

Doors Open across Scotland

Every weekend in September, buildings across Scotland open up their doors to the public for free, coordinated nationally by the Scottish Civic Trust with support from Historic Scotland. Civic societies, local authorities, heritage and building preservation trusts act as area coordinators, and are supported by many thousands of volunteers.

Sites include private homes, never normally open for visits, contemporary architecture showcased for the first time and public buildings offering behind-the-scenes tours. It is now unthinkable that this annual event could be anything other than a huge success. However, when the idea was dreamt up 20 years ago, organisers were unprepared for its popularity.

The origins of Doors Open Days go back to a trip taken to Groningen in the Netherlands during September of 1989 by John Gerrard, then the Technical Director of the Scottish Civic Trust, and his wife. They happened to be visiting on the same weekend that the local 'Open Monument Day' was planned and were enchanted and enthralled by what they stumbled upon. "Ancient almshouses, usually kept very private, could be visited, as could the grander parts of the old university", noted John, adding "a great mediaeval church resounded to brass band music and a sense of enjoyment seemed to pervade the whole town."

Enthused by this heady mixture of architecture, civic pride and fun, John proposed to the European City of Culture organisers that Glasgow, assisted by Glasgow Building Preservation Trust, pioneered their own version. Ayr, coordinated by the Kyle and Carrick Civic Society, joined in too and so in 1990, Scotland saw the first buildings take part in 'Doors Open Days'.

Highlights from that first year included the Port Authority

responsible for the docks and shipping on the River Clyde whose opulent head office contains some magnificent interior decoration. The story goes that a director, when leaving the building on the day before the open day, causally reminded the caretaker that a few people might call in and it would be good to offer them a cup of tea. By the end of the following day the caretaker had admitted around 2000 inquisitive members of the public.

Such demand from the public signalled the beginning of what is now a 20-year-old event, one which has grown and developed to include all of Scotland's local authorities. As a concept the idea has also grown, with similar events organised in September throughout Europe under the banner of 'European Heritage Days', attracting some 20 million visits each year. North America, Australia and New Zealand run comparable programmes and canny tourists and day-trippers now time their visits to coincide with local events.

This September, with support from EventScotland, there are big plans to celebrate Doors Open Day's 20th anniversary and encourage visitors to discover the architectural and historic gems around the country.

Highlights in 2010

Emergency Centre, Mackintosh Road, Inverness, IV2 3TX (4th September, 11am-3pm)

In 1941 an underground bunker was built for the RAF. Its purpose was top secret. Unknown to the pilots of enemy aircraft – through the technology of radar – their movements were being plotted beneath this unassuming hillside. Today, and still as little known, the bunker is used as the Highland Council's Emergency Centre.

The Private Telephone Museum, 1 Burn Road, Darvel, Ayrshire KA17 0AJ (4th and 5th September, 9am-5pm)

Housed within a mid-18th century bake house, this private

museum contains a unique collection of telephone memorabilia dating from the early 1900's to the present. This labour of love documents by-gone technology and developments that have changed the world. Normally open by appointment only, during Doors Open Day visitors can meet the museum's owner and explore the collection at leisure.

Finish Timing Tower, Strathclyde Country Park, Hamilton Road, Motherwell, North Lanarkshire, ML1 3ED (11th September, 10.30am-5pm)

Built in 1985 by John Payne for the 1986 Edinburgh Commonwealth Games. Located on Strathclyde Loch at the Watersports Centre, the Finish Tower is the control centre for the timing of rowing regattas at Strathclyde Park. Tours will be available which will include the press and media areas and the control room for computerised timing.

Xscape, Kings Inch Road, Renfrew, PA4 8XQ (11th September, tours at 12noon, 1,2 and 3pm)

For the first time ever, Xscape is offering behind-the-scenes tours of the Centre to give visitors the opportunity to gain some insight how this amazing venue runs. Opened in 2006, this 4 star visitor attraction has attracted over 11 million visitors through its doors. More than 30 businesses are contained under one roof including the UK's longest indoor real snow slope and loads of other leisure activities, restaurants and shops. To book a tour report to the ground floor centre atrium.

Masonic Temple, 85 Crown Street, Aberdeen, AB11 6EX (11th September, 10am-4pm)

Your chance to visit one of the finest purpose-built buildings devoted entirely to Freemasonry in Scotland. Highly ornate and beautifully decorated, the Temple will be open all day with members in attendance to answer your questions.

Musselburgh Links, Stables Pavilion, Musselburgh Racecourse, Linkfield Road, East Lothian, EH21 7RG (12th September,

12noon-4pm)

The Friends of Musselburgh Links warmly welcome you to the new Stables Pavilion where you can find out about the 'oldest golf course in the World'. The course was mentioned as early as 1672 by Sir John Foulis of Ravelston but Mary, Queen of Scots reputedly played here in 1567.

27 Kirkcaldy Coptic Orthodox Church Link Street, Kirkcaldy, Fife, KY1 1SE (St Marks) (12th September, 1-4pm)

This Coptic Orthodox church serves a congregation made up of more than eight nationalities from all over Scotland. In converting Inverleith Parish Church in 1994 wonderful hand painted icons from Egypt were inserted in a beautiful iconostasis (icon wall) which now dominates the interior of the church, producing an incredible golden contrast to the building's simple grey exterior. The Church will be open all afternoon with special guided tours at 1.30 and 3.30. Free Egyptian cuisine is offered from 12.30 after the morning service.

The University of Dundee, various locations, tours must be pre-booked (18th September)

Explore some of Dundee's most important academic departments while taking in some fascinating history and architecture. Discover how the Book & Paper Conservation Studios preserve their world-class collection of archives; explore Hawkhill House, the home to the University's Museum Service; and meet the scientists who work at the College of Life Sciences.

Open Gates, Glasgow various locations (18th and 19th September)

For the first time, 11 of Glasgow's allotments are opening their green doors for a weekend of activities and tours. Glimpsed from trains, hidden behind walls, between tenement blocks and in odd corners of the city, these oases help make Glasgow a 'Dear, green place'.

ScottsLand celebrations, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National

Park (18th and 19th September)

This year, as part of the wider ScottsLand celebrations, a series of cultural and outdoor events will celebrate 200 years since Sir Walter Scott published *The Lady of the Lake*, which he set in the heart of the Trossachs. Open sites and trails will mainly be scattered through the Trossachs and the eastern part of the National Park. In true Rob Roy country at Balquhiddar a unique cluster of properties will be open, including the school house, the former library, now a tea room, and the Church. The church itself was built by David Bryce 1853 and Rob Roy's grave is a much-visited feature of its graveyard. More details about ScottsLand events at www.scottsland.co.uk.

Sumburgh Lighthouse Buildings, Sumburgh Head, Dunrossness, Shetland ZE3 9JN (18th and 19th September, 12noon – 4pm)

This A-listed building was designed by Robert Stevenson. It was Shetland's first lighthouse built in 1821 with additional buildings in the 19th century and 1905, perched atop the cliffs of Shetland's most southerly point, on a vital yet dangerous shipping route. A visit to the site will include a tour of the engine room and the fog gear. The site of the building also offers stunning views and a wealth of seabirds.

5 Melville Street, Perth (25th September, 10am-3pm)

"Vulcan Works" at 5 Melville Street is a new building combining parts of both old and new structures. The building includes artist and architect studios with workshops and a living space. The frontage has a single large contemporary window, which is planned to house artworks and installations

The Caves and The Rowantree and the Upper Vaults, 8-12 Niddry Street South, Edinburgh EH1 1NS (26th September, 12noon to 3pm)

A visit to The Caves offers an exciting opportunity to see the restoration work to the vaulted sub-structures of Edinburgh's South Bridge. Rediscovered and excavated in the mid 90's, the rooms form a series of arches underneath the buildings on

South Bridge and make for a unique venue steeped in history and atmosphere. Guided tours will run throughout the afternoon and the excavator will be on hand to answer any questions.

Theatre Royal, Shakespeare Street, Dumfries, DG1 2JH (25th and 26th September, 10am-4pm)

The Theatre Royal, Dumfries was built in 1792 and is the oldest working theatre in Scotland. Robert Burns and J M Barrie were both regular attendees (but not at the same time!). It is owned by the Guild of Players who bought it in 1959, saving it from demolition and is run on a voluntary basis by the members of the Guild. The Theatre is funded entirely by Guild membership subscriptions and by Box Office receipts. It does not currently receive any grant-aid towards running costs. Last year over 60 performances were held in the theatre, including wrestling, drama, musicals, and concerts.