

# Recording History

Those who joined us at last year's Patron's Gathering will recall The Princess Royal offering encouragement for our latest project: Church Recording. The history embedded in our Places of Worship (POW), gathered over centuries in most cases, and

during times when the POW may have changed Denominations a few times is essential in defining who the Scots are.

The importance of such history, and the need to record it is always a valuable and worthwhile exercise – but at times such as this, and before

the pandemic, when denominations considered significant closures the need is even more apparent.

Our Project, supported by Historic Environment Scotland and The Allchurches Trust took advice from those already doing this for The Arts Society and the Scottish

NADFAS Team – sadly, The Arts Society has decided to pull out of Church Recording and this leaves SCT as being the sole body dealing with this. Our Team of Church Recorders is organised and managed by one of SCT's Trustees Professor Adam Cumming and supported by his wife Lesley.

## Capturing the Past for the Future

by Adam and Lesley Cumming

There is perhaps a belief that there is little of cultural interest in the many churches that cover the Scottish landscape. This is not true, as all reflect and testify to the social and cultural activities of the people who built, have used, and still use them. This testimony is visible not only in the architecture but also in the fixtures and fittings that reflect the congregations and the wider fellowships that have used the place.

With churches closing or being converted, this heritage is in danger of being lost and the Trust has become involved in trying to capture as much as we

can of the contents and their social connections within churches. As always this is non-denominational and aims to ensure that there will be a permanent record.

The project is being supported by Historic Environment Scotland, and SCT Church Recording Reports will be placed on their database, Canmore, so that they are available to all for research and information.

We have had several sessions, beginning with a training exercise at Heriot, where we learned that this is more complex than we thought, and that

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Smailholm tower in the Scottish Borders. The tower was built in the 1400's as protection from border raiders and the elements.

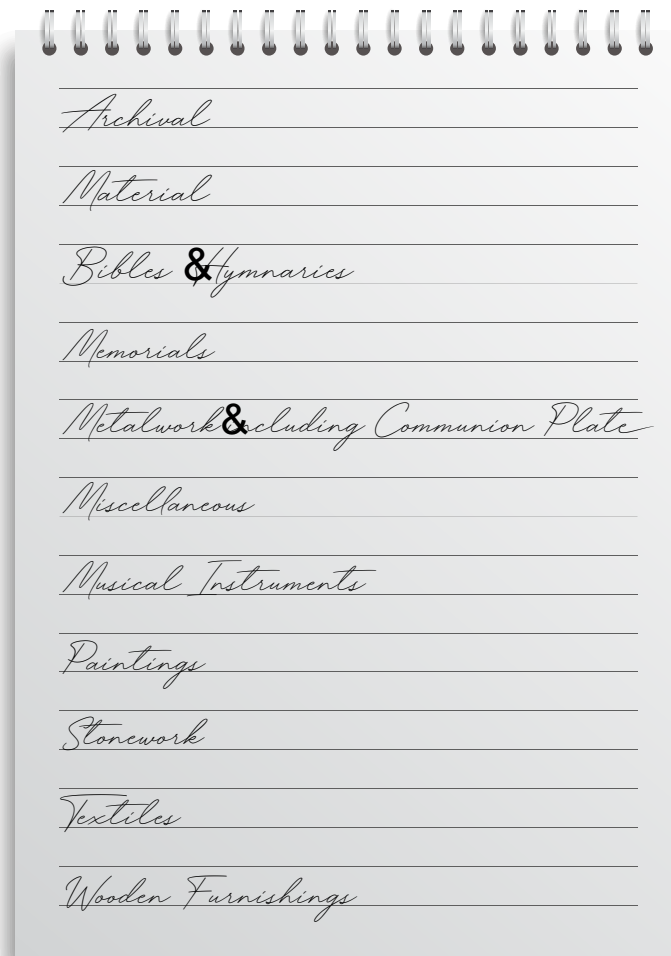
even the most austere seeming church has many riches! The small group of recorders, all volunteers, then attempted a more detailed examination in Fife with Dysart St Clair and Kirkcaldy Viewforth being examined over a full day. We captured a lot and also learned more so that it took a week of hard work to collate the notes and photographs.

The reports from Dysart and Viewforth are still being reviewed but will be sent to the churches themselves as well as Canmore later this year. This visit also helped refine our approach and we have now produced a checklist which will be used for further recording visits.

This checklist was used during preliminary visits to both Smailholm and to Roxburgh recently and in addition a separate local exercise with local volunteers took place in Shetland.

For each item Volunteers produce a description, including size, and where possible back the written record with photographs. It is quite exhaustive, and we have found that churches have items that

**The obvious question is ‘what do we record’?  
The project records items using 10 categories:**



they are unaware of, and which throw light on their past.

Plans had been made to complete the recording of the two Border churches and expand activities

to other areas using the experience gained. However, COVID19 has made this impossible for now. Yet some things could be done, and you can help.

Part of the list includes assembling details of what is known about churches and their contents. You may have easy access to these or know who has, so that this could be listed

without visits or contact. This will make the actual recording faster and more complete.

We do not want you to put yourselves at risk or to break the current isolation rules so please only consider what might be done remotely for now. Once life changes we can build on that and work with you to produce the report for Canmore.

Note - All the reports including the photographs and methodology are copyright and must not be used without the permission and acknowledgement of SCT.

We think you might be surprised at what riches you have, and what they tell you about your church and its life. These roots go deep and will provide strength for community growth in the future. This is a very exciting project and we hope that this article will inspire you to get involved!

We look forward to hearing from you and, more, to working with you on this project.

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Cumming and Scotland's  
Churches Trust**

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