

Managing  
Change  
in the Historic  
Environment

# Interiors



Consultation draft  
August 2009

# Key Issues

- 1. The interior of a listed building is an important part of its special character. Consent is required for any works which will affect that character.**
- 2. The significance of the interior, the nature of the proposed work and its impact should be carefully considered in order to protect the building's character.**
- 3. The interest and authenticity of a historic interior is derived from its plan form, completeness and quality of decorative schemes, materials and craftsmanship, historical/cultural associations, fixtures and any associated archaeology.**
- 4. Alterations should protect this interest wherever possible.**
- 5. Local authorities give advice on the requirement for listed building consent, conservation area consent and other permissions.**

## INTRODUCTION

This is one of a series of guidance notes on managing change in the historic environment. The series explains how to apply the policies contained in the *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* ([SHEP](#), PDF 312K) and *Scottish Planning Policy 23: Planning and the Historic Environment* ([SPP23](#), PDF 192K).

This note sets out the principles that apply to alterations to the interiors of listed buildings. It replaces the equivalent guidance in *The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas* (1998) and should be afforded equal weight in drawing up planning policies and determining applications relating to the historic environment.

The protection of statutory listing includes the interior, whether or not the list description itemises interior features.

Monuments scheduled under the Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979 require scheduled monument consent for any works. Where a structure is both scheduled and listed, the scheduling controls have precedence. Separate advice is available from Historic Scotland's website: [Scheduled Monuments: Guidance for Owners, Occupiers & Land Managers](#) (PDF 718K).

## WHY ARE HISTORIC INTERIORS IMPORTANT?

The interior makes a substantial contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of a building. Its style, detailing and the use of materials help us to understand when the building was constructed and adapted, its social and cultural significance, what it was used for and how this has been influenced by advances in technology and changes in fashion.

## IDENTIFYING THE INTEREST OF A HISTORIC INTERIOR

The significance of a historic interior, or part of an interior, is usually derived from a number of factors, including those set out in the paragraphs below. The degree to which an interior remains intact from key periods in its history, and its rarity in a broader context, are also important considerations.

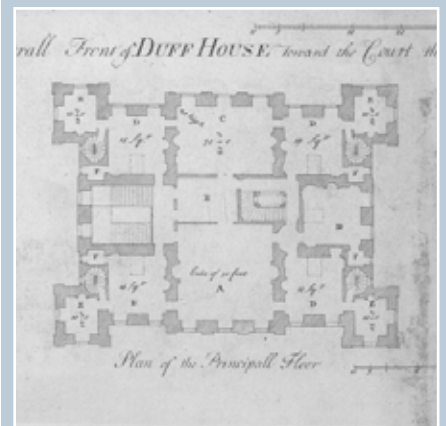
### Plan form

The 'plan form' is the arrangement and division of internal spaces into rooms and circulation spaces such as halls, stairs and corridors, and is a key component of the character of any building. The interrelationship of rooms and circulation spaces is a reflection of the building's design, function, status and period. Where rooms are arranged to create particular spatial effects or views, the position of features such as doors, windows, fireplaces and cupboards can be significant.

Room proportions are important to the integrity of a design. The size and height of a room is normally carefully proportioned and may relate



*Holmwood, 61–63 Netherlee Road, Glasgow, designed by Alexander 'Greek' Thomson in 1857. Although the decorative scheme is unusually ornate, the arrangement is typical of many 19th-century dining rooms. A 'buffet recess' was constructed on the wall opposite the window to house a sideboard. Two presses, or cupboards, are built in a symmetrical arrangement on either side of the buffet recess. The door on the left-hand side is hung so that visitors passing through the adjoining hall cannot see the occupants of the dining room, even if the door is open or ajar. Mural scenes from the Iliad were found and conserved during repairs to the building. While some parts are displayed, other damaged parts are protected by conservation paper. Reproduced by kind permission of the National Trust for Scotland.*



*Plan of the principal floor of Duff House, Banff, Aberdeenshire, designed by William Adam in 1735. The layout is almost symmetrical, reflecting the prevailing interest in classical architecture, rational planning, and a hierarchy of public and private spaces. The main room, the 'Sallon', is noted as a 30ft cube. © Crown copyright, RCAHMS.*



*17th-century painted timber ceiling, Edinburgh. Colourful decoration painted directly onto ceiling boards and beams was commonplace in merchant and noble houses in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many painted ceilings depicted narrative, allegorical or emblematic subjects appropriate to the patron, but they were often covered over at a later date by new owners. © N Haynes.*



*A typical 'best room' or parlour fireplace in a late 19th-century tenement. In this case the fixtures are likely to include the fireplace and shelf, the cast-iron grate and hood, the decorative tiled panels flanking the grate and the floor tiles. Reproduced by kind permission of the National Trust for Scotland.*



*A built-in box bed in a cottage at Bridge of Brown, Highland. The interiors of vernacular buildings can contain features that were once commonplace, but are now rare.*

to its function. For example, the size and arrangement of a 'public' room, such as a dining or drawing room, often contrasts with less formal or elaborate 'private' spaces, such as bedrooms and parlours. Windows, doors and fireplaces within rooms were frequently designed and located to complement these proportions.

### Decorative schemes

The decorative treatment of a historic interior is almost always an important element of a building's character, whether it is a simple functional space or a grand and imposing one. Depending on the building type, or the location within a building, interior schemes range from utilitarian bare plaster or wood to highly elaborate applied finishes. Decorative schemes can reveal much about the function/status of a room and broader stylistic movements. Work was often designed to co-ordinate throughout a room or a building in one style or a complementary variety of styles. Some schemes have a programmatic purpose reflecting the outlook of the patron and/or artist.

Most interiors have been redecorated on a number of occasions. Later schemes can be of interest in their own right.

### Materials and craftsmanship

Even relatively modest interior spaces can display high levels of craftsmanship and quality of materials. The enormous variety of materials and skills employed in historic interiors can range from simple panelled timber doors and shutters to elaborate marble fireplaces, hand-painted Chinese wallpapers and embossed leather hangings.

### Fixtures and fittings

Objects associated with a building, such as fixtures, fittings, furnishings, collections of books or art works, and machinery, can greatly enhance the overall significance of an interior space.

Statutory protection extends only to those features that form an integral part of the listed building. It is not necessary for the feature to be set out in the list description for it to be considered as part of the protected structure. Local authorities can advise on whether consent is required for the removal of a fixture.

In general terms objects such as staircases, chimneypieces, doors and doorpieces, timber panelling, shutters, built-in furniture and painted or plasterwork ceilings are likely to be considered integral parts of a listed building. The degree of physical attachment and the extent to which it was intended to make the object part of the building are relevant factors for other items such as bathroom and kitchen fixtures, overmantel mirrors, overdoor paintings, fire grates, lighting and machinery.

The circumstances are likely to be different in each case, and professional guidance in legal precedent should be sought where necessary.

## Archaeological potential

In many cases there is potential for early structural evidence or decorative schemes to survive below later work, and these can contribute to a building's special interest. Interior structural evidence, such as timber framework, masonry vaulting, or blocked doorways and windows, can reveal much about the development of a building through time.

Common discoveries of decorative features include chimneypieces, grates and ranges in blocked fireplaces, door panelling under hardboard covering, and decorative plasterwork above suspended ceilings. There is potential for mural and other painted decorative schemes to be recovered from beneath later paintwork. In cases where a decorative scheme cannot be recovered in full, it may be possible to re-create the scheme through paint sampling and matching.

## Historical, cultural and social associations

The link between particular interior spaces and notable people or events in history forms a significant element of their interest. Interiors connected to important historical figures can provide an invaluable insight into their lives, inspiration and works. Similarly the context of a historical event or cultural/social activity can be better understood when the physical surroundings are intact.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ALTERATIONS

### Character and interest of the building

Internal alterations to a historic building should protect its character. The contribution of the interior to that character should therefore be understood before considering how to alter the building. A brief description of the interest of the interior and an explanation of the impact of the alterations is always helpful in assessing proposed works.

### Significance of the interior spaces

Alterations should be carefully planned and located to best protect the interest of the internal spaces. In general, the principal spaces in a building will be more sensitive to change as these are the spaces that normally make the most significant contribution to its character. There will also be occasions where secondary spaces such as basement kitchens or attic rooms are sensitive to change, for example where they survive in their original form.

### Subdivision and amalgamation of spaces

Where the original plan form (or a later plan form of quality) survives, this should normally be retained without subdivision or amalgamation of spaces.

When planning new links between rooms or circulation spaces it is important to take account of the historic design and layout, and also of distinctions between different types of space. For example, in most pre-20th-century townhouses or villas a direct opening between a vestibule and a dining room, or between a 'public' drawing room



*Former India of Inchinnan Tyre Factory of 1929–30, Renfrewshire. The mosaic floor was conserved and the cracks sealed as part of the rescue of this building at risk.*



*New Barony Mill, Boardhouse, Orkney. The survival of the machinery in this meal mill of 1873 allows an understanding of why the building was designed and laid out in the way that it is and how the building functioned. Corn or meal mill machinery is usually located in a small area at the end of the building nearest the power source, and can frequently be kept as a feature of mills converted for other use. © Copyright: RCAHMS (Scottish Industrial Archaeology Survey Collection). Licensor [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk).*



*The Library, Abbotsford, Scottish Borders. Apart from containing the book collection that helped to shape the imagination of Sir Walter Scott, the decoration of the little-altered room reveals the famous writer's antiquarian taste in architecture and furniture. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk).*



*Law's Close, Kirkcaldy, Fife. A 17th-century painted, grained and marbled geometrical pattern was reinstated in 2005 on the basis of patterns found beneath layers of paint and a shelf. The original evidence was retained beneath thin plywood for future study.*



*Taybank Works, Dundee, a former jute spinning mill of 1873. The structural cast-iron frame was retained in situ when reversible sound- and fire-proofed partitions were inserted on conversion to residential use.*



*Intumescent strip added to the edge of a historic door. When heated the strip expands to seal the gap between the door and the frame, reducing the supply of oxygen to a fire. Intumescent paint or varnish can also enhance the fire resistance of historic doors.*

and a 'private' parlour, would be uncharacteristic of the traditional arrangement. A new opening in such a location should be carefully designed to minimise disruption to the characters of the spaces being linked. Solid doors are likely to best retain the sense of enclosure in these cases, rather than glazed doors or openings without doors.

Where a new linking opening would unbalance a symmetrical arrangement, a 'jib' door designed to match the decorative detail of the wall might serve to minimise the impact of the new work. In each circumstance, careful thought should be given to the location, size and detailing of the new opening to best maintain the character of the historic space.

In some rare cases, the quality of the decorative scheme or layout of the space may be such that removal of fabric to create a link would be damaging to an unacceptable degree.

### Historic materials

Historic fabric also makes an important contribution to the character of a building's interior and should be retained where possible. Replacement of lath-and-plaster walls, original joinery or decorative plaster will almost always be damaging to the interest of the interior and is often unnecessary. Even where not in use, features such as doors, fireplaces or machinery should where practical be left in situ.

### New design

Alterations to historic interiors should be considered in the context of the type and quality of the existing interior. High-quality contemporary design can enhance and complement the significance of a historic interior, but it should not destroy earlier spaces or features of interest.

### Structural works

In undertaking structural works, it is often best to repair the existing structure rather than replacing it. Where this is impractical it may be possible to incorporate modern structural components, but care should always be taken to avoid harming the structural integrity of the building and its fabric.

The loss of a building's interior through the removal of interior walls and floor plates will almost always harm the character of a historic building and should not normally be considered.

### Decorative schemes

High-quality decorative schemes should be retained in situ where possible. If the scheme is largely intact, it may be possible to undertake discreet repairs without damaging historic fabric or the authenticity of the scheme as a whole. If there is significant damage, or the scheme is incomplete, it may be better to protect the historic fabric and add a new layer of decoration, perhaps in the manner of the original.

## Fire and security measures

With careful attention to details, fire and security protection measures can usually be incorporated with minimal visible disruption to historic interiors. However, care should be taken to ensure that harm is not caused to the character of the interior by sensors and other equipment or wiring/pipework, fire retardant measures such as additional screens and doors, and in the upgrading of the retardant qualities of existing doors and historic surfaces (e.g. by intumescent paint or varnish).

## Vacant buildings

Historic interiors and collections should be protected from damage during construction works or building vacancy. Measures can include physical protection by covering, security surveillance, or in some agreed cases temporary removal of valuable items to secure locations.

## Fixtures

Where fixtures contribute to the character of a building, these should be retained.

## Archaeology

Archaeological investigation of a building's interior may be appropriate where there is potential for archaeological evidence including early fabric.

## RECORDING

Where alterations are proposed to important decorative schemes or layouts, photographic or other recording of the interior in its unaltered state may be required as a condition of listed building consent. In other cases evidence of early decorative schemes sometimes come to light in the course of works. Evidence of earlier schemes, such as fragments of wallpaper, can provide an interesting insight into the history of the building and its occupants. The Threatened Buildings Survey of the Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) records buildings, structures and sites prior to significant alteration or conversion, and in emergencies where they face imminent risks such as fire or collapse.

## CONSENTS

Listed building consent is required for any work to a listed building that affects its character. The local authority determines the need for consent.

Where listed building consent is required, an application is made to the local authority. This should include accurate scale drawings showing both the existing situation and proposed works in context. It is normally helpful to provide detailed technical information and photographs.



*Late 19th-century taps, forming some of the fixtures of a house in the Scottish Borders.*



*Abbot's House, Dunfermline, Fife. Refurbishment of the building provided an opportunity to reveal and record archaeological evidence of the building's development. Evidence of an earlier structure, possibly dating from the 1460s, was discovered. This blocked plate-traceried window is now conserved and displayed to visitors.*



*RCAHMS record photograph of a textile studio (1972) before recent residential conversion. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk).*

## Other selected Historic Scotland publications and links

[Inform Guide: Energy Efficiency in Traditional Homes](#) (2008) (PDF 715K)

[Inform Guide: Fire Safety](#) (2005) (PDF 339K)

[Inform Guide: Fireplaces](#) (2008) (PDF 456K)

[Inform Guide: Interior Paint](#) (2007) (PDF 278)

[Inform Guide: Ceramic Tiled Flooring](#) (2007) (PDF 469)

[Inform Guide: Gilding](#) (2007) (PDF 571K)

[Inform Guide: Timber Floors](#) (2008) (PDF 411K)

[Inform Guide: Ventilation in Traditional Houses](#) (2008) (PDF 753K)

[Inform Guide: Decorative Domestic Glass](#) (2007) (PDF 424K)

For the full range of Inform Guides, Practitioner Guides, Technical Advice Notes and Research Reports please see the Publications section of the Historic Scotland website.

## Recording of historic interiors

Threatened Buildings Survey  
Royal Commission on the  
Ancient & Historical Monuments  
of Scotland (RCAHMS)  
John Sinclair House  
16 Bernard Terrace  
EDINBURGH  
EH8 9NX

Tel: 0131 662 1456  
Fax: 0131 662 1477  
E-mail: [info@rcahms.gov.uk](mailto:info@rcahms.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Details of all individual scheduled monuments, listed buildings, designated gardens and designed landscapes, and designated wrecks can be obtained from Historic Scotland (see contact details below) or at: [www.pastmap.org.uk](http://www.pastmap.org.uk). Details of listed buildings can also be obtained from the relevant local authority for the area.

Advice on the requirement for listed building consent, conservation area consent, building warrants, and other permissions/consents should be sought from local authorities.

Historic Scotland Inspectorate  
Longmore House  
Salisbury Place  
EDINBURGH  
EH9 1SH

Tel: 0131 668 8981 or 8717 Fax: 0131 668 8765

E-mail: [hs.inspectorate@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hs.inspectorate@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk)

Advice on technical issues is available from Historic Scotland's Technical Conservation Group at the above address and website or at the following:

Tel: 0131 668 8715 or Fax: 0131 668 8669

E-mail: [hs.technicalconservationgroup@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hs.technicalconservationgroup@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

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[www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk](http://www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk)

### Cover images

*17th-century plasterwork ceiling detail, Edinburgh.* © N Haynes.

*Part of an 1855 mural by Campbell T Bowie, discovered during redecoration of the Trades' Hall, Glasgow. The mural was re-covered with conservation tissue paper to allow the redecoration to continue and to enable future recovery of the mural if required.*

*Public toilets (1899), Rothesay Pier, Argyll & Bute.* © N Haynes.