

Cover: Experimental archaeologists weaving a similar piece to the one uncovered at the bottom of Loch Tay.

OGL

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Celebrating archaeology in Scotland

# 2025



SCOTLAND'S  
ARCHAEOLOGY STRATEGY

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# Welcome!

We want a Scotland where archaeology is for everyone! A place where the study of the past offers opportunities for us now and in the future to discover, care for, promote and enjoy our rich and diverse heritage, contributing to our wellbeing and knowledge and helping to tell Scotland’s stories in their global context.

In this magazine, bringing together articles and comments from people and organisations across the archaeology sector, we celebrate how Scotland’s Archaeology Strategy is being delivered across the country.

Heading towards the rock art at High Banks, Dumfries and Galloway.

Image © Society of Antiquaries of Scotland



## The Scottish Crannog Centre

Hard at work inside one of our reconstructed round houses.

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Images © Martin Shields Photography.

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Image © HES



Image © SCARF

## Heritage Heroes Awards

Over 30,000 awards have now been achieved by people of all ages across Scotland.

40



Image © Archaeology Scotland.

## The Nigg Stone

In the Highlands. Specialist heritage skills such as stone conservation are going to be essential in the future.

46



Image © Craig Stanford



Image © NTS.

Being involved long-term has also meant the National Trust for Scotland can rely on volunteers to support public events. Like our family archaeology days at Castle Fraser, Aberdeenshire.



# WELCOME to Celebrating Archaeology in Scotland 2025! This is our eighth issue and coincides with the 10th year of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy.

The theme of this year's magazine is Wellbeing. Whilst celebrating the range of activities that have taken place across the country, we are eager to showcase the physical, mental and social wellbeing benefits our shared archaeology practices can have on individuals and communities. Equally, an informed view of our past can help build a positive view of the present and future.

In this issue you will discover a range of outstanding projects where archaeology partners delivered wellbeing initiatives across the country, including working with people with dementia at Jedburgh Abbey and in the National Museum of Scotland, 'Slow Archaeology' around Stirling, and how archaeology can help with mental health by allowing you to 'become the person you really are without all the baggage we carry day to day'. This issue is packed full of inspirational articles and honest views of how our shared archaeological practices actually help support people and change their lives.

As one of the authors says in the magazine; "Delivering archaeology within our varied profession can often feel high pressured with countless policies, funding applications to complete and deadlines to navigate. But we must never forget the substantial and often life-changing outcomes we help collaboratively deliver for a range of people." Archaeology means so much more than just discovering new finds and sites.

In my role as the Chair I have the privilege of attending many meetings with heritage sectors representatives from across the UK and Ireland; I am constantly told that Scotland's archaeology is looked at enviously – a collaborative group of people from across the public, private, and third sectors working together to ensure archaeology is as welcoming and inclusive as possible. This magazine showcases all that important and valuable work, and demonstrates just how much archaeology matters to everyone.

I hope you enjoy reading and celebrating the continued successes across our collaborative sector.

Andrew Heald,  
*Chair of Scottish Strategic  
Archaeology Committee*

 @heald\_andy

# WELCOME 2025



Image © Andy Heald





Working together to broaden the impact and public benefit of archaeology.

# DELIVERING ARCHAEOLOGY

Historic Environment Scotland and the Scottish Strategic Archaeology Committee would like to say I big thank you to everyone that engaged with the recent review of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy, which took place between October 2024 and March 2025. The review will be published online shortly, but for the time being we'd like to share a few headlines with you, and talk about the next steps.

A quick recap

Scotland's Archaeology Strategy (SAS) was launched in 2015 to run for ten years, it completes in December 2025. The Strategy was created following the review of Historic Scotland's archaeology function. It was intended to deliver *Our Place in Time*, and to give strategic direction to Historic Scotland's support to the archaeology sector. Over that period, the Scottish Strategic Archaeology Committee (SSAC) has led on the delivery of the Strategy. SAS is a sector owned strategy and the lead bodies and other key sector partners in Scottish archaeology have been working together on SSAC.

As we were approaching the end of the ten-year lifespan of the Strategy, Historic Environment Scotland and SSAC decided to review SAS to see how successful it had been at fulfilling its objectives.

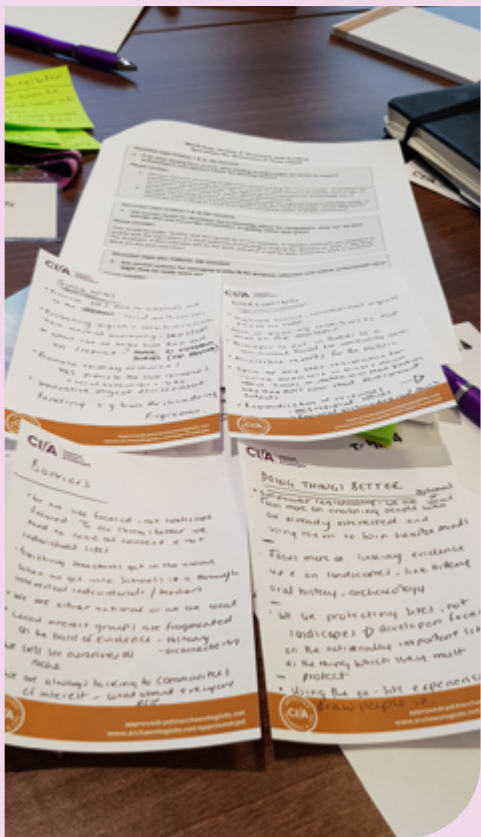
We wanted to understand more about the following:

- **Measuring Success:** How far have the objectives of SAS been delivered?
- **Impact:** What impact has it had?
- **Awareness:** How well is SAS known and understood?
- **Perceptions:** How is SAS regarded by the archaeology sector, both in Scotland and elsewhere?
- **Value for money:** Drawing on information produced by HES Grants, how far has the support which HES has given to SAS translated into successes which align with HES's corporate objectives?
- **Future:** What should the objectives be going forwards

Asking the questions

Historic Environment Scotland commissioned Diffley Partnership to carry out the review. To answer the questions above, Diffley Partnership designed a three-strand research agenda, including:

1. Desk review of materials pertaining to SAS
2. Roundtable and focus groups with past and current members of Scottish Strategic Archaeology Committee (SSAC) and stakeholders from the wider sector. Taking place November and December 2024
3. Public survey of 1,086 Scottish adults (16+) in January 2025.



Above left: Previous issues of this magazine being handed out at conferences.

Above: Feedback sessions have informed the next evolution of the strategy.

Images © HES

What did we find out?

The review found that SAS was a very effective strategy which has remained relevant over its ten-year lifespan. It has played an important part in the maturing of the archaeology sector and established firm foundations for its continued success. The original aims have stood up well over the ten years of the Strategy.

Adoption of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy has been high. It has established common priorities, common purpose and common language across the sector, not just internally but in communicating and influencing beyond it.

Alignment with the national historic environment strategy was notable, and helpful for strategic archaeology projects seeking funding. Public benefit was a key driver in SAS and has become an integral part of programme delivery.

The HES Grants data shows that archaeology is one of the primary ways in which HES delivers public benefit through funding. Through the participation of all the main bodies in Scottish archaeology over the decade, SSAC has built stronger and more constructive relationships across the Scottish Archaeology sector.

Good aim!

The original Aims were agreed to have been the right ones. The delivery plan was largely delivered, and with the adoption of an operational plan in 2020, delivery became more fluid with some elements being changed or dropped in the face of changing circumstances.

A national strategy for archaeology is the next way of adapting to and managing future challenges as a sector – inspecting eroding sections at Tuquoy, Orkney.

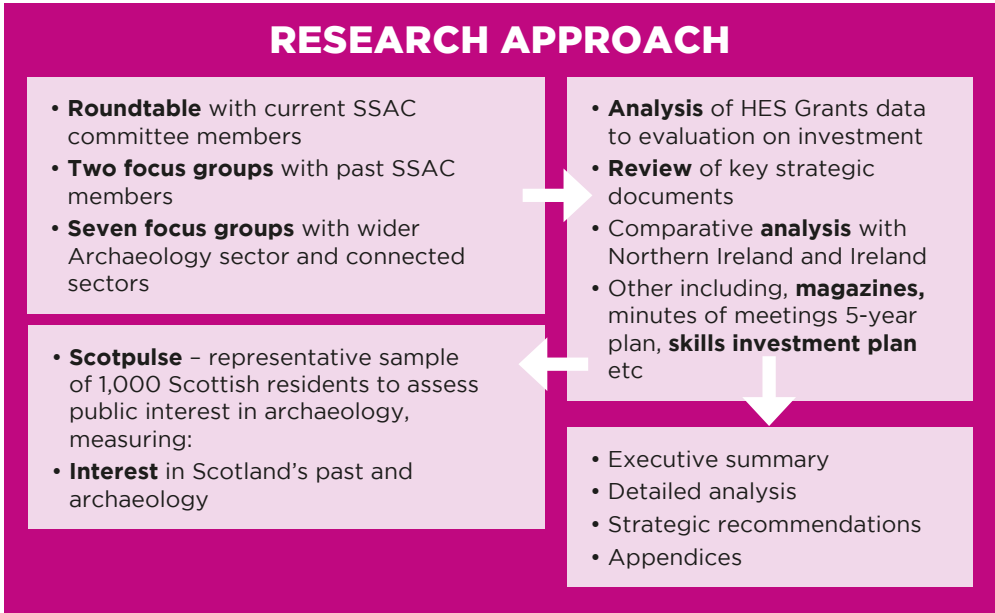


Image © Craig Stanford





The existence of the Strategy helped Scottish Archaeology to pull together and remain coherent and focused in the face of a changing post-pandemic world.

Looking forward, the existing Aims map well against *Our Past Our Future*, the current historic environment strategy for Scotland and SSAC had become one of its named delivery groups.

Kirsty Owen and Alex Adamson  
Historic Environment Scotland

Right: AOC Archaeology undertaking specialist conservation of a sword from a pagan Norse grave discovered at Mayback, Orkney, in 2015.

Below: New Archaeology Scotland learning resource, The Bare Bones Toolkit, being used to support Attainment through Archaeology projects at Ballochmyle.

Bottom: Career fair at the University of Edinburgh.



Below: Taking the Archaeology Strategy on the road.

Bottom: The archaeology strategy has had wide readership - international group of archaeologists reading the magazine in Sofia, Bulgaria.



Images © Craig Stanford

## Diversifying the delivery of guidance

**There is a vast landscape of standards and guidance available to archaeologists working across the heritage sector. A lot of this information has been created by different types of organisations ranging from professional and public bodies, third sector organisations, specialist groups and individuals.**

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) Standards and guidance are based upon a shared understanding of what constitutes good practice to deliver public benefit. The Institute provides resources in a variety of forms supporting members to consistently work in accordance with professional standards.

### Special interest

Working within a strategic framework, like Scotland's Archaeology Strategy, opens more doors to collaborate with new partners and specialists. In addition to CIfA's advocacy initiatives, the work of its Area and Special Interest Groups and annual events such as the CIfA conference and Innovation festival this has facilitated great opportunities for knowledge exchange. It has also afforded the chance to reflect on current practice and identify if updates to Standards and guidance, or the development of new guidance, is needed.



### A toolbox of toolkits

Over the past few years, web-based Toolkits have become an established feature on the CIfA website proving to be a great vehicle for the delivery of accessible guidance, tools and resources to support practitioners working in various roles. Their format allows for easier updates, amendments and/ or additions to information.

There are currently seven Toolkits which focus on specialist finds reporting, finds recording, digital data management, archiving, managing digital data, Roman coinage and public engagement, with more in the pipeline. These have been designed by a range of sector specialists, including expertise from Scottish specialists, and widely consulted on across the CIfA membership and further afield. Six of the seven Toolkits were developed with funding from Historic England, with one funded by the CIfA Finds Special Interest Group. Supported throughout by the Special Interest Groups committees, the Toolkits contain information and guidance that is predominantly applicable and adaptable to practice across the UK.

Jen Parker Wooding

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists





**IN JUNE 2025, THE LEARNING & INCLUSION TEAM AT HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND RAN A DISCOVERY DAY FOR THE DEMENTIA COMMUNITY AT JEDBURGH ABBEY.**

# SOUNDS OF JEDBURGH ABBEY: BORDERS DISCOVERY DAYS

**The interactive session took the theme of Sounds, with participants playing bells, singing, learning hand signals to communicate without speaking and even a moment of medieval mindfulness.**

## **Promoting healthy experiences**

One of the key aims in Making Sense of Scotland, the HES learning framework, is to help promote an active lifestyle or improved mental health through experiences like socialising, prescribed culture, and being outdoors.

Opportunities to explore history and culture have been found to offer benefits to people with a dementia diagnosis, including social engagement, cognitive stimulation and improving general feelings of wellbeing.

Images, sound clips, handling objects and accessible activities were used to support learning in the here and now, enabling participants to make connections to a world far removed from their own.

For example, discussions about songs, singing and monks led to one participant breaking into a rendition of “Frères Jacques”, which then prompted others to join in.

## **Learning from the source**

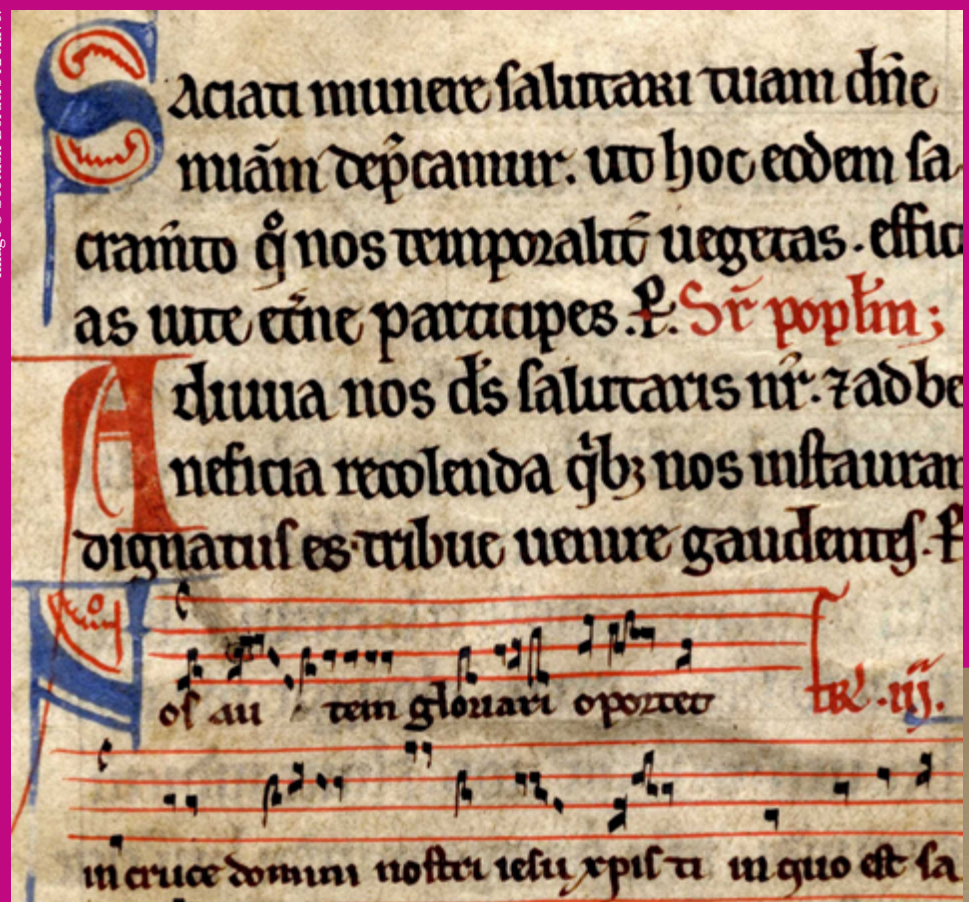
Local source material informed the content of the session including the 12th century Kersmains bell found near Kelso, the earliest known example of a tower bell in Scotland and the Hawick Missal, pages of 800-year-old music originally used in medieval mass that were discovered in family papers belonging to a Jedburgh family. The music has been recreated by scholars so participants could hear how the monophonic melody might have sounded.

The Discovery Days are part of a wider partnership project between Alzheimer Scotland and heritage venues across Scottish Borders. The project aims to support those living with a dementia diagnosis and their care givers to access, discover and engage in activities at the fantastic heritage across the area and support their wellbeing.

*Fiona Davidson,*  
**Historic Environment Scotland**

Jedburgh Abbey.





Above: A music manuscript known as The Missal Fragment (Scottish Borders Archives SBA540).

Right: Kersmains Bell in the National Museum of Scotland.



Image © Fiona McLaren.



The focus of the session was on exploring the sounds of the abbey, which also features an audio guide available to visitors.

Image © Rob McDougall.



Increasing knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the past.

The 'Giant's Graves' Neolithic Chambered Cairns on Arran – look out for the Neolithic chapter of the South West regional framework coming soon.

**THE SCOTTISH  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH  
FRAMEWORK (SCARF)  
TEAM CONTINUES TO WORK  
TOWARDS ENHANCING  
THE UNDERSTANDING OF  
ARCHAEOLOGY THROUGH  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF FREE  
AND ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES  
AND THE DELIVERY OF PUBLIC  
EVENTS ACROSS SCOTLAND.**

# ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING

Images © ScARF



## Regional frameworks in progress

Following the successful symposium held in Edinburgh earlier this year, we are looking forward to launching the final chapters of the South East Scotland Archaeological Research Framework (SESARF) at the Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders Archaeology Conference at Queen Margaret University this November. We made chapter drafts available on our website to enable users to offer feedback and contribute to the final framework and are excited to share the culmination of this project with the wider sector.

We are also putting the final touches to Scotland's Island Research Framework for Archaeology (SIRFA), which is set to launch in the autumn. Look out for news about the launch of this highly anticipated new resource, which explores the rich archaeological landscape of the Western Isles, Shetland and Orkney and offers a valuable insight into future research across the islands with useful research questions and recommendations.

Work continues apace on both the Clyde Valley (CVARF) and South West Scotland (SWSARF) projects, which you can read more about in this issue.

## New thematic frameworks available

Two new thematic frameworks were also launched this year – the new Dendrochronology Research Framework for Scotland resource and the International Network for Contemporary Archaeology in Scotland (INCA Scot) website. We were delighted to launch both the online and printed versions of the Dendrochronology framework at the Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders Archaeology Conference last November, where we were able to celebrate the outcome of this collaborative effort. The brand-new INCA Scot website was launched at an online event in March this year, showcasing not only the significance of contemporary archaeology, but the potential for future research in Scotland.

## Improving your access

ScARF and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland have also helped support the long-term preservation of invaluable online resources such as the Scottish Rock Art Project and the National Committee on Carved Stones in Scotland websites.



Left: SESART Medieval to Modern Symposium – the final South East Scotland Archaeological Research Framework symposium, discussing the medieval to modern periods, held in Edinburgh.

Right: The launch of the new Dendrochronological Research Framework for Scotland, available as a full colour booklet, at the ELBAC conference in November.

You can read all about our recent Rock Art workshops on the next few pages! One big change to the ScARF website has been the introduction of a new function for people to add comments and contribute to our frameworks at any time from the comfort of their homes. Head to the About Us pages of our website to find out how to create an account and add 'quick comments' to the framework pages. This new update will help more people contribute to the frameworks, add links to new research and help keep ScARF relevant in the years to come. All comments will first be reviewed by the framework project team and considered when future revisions are made to the draft chapters and research questions.

Our new search function on the website will also be launching this autumn to make searching across all our frameworks much easier. You will be able to control the results you see by searching specific frameworks or key words, looking for research questions only or searching our news posts. We hope this new function will make ScARF more accessible for our users and allow these significant resources to be utilised to their full potential.

Remember you can also directly access most of the different research frameworks from across the UK – including ScARF – all in one place online. This resource continues to grow with the Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales soon to join the Scottish and English frameworks in using the platform.

The ScARF Project is primarily funded by Historic Environment Scotland. To find out more, please visit our website.

*Helen Spencer*  
**Society of Antiquaries of Scotland**





Main image: The Clava Cairns – a number of the stones with cup and ring mark decoration have been incorporated into this amazing site.

Below: Looking out over the Scottish Borders from Edin's Hall broch – part of the SESARF region.

Right: View West from Arthurs Seat. Looking out over Edinburgh, the development of this city forms a key part of the Medieval to Modern chapters of the new SESARF framework.



The Ring of Brodgar on Orkney, one of many sites featured in the forthcoming SIRFA framework.





## Archaeologists and Volunteers Uncover Scotland's First Skatepark

**Earlier this year, Scotland's oldest antiquarian society funded a project aiming to preserve a central part of modern Glasgow's sporting heritage, with opportunities for the public to get involved.**

### The rise and fall of a skatepark

The state-of-the-art Kelvin Wheelies Skatepark opened in May 1978 with bowls, a slalom run and a half-pipe (or "hauf-pipe") and was initially hugely popular. It hosted several competitions, including Scotland's first national skateboarding competition, where Glasgow dominated the Bowl Riding competitions.

However, growing concerns about maintenance costs and safety led to the park's closure then burial by 1983. Elements of the original site remain visible adjacent to the modern skatepark in Kelvingrove Park today, but there was no information available to explain the significance of this site to park visitors, or users of the modern skatepark.

### Supporting the study and enjoyment of Scotland's past

In August 2025, a grant awarded by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland enabled experts at the University of Glasgow and volunteers to undertake drone and 3D photography survey and excavation at the site.

The team learned more about the current condition of the skatepark and ensured that this important part of Glasgow's heritage was recorded before it was lost to time.

The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland supports high-quality research and publication relating to Scotland's past by making several grants and awards twice each year. In the last 12 months, the charity has awarded a total of £37,271 to 23 projects, including ones investigating 19th century Scottish tea merchants and the global interactions in China, and Viking ship stems from the Isle of Eigg. Research grants are open to all, and the deadlines are 30 April and 30 November each year. Visit the Society website to find out how to apply and discover more Society-funded research projects.

*Sally Pentecost,*  
**Society of Antiquaries of Scotland**

**Right and below: Kelvin Wheelies Skatepark in the early 80s with the spire of Glasgow University visible in the distance.**

**Bottom right: Kelvin Wheelies Skatepark Site after its burial.**

## Hidden Voices

**Since 2024, the Hidden Voices project, initiated by Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, has been 'unearthing' the impact of women in Scottish archaeology.**

A core activity includes creating and updating Wikipedia pages, so if you'd like to suggest a female archaeologist or participate, please contact the Society.

**Society of Antiquaries of Scotland**



Image © Kenny Brophy



Image © Ian Urquhart with kind permission from North Skateboard Magazine.

## Rock Art Workshops

**In the spring, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland hosted a series of Rock Art workshops across Scotland. These were funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh and delivered in partnership with the University of Glasgow.**

The aim of these workshops was to build on the success of Scotland's Rock Art Project (ScRAP) and bring back together many of the volunteers who took part in this project, as well as people new to rock art. We enjoyed a mix of talks, discussions and field trips led by Tertia Barnett and Joana Valdez-Tullett.

The first workshop was held in Faifley, West Dumbartonshire, where discussions focused on the protection of rock art in a suburban environment and continued community awareness of the stones following the earlier Cochno Stone community project. During the field trip to some of the rock art we were also able to listen to soundscapes created by Lizzie Robertson, allowing us to experience the stones from a new perspective.



**Top: Participants at the RSE funded Rock Art workshop in Kirkcudbright studying original 19th Century drawings of local rock art by F R Coles, kept by the local Stewartry Museum.**

**Above: A ScARF field trip to study rock art sites near Faifley, Clydebank.**

**Top right: Touching the stones – investigating rock art at the Clava Cairns as part of the Highland rock art workshop.**

**Background: heading towards the rock art at High Banks, Dumfries and Galloway.**



In Kirkcudbright, conversation turned to the rural locations of the rock art and how it is protected from farming, forestry and new infrastructure projects. There was also discussion of tourism and archaeology in the region, as well as how rock art serves as inspiration for art and literature.

While at the Culloden workshop, the importance of bringing rock art research to the forefront of archaeology was a key theme throughout the day. Participants believed that making existing and ongoing rock art research as widely accessible as possible will aid the preservation of the stones as well as enriching communities who are already engaged in archaeology. The results of these workshops are now being used to create new updates for our regional and thematic frameworks. We hope to hold an event to launch these new resources next year. The Society has also taken over the hosting and management of Scotland's Rock Art Website and are planning how this resource can be updated in future.

*Helen Spencer,*  
**Society of Antiquaries of Scotland**



Images © Society of Antiquaries of Scotland



# CVARF: Exploring new directions for the Regional Research Framework

**The Clyde Valley region comprises eight council districts and is home to over one third of the Scottish population, including many of the country's most deprived communities.**

The region is also home to 27,747 sites recorded in the Historic Environment Records from the Mesolithic period to the present day. In comparison to other parts of Scotland this region has seen a lack of investment in archaeological research despite being home to a number of significant archaeological sites and landscapes, and experienced rapid urbanisation prior to the development of professional archaeology. These challenges set the scene for the CVARF project.

## Setting out the task

How can we create a research framework in a region with limited baseline data? What can the research framework process deliver for communities whose heritage has historically been undervalued and underrepresented? If the regional research framework is to be a guiding document to shape the practice of archaeological research in its region, how can we make this serve the communities of that region?

As the Clyde Valley Archaeological Research Framework Engagement Officer, it is my privilege to engage with a diverse array of communities across this region from Biggar to Battery Park, Cauldermill to Cumbernauld through pop-up events and targeted projects.

I work both with the existing heritage and archaeology groups of the region and groups supporting local young people, disabled people and New Scots such as the Developing Young Workforce teams of the region, Parklea Branching Out and Scottish Detainee Visitors.



Images © Edward Stewart

Through working with these groups, we can record and recognise their interests and questions about the archaeology of their areas, and value this as a contribution to the Clyde Valley framework.

## Already delivering results

So far we have engaged with 1,455 people and 22 groups, including 480 young people, 78 individuals with additional support needs, and 11 New Scots. This raises the profile of Archaeology in this region, but our projects, co-designed with our partners and participants, also showcase the value of participating in archaeology for these communities, as educational opportunities, for wellbeing as a therapeutic practice, and for community building.

*Edward Stewart,*  
**Archaeology Scotland**

**Top:** Co-production workshops for a pop-up archaeology exhibition at the Parklea Centre.

**Left:** Co-design workshops at the Parklea Branching Out Centre to create a community archaeology project for and with the clients and staff at this horticultural therapy centre in Inverclyde. Working with the team we explored what they were interested in about their local archaeology, carried out map regressions for their site, and planned a programme of intertidal surveys.

**Below:** Finds handling workshops were delivered at the Parklea Centre for clients, taking artefacts they found on the foreshore and cleaning, sorting, drawing and typologising these. We also responded to our finds, such as bags of Clyde pottery, through producing our own 'spongeware' plates.



Image © ScARF



## A Framework for the South West Region

**In compiling the archaeological framework for the three Ayrshires and Dumfries & Galloway, we are taking a different approach to other regions in the method of delivery.**

Just over a year in, drafts of three early prehistory chapters are already available online. These emerging chapters present our current knowledge, explored through the research undertaken by archaeologists in the region. They are complemented by research tools to assist anyone seeking to explore or build on the available research. Further chapters will be released as they become available during the coming year.

## An iterative process

Sharing the emerging chapters as pages on the ScARF website is designed to drive engagement, allowing potential contributors to comment on and add to the text. This process will enable everyone to get involved, especially archaeologists in commercial practice and local societies, to ensure that the full breadth of research undertaken is included.

This open process may look disordered, especially with the input of competing views, however our team are not trying to produce definitive statements; they are compiling how research has progressed in the region, including disagreements, errors and omissions.

## Building a research agenda together

An ongoing events programme across the region will help compile the research agenda for each chapter. The ScARF website is the best place to keep up to date on these events. A Gap Analysis for each chronological period will be used to challenge attendees to reflect on what research questions are most pressing and appropriate for the region. This process will also assist in identifying existing research that has been missed or different approaches to interpreting our past that have not been used. Our intent is that the completed framework will be a toolkit that improves the quality of archaeological research in our region, enabling it to reveal a richer understanding of how past communities lived.

*Thomas Rees,*  
**Rathmell Archaeology Limited**

**Top left:** The Kings Cave on the coast of Arran which is home to carvings and rock art from the past two millennia.

**Above left:** The tower of Brodick Castle, Isle of Arran.

**Above:** One of the standing stones at Machrie Moor, Isle of Arran.

**Below:** The south doorway of the medieval Whithorn Priory, Dumfries and Galloway.



Images © Craig Stanford.



From 2013 we spent three seasons excavating an Iron Age site on the west coast of Unst in Shetland.



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SLIDING DOORS



Being involved long-term has also meant the National Trust for Scotland can rely on volunteers to support public events. Like our family archaeology days at Castle Fraser, Aberdeenshire.



Images © NTS.

It was 'date 2009', and I had a ticket for Oasis at Murrayfield Stadium. I didn't even particularly like Oasis but that's what you do as a normal person, isn't it? I wasn't so sure anymore and had been looking for something more from life.

I had read an article about NTS working holidays, called Thistle Camps, and thought that these week-long trips, with like-minded people/ strangers doing worthwhile tasks and socialising together, sounded like the kind of challenging change of direction my psyche was craving. They offered archaeological digs as an option, although these were always over-subscribed.

### Today is gonna be the day

So, I applied and, long story short, was offered a place on an archaeology camp at St Abbs Head. Now, here is my sliding doors moment, it was the same week as the big concert. How long did my decision take? One heartbeat. I gave away the ticket, didn't sell it. Bad karma. And accepted my place on what I didn't quite realise would be such a life changing journey and absolutely the most positive thing I ever did.

The dig wasn't hugely successful in artefacts or features, but I was hooked. The next year I applied again and did two digs. The year after that the camp leader decided to put me forward for leader training and before I knew it, I was responsible for 10 to 12 peoples transport, food and accommodation for the week, all things way out of my comfort zone then, but not now.

### They're gonna throw it back to you

All the trips were archaeological. I learned so much, and this continues to be the case with the people who I now consider to be my very good friends. I've learned about the science and history, but also about working and socialising with people from all backgrounds, age groups, nationalities and personalities.

There have even been times when we haven't had to de-turf by hand. Like our four seasons at Brodie Castle in Moray.

Unfortunately, the Thistle Camps don't exist anymore, another victim of Covid. However, the NTS Archaeology Department continues to run digs all over the country, most of which I seem to be involved with in one way or the other. We work with volunteers from local groups, school classes, students etc on our digs, along with a core of experienced archaeological volunteers like me, who give our time and effort freely, but receive so much more in return.

### All the roads we have to walk are winding

It was a turning point for me. I had been struggling with my mental health. On a dig, you can leave behind your troubles, concentrate on what's right there in front of you, and become a different person. Or, actually, become the person you really are without all the baggage we carry day to day. And, for me, each time I go home, I feel like a slightly more rounded individual, more able to cope with life back in the "real", but still with a rough edge or two, who wants to be perfect, how boring! And if I can contribute to others discovering archaeology and getting out of it just a fraction of what I do, doesn't that make it even more worthwhile?

Have you ever done something truly life changing? I have. Go on, give it a go.

And no, I didn't try to buy a ticket for the Oasis reunion tour, I'm going to be busy at Culloden, or Brodie Castle, or St Kilda, or Crarae Gardens, or...

*Jim Shearer,*  
**National Trust for Scotland Volunteer**





Above:  
Encouraging  
young people  
to participate in  
archaeology at the  
House of Dun in  
Angus.

Left: Sometimes a  
find really is just  
a rock! National  
Trust for Scotland  
Volunteer Jim  
Shearer helping  
run excavations on  
Unst in Shetland.

Below: Even in  
Shetland we've  
worked with  
people from all  
over the world  
and from all kinds  
of backgrounds.





# National Campaign Promotes Summer Fieldwork Opportunities and Wellbeing Benefits of Archaeology

On 20 June, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland's Dig It! project highlighted free summer fieldwork opportunities for the public and the wellbeing benefits of getting involved in archaeology through their Scotland Digs 2025: Meeting People campaign.

## Summer Fieldwork

The campaign used social media (#ScotlandDigs2025), dedicated webpages on the Dig It! website and a national press release to encourage the public to:

- Help Archaeology Shetland survey a network of roads created as part of a famine relief scheme in the mid-1800s and record a 19th century croft house
- Watch the Monastic Archaeology Field School's excavation of the 12th-century Lindores Abbey in Fife and attend their open day featuring tours and a finds showcase
- Visit the site or volunteer with the University of Glasgow and the National Trust for Scotland as they investigated an early modern township in Glencoe, and attend their festival which offered tours, storytelling, and more

• Volunteer with or watch the 1722 Waggonway Heritage Group's excavation in East Lothian, where remains of Scotland's earliest railway were discovered in 2021

• Help Stirling Council's Archaeologist Murray Cook and Fintry Museum dig at Balgair, a site with a history thought to span 4,000 years

• Volunteer at Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust's community excavation of prehistoric rock art near Aberfeldy and attend their open day

• Explore additional opportunities on the Dig It! website

## 'Heritage for Health: why the wellbeing of practitioners matters too'

The campaign was wrapped up with a LinkedIn article by Wessex Archaeology's Heritage Inclusion Manager, Leigh Chalmers, who offered tips for 'ensuring that when it comes to planning and delivering inclusion programmes, the wellbeing of practitioners is also at the heart of the project'.

## Get involved

In addition to coordinating this annual campaign, Dig It! advertises Scottish archaeology events for the public all year-round. Visit [DigItScotland.com](http://DigItScotland.com) to find out more.

Julianne McGraw  
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

Image © Tertia Barnett



Above: One of Several Boulders with Prehistoric Carvings That the Rock Art Excavation Focused on as Part of Scotland Digs 2025 Meeting People.

Right: Glencoe Excavation - Part of Scotland Digs 2025 Meeting People.



Image © Cole Juckette

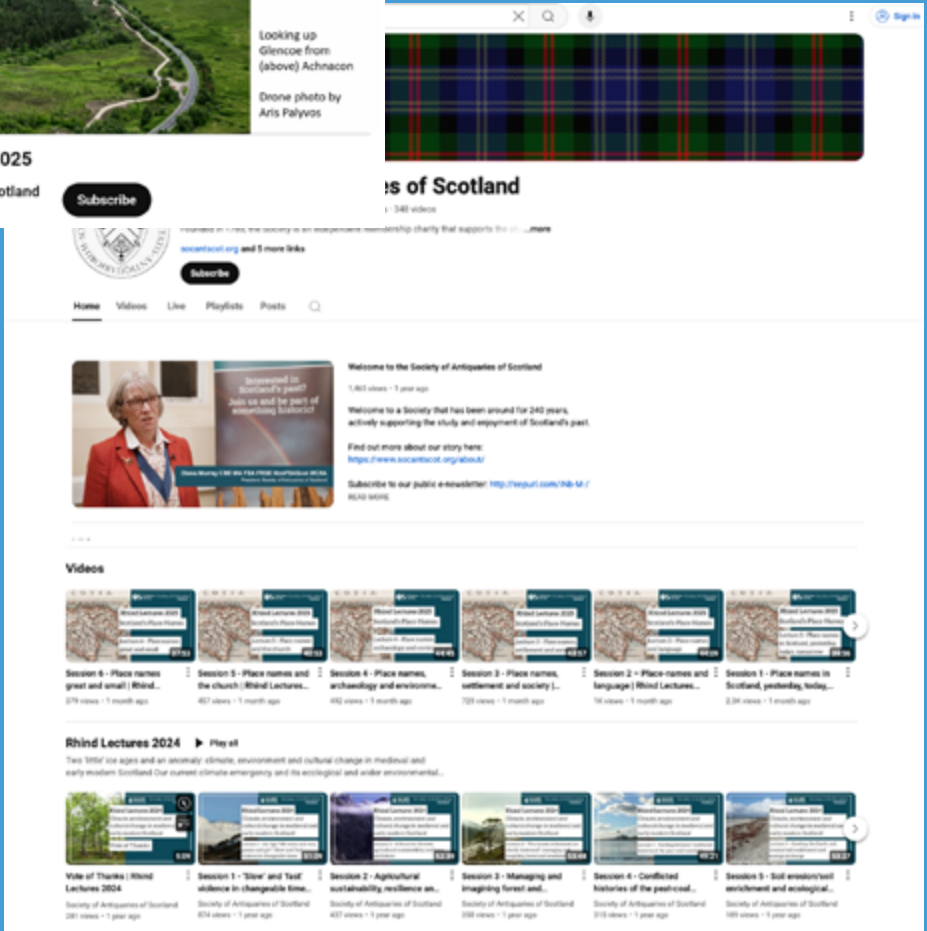


The Glencoe Project | ARP 2025  
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland  
8.6K subscribers

# Society Lecture Recordings

Did you know that the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland records their public lectures and uploads them to YouTube?

Visit the Society of Antiquaries' channel to catch up on talks from the past year which covered Galloway Hoard textiles, hillforts, Picts, the archaeology of the 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival, and more.



# Murray Cook wins 'Outstanding Contribution to Stirling' award

Stirling Council Archaeologist Murray Cook has been awarded the Outstanding Contribution to Stirling Award to recognise his work in raising awareness of Stirling's rich history and landscape.

He was presented with the honour in March at the annual Stirling Business Awards, which celebrate Stirling's vibrant independent business community. Over 26,000 public votes were cast in the selection process.

Murray Cook proudly shows off his framed certificate at the Stirling Independent Business Awards, hosted at the Albert Halls.



Image © XXXXXXXXXX



## Community archaeology events

**Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust is running community archaeology events in 2025 focussing on prehistoric rock art.**

Our guided walks, excavation and learning activities aim to promote community well-being and awareness, enhance understanding of rock art, and celebrate the region's rich heritage.

For details see [Events and Digs – Dig It!](#)



**SCOTLAND  
DIGS**

**Local community members preparing rock art for digital survey and excavation.**

**Community involvement with digital rock art survey by Historic Environment Scotland's Survey and Recording Team.**

Images © Tertlia Barnett



**“ BY TAGGING YOUR CONTENT WITH #SCOTARCHSTRAT YOU CAN JOIN A NATIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT HOW SCOTLAND'S ARCHAEOLOGY STRATEGY IS MAKING ARCHAEOLOGY MATTER. ”**

**#SCOTARCHSTRAT**



## Talking About Heritage

**What do you talk about when you talk about heritage? Scotland's heritage belongs to us all – from stone circles and high streets to tenements and schools.**

It may also be your local park, the venue where you saw the best gig you've ever been to, or the place you picture when you think of home. Heritage makes our communities special and it's everything we inherit from the past that shapes who we are today as well as influencing our future. Talking About Heritage is a national conversation. If you want to talk to us about heritage, we want to hear from you. What you tell us will have an impact on how we think about and care for heritage in Scotland. What heritage matters to you? How should it be looked after?

Join the conversation and help shape the future of heritage policy in Scotland by filling out our survey and joining us online or in person at one of our events.





Ensuring evidence of our past is valued and cared for sustainably.

## CARING AND PROTECTING

IT IS WELL UNDERSTOOD THAT OUR SURROUNDINGS PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART IN OUR WELLBEING. SCOTLAND'S HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT INCLUDES CITIES AND TOWN CENTRES, RURAL VILLAGES, ISLANDS AND COASTS THROUGH TO OUR RURAL LANDSCAPE.

**Managing the mundane – empowering local authorities to safeguard Scotland's heritage** We know that areas in which we work, live or even just visit can affect how we feel and sustaining them greatly increases our sense of wellbeing and can help promote relaxation, enjoyment and even curiosity.

### Managing change

In Scotland the historic environment is an integral part of our wider environment and is inseparable from the natural and built environments. What are considered 'nice places' often contain significant elements of the historic environment. This can include archaeological sites and monuments, historic buildings, designed landscapes and gardens, historic townscapes, managed coastlines and historic land use patterns.

However, like the natural and built environments, the historic environment is subject to continuous change and pressures from the requirements of modern living.

Below: A tour of Dunbar Battery.

Main image: repairing the mortar at Preston Tower in a traditional style.

Right: A group inspecting the remains of a World War II midget submarine in Aberlady Bay, East Lothian.



The focus of ALGAO: Scotland is to ensure that when change must occur the historic environment is taken account. ALGAO: Scotland is a council membership body made up of senior Archaeological or Heritage advisors to local authorities.

### Living with heritage

ALGAO: Scotland member authorities help manage and care for over 95% of Scotland's historic environment, principally through the planning process. Most visible elements of managing this change are planning conditions to carry out archaeological work, surveys and building recording. However a large proportion of the management is hidden and happens well before any work starts. We work closely with developers and our colleagues in local authorities to ensure that where possible any changes proposed take account of the historic environment. This might mean preserving archaeological remains under green space, ensuring that the character of historic buildings is not changed by proposals to modernise, the design of new build developments is in keeping with surrounding historic elements or seeking to maintain the essential characteristics of the setting of monuments and sites to name a few. This does not mean preserving things in aspic - but instead our work ensures that important characteristics are considered, protected and enhanced while also allowing changes to take place to ensure that it remains integrated into our day-to-day environment.

### The lesser noticed places

When changes to the historic environment are undertaken we generally don't notice it if it's been done well. In Scotland every aspect of our wider environment has historic elements within it. For example, we don't have any truly wild landscapes as even the most remote parts of the country have evidence of past human activity. Many of our coasts and settlements all have elements of the historic environment within them.

Without the work of ALGAO: Scotland members not only would many of our historic places and sites be less cared for and protected but we would lose the characteristics which make these places feel special.

We all know and appreciate the showstopper elements of our environment – the great natural vistas, the historic sites and monuments and the remarkable examples of architecture. But it is the more mundane elements of our environment which often go unnoticed. These elements are critical to this overall sense of wellbeing; they are the cottages, the historic roadways, the drystone dykes and hedgerows, the 18th century townhouses, the closes and vennels etc. These are what give our settlements and rural areas their character and make them enjoyable places to live, work and visit.

### The right tools

The planning system equips us with many tools to successfully 'manage the mundane'. We seek to ensure that repairs to historic buildings use the appropriate materials and styles. Were larger developments are proposed we ask that they are in keeping with their surroundings. Key sightlines and views to and from monuments are preserved and where possible enhanced. We protect the character of historic landscapes from inappropriate development. We also work to ensure that the special character of our historic cities, towns, and villages is preserved while still allowing modern adaptation. This is not the headline grabbing discoveries or the stuff of TV documentaries but is essential in ensuring that the historic elements that are important to the character of our environment are preserved and cared for.

Andrew Robertson,  
East Lothian Council





# Oakbank Textile now on display at The Scottish Crannog Centre

**Found in 1979, the Oakbank Textile is a rare example of organic preserved textile from Iron Age Scotland, dated c. 390BC. It has now gone on display to the public for the first time at the Scottish Crannog Centre after preservation work.**

What's the story behind this textile? Was it woven here on Loch Tay? Did it travel here, worn by someone? If so, where did they come from?



Images © Martin Shields Photography.

## Died in the wool

We do know how rare and special this piece of textile is. It has an unusual and distinctive 2/1 twill weave and appears to be the earliest example of this type of weave in Britain. It's also believed to be one of the largest pieces of preserved textile in Scotland from this time. Our textile is in two large pieces with several smaller fragments. It has been cleaned and freeze-dried for preservation. There are distinct tones in the textile, but no dyes were discernible due to its long immersion in the loch. The sheep at this time were likely to be Soay sheep and would have had a short fleece. Sheep were becoming less pigmented and white wool was popular as it was easier to dye.

Our textile could have been woven using either a warp-weighted loom, which we know from our excavation was here at Loch Tay, or a two-beam vertical loom, which may have perished, leaving no trace, as they are made of wood.

## Tight knit community

This textile is more than an inanimate artefact in a cabinet; it also symbolises community and strength: a shepherd and his flock of sheep, the spinner of wool, the dyer, the weaver and the person who sewed up the finished garment, as this could well have been clothing. It was made in a community, by a community, 2,500 years ago... with care and skill.

*Georgia Holmes,*  
**The Scottish Crannog Centre**



**Top:** A close up of the 2,500-year-old textile. The piece of woven fabric which lay buried in the bottom of Loch Tay in Perthshire for nearly 2500 years.

**Left:** Experimental archaeologist Isobelle Hanby with the piece of woven fabric which lay buried in the bottom of Loch Tay in Perthshire for nearly 2,500 years. The textile was thought to be too delicate to display, but it has now been expertly conserved.

**Right:** Experimental archaeologists weaving a similar piece to the one uncovered at the bottom of Loch Tay.

**Bottom right:** Big progress at the Scottish Crannog Centre.





A sheard of prehistoric pottery recovered during the archaeological excavations.

*“The children really enjoyed the visit... [they] enjoyed seeing the site and being able to walk around and ask questions and seeing the pottery brought it to life for them... it will be something that we can use to enhance learning during our local history topics.”*

Logierait Primary School

Images © Transport Scotland.

## Archaeology on the A9 – and in the classroom!

**In 2025 Rubicon Archaeology, on behalf of Transport Scotland, undertook non-invasive and invasive archaeological investigations as part of the A9 Dualling: Tay Crossing to Ballinluig project.**

As part of the work, Rubicon held a series of engagement events with local schools and community groups to provide them with insight into the archaeological works and why they were being carried out.

### Recording an ancient landscape

The archaeological investigations comprised historic building recording, archaeological earthwork survey, archaeological trial trenching, and archaeological excavations.

Features associated with General Wade’s Military Road were recorded, as well as three stone bridges, providing evidence for previous phases of road building along the route of the A9. The archaeological excavations recovered evidence for two prehistoric settlements, including roundhouses, four-post structures and a sizeable assemblage of prehistoric pottery. Kindallachan Cairn, a Scheduled Monument, was also excavated under Scheduled Monument Consent from Historic Environment Scotland. However, no archaeological remains were identified.

### Social value delivery

During the delivery of the investigations, Rubicon led a series of educational activities for the local community. This included classroom-based learning at a local school, and an on-site open day for pupils and local community groups.

This gave individuals the opportunity to speak to the archaeologists directly and watch them carry out the excavations, bringing what they learned in the classroom to life.

Members of the local Young Archaeologists Club and local heritage societies also visited the site and expressed their enjoyment and enthusiasm for what they had seen and learnt. The aim of these activities was to deepen the local community’s connection to their local heritage.

### Rubicon Archaeology and Transport Scotland

Left: Classroom learning was also provided through Academy9, the A9 Dualling programme’s educational initiative which aims to inspire and encourage young people into Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths careers. Rubicon Archaeology seen here delivering an Academy9 event at Pitlochry Primary School.

Below: An aerial view of one of the prehistoric settlements, west of the existing A9.



Image © Rubicon Archaeology.

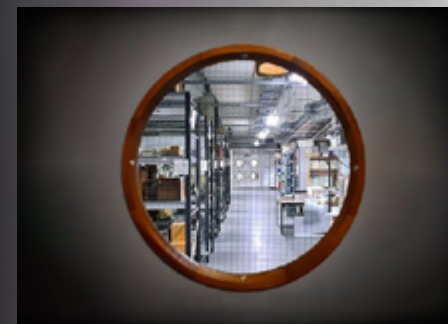


## 1,000,000 Artefacts

Discover the secrets of how we preserve and research our collections on a behind the scenes tour of the National Museums Collection Centre in Edinburgh. Highlights include the Natural Sciences, Science and Technology, and Scottish History and Archaeology collections, which includes over 1 million archaeological artefacts.

Find out more at:

[www.nms.ac.uk/events/collection-centre-tours](http://www.nms.ac.uk/events/collection-centre-tours)



Left: View into the National Museums Collection Centre in Edinburgh.



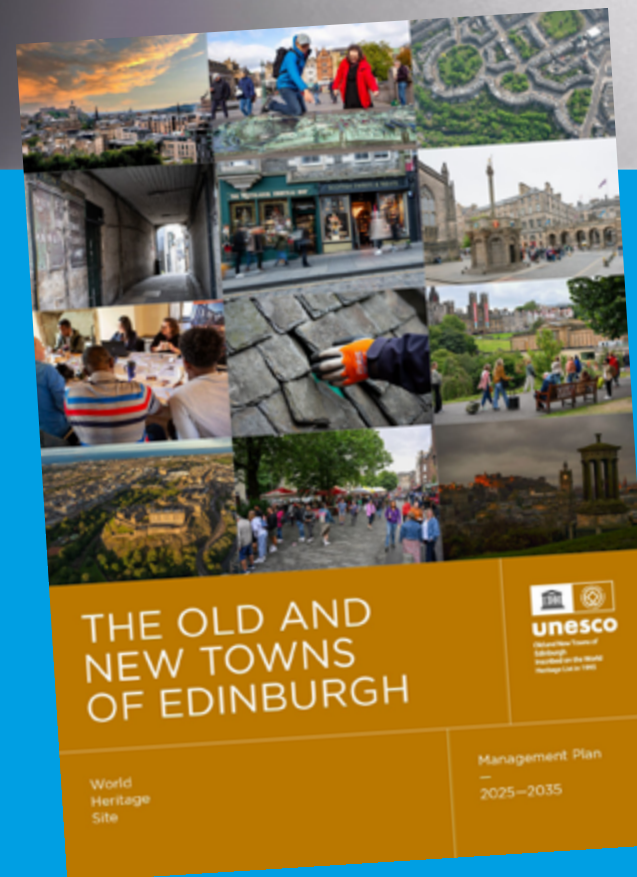
Above: Special carved stone objects, including a mace head and carved stone ball, from Skara Brae, Orkney.

## World Heritage Site 30th anniversary

**It’s an exciting year for the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh, as the 30th anniversary of its inscription as a World Heritage Site coincides with the launch of the new 10-year Management Plan.**

The new Management and Action Plans tackle issues such as the climate emergency and sustainable tourism to ensure that the Site remains at the heart of this vibrant City.

*Olivia Anderson,*  
**Historic Environment Scotland**



Images © NMS.



Arist Karen  
Clulow sharing  
her love of  
Scottish nature.



AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND ON THE THIRD FRIDAY MORNING OF THE MONTH, WE HOST MUSEUM SOCIALS. THESE FREE SESSIONS ARE DESIGNED TO SUPPORT THE WELLBEING OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA, THEIR RELATIVES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

## WELLBEING AT THE MUSEUM

Museum Social participants enjoy learning about Jacobite history through replica handling objects.



For over a decade now, this initiative has been run in partnership with the National Galleries of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and other local partners.

### Coffee and quernstones

Each month we explore a different theme linked to the collections, which include over 12 million objects covering a broad range of areas from Natural Sciences, World Cultures, Art and Design, Science and Technology, and Scottish History and Archaeology. Always relaxed and informal, Museum Socials often include talks by curators, opportunities to handle museum artefacts, and arts and crafts activities.

This provides a sense of fun and discovery and stimulates conversations so vital to those who might otherwise experience increased social isolation. Over refreshments, participants are able to mingle and chat with others, to discuss their interests and share a laugh as well as the more challenging experiences they face.





Sarah Scott from Ionad Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann talking about Gaelic history and placename.

### Succinct Pony Club

In the last year, sessions have encouraged mindfulness and the importance of keeping active with a range of inputs from; a rousing performance by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, a talk from Ionad Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann in which we learned about Gaelic history and placenames, a fascinating exploration of recent fossil discoveries by paleontologists on the Isle of Skye, and learning about the rural history of Shetland - with the added joy and novelty of a visit from Wilson and Flicker - miniature Shetland ponies from Therapy Ponies Scotland.

Furthermore, Museum Socials offer the opportunity to gain behind-the-scenes insights. We were fortunate to be joined recently by a colleague in the Treasure Trove Unit, which is the first port of call for new archaeological discoveries and finders in Scotland. The sense of place and connection provided by these inputs is highly valuable to the participants. Find out more on the [NMS website](#).

Ross Combe,  
National Museum of Scotland

*"It's the highlight of her week... the variety of Friday activities are right up her street. It's a fabulous program doing really important work and definitely contributing greatly to my Mum's mental health and wellbeing."*

Museum Socials Participant

Community Engagement Officer Ross Combe with Wilson and Flicker the miniature Shetland ponies from Therapy Ponies Scotland.



Musicians from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra performing music for wellbeing.

Bottom: Museum Social participants enjoy learning about Jacobite history through replica handling objects.





## Encouraging creative learning and engagement for everyone.

OVER THE PAST YEAR WE HAVE CONTINUED TO PROVIDE MORE INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT ACROSS SCOTLAND. WE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT A WIDER RANGE OF PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO PARTICIPATE IN ARCHAEOLOGY THAT ALLOW SKILLS AND WELLBEING TO DEVELOP.

# ENCOURAGING GREATER ENGAGEMENT

**We continue to work with children and young people across Scotland using archaeology to help close the attainment gap. Over the past year 205 children and young people in East Ayrshire, Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, Stirling, and the Scottish Borders have participated in Attainment through Archaeology projects.**

### Attainment through archaeology

Attainment through Archaeology (AtA) projects have given participants the opportunity to work together to develop a better understanding of the past using newly acquired skills and knowledge. Last year AtA participants recorded historic graveyards, joined the wider community to carry out archaeological excavations, investigated local prehistoric rock art, used archaeology to develop numeracy skills and explored sustainability and energy uses/sources in the past during 'Energy through Time' AtA projects.

### Inclusive archaeology

In the past year, Archaeology Scotland's New Audiences project has delivered engaging activities with groups of New Scots in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Recording Balgay Park project helped deliver English Language courses for participants and the development of ESOL Tool-Kit for future groups.

In Glasgow participants supported a Make Your Mark taster session for volunteering. In both Edinburgh and Glasgow participants took part in a range of archaeological fieldwork.

There is a growing recognition of the impact that inclusive archaeology can have for wider audiences, and the real-life potential archaeology has for supporting people in their day-to-day lives.

Robert Burns Academy ATA project – done exploring and recording Ballochmyle Rock Art.



Above: Recording Balgay Park - New Audience Group ready to start the survey of archaeology in the park.

Far left: A new geophysics activity developed for S2 students at Shetland Science Fair in November 2024.

Middle: A new learning resource, The Bare Bones Toolkit, being used to support AtA projects at Ballochmyle.

Below: Trinity Academy AtA project – pupils used Minecraft to share learning and achieve their Heritage Hero Awards.



### Heritage Heroes Awards

Heritage Hero Awards recognise, reward and celebrate the work of participants involved in history, heritage and archaeology projects. Since the Awards were first piloted in 2016, over 30,000 awards have now been achieved by people of all ages across Scotland. The Awards encourage people at all stages in their lifelong learning journeys to explore, engage with and respond to the archaeology, places and sites that are important to them.

### Supporting educators across Scotland

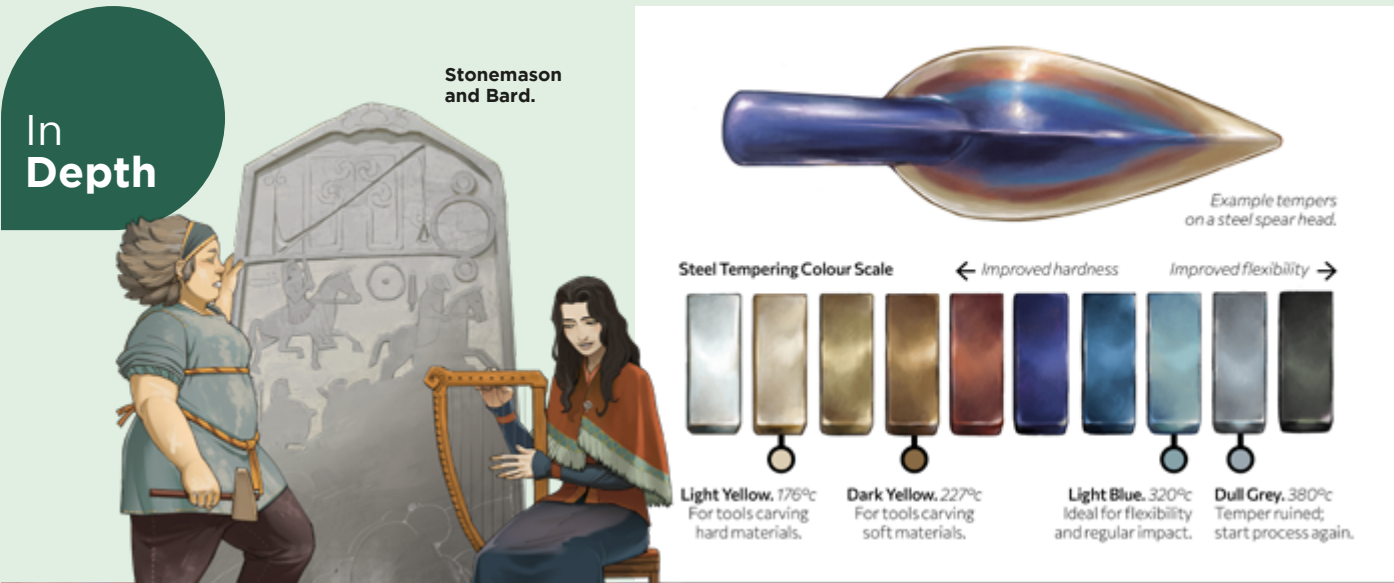
The Archaeological Learning Working Group continues to champion archaeological learning across Scotland. Learning resources, digital and hands-on, are freely available through the Heritage Resources Portal and Archaeology Scotland's loan kit service, encouraging and supporting more educators to deliver archaeological learning activities. Looking forward, we have an ambition to get Archaeology into every school in Scotland. We want children and young people across the country to experience the excitement and sense of community and place that archaeological learning activities can provide.

*Gavin McGregor,*  
**Archaeology Scotland**

**Stirling Young Carers AtA project, digging at Bannockburn House with Stirling Field and Archaeological Society.**







# Carved in Stone

After four years of work by game designers, writers, archaeologists and a diverse group of artists, **Carved in Stone**, a beautifully illustrated and incredibly comprehensive guide to the Picts, is ready for the first roll of the dice.

Led by Stout Stoa’s Brian Tyrell and ArchaeoPlays’ Dr Heather Christie and supported through the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland’s Dig It! project, Carved in Stone is a groundbreaking tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG). In over 160 pages, it enables players to learn about the Picts while utilising the latest archaeological research which highlights that Scotland has been a multicultural, multilingual and socially multifaceted place since at least the 7th century AD.

**What’s a TTRPG?**  
TTRPGs like Dungeons & Dragons are collaborative storytelling games in which players take on the role of characters in the story.

Typically, the game’s storyteller manages the world and the challenges while players explore and problem-solve.

Carved in Stone is a setting guide which describes the world in which the game takes place: the period after the Battle of Nechtansmere in 685 AD. It includes information about the weather, languages, cuisine, fashion, medicine, skills, and more. It can be used by the storytellers to build adventures where players explore the landscape, meet members of society, and create their own stories.

If that’s not enough to tempt you, evidence suggests that roleplaying games ‘can aid in friendship and relationship maintenance, mitigation of social anxiety, improved social skills, reducing stress’, and more.

**Game On**  
Want to find out more about Carved in Stone? Attend the Society’s free lecture in Edinburgh or online on 11 December 2025 and pre-order/ order your copy from Stout Stoa.

*Julianne McGraw FSAScot,*  
**Society of Antiquaries of Scotland**

## SCOTLAND DIGS

### Scotland Digs!

The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland’s Dig It! project writes and commissions online articles which present archaeological information in a way that informs, engages and sparks the imagination. In the last year, they covered ‘Anglo-Saxons’, textiles, development-led archaeology and more.

Visit [DigitScotland.com](https://DigitScotland.com) to dig in or email [digit@socantscot.org](mailto:digit@socantscot.org) to submit an idea.



### Promontory sites of the Upper Clyde

**Clutha Archaeology Group have embarked on a research project to investigate the promontory sites of the Upper Clyde Valley.**

We have identified 27 sites and dug at three sites: Castle Qua in 2017, Eddlewood Castle in 2024 and Avon Gorge in 2021, 2023, 2024 and 2025. We have written a case study on our project for the Clyde Valley Archaeological Research Framework website.

**Avon Gorge Dig**  
In June 2025, we returned to the promontory site at Avon Gorge in Chatelherault Country Park. This is a short distance along the Avon Water from Cadzow Castle and Cadzow Earthworks, a possible promontory fort.

The site was first discovered by two of our members in 2016 during a walkover survey of Chatelherault Country Park as part of the Clyde Valley Archaeological Research heritage project. Archaeology Scotland organised digs for us in 2021 and 2023 as part of Adopt-a-Monument.

This year, we excavated a 3m by 4m trench surrounding the test pit where we found a small piece of medieval pottery last year. We did not find any more pottery, but we did find four possible stone tools in the red clay. Last year we found some possible hammer stones. We plan to return to explore the bounds of the paved area uncovered in 2023. Thanks are due to Chris McGinley, the Countryside Ranger Team Leader, for strimming the site and transporting our tools. Our website is [cluthaarchaeology.org](https://cluthaarchaeology.org)

*Ailsa and Ed Smith,*  
**Clutha Archaeology Group**

Drone photos of Clutha Archaeology Group members at Avon Gorge dig.







Images © Murray Cook.



Getting stuck in at Logie Cultivation Terraces.

## Slow Archaeology in Stirling

**Archaeology can often feel high pressured. Time Team-style deadlines, tenders to win or pressure from developers - professional archaeology is a rewarding but hard career.**

You are often away from home, up before dawn and back in the rented accommodation after dark nursing a stiff back. However not all archaeology has to be done at this pace – the voluntary side of archaeology can be slower and more enjoyable while maintaining high standards.

**Building a Community**  
Over the last 14 years in and around Stirling, volunteers have put in thousands of trowel hours generating over £500,000 worth of value. We have secured around 50 radiocarbon dates, recovered volumes of struck quartz, and had a lot of fun. There are no deadlines or budgets to break, no angry bosses or demanding clients.

Digging at the Hill of Balgair, Fintry.

We do as much as we can when we can over a few days. If it's too much, we close the site and will come back next year. It will wait; there are more important things.

A typical digging day starts around 10am and finishes around 3pm, so people can get other things done with their day. Sometimes it's longer, we might stay until the evening to let the local Brownies come and dig.

We have also been known to camp next to hillforts and watch the sunset with a dram or two. There are big breaks and bad jokes. It's relaxed and fun, slow and patient. We get to know each other and the site, building capacity for volunteers and careers for students.

Why not join us? More details in my blog [Stirling Archaeology](#).

*Murray Cook,  
Stirling Council*

## New Interactive Story Map Brings the Antonine Wall to Life

**A new digital tool has been created to allow people to walk and explore the entire length of the Antonine Wall – from Bo'ness in the east to Old Kilpatrick in the west – without ever losing their way.**

The interactive story map combines GIS mapping with rich historical content, transforming Scotland's Roman frontier into an accessible, immersive experience for all.

### Taking in the air

this innovation builds directly on recent access-focused outreach work, where health walk leaders were introduced to the Antonine Wall's landscapes and stories.

That initiative helped more people connect with the site's heritage while encouraging active lifestyles. The new story map takes that spirit further, providing a companion for anyone wishing to follow in the footsteps of Roman soldiers along the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The project also draws inspiration from the recently created community map in West Dunbartonshire, which celebrated local connections to the Wall and showcased the power of place-based storytelling. Now, those community insights sit alongside archaeological detail, historic imagery, and walking guidance, woven together in an easy-to-use digital format..

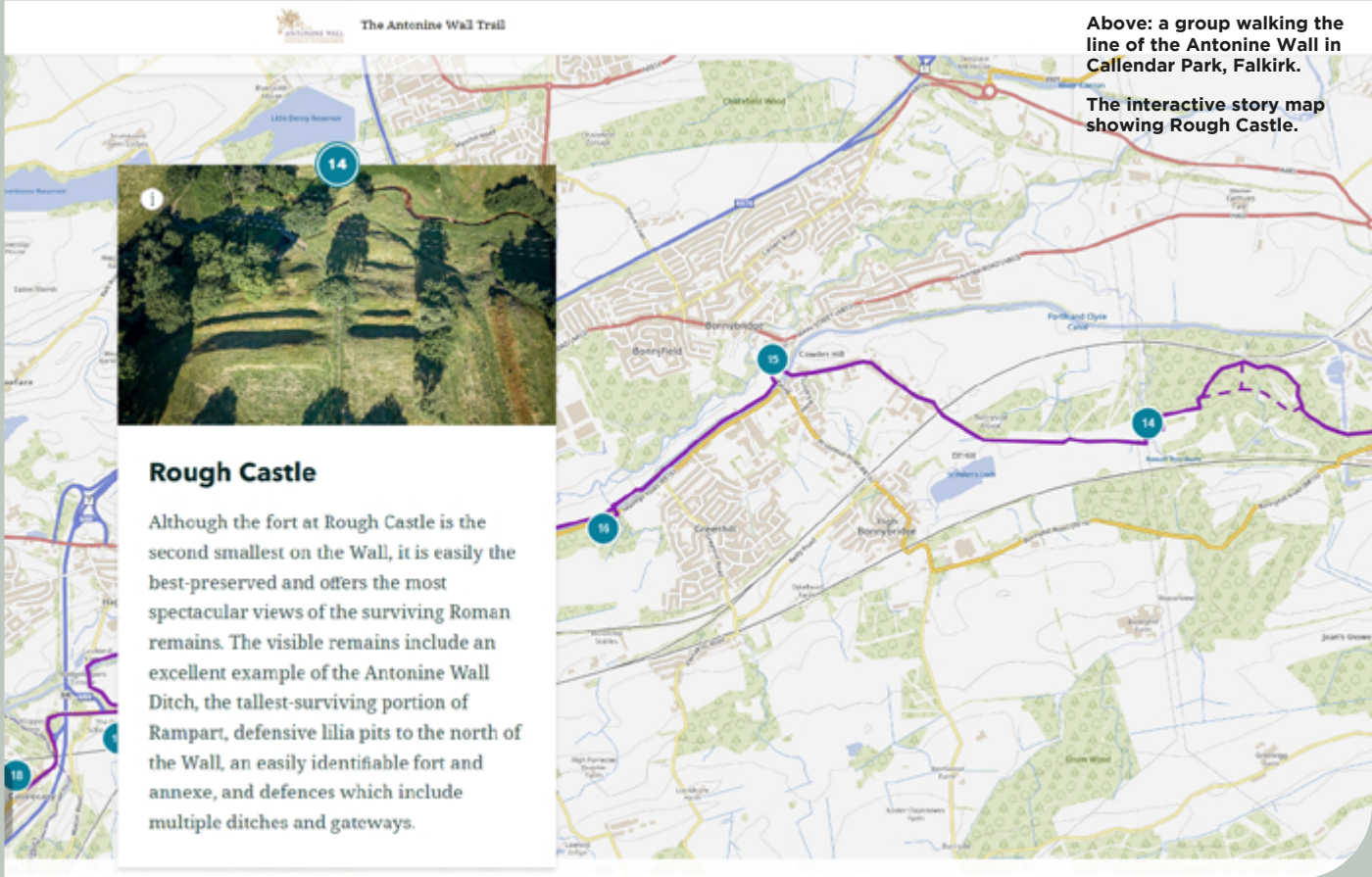


### Designed for discovery

In addition, this launch is part of a broader digital refresh of the [Antonine Wall website](#). Visitors can now move seamlessly from reading about the Wall's history to planning their own journey – whether a gentle local troll or a full east-to-west expedition.

By blending mapping, history, and health, the story map opens the Antonine Wall to a wider audience than ever before. It invites users not only to explore the landscape but also to uncover the people, events, and cultures that shaped it nearly two millennia ago. This is heritage brought vividly to life – a journey through time, powered by technology, and designed for discovery in the 21st century.

*Stephen Balfour,  
Rediscovering the Antonine Wall Project*



Above: a group walking the line of the Antonine Wall in Callendar Park, Falkirk.

The interactive story map showing Rough Castle.

Images © Rediscovering the Antonine Wall Project



Creating opportunities to acquire archaeological skills and driving innovation.

**GAINING GROUND AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICE: A YEAR OF ACTION WITH INNOVATION, SKILLS AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE BEYOND SCOTLAND**

Image © CIFA

## INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Image © Craig Stanford



**Far left: A student completing a section drawing at the Dunsapie Hillfort excavation in Holyrood Park, Edinburgh.**

**Left: Detail of the early medieval Nigg stone, in the Highlands. Specialist heritage skills such as stone conservation are going to be essential in the future.**

**This year marks ten years of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy and that milestone has given us the opportunity to review progress with Aim 5 over the last decade. In some respects, ten years seems like a long time, ample time to change the (skills) world... the reality is that when you are changing workplace cultures, when you are transforming ideas about who can be an archaeologist and how they can get there, it is barely time at all.**

### **Pathways to archaeology**

The main aim of this work is to develop a sustainable skills ecosystem – to create equitable career paths to and through archaeology, to ensure that we have the right skills in the right place at the right time. Working collaboratively is essential to this process and all workstreams have (and continue to) be informed by sector partners to ensure we are responding to skill issues with the appropriate solutions. Being part of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy and the Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment has enabled new conversations to take place and opened doors to new initiatives. It has enabled new skill partnerships to be created and existing systems of skill development to be questioned.

All of this has been made possible by funding from Historic Environment Scotland.

### **An unsinkable apprenticeship**

While that review has been taken place, work has also progressed with key initiatives being delivered under Aim 5. In August 2024, the Archaeology Modern Apprenticeship was given approval from the Skills Development Scotland Apprenticeship Approval Group to proceed to formal development. Consisting of four stages, the development is currently within stage 2 of the process. The development process includes confirming which job roles should be 'in scope' for this apprenticeship – a process that is informed by consultation with the sector. This work also includes creating a SVQ which will underpin the apprenticeship and developing the infrastructure which will deliver the initiative. A new 'Technical Expertise Group' has been created to inform this process, a group which includes ten employers who are interested in engaging with this apprenticeship once available. This apprenticeship is currently scheduled to launch in Winter 2026.

The formal development process for the Professional Development Award (PDA) has continued with a review of the qualification outline and the creation of a Qualification Development Team (QDT). As detailed in previous updates, this qualification is being developed to address an early career skill gap with fieldwork skills. The QDT has representation from five organisations (which include employers, training specialists and university employees) all of whom can inform on the content of this qualification to ensure it is fit for use.

### **The next generation**

Student engagement remains vitally important for this work and we have been delighted to meet so many students in the last 12 months. This has included visits out to training projects like Archaeology Scotland's Big Dig and Edinburgh University Holyrood Park Field School. It is invaluable to be able to talk directly to students to learn about their training needs and observe their training in action! The Scottish Student Archaeology Society Conference is always a highlight in our calendar and the 2025 event was hosted by Edinburgh University in February.



CiFA spoke directly to 86 students and early career archaeologists providing context for the archaeology profession and information on career pathways. We also asked them about their preferred communication platforms (email is still a favourite!) and training requests.

### Keeping You in the Loop

Sharing our progress and practice has always been an important element of this work and this year has been no exception. It has been brilliant to share this work through articles in the CiFA membership magazine and presentations at conferences. That includes presenting at the CiFA Innovation Festival, the European Association of Archaeologists and Scotland's Community Heritage Conversations event. In October CiFA was invited to speak at the CHARTER Alliance Cultural Heritage Skills Strategy Conference in Brussels, to exchange knowledge on developing and delivering skill strategies, drawing on the work completed in Scotland. It was invaluable to learn of similar initiatives across Europe.

We can't wait to see what the next ten years hold for skill development work in Scotland!

*Cara Jones,*  
**Chartered Institute for Archaeologists**



Image © CiFA



Images © Craig Stanford

**Left: Results of a student survey on how they would prefer to hear about career opportunities.**

**Above: Specialist site visit to Rothesay Castle to discuss repairs.**

**Main image: The crown spire of the University of Aberdeen. Student outreach remains a vital way of engaging the next generation.**



Images © CiFA

## The Skills Investment Plan turns a year old

The refreshed **Skills Investment Plan for Scotland's Historic Environment (SIP)** was published in 2024 with a vision to build a sustainable skills ecosystem that would equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to safeguard heritage for generations to come.

This strategy is a collective framework for collaboration and works towards three priorities: growing provision and building capacity, attracting future talent and improving access, and fostering innovation. One year after its publication, we have issued a Year One Report showcasing actions for the ten areas that form the SIP footprint including archaeology as well as key activities contributing to the strategy's vision across its footprint.

### The Five-Point Plan

Throughout this strategy's first year, under the leadership of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, we have worked with representatives from the archaeology sector to create an action plan for skills that delivers against Scotland's Archaeology Strategy and SIP outcomes.



Copies of the Skills Investment Plan on display.

The action plan focuses on activity to deliver on five priorities for skills in archaeology:

- Address the lack of post-excavation specialists,
- Upskill in digital methods, including AI,
- Develop skills and knowledge around net zero,
- Continue to develop and build infrastructure to support training provision, and
- Develop sustainable and equitable career entry routes and pathways.

To learn more, read our [Year One Report](#) or get in touch with the team at [skills@hes.scot](mailto:skills@hes.scot)

*Mar Roigé Oliver,*  
**Historic Environment Scotland**

## Make your mark!

In 2024-25, Make Your Mark partnered with the Scottish Stonemasons' Marks Project and Historic Environment Scotland to host **volunteer taster sessions** with Access to Industry (A2I), who work with unemployed people facing barriers to employment.

Find out more about this campaign to increase the number and diversity of heritage volunteers at:

**[MakeYourMark.scot](https://MakeYourMark.scot)**

Volunteer Taster Session 2 at Linlithgow Palace.

Using the raking light of a torch to illuminate masons marks at Linlithgow Palace.



Image © Make Your Marks





## RICHeS - A Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science

**Heritage and conservation science applies scientific analysis and technology to cultural heritage to enhance its understanding, interpretation, management and public engagement ([National Heritage Science Forum](#)). Investment in scientific and conservation infrastructure is vital to enable research, foster collaboration, meet user needs, and ensure open access to results.**

RICHeS (Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science) is an £80 million UK Research Infrastructure-funded initiative launched in 2024 to strengthen heritage science across the UK. It supports research facilities, scientific equipment, reference collections, and a heritage science data service. The programme aims to build a skilled network of scientists and facilities, keeping the UK at the forefront of innovation in this field. 31 projects have been funded nationwide, including four at Scottish institutions.

### **Scotland's Archaeological Human Remains Collection (SAHRC)**

National Museums Scotland curates an archaeological human remains collection which attracts significant research attention, owing to its significance to national and international projects. As more human remains are excavated and research interest grows, so does the need to expand storage, develop research frameworks and enhance the ethical care of this important collection. This project, co-led by Historic Environment Scotland, is enhancing facilities at the National Museums Collections Centre for curating and studying human remains. In addition, it will provide leadership by setting new standards on ethical care, curation and research of archaeological human skeletal remains, supporting other museums throughout the country.



**Ark of the North: opening up access to animal bone reference collections in Northern Scotland**

Animal bone reference collections are vital in both archaeological and palaeontological research, enhancing our understanding of past environments, ecosystems, economies, human-animal relationships and evolutionary studies. Despite digital tools, physical access remains essential. This project by The University of Aberdeen will consolidate and rehouse two extensive animal bone reference collections, over 2,000 specimens, into the Ark of the North, an accredited museum collection and online catalogue. This will ensure long-term sustainability of this collection, improve access and discoverability to rare and diverse specimens, fostering new partnerships and promoting interdisciplinary research which will have global impact. It is partnered with the Heritage Science Collections Hub: South in Portsmouth and SHEFF BIOARCH in Sheffield, creating hubs through which to access equipment and expertise across the UK.

**Retrofit Centre for Traditional Buildings**

With the UK having the highest proportion of traditional buildings in Europe, improving their energy efficiency is key to achieving net zero targets. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) frequently receive requests for advice on the practicalities of retrofitting buildings, and for support in testing retrofit products using traditional materials. However, it currently lacks the space and resources to meet this growing demand. The Retrofit Centre for Traditional Buildings will be a dedicated facility to support research, training and product development, ensuring that retrofit materials maintain a building's thermal performance, moisture control and air quality, while preserving their cultural heritage.

The facility will drive innovation in low carbon materials, influence national policy, set new industry standards and foster partnerships across heritage and construction sectors.

**Archaeology and the Environment Science Facility (AEONS)**

Environmental archaeology focuses on the relationships between past human populations and the environment and is essential for the study of Scotland's past climates and ecosystems, agriculture and diets, human impact on our diverse landscapes and our responses to change. The Archaeology and the Environment Science Facility project led by the University of the Highlands and Islands and Historic Environment Scotland will establish a comprehensive suite of laboratories enabling advanced processing and analysis of biological materials from archaeological sites, soils and sediments. It will broaden access to these resources for researchers, communities, commercial units and museums across Scotland, offering access to a network of expertise, as well as training opportunities. A mobile laboratory will also be deployed providing on-site support across the country. This initiative will offer global insights into climate change, conservation and sustainable land management.

Lisa Brown,  
Historic Environment Scotland



Far left: Pop-up AEONS lab at Sanday, Orkney.

Left : Pop-up AEONS lab at Skaill Bay in Rousay.

Above: Delivery of the Energy Efficiency course at the Engine Shed, Stirling.



Images © UHI

Image © HES



*Animal bone reference collections are vital in both archaeological and palaeontological research, enhancing our understanding of past environments, ecosystems, economies, human-animal relationships and evolutionary studies.*



3D model of an Ursus (bear) phalanx. The Ark of the North lab will be equipped with 3D scanners and printers to ensure scans of copies of bones can be made ahead of destructive sampling, and in order to share models and 3D replicas with other laboratories.

A European brown bear.

Image © Pexels from Pixabay

Image © Kiki Borden



# Get in touch

## Our hashtag #ScotArchStrat is a great way for you to get involved.

Follow it to see up-to-date news about how the Strategy is being delivered or tag your own content with it to share what you are doing to help make Scotland's archaeology matter.

**#SCOTARCHSTRAT**



### Scotland's Archaeology Strategy website

Visit the Strategy's website to find more information on how the Strategy is being delivered and how you can get involved. You'll find previous issues of the magazine, the Five Year Review and much more. Also, look out for our new blog launching soon:

<https://archaeologystrategy.scot/>

### We'd love to hear your stories!

We are always keen to hear of great work happening that is delivering the Strategy - if you have an example of best practice, lessons you've learned, or something you are particularly proud of, please get in touch either through the Strategy email or social media. We would love to share your project so that others can learn and be inspired! For more information on promoting the strategy and getting involved, visit our website:

<https://archaeologystrategy.scot/promoting-the-strategy/>

### Scottish Strategic Archaeology Committee needs you!

The Scottish Strategic Archaeology Committee is a group which represents a wide spectrum of interests in Scottish archaeology. They oversee and drive the delivery of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy. Members sit on the Committee for four years. We regularly look for new members for both the Committee and its working groups. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch:

[ArchaeologyStrategy@hes.scot](mailto:ArchaeologyStrategy@hes.scot)

### #ScotlandDigs2025

If you are conducting any summer fieldwork keep your eye out for **#ScotlandDigs2025**

Use this hashtag to make your work part of a national conversation.

## Enjoyed finding out what is happening in archaeology in Scotland this year?



Dig into past issues of the magazine [here](#).