



# Heritage crime fact sheet

## What is heritage crime?

Heritage crime is any criminal activity which causes damage to what we call historic assets. An asset in this case is something which is historically valuable such as buildings and monuments, carvings, collections in our care such as paintings and sculptures and objects of historical significances.

### Heritage crime includes:

- Criminal damage or vandalism
- Wilful fire raising
- Theft, including metal theft
- Metal detecting on scheduled monuments (legally protected places).

**Top right:** Graffiti at Dumbarton Castle.

**Bottom left:** Firepit dug in the middle of a prehistoric stone circle, possibly damaging archaeological deposits.

**Bottom right:** Stolen turf, suspected illegal metal detecting in Holyrood Park.



# Heritage and the law

The **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979** is law which can be enforced to protect our heritage.

Heritage crime carries significantly more severe penalties than vandalism; the maximum fine for damage to a scheduled monument is £50,000 and between six months and two years' imprisonment.



## Our responsibility

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) are legally obligated to look after and conserve ancient monuments on behalf of the Scottish Government. This includes protection and conservation work and the prevention of loss or damage to the monuments.

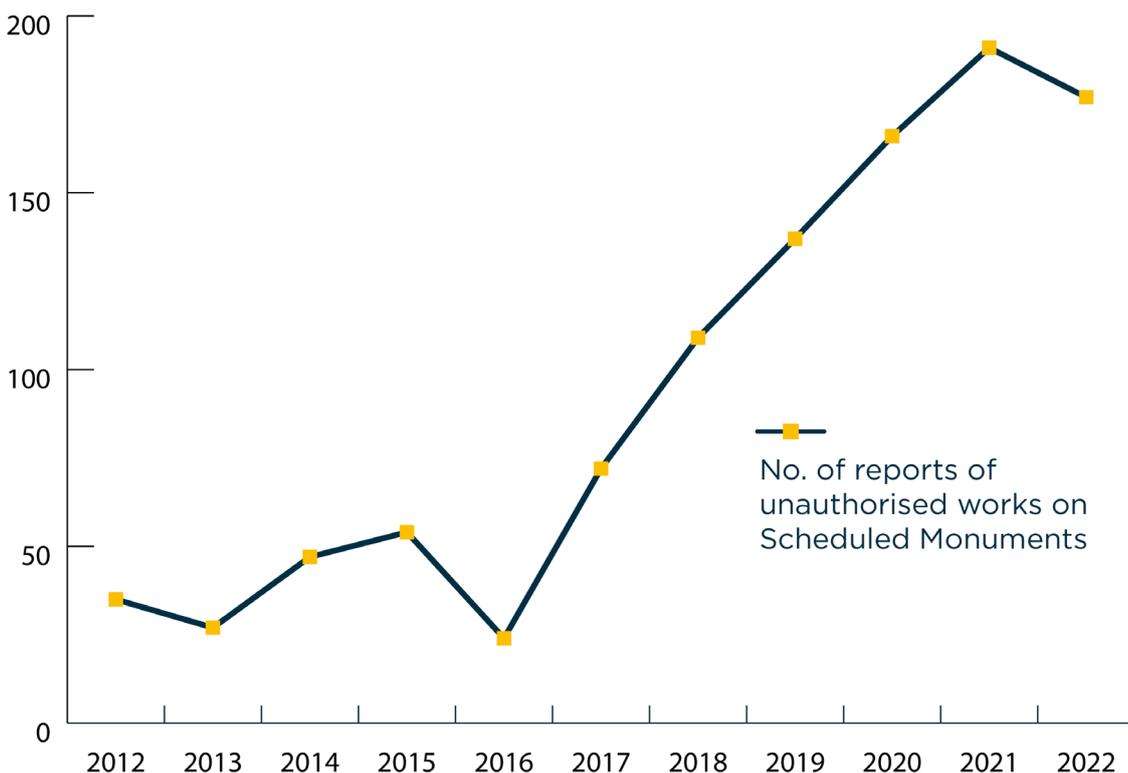
## Criminal activity

When someone deliberately damages a monument then they are likely to be committing a heritage crime. This could be anything such as removing stones, graffiti, setting a fire, metal detecting or even camping at the site.

Anyone can report a heritage crime or evidence of crimes they see, anonymously, through **Crimestoppers**.

## The increase in heritage crime

There has been an increase in heritage crime over the last five years with reports of 164 incidents from January to December 2020 alone.



Unauthorised Works Report (HES) 2022

# Examples of heritage crime

## Aberdour Castle

- Littering, broken bottles – health and safety hazard
- Vandalism to signage and structures
- Theft of a millstone from the 1400s
- Break-in to visitor areas with hundreds of pounds worth of damage caused and HES property stolen

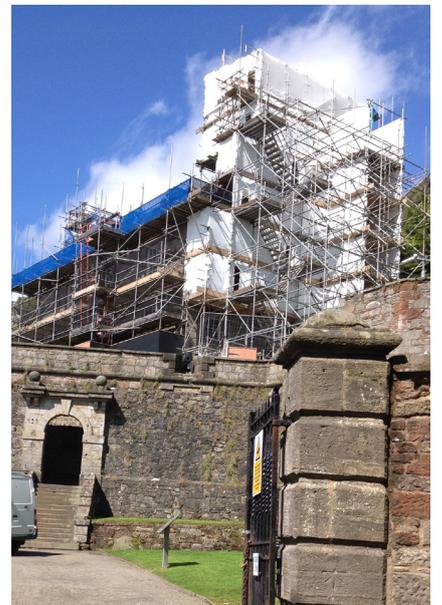


## Craigmillar Castle

- Damage to protective fencing intended to keep people safe and away from the monument
- Repeated reports of damage to entrance points

## Dumbarton Castle

- Reports of unauthorised access through scaling of walls or scaffolding
- Damage to locks
- Report of digging or climbing on the Castle Rock



## Ravenscraig Castle

- Damage to protective fencing intended to keep people safe and away from the monument
- Stonework at the castle entrance points damaged
- The device which counts the number of visitors has been kicked and dislodged



**Top:** Vandalism at Aberdour Castle  
**Middle:** Scaffolding, Dumbarton Castle  
**Bottom:** Protective fencing at Ravenscraig Castle

# The impact of heritage crime

Whenever a monument suffers deliberate damage, it may mean that it can never be properly restored to the condition in which our ancestors meant it to be seen or understood. If these ancient structures from our past are routinely attacked and deliberately damaged, we lose part of where we have come from.

While not all reported incidents amount to a heritage crime, there is a lot of work which has to be done, for example:

- recording incidents
- repairing fencing
- clearing up rubbish
- replacing signs.

This work takes a considerable time, effort and resources that could be put to better use in caring for and conserving our protected places. Incidents can also lead to site closures.

There are also dangers to those carrying out the crimes, who often take risks like climbing on high buildings and setting fires.



Ring of Brodgar, Orkney, is the largest stone circle in Scotland, dating from c. 2,000 BC. It was vandalised in 2015.

## What can be done to tackle heritage crime?

- HES is part of the **Scottish Heritage Crime Group** which tries to raise awareness of the impact of criminal activities and encourages information sharing.
- HES also **work with local authorities and local communities** to increase understanding of heritage crime and the dangers of climbing on buildings and settings fires.
- Local people can be employed as **'keykeepers'** to check on sites most at risk from crime.
- As a last resort, areas of sites or even full sites can be **blocked off by fencing** to protect them. This also helps to protect the people who are trying to damage them.

## Find out more:



[Robbed of our history: heritage crime](#)  
HES website



[Wild camping at Scheduled Monuments](#)  
HES website (PDF)



[Joint drive to tackle heritage crime in Scotland](#)  
HES website

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