



# Conservation fact sheet

## What is heritage conservation?

Conservation work protects places which are important to us so that people will still be able to visit them in the future.

Heritage conservation is the act of protecting and conserving the historic environment for future generations. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) are legally obligated to look after and conserve sites and monuments in its care on behalf of the Scottish Government.



**Top L:** High level masonry inspection, Caerlaverock Castle. **Top R:** Conservation work, Tantallon Castle. **Bottom L:** Gravestone maintenance, Dunblane Cathedral. **Bottom R:** Cleaning/restoring panels, Edinburgh Castle.



# How does climate change affect conservation work?

Climate change is one of the most serious issues for conserving the historic environment as it speeds up deterioration of historic properties and monuments. If we work to reduce climate change, we can help slow this down.

We investigated 352 sites and found that 89% are at high or very high risk from climate change. However the number of sites drops to 53% when there is routine maintenance or conservation work. (*HES Climate Change Report 2018*, p4).

## We can protect our historic places by:

- Highlighting the risks of climate change
- Reducing emissions from our own activities
- Adapting our buildings
- Making our activities more sustainable
- Promoting sustainable and local building materials
- Promoting adaptation and repair of traditional buildings

Find out more in the [climate change fact sheet](#).

## Who do we need?

Our local teams of conservation specialists carry out checks and repairs on the properties in our care as well as maintenance work of the grounds. The teams include:

- stonemasons
- joiners
- blacksmiths
- painters
- gardeners
- plumbers
- electricians

Find out more in the [careers fact sheet](#).

## What conservation work do we carry out?

Conservation work might include:

- Repairing/replacing damaged or worn parts of a historic property
- Surveying the properties we look after, to spot damage and making sure they are safe to visit
- Measuring impact of damage and decay caused by rain, heat, ice and wind
- Keeping places clean and free from rubbish – or bird poo!
- Grass cutting and managing vegetation
- Developing new ways to preserve our historic buildings using local, traditional materials



Our summer school learning to care for traditional buildings.



Our Monument Conservation Unit staff.



High level masonry inspection, Arbroath Abbey.

# What role does science play?



**Above:** Scientist preparing a sample.  
**Left:** Science manager taking a thermal image, Iona Abbey.

The climate crisis poses a threat to our heritage, but the HES Conservation Science team carry out scientific research to better understand how to look after the historic environment. They help us investigate causes of decay and choose suitable replacement materials. For example, the team:

- Use scientific analysis to identify stone types and mortar mixes, allowing us to match these traditional materials and use them for repair work.
- Help to monitor moisture levels in buildings and measures which could reduce moisture.
- Use thermal imaging to look at heat loss in buildings so that they can be made more energy efficient.

## A centre for conservation

The Engine Shed, our dedicated Conservation Centre in Stirling, provides support, advice, training and learning opportunities.

For example we run a dedicated Conservation Summer School, to help understanding of traditional building materials and skills as well as inspire future generations to continue to care for Scotland's built heritage.



### Find out more:



[Scotland's dedicated building conservation centre](#)

The Engine Shed website



[Building a future for our past: conservation and education at the Engine Shed](#)

YouTube (13m 26s)



[Conservation: what we do](#)

HES website



[Young people in conservation: working with HES](#)

YouTube (3m 20s)