

100 years of recording Scotland's Treasured Places

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In 2008 the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) celebrated 100 years of surveying, recording and collecting information and images on the ever-changing landscape of Scotland. Central to our Centenary celebrations is the Treasured Places project, which, through online and workshop activity, exhibitions, and this publication, seeks to open up the resources of RCAHMS and capture personal responses to what we do and the collections we hold. This is our story.

Treasured Places is an exploration of our relationships with buildings and archaeology, from the everyday vernacular to the great anchors of our past. These relationships form an integral part of our personal identities, as much as the places themselves construct the identity of the nation. The role of RCAHMS in documenting these buildings and monuments has grown and developed over the 100 years since we were set up in 1908. Our work reflects the need of society to understand its inherited identity and to capture that for future generations to enjoy and understand. Treasured Places represents a window on the work of recording the 10,000 years of Scotland's human influence on the landscape.

Scotland has some of the best cultural landscapes in the world, from its wildest shores and the density of its abandoned rural settlements to the landscapes of its industrial heartlands and the complex modern and historic city centres. Places do not develop without the interaction of people. Capturing the physical evidence that remains of the human influence on the multi-layered landscapes and townscapes that we inherit today is the vital skilled task of RCAHMS.

The material that has been selected for Treasured Places has been created and collected by RCAHMS and includes drawings – pencil studies, sketches, field surveys – prints, photographs, models, pamphlets and new media. Through advancing technologies and the specialist knowledge of our staff, we are able to offer accurate information that both reflects and leads current thinking in the understanding and interpretation of the structures we survey and the material we collect. This ever-increasing body of work is available to anyone who visits our search room and much of it can be used through Canmore online at www.rcahms.gov.uk. Treasured Places has been designed to show off this rich and varied national collection and to share our passion for it. Incorporated in the exhibition are personal reflections on places which are important to people in many complex ways. We invite you to celebrate with us 100 years of creating the story of Scotland's places.

RCAHMS is recognised worldwide for the quality and standards of our research and survey, the curation of archaeological, architectural and aerial photographic collections, and the use of the latest technology for our heritage information systems. Today, as one of Scotland's National Collections, RCAHMS continues to collect, record and interpret information on the archaeological, architectural, industrial and maritime heritage of Scotland. Importantly, in addition to acquiring material, we create our own collections through detailed measured survey drawings, photography and research and make them freely available for professional, personal and educational purposes. Much has been achieved in the first 100 years: archaeological fieldwork has identified thousands of monuments and historic landscapes; aerial photography has revealed the buried remains of long-lost settlements and communities; historic buildings and industrial monuments have been analysed and recorded; maritime archaeology and an index of wrecks has been established; and an archive of some

14.5 million drawings, photographs, manuscripts and digital files has been assembled. The story of RCAHMS is one of a forward-focused organisation, which constantly adapts to changing circumstances and realises and responds to opportunities. We developed from a small group of dedicated professionals, appointed by the Crown to present the evidence of the importance of Scotland's monuments to government, into the modern dynamic organisation that we are today. On the way, we have amalgamated with or become the permanent home for a number of other bodies doing related work, for collections built up by others, and for initiatives set up to respond rapidly to a specific opportunity or need.

Throughout the late nineteenth century, the damage and destruction to Scotland's historic buildings and monuments through increased urbanisation and industrialisation had been recognised. It was Baldwin Brown, Professor of Fine Art at Edinburgh University, who in 1905 recommended that a Royal Commission should be founded to create an Inventory of ancient monuments and historic buildings that could be used to inform decisions about the improved protection of monuments: 'If ever a national work of inventorisation were set on foot, it is in Scotland that it might be started with the best promise of a satisfactory result.' In his influential volume *The Care of Ancient Monuments*, Brown highlighted the neglect of Britain's ancient monuments, in contrast to the work being done in countries around Europe: Denmark had had a Royal Commission since 1807 and had a programme of listing monuments, while France started the compilation of a national inventory of archaeological and historical monuments as early as 1837.

Thus it was that in February 1908, Sir John Sinclair, Secretary of State for Scotland, established the Commission 'to make an Inventory of the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions connected with or illustrative of the contemporary culture, civilization, and conditions of life of the people in Scotland from the earliest times to the year 1707'. Baldwin Brown found himself appointed, along with six other well respected academics from the world of Scottish art, architecture and archaeology, as Commissioner of the newly established body to provide direction and guidance. At their first meeting on 7th February 1908, under the chairmanship of Sir Herbert Maxwell, the Commissioners agreed a scheme for carrying out the work of the pioneering organisation (Royal Commissions for England and Wales were appointed later in 1908). Working on a county-by-county basis, lists of known monuments or historic buildings were prepared, extracting details from Ordnance Survey maps or publications, supplemented by information from local people. The Secretary was tasked with inspecting each and every monument, and preparing summary descriptions for inclusion in a published Inventory.

Described as a 'rising antiquary', Alexander Ormiston Curle was appointed as the first Secretary of the Commission and, in August 1908, he began the process of visiting monuments in the county of Berwickshire. It took him three months to survey the county, inspecting and taking notes on over 200 monuments. He cycled almost 300 miles and proudly declared that he had only hired a trap and motorcar twice. This was to be the pattern for the next five years – with only the assistance of a clerk, based in Edinburgh, and the occasional hired help to measure monuments – Curle completed fieldwork in the counties of Berwickshire, Sutherland, Caithness, Wigtown and Kirkcudbright with the publication of the Inventories in 1909–14. By the time he resigned from the Commission in 1913 to become Director of the National Museum of Antiquities, there were three additional professional staff to help speed up fieldwork and the compilation of the Inventory. In his short time as Secretary, Curle established a *modus operandi* and firm foundations from which the organisation has developed and expanded. He continued to contribute as a

Commissioner for a further 38 years until 1951.

The first Inventory that was published, for the county of Berwickshire, did not contain any photographs or drawings. It soon became clear that illustrations were essential to the understanding of the built heritage and subsequently they became an essential part of the Commission's work and were included in all publications. Early minutes of the Commissioners' meetings note the acquisition of photographs or drawings to help with the inventorisation process, such as the gift of some 67 glass plate negatives and photographs by George Chrystal, Professor of Mathematics at Edinburgh in 1914, which illustrated a number of historic buildings across Scotland. It was not until the 1950s, when the cap on the complement of staff was lifted, that a specialist draughtsman and a professional photographer were recruited. These latter appointments were to be particularly influential in improving the understanding of monuments and buildings by raising the standard of survey and recording techniques, and by developing new methodologies.

One such example is the recording of carved stones. With the start of a full survey of the county of Argyll in the early 1960s, with its large number of medieval carved stones, new techniques were developed to assist interpretation and to capture the subtle details of carvings that had suffered the ravages of time. For photography, the technique of using oblique peripheral lighting was introduced to add extra definition to the sculptured surface and help bring out the detail, and for drawings the development of a subtle, stippled method allowed for a more sensitive and accurate depiction. Both techniques have been extended and developed for all manner of carved stones, whether cup-and-ring marked rock faces, Pictish stones or architectural details.

Many archaeologists were employed in intelligence work during the Second World War because of their skills in interpretation and observation. Returning to employment in RCAHMS in the late 1940s, staff were to bring new skills and experience which had a radical impact on survey work. Although RCAHMS had first used an aerial photograph in the Inventory of Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan in 1933 to illustrate a known archaeological site, the Royal Air Force imagery that became available for all of Scotland in the late 1940s, now provided a means of identifying new sites. Through detailed analysis of the photographs, large quantities of sites were discovered and interpreted for inclusion in the Inventories. The value of aerial reconnaissance for archaeological research grew in importance and by 1976, RCAHMS had established its own programme of aerial survey. Initially this was designed to discover sites visible as cropmarks, but it was soon extended to include aerial views of upstanding monuments, industrial complexes, historic buildings and landscapes. Since then, thousands of sites have been photographed, including numerous cropmark sites which are plotted out in detail to create a continuously evolving map of the hidden archaeological landscapes of Scotland.

An active research and development programme ensures that recording techniques are continually enhanced. The plane table, with its accompanying alidade and compass, is used by RCAHMS as the principal method for the preparation of archaeological and architectural plans, in addition to a survey grade satellite based Global Positioning System to locate and accurately position sites. Photogrammetry and high definition laser scanning produce excellent results for the recording of carved stones and historic buildings while airborne laser scanning and aerial photography rectification techniques offer huge potential for mapping and creating three dimensional models of the landscape.

The Second World War brought the threat of enemy bombings and potential damage to

historic buildings and monuments. In areas not already covered by the published inventories, RCAHMS immediately turned its attention to photographically recording historic sites thought to be at risk and by 1942 had created a record of some 2,300 photographs. Elsewhere in Edinburgh, the Scottish National Buildings Record was established in 1941 with a very similar objective, to make an emergency record of Scotland's historic architecture threatened by possible destruction from enemy action. Work focused on the preparation of measured survey drawings, the collation of existing survey records, and photography. A limited staff, architectural students and Polish architects, took photographs and prepared measured surveys. From the outset it was realised that the small Scottish National Buildings Record survey staff could not cope with recording the volume of buildings potentially at risk, and consequently existing architectural design drawings were collected to broaden the coverage as rapidly as possible. The first historic collection to be presented in 1942 comprised the exhibition drawings of the architect David Bryce (1803–1876). This was to be the start of an active acquisition policy of illustrative material relating to Scotland's buildings.

Interestingly there was no formal connection between RCAHMS and the Scottish National Buildings Record during the war but they were to come together in 1966 to create the National Monuments Record of Scotland, in one of the most significant developments in the history of the Commission. In the words of Kenneth Steer, Secretary at the time: 'it has enabled the two largest collections of negatives, photographic prints, and drawings of ancient monuments and historic buildings in Scotland to be combined into a single archive'. Emergency recording of buildings in advance of proposed works involving demolition, alteration or conversion was one of the functions of the Scottish National Buildings Record that was taken on by the Commission. This was to receive statutory recognition in 1969 with the implementation of new planning legislation, still in force today, that stipulates that RCAHMS must have the opportunity to make a record of any listed building threatened with destruction or alteration.

Until 1983, the Ordnance Survey maintained an Archaeology Division to record and survey information on archaeological and historical sites for mapping purposes. Set up in 1920 with the appointment of O G S Crawford as the first Archaeology Officer, the Division assembled a remarkable card index, and set of annotated 1:10,000 maps relating to monuments throughout the whole of Great Britain and which supported the validation and publication of all the 'antiquities' on the Ordnance Survey map series. In 1983, the responsibilities for recording and surveying were transferred to the three Royal Commissions in England, Scotland and Wales, while the business of publishing the maps remained with the Ordnance Survey. The transfer of responsibilities took RCAHMS to a new level of survey assisted by improvements in survey equipment, using electronic and laser technology. For the first time it became possible to map the landscape around individual monuments, recording their context, extent and the extensive field systems from the past that are often still visible. Combined with aerial photography this remains today the most powerful way of capturing the multiple layers that make up Scotland's complex and varied landscape.

Until the 1980s, the Inventory RCAHMS had been tasked with creating was presented in the form of a series of publications. The transfer of the Ordnance Survey card index and maps, with their comprehensive coverage but limited analysis and interpretation, combined with the new approach to mapping the landscape, caused a re-evaluation of what the Inventory should be and how it could best be constructed for the future. By this time there was also a burgeoning archive that required improved cataloguing. This was to be the stimulus to the development of an integrated computerised heritage information system, one of the earliest in

its field. RCAHMS still leads the field in heritage information systems, with free public online access to its data. This online data – Canmore – is now the Inventory, while our publications are analytical or thematic in approach. The Inventory has therefore broadened in scope and contains a mixture of data from both older and completely up-to-date surveys and research, as well as an integrated catalogue to the collections. Updated daily and highly developed technically, it is also networked with other data sources to provide a ‘one stop shop’ for heritage information through Pastmap which combines data from RCAHMS with that from Historic Scotland and Local Authority archaeology services. With the amalgamation in 2008 of the Scran online learning resource, with its direct routes into both formal and informal education, the RCAHMS online service has been significantly strengthened.

For the first 40 years, the Commission was restricted to recording monuments and buildings up to 1707, as defined in the Royal Warrant, but this was removed in 1948, allowing for increased survey of more ‘modern’ architecture, including vernacular and industrial buildings. Today, we include buildings that are clearly significant indicators of life in the twentieth and even the twenty-first century such as the Scottish Parliament, and we are embarking on a project that will analyse the multifaceted layers of the development of towns and cities in much the same way as we have approached rural landscapes.

In 1992 RCAHMS was given responsibility for recording the maritime heritage, while for industrial buildings RCAHMS was to benefit particularly from the integration of another organisation, the Scottish Industrial Archaeology Survey, which greatly increased the Commission’s capacity to record industrial monuments threatened with demolition or conversion. Established in 1977 to systematically survey significant industrial monuments across the country, it responded to the growing concern that the monuments associated with the transformation of Scotland through its industry, technology and commerce from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries were rapidly disappearing with no record and no protection. It was to find its permanent home with RCAHMS where it was transferred in 1985, by which time it had amassed an invaluable collection of some 1,500 records.

Landscapes of deserted settlements make up much of our more recent rural past, with traces of former habitation visible in almost every highland glen. These were initially not included in the inventory because they were difficult to record with the early methodology, they were thought to be too recent to be of significance to the task in hand, and their social connotation was undoubtedly still very raw. In more recent times it has become important to record these places because of the significance that they have for the understanding of the changing cultural landscape. Work on recording these landscapes began in the 1970s and the body of knowledge created is now at the heart of a project in which RCAHMS, with its funding partners, is engaging local groups to look at and record the rural landscape on their doorsteps and contribute this to the national Inventory online. This type of community contribution to the national Inventory is also being embraced within Treasured Places, with a series of developments that allow users to post content online.

The RCAHMS collection has expanded and developed very substantially over the last 100 years. With a growing reputation as the place that would care for archives relating to Scotland’s archaeology and buildings and use them to further research, RCAHMS inevitably attracted many collections. Perhaps one of the most significant gifts to be made to the Commission in its early years were the drawings from the National Art Survey of Scotland which came from the Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland. Later came

numerous archives, such as of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland; the Northern Lighthouse Board drawings; the records relating to archaeological surveys and excavations carried out throughout Scotland; and the photographs of Scottish buildings and interiors by architectural photographer Harry Bedford Lemere from the period 1890–1928. In the 1990s an economic down-turn and consequent crisis in the architectural profession led to the gift and acquisition of a significant number of collections of architects' papers, including from the practices of Dick Peddie and McKay, Ian G Lindsay, and Lorimer and Matthew. The advent of the Heritage Lottery Fund, and its support for making the heritage accessible and enjoyable to an ever-widening audience, allowed RCAHMS to undertake major programmes of conservation and cataloguing of these collections, and inspired a more adventurous approach to how they are delivered to the public. This new work in turn led to new gifts, including the collection of the twentieth century architect Sir Basil Spence. Very recently, significant support from the Heritage Lottery Fund has allowed the development of an extensive workshop and exhibition programme, allowing us to take our collections out of our headquarters for people throughout the UK to use and enjoy them.

Another very significant area of our collecting has seen RCAHMS become one of the largest aerial photographic collections in the world, known for our expertise in managing, interpreting and handling these collections. They include 1.5 million images of Scotland taken by the Ordnance Survey and the Royal Air Force from the 1940s to the 1990s, as well as the Scottish component of the historic Aerofilms archive, recently purchased in partnership with English Heritage and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. However, the single most significant deposit came in 2008 with the transfer of The Aerial Reconnaissance Archives (TARA) from Keele University that comprises some 10 million prints and negatives of Europe dating from 1939 through to recent years.

Today the collections include an increasing amount of digital data that presents its own challenges for the next 100 years. Notebooks used on excavations have been replaced by databases, photographs no longer have negatives but are digitally born, and designs by architects are rarely produced on paper. Digital files not only have to be accessioned into the collection, but must be regularly checked to ensure that they will still be usable in the technology of the future.

Without the generosity, enthusiasm and support of people around the country, RCAHMS could not have achieved so much. From volunteers who have freely given their time to assist with projects, to local historians who have submitted the results of their fieldwork or research, through to the donors of single photographs or significant collections, they have all contributed in so many ways to the national Inventory.

In 1908, the vision for the Inventory of Scotland's ancient monuments and historic building was a series of publications. The first Commissioners could not have imagined the developments that would unfold through the century, together with the evolution of the public's enthusiasm and engagement with their historic environment. They would be delighted to know that the cause that they so determinedly and passionately believed in, then very much a minority interest, would one day become so universally accepted as part of our national psyche; one that excites world wide interest, attracts tourism to Scotland and makes a significant contribution to the Scottish economy. Treasured Places is just a taste of the contribution that RCAHMS makes to the ongoing evolution of Scotland's story.