Mighty Oaks from Little Acorns

Building the Scottish Castles Association Archive

Scotland's castles are disappearing. Some can still be saved, restored or brought back into sustainable use, others are deteriorating rapidly, while some have already been lost. Yet even the number of castles and fortified sites in Scotland is not precisely established, and much of the detailed recording that does exist is decades old. The Scottish Castles Association wants to help change that.

We are developing a **permanent, freely accessible record of Scotland's castles**, bringing together historic photographs, drawings and research with new recording and fieldwork.

This will allow what can be saved to be identified. And what cannot be saved to be properly recorded. But the aim is to do more than just preserve the past. A reliable record can help us understand **what survives, what is changing and what is at risk** and help identify where restoration, conservation or sustainable reuse may still be possible.

From little acorns …

SCA members have built up an extraordinary body of knowledge, photographs and research about Scotland's castles. Our members have knowledge that cannot simply be created by a professional archive. You know the buildings, the places, the stories and often the people who have recorded them. The **SCA Archive, in partnership with University of Stirling** provides the professional framework to preserve that knowledge and make it accessible.

The Archive began with the generous contribution of material assembled by **Robert and Nicholas Bogdan**. Since then, other important collections have followed, including photographic and architectural, research and guidebook collections, but much of our body of knowledge remains in private collections. **The Archive gives us the opportunity to bring that knowledge together and make it available for generations to come.**

- A photograph that might otherwise remain in a private album can become part of a permanent record.
- Research carried out by one member can become available to researchers and enthusiasts.
- A collection built up over a lifetime can continue to have value long after it leaves the hands of its original owner.

The Archive will combine the SCA's accumulated knowledge and networks with the professional archival expertise of the University of Stirling. However, its purpose is not simply to document decline, or even just to preserve material, but to create an evidence base for **research, education, conservation and decisions about the future of Scotland's castles and to help secure them for the future.**

… to mighty oaks: an ambitious five-year programme

The SCA is developing a **five-year programme requiring an initial investment of £880,000**.

The programme will **create opportunities** for **members, volunteers, students, universities, local communities and heritage groups to become actively involved in recording and understanding Scotland's castles**. Training and practical resources will help people develop the skills to undertake recording themselves. Together, we can create something that is greater than any individual collection.

The funding would provide the capacity to:

- employ dedicated professional research and archive capacity;
- digitise approximately **125,000 images**;
- conserve important collections;
- enhance the Archive website and digital access;
- undertake systematic castle recording and survey;
- develop education and community involvement;
- respond to emerging priorities as the programme develops.

The programme is **designed to be active** — preserving existing material while generating new knowledge, undertaking recording and identifying opportunities to help secure the future of Scotland's castles. The ambition is to create a **living, expanding national resource for Scotland's castles**.

The SCA will seek substantial external support for this programme, but the strength and involvement of our own membership will be fundamental to its success.

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How can SCA members help?

There are four simple ways in which every member can play a part.

1. Give your time

You don't have to be an archivist or professional historian. You might be able to help:

- identify an unknown castle or location in a photograph;
- provide information about a particular site;
- contribute research or local knowledge;
- help describe photographs and other material;
- assist with photography, fieldwork or recording.

We will shortly be rolling out a simple template to make it easier for members to contribute their knowledge and help record material for the Archive.

As the programme develops, there will also be opportunities for members and volunteers to take part in training and practical castle recording.

2. Give a collection

Many SCA members have accumulated photographs, slides, negatives, research notes, books, plans or other material relating to Scottish castles. Some collections may represent decades of work. Please don't assume that because something is a personal collection it has no wider value. The Bogdan collection demonstrates what can happen when material gathered by individuals becomes part of a much larger resource.

If you have material that you think could have a place in the Archive, **please talk to us before disposing of it or allowing it to become inaccessible**.

The Archive has a clear remit focused on material that genuinely contributes to the understanding, recording and protection of Scotland's castles. Material that is better suited to another archive can be directed to the appropriate repository.

3. Give a donation

Building the Archive to the scale envisaged will require significant investment.

The five-year programme requires **£880,000 of initial investment**, and the SCA will be seeking support from **trusts, foundations, grant-making bodies, businesses, major donors and others who share the ambition.**

Members can play an important part too. Your contribution, large or small, could help support digitisation, conservation, research, recording, website development or education. And member support demonstrates that the Archive has the backing of the community from which it has grown. **Small contributions, multiplied across the membership, can make a significant difference.**

4. Publicise the Archive

The SCA membership is one of the Archive's greatest assets.

You can help simply by telling people about it.

- Tell friends and fellow castle enthusiasts.
- Share Archive material through social media.
- Talk to local history and heritage groups.
- Tell us about people who may hold significant collections.
- Encourage potential donors and supporters to find out more.
- Help publicise Archive events and new developments.

The more people who know about the Archive, the more likely it is that important **knowledge, collections and funding** will come to light.

An opportunity for the SCA and for everyone who loves Scottish castles and wants to help secure their future.

The foundations are in place: a professional partnership with the University of Stirling, an established digital platform, growing collections and an active community of researchers and volunteers. What is needed now is the capacity to develop this into a resource of national significance, which will **showcase the work and charitable purpose of the Scottish Castles Association to a global audience**.

By bringing together Scotland's castle heritage, the knowledge of our members and the expertise of our partners in one accessible resource, we can reach far beyond our existing membership and attract **new collections, researchers, volunteers, partners and funding**, creating the critical mass needed to make the Archive truly significant. This will enable it to preserve what we have inherited, help identify what can still be saved, inform decisions about the future of Scotland's castles, and ensure that what ultimately cannot be saved is never lost from the record.

The next stage

The next stage of the Archive will be marked by a special event at **Dundas Castle on 18 November 2026**.

Further information about the evening will appear separately in the newsletter and through the SCA's social media channels.