

Historic Environment

Scotland's historic environment includes thousands of historic buildings and monuments, many of which are unique and irreplaceable. They attract millions of visitors every year and generate income and jobs.

Summary

Key messages

- Scotland's historic environment includes thousands of historic buildings and monuments, attracts millions of visitors each year and generates income and jobs.
- Although there are good data to describe some of the individual parts of the historic environment, the lack of consistent data means that it is difficult to assess the current and changing state of the historic environment as a whole.
- The main pressures are development, lack of maintenance and investment, inappropriate land use, climate change and visitors.
- Scotland's historic environment makes a valuable contribution to our quality of life, cultural identity, education and economy.
- Our historic environment is irreplaceable and we should protect it for future generations.

State and trend

State: Moderate - medium agreement, medium evidence

Trend: Stable - high agreement, medium evidence

There is an explanation of the diagram and further information on how we carried out the assessments on the [summary pages](#).



- Assessments are of the current “average condition”; some aspects of the historic environment are in a worse condition, and others are in a better one. Equally, the condition of some aspects is declining, while others are improving;
- Making any overall assessment is necessarily a simplification;
- We have taken account of the scale of any damage to the historic environment in these assessments; impacts can be locally damaging, but may have little effect on a national scale;
- We have stated how confident we are in the assessments based on the level of agreement between the specialists involved, and the quality and quantity of the supporting evidence;
- This topic considers marine heritage, archaeology and the wider historic environment. It is difficult to integrate these three disparate strands into an overall assessment.

Overview

Scotland's historic environment is made up of the physical evidence of past human activity as well as associated concepts that we cannot see or touch, such as stories and traditions. It includes archaeological sites and monuments, buildings, gardens and landscapes, artefacts and archives. The historic environment enriches Scotland's landscapes and townscapes, and is central to the country's distinctive character. It makes a major contribution to Scotland's national identity, culture and economy.

Importance of the historic landscape

Our whole environment – rural and urban, on land and under water – has a history that contributes to its quality and character. It has been shaped by human and natural processes over thousands of years. This is most obvious in our built heritage: ancient monuments; archaeological sites and landscapes; historic buildings; townscapes; parks; gardens and designed landscapes; and in our marine heritage; for example, in the form of historic shipwrecks or underwater landscapes that were once on dry land.

The historic environment is estimated to contribute [more than £2.3 billion](#) (2.6%) of Scotland's national [gross value added](#) (GVA), which is the contribution to the economy of each individual producer, industry or sector in Scotland. The historic environment also accounts for 2.5% of Scotland's total employment, directly supporting 41,000 full-time-equivalent employees. It is a magnet for tourism and inward investment – attracting around 14 million visitors each year – and it promotes a positive image of Scotland, at home and abroad, creating a sense of place and a unique cultural identity.

Heritage-led development benefits communities and the economy, bringing about regeneration of the built environment and work for the construction industry. The historic environment also provides many opportunities for volunteering across Scotland and contributes to education and training programmes in schools and colleges, as well as developing traditional skills within the construction workforce. [Maintaining the historic environment is important for Scotland's construction industry](#), directly supporting 10,500 full-time-equivalent employees, and contributing some £1 billion to Scotland's GVA.

Parts of the historic landscape

Some parts of Scotland's historic environment are protected through the process of 'designation'. The process aims to identify the most important parts of the built environment to recognise their significance and enhance their protection.

Designated assets currently include:

- 5 [world heritage sites](#);
- 47,672 [listed buildings](#);
- 8,205 [scheduled monuments](#);
- 390 [designed gardens and landscapes](#);
- 645 [conservation areas](#);
- 8 [protected wrecks](#);
- 7 [scheduled wrecks](#);
- 1 [historic marine protected area](#);

- 28 [nationally important battlefields](#).

Scotland has two [national parks](#) and 40 [National Scenic Areas](#). These contain many important features of the historic environment, and you can find more information about them in the [Landscape](#) topic.

Much of the historic environment is undesignated. The [Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland](#) (RCAHMS) and local authority Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) also hold information on historic environment assets that are not necessarily nationally important or legally protected, but nonetheless contribute to Scotland's overall historic environment. There are currently 295,784 RCAHMS records of historic assets or events available [on the RCAHMS website](#). There are 283,238 records held by local authority SMRs.

Description of the historic environment

World Heritage Sites

Scotland has five World Heritage Sites (sites of outstanding universal value) under the terms of the [UNESCO World Heritage Convention](#).

Four are cultural World Heritage Sites:

- [Edinburgh Old and New Towns](#);
- [New Lanark](#);
- The [Heart of Neolithic Orkney](#);
- [The Antonine Wall](#).

[St Kilda](#) is a mixed cultural and natural World Heritage Site.

Properties in care

A 'property in care' is an ancient monument or historic building that is cared for by [Historic Scotland](#) under the terms of the [Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979](#). There are [345 properties](#) in the care of Historic Scotland including Edinburgh Castle, Melrose Abbey and Urquhart Castle.

Listed buildings

Historic Scotland lists buildings of special historic or architectural interest and maintains associated descriptions of these [listed buildings](#).

The lists ensure that information is available for the planning process to take the needs of the historic environment into account. [Scotland's Historic Environment Audit](#) shows that there were 47,672 listed buildings in Scotland in March 2012: an increase of 507 since 2008. Buildings are assigned to one of three categories according to their relative importance. All listed buildings receive equal legal protection, which applies to the interior and exterior of the building, regardless of its category.

- **Category A:** buildings of national or international importance, either architectural, historic, or fine, little-altered examples of a particular period, style or building type (around 8% of the total).
- **Category B:** buildings of regional (or more than local) importance, or major examples of a particular period, style or building type, which may have been altered (around 50% of the total).
- **Category C:** buildings of local importance, lesser examples of any period, style or building type, as originally constructed or moderately altered, and simple traditional buildings that group well with others in categories A and B (around 42% of the total).

Scheduled monuments

Scheduled monuments are of national importance and are legally protected under the [Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979](#). Historic Scotland [keeps information](#) about monuments.

There were 8,205 scheduled monuments in Scotland in March 2012: an increase of 184 since 2008. The oldest scheduled monuments date from around 8,000 years ago – before farming began in Scotland. The most recent scheduled monuments include Second World War defences. In between, there are many different types of monuments, including prehistoric chambered cairns, Roman forts, early medieval carved stones and industrial mills. They may be visible as earthworks or other upstanding structural remains, but much of a monument may survive beneath the ground, often extending well beyond the visible remains.

Gardens and designed landscapes

There are 390 sites on the [inventory of gardens and designed landscapes](#) in Scotland. Sites on the inventory are of national importance and should be taken into account during the planning process.

Conservation areas

Conservation areas are described by local planning authorities as "*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*".

There were 645 [conservation areas](#) in Scotland in March 2012, compared to 636 in 2008.

Wreck sites

There are 16 nationally protected wreck sites across Scotland. Of these, [eight wreck sites](#) are designated by Scottish Ministers (through Historic Scotland) under the [Protection of Wrecks Act 1973](#). Seven other offshore wrecks are scheduled under the [Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979](#). There is also a single wreck protected as a [Historic Marine Protected Area](#) under the [Marine \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#). Further information on Scotland's marine historic environment is contained in [Scotland's Marine Atlas](#).

Battlefields

There are 28 nationally important battlefields on the [Inventory of Scottish Battlefields](#).

Undesignated assets

Most of Scotland's historic environment is not protected by designation and is privately owned.

The scale of the undesignated built heritage is considerable.

- There are 125,685 archaeological monuments recorded by [RCAHMS](#), of which only 9,967 are linked to scheduled monument designations. This suggests that 92% of known archaeological sites and monuments in Scotland are undesignated;
- RCAHMS holds 138,601 records relating to historic architecture. Of these, 71,232 records (51%) are not linked to listed building records;
- 455,000 Scottish homes were built before 1919, which means that one fifth (19%) of our housing stock is now over 90 years old. These properties comprise the bulk of the vernacular architecture that contributes to Scotland's unique character;
- RCAHMS holds 20,675 records relating to maritime heritage. However, there are only 16 protected wrecks in Scotland, suggesting that 99.9% of recorded maritime heritage is undesignated;
- Of the gardens and related sites (sundials, garden features etc) recorded by RCAHMS, 92% is undesignated;
- RCAHMS holds 297 records relating to battle sites or battlefields, only 28 of which are on the Inventory of nationally important battlefields.

Unprotected assets

There are many different undesignated archaeological sites, monuments, areas of historical interest, historic landscapes, gardens and designed landscapes, woodlands and routes, such as drove roads, that are not protected by law. There are a number of reasons why a historic feature might not be designated, including not meeting the designation criteria, not yet being assessed or not yet being recorded.

State

There is good information about the size and condition of some parts of Scotland's historic environment. However, it is difficult to assess the current and changing state of all of the elements that make up the historic environment because of a lack of nationally consistent trend data.

Scotland's historic environment is under pressure from human activities as well as from the weather. Inappropriate development and lack of maintenance can quickly reduce the value of buildings and other historic features.

Condition of the historic environment

It is difficult to assess the current and changing state of all of the elements that make up the historic environment as a whole. However, the following information sources do provide some useful national data about the condition of various parts of the historic environment.

<http://www.environment.scotland.gov.uk/get-informed/people-and-the-environment/historic-environment/>

Condition of listed buildings

The [buildings at risk register \(BARR\) for Scotland](#) was established in 1990 and highlights buildings with architectural or historic significance throughout the country that are considered to be at risk. Buildings at risk are not necessarily in poor condition; they may simply be standing empty with no clear future use.

A [survey of category A listed buildings at risk](#) in 2013 found that:

- 8.0% of A-listed buildings (nationally or internationally important) are at risk, compared to 8.2% in 2011 and 8.7% in 2009;
- A-listed buildings in rural areas are more likely to be at risk than those in urban areas;
- nine out of ten A-listed buildings at risk are vacant.

Condition of scheduled monuments

Historic Scotland's Field Officer reports provide systematically generated, detailed data about the condition of [scheduled monuments](#). The data do not represent the overall state of all ancient monuments. However, the range of issues faced by unscheduled monuments is likely to be very similar.

Scotland's Historic Environment Audit reported in 2012 that:

- the percentage of monuments in an 'optimal' or 'satisfactory' condition has increased over the last 13 years, from 82% to around 87%;
- there is a direct relationship between condition and risk, with monuments in an optimal or satisfactory condition likely to be associated with a low risk of deterioration;
- monuments are more frequently being assessed as at high or immediate risk of further deterioration: currently, around 12% of monuments fall into this category;
- condition varies significantly between each category of monument: prehistoric and Roman monuments are generally in a better condition than ecclesiastical, secular and industrial monuments;
- since standard scores were introduced in 1998, around 28% of scheduled monuments have shown an improvement in condition, with 26% showing a decline; while around 26% of monuments have shown a decrease in assessed risk, with a further 26% showing an increase.

Pressures affecting the historic environment

A range of pressures affect the historic environment.

Development pressures

Short-term objectives for the development of places for housing and other needs, such as energy generation and transport infrastructure, can result in inappropriate development and demolition, which can affect the character of a historic area or an individual building or monument.

Maintenance

More focus is needed on long-term sustainability and better repair and maintenance of traditional buildings. As our buildings get older, they require increasing levels of maintenance. Poorly executed repairs can also damage heritage value. The shortage of traditional skills, suitably qualified craftsmen and locally-available materials is an additional pressure on maintaining and repairing the historic environment.

Land use

Changing the way in which land is used and managed can put pressure on the historic environment. For example, light grazing by sheep is often a gentle and beneficial way of keeping monuments in good condition. By contrast, ploughing the site of a monument over successive years can lead to the archaeological remains being worn away, while the spread of tree roots and scrub can disturb and damage buried archaeological deposits and undermine masonry above ground.

Climate change, coastal erosion and pollution

It is projected that climate change will lead to Scotland becoming warmer, with drier summers and wetter autumns and winters. More rainfall will mean that traditional buildings will be wetter for longer periods of time, resulting in increased weathering of stone, rotting timbers and corrosion of metals.

Rising sea levels mean that coastal erosion is an increasing threat to heritage assets. Some of Scotland's most special sites, such as [Skara Brae](#) in Orkney, are particularly at risk. Information about the impact of coastal erosion on Scotland's heritage is available from [The SCAPE Trust](#).

In the past, severe pollution in urban areas, particularly black soot and sulphur dioxide, caused significant damage to buildings. Although levels of these pollutants have fallen over recent decades, their effects continue to cause damage, particularly to materials such as sandstone, resulting in these materials being vulnerable to ongoing decay. Furthermore, poorly executed stone cleaning has had a damaging effect on some historic buildings.

Sustainability of traditional buildings

Traditional buildings have embedded energy (the energy required to extract, process, manufacture, transport and install building materials). Although traditional buildings usually have a lower thermal performance than new buildings, continuing to use them can avoid some new carbon by reducing the need for new buildings.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with the upkeep of old buildings, while maintaining their cultural significance, is a challenge. All measures to improve energy efficiency in traditional buildings need to be considered carefully with thought given to the carbon footprint, lifespan and the sustainability of existing and replacement materials. In improving energy efficiency, it is important to avoid damaging effects on traditional buildings. For example, reducing air leakage in buildings to prevent heat loss may result in condensation and fungus growth, with damaging effects on the fabric of the building and the health of people using it.

Visitors

Tourism, leisure and sport can improve understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment and generate additional revenue for managing it. However, increased visitor numbers can also lead to pressures. For example, visitors can cause damage to heritage sites by wearing down the footpaths across sensitive features, or by lighting fires.

What is being done

A [strategy for managing Scotland's historic environment](#) was published in 2014. It complements existing legal measures for protecting and managing buildings and other assets. There is significant investment in care and maintenance, but this often relies on a contribution from public funds or the National Lottery.

Policy and the law

[Our Place in Time](#), the first Historic Environment strategy for Scotland, was published in March 2014. It sets out a vision, definition and desired outcomes for our rich historic environment. It provides an overarching framework within which organisations can work together to achieve these positive outcomes.

The [Scottish Historic Environment Policy](#) (SHEP) is the Scottish Ministers' policy for the historic environment in Scotland. Other policies and guidance are also relevant to the historic environment, such as the recently published [policy statement on architecture and place-making](#), [Scottish planning policy](#) and the [third national planning framework](#).

Legal measures for protecting the historic environment have been in place for many years and are routinely used by planning authorities to control local development. Recent improvements have been made to the law to make it easier for a wider range of people and organisations to manage the historic environment. For example, the [Historic Environment \(Amendment\) \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#) tackles some long-standing practical issues and makes it easier for owners, tenants, businesses, the voluntary sector and the regulatory authorities to manage and care for the historic environment.

Management

Developing a better picture of Scotland's entire historic environment is important for making decisions about how it should be managed. The [Historic Land-use Assessment](#) (HLA) is an ongoing project undertaken by RCAHMS and Historic Scotland. It is designed to map past and present land use across Scotland to help us understand how today's landscape has been influenced by human activities in the past. By March 2012 around 80% of Scotland had been mapped using HLA.

The development-planning process helps to manage change in the historic environment. Many developments do not have a significant impact on the historic environment but, when they do, concerns must be considered. A local authority may impose a condition on a development to protect the historic environment and, in rare instances, may refuse a planning application.

You can find Scottish Government planning performance statistics on the [Scottish Government](#) website.

Specific procedures in place for protecting the historic environment include [listed building consent](#), [conservation area consent](#), and [scheduled monument consent](#). In addition, Historic Scotland publishes [guidance on managing change in the historic environment](#) for planning authorities and other interested parties, including owners.

Usually, unlisted buildings in conservation areas also have protection through conservation area consent, because this consent is normally required before unlisted buildings in conservation areas can be demolished.

Climate change could damage Scotland's historic environment, and a lot of effort is being made to raise awareness of the risks so that action can be taken to protect valuable assets. The [UK Climate Change Risk Assessment](#) and SEPA's [National Flood Risk Assessment](#) are two examples of comprehensive studies that have significantly raised awareness of the potential risks, impacts and adaptations.

Investment

Each year we spend more than a billion pounds on our historic environment. Funding for the historic environment comes from a wide variety of sources in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

- Private investment is the largest source of funding for the historic environment in Scotland: most historic buildings and places are privately owned, so it is critical that private owners are able to invest enough to maintain them. [Research undertaken in 2008](#) and [updated in 2013](#) suggests that the [best current estimate of annual spend on repairing and maintaining historic buildings](#) (including historic industrial and commercial buildings and infrastructure) is £1.1 billion.
- In 2012-13, the Scottish Government through Historic Scotland spent £80.6 million on the historic environment, including £33.7 million in income from properties in care.
- The [Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy](#) (CIPFA) figures show that local authorities' net expenditure on heritage was £7.6 million in 2011-12.
- Grant aid is a major incentive for conserving built heritage, regenerating our town centres, creating work in the construction industry and supporting tourism. Between 2003 and 2013, Historic Scotland awarded grants of more than £133 million that assisted with the cost of repairs worth more than £580 million. For every £1 Historic Scotland awards in grant funding, an additional £4.50 is provided from other sources, further benefitting the Scottish economy. An independent assessment of the [impact of historic environment grants](#) showed that they have a wide range of social, cultural and economic benefits.
- The [Heritage Lottery Fund](#) awarded a total of £29.6 million to 107 different heritage projects in Scotland in 2011-12.
- Some of Scotland's most important historic places are in the care of charitable trusts, and the voluntary sector plays a vital role in caring for the historic environment in Scotland. For example, in 2011-12 the [National Trust for Scotland's](#) total expenditure was £42.1 million.

Investment is also being used to support, develop and promote Scotland's [traditional building skills and the use of traditional building materials](#). Historic Scotland has helped to develop new specialist vocational qualifications and launched the [Traditional Building Health Check scheme](#) in partnership with CITB-Construction Skills Scotland.

<http://www.environment.scotland.gov.uk/get-informed/people-and-the-environment/historic-environment/>

This will introduce independent inspections to identify issues with traditional buildings, which will benefit the repair and maintenance market through using appropriately skilled and qualified contractors.