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UNSEEN AERIAL IMAGES OF SCOTLAND LAUNCHED ON NEW WEBSITE

A collection of post-war aerial photographs that informed the planning and building of modern Scotland are now available to view for the first time on a new website.

As Scotland adjusted to peace in 1945, the sight and sound of RAF planes overhead remained a familiar sight, as military photographers set to work using the reconnaissance skills learned during wartime to record every town, port, valley and hill in Scotland.

The 280,000 images taken during 500 sorties across the length and breadth of the country were part of Operation Revue, an aerial survey carried out for the Ordnance Survey. Running from 1945 to 1951 it was not only a means to gainfully employ pilots and aircrew in peacetime, but also created an invaluable blueprint for the planners and architects engaged in producing a vision for the future development of Scotland.

These photographs, many of which have never been seen before by the public, now form the basis of the Scottish online section of the National Collection of Aerial Photography, an archive of millions of aerial images held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). Through the new website the public can view digital copies of the historic images and plot their locations on modern satellite maps of Scotland. Subscription to the site allows the user to access detailed search and zoom facilities.

RCAHMS aerial archive manager, Allan Williams said:

“These unique photographs show Scotland’s countryside and towns on the cusp of tremendous change. The details they contain are remarkable. At one extreme, you can see long-gone industries like jute and shipbuilding dominating town and city centres. At the other, it’s the small things that have amazing resonance – for example, horses and carts were still commonplace sights in Scottish towns in the 1950s, something that many might find hard to believe today.”

“But not only are the images a record of the nation at a specific period of time, they were also the main source material that informed the creation of modern Scotland. Government planners wanted the most up-to-date overview of what the whole of the country looked like. Obviously there was no satellite technology at this time, so they relied on the unique skills of the reconnaissance pilots to create this comprehensive record.”

The thousands of images that comprise Operation Revue are just one part of the Scottish component

of the National Collection. There are over a million images of Scotland in the archive and many more images from this unique resource are being added to the website all the time.

Among the thousands of photographs currently available online are:

- Images that capture the development of 'New Towns' like Cumbernauld, East Kilbride and Glenrothes, showing the small villages and open countryside that existed in the late 1940s and early 50s. These photographs were the primary source material that informed government programmes of housing development and resettlement.
- Edinburgh in December 1951, including city centre landmarks like the Balmoral Hotel, Waverley Station, St Andrew's Square and the Scott Monument, and areas such as Liberton, Newington and Powderhall.
- Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness photographed in June 1947.
- Images of towns across Scotland in the late 1940s and early 50s including Paisley, Perth, Stirling, Dumfries, Dumbarton, Hamilton, Kilmarnock, Kirkcaldy and Greenock.
- A sequence of images taken in 1950 following the path of the River Clyde from Finnieston to John Brown's Shipyard in Clydebank, showing the River's many dockyards swollen with industry and activity.

"The early photographs are particularly interesting when compared to more recent images. We have a shot of a farm worker and his horse in a hayfield taken in 1947 which today is in the exact spot of East Kilbride town centre. Because our website allows users to plot the locations of archive imagery on programmes like Google Maps and Google Earth, they can make direct comparisons between the historical landscape and the present day", Allan Williams said.

The new website is accompanied by a new, dedicated search area devoted to aerial photography within the RCAHMS Edinburgh headquarters, which allows anyone to consult archive imagery of every inch of Scotland.

The website - aerial.rcahms.gov.uk - can be freely browsed but subscribers can view higher resolution images and access additional information. Subscriptions are currently available at a special offer price of £15 for two years.

Media enquiries: Barbara Fraser or Shaheena Abbas on 0131 556 0770. Barbara.fraser@pagodapr.com; Shaheena.abbas@pagodapr.com

Notes to Editors:

- 1) More information on Operation Review, the RAF National Air Photograph Survey of Scotland, can be found on RCAHMS [National Collection of Aerial Photography](http://NationalCollectionofAerialPhotography) website.
- 2) RCAHMS is the National Collection of materials on Scotland's built environment that connects people to places across time. It:
 - Is the first port of call for information about the built environment of Scotland, from prehistory to the present
 - employs expert staff and cutting edge technology to make its collections easy to access
 - makes accessible a wide range of resources from maps and manuscripts to photographs and drawings, for people interested in Scotland's culture and heritage

- is Scotland's National Collection for information and materials on the built environment
- records the changing landscape of Scotland and collects materials relating to it
- involves people in discovering and investigating Scotland's built environment