Liverpool University Press – the first covered the city of Liverpool and the latest, on Bristol, was published in January 2011.

What these publications consistently reveal is how little we have previously known about the designers and makers of many of these monuments, even though most of them have been erected within the last 150 years. Those responsible rarely fall into conventional ‘professional’ categories, so it instead becomes necessary to search for them among contemporary art workers, art manufacturers and masons. What is more, most of this information still exists only at a local level, often buried in simple but prolific sources such as local newspaper reports of un-veiling ceremonies. Until all of this hidden information has been properly incorporated within a central database, it will remain impossible to provide the most significant of our public monuments with the listing and conservation actions they deserve.

Establishing a better context for PMSA sites brings with it new levels of understanding. Among these is an awareness of the enormous proportion of post-war sculpture that was commissioned for the public domain: a renaissance in public art has taken place in the decades since 1951 yet there have been very few systematic attempts to assess its importance either locally or nationally.

Another new area of understanding concerns the risks that public sculptures and monuments face from theft and criminal damage, especially when they are located in isolated places away from the public gaze. In recent years the PMSA has found that an absence of adequate security measures is due directly to a lack of awareness about how to assess the significance of these important public assets and the kinds of risk that they face. Happily, this problem should from now on be reduced as a result of the formation in February 2011 of the Alliance to Reduce Crime against Heritage (ARCH) – a new voluntary national network spearheaded by English Heritage that will take forward a range of initiatives and galvanise local action against heritage crime (www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/advice-by-topic/heritage-crime).

England’s 10,000 public monuments and sculptures make an enormous contribution to the places in which we live, but until now we have lacked the awareness and reference tools to properly care for them. With the help of English Heritage, the HLF and others, the PMSA is at last unlocking that vital knowledge and understanding.

The Cemeteries Select Committee Inquiry revisited

David Lambert
Director, Parks Agency

In 2001, a House of Commons Select Committee held an inquiry into cemeteries. Its report was damning: ‘unsafe, littered, vandalised and unkempt cemeteries … shame all society in their lack of respect for the dead and bereaved’; ‘the almost complete failure on the part of public authorities to take the action necessary to address the problems faced by cemeteries is inexcusable’. How much has changed in the last 10 years?

In many ways, the answer is disappointing. Data on numbers, cost, condition have not been collected, a lack that will continue to dog attempts to establish national policy. Estimates of burial space suggest a looming crisis, which has already arrived in major urban areas: at least three London boroughs have simply stopped providing for burials. Provision of burial space is not a legal obligation; the only statutory duty concerns health and safety, which generally means laying down or demolishing monuments.

Evidence suggests that cemeteries are managed best under a dedicated Bereavement Service, but responsibility for cemeteries tends to remain with local authority leisure services, where they are subject to the same relentless budgetary pressure as parks. Worse, because their amenity potential often seems obscure, they can be off a park manager’s radar. There are very few local strategies for burial. And while parks have benefited from the work of CABE Space and the HLF, neither body has paid the same attention to cemeteries.

Progress on the key question of re-use of older graves has stuttered. The select committee supported it as the only realistic way to fund cemeteries properly and to continue to make proper provision locally, but discussion then dragged on as a succession of ministers felt ‘sensitive’ about the issue. Eventually, in 2007, Harriet Harman announced legislation to enable London authorities to re-use graves. This established a procedure to extinguish unexercised burial rights after 75 years, to open up the grave, rebury any surviving remains at the bottom of the grave, and use it for new burials.

So far there has been little take-up, possibly because the powers, dependent as they are on extinguishing burial rights, are restricted to purchased graves, while most burial space is occupied by unpurchased graves. It has also effectively been discouraged by government, which failed to set up
its promised pilot studies and draft guidance. With burial space disappearing, authorities have resorted to cramming new graves into landscaped areas, verges and disused paths; or even importing soil to create new raised areas for new graves. The impact on the historic character of cemeteries that are still providing for burials is grim and almost entirely bypasses the planning system. Registered cemeteries have suffered similarly from this approach.

An alternative route is being pioneered at the City of London Cemetery, using Church law to allow the removal of remains from consecrated ground providing they are re-interred in consecrated ground, using a ‘dedicated grave’ at the end of the row. This approach has the advantage of applying to unpurchased graves and thus has the potential to release far more space. More than 270 graves have now been re-used without any public complaint. It goes without saying that clear protocols need to be established for schemes of this kind and a conservation management plan is essential to balancing operational and heritage needs.

Cemeteries that have become inactive face an uncertain future. It is hard to imagine a park being abandoned to nature but that is what has happened to many cemeteries, sometimes, under the banner of nature conservation, where it translates as either a managed or, at worst, a headlong retreat. The voluntary sector, however, has recently shown some positive results, with local trusts taking on major sites and securing substantial grant-aid towards conservation programmes, as at Arnos Vale in Bristol or the General Cemetery in Sheffield.

For those of us interested in the historic character and fabric of cemeteries, the key question is conservation. How is the maintenance of cemeteries – so much more onerous than that of parks because of their buildings and monuments – to be funded unless by re-establishing the revenue stream which paid for them originally? An overgrown cemetery may be appealing, but being overgrown is not a stable state: under tilting monuments, tree roots are withering and heaving.

Cemeteries have long been undervalued as sites of historic importance. English Heritage has done quite well: in 2001, there were only 26 cemeteries included on the Register of Parks and Gardens; by 2005 that number had been increased to 105. Since then, however, it has risen only to 108, still just a fraction of the total number of historic cemeteries that deserve recognition – even as early as 1994, Chris Brooks proposed registering some 300 on the basis of his thematic study of cemeteries. Cemetery structures also remain underrepresented in terms of listing, which means that too few of them have the chance to appear in national and local registers of buildings ‘at risk’.

Heritage Lottery Fund has in the past made a small number of grants to cemeteries but from 2013 proposes to include them in its new Parks for People programme. In 2007 CABE Space published a guidance note on cemeteries, Cemeteries, Churchyards and Burial Grounds (www.cabe.org.uk/publications) but otherwise treated them as a type of green space and never tackled their specific needs. More encouragingly, Cemetery Heritage
even more so the First World War, in the absence of graves at which to grieve, the nation embraced the community war memorial. Across the country communities raised money and created their local memorials. After the Second World War this trend continued with names added to earlier memorials or to new, often more utilitarian, memorials in places ranging from hospitals to bus shelters. Today, even when those who fall are brought home to be buried, names continue to be added.

There are estimated to be 100,000 war memorials across the UK. Many are local landmarks in the community, central to Remembrance services. Others are forgotten, discarded in cupboards or neglected and deteriorating. While people often think of a war memorial in terms of a village cross, there is actually a huge diversity of forms. Memorials may be cenotaphs, statues, plaques, lychgates, buildings, parks, clocks, church fittings, organs and many more. Some are humble in design, others the work of some of the most noted British architects and sculptors of the 20th century.

Since 1997 War Memorials Trust (WMT) has been working to protect and conserve our war memorial heritage in the UK. A registered charity, WMT provides advice and information on war memorial issues and administers grant schemes that support the repair and conservation of war memorials. With just two Conservation Officers it is a big challenge. WMT has no statutory power and there is very little legislation covering war memorials; they remain the responsibility of the community and WMT has to co-operate, encourage and facilitate to achieve its objectives.

For many war memorial custodians conservation principles are not necessarily central to their approach and regular and appropriate maintenance is sometimes neglected. To combat this WMT has been developing its proactive work. Its website, www.warmemorials.org, is designed as a central

In place of graves – England's war memorials
Frances Moreton, Amy Davidson and Emma Nelson
War Memorials Trust

Historically, few of our military personnel who died overseas were repatriated. They lie buried near to where they fell, some in beautifully kept Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cemeteries, some in unmarked graves, others never found. Following the Boer War, and

A monument titling picturesquely is actually a monument in the process of falling down. © David Lambert

After 90 years the names on the Grade II Longhope war memorial in Gloucestershire had become almost illegible. © Longhope Parish Council