

CIFA

Heritage
Crime
SIG



Heritage Crime

What is heritage crime?

Heritage crime is any offence which harms the value of heritage assets and their settings to this and future generations and includes all offences involving cultural property. The harm caused by heritage crime is varied and impacts both sites themselves in terms of physical loss or damage but also impacts society in the loss to our collective knowledge of the historic environment. Heritage crime has always been an issue although not always recognised as such. With new technologies, threats have expanded as have opportunities to increase prevention and detection.

Heritage crime covers a wide range of criminal activity including:

- Architectural theft, e.g. lead roofs on church buildings
- Criminal damage, including arson
- Unlawful metal detecting (sometimes known as 'nighthawking')
- Anti-social behaviour, e.g. off-road driving, graffiti and vandalism
- Unauthorised works to monuments, sites and buildings
- Illicit trade in cultural objects
- Unlawful salvage of maritime vessels and sites



Graffiti on interpretation boards at Lower Gillingham Park, Kent © Jonathan Gladwin

Working together to prevent heritage crime

Heritage organisations and law enforcement agencies are working together to better understand the impact of heritage crime, prosecute offenders and help develop prevention strategies. This collaboration is taking place at a national, regional, and local levels with a number of initiatives being launched in recent years.

National campaigns targeted at particular types of heritage crime have been conducted by the National Police Chiefs' Council's Heritage and Cultural Property Crime Working Group such as Operation Chronos (nighthawking), Operation Crucible (metal theft) and Operation Birdie (unlawful activity targeting historic wreck sites).

On a local level, Heritage Watch Schemes have been set up in various locations. These enable the public to report and share information on crime, suspicious behaviour and damage observed at historic sites in their community. A Heritage Watch site security champion scheme is also in operation in the marine environment in England.

As well as partnership and collaboration, technology is also helping in the fight against heritage crime. A range of different forensic marking products have been developed to address specific priority threats. These include markers to protect historic metal such as church roofs and artefacts on Protected Wrecks.

Other technological initiatives include the use of apps for law enforcement practitioners and satellite monitoring of a range of at risk sites.

Special Interest Group

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working both in the UK and overseas. One of the main objectives of CIfA is to promote professional standards and ethics within archaeological practice and as part of this role, CIfA hosts 20 Area and Special Interest Groups. These groups are formed by CIfA members and represent different specialisms and areas of interest across the historic environment sector.

Partnership working between heritage organisations and law enforcement agencies is gathering pace and it became necessary to create a hub for both sectors to promote awareness, training and continuing partnership working. In 2023, the Heritage Crime Special Interest Group (HCSIG) was formed to create such a hub.



Heritage Watch Volunteer conducting a site security survey © Heritage Watch, Leicestershire Police

The aims of the Heritage Crime Special Interest Group are:

- To raise awareness of the impact of heritage and cultural property crime
- To help prevent heritage and cultural property crime through signposting of resources including training and guidance
- To bring together interested parties to identify partnerships and opportunities across heritage and law enforcement.
- To explore with the CIfA Board of Directors the establishment of a register and panel of experts in heritage and cultural property crime.

To meet these objectives, several initiatives have been started by the group and include:

- A resource bank – hosted on the group's CIfA webpage, this bank consists of a series of case studies which provide examples of heritage crime, completed investigations and best practice.
- Working groups – these groups focus on specific areas of practice and potential partnerships. Details can be found on the group's CIfA webpage.
- Guidance on how to become a Heritage Crime Police Support Volunteer for those interested in volunteering opportunities with their local police force.
- Training resources including the creation of a specialist skills matrix.



Warning sign on a Protected Wreck to inform divers that the site has been marked © MSDS Marine

Getting involved

Membership of the HCSIG is open to both members and non-members of CIfA including heritage professionals, law enforcement officers and other interested individuals.

If you'd like to get involved in any aspect of our work, or have any questions or suggestions email us at groups@cifa.co.uk



Scan for more information on the Heritage Crime Group



Front cover image: Wreck inventory as part of an investigation © Historic England

Back cover image: A Cheshire Rural Crime Team officer undertaking a patrol of Beeston Castle, an isolated English Heritage site © Historic England

www.archaeologists.net/groups/heritagecrime

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