

The Climate Change Is Reshaping the Risk to Historic Buildings

What every heritage custodian, church warden, hospitality operator and private owner needs to know — and what to do about it. This is a summary. Download the full climate Risk Briefing for your building type.

1 in 4

historic buildings in England already sit in an area of meaningful flood risk - rising as the climate changes (source 1)

3.5m

people projected to be at high flood risk by 2080, up from 1.5 million today. (source 2)

89%

of monitored heritage sites are already exposed to damaging environmental effects; over half rated genuinely at risk. (source 3)

4,150

listed buildings sit within 1km of hte high-wtaer mark and face long term coastal erosion risk. (source 4)



Increased Temperature

36°C→37°C5 extreme-day ceiling by mid-century

One-in-50-year summer extremes are climbing across the UK. For historic fabric this means faster thermal cycling of stone, lime and timber; accelerated cracking, and drier ground that destabilises footings never engineered for today's extremes.



Extreme Weather Events

Rising storm frequency

Storm intensity is increasing and lightning activity is rising across parts of the Midlands and North. Ageing or absent lightning protection and older roof coverings face stress levels many were never designed to withstand.



Increased Rainfall

4x (source 6) frequent intense downpours by 2080

Heavy-rainfall events capable of overwhelming rainwater goods within minutes are projected to become far more common. Historic roofs and drainage were never sized for this volume — and saturated ground is a growing driver of subsidence claims.



Sea Level & Coastal Change

£7.4m (source 7) damage from a single winter flood event (2013-14)

Not a distant risk for coastal heritage: 30% of registered parks and gardens within 1km of the high-water mark are already assessed as at risk from long-term coastal erosion.

What this Costs You

This isn't only a conservation issue — it's a balance sheet issue. Every year of deferred maintenance compounds risk exposure, and insurers are responding: flood, storm and subsidence claims on older buildings are rising and excesses are tightening. Historic England allocated £6.6 million to Grade I and II* buildings on the Heritage at Risk Register in 2023/24 alone (source 8) — money spent because risk wasn't caught early enough. The cheapest intervention against all of this is early, evidenced, regular inspection

WHAT’S AT STAKE FOR YOU

Heritage Custodians & Church Wardens	Hospitality & Venue Operators	Private Owners & Estate Managers
Your quinquennial cycle was built for a slower-moving climate. Roof and rainwater condition can now shift meaningfully within that five-year gap. Dated evidence between formal inspections protects the building and the PCC's duty of care.	Guest safety, event continuity and seasonal revenue are now weather-exposed. A storm-damaged roof during peak wedding season isn't just a repair bill —it's cancelled bookings and reputational damage.	Listed consent constraints make reactive repair slower and costlier than proactive monitoring. Early evidence buys time to plan sympathetic, consented repairs rather than emergency ones.

You Can’t Stop The Climate Changing. You Can Stop It Catching You Off Guard

Get a baseline aerial condition inspection - you can’t manage risk you haven’t measured. Shorten inspection intervals for roofs, rainwater and high-level masonry.

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Sources: 1. Historic England - Historic and Traditional Buildings at Risk of Flooding, 2. Historic England Flooding and Historic Buildings 3. Historic Environment Scotland - Climate Risk Assessment Report 4. Historic England (CWR0035) 5. Met Office - Future Weather Extremes Likely to Break New Records 22/10/20 6. Met Office UKCP news 7. Environment Agency, The Costs and Impacts of the Winter 2013 to 2014 Floods. 8. Historic England - Heritage at Risk Indicator Data, Heritage Counts

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