WAR MEMORIAL THEFT
Prevention and solutions

This leaflet can help you reduce the likelihood of theft and provides information on what to do if theft has occurred

War Memorials Trust

ENGLISH HERITAGE

HISTORIC SCOTLAND

Introduction

War memorials are a unique aspect of our national heritage. They stand at the heart of almost every community and it is estimated there are more than 100,000 throughout the UK. As familiar features of our towns and villages, war memorials are often taken for granted, only to become the centre of attention at Remembrance services or once they are damaged.

Many different people in the community take an interest in war memorials, from local councils and churches, to history groups and individuals. This guidance has been written to inform custodians – those who are responsible (or who are prepared to take responsibility) for war memorials – what steps can be taken to address the threat of theft. Some of the advice will also be applicable to preventing vandalism. The focus of the guidance is on war memorials which are outside or attached to external walls of buildings as these are at the greatest risk of theft but many of the principles can be applied to other types of memorials.

This guidance has been published by War Memorials Trust in association with English Heritage and Historic Scotland. War Memorials Trust works for the protection and conservation of war memorials in the UK. The charity provides free advice and information to custodians and members of the public, as well as running grant schemes for the repair and conservation of war memorials.

Broomfield Park Garden of Remembrance in Palmers Green, London Borough of Enfield. All but two of the bronze plaques were stolen in August 2009.

Why is there a problem?

In recent years, the rising cost of metals has meant that war memorials have increasingly become targets for theft for their scrap value. Memorials made of bronze, copper or lead, or with decorative features or plaques made of those materials, have been stolen in similar circumstances to the commonly reported cases of theft of lead roofing from churches. Not only are these metals expensive to replace but in many cases they bear inscriptions and names which may not be recorded anywhere else. Without its names and inscriptions, a war memorial may lose its commemorative function and relevance to the community.

As well as metal parts being sold for scrap, there is a black market for public art made from any material. Some war memorials with figurative sculpture were designed by leading artists and this makes them collectable items, some being stolen to order for display in private homes. Once a war memorial of any type is removed, it can be quite hard to identify where it has come from, especially if it gets taken abroad. For example, War Memorials Trust is aware of one war memorial plaque from the UK which was found in a restaurant in Canada with the names removed and being used to display menus.

Broomfield Park Garden of Remembrance in Palmers Green, London Borough of Enfield. Only two of the bronze plaques remained after thieves targeted the memorial. In the course of the theft, damage was caused to the masonry.

What can be done to prevent theft?

Taking responsibility

As many war memorials were created by public subscription, it can be difficult to identify ownership or who is legally responsible for them. Often local councils have taken on responsibility for war memorials in public spaces whilst churches take care of those within their grounds. Sometimes local community groups and individuals will also keep an eye on war memorials in their area. For further information, please see the Trust's *Ownership of war memorials* helpsheet. Where ownership is unclear, interested groups or individuals may be able to take the initiative.

It is suggested that the local council take the lead by drawing up a list of the war memorials in their area and identifying which organisation or individual is responsible for each one. The list should include the details of a main contact person to be notified if a theft is reported.

Recording and surveying

War memorial custodians are encouraged to establish exactly how the memorial is constructed, its different parts, what each part looks like and what it is made from. This can be achieved by carrying out a written and photographic survey. A sample recording form can be found at the end of this guidance. This can form the basis of a file for the war memorial which can be used by the police to identify recovered items if they have been stolen or help conservators create replacement parts.

The key points to include in the file are:
■ Location of war memorial, including a map;
■ Brief description of memorial and its setting;
■ Details of constituent parts, materials and construction;
■ Details of inscriptions – ideally a full transcription;
■ Details of condition;
■ Details of history, including designer/ architect;
■ Details of any designation (if it is a listed structure, a scheduled monument or has other protection);
■ Good quality photographs;
■ Who undertook the survey and when.

A key part of the process is recording the names and the inscriptions and making clear photographic records. A permanent record of the list of names is very important as the war memorial may be the only place these people are now remembered. A copy of the file should be sent to the UK National Inventory of War Memorials (UKNIWM) so that the information is also stored in an accessible national record. The UKNIWM is a project which aims to record all war memorials in the UK for future generations. You could also inform The Immobilise National Property Register, which is a service that helps the police identify stolen items and reunite them with their owners – visit www.immobilise.com for more information.

In addition to the UKNIWM, the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association (PMSA) can be used as a research source. It has been carrying out a national survey of public sculpture and monuments which is likely to have images and descriptions of major war memorials in those localities that have been surveyed.

Historical information about the war memorial can often be found in local library archives. It was common for newspapers to cover the unveiling ceremony and these articles can provide descriptions and photographs of the memorial's original appearance.

War Memorials Trust has two helpsheets on researching war memorials: *Researching the history of a war memorial* and *Researching the names on a war memorial*. Local history groups or individuals may also be able to assist.

Risk assessment

The next step is to assess the risk of theft. The main points to think about are set out below. This is also likely to be of use in considering measures against vandalism.

Value:
- Is the whole war memorial or any of its parts commercially valuable? It may be that it is the work of a famous artist or an attractive piece of sculpture, or may contain a large amount of metal with a high scrap value. All of these factors will make the war memorial more vulnerable to theft.

Structure:
- If the whole memorial is valuable, how is it attached to the ground or the building it forms part of?
- If certain parts are valuable, how are they attached to the war memorial? Look at the types of screws and mortar. Loose fixings can encourage theft.
- Can the parts be easily removed? It may depend on their size and weight.
- Could the parts be fixed more securely? It is worth looking into the 'anti-theft' fixings available.
- Could the parts be marked? Information on security marking is available from the police. Visit www.met.police.uk/crime prevention/art.htm for more information on how to use the "Object I.D." format recognised throughout the art world.

War memorial in Newburn, Tyne and Wear. After the theft of one of the bronze plaques, vandalism and graffiti followed.
© Newcastle City Council

Access:

- How easy is it to access the war memorial by foot and by vehicle?
- Are there any unsecured ladders or wheelbarrows nearby? These can be of help to thieves and should be removed or secured to prevent them being used.
- Are there any physical deterrents surrounding the memorial, such as railings or prickly bushes? It might be worth considering installing these as they are low cost but effective.

Security features:

- What security features are already present and could these be improved?
- How visible is the war memorial? Increased visibility and use of CCTV can cut down the risk of theft. It is preferable that surrounding trees do not obscure the war memorial from public view. However, before you do any work to cut back or remove trees, you should check with the planning department of your local authority as some trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders.
- Is the war memorial well lit at night? Better lighting may help to deter theft.
- Are there any security warning signs? Installing signs stating the area is being monitored will deter thieves.
- Is there an information board with the custodian's contact details and those of the local police? This will enable people to raise the alarm early and increase the possibility of recovery.

Action plan

It is also beneficial for the custodian to have an action plan in place which outlines what should be done if a theft does occur. It would be advisable for the custodian to appoint an alternative contact person to cover absences. It would also be advisable to lodge a copy with the local police and local authority (if not the custodian). The action plan should include:

- Details of who will contact and liaise with the police and the details of the current police contact;
- A list of everyone who needs to be informed of the theft;
- Who is responsible for holding the war memorial file and what to do if they are unavailable;
- How the theft will be publicised to improve chances of recovery, including the contacts of local media or journalists who would be interested in the story;
- War Memorials Trust, UKNIWM and PMSA contact details so that they can be advised of the theft.

Liaising with the police

All custodians should maintain a good relationship with the local police force. It is a good idea to have a meeting with the Crime Prevention Officer to discuss your plans for drawing up a risk assessment and action plan. The police may be able to offer suggestions to make the plan more effective. Custodians could also raise the issue in local Neighbourhood Watch meetings. The police may be able to include the memorial in their 'beat', and highlight it to Police Community Support Officers for extra vigilance.

Make sure it is established who the main contact is and maintain good communication.

Encouraging local vigilance

One of the key factors in preventing theft is the co-operation of local people. They will probably be the first to notice any unusual activity around the war memorial or if anything has been stolen. It is worth putting an article in the local paper, installing an information board or producing a leaflet encouraging local people to be vigilant and advise them who to contact if they have a concern.

If a memorial is a prominent feature of the community, and it is made public that it is being cared for and monitored, it will make it less vulnerable to theft. There should also be communication with local people if repair works are going to take place.

Maintenance of the memorial

Areas and structures which are well cared for are less appealing for thieves so good maintenance is essential. Further guidance can be found in the leaflet *Advice on Maintenance of War Memorials* produced by War Memorials Trust and English Heritage. The content is relevant to war memorials across the UK.

Insurance cover

Further protection can be given by insuring the war memorial against vandalism and theft. For further information on specialist insurers, please see the Trust's helpsheet on *Insurance for war memorials*.

What can be done once theft has occurred?

Maintaining contact with the police
Once a theft has been reported to the police, they will attempt to recover the stolen war memorial. This may take a long time and even if found, it may have suffered damage. Keep in regular contact with the police to monitor progress. If they cannot recover the memorial, a plan needs to be made for replacement.

Local publicity
There may have been some witnesses to the theft or people who remember some unusual activity around the time. Working with the local newspaper to produce an appeal for information could yield helpful results.

Contacting other organisations
There are several organisations who take an active interest in the theft of parts of, or whole war memorials. It is recommended that the custodian contacts them as they can help in a number of ways:

- War Memorials Trust – can advise on conservation options for the war memorial and funding available.

- UK National Inventory of War Memorials – can provide details on the history of war memorials and sometimes photographs showing original inscriptions and appearance to assist with replacement.

- Public Monuments and Sculpture Association – can advise on recording methods, provide details on art history, advise on the theft of public art and working with the police on recovery.

All contact details can be found at the end of this guidance.

Getting a professional to inspect the memorial
When parts of war memorials are stolen, there is often some damage done to the main structure. It is important to ask a contractor or architect/surveyor to inspect the structure as it may be that some urgent works are required to stabilise it. Information on specialist contractors can be obtained from War Memorials Trust.

Replacing stolen parts

Like-for-like replacement

If the stolen part has not been recovered, the custodian may choose to replace it. It is recommended that the replacement part be exactly the same in design and material as the original. It could be argued that this will be expensive and that it will simply be stolen again. However, this is not necessarily the case with increased security and awareness of the problem. The reason for the 'like-for-like' approach is that it maintains the historical integrity of the structure and respects the intention of those who set up the memorial.

Consent or permissions that may be needed

If the war memorial is a listed building or scheduled monument, changes to the physical fabric are likely to need statutory consent.

For details of listings and schedulings contact the local planning authority (in England), Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Historic Scotland, or Cadw in the Welsh Assembly Government. Depending on the design and location of the memorial, planning permission or Conservation Area Consent may also be required.

The local planning authority will be able to advise on how to apply for these consents so any plans for replacement must be discussed with them in advance. The best contact person is usually the Conservation Officer or Planning Officer. Contact the Planning Department of your local authority.

War memorial in Stocksfield, Northumberland. Thieves stole the bronze plaque but fortunately the Parish Council received a grant for a replacement.
© Broomley and Stocksfield Parish Council

Funding available

War Memorials Trust runs a number of grant schemes to assist with the conservation, repair and protection of war memorials across the UK. Further information on grants and on other issues raised in this guidance can be found on War Memorials Trust's website: www.warmemorials.org

Please note that none of the grant schemes are able to fund work retrospectively, so please do not commence work prior to receiving the grant provider's decision on your application to the scheme.

Sources of information

War Memorials Trust
42a Buckingham Palace Road,
London SW1W 0RE
Tel: Conservation 020 7233 7356
Tel: Charity 0300 123 0764
Email: conservation@warmemorials.org
www.warmemorials.org

UK National Inventory of War Memorials
Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road,
London SE1 6HZ
Tel: 020 7207 9851/ 9863
Email: memorials@iwm.org.uk
www.ukniwm.org.uk

Public Monuments and Sculpture Association
70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ
Tel: 020 7490 5001
Email: pmsa@pmsa.org.uk
www.pmsa.org.uk

English Heritage
Customer Services Department,
PO Box 569, Swindon SN2 2YP
Tel: 0870 333 1181 (general enquiries)
Email: customers@english-heritage.org.uk
www.english-heritage.org.uk

**Contact details for Regional Offices
can be found at:**
**www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/
nav.001004003**

Historic Scotland
Historic Scotland, Longmore House,
Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH,
Tel: 0131 668 8600 (switchboard)
Email: hs.website@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government
Plas Carew, Unit 5/7 Cefn Coed,
Parc Nantgarw, Cardiff CF15 7QQ,
Tel: 01443 33 6000 (switchboard)
Email: cadw@wales.gsi.gov.uk
www.cadw.wales.gov.uk

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Waterman House, 5-33 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LA,
Tel: 028 9054 3095 (general enquiries)
Email:bh@doeni.gov.uk
www.ni-environment.gov.uk

The Immobilise National Property Register
c/o Recipero Limited, The Coach House, Ryeford Road South,
Kings Stanley, Gloucestershire, GL10 3HG
www.immobilise.com

Home Office – Marking property
Advice on marking property from the Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers Property Tracking Group
**www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/
property01.htm**

Crime Stoppers – Crime reporting
Tel: 0800 555 111
(anonymous confidential service for reporting information about who may have been involved with theft)
**www.crimestoppers-uk.org/how-we-help/
who-are-crimestoppers**

Metropolitan Police – Crime prevention
Tel: 020 7230 2150
(anonymous confidential service for reporting information about who may have been involved with theft)
www.met.police.uk/crimeprevention/art.htm

Metropolitan Police – Art and Antiques Unit
Tel: 020 7230 2150
Email: ArtandAntiques-SC6@met.pnn.police.uk

Recording Form

This form can also be downloaded from www.warmemorials.org.
Additional material may be added on separate pages.

Name of war memorial	
Location/address of war memorial	
Map attached	Yes / No
Brief description of the memorial eg. Stone cross on 3 steps with names carved in stone with a chain and bollards around it	
Brief description of the memorial setting e.g. Stands in a small garden adjacent to the village hall	
Details of constituent parts (steps, plinth, shaft, decoration etc) eg. Three stepped base with octagonal shaft and celtic cross	
Details of materials eg. Limestone, sandstone, bronze, timber	
Details of construction eg. Concrete foundation, steel armatures, type of fixings	
Text of inscription wording (or attached) eg. 'Dedicated to the men of this village who fell in the Great War'	
Copy of list of names attached	Yes / No
Details of history, including date of dedication, names of designer/ architect and builder eg. J Smith, Builder; S Jones, Architect. Cost £100. Erected 1919 etc.	
Details of any designation (if it is a listed structure, a scheduled monument or has other protection)	
Details of condition eg. stone steps in good condition, mortar failing in some joints, stone weathered on shaft, bronze panels corroded, some staining below.	
Good quality photos attached (include any defining marks or features)	Yes / No
Who undertook the survey	
Date of survey	

Boer war memorial in Nuneaton, Warwickshire. The bronze figure of a soldier was stolen in 2006 but this replica has since been installed.
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