

## How do we approach heritage?

All over Europe, there are war damaged buildings which have been preserved as historic monuments. Some are open to the public and are visited by thousands every year. Some stand in city centres. Others are hidden in forests and remote places, hidden from view, and neglected.

Some, like the French forts around Verdun, suffered from artillery bombardment in months of intense fighting, and have been preserved as a sacred memory of human suffering and sacrifice. Others, like the bunkers of Hitler's wartime headquarters, the Wolf's Lair, were deliberately demolished by their own side before they could be captured by the enemy.

In most cases, the original damage caused by high explosives and by shrapnel has been compounded by the effects of decades of erosion, and by plants growing around and through the buildings. We will explore why these damaged buildings have been preserved, what memories they carry today, and what questions they pose now for conservationists and all those interested in preserving our fragile heritage.



## What can scientists do?

One of the biggest things we worry about is the material damaged incurred during conflict. What do shrapnel, bullet impacts, fire and pollution do to the surface of heritage buildings and objects?

Currently, scientists at Cardiff University are investigating the impact of bullets on stone surfaces. We can measure deformation, fracturing, and material loss as well as the way damaged heritage responds to environmental changes such as being moved to a new environment but also long-term changes such as higher average temperatures and droughts.

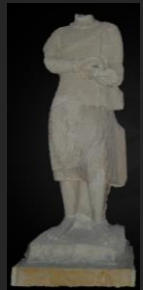
So how do we do it? Well, we take a piece of stone and we shoot it! That gives us the opportunity to work on these impacts without having to handle fragile objects or wandering into dangerous areas. We also know exactly what gun was used and how far away the shooter was, making it easier to figure out the relationship between bullet and bullet movement and the damage to the surface.

We can also measure damage from previous conflicts, such as the portal of the Cardiff University Main building on Park Place. Go have a look to see if you can find the damage from WW2!

## How do museums and international organisations work together to protect heritage?

The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict seeks to safeguard and respect cultural heritage. This includes planning of emergency measures for protection against fire and structural collapse.

Museums hold a wealth of expertise and take a central role in heritage preservation and emergency preparation. Through networks and international organisations, such as UNESCO, museums provide advice on emergency planning, or assistance in times of disaster.



While normally considered safe havens for cultural and natural heritage, in times of conflict museums are often the targets of ideologically driven anger or financially motivated looting.

New technologies may be able to assist with heritage preservation, even reconstruction, as recently shown by Project Mosul (<http://projectmosul.org/>). Fellows of the European Union's Marie Curie programme, "Initial Training Network for Digital Cultural Heritage", are using crowd-sourced images to reconstruct three-dimensional images of objects that were destroyed.

# Preserving war-damaged heritage in turbulent times.

## Why does it matter?

Statues, monuments, memorials, even buildings are statements of a community's values. We remember positive events or important contributors to society. We also commemorate negative events, if only to prevent repeating the mistakes of the past.

The past is not dead and symbols matter. Because our past heritage holds so much meaning, it is often emotionally charged. Especially in times of conflict, the symbolism carried by the heritage of one party can then form a conduit for discharging the anger of another party.

Ideologies and world-views change, and with them changes how we view our past. It is tempting sometimes to simply remove statues of former heroes that have now fallen from grace.

But removing 'inappropriate' memorials pretends that they never existed. Leaving them in place, on the other hand, is as if the wounds of the past do not matter. Finding a balance, where history is respected, is not easy and a constantly evolving process. This is where academics and museums can help.

For more information,  
visit our blog:

<http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/heritage/>

Or contact the coordinators:

Dr Lisa Mol: [MOLL@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:MOLL@cardiff.ac.uk)

Dr Toby Thacker: [ThackerET@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ThackerET@cardiff.ac.uk)

Dr Christian Baars: [Christian.Baars@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:Christian.Baars@museumwales.ac.uk)



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# Heritage in turbulent times

A joint project  
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