

Government to debate technology and Scotland's heritage

✘ Scotland's treasure trove of history and culture is making unprecedented international connections through the use of digital channels and new technologies.

Following a very successful "digidoc" international conference hosted by Historic Scotland in Glasgow last week, Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, will outline how Scotland is leading the way in providing digital archives to allow people to research their ancestry and how technology is being used to capture our unique historic landscape.

Ahead of the Scottish Government's first ever debate on the use of modern technologies to promote Scotland's heritage, Ms Hyslop launched the first digital images of Edinburgh's historic Old and New Towns in the heart of the World Heritage Site.

Ms Hyslop said:-

"This may be the first time that the parliament has talked about our heritage in terms of digitisation and innovation, but I am certain that it will become a cornerstone of what we expect to deliver from our cultural collections, archives and buildings. We are improving access to resources and history

that no previous generation could have imagined that are allowing people to approach our history and collections in a whole new way.”

As well as encouraging people to engage with collections, museums and galleries, Ms Hyslop pointed to the way technology is changing the way we protect what we hold dear.

Laser scanning has been used in Scotland to record three of the UNESCO designated World Heritage Sites – The Neolithic Heart of Neolithic Orkney, New Lanark Mill Village and St Kilda, recognised for both its natural and cultural importance – with work on The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh underway. The team will then begin work to record the Antonine Wall which spans five council regions and marks the most Northern Frontier of the Roman Empire.

As part of a project called the Scottish Ten, Historic Scotland and Glasgow School of Art’s Digital Design Studio will also record five international sites in countries that Scotland has trade or diplomatic relationships with.

Mount Rushmore has already been completed and work is due to begin at Rani Ki Vav stepwell in India. The First Minister recently announced that the team would begin work on The Eastern Qing Tombs in China next year with two further international sites to be announced in the future.

The team will leave to scan the Indian heritage site Rani Ki Vav stepwell, near Gujarat, in the next few weeks.

Ms Hyslop added:-

“The scanning of the stunning Rani Ki Vav stepwell in India promotes Scotlands creativity and innovation internationally, supports world conservation and helps build positive international relationships. More and more we are embracing digital channels and new technologies as a new way to tell the fascinating story of Scotland’s past. We are often described as a nation with a gift for storytelling and the possibilities open to us now have the ability to make those stories even more captivating and engaging. Scotland is also in a unique position in being on the road to creating a digital record of all of our globally important World Heritage Sites and will expand our work to ensure that all of the properties held in the care of Scottish Ministers due to their national significance are captured digitally to assist with their conservation and presentation.”

There are many ways to access Scotland’s important natural and cultural sites in person or on line through web services such as the ScotlandsPlaces website, Canmore, and SCRAN, which provide online learning resources and promotes Scotland’s cultural resources overseas.

The Scottish Ten initiative showcases the use of the latest digital documentation and visualisation technology, which allows creation of a digital archive of sites to help conserve sites and provide virtual access to inaccessible sites. Through these initiatives, Scotland is reaching out and promoting Scottish innovation around the world.

The other side of the digital history coin is the phenomenal interest in family history and tracing Scottish ancestors. [The ScotlandsPeople website](#), run by National Records of Scotland, has nearly one million customers and last year logged over 1 million registered users from across the world, attracted by a database containing 80 million records from as far back as 1513..

There is also growing interest in places in Scotland in the past and [the ScotlandsPlaces website](#) features high resolution maps, photographs and other documents from National Records of Scotland, the National Library and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments.