

Legislation / Scheduling / Listing

By far the majority of Cornwall's stone crosses are Scheduled Ancient Monuments and are therefore legally protected. Scheduled Monuments come under the control of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with English Heritage acting as their agents. As such it is illegal to damage, move, or carry out work on a cross without consent from the DCMS, known as Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). The DCMS website is at www.culture.gov.uk/

If the cross falls into disrepair or is in need of restoration, Scheduled Monument Consent needs to be obtained before any work can be carried out. Protection is also afforded to the area of ground immediately around the monument and below it. Therefore it is also a criminal offence to dig in close proximity to an ancient cross or other scheduled antiquity. Some crosses are also recorded as Listed Buildings and are legally protected and controlled through the local authority's planning department. Sometimes crosses close to historic houses come under the curtilage of the Listed Building that they are close to.

Planning permission may be required to erect a cross, although this is not usual. Crosses that are erected, removed, repaired or restored in churchyards, cemeteries and parish churches will need a Faculty from the diocese. A Faculty is the ecclesiastical equivalent of planning permission, as the Anglican Church is exempt from the local authority planning rules.

Please note: - The fact that a cross may be a Scheduled Ancient Monument or a Listed Building does not indicate that the public have any rights to view the stone; many are still on private property.

In the first instance it is wise to contact the Historic Environment Service of Cornwall County Council to report any problems to do with a cross. They can usually advise whether a monument is Scheduled or Listed and what action needs to be taken. Their address is Historic Environment Service, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro TR1 3AY, telephone number 01872 323603, email: hes@cornwall.gov.uk

Micro chipping

Granite wayside crosses are a distinctive and numerous feature of the Cornish landscape. The majority were set up as medieval signposts marking the route to the parish church, or as boundary stones marking the boundary of the glebe or parish.

Today, these monuments not only represent an aspect of Cornwall's rich heritage but are also often seen as symbols of Cornish Identity. This has led to a growing interest in them, as well as an increasing number of replica and modern crosses being set up over the past decade by both community groups and individuals. It is this renewed interest in Cornish crosses and general interest in granite artefacts that has perhaps fuelled the need by a very small minority to steal their own ancient cross.

During the past twenty years there have been numerous attempts to steal stone crosses from rural locations in Cornwall. These are usually small and medium sized monuments, located beside country roads and tracks, although on at least one occasion a cross located within a field marking a church path has been removed.

In 1987, the Halvana Cross within the parish of Altarnun was removed from a remote location on Bodmin Moor and has never been retrieved. On visiting the site of the cross in October 1987, it was clear that the monument had been pulled from the ground by mechanical means. In January 1990, the Trevorry or Sandyway Cross at Lanlivery was stolen and re-discovered by the police a few months later in a back garden in a neighbouring parish, and its theft was the subject of a successful prosecution.

During 1993, several attempts to steal wayside crosses were made across Cornwall by an organised gang equipped with a flat bed lorry and hydraulic winch; all attempts were unsuccessful partly due to the vigilance of locals who challenged this action. One cross at St Buryan was left leaning at an acute angle while another at Lanivet was pulled off the hedge and abandoned in the middle of the road.

In response to this, the Cornwall County Council's Historic Environment Service (HES) decided to follow the lead taken by the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DPNA), who microchipped a number of their crosses in 2004. As a result, the HES piloted a similar project in Cornwall in the summer of 2006.

The project involved:

Identifying one hundred medieval stone crosses that stand beside the roadside that are vulnerable to theft.

Securely and discretely fixing a microchip on each monument, having first obtained permission from the landowner. The microchip is just a little bigger than a grain of rice

Making a simple record with photographs of each cross showing the location of the microchip.

Compilation of a database of the microchipped crosses to be deposited with the Historic Environment Service, English Heritage, and possibly the police.