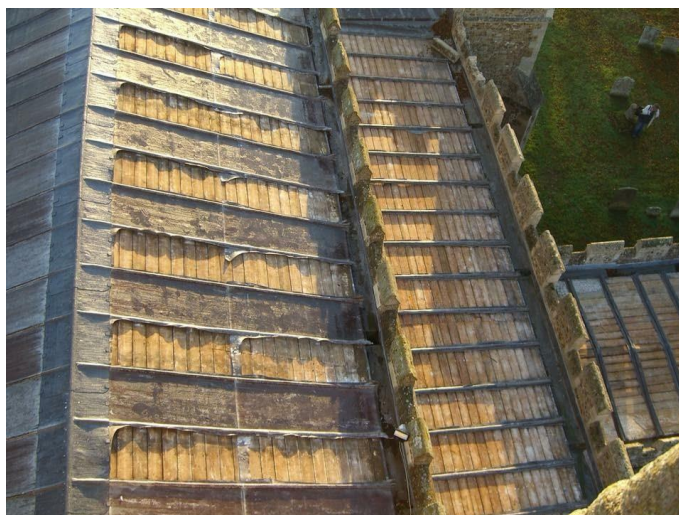


Metal Theft from Church Buildings

A Guide for PCCs, Churchwardens and Clergy

Metal theft declined during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, but has been on the increase ever since. Before the pandemic, theft of metal was one of the fastest growing crimes globally, attracting organised criminal groups. A survey published at the beginning of June 2019 by VPS Security Services, found that reports of lead theft from church roofs were averaging 37 a month¹.



These thefts, now officially recognised as Heritage Crime, have more impact than just the financial loss of the lead; significant damage is often done to stonework, as well as water damage to internal furnishings if it rains before the theft is discovered. Added to this is the emotional impact of suffering a theft, the irreplaceable loss of heritage, and the additional fundraising challenge.

It's not just lead that thieves are interested in, copper and stainless steel are also a target. Thefts also aren't limited to roof coverings - flashings, copper lightning conductors, lead and copper rainwater pipes, bronze statues, metal garden ornaments, iron gates and even church bells have all been stolen.

There are, however, several things you can do to help prevent theft; the first is to recognise that all church buildings with metal are at risk, even those in central village locations which are overlooked and in frequent use – it really is better to **plan for the worst but hope for the best**.

7 RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. **Record** items of **significance**
2. Review your **Insurance**
3. Undertake a **basic security check**
4. **Mark your metal**
5. **Install an alarm**
6. Build good links with the **local community**
7. Nominate a **key contact** who will co-ordinate matters in the event of a theft.

1. RECORD ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE

- Make sure you know what type of metal you have, where it is and how much there is.
- Look at your church building – what would be damaged if the roof or all of the drainpipes and hoppers were stolen? Maybe, these are particularly fine or historic examples in their own right.
- Record items of significance - make sure you include descriptions of any particular details, graffiti or markings and for roofs, any information about when the metal was laid, repaired etc... Include photographs showing the whole of the roof/item as well as photographs of details.
- Look at each building element and consider what damage would be done if you no longer had a roof covering – do you have significant wall paintings? Would the organ be at risk? How easily could items be removed or covered?

2. REVIEW YOUR INSURANCE

It is very easy to let your insurance renew without questioning what you are getting from your policy or whether your insurer has changed any terms.

Some key questions to consider:

- Who is our insurer?
- Is our policy up to date? When does it renew?
- In the event of metal theft from our church, will we get a full pay-out or are there limitations?
There may be a limit on any pay-out if conditions are not met. Typically, these caps are £7500 which is insufficient to replace even a small tower roof.
- What are the specific conditions and/or exclusions around metal?
- Do we have SmartWater applied? Is it registered? *SmartWater (or other similar approved forensic marking systems) is required by most insurers – without this, you will not be insured.*
- Have we undertaken any works since the SmartWater was originally applied (e.g. renewing a section of lead roof) that means that it needs to be applied to this new area? *It is also essential to register newly marked metal.*
- Do we need to have a roof alarm in order to meet our policy conditions? What installation costs are involved? What are the annual maintenance costs?
- Does our insurer provide any checklists or guides that might also help us? *Websites are usually the best place to look. If you don't have access to the internet see if they have a customer helpline. You don't have to limit yourself to your insurer, for instance, Ecclesiastical Insurance have a range of guidelines available on their website which are available to all <https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/church-metal-theft/>*

3. UNDERTAKE A BASIC SECURITY CHECK

- Take a good look at your church through the eyes of a potential thief – how would you get up the roof? Where would you park? Would you be seen? Do neighbours overlook the site? Are there any deterrents or invitations? It is often helpful to do this with someone less familiar with the church e.g. a member of your local Neighbourhood Watch or a Police/Community Support Officer.
- Imagine how a thief would recce the site. Start with a wide view of the church from a satellite image (e.g. using google maps), then look at it from the road/ street/footpaths. Finally look outwards FROM the church - do this from each side.
- Is the church heavily shielded by trees or easily visible? *Could trees/vegetation be cut back/reduced to improve visibility?*

- Do any neighbours overlook the church or is it remote? *An overlooked location is no guarantee of improved security*
- How well-lit is the church and churchyard? *Consider installing security lighting, particularly at roof level. Seek advice from a security expert to avoid creating shadows or lighting secluded areas that might assist thieves.*
- Is there any CCTV on neighbouring properties that cover key areas in or around the churchyard? *Installing CCTV at the church is the most complex and expensive type of security system; roof alarm systems may be more cost-effective and preferred by your insurer.*
- Do people pass by? *Many churches and churchyards are popular routes for dog walkers.*
- What is the access like? Are there gates? Are they secured at night? How close would you be able to get a vehicle? *It is important to secure the hinge pins in gates, otherwise thieves will simply lift them off. There are systems that can be fitted, or you can just screw blocks of wood over the ends of the pins and drill out the screw heads (it's not very often gates have to be lifted for maintenance, and the headache of removing the blocks in the future will be much less than the headache of dealing with a lead theft).*
- Is the wheelie bin easily accessible or is it secured? *These are often used to collect and transport rolls of lead which have been dropped on the ground to waiting transport, or as something to stand on to gain access.*
- Are there water butts, compost bins, oil tanks or similar which provide easy points of access to roofs?
- Are ladders/tools locked up? *Ensure that any tools are kept securely e.g. wheelbarrows can be used to collect and transport rolls of lead which have been dropped on the ground to waiting transport.*
- Are downpipes easily climbable and enable easy access to roofs? *Consider applying anti-climb paint to drain pipes, roof guttering and sections of scaffolding. You should not apply below a height of 2m and must prominently display a warning notice. You DO NOT need consent to apply anti-climb paint and it only needs to be applied to the backs of drainpipes.*

Please note that certain works might require Faculty Approval before being undertaken.

Please contact the DAC on 01353 652729 or at dac@elydiocese.org

4. MARK YOUR METAL

There are several types of marking which enable metal to be identified. One of the most common is SmartWater, a water-based, inorganic traceable liquid which contains a unique forensic signature. It is usually a condition of insurance that metal be marked in some way, so it is important that you understand your insurance policy (see previous section 'Review Your Insurance'). You must ensure that you follow all the requirements (apply the marker, register it and display notices) and remember to mark and register any new lead work in the future.

Forensic marking will mean that materials can be traced back to your building and it can also mark thieves so they can be linked to a site or crime. It is a known deterrent, however, it relies on the stolen lead being inspected for the markings, which is proving increasingly difficult with organised crime groups, so the preferred option is to use forensic marking in combination with a roof alarm.

5. INSTALL AN ALARM

The fitting of an insurance-approved roof alarm remains the only way to provide effective protection AND full insurance cover for the metal on your church roof. Many congregations are still hesitant about installing them, even following a theft to protect the remaining lead. There are grants available from the AllChurches Trust and County Historic Churches Trusts to help with installation, but the annual monitoring and

maintenance costs do have to be met by the congregation. These costs are, however, significantly less than the those associated with a theft which can reach into six figures and will not be covered by your insurance if you do not have a roof alarm. Grants for repairs can take months, even years to secure and require a considerable amount of time and commitment with no guarantee of success.

6. BUILD GOOD LINKS WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Do you know who your neighbours are? Do they understand the threats their local church building faces? There is real value on so many levels of establishing good links with the local and wider community.

Open Days and Events

If you don't already have open days or community events, raising awareness of 'Heritage Crime' is as good an excuse as any to organise something. Hold an event that celebrates the heritage of the local church and village, and include some information or an activity that raises awareness of metal theft and how the local community can help. You don't just have to do this in the church, you can include such information at other local events you take part in/support.

Neighbourhood Watch

If you already have a scheme in your village/town, make sure the church is included. If not, consider setting one up or a similar 'Heritage Watch' scheme. <http://heritagewatch.co.uk/>

It is also worth setting up a local network which can be used to gather and send relevant, important and appropriate information relating to church security. Make sure it is sensibly used and managed so that people take notice of it. Keep it on topic – don't start advertising the forthcoming coffee morning – use other channels for that. Make sure that you don't fall foul of any relevant GDPR rules along the way.

Communication

- Give neighbours a contact number and encourage them to report anything suspicious. Thieves often make repeat visits, so noting vehicle numbers can help.
- Display notices requesting people call the police if they see vans or workman around the building outside normal working hours.
- Let people know that, unless you tell them otherwise, NO work is taking place on the church, so if they see someone on the roof then there is something wrong. Yes, thieves are that brazen and will steal during the day under the guise of being legitimate workmen.
- Keep in touch with local churches in your benefice/deanery. They might have fallen victim at the same time or could be the next target. Depending upon your situation, there may be other nearby buildings that could also be susceptible to metal theft. Where are they?
- Get to know your local PCSO/beat officer and report anything suspicious to:
 - ~ Cambridgeshire Rural Crime Action Team at RCAT@cambs.pnn.police.uk
 - ~ Norfolk Rapid Response Team - DC Andy Brown brownap@norfolk.pnn.police.uk
- Police have also advised PCCs to collect cigarette butts and beer cans that may appear unexpectedly in their churchyards – these could indicate that your church has had a scoping visit, and can provide useful DNA evidence.

7. NOMINATE A KEY CONTACT WHO WILL CO-ORDINATE MATTERS IN THE EVENT OF A THEFT.

In order not to duplicate efforts it is worth nominating a key person who will coordinate things in the event of a theft. This way, ONE person knows what is going on and has the facts to hand! That one person does

not have to shoulder all of the responsibility, they act as a coordinator. Make sure that people in the Community know who this person is as well.

Useful information for the key contact to have to hand (it is a good idea for one other person to hold this information to cover holidays, illness etc...):

- Insurance Company name, claim telephone number, policy number
- Telephone numbers for key church contacts
- Telephone/email/social media for any local information networks
- Other neighbouring churches and Rural Dean
- Name of your Quinquennial Inspection architect.

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF METAL THEFT

TELL THE POLICE

- If a crime is taking place phone the Police on 999, otherwise, use 101.
- **Give clear information** about the location, and any information that would help identify the suspects or vehicles used.
- **Report it as a Heritage Crime** - make sure you tell the call handler that the building is listed and that you would like the incident reported as a Heritage Crime, and that the Heritage Crime Liaison Officer should be notified.
- Make a note of the **Crime Reference Number**
- If you think that the criminals have left stolen property at the scene or nearby, inform the call handler as it is likely the thieves will return to collect them and possibly steal more.
- If you believe that the suspects have left any items of property or tools or any object which may contain forensic evidence such as finger prints or tyre marks, please tell the call handler.

ASSESS THE SCENE IN MORE DETAIL

- Check the building for any additional theft or damage caused by the theft e.g. stonework disturbed/broken in the course of removing a roof, or where access has been gained.
- Record anything else unusual about the building and surrounding grounds (e.g. anything that might have been moved to gain access)

NOTIFY YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY

Make sure you have the Crime Reference Number to hand.

PROTECT THE BUILDING

- Use tarpaulin or plastic sheeting as an emergency cover – even a small amount of rain can cause huge damage quickly.
- Whoever is putting a temporary covering on should be asked to take photographs.
- Move furniture etc... to unaffected area(s)/cover with waterproof sheeting if external temporary coverings cannot be done immediately. Waterproof sheeting may also be required to cover fixed furnishings, organs etc...
- Contact your quinquennial inspecting architect so they can inspect the building and help arrange emergency protection and repairs.

Notify the DAC by contacting Geoffrey Hunter, Head of Church Buildings and Pastoral Department, on 01353 652737 or via geoffrey.hunter@elydiocese.org

Notify your Archdeacon, local community contacts and neighbouring parishes.

If the suspects are apprehended, you might be asked to provide a Heritage Crime Impact Statement. In doing so, remember to describe the full impact the theft has had in the widest context i.e. it's an attack on resources belonging to local communities which restricts use, imposes additional financial burden, undermines the morale of volunteers, and threatens the enjoyment and learning of future generations.

Further Guidance

[Historic England](#) – guidance notes cover prevention and response, replacement materials and using terne-coated stainless steel.

[Ecclesiastical Insurance](#)

Church of England – [crime and security prevention](#).

Grants for Roof Alarms

- [Benefact Trust](#)
- [Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust](#)
- [Norfolk Churches Trust](#)

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¹ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/7-june/news/uk/church-lead-thieves-are-becoming-more-violent>