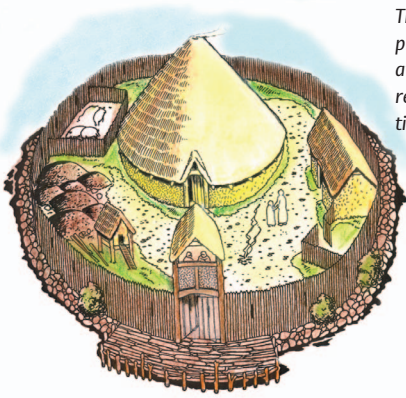




# EARLY HISTORIC SCOTLAND



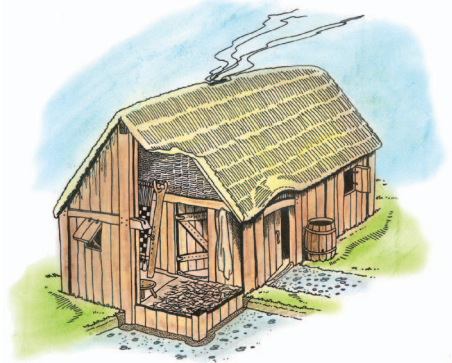
This artist's reconstruction of a crannog in a loch shows the stony platform on which the timber structures were built, and a small jetty at the gate. The main house here is round, but it could have been rectangular, like the barn and small storehouse. Once abandoned, the timber would rot except where it was waterlogged.

Once called the Dark Ages, the period from about AD 400 to 1000 is now known as Early Historic to reflect the fact that some, but not many, written records have survived. We know the names of kings and the dates of battles, but archaeology remains the only way of discovering how and where most people lived. The fort on the front cover, Dunadd in Argyll, is mentioned twice in a list of events compiled by monks in the 7th and 8th centuries, but it is excavation that has provided the practical details of life there at that time.

Place-names are an invaluable source of information for this period, because they reflect the different languages that were spoken and thus the areas, and even the individual farms, occupied by the speakers. The kingdom of the Picts covered most of Scotland, and they spoke a language akin to Welsh, as did their British neighbours south of the Forth and Clyde. Gaelic-speakers lived in Argyll, and English-speaking Anglians settled in southern Scotland from about AD 600. After about AD 800, the northern and western fringes of Scotland were colonised by Norwegian Vikings.

Picts, Britons and Gaels all continued to use the same types of defended high-status settlement as their predecessors: hilltop forts, coastal promontory forts and crannogs. Forts vary widely in size from those that could house a large community to small duns that were the homes of single extended families. Their ramparts are now often so low and eroded as to be barely visible, but they were originally strongly built of stone, rubble and timber. An alternative defence was water, and crannogs in lochs, marshes and river estuaries made secure family homes. A crannog could be built on timber piles sunk into the bed of the loch, or an existing small islet could be enhanced as a platform for a round or rectangular timber house. Today many crannogs are below water-level, or appear as small islands or promontories, or as low grassy mounds in marshy areas that have been drained in recent centuries.

The artist has cut away the front corner of this reconstructed timber house to show the bedding trench in which the wall timbers are set. This trench, or individual post-holes, would be all that remained of the house after it had been abandoned and the timbers were either removed or left to rot.





Coastal erosion is a huge problem in Scotland, not just by the sea but also by the wind. Here the rubble footings of an oblong house have been exposed as the wind has blown away the sand dunes. This is in north-west Scotland and the house is likely to have been part of a Viking-age farm. © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)



On undefended farms and in small villages, domestic houses were built in timber, turf and stone, according to local materials, and they were round, oblong or rectangular, and sometimes semi-subterranean. Only those with stone walls, or at least stone foundations, are likely to be visible above ground today, as low stony banks, usually in upland areas. Since timber rots away, all that survives of the walls are the pits or bedding trenches in which the posts were set. These can sometimes be seen as cropmarks from the air, and they are vulnerable to deep ploughing. The Anglians also used a special type of small sunken-floored building, apparently as weaving-sheds.

*The cover slabs and side slabs of long cists are often close to the ground surface, and they can easily be caught by a plough or digger. Graves should be recorded and the human bones examined by a specialist. © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)*

Christianity was introduced gradually into Scotland during this period, and, although a major new injection of pagan beliefs arrived with the Vikings, they too had accepted Christianity by AD 1000. Pagan Viking burials are easy to recognise, because people were buried fully dressed, along with their personal belongings, and were even occasionally laid to rest in their boats. Pagan Pictish graves are indistinguishable from Christian ones because neither have gravegoods and both are found in simple long pits and long cists (where the pit is lined and covered by stone slabs). Pictish graves were sometimes covered by a round or square mound of earth or stones. If soil conditions are very acidic, the bones may not survive, but it is still important that the grave is recorded. Graves are often discovered through ploughing and coastal erosion, but they have also been found in towns and villages during redevelopment.

The earliest churches were built of wood and are usually only found during excavation beneath later stone chapels. Low stony foundations of small rectangular chapels survive in many areas where land-use has changed little, and simple cross-incised gravemarkers are clues to early burial-grounds. Fragments of elaborately

carved memorial stones are often turned up by the plough.









Buried remains of Early Historic sites are often indicated by objects brought to the surface by ploughing or ditch-digging. Metal objects can be discovered through metal detecting, but it is vital that the exact find-spot is recorded. Please report any finds of objects to your local museum. Remember that metal detecting is not permitted by law on scheduled monuments.

*This Pictish symbol stone was uncovered by ploughing in Aberdeenshire. Carved stones such as this are sometimes unearthed by ploughing, and there are also many intact stones still standing today. There may be graves or traces of churches or settlement in the vicinity.*

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# TIME-LINE

End of the last Ice Age Wildlife colonises land Mesolithic hunting settlers		12,500	
Neolithic farming settlers		4000	Flint scatters Shell mounds, rock shelters Chambered tombs and houses Cupmarked rocks
		3000	Stone circles, henges, and standing stones
Metal technology (gold, copper)		2000	Burial mounds and short cists Hut-circles
Climate deteriorating Fortifications begin		1000	Burnt mounds Hillforts
Iron-working technology		500 200 BC ▲	Crannogs Duns, brochs, wheelhouses, and earth-houses
		▼ AD	
Roman army in Scotland		79	
Waning of Roman influence		200 400	Roman camps, forts and roads, Antonine Wall
Introduction of Christianity Picts, Gaels, Britons and Anglians		600	Long cist graves
Start of the Viking Age		800	Early Christian and Pictish carved stones, chapels Pagan Viking graves and settlements
Emergence of Scottish nation		1000 1100	
First burghs		1200 1500	Stone-built churches Mottes, abbeys, stone-built castles
Reformation of the Church		1600	
Agricultural improvements & Industrial Revolution		1800 1900	Tower-houses Deserted villages and farms Coal mines and heavy industries
Two World Wars		2000	Gun batteries and airfields

## FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

A favoured location for an Early Historic stronghold was an isolated hill, with a peak and lower terraces, which could be walled as a series of enclosures for different activities. The warlord's feasting hall was probably in the upper enclosure, while fine metalworking and other activities would be carried out in one of the lower enclosures. A fort, like this one at Dunadd, was a focal point in the landscape of its day, physically dominating the farms of ordinary folk and acting as a centre for trade and social life. © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)

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Historic Scotland is an agency within the Scottish Government and is responsible for administering the legislation that protects ancient monuments (buildings, ruins, archaeological sites and landscapes). It provides general advice on the conservation and protection of Scotland's heritage.

Historic Scotland's Education Service encourages the use of the historic environment as a learning and teaching resource.

Over 300 historic properties are looked after by Historic Scotland and are open to the public for enjoyment and education. For further information, including free leaflets, telephone 0131 668 8600.

Our data service website contains details of scheduled monuments and has GIS datasets available to download:  
<http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk>

### **The following leaflets are available from Historic Scotland:**

*Scheduled ancient monuments: a guide for owners, occupiers and land managers*

*Managing Scotland's archaeological heritage*

*Grants for Ancient Monuments: a guide to grants available for the preservation, maintenance and management of ancient monuments*

*Archaeology on farm and croft (produced jointly with Archaeology Scotland)*

*Scotland's listed buildings: a guide for owners and occupiers*

*The carved stones of Scotland: a guide to helping in their protection*

*Metal detecting - yes or no? Metal detecting, scheduled ancient monuments and the law*

A leaflet on *Treasure Trove in Scotland* is available from the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

A number of *Historic Scotland Technical Advice Notes*, on topics such as the use of lime mortars, the conservation of thatching and stonecleaning, are available. Catalogue from and orders to:

Historic Scotland Conservation Group  
Tel: 0131 668 8638

e-mail:  
[hs.cgpublishations@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hs.cgpublishations@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

*This information leaflet is one of a series produced by Historic Scotland.*

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