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*Reviving Gracehill's Old Shop: A Case Study in Heritage Preservation and Community-Led Restoration*

The Moravian settlement of Gracehill in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, represents one of the most complete 18th-century planned communities linked to the Moravian Church's international mission. Founded in 1759 and laid out around a central square according to Moravian ideals of equality, education and community, Gracehill is not only an architectural gem but also a living testament to a distinct cultural heritage. In 2024, Gracehill joined Bethlehem (USA), Herrnhut (Germany), and Christiansfeld (Denmark) as part of the transnational "Moravian Church Settlements" UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.

This case study will focus on a pivotal heritage project within this settlement: the restoration of the Old Shop, originally constructed in 1787 as the community's purpose-built store. After decades of disuse and the passing of its last proprietors, the building fell into disrepair. Responding to the community's desire to preserve Gracehill's architectural integrity and strengthen its cultural identity, the Gracehill Old School Trust (GhOST) spearheaded the effort to secure ownership and develop a sustainable redevelopment model.

We will examine the multifaceted restoration process: securing funding from Ballymena Borough Council, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, and later the Village Catalyst Pilot scheme; conducting historical assessments; developing plans respectful of the settlement's historic fabric; and navigating challenges including economic constraints and pandemic delays. The lecture will also highlight how adaptive reuse—combining historical preservation with practical functions such as holiday accommodation and community engagement—ensures the building's future relevance and economic sustainability.

Ultimately, this case study illustrates how community-led stewardship, strategic partnerships, and heritage-sensitive design can restore not only a building, but also reinforce cultural identity, enhance tourism, and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing preservation of a World Heritage-designated settlement.