



Talking about heritage

Draft guidance for consultation

September 2020

## Introduction

Heritage is everywhere and it means different things to different people.

This guide is all about exploring and talking about heritage, so we've included some of the things that people have said to us when we've asked them, 'What's your heritage?'

Heritage to me is everything in Scotland's history. It's not just buildings but everything that's passed down like songs, stories, myths.

Perthshire 'What's Your Heritage' workshop.

Your heritage might be the physical places that you know and love – your favourite music venue, your local park, a ruined castle you've explored, or the landscapes you picture when you think of home.

Your heritage could also be your working life, the stories you were told as a child, the language you speak with your family, the music or traditions you remember from an important time in your life.

Heritage can inspire different emotions, both positive and negative. It can be special to people for lots of different reasons. Here are a few:

- It's beautiful.
- It's what I think of when I picture home.
- It's part of who I am
- I can feel the spirits, my history.
- It's where I walk my dog.
- It's an amazing insight into my past.
- It's my home town and it reminds me of my family.

Heritage can help to us to feel connected. It might be to a community, a place, or a shared past. It reflects different viewpoints across cultures and generations and is key to local distinctiveness and identity. Heritage can also inspire creativity.

But heritage can also challenge us and make us question things about our current society. It can shed light on aspects of our past that have been hidden. Sometimes parts of our past will make us uncomfortable – we might feel anger or shame.

It is important that we understand these issues to help us shape our society today and in the future.

## How can I use this guide?

You can use this guide to help you to talk about heritage. You might be talking about heritage in your community, with friends and family, with experts, or with people who don't know anything about it at all.

This guidance can help you to explore your heritage. It gives tips and sources of information that will help you to learn more about heritage and what makes it special. When you can explain your heritage well, it will help you to get your voice heard.

Our guidance is set out in four main sections. Each section focuses on a different activity and will give you helpful information by drawing together existing resources to start you on your way.

Some of these resources are held by us at Historic Environment Scotland. However, our guidance also provides signposts to resources held by many other national and local organisations, charities, and others with interests in heritage.

There are four topics covered in this guidance:

- [Investigating heritage](#)
- [Understanding heritage and what makes it special](#)
- [Sharing and celebrating heritage](#)
- [Caring for and protecting heritage](#)

## **Investigating heritage**

Investigating heritage is a journey of discovery. This journey can be exciting, but also thought-provoking and even disquieting.

It's not always easy to know where to start if you're curious about the past.

There's a huge range of information out there, from old photos and historic documents, to online maps and databases, to living history such as stories, language and traditions. Deciding what you want to find out will help you to find the right place to start.

We've collected some good online resources to get you going. Once you start exploring, you'll find many more along the way.

## **Finding out about heritage**

There are lots of fascinating resources for researching heritage. Some of them are online. Most of these are free, and don't ask you to sign up to memberships or mailing lists.

Before you start looking for sources of information, have a think about what you're interested in. We've arranged our examples around three broad areas you might want to focus on:

- [Places, buildings, archaeological sites and landscapes](#)
- [People, families and communities](#)
- [Traditions, stories, songs and language](#)

Our guidance is concerned with cultural heritage. If your interests are primarily in natural heritage, the best place to start your journey is with [NatureScot](#).

#### Places, buildings, archaeological sites and landscapes

'I want to find out about what is already known about my home, and about sites and places in my local area.'

The best place to start might be a visit to your local museum, library, local Historic Environment Record ([HER](#)), archive or heritage society, or it could be visiting a nearby historic place that's open to the public. There are many places run by us at [Historic Environment Scotland](#), and others such as the [National Trust for Scotland](#) and the [Historic Houses Association for Scotland](#).

If you prefer searching online, there are great websites out there, including lots that cover the whole of Scotland:

- [PastMap](#)  
PastMap is a free online interactive map that shows the locations of historic sites and places, as well as aerial photography and historic maps. It helps you to find out about heritage in any part of Scotland. It has information from different national and regional sources, which you can explore from the map. Have a look at the introductory [PastMap](#) video.
- [Canmore](#)  
This is the online catalogue for the National Record of the Historic Environment held by us at Historic Environment Scotland. It covers Scotland's archaeological sites, buildings, industrial and maritime heritage. You can search the catalogue and look at written records, historic photographs and aerial photography. You can also search the archive in person in our [Edinburgh search room](#).
- [Scran](#)  
Scran is an online learning resource containing over 500,000 images and other media from many museums, galleries, archives and private contributors, much of which relates to Scotland's heritage.
- [National Library of Scotland](#)  
From this website you can find access to the national library catalogue. Some of the oldest maps of Scotland (and lots of more modern ones too) are [available to view online](#) free of charge.
- [National Museums of Scotland](#)  
This website provides information about the national museums, and the insights they offer into Scotland's heritage.
- [ScotlandsPlaces](#)  
This website lets you explore thousands of records about Scotland by searching for a place name, clicking on a map or typing in a postcode. You can find historic maps, photographs and written records about your chosen place.

- [The Dictionary of Scottish Architects](#)  
This online resource provides information about architects known to have worked in Scotland from 1660–1980 and the buildings they designed.

### People, families and communities

'I'm curious about where I come from. I want to find out about my family history, and the history of other families in my community – it's part of who I am today.'

Here are some great places to start:

- [National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#)  
NRS collects information about Scotland's people and history. Some of it is available online, but some you need to visit in person. The online resources include lots of statistics, and they also publish [research guides](#) online.
- [ScotlandsPeople](#)  
This website helps you to find out about your ancestors, people and places that matter to you. You can search by name, by date, and by place. There are also many commercial websites for ancestry and genealogy research that you could refer to.
- [Colourful Heritage](#)  
Colourful Heritage is a great example of a community resource which explores the history of inwards migration to Scotland. It seeks to preserve South Asian and Muslim heritage in Scotland.

### Traditions, stories, songs and language

'I'm interested in the oral history, stories and songs of my local area.'

Social history – the history of ordinary people and their experiences – is recorded in lots of ways: in storytelling, word of mouth, writing, photos, sound recordings and even videos. This means there are different places you might find useful things – from online encyclopaedias to online video sites. Here are a few places to start:

- [Traditional Arts & Culture Scotland](#)  
TRACS brings together subjects such as traditional music, language, storytelling, and dance, to showcase these aspects of Scotland's heritage.
- [The Oral History Society](#)  
The Oral History Society promotes the collection, preservation and use of recorded memories.
- [ICH Scotland](#)  
On the ICH Scotland wiki you can find out about Scotland's living culture and 'intangible cultural heritage' – the heritage that cannot be touched. It's curated by Museums Galleries Scotland.
- [Tobar an Dualchais/Kist O Riches](#)

This website brings together recordings collected by the School of Scottish Studies, the BBC and the National Trust. It contains a wealth of recorded folklore, songs, music, history, poetry, traditions, stories and other information, collected from all over Scotland and beyond from the 1930s onwards.

- [Scran](#)  
In addition to recording your heritage through text, images and documents, Scran also holds records of people's lived experience of the past through sound and video.
- [The Scottish Poetry Library](#)  
A world-leading resource for Scottish poetry.

The language we use reflects the cultural influences that have shaped our society, playing a big part in how we see ourselves today. We are all influenced by a broad range of cultures, which might reflect different times, places and experiences.

### Researching and recording your heritage

Some of the most valuable information about local heritage is held by individuals and groups themselves. We work with community groups to explore heritage and show them how to find out more about it by researching and recording. You can find out more about our research on the [research pages of our website](#).

Scotland's social history is fascinating. By gathering facts and personal stories, you can enrich your understanding. Talking to people who would like to share their memories will bring together unique stories and first-hand experiences. It can be the best way to capture people's feelings and attitudes. Information gathered like this is called 'oral history'.

If you're interested in recording oral history, the [Oral History Society](#) offers training and provides other resources to help you. At Historic Environment Scotland, we also provide [information and advice about editing your interviews](#), and this [video on recording oral history](#).

Getting out and about can be one of the most exciting parts of researching and recording your heritage. Before you go, take the time to read up on the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) – we all share responsibilities for respecting the outdoors.

Exploring and investigating the places around you can shed light on hidden history, potentially challenging prevailing narratives of the past. We have some information that might help through the steps of the process. You can download our [guide on researching historic buildings](#) and our [guide on recording buildings](#) from our website. If what you're most interested in is the changing heritage of our cities, you might want to watch our [short film on surveying urban buildings](#).

Archaeology is the study of the human past through its material remains. If you're interested in archaeology, you can find [a practical guide to recording archaeological sites](#). This provides advice on techniques that don't involve disturbance of archaeological sites and should be useful if you're looking at ruins, buildings, other

structures, or landscapes. Investigating features that are buried can involve excavation. This isn't something to undertake without the necessary skills and careful planning. However, many archaeological digs welcome community involvement.

For information on some of the big archaeological research questions and how you can contribute, have a look at the [Scottish Archaeological Research Framework](#). There are also great resources on Archaeology Scotland's [website](#). Whatever your interest, photography and video is an excellent recording tool. If you've just got a new camera or phone, and are looking to learn some new techniques or have been shooting for a while and want to master some old ones, have a look at [this webpage on composing your photographs](#) for some top tips, including a short film.

Once you've done these things, you'll need to think about how to make a record of your efforts. Forms can help you to organise your thoughts and set them out clearly. We have [a variety of different templates for recording buildings and places](#) available to download. These can also be helpful as a starting point to create your own template.

We've chosen some examples that we think help to show how community groups have used our guidance for sites and places of importance to their local areas, contributing a shared understanding of the past. If you don't find what you're looking for here, there are lots of other great case studies available from [Built Environment Forum for Scotland](#).

#### **Case study – Lerwick Observatory, Shetland.**

The Lerwick Observatory is a scientific weather observatory located on high ground close to the town of Lerwick, Shetland.

In 2016, members of the Lerwick community, including several former employees and local supporters of the observatory, were concerned that a huge amount of information about the site was at risk of being lost.

The Met Office observatory opened around 1919-21 on the site of a First World War naval station. At the time there were two other weather stations providing meteorological information to the UK. The office originally employed up to 40 staff in housing on the site. Other buildings on the site included the scientific offices and a bar. The Observatory continues to operate as meteorological station and is also used by British Geological Survey for seismology research.

The group got together to compile a record, including oral history recording, a photo archive and a [short film](#) about their project and the Observatory's history.

## Understanding what's special about heritage

When we think about what makes something worth looking after, it's not because it's an object, building, or tradition. What makes heritage special is the particular values that people place on it.

A good place to start when you're trying to understand why heritage is special is thinking about what it means to you.

I love using words like 'braw' and 'scunner'. Local language is dying out.

Forth Valley College 'What's Your Heritage' workshop

The Barrowland Ballroom is just the same. The smell transports me back to when I was a teenager.

East Renfrewshire 'What's Your Heritage' workshop.

The Outer Hebrides suit me very well. It's full of history, beauty and isolation.

Perth 'What's Your Heritage' workshop.

We'd like to encourage dialogue about heritage. It's helpful to share a language about heritage so we understand each other. This shared understanding helps when we discuss whether something should be recognised or celebrated, and how it should be managed in the future.

At Historic Environment Scotland, when we talk about heritage and what makes it special, we often talk about 'cultural significance'. This is how we talk about listed buildings, World Heritage Sites, or why any place or object might be special. The idea of 'cultural significance' is used widely in Scotland and across Europe.

Getting used to talking about cultural significance can help you to talk about the heritage that is important to you.

If you'd like to find out more about cultural significance and how we talk about it at Historic Environment Scotland, you can read more in [the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland](#), and in [our Designation Policy and Selection Guidance](#).

Significance is a big topic, so it helps to break it down into sections. Here are some simple steps that you can follow.

### A step-by-step guide to understanding significance

We've set out three basic steps to understanding significance. It can be helpful to think of these as three questions to ask yourself:



- What is it?
- What is its context?
- What values do people place on it?

To understand more about how people interact with and value heritage it's good to talk to people who use, live, or work near a site or place. It's also important to reach out to other groups who might value it or feel strongly about it because they share a common interest or culture – 'communities of interest' and 'communities of identity' – and to individuals or groups who might take an opposing view.

Doing this should bring you closer to understanding a place or object and to explaining its significance. There are some examples at the end of this section.

### Step 1: What is it?

Here, the idea is to think about the place, object, or any other thing you're analysing in detail. In this step, you should focus on it in isolation.

A key part of this will be thinking about any physical elements:

- How much survives of what was once there?
- What does it look like?
- How much has it changed through time?

You can also think about this for things that aren't physical. For example, you might think about how stories change as they get told time and time again.

### Step 2: What is its context?

The next step is to examine where the thing you're analysing sits in the wider world. Even if something is unique, it will still have wider relationships.

You can think about context in terms of place, time, and also a wider context of ideas and traditions:

- What is its history? How has it been used in the past, and now?
- Does it have relationships with other objects, places, events, stories?
- Is there anything like it – can you find any other examples? Is your example unusual? Or is it in particularly good condition?
- Does it have wider meaning to people? Do people tell stories about it, or sing songs about it? Is it something that people would recognise from a painting, or photographs? Has that meaning changed with time?

### Step 3: What values do people place on it?

Once you've thought about these things, you should be in a good position to think about what values it has for people.

Bear in mind that people will often have different views about what is special. At one extreme, heritage that might be 'special' to one person or group of people, might be viewed differently or even reviled by another. Where there is heated debate about heritage, this is sometimes referred to as contested heritage.

How people value heritage can also change with time. It's important to speak to other people, including communities of interest and communities of identity, about this so that you understand the full range of values, rather than just thinking about this on your own. Capturing this diversity can be the most rewarding part of the process.

There is a group of values we normally refer to when talking about cultural significance:

- **Aesthetic**  
These values relate to our sensory perceptions – how we experience physical things, how they look, sound and feel.
- **Historic**  
These values reflect something's place in history. Did it change or influence things – ideas, events, or people? Or was it influenced by them?
- **Scientific**  
Something has scientific value if it can contribute to research – can it tell us more about the past?
- **Social**  
Does it have spiritual or cultural meaning for a particular community or group? How does it shape people's sense of place and identity, and practices?

At Historic Environment Scotland, we are looking at the significance of heritage to communities in collaboration with Stirling University. You can find out more on the [Wrestling with Social Value website](#).

Once you've researched and considered the significance of a site, place or object, you might want to think about how to share the information you've gathered.

### Writing about significance

Sometimes you may need to explain to people why the heritage you care about is significant. You may be applying for a grant, nominating someone for a commemorative plaque or proposing a building to be listed. One way to communicate the significance is to write a statement explaining the values and meaning of the object or place. A 'statement of significance' can be as short or long as you need.

Explaining significance clearly can help community groups gain support for a project or to make the case for changing how heritage is presented to the public. Alternatively, you might be a community council needing to explain the significance of a site or place in relation to a local planning case. Statements of significance can be used to support applications for funding, or for protected status – like a [listed building](#), or a [scheduled monument](#).

They're also useful if you're looking to make the case for bringing a building back into use. Sometimes to find a long-term sustainable use for a building you have to make changes to it. A statement of significance can help you make sure that you're protecting what is special about the building, so that it isn't lost.

At Historic Environment Scotland, we write [statements of significance for the historic sites that we look after](#) on behalf of Scottish Ministers. We also have statements describing the importance of designated sites and places on [our online portal](#).

These case studies explore a range of values and different ways to explain significance.

### **Case study – The [Hood Stones](#), Loch Eriboll, Sutherland**

What is it?

On the hillside above the village of Laid, Loch Eriboll, there are two sets of arranged white-washed stones spelling out the word 'Hood'.

What is its context?

The Hood Stones are directly connected with the Royal Navy battlecruiser HMS Hood, one of the greatest warships of the Second World War. The stones were originally placed there in 1934 by the ship's crew, while the ship was anchored in Loch Eriboll. In 1941, Hood was sunk by the German warship Bismarck during the 'Battle of the Denmark Strait' with the loss of 1,415 crew. The stones remained undisturbed for years, gradually becoming overgrown. However, in 1993, pupils from nearby Durness Primary School cleared the stones of foliage and whitewashed them. Hood is not the only ship for which a visit to Loch Eriboll has been recorded in this way; there are several other ships' names on the same hillside, some historic and others more recent. There are other memorials to the Hood in England and Canada.

What values do people place on it?

The Hood Stones are valued by a variety of communities that include people living in the area and people who have an interest in HMS Hood or are descendants of her crew but may never have visited in person. This community of interest extends beyond the UK, connected with each other and the site in part through digital online platforms. The Stones provide a connection to the ship and her crew, linking Loch Eriboll where the ship visited, and the surrounding communities to events of national importance and to a global network of people and places associated with HMS Hood. For some people, the Stones have become a form of memorial and focus for sharing memories. Regular repainting of the Stones, by local school children and the Royal Navy, is seen as a mark of respect and helping to pass on the memory of the ship and her crew to future generations. The Stones feature in the 'Laid Heritage Trail', developed to highlight local sites of interest and showcase the area's distinctiveness.

You can read more about research into the values associated with the Hood Stones – and the University of Stirling research project on them – on the [Wrestling with Social Value website](#).

## Case study – The Tinkers’ Heart, Argyll

What is it?

[Tinkers’ Heart](#) is a heart-shaped setting of quartz stones embedded in the tarmac of an old road junction near Cairndow in Argyll & Bute.

What is its context?

According to oral tradition among the Scottish Traveller community, the Tinkers’ Heart was originally created by Traveller women as a memorial to honour the Traveller men who had died during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 and specifically at the battle of Culloden in 1746. Although the definite date for the primary establishment of the heart has not been established, there is sound evidence since the late 1920s, for the physical form of the heart and its evolution over time, including its repair several times by the local authority. The stones serve as a tangible symbol of the strong relationship of Travellers, and their traditions, to this location at a significant route junction. Their location is also scenic, with open views towards Loch Fyne and Inveraray. There do not appear to be any other similar monuments to the Travellers in the Argyll area or in the rest of Scotland.

What values do people place on it?

The Tinkers’ Heart appears to be a unique permanent physical monument to the Scottish Travellers for whom the heart has a very strong symbolic and traditional meaning. It is a place of collective remembrance, as a location where weddings, christenings and other meetings took place. The site is also recognised as historically significant by the local settled community who consider it a part of the rich cultural heritage of the Cairndow area.

You can hear more about the Tinkers’ Heart in the words of Scottish Traveller and writer Jess Smith on our YouTube channel. In this [short video](#), Jess talks about how she worked to preserve the legacy of the Tinkers’ Heart and to have it recognised as a [nationally important monument](#).

## Sharing and celebrating heritage

Sharing knowledge about your heritage and the heritage that affects you can add to a shared understanding of the past. This helps to make heritage more accessible for everyone.

Understanding heritage better can help us all to make better decisions about the places where we live and work. It encourages inclusivity and helps us to respect a wide variety of cultures. If others learn to appreciate your heritage, they may be more likely to support efforts to conserve or protect it too.

We think this is so important that it’s the first policy in the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland:

Decisions affecting any part of the historic environment should be informed by an inclusive understanding of its breadth and cultural significance.

HEP1, Historic Environment Policy for Scotland

You can find out more about how an understanding of cultural significance can help us all make informed decisions about actions affecting heritage, by reading the [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland](#) online.

## Sharing your research

If you would like to make your research available to other people, here are some of the options you might want to look at:

- [HES Archives and Library](#)  
At Historic Environment Scotland, we welcome contributions of archives in physical or digital format and undertake to ensure their long-term preservation. These archives could be photographs, drawings, plans and many other forms of information. Get in touch through our [website](#).
- [MyCanmore](#),  
Through MyCanmore, part of our Canmore website, you can also share photographs and information about your favourite places with others. Find out more through our [website](#).

### Case studies – Granton Castle Walled Garden, Edinburgh

The Friends of Granton Castle Walled Garden contacted Historic Environment Scotland's Scotland's Urban Past team in 2015 for help in surveying and recording the medieval walled garden of the now-demolished 15<sup>th</sup>- century Granton Castle, north Edinburgh. From 1921 to about 2005, the garden was owned and cultivated by a family of market gardeners.

In 2014, this historic greenspace was facing potential demolition to make way for a new housing development. The Friends hoped to improve awareness of how untouched the garden has remained for over 500 years, and to help restore and manage it for use by community members

They produced a [website](#), and uploaded photographs and information about the walled garden through [MyCanmore](#). The research undertaken by the group also contributed to an updated [Listed Building Record](#) for the walled garden. The garden has become a focus for community activity.

- Historic Environment Records (HERs)  
These records are an important source of local heritage information. Your [Local Authority Archaeology Service](#) will be keen to hear from you if you have suggestions about what you want to see included. You might be adding a new site to the record, or new information to a site that is already included.
- [ICH Scotland](#)  
You can contribute information to the ICH Scotland wiki, about everything from beliefs and crafts to customs and rituals, or festivals and music, and help to raise awareness of and respect for this aspect of our heritage.

- [The People's Parish](#)  
On People's Parish you can contribute local stories, traditions and cultural memories. It reflects the distinct local voices and creativity of Scotland's 871 parishes places today.

If you're thinking about contributing your research either to the National Record, or to local Historic Environment Records, it's worth getting in touch early on through the links above, for advice on how to do this in the easiest way possible.

Some local projects also promote their research through their own websites. For example, [Sanday Voices in Orkney](#), and [Project Hawick](#) have made fantastic contributions in preserving their local oral history and traditions and promoting these through their own websites or through social media. The [Community Archives and Heritage Group](#) helps to support and promote community archives.

#### **Case studies – Sanday Voices, Orkney**

The island of Sanday is one of the larger inhabited outer islands of Orkney. The island has a population of around 550.

In 2003, the Sanday community launched a project to record the lives and experiences of those currently living on Sanday and their memories of personal, local and world events.

Over the next five years the community made more than 40 hours of recordings – of life before mains water; of changing agriculture and transport; of the ways island life has evolved over time. A small selection of the recordings are available on CD with an accompanying illustrated booklet from the [Sanday Community website](#).

### **Celebrating your heritage**

There's so much to celebrate in Scotland's heritage. If you want to celebrate your heritage so that others can appreciate it too, you could also explore these options:

- [Historic Environment Scotland's Commemorative Plaque Scheme](#)  
Tell us about the people from the past who you think deserve to be celebrated. Our scheme recognises significant people by erecting plaques on the buildings where they lived or worked. If you're interested in nominating a person and building for a plaque, look out for the next call for nominations on the HES website and through our social media. It's best to get permission from the owner of the building first!

### **Case study – Frederick Douglass, African American author and anti-slavery activist**

In 2018, following a nomination by a member of the public, a plaque was [unveiled at 33 Gilmore Place](#), the place where Frederick Douglass once lived as Scotland's anti-slavery agent, organising many of his abolitionist and civil rights campaigns.

Born into slavery in Maryland USA in 1818, Douglass had survived the tragedies of life as an enslaved individual until his escape in 1838. He went on to become a world-renowned author and freedom fighter. In 1845, while on the run as a fugitive slave, Douglass travelled to Britain and Ireland to tell his story.

In Scotland, Douglass visited numerous cities and towns to inspire anti-slavery activism amongst his audiences. He played a leading role in the campaign against the Free Church of Scotland and its acceptance of donations from white US slaveholders, a protest movement he spearheaded with the slogan, "send back the blood-stained money!" As Douglass recalled, while he and his advocates may have failed in making them send back the money, they succeeded in enlightening the people of Scotland about slavery in America. The plaque recognises the significant contribution Douglass made to civil rights.

- [Scottish Civic Trust](#)

This trust is passionate about helping communities take an active role in their heritage. They work to celebrate heritage through award schemes and events like Doors Open Day, and to give communities the skills and knowledge to make their area a better place.

### **Queering the map of Edinburgh**

To celebrate LGBT+ History Month in 2019, [LGBT Health & Wellbeing](#) got together with the Scottish Civic Trust, [Our Story Scotland](#), and HES's Scotland's Urban Past project to discuss what the buildings, streets and places of Edinburgh mean to LGBT+ people.

The group held a workshop. On three large maps, participants identified significant places ranging from queer venues to personal memories – an iconic gay bar that no longer exists; the cafe where someone can use their real name; a park where a couple spent a happy afternoon; the AIDS memorial bench.

These observations have been collated into [an interactive map of Edinburgh](#) which allows people to explore aspects of the city's LGBT+ heritage. It doesn't just record positive places and experiences, and one of the main motivations for running this workshop was to think about how our environment can be experienced very differently by different groups of people.

## **Helping others to explore your heritage**

We believe in widening opportunities for people to see heritage, connect with it, create it, understand it and explore it in everyday life.

Scotland's fantastic heritage attracts millions of visitors every year, helping to support the economy of local communities. [Visit Scotland](#) provides resources to help communities and businesses to promote the best of Scotland to our visitors through tourism, and to meet the needs of customers.

One of the ways to help people to access, explore and understand heritage is through interpretation. Good interpretation can bring heritage to life – revealing new insights into a place, object, building, event or tradition, and making it accessible and enjoyable for all.

If you want to create interpretation for heritage, think about the people you want to communicate with, and what you want them to get out of it. You can break this down into a series of questions:

- Who is your audience? These could be existing visitors or potential visitors in the future. Try to reach out to new audiences who might have no previous experience of your subject, or no previous opportunity to get interested.
- Why do you want to communicate with them?
- What's your heritage and what does it have to offer? Think both about things that are tangible (such as places) and intangible (stories and traditions) and remember to consider both positive and negative aspects.
- What do you want to say? There could be great opportunities to interpret prevailing narratives, but also to shed light on hidden stories and perspectives that are seldom heard,
- How do you want to say it?

There are lots of options for delivering effective interpretation. It can be presented live by guides or actors at events, or through panels, publications, film, audio, sculpture and artwork, or even virtual interpretation delivered online.

Here are some useful places to find advice on delivering effective interpretation:

- [Museums Galleries Scotland](#)  
This website provides a great general introduction. Although it focuses on museum collections, there's plenty of good advice for wider use.
- [NatureScot guidance on natural heritage interpretation](#)  
This is a step-by-step guide to planning and producing attractive and effective natural heritage interpretation which applies more widely too.

It's also useful to see what other people have done. Here are two examples of how online content can make heritage more accessible to everyone.



## Friends of St John's Tower, Ayr

St John's Tower is all that remains of Ayr's original parish church, which was dedicated to St John the Baptist, the patron saint of Ayr. The church was built in the late 12th century, but it's not specifically mentioned in documents until the 13th.

[Friends of St John's Tower](#) uncovered the history of the tower and celebrated its past with the whole town in a special community event called 'Unlocking the Tower'. The Friends developed a website, and added their surveys, photos and sketches to [Canmore](#).

Because of access restrictions, the community also created [a film showing the tower's interiors and views from the top](#).

We were delighted to be able to give visitors who couldn't get up the tower the link to our film. There are many who arrive, and feel it's too high, too dark or that they are unable because of mobility problems. It was good to be able to say, 'well you can see it online!'

Friends of St John's Tower

## [Landscape legacies of coal-mining](#)

It's not so long ago that coal had a place in everyday life in central Scotland. At its peak in the post-war period, the industry employed around 140,000 workers and met roughly 90% of the nation's demand for fuel.

This collaboration between the University of Stirling and local community groups and individuals, produced a series of heritage walks that tell the story of Scottish coal mining through the surviving, but gradually disappearing industrial landscapes left behind by the coal mining industry. The walks are available as a free to download mobile app.

## Learning about heritage

Exploring castles, investigating archives or having a go at traditional skills can help people at all stages of learning to understand the past. It also improves accessibility and inspires creativity for the future.

If you're interested in how heritage can contribute to learning and what resources are available to support learners, there's lots of information out there. Here are a few to get you going:

- [Learn with Historic Environment Scotland](#)  
On these web pages there's information on the free visits, event and learning resources we provide to help inspire the public about heritage and make it accessible to all. These include resources to help you [learn from home](#).
- [Archaeology Scotland](#)

Archaeology Scotland offer learner groups support and information about what archaeology is and how it can be used in delivering learning activities. Their website provides lots of useful resources.

- [ARCH](#)  
Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH) has lots of great learning and information resources including information sheets and lesson plans for teachers.

## Caring for and protecting heritage

Individuals and groups make a major contribution to how heritage is looked after for the benefit of the people of Scotland, both today, and in the future.

Here are just some of the ways you can get involved.

### Recognising significance through listing and other registers

One of the main ways that we recognise that sites and places are significant is by adding them to lists, registers and inventories.

#### Recognising sites and places through statutory designations

At Historic Environment Scotland we manage four lists, each for a different type of site or place. These are:

- [The List of buildings of special architectural or historic interest](#)
- [The Schedule of nationally important monuments](#)
- [The Inventory of gardens and designed landscapes](#)
- [The Inventory of historic battlefields](#)

We also give advice to the Scottish Government on [Historic Marine Protected Areas](#) for our most important marine heritage sites.

We call the process of adding a place to one of our lists, 'designation'. Designation is the legal recognition of some of our most important historic sites and places. It ensures that sites and places are recognised by law through the planning system and other regulatory processes. This means that any changes to them, must be carefully considered.

This includes changes to the setting of sites and places. 'Setting' is the way the surroundings of a historic site or place contribute to how it is understood, appreciated and experienced. You can read more about setting in our [Managing Change guidance note on Setting](#).

You can find out about sites and places throughout Scotland that are protected in this way on [the Historic Environment Scotland Portal](#).

Anyone can propose a new designation or ask us to review an existing one. If you'd like us to consider a building, monument, battlefield, garden and designed landscape or marine heritage site for designation, to review an existing designation or update a record, you can fill in our [application form](#). We regularly work with community groups and we welcome comments on designation proposals to help us make good decisions about protecting Scotland's heritage.

If you would like to read more about designation, have a look at our [Designation Policy and Selection Guidance](#). This sets out how we take decisions on designation at the national level.

#### Case study – Assynt prehistoric cairns along the route of the North Coast 500

The community group [Historic Assynt](#) asked us to consider putting a group of prehistoric burial monuments in their local area on [the Schedule of nationally important monuments](#). They wanted to make sure that these little-known sites had greater recognition and protection.

'Scheduled monuments' are monuments identified as being nationally important to Scotland. Currently, there are around 8000 of them. Many of them have survived for more than 5000 years. Scotland has been recognising the cultural significance of its ancient monuments since 1882 when the first legislation was passed to help protect these sites.

After carrying out desk-based research, our team visited around 50 sites across the area, joining up with volunteers from Historic Assynt. After carrying out further research, 14 prehistoric sites were designated as scheduled monuments for the first time. A further 17 sites were already protected as scheduled monuments, but the site visits allowed the team to re-assess them and update records. [You can read more about the Assynt cairns project on the Historic Environment Scotland blog page](#)

There are many sites and places that are valued by individuals and communities, but which will not meet the criteria for national designation. For example, many of Scotland's communities will have a place of worship, a school, or a community hall. Places like these are often important to a community, but not all of them will have a level of cultural significance that means they should be designated.

There are lots of other ways that sites and places can be recognised and acknowledged. Local authorities manage local designations, like [conservation areas](#) and [local landscape areas](#). If you're interested in these, the best place to start is your local council's planning department. Having a clearly written statement of significance can help with this process.

[Recognising significance through other types of lists and registers.](#)

For some other types of heritage there are also registers which recognise significance but without providing protection in law. More well-known ones include:

- [War Memorials Register](#)
- [Tree Register of the British Isles](#)

- [National Register of Historic Vessels](#)

Recording and identifying the heritage that matters to people and communities  
One way that people and communities in Scotland can identify and record the heritage that matters to them is to prepare a list of locally significant heritage. These lists do not provide legal protection but may be taken into account when change is proposed.

Some communities have already started to think about the heritage that matters to them and how to recognise it in this way.

#### Case study: [Leith Listings](#)

Leith has some of the most rapidly evolving communities and neighbourhoods in Scotland. However, in recent years, local community groups became concerned that new-build housing and commercial development has overwritten a lot of the area's industrial landscape.

As part of the [People and Places: Make Leith Better programme](#), community groups gathered together to develop a 'Local List' that could give prominence in decision-making both to local buildings and structures, but also other places and intangible assets that make Leith unique and important to the local community.

The project team wanted to be as open and as accessible as possible to encourage participation from everyone, but particularly those who experience barriers to being involved with mainstream planning processes. Through on-street interviews, public events and exhibitions, more than 2000 people took part.

The final list of 121 places includes pubs, parks, swings, graveyards and many other local places. It reflects some of the significant historic buildings and structures in Leith, but also the people, places and attitudes that make it unique.

A list of locally significant heritage that is community-led can help in lots of ways. They promote the importance of all of Scotland's historic environment. Where lists of locally significant heritage are prepared through an inclusive process, they can help to bring people together and to increase community cohesion and sense of pride. They can also act as a vehicle to encourage collaboration with local authorities and other decision-makers about the heritage that matters to communities and people.

#### Making good places

We support the [Place Principle in Scotland](#) to create successful and sustainable places and believe that heritage has a big part to play in this.

Good places are distinctive, safe and pleasant, easy to move around and beyond, welcoming, adaptable, and resource efficient. One way of thinking about what contributes to successful place-making is to use the [Place Standard Tool on Architecture & Design Scotland's website](#).

If you're part of a community group and you want to champion local heritage and protect its distinctiveness, there are a number of ways to get involved in making

good places, and also information on some of the organisations that can give you support.

### Communities and ownership

Community bodies have specific rights when it comes to taking control of land and buildings under community empowerment laws. These include a right to request to buy, lease, manage or use land and buildings belonging to local authorities, Scottish public bodies or Scottish Ministers. You can find out more information on our [website](#).

The [Community Ownership Support Service](#) has helpful information and provides support for the transfer of assets into community management or ownership. We recommend that community groups identify a sustainable long-term use for any historic asset you plan to take into community management or ownership.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 also gives communities the right to request greater involvement in the decisions and services that affect their communities. The [Scottish Community Development Centre](#) has useful information available for submitting participation requests and works with communities to help build capacity.

### Engaging with the planning system

The planning system is there to promote, facilitate and regulate development in the public interest. Planning plays a major part in helping to maintain and enhance Scotland's distinctive historic places and makes a real difference to people's lives.

Some change is essential to meet current and future economic, social and environmental needs. Change can help places to thrive, but local communities are often the ones who feel the impact of planning decisions on the ground.

Although the system can seem confusing, we encourage early engagement with the planning system, as this helps to shape good places. All too often people will only get involved at the last minute, when a development proposal directly affects them.

Every council area in Scotland has a Local Development Plan. These are the main decision-making documents for managing development and use of land in Scotland. Getting involved in creating these plans can be a great way to influence what's happening in your area.

You can also get involved when specific applications for planning permission are being made. Early engagement doesn't guarantee that everyone will get what they want as planning decisions often require hard choices where differences cannot be resolved. Effective early engagement allows for a more transparent planning and decision-making process and early identification of issues.

If you're looking for support to get your voice heard in the planning process, there are organisations that can help you.

A good place to start is [PAS](#). PAS is a charity that helps people to get involved in decision-making in the planning system in an impartial, open and inclusive way. If local heritage is your focus, the [Scottish Civic Trust](#), will want to help. They work to give communities the skills and knowledge to make good places, and provide advice and information on lots of things, including how to [comment on planning applications](#).

### Historic Environment Records (HERs)

Local authorities take this valuable source of heritage information about local areas into account when they make decisions about planning. Providing information to the Local Authority Archaeology Service doesn't bring additional protection but it does help planners and others to take account of the things that matter to you in their decision-making.

### Local Place Plans

In 2019, a new [planning Act](#) brought changes to the planning system in Scotland. One important change was to introduce [Local Place Plans](#). This new type of plan allows community bodies including community councils to shape proposals for development and land use in their own area, based on local knowledge, aspirations and needs.

Local Place Plans are still new, so we don't know yet exactly how they'll work in practice or how they will be used in making decisions. We do know that Local Development Plans will have to take them into account. PAS have produced a [guide on Local Place Plans](#) where you can find out more.

An important part of them will be identifying land and buildings of particular significance to the local area. Along with the many other priorities that these plans will address, we believe that community bodies are in a great position to include local heritage in these, drawing information from the wide range of sources set out in this guidance.

### Looking after heritage

Individual owners and communities are often the best people to care for and celebrate their local built heritage – few people know what's going on in a place better than those who live there.

*'We are making heritage for the future, playing a role in shaping heritage.'*

Orkney What's Your Heritage project workshop

Communities bring their passion and local understanding to all types of heritage. For sites and places, this might be old school buildings, former factories, ruined churches, local memorials or archaeological sites. We couldn't do our work at Historic Environment Scotland without involving local people and sharing information.

Here are just some of the ways in which community groups can get involved.

You can help to understand and monitor what's happening in your community's historic environment. Archaeology Scotland's [Adopt-a-Monument programme](#) helps you take on the care of local monuments. It supports local communities to conserve the monuments they feel passionate about. Or, if you live along the coast, why not consider helping the [SCAPE Trust](#) with its efforts to monitor and record coastal heritage sites threatened by coastal erosion and climate change. You can also help us at Historic Environment Scotland to monitor the historic buildings and places that we look after through our [Monument Monitor](#) project.

### **Bringing historic places back to life**

Communities involved with local heritage can also make a major contribution to regenerating historic places. If you want to return a local historic building to its former glory, we can give you support and guidance along the way.

For 30 years, we've been gathering information on the vulnerable historic places of Scotland on the [Buildings at Risk Register](#). A lot of this information comes to us from local sources. If you think an important local building should be on the Register or would like to let us know about changes at an existing Building at Risk, get in touch. You can contact us via [the Buildings at Risk website](#), or e-mail [barr@hes.scot](mailto:barr@hes.scot).

If you'd like to get involved in monitoring your local built heritage, get in touch and we'll help you to understand the Buildings at Risk project, and how you can help. We also have lots of [guidance and research publications on our website](#). Our guidance includes practical guidance on looking after traditional buildings and on the procedures involved. If you're not sure where to start, it might be helpful to look at our [advice webpages](#). You can contact us by e-mail at [hmenquiries@hes.scot](mailto:hmenquiries@hes.scot).

We also recommend that you get in touch with [Heritage Trust Network Scotland](#). This network of building preservation trusts operates in the major cities and rural areas across Scotland. It plays a major role in regeneration of historic places, sharing advice and offering expertise to local groups.

### Case study – White House Craigmillar, Edinburgh

The White House had always been a popular building in Craigmillar - not least because when it was first built it was one of very few pubs in the area. It was one of Edinburgh's original roadhouses – a sort of cross between a pub and a hotel – built in the 1930s.

For more than five years in the early 2000s, the White House lay empty. It became a target for anti-social behaviour and was vandalised and even set on fire a number of times. The situation was only going to get worse, both for the building and for the community around it. But it was the affection the community still had for this important part of Craigmillar's local heritage that saved it from being lost entirely.

[PARC](#), a publicly-owned development company, bought the building in 2007. They got funding from the Scottish Government and Historic Scotland to restore it to its former glory.

But it was the local community who gave the building a long-term future. They set up a [community development trust](#), and agreed a lease for the building. Using the White House as a base, the trust started 'social enterprise' operations to benefit the community. The [White House Kitchen](#) offers healthy, affordable food, using local and homegrown produce. The building hosts local festivals and music events. It is a centre point for the community.

### Communities and funding

There are lots of options for community bodies looking for ways to pay for what they plan. But this can mean it's hard to know where to start.

Not all ways of generating income will suit every community body or every project. It's a good idea to lay out what your goal is, what you're going to do and who will benefit from it. Have a think too about whether you may be able to encourage volunteers to help you – people who share your passion for heritage and may be willing to lend their time and knowledge at reduced cost, or even for free.

We've pulled together information on a few ways for getting the money and other resources you need in our [funding pack](#).

Information on our grant programmes and how to apply is available on [our website](#).



### **Case study – [Portsoy Community Enterprise](#), Aberdeenshire**

Every June, the harbour town of Portsoy hosts the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival, bringing around 20,000 visitors from all over the world.

Since the first boat festival in 1993, the event has grown. Portsoy Community Enterprise (PCE) has regenerated redundant harbour buildings for boat-building courses; restored a former working salmon house as a museum; and taken on the lease of a caravan park. Together, these initiatives provide significant economic benefit from tourism for the town of Portsoy and surrounding area, with all assets belonging to the community.

PCE is a social enterprise, committed to offering opportunities for people to be involved in traditional boat building and other cultural programmes throughout the year.

The most recent plan was to run residential courses on boat-building for which the community needed new accommodation.

The [Sail Loft Bunkhouse project](#) was led by [North East Scotland Preservation Trust](#), in partnership with PCE. They got support from the Heritage Lottery Fund Heritage Enterprise Scheme and the [Coastal Communities Fund](#). They also received a grant from us at Historic Environment Scotland, via the Portsoy [Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme](#).

With that money, they repaired a group of 18th century buildings, and converted them into [4-star bunkhouse accommodation](#). The [buildings are listed](#), and had previously been on the [Buildings at Risk Register](#). On top of financial support, we also gave advice on the detailed design of the bunkhouses.

### **Further information and advice**

If you would like further information about how you can contribute to shaping Scotland's heritage, please get in touch with us at [Historic Environment Scotland](#).