

Society of Antiquaries
of Scotland



Scotland's heritage hub
A gateway to the past



Capital Fundraising Campaign

*Please help us raise £1.5 million
to establish a new permanent
home for the Society of
Antiquaries of Scotland.*

Your generosity will ensure you are part of the enduring story of the Society, following in the footsteps of the great antiquaries whose united passion founded this Society in the 18th century and have helped preserve and celebrate Scotland's past over the last 245 years.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape the future of Scotland's heritage by supporting the creation of a new heritage hub.

You will help ensure that the Society's work in sharing the stories and discoveries that shape our understanding of the past reaches people today and creates a lasting legacy for generations to come.



*We believe that
Scotland's past
is for everyone
to research,
share, enjoy and
protect, at home
and abroad.*

Cover image: artist's impression of the Bristo Place Building. © Benjamin Tindall Architects



An exceptional opportunity

A message from the President

The Society stands at a defining moment in its long and distinguished history. For 245 years, we have helped protect and promote Scotland's past, but today we face real and urgent challenges.

The heritage sector is shifting rapidly, shaped by changing public expectations, financial pressures, and the call for greater inclusivity and innovation. At the same time, more people than ever are seeking connection: to place, to identity, and to the deeper stories that shape who we are.

This is a moment of great promise for the Society and of great potential for the role that we can play – but we are being held back. We operate from an attic flat within the National Museum of Scotland: a hidden, inaccessible space that isolates us from the very people we exist to serve. We cannot host in-person events, welcome visitors, or fully support the sector we care so deeply about.

Our Fellows, the very heart of the Society, are unable to visit our current premises in Edinburgh, including those who travel from across Scotland and from around the world. That simple act of connection, of networking, of standing with the Society to create, hold and share knowledge is out of reach.

But today we have an exceptional opportunity to change our future, acquire a permanent home and establish Scotland's first national heritage hub.

Located in a B-listed landmark building beside the National Museum of Scotland in the centre of Edinburgh, the hub will be a visible, welcoming centre for research, knowledge exchange, innovation and public engagement. It will transform the Society, opening our doors to Fellows, the heritage sector, and the wider public.

But we only have a limited time in which to act.

To make this vision a reality, we must raise **£1.5 million by January 2027 to purchase the building**. This is your moment to stand with us, transform the Society, and leave an enduring legacy that will ensure Scotland's past is celebrated, protected, and shared for centuries to come.

Diana Murray, President
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland



How we forged the Nation's story

For nearly 250 years, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland has been actively supporting the study and enjoyment of Scotland's past through archaeological and historical research.

As the oldest antiquarian society in Scotland – founded in 1780 by David Steuart Erskine, the 11th Earl of Buchan (1742–1829), and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1783 – the Society has helped define the story of Scotland. Fellows began donating material to the Society from its inception, and in 1781, a property was bought in Edinburgh so that the donations it received could be stored and displayed.

By 1841, more than 4,000 visitors, including Queen Victoria, had flocked to the Society's museum to marvel at the thousands of artefacts collected over the previous six decades. By 1850, the doors of the Society's collection were drawing 17,000 visitors a year with free admission. From 1861 an astonishing 88,000 people visited the museum annually.

In 1851, a landmark Deed of Conveyance with the UK Treasury transferred these remarkable artefacts into public ownership. This pivotal moment freed the Society to pursue new ambitions, including the launch of its renowned annual journal, the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, in 1852.

The Society's Fellows were visionaries. Counted among them were Sir Walter Scott and Alexander Henry Rhind of Sibster, whose passion for Scotland's past helped shape the national identity we celebrate today.

By 1891, the Society and its collections had moved into magnificent, purpose-built accommodation alongside the National Portrait Gallery on Queen Street, a fitting home for some of Scotland's most important treasures.

Just over a century later, in 1998, the collections provided the cornerstone for the newly formed National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street, and the Society moved with them into the new museum complex.

Today, the collections continue to inspire more than 2.3 million visitors each year, standing as a living testament to the Society's enduring legacy.

Now, in the 21st century, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland stands as Scotland's oldest heritage charity and learned Society, connecting more than 2,600 Fellows worldwide. We stimulate discussion and collaboration, deliver national projects, and support research and publication to bring Scotland's past to everyone. In 2024, our multi-channel social and conventional media reached over 5.2 million people, a clear demonstration of the growing demand for our work and the continued relevance of our vision.

As an independent voice for Scotland's heritage, we unite people who share a deep passion for our nation's past. Our charitable vision is simple: "Scotland's past is for everyone to research, share, enjoy and protect, home and abroad." But we need new premises to deliver this vision to the full.

Royal Patronage continues under His Majesty King Charles III.

First row: © National Galleries Scotland; Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons; © National Museums Scotland; by Maccoinnich licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0; Benjamin Tindall Architects. Second row: Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland; Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons; all other images © Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.



The Society is founded by David Steuart Erskine
1780

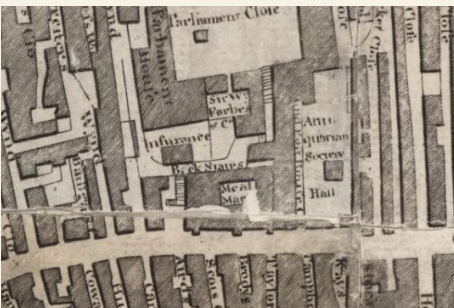
The Society is incorporated by Royal Charter
1783

Moves to Chessel's Buildings, Old Town, and Runestone arrives
1787

First property acquired to store and display donated artefacts
1781

First *Transactions* published
1792

'Antiquarian Society Hall' appears on Alexander Kincaid's Edinburgh map
1784



Moves to Gossfords Close, Old Town
1793

Moves to 42 George Street with the Royal Society of Edinburgh
1813

Moves to Royal Institution near The Mound
1826

King George IV visits Edinburgh orchestrated by Society Fellow, Sir Walter Scott
1822

Moves to Castle Hill, Old Town
1794

Free admission attracts 4,000 visitors including Queen Victoria and Prince Albert
1841



Proceedings published for the first time
1852

Moves to 24 George Street, New Town
1844

Return to the Royal Institution on The Mound
1859

Deed of Conveyance makes the collection National Property
1851

22,000 visitors to museum
1854



First Rhind Lectures delivered, funded by Alexander Henry Rhind
1876

Board of Trustees for Manufactures in Scotland dissolved
1906

88,000 visitors to museum
1861

Moves to 1 Queen Street
1891

National Museum of Antiquities Act transfers governance to a new Board
1954



The National Museum of Antiquities merge with the Royal Scottish Museum to form National Museums Scotland
1985

The National Museum of Scotland new building opens
1998

Supplementary Royal Charter awarded
2019

Dorothy Marshall legacy and RBK Stevenson bequest received
1992

The Society's future is secured for generations to come
2027



Our Vision for Scotland's heritage hub

A gateway to Scotland's past

The heritage hub will be a gateway to Scotland's past. An open front door welcoming everyone and addressing the accessibility challenges that are holding us back. With exhibition space, podcast recording facilities and flexible meeting rooms, the hub will become a visible and inviting centre for engagement, learning, and collaboration.

A Base for National Endeavours

Our projects (Dig It!, ScARF, ReACH, Make Your Mark) have the anchor building they need to deliver additional benefits, and we can provide Treasure Trove the public accessibility they require for public reporting of finds.

A Home for Fellows

Inspiring spaces for Fellows to meet, research, collaborate, and share knowledge through talks and seminars, strengthening the community at the heart of the Society.

A Connector for the Sector

Building partnerships and collaborations with heritage organisations, academic institutions, and cultural bodies to strengthen sector impact and reach.

A Centre of Innovation

Enhancing our digital presence and capabilities to reach a wider audience.



A Portal for Public Discovery

Signposting visitors to Scotland's wider heritage sites and introducing their stories. Supporting visitors in tracing their roots and understanding Scotland's heraldic traditions in partnership with the relevant organisations.

A Hub for Learning and Debate

Encouraging open discussion, diverse perspectives, and critical thinking about Scotland's past and its relevance today, including strengthened advocacy to safeguard Scotland's heritage through the Society's independent voice.

A Catalyst for the Sector

An affordable space in a prime position where heritage professionals, community heritage groups, volunteers, and researchers can host exhibitions and share experiences.

A Place to Support the Future

Fostering the education and professional growth of emerging heritage specialists.



A partner to National Museums Scotland

The heritage hub will complement the work of our neighbours at the National Museum of Scotland. The hub will reveal stories about the communities involved in unearthing the museum's treasures: those who make, record and research Scottish heritage.

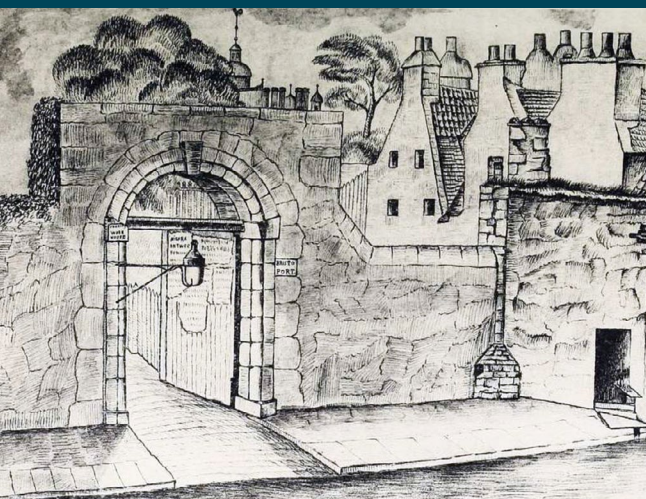
Artist's impression of the shop (above) and shop front (right), which includes museum title for clarity.

© Benjamin Tindall Architects



A sustainable future

The new building also offers a unique opportunity to secure the Society's long-term financial sustainability. Covering c.845 square metres (9,100 square feet), the building will be purchased with six residential flats, which have the potential to generate income each year. This revenue will play a vital role in sustaining the Society's mission and expanding its reach.



Above: The Flodden Wall with its entrance at Bristo Port. CC0 1.0 Universal

Below: Kincaid's 1784 map. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland



Introducing our new home: the Bristo Place Building

Steeped in the nation's history

The property we wish to acquire is no ordinary building; it is a physical link to Scotland's past, steeped in the stories that shaped the nation. Located on the corner of Bristo Port and Bristo Place, this B-listed property holds special architectural and historic significance, standing on ground that has witnessed more than five centuries of Scottish history.

Bristo Place was once the southern gateway into Edinburgh, entered through Bristo Port, a fortified arch built in 1515 as part of the Flodden Wall. Though much of the wall has disappeared, its remains can still be seen in the neighbouring National Museum of Scotland, traced in cobbled lines across the surrounding streets and marked by a nearby commemorative plaque.

This site has long been a stage for defining moments. In 1503, Margaret Tudor entered the city here through a grand Renaissance arch to marry King James IV, marking the Treaty of Perpetual Peace between Scotland and England. Nearby, in 1638, the National Covenant was signed at Greyfriars Kirk, another turning point in the nation's story, and later the doomed Darien project was directed from a house on Bristo Place.

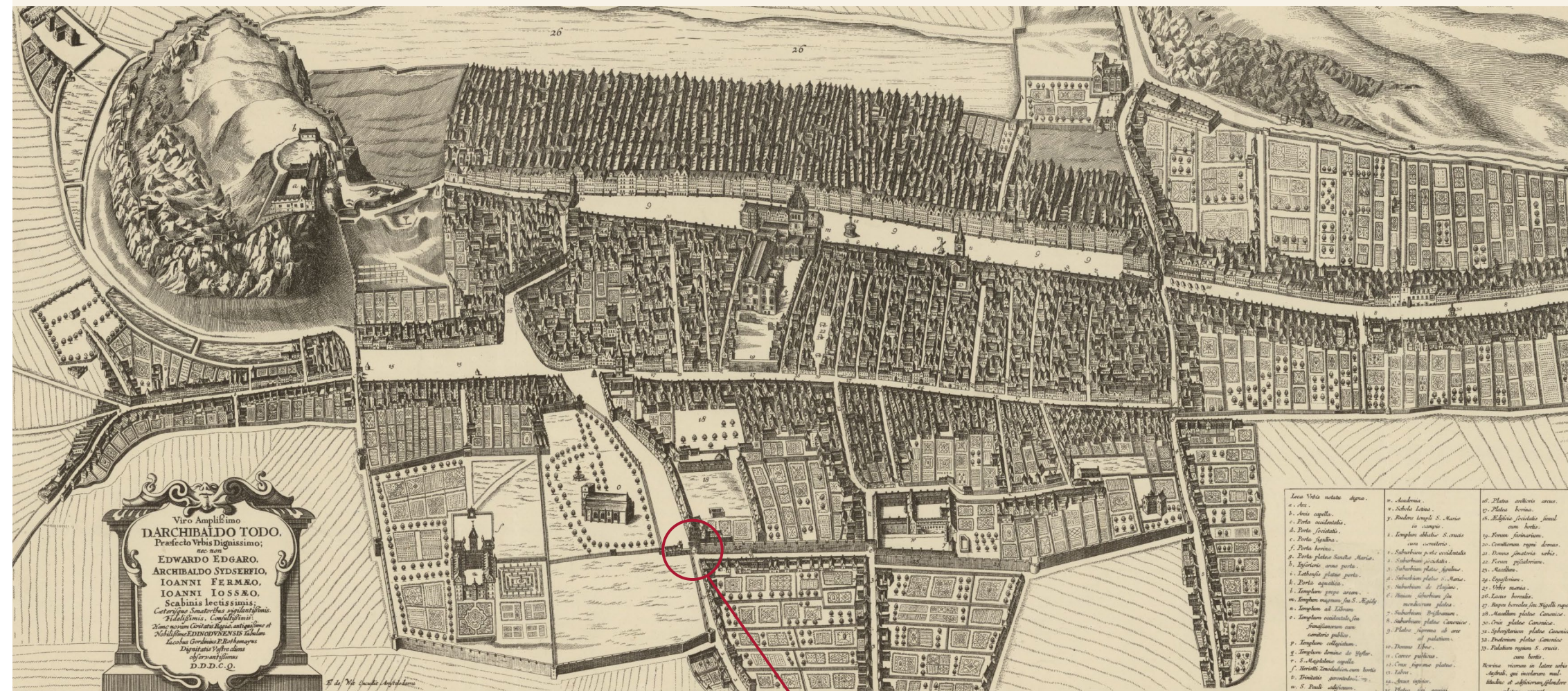
The present tenements stand on the site of the George Inn, shown on Kincaid's 1784 plan, close to the former Greyfriars monastery and other landmarks that reveal Edinburgh's evolving civic and social life.

For centuries, this small corner of the city has been a gateway to Scotland's past, a place where people, ideas, and events have met and reshaped history. Now, it stands ready to open its doors once again, this time as the new home of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

The heritage hub will continue that tradition, acting as a modern gateway to Scotland's past, welcoming everyone to explore, learn, and connect with the nation's stories. In bringing new life to this historic site, we are not just preserving its fabric, but ensuring its spirit endures for generations to come.

Bird's eye view of Edinburgh in 1647

Reduced scale reproduction of the De Wit version of Gordon of Rothiemay's original 1647 plan, imprint by W & AK Johnston, c. 1870. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.



Bristo Port, the southern gateway into Edinburgh through the Flodden Wall, built in 1515.



Above: Aerial view of the area around Bristo Port.
© 2025 Google

Below: Great Seal of Scotland as attached to the
Society supplementary Royal Charter.



A prime location

Located at the heart of Edinburgh's cultural quarter, the Bristo Place Building sits within one of the United Kingdom's richest cultural corridors and offers an unparalleled platform for public engagement. As part of the city's UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is surrounded by national heritage institutions and cultural landmarks such as Edinburgh Castle, the King's Theatre, Greyfriars Bobby, Surgeons' Hall Museums, the National Library of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh. This area attracts over 10 million* visitors annually, including 2.3 million to the adjoining National Museum of Scotland.

The site's central position offers further strategic advantages. Excellent transport links ensure easy access from across Scotland and beyond. This prime setting will amplify the reach and visibility of our work to one of the largest and most engaged heritage audiences in Scotland.

*Source: City of Edinburgh Council, footfall data and VisitScotland visitor estimates.

A rare alignment of opportunity: a new home by our 250th anniversary

Thanks to the exceptional generosity of the current owner, we have been offered the chance to secure this building at a fixed price. It is a rare opportunity that brings together affordability, reliable rental income, an unrivalled location, valuable public space, and irreplaceable historic character. Situated directly beside the National Museum of Scotland, the building's setting enhances our shared heritage and complementary missions, creating a cultural synergy that is both powerful and unlikely to be repeated.

As the Society approaches its 250th anniversary in 2030, this alignment represents a truly historic moment. Securing the building would allow us to be in our new permanent home in time for this remarkable milestone.

It's now or never: we need to act

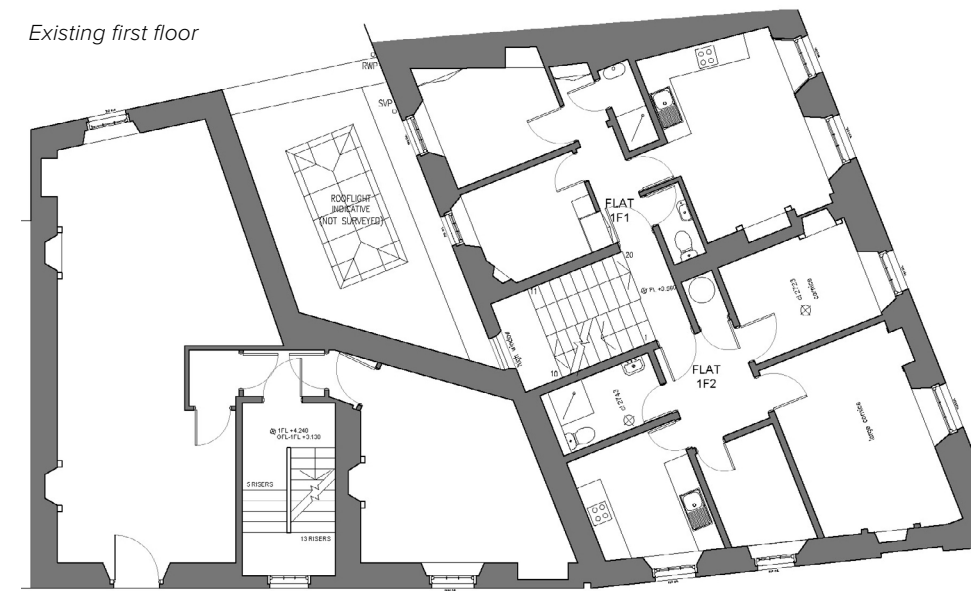
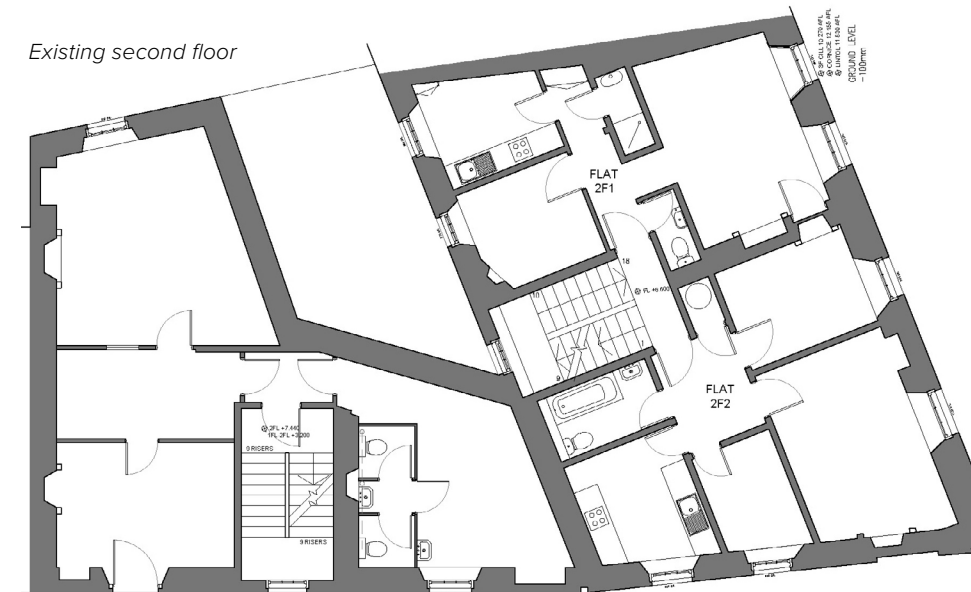
However, we have limited time to raise the funds required to secure the B-listed building before it is lost to commercial sale.

Once the building is purchased, we will immediately enter a development phase to restore this B-listed asset and advance our vision for the heritage hub. This approach has already drawn national interest: The National Lottery Heritage Fund in Scotland and other bodies have signalled interest in supporting the development phase. To unlock this support we must first secure ownership of the building by 1 January 2027 at a cost of £2.1 million.

The Society is contributing at least £600,000 from its investments, leaving a funding gap of £1.5 million.

Support from our Royal Patron

Our Patron, His Majesty King Charles III, has been informed of our plans, and we will extend an invitation for him to visit on our 250th anniversary in 2030 to formally open the restored building, a moment we hope will mark a proud new chapter in our history.



The Bristo Place Building

Plans © Benjamin Tindall Architects





Above: Lewis chessmen. British Museum, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Below: Society events allow people to meet, research, collaborate, and share knowledge.
© Neil Hanna



How you can support us

To help realise the Society's vision for a new heritage hub, we are inviting supporters to contribute towards the cost of purchasing the building.

We would be delighted to discuss how you can be part of this transformative moment for the Society and for Scotland's heritage. Whether you are considering a personal gift, supporting through your trust or foundation, your company, or exploring a wider partnership, we would be pleased to work with you to ensure your philanthropy has lasting impact.

For gifts of £1 million or more there is the opportunity to be the Primary Naming Donor. The donor will be honoured with a truly unique and prestigious form of recognition: the opportunity to name the building itself, thereby establishing their name as the official postal address.

Their name, coat of arms or corporate logo will also be acknowledged on the building's exterior, proudly aligned alongside the Society's name in a commanding position beside the National Museum of Scotland, in the very heart of Edinburgh, Scotland's capital. This public expression of gratitude offers a legacy at the heart of Scotland's cultural quarter.

For other gifts we have developed tiered giving levels inspired by iconic artefacts from Scotland's past, reflecting metalworking traditions that range from the brilliance of gold to the functional beauty of pewter.

Gold Tier (gifts of £200,000 or more)

Gold Donors will be honoured with their name, coat of arms or corporate logo displayed in the new Board Room.

As part of the special distinction reserved for the **Primary Donor** and **Gold Donors**, those individuals who fall within Lord Lyon's consideration and do not already have a coat of arms will have the opportunity to work with us to propose one. In recognition of their significant contribution to Scotland's heritage, this bespoke design can then be presented as a petition for a grant of arms to Lord Lyon.

Silver Tier (gifts of £100,000 or more)

Bronze Tier (gifts of £50,000 or more)

Copper Tier (gifts of £10,000 or more)

Pewter Tier (gifts between £2,000 to under £10,000)

Silver, Bronze and Copper Donors will be celebrated on an honour board within the building, marking their commitment to the Society for future generations.

Pewter Donors will also be recognised in the building.

All **Copper Donors** and above will join **The 21st-Century Founding Circle**, recognising those whose generosity makes this transformation possible. Through special events, insights from experts, and opportunities to engage with the Society's communities, this Circle offers a meaningful way to see the difference your philanthropy makes.

Pewter Donors will be welcomed into **The Antiquaries Circle** and will also enjoy a tailored programme of events.

All donors will be recognised individually in a special volume of the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*.



Artist's impression of the Bristo Place Building's Board Room (above) and frontage (right).

© Benjamin Tindall Architects

Primary Donors giving £1 million or more will be recognised with their logo, coat of arms, or name featured on the building.

Gold Donors giving £200,000 or more will be acknowledged with their logo, coat of arms, or name displayed in the Board Room.



Become part of Scotland's story



Above: Excavation in the Cairngorms promoted as part of Scotland Digs 2023.
© Shahbaz Majeed

Below: the Calanais (Callanish) Standing Stones, Isle of Lewis.



How to contribute

Gifts may be fulfilled through a single contribution or a pledge payable over time. We can also offer flexible approaches, including phased giving, to make your support for the heritage hub as easy as possible.

We also warmly invite our Fellows to help champion the Society's vision by opening your prestigious networks and sharing our ambitions with others who might share a passion for Scotland's past. By introducing potential supporters, hosting small gatherings, or acting as ambassadors abroad, you can play a vital role in extending our reach and inspiring new donors who will help us reach our goal.

Every contribution matters, and we are grateful for support of any size. Gifts can be made easily through our secure website at www.socantscot.org/donate.

If you are considering a larger gift, please get in touch, we would be delighted to talk through the details together.

International giving

We have teamed up with Chapel & York to make it easier for people based in the USA to make charitable donations to the Society and enjoy tax benefits for their charitable giving.

In addition to online and wire transfer donations, the Chapel & York US Foundation also accepts gifts of stocks and shares, as well as donations from a Donor Advised Fund, donations of property and legacy gifts.

Donations from other locations beyond the UK are very welcome.

To find out more please visit www.socantscot.org/donate or contact us directly to discuss.

Maximising your gift's impact

Your generosity can go even further with tax-efficient giving. Whether you are considering a personal gift or wish to support us through your company, there are a number of tax-advantageous options available. As personal and corporate circumstances differ, we encourage you to seek guidance from a financial or tax adviser to explore the options most suitable for you.

Leaving a legacy or planned gift

If you are considering remembering the Society in your Will or making another form of planned gift, we would be honoured to discuss this with you. Sharing your intentions with us ensures we can thank you appropriately and uphold your wishes for the future.

We would be pleased to hear from you

For a confidential conversation about your donation, pledge, planned gift or Will, please contact:

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We uphold the Good Fundraising Code of Practice (goodfundraising.scot/fundraising-guarantee) and are committed to best practice fundraising.

Please be assured that, under Scottish law, if we do not reach our fundraising target, any donations given specifically for this purpose will be returned unless you have agreed to an alternative use for the funds.



Artist's impression of the Board Room.
© Benjamin Tindall Architects

Contact

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*Illustration based on elevation drawing.
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Charity Number: SC010440
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