, Gracehill was well known for its international links which continue today. World Heritage status gives the village protection and will enable the community to develop its research and extend its international links.

Gracehill is historically renowned for its principles of religious and political tolerance, neutrality and reconciliation, first manifested significantly during the United Irishmen’s Rebellion of 1798 when Gracehill was seen as a place of refuge for all.

It is well known locally as a place of tranquillity, and the Bishop’s Walk provides a looped path for visitors to enjoy the village’s peaceful charm.

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