

News statement

2025-26 war memorial theft, vandalism and anti-social behaviour cases



Date: 1st July 2026
Status: Immediate release

Starts

In 2025-26, War Memorials Trust noted a slight decrease in the number of cases of theft, vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour directed at war memorials. Data available to the charity shows 9 identifiable incidents compared to 13 the previous year. This indicates that 0.00009% of war memorials in the UK, based on a total of 100,000, have been subject to such problems, compared to 0.00013% in 2024-25.

Of the cases the charity was made aware of, and we know this is not necessarily all of them, there was 1 report of theft or attempted theft in 2025-26, a fall of 5 on the previous period. Incidents of anti-social behaviour and graffiti increased from 3 to 8 whilst cases of vandalism fell from 4 to 1.

Any event of this type should be condemned. They cause incredible levels of upset and outrage in the community. However, these events are rare and it is important to recognise the overwhelming respect given to our war memorial heritage. The fact they do not occur often but cause great distress ensures they receive a great deal of attention with perpetrators often shamed when identified.

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. For example, seeking to remove graffiti the wrong way may cause paint or chemicals to seep into stonework and cause permanent staining which could have been avoided if a best conservation practice approach had been used.

	Total incidents	Number and % involving the following issues (some may include more than one element)				
April-March		Anti-social behaviour	Graffiti	Attempted Theft	Theft	Vandalism
2020-21	38	10 (26%)	18 (47%)	0	4 (11%)	16 (42%)
2021-22	39	18 (46%)	13 (33%)	0	2 (5%)	8 (21%)
2022-23	29	7 (24%)	10 (34%)	0	1 (3%)	11 (38%)
2023-24	32	7 (22%)	11 (34%)	0	5 (16%)	9 (28%)
2024-25	13	0 (0%)	3 (23%)	1 (8%)	5 (38%)	4 (31%)
2025-26	9	2 (22%)	5 (56%)	0	1 (11%)	1 (11%)

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.

War Memorials Trust's Director, Frances Moreton, said: "War memorials act as a focal point for individual and community remembrance. An attack on a war memorial today is an attack on both the memory of the fallen and those who remember their sacrifices.

War Memorials Trust condemns these incidents. But we also believe we should recognise the great respect of the vast majority. The bad behaviour of the few should not detract from the efforts of the many.

Anyone concerned about a war memorial, or who has spotted a problem, can contact War Memorials Trust for advice, ideally providing photographs. 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. 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 or 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.
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
 - ii. 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.
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.