

# THE ARCHIVISTS' GARDEN

AT THE NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND, EDINBURGH

A unique courtyard garden celebrating the link between plants and Scotland's collective memory



## A NATION'S MEMORY

At the east end of Princes Street, fronted by Robert Adam's splendid **General Register House**, stands an imposing group of buildings housing the organisations which collect and maintain the records of Scotland's history: the **National Records of Scotland** and the **Court of the Lord Lyon**.

In the heart of the group is an open courtyard. This has been turned into a unique garden planted with 57 plant species – all connected in some way to Scotland's collective memory, whether through myth and folklore, through heraldry, or through association with individual famous Scots. A visit to the garden will start you thinking about the role that plants play in our national identity.

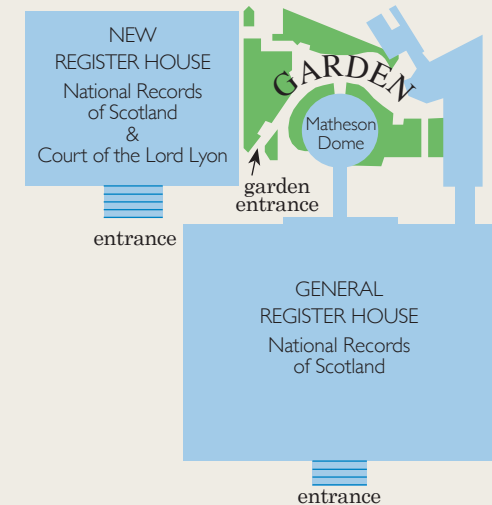
Access to the garden is free, and once you have explored it you will be able to visit the changing exhibitions in the surrounding buildings ([nrscotland.gov.uk/events](http://nrscotland.gov.uk/events)). The records themselves are open to anyone, though you must first obtain a reader's ticket. (see 'Visit Us' at [www.nrscotland.gov.uk](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk))

*Below: View of the Archivists' Garden*



## THE ARCHIVISTS' GARDEN

*Hortus Custodiorum*



The buildings surrounding the garden store information relating to Scotland's past and present. **National Records of Scotland** maintains records of births, deaths and marriages, and preserves the country's documentary heritage; the **Court of the Lord Lyon** holds registers of Scotland's heraldry.

In these buildings, information is filed and indexed in an ordered, logical way. The human mind is not like that: living memories are random and incomplete. This fact is mirrored in the layout of the garden, which is planted in flowing patterns – both to suggest the randomness of memory and to replicate the shapes on the surface of the human brain.



*Left: The garden is planted in flowing waves*

Symbols are a useful means of communicating information quickly, and in older, more rural cultures the shapes and colours of plants were an obvious source of imagery.

In Scotland, plants have long been used to represent clans and families – as the plant badges of the clans or as elements in heraldry. They also represent countries, for example, the thistle of Scotland and the rose of England.



### SEA PINK OR THRIFT:

*Armeria maritima* – plant badge of the Clan Hunter.



### COMMON MYRTLE:

*Myrtus communis* – sacred to the goddess of love – is commonly used in wedding bouquets.

Plants also came to represent events – such as weddings or funerals – and emotions. Some of these associations are ancient, and originated far from Scotland in the mythologies of other cultures. This symbolism peaked with the Victorians, who developed a *Language of Flowers*.

The link with emotions fed naturally into artistic expression, and flowers are often used as symbols in poetry.

*‘O my Luves’ like a red, red rose  
That’s newly sprung in June ...’* Robert Burns

## SCOTTISH CONNECTIONS

The plants in the Archivists’ Garden are connected to Scotland’s culture in a variety of ways – some more obvious than others. For example:

**THISTLE:** First recorded as a heraldic emblem of Scotland in 1488, the thistle has represented the country on official documents, in poetry and on the badges of sports teams ever since.

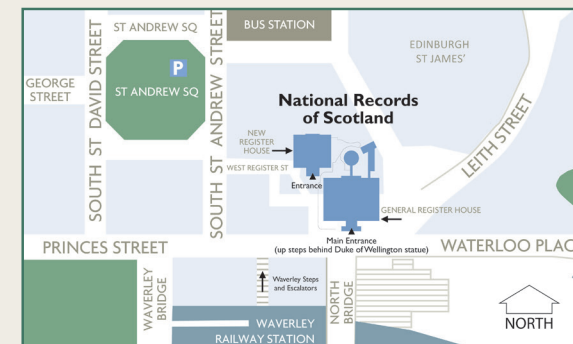


**HEATHER:** Heather (ling) has many uses. But it is for its romantic symbolism – as the emblem of Scotland’s wild moorland – that it is best known. White heather is a good luck charm and sprigs are often worn at weddings.

**IRIS:** The wild iris had a specific use. Before modern dyes, its roots and leaves produced black, dark blue and bright green dyes for the colouring of tartans and tweeds.



**IVY:** Some associations originated far from Scotland. In the *Language of Flowers*, ivy represents marriage and fidelity – which is why it appears in marriage bouquets and on gravestones. This association dates back to its link with Hymenaios – the Greek god of marriage.



## GARDEN ACCESS

**FREE: MONDAYS – FRIDAYS  
DURING OPENING HOURS**

You are welcome to explore the garden, or just sit and enjoy the calm in the centre of the city. You can also visit the ScotlandsPeople Centre for family history or the Historical Search Room at the National Records of Scotland for research. There is a café in New Register House which is easily accessible from the garden.

National Records of Scotland  
H M General Register House  
2 Princes Street  
Edinburgh EH1 3YY

For further information about the Archivists’ Garden and the plants and their stories visit [www.nrscotland.gov.uk/garden](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/garden)

*The Archivists’ Garden was conceived and coordinated by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.*



ScotlandsPeople  
Connecting Generations

