

Cold War Scotland explored in new exhibition

A new exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland explores Scotland's critical position on the frontline of the Cold War.

Cold War Scotland (13 Jul 2024 – 26 Jan 2025), features dozens of objects on display for the first time, including secret intelligence training documents and a map of central Scotland marked to highlight targets under threat of nuclear attack.

Scotland's unique geography and topography provided a useful base for NATO military preparations and research during the Cold War, a 40-year nuclear stand-off between the USA and the Soviet Union following the end of the Second World War.

Opening this Saturday, 13 June, the exhibition tells the stories of the Scots at the centre of this global conflict.

For the first time visitors will see an Ordnance Survey map of Scotland hand-painted to highlight areas that were expected to be affected in the event of a nuclear attack, particularly major cities, military bases and dockyards. Created in the 1980s, it is colour coded to indicate the point of explosion and scale of the impact across the central belt and beyond.

Atomic power brought jobs and investment to some of the country's most remote areas, but as global tensions mounted this threat of attack or nuclear disaster became part of everyday life. Cold War Scotland explores both the visible and invisible legacies of the war in Scotland.

The impact of the war still lingers in Scottish politics, culture and memory. Scots played an active role in the global conflict as soldiers, for example, within intelligence services and as part of voluntary civil defences. The exhibition also draws on Scotland's rich history of Cold War-era protest and activism. Firsthand accounts include a young mother who decorated her daughter's pram with Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) badges. A rattle made from an old laundry detergent bottle emblazoned with the CND logo was given to them during the Peace Marches of the early 1980s and is on display in the exhibition.

The exhibition also reveals the physical remains of the Cold War; the ruined bases, forgotten bunkers and decommissioned nuclear power stations still evident across the Scottish landscape. This infrastructure became part of the fabric of local communities, none more so than the US-controlled listening and monitoring station at RAF Edzell in Angus, now commemorated with its own bespoke tartan.

Dr Meredith Greiling, Principal Curator of Technology at National Museums Scotland, said: "From nuclear submarines to lively peace protests and observation stations perpetually monitoring for devastating attack, the Cold War permeated every aspect of life in Scotland for decades. This conflict is so often remembered on a global scale, but this thought-provoking exhibition will offer a Scottish perspective of the period, allowing Scots from all walks of life to tell their remarkable stories for the first time."

Further highlights of the exhibition include artwork from Glasgow's 1951 Exhibition of Industrial Power and a toy nuclear power station, operated by steam and hot to the touch when played with. Both these examples highlight the spirit of optimism, progress and modernity associated with atomic energy in postwar Britain. In contrast, a Geiger counter used by farmers in East Ayrshire to test for radiation in sheep following the Chernobyl Disaster illustrates the enduring but

unseen impact of the Cold War on Scotland's landscape.

The exhibition will be supported by a book and programme of events including curator tours and talks. Cold War Scotland is an output of Materialising the Cold War, a collaborative research project between National Museums Scotland and the University of Stirling. The project explores how the Cold War heritage is represented and how museums can adapt to tell this story in future.

Materialising the Cold War is funded by a major grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council.



Kim Foden, a former Chief Observer of the Royal Observer Corps, visits the new Cold War Scotland a new exhibition opening at the National. PHOTO © Stewart Attwood



Curator Dr Meredith Greiling puts the finishing touches to Cold War Scotland PHOTO © Stewart Attwood



Cold War Researcher Sarah Harper puts the finishing touches to Cold War Scotland, a new exhibition opening at the National Museum PHOTO © Stewart Attwood