

## News statement

### 2023-24 war memorial theft, vandalism and anti-social behaviour cases



Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2024  
Status: Immediate release

#### Starts

Levels of theft, vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour directed at war memorials rose slightly in 2023-24. Data available to the charity shows 32 incidents compared to 29 the previous year. This data indicates around 0.03% of war memorials in the UK have been subject to these problems.

In 2023-24, there were 5 reports of theft compared to 1 the previous year, incidents of anti-social behaviour and graffiti increased by 1 to 18 whilst cases of vandalism fell to 11 in 2022-23 to 9.

All these events cause great upset to communities and individuals. They should be condemned. But, it is important to recognise that these events are rare and that the vast majority of our war memorials are cherished. The attention such cases attract reflects their rareness and the outrage they cause.

War Memorials Trust can provide advice, guidance and potentially grant funding, to those impacted by such incidents. Dealing with the results of such attacks inappropriately can cause further damage so the Trust highlights the importance of obtaining professional advice. In some cases, like damage from by vehicles, remedial action can be covered by insurance.

	Total incidents	Number and % involving the following issues (some may include more than one element)				
		Anti-social behaviour	Graffiti	Attempted Theft	Theft	Vandalism
2019-20	<b>34</b>	9 (25%)	12 (33%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)	11 (31%)
2020-21	<b>38</b>	10 (26%)	18 (47%)	0	4 (11%)	16 (42%)
2021-22	<b>39</b>	18 (46%)	13 (33%)	0	2 (5%)	8 (21%)
2022-23	<b>29</b>	7 (24%)	10 (34%)	0	1 (3%)	11 (38%)
2023-24	<b>32</b>	7 (22%)	11 (34%)	0	5 (16%)	9 (28%)

Custodians can be proactive in deterring theft by ensuring their war memorial is protected with SmartWater available free of charge through In Memoriam 2014. Since 2011, In Memoriam 2014 has enabled communities to apply for their free SmartWater online see [www.inmemoriam2014.org](http://www.inmemoriam2014.org).

War Memorials Trust's Director, Frances Moreton, said: "Any act that desecrates or disrespects our war memorials and those individuals which they commemorated should be condemned. It is important to recognise that our war memorials are about the people whose sacrifice is being remembered, not about a specific conflict or event either contemporary or historic. Our war memorials are the graves that families and friends visited as their loved ones were buried overseas at a time when international travel was hardly contemplated.

The vast majority of the UK's war memorials are cherished by the communities who remain responsible for their care. We should not allow the negative actions of a few to detract from the amazing work being done by the many people and organisations who ensure our war memorials continue to provide sites at which we can all pay our respects.

Anyone concerned about a war memorial, or who has spotted a problem, can contact War Memorials Trust for advice, please provide pictures if you can as they can help us give more better advice. You can also get involved in conserving this unique aspect of the UK's heritage by submitting pictures and condition information to War Memorials Online, [www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk). This will help build a

greater understanding of the condition of our war memorials and make sure they are recorded so should the worst happen there is information to help identify stolen items or assist with repairs.”

**Ends**

## **Contact**

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## **Notes to editors**

1. For details of specific cases of theft and vandalism in each year please see the associated **appendix** for the relevant [News releases or statements](#). Numbers of reported thefts and vandalism are based on cases reported directly to War Memorials Trust or those that it picks up from various media. There is no obligation for anyone to report theft and vandalism to War Memorials Trust and as such there may be other cases of which the charity is unaware.
2. **In Memoriam 2014** is a partnership between DeterTech and War Memorials Trust. In Memoriam 2014 offers protection for war memorials at risk of theft or damage by enabling communities to mark them with a forensic liquid called SmartWater. The traceable liquid has a unique chemical composition and forensic code that can be applied so if memorials/features are stolen they can be returned to the scene of the crime. It is available **free of charge** to war memorial custodians. SmartWater is well known to criminals, who acknowledge that it represents a genuine threat to them as the product has had a 100% conviction rate in hundreds of cases. For further information please visit [www.inmemoriam2014.org](http://www.inmemoriam2014.org) or [www.warmemorials.org/im2014-press](http://www.warmemorials.org/im2014-press).
3. **War Memorials Online** is seeking to create a greater understanding of the condition of war memorials. Identifying war memorials in 'Poor' or 'Very bad' condition will help target resources at those memorials that need help. The public can also raise concerns through the website which are passed to War Memorials Trust to follow up. The map search on the website can be used to show war memorial condition in your local area, [www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorials](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorials).
4. **Relevant advice**
  - a. War Memorials Trust has a range of guidance on issues related to war memorials which run alongside those issued by national heritage bodies
    - i. [www.warmemorials.org/helpsheets](http://www.warmemorials.org/helpsheets)
    - ii. [www.warmemorials.org/faqs](http://www.warmemorials.org/faqs)
  - b. Historic England:
    - i. [The Conservation, Repair and Management of War Memorials](#)
    - ii. [Graffiti on Historic Buildings and Monuments. Methods of removal and preservation](#)
  - c. Historic Environment Scotland:
    - i. [Repair and Maintenance of War Memorials](#)
    - ii. [Graffiti Removal](#)
  - d. Cadw
    - i. [Caring for War Memorials in Wales](#)
    - ii. [Caring for War Memorials in Wales – Technical Guidance](#)
5. War Memorials Trust has educational resources aimed at helping **young people** in schools and youth groups to learn about war memorials visit, [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org).
6. War Memorials Trust is an independent registered **charity**. Established in 1997 due to concerns about neglect and vandalism, it works to protect and conserve war memorials. It provides advice, information and administers grants schemes that assist the repair and conservation of war memorials across the UK. As a charity the Trust relies on voluntary contributions to undertake its work. Supporters include annual and life members, donors, charitable trusts and corporate contributors.