



Annual General Meeting Minutes

23 June 2029

Present:

Lord Faulkner, Co-chair	Kevin Thomas, EIG
Andrew Selous, Co-chair	Vicky Foskett, Virgin Media
Lord Birt, vice-chair	Richie Iwanoff, BT
Baroness Browning, vice-chair	Robin Edwards, Onis Consulting
Bethan Laughlin (for the Bishop of Worcester)	Graham Sievers, Knole Park
Antonia Grey, Secretariat, British Metals Recycling Association (BMRA)	Eddie Tulasiewicz, National Churches Trust
Superintendent Mark Cleland, BTP	Alison Spooner, SRL
Susie Burrage, Recycled Products/BMRA	Emma Viner, Environment Agency
Mark Harrison, Historic England	Ernie Locke, West Mercia Police
Andy Bliss, Historic England	

Note: others joined the meeting by telephone.

1. Welcome and introduction

2. Matters pertinent to the Annual General Meeting

- a. Election of officers:
 - i. Chair (s) Co-Chairs: *Andrew Selous and Lord Faulkner.*
 - ii. Vice-Chair (s) *Baroness Browning, Lord Birt, the Bishop of Worcester*
 - iii. Secretariat: *Antonia Grey.*
- b. Review of income and expenditure in respect of the past reporting year:
No expenditure to report

3. Updates from Attendees.

Lord Birt noted that church roof lead theft was a highly professional crime, often carried out by organised gangs, and that there do not seem to be any serious attempts to tackle this crime or any means to log this type of crime. He suggested there needs to be a proper, national focus on the crime across the country not least to gather intelligence.

Lord Birt also shared his concern that when lead is stolen, conservation officers often insist on the lead being replaced rather than using one of the substitute roofing materials available.

Baroness Browning pointed out that there are other areas are hit by metal theft not just churches but also railway networks and the communications industry. She suggested that if enforcement is the problem, the Group should request an update from law enforcement agencies to better understand what is being done to tackle the crime.

Superintendent Mark Cleland presented an update on behalf of BTP and other enforcement agencies. On 1 July, a newly formed enforcement taskforce will have its first meeting. Alongside police services, the group comprises organisations that have enforcement power. The aim of the taskforce is to drive activity across the country, to share intelligence and to collate better data. Outside of this, there have of local days of action. At the same time, additional data collection is being co-ordinated by Operation Opal; efforts are underway to embed metal theft analysts within that team. Finally, BTP and other police services have continued to work with industry. Currently there is about 50% coverage across the UK when it comes to having a special point of contact within police forces.

In terms of theft from the railways, BTP has seen a drop in metal crime. With fewer people travelling it has mostly redundant material being stolen. Mark agreed that the Act does not need reviewing as much as enforcing.

Susie Burrage informed attendees that scrap metal dealers are victims of metal theft too. She set out the measures the legitimate industry is taking to police the issue themselves such as testing lead for forensic markers. However, she pointed out that illegal operators continue to trade with impunity with little fear of being caught, which is creating an uneven playing field for legitimate businesses.

Mark Harrison reminded the Group that when the Scrap Metal Dealers Act was first mooted, Historic England asked for theft of metal from church buildings to be recognised as a discrete crime. However, this request was not met, and it is now regarded as infrastructure crime. This, he suggested, needs to be revisited. Nevertheless, its gravity is now recognised in courts and if a person is convicted of stealing heritage metal, they get an uplift in the sentence tariff.

Responding to Lord Birt, he confirmed that when it comes to replacing lead and copper, Historic England's position is that it should be looked at based on risk rather than conservation.

Andy Bliss added that he was undertaking a review for Historic England looking a theft of heritage metal. The aim of the review is to try to understand the geographic spread of metal theft and the related cost of thefts.

Eddie Tulasiewicz told the Group that where the National Churches Trust did give grants, the lead was often stolen when it was replaced. He suggested that there need to be stricter controls around the sale of scrap metal such as making selling scrap for cash a crime and adding additional restrictions on how people are paid. He pointed to the problem being caused by online portals such as Facebook and Gumtree where users offer cash for scrap.

Kevin Thomas agreed that metal theft was a major challenge. While the impact of COVID-19 has seen a drop in claims and while alarms are affective, he said there needs to be a step change towards intervention and enforcement.

Both Vicky Foskett and Richie Iwanoff agreed that the biggest challenge at the moment is battery theft from telecom cabinets, which provide the back-up power. However, BT is now beginning to see cable thefts increase, some of which have been live cable thereby interrupting service.

Lord Faulkner, having helped with the Bill's passage through Parliament, pointed out that the Act was most effective immediately after it had just been passed, and the issue of metal theft had greater attention in parliament. Its introduction was also supported by a dedicated Metal Theft Taskforce. However, while accepting that priorities have changed, there is a need to draw greater attention to the issue in Parliament and to talk to Government about proper enforcement.

Action: Antonia to liaise with Mark Cleland to produce a report for the Group based on data and information gathered by Operation Opal. Those who are not part of this reporting structure should send an update to Antonia by 10 July, so a final document is ready for 15 July. The Group can then use this information to develop a plan for the autumn.

Should this report need additional work, Antonia will set up a sub-group.

4. Online portals: several members of the APPG have been working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) to tackle metal theft crime online. As a result, they have developed a relationship with companies such as Facebook. At some point, as long as there is agreement all around, it could be that the Group can leverage on this progress to tackle the issue of cash for scrap advertisers online.
5. AOB: Susie Burrage reported that the issue of catalytic converter thefts is a continuing issue, affecting large numbers of people across the UK. Mark Cleland informed the meeting that the NPCC Working Group on Vehicle Theft will be dedicated to tackling this crime in the future.