

Guidance note

Re-mounting loose monumental brasses in churches

ChurchCare



16,000 buildings. One resource



Monumental brasses are one of the most common forms of memorial surviving from the Middle Ages although later, post-Reformation and Victorian 'brasses' are also common. Brasses usually depict a likeness of the person commemorated and were traditionally cut and laid in an indent, usually of Purbeck marble. It was secured with rivets and bedded on pitch to prevent damage from foot-traffic.

When Brasses become loose, or proud of its slab, they can be damaged by the movement and stress caused by foot traffic. It can also be prized off and stolen. For these reasons we encourage parishes to commission the conservation and re-fixing of these brasses.

When the original slab is no longer available, the question arises regarding where and how the loose brass should be mounted and displayed.

The historical use of monumental brasses is associated with stone slabs positioned at ground level and in many cases they mark an existing grave. Remounting a brass away from the ground would therefore alienate this relationship.

Consideration should always be given to repositioning a monumental brass in its original location or, if unknown, in a similar position at ground level.

The repositioning of monumental brasses away from the ground (for example on walls) also carries aesthetics consequences to the overall church decoration which must be taken into consideration.

When the original slab is missing, consideration should be given to the introduction of a new one, using a stone similar in colour and texture.

It is often decided to use a new wood mount, often Cedar of Lebanon, but this practice should be discouraged, as it may increase the risk of deterioration to the metal. Cellulose present in wood has the potential to react with water in damp conditions and release acid solutions. This volatile compound could lead to corrosion of metal surfaces in contact with, or close vicinity of, the wood mount. The aromatic properties of Cedar of Lebanon indicate a high release of volatile compounds, which makes this unsuitable as a conservation-grade material. The diminishing availability of

sustainable sources of this material is also a cause for concern.

Other materials (e.g. powder-coated metals, galvanized and stainless steel, acrylic sheet and glass) are often used in museum displays. However, because of the uncontrolled nature of the church environment it is difficult to predict their long-term properties and reactivity with the object. For example, galvanic corrosion could be induced between a metal mount and the brass; light, dust and damp could discolour acrylic mounts. Their use should therefore also be discouraged.

In summary, the mounting of loose monumental brasses should be carried out using the original slab or, when missing, by introducing a new stone base. Preference should be given to positioning this on the ground. The use of wood and other materials should be discouraged, as should the mounting on walls.

