

**Managing
Change
in the Historic
Environment**

Boundaries



Key Issues

- 1. Walls, fences and other boundary treatments form important elements in defining the character of historic buildings, conservation areas and designed landscapes. Listed building consent is required for any works affecting the character of a listed building and planning permission may be required in a conservation area.**
- 2. Age, design, materials, and associated features are amongst the factors that contribute to the interest of historic boundaries.**
- 3. In planning works to historic boundaries it is important to understand and protect their key characteristics.**
- 4. Walls often use local building materials or local traditions. New work should seek to maintain this wherever possible.**
- 5. Physical or documentary evidence should inform the reinstatement or reconstruction of boundary treatments.**
- 6. Planning authorities give advice on the requirement for listed building consent, planning and other permissions.**

1. INTRODUCTION

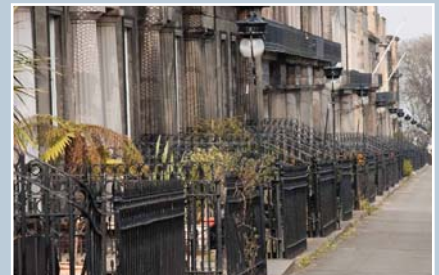
- 1.1 This is one of a series of guidance notes on managing change in the historic environment for use by planning authorities and other interested parties. The series explains how to apply the policies contained in the *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* (2009) ([SHEP](#), PDF 312K) and *The Scottish Planning Policy* (2010) ([SPP](#), PDF 299K).
- 1.2 This note sets out the principles that apply to altering the boundary treatments of historic buildings. It should inform planning policies and the determination of applications relating to the historic environment, and replaces the equivalent guidance in *The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas* (1998).
- 1.3 Monuments scheduled under the Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979 require scheduled monument consent for any works. Where a structure is both scheduled and listed, the scheduling controls have precedence. Separate advice is available from Historic Scotland's website: [Scheduled Monuments: Guidance for Owners, Occupiers & Land Managers](#) (PDF 718K). Local authorities' archaeological advisers are a source of advice about potential archaeological sensitivity.
- 1.4 The legal issue of 'curtilage', or extent of property ownership, is not covered in this guidance note. Its definition is a matter for the local authority in each case, but may be ultimately determined by the courts. Professional legal advice is recommended in cases of doubt.

2. WHAT ARE BOUNDARY TREATMENTS?

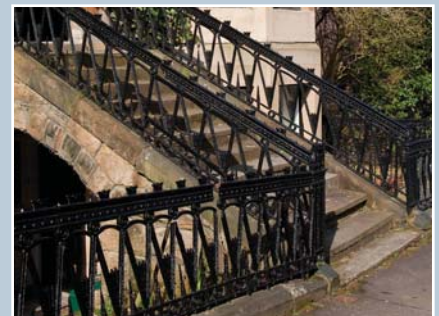
- 2.1 A boundary treatment is a structure such as a ditch, wall, or fence, used to mark the boundary of a property, or part of a property. In many cases boundaries have associated structures or fixtures including gates, gatepiers, and lamp standards. Historic planting, such as a hedge or tree avenue, is often used to define a boundary. Only trees in Conservation Areas or those subject to specific Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) are subject to control by the Planning Authority.
- 2.2 Some boundaries, such as the walls of a walled garden or graveyard, might be protected by listing in their own right, whilst other boundaries can be of interest for their contribution to the character of a building, group of buildings, or area.



A domestic boundary wall in Ayr. The cast-iron street name sign and wall letterbox fixtures form part of the character of the wall. © N. Haynes.



A long complete stretch of iron railings and lamps at Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, part of the development planned by William Henry Playfair in 1825 and built 1826–33. © N. Haynes.



Circa 1865 cast-iron railings at a tenement in Sanda Street, Glasgow. © N. Haynes.



The 'Bear Gates', Traquair House, Scottish Borders, constructed in 1737–8. Part of their historical and associative interest is a legend that the gates were closed behind Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 and have not been opened since. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.



Three early 17th-century charter boles (used for defining boundaries and keeping property charters) set in the high wall of one of the long rig plots in South Street, St Andrews.



Part of the Citadel wall in Ayr, designed by the military engineer, Hans Ewald Tessin, in 1652 to protect Oliver Cromwell's garrison in the town. The corner turret is a 19th-century folly. The surviving walls of this large military complex are now in multiple ownership. © N. Haynes.



Like many 18th- and 19th-century buildings in Shetland, Belmont House (1777), Unst, stands at the centre of an extended formal arrangement of field boundaries. This aerial view was taken in 2005 before the recent restoration of the house. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

3. WHY ARE BOUNDARY TREATMENTS IMPORTANT?

- 3.1 The layout and design of a boundary, its materials and method of construction, and the way in which it relates to other structures can be important elements of the character of a building or street, or contribute substantially to the sense of place and historical understanding of a rural or urban landscape.
- 3.2 Many boundaries are largely decorative, but others are functional, marking property ownership or providing security, privacy, shelter, safety, defence, containment of livestock, or even structural support as retaining walls. Some boundaries or gateways have historical associations with significant events or people, or play a part in ceremonies or rituals. Many present-day boundary walls provide visual clues to earlier buildings and structures in the form of blocked windows, doors and other features. These can be important in understanding the historical landscape.

4. IDENTIFYING THE INTEREST OF HISTORIC BOUNDARY TREATMENTS

Design qualities

- 4.1 Design qualities include the way in which a boundary is laid out or altered, its physical dimensions and appearance, the sense of enclosure it provides, its associated features, and its relationship with other structures. These qualities can be consciously determined by a designer or achieved more informally by craftsmen/tradesmen in conjunction with property owners. The age and rarity of the boundary are also factors in its interest.
- 4.2 Design qualities of boundaries, such as height and visual permeability, usually relate closely to function and location. High, solid walls are associated with controlling access or providing shelter, whilst fences, railings, balustrades and low walls are intended to allow views through or over the boundary. Some boundaries, such as 'hahas' (sunken retaining walls and ditches), are designed to be invisible from some directions, but still provide containment for livestock.
- 4.3 Boundaries and their associated structures and fixtures often have formal design relationships with a building or garden/landscape. For example, a garden wall might be arranged to form a symmetrical compartment around a house, with a gateway aligned on the axis of the house. Another type of relationship could include a stylistic similarity between the treatment of the boundary and the architectural characteristics of the house, such as a crenellated cope.
- 4.4 A particular characteristic of many boundaries is their scale in terms of length or height. The many different types of cope

found on historic walls can demonstrate different regional characteristics to wall construction and should be respected in new or repaired walls. The continuity or uniformity of a boundary can characterise a whole street or area of the same period, style, historical development or original ownership.

Material qualities

- 4.5 Design considerations were normally determined by the technological capabilities of the period, the availability of local building materials, and the craft or trade traditions of particular areas.
- 4.6 From an early date ditches and/or turf walls were constructed around buildings for defensive purposes. These were superseded by stone walls. Stone walls were also used in and around the medieval burghs for demarcating plots of land, or 'feus', and for controlling trade through the official 'ports' (gateways). Stone boundary walls of various types and dates characterise cities, towns, villages, and remain a very potent symbol of agricultural 'improvement' from the mid-18th century onwards. Where the boundary walls form a contiguous feature of a harled building, they are often harled to match.
- 4.7 Brick was frequently used for its qualities of heat retention in the construction of walled gardens. Concrete, and composite materials like Coade Stone, may reflect local character in boundary walls.
- 4.8 Cast-iron railings define the edge of the public realm and the fronts of properties in many planned developments of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Boundaries to the rear of properties tended to be of high rubble walls with 'slaister' (widely spread) mortaring and stone copes. The iron industry of the 19th century resulted in a great variety of decorative cast and wrought iron railings and gates from the sober to the exuberant, a feature that continued through to early 20th-century boundaries. Suburban Victorian properties frequently feature



Boundary walls at a country estate in the Scottish Borders.



The famous 1761 Pineapple pavilion (now a holiday cottage) forms part of the boundary of the walled garden at Dunmore, Falkirk. Pineries originally flanked the entrance: heating and ventilation shafts for the glass houses are built into the brick walls. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

Hopetoun House, West Lothian, viewed from beyond the haha. The sunken wall and ditch allowed unobstructed views from the house, but kept livestock out of the garden.





Bee boles (niches for bee hives) set into a boundary wall at Law's Close, High Street, Kirkcaldy, Fife.



Meikleour Beech Hedge, Perth & Kinross. Whilst a low, drystone wall forms the policy boundary with the A984, the associated beech hedge, believed to have been planted in 1745, is the dominant feature.
© N. Haynes.

dwarf ashlar walls topped with cast-iron railings with matching gates. Cast-iron lamp standards contribute to the character of an area.

- 4.9 The rustic qualities of timber were sometimes exploited by designers in boundary fencing from the later 18th to the mid 19th-century, but little of the original fabric now survives. Original timber fences can still be found on the boundaries of late 19th-century Arts and Crafts buildings. Nineteenth-century timber pedestrian and carriage gates are also common features.

Associated structures and fixtures

- 4.10 From early times boundaries have been constructed to incorporate functional and decorative features, such as gateways and bee boles (niches for bee hives). The range of features expanded from the 18th century, with the incorporation of lighting and other infrastructure fixtures, including signage and post boxes. Such structures and fixtures are often of significant interest and contribute to the character of the boundary.

5. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ALTERATIONS AND REPAIRS

Character and interest of the boundary

- 5.1 Alterations or repairs to a historic boundary should protect its character. Walls and fences can be valuable in their own right as major elements in the design of a historic building and its setting, or in a broader streetscape or landscape. Documentary research and fabric analysis can be useful in understanding the design and material properties of historic boundaries before undertaking alterations or repairs.
- 5.2 The precedent of alterations in unified designs of streets and other groups of buildings should be considered. Where historic planting contributes to the character of the boundary, it should also be taken into account.

Maintenance

- 5.3 Regular inspection, maintenance and appropriate repair are essential to maintaining the structural and visual integrity of historic boundaries and their associated features. Cast-iron gates and railings require a regular schedule of painting to prevent corrosion. Where extensive historic boundaries are now in multiple ownership, a co-ordinated approach to maintenance is desirable to ensure a consistent approach. Where they contribute, planted boundaries should be retained wherever possible.

Alterations

- 5.4 All alteration proposals must take into account the design and material characteristics of the historic boundary. Lowering of walls to create better sightlines can be damaging to the

character of the boundary and gateway. Alternative locations for access may have less impact on a boundary and provide safer approaches for vehicles. The design, materials and execution of alterations should have regard to the original.

New Openings

- 5.5 The formation of a new opening needs to be considered in light of the overall composition of the boundary and assessed as to whether it would be consistent with the existing design. Where the formation of a new opening is found to be consistent, the minimum of historic fabric should be lost and the opening should normally be detailed to match the existing openings. In some cases it might be appropriate to introduce high-quality contemporary design to new fixtures like gates.

Widening of openings

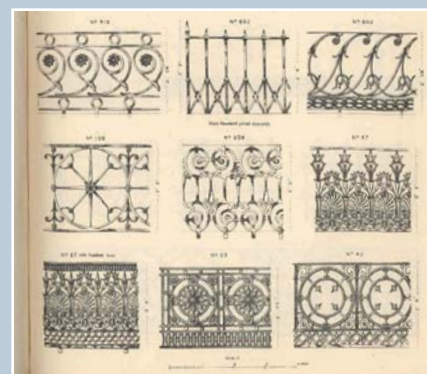
- 5.6 The widening of gateways should be avoided where it will adversely affect the coherence and proportion of a design or the relationship of the gateway to another building or planned layout. In other cases, particularly where historic gates are not part of the design or have been previously removed, careful dismantling and reconstruction of gatepiers to provide a wider opening may be possible.

Rebuilding

- 5.7 There may be occasions where a boundary wall needs to be rebuilt for structural reasons. In cases where the boundary is of interest in its own right, or contributes to the interest of another structure, it is usually possible to rebuild the boundary reusing the bulk of the dismantled original material. Dressed stone in particular should be rebuilt in its original position. It is important to maintain the proportions, depth and irregularities arising from historic methods of construction in the rebuilt wall. Where alterations are proposed the design, materials and execution should have regard to the original. The opportunity can be taken to restore any details of the wall that have previously been altered. Proposals to rebuild should normally be supported by a structural report, photographs and detailed survey drawings. This is particularly the case where faithful reconstruction is proposed. The local authority will then determine whether consent is required.

Reinstatement

- 5.8 Although cast and wrought iron railings are a feature of boundaries from the mid 18th-century to the mid 20th-century, many were removed from cities and towns during the Second World War. Where portions of historic cast-iron railings remain or photographic evidence exists, the restoration of traditionally detailed railings is appropriate. The method of fixing new railings to copes must be balanced against preventing damage to historic fabric. Historic Scotland's *Inform Guide: Boundary Ironwork - A Guide to Reinstatement* provides further details on



Late 19th-century catalogue of railings produced by MacFarlane's Saracen Foundry, Glasgow. Specialist iron founders are still able to reproduce these patterns for repair and reinstatement work.



Baxter Park, Dundee. The cast-iron gatepiers and cresting of 1863 survived, but the gates were missing until they were replaced as part of the restoration of the park in 2007.



Railings reinstated in 2006 define the edge of Baxter Park, Dundee, and are key to its regeneration and good management. The patterns were deduced from a short surviving section.



A contemporary gate at the Salisbury Centre, Edinburgh designed by the artist blacksmiths Ratho Byres Forge.

the practicalities of researching historic patterns and reinstating boundary ironwork.

- 5.9 If there is no clear historic model to follow then high-quality contemporary design may be considered. It should be in materials compatible with the historic fabric and not damage or obscure historic detailing. The means of fixing must be compatible with the historic fabric.

Graffiti

- 5.10 Further information on localised cleaning methods is available in Historic Scotland's Inform Guide: Graffiti and its Safe Removal, details are given on the back page of this leaflet.

6. CONSENTS

- 6.1 Listed building consent is required for any work to a listed building that affects its character. The local authority determines the need for consent.
- 6.2 Where listed building consent is required, an application is made to the local authority. This should include accurate scale drawings showing both the existing situation and proposed works in context. It is normally helpful to provide detailed technical information and photographs. A brief description of the interest of the boundary treatment and an explanation of the impact of the alterations are always useful in assessing change.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Details of all individual scheduled monuments, listed buildings, designated gardens and designed landscapes, and designated wrecks can be obtained from Historic Scotland (see contact details below) or at: www.pastmap.org.uk. Details of listed buildings can also be obtained from the relevant local authority for the area.

Advice on the requirement for listed building consent, conservation area consent, building warrants, and other permissions/consents should be sought from local authorities.

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Boundary wall at Warsetter Farmhouse (late 19th century), Sanday, Orkney. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

Detail of the 1871 wrought- and cast-iron 'Golden Gates' at Benmore House, Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park.

Cast-iron railings (circa 1880), Dowanside Road, Glasgow. © N Haynes.

Other selected Historic Scotland publications and links

[Maintaining your Home – A Short Guide for Homeowners](#) (2007) (PDF 1.4MB)

[Scotland's Hidden Gem: Architectural Ironwork in Stornoway](#) (2008) (Historic Scotland online shop)

Inform Guide: Domestic Boundary Walls (2008)

Inform Guide: Maintenance of Iron Gates and Railings (2007)

Inform Guide: Boundary Ironwork – A Guide to Reinstatement (2005)

Inform Guide: The Use of Lime and Cement in Traditional Buildings (2007)

Inform Guide: Repointing Rubble Stonework (2007)

Inform Guide: Repairing Brickwork (2007)

Inform Guide: Graffiti and its Safe Removal (2005)

For the full range of Inform Guides, Practitioner Guides, Technical Advice Notes and Research Reports please see the [Publications](#) section of the Historic Scotland website.