

Guidance note

Protecting Church Treasures



With increasing number of churches being open for visitors and community activities particular challenges arise when trying to protect significant items, many of them portable works of art. This guidance note has suggestions for improving the protection of treasures in your church and should be read in conjunction with the guidance on general security in church buildings also available on the ChurchCare website.

Securing your building

The safe display of treasures in a church starts with a secure building and you can find practical suggestions on improving general security on the ChurchCare website.

Securing your treasures

The protection of treasures in your church should be discussed with your insurer at an early stage and taken on board in the church's security review.

A complete, up-to-date and good quality inventory is of the utmost importance, as it will help the police investigate

a crime and recover stolen treasures. In addition, you should also identify the objects that are particularly vulnerable to theft and have good quality photographs available (you can find practical advice on photographing works of art on The Metropolitan Police website).

Below are a few practical suggestions to improve security of your treasures:

- Forensic marking is an increasingly popular method of labelling high-risk property in church buildings and its use can also be

considered for treasures. However, any marking on works of art needs to be of conservation standard to avoid irreversible damage and remember that not all surfaces are suitable for forensic marking.

Professional conservators can advise you on marking works of art and you can find details of conservation practices in your area via the Conservation Register

- You can protect paintings by ensuring that their frames are securely fixed to a wall (although a gap between



the painting and the wall is recommended to prevent deterioration in high humidity environments).

Professional conservators can advise you on the secure display of paintings and also on discreet labelling of these objects.

- Although monuments are usually well secured to walls, smaller features such as busts, figures, helmets and swords, can be vulnerable to theft. Some conservation measures can be considered to improve security of portable items (for example by using invisible dowels and conservation-grade adhesives) but such interventions need to be proportional to the risks involved and carried out by a professional conservator.
- Loose items, such as architectural fragments, books and manuscripts can be exhibited in secure display cases. You can find guidance on the use of display cases in churches on the ChurchCare website.
- Small items of silver, brass and pewter should be stored in a modern theft resisting safe (which itself should be anchored to the fabric of the building) or secure area such as the

vestry, when not in use for a service. The use of display cases, as above, can also be considered.

- Furniture (e.g. medieval chests) and other portable items (e.g. lecterns) should be chained to the floor using a good quality closed shackle padlock.

Some objects in churches are either too big, or complex, to be protected with the measures set out above. For example, significant items of furniture and decorative panels (particularly painted medieval panels) can be vulnerable to theft and may require more specialised protection. In such cases, alarms can provide additional protection and this is something you should discuss with your insurers and the local police, in order to ascertain the type of alarm most suitable for your building and object.

Having a notice in the church highlighting that the property is protected by alarm (and other measures) is always a good deterrent.

Responding to incidents

You can find general advice on responding to incidents on the ChurchCare website but if a treasure in your church has

been stolen you should immediately alert the following:

- The Police
- Your Archdeacon
- Your DAC
- The Church Buildings Council
- Your insurer

Having good quality photographs of the treasures in your church is your best protection as it helps alert the art market to a stolen item. Make sure that you provide the above contacts with good quality images and a crime reference number. Early reporting is key to improving the chances of recovering a stolen object so regularly check the treasures in your church.

October 2013

