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# Working with the police: volunteering opportunities and challenges at Leicestershire Police

Not many people know that police forces not only employ police officers, but also police staff and volunteers. Leicestershire Police, for example, have over 600 volunteers who undertake a variety of roles. Roles range from mounted volunteers to volunteers undertaking speed monitoring, and there are many more opportunities in between!

Jenny Kent ACIfA (2241), Senior Project Officer, MSDS Marine

One of those roles is that of Heritage Crime Volunteer. Leicestershire first introduced their heritage crime scheme in 2016, when the county was experiencing a lead theft crime wave. It has since grown in strength and they currently have a team of seven Heritage Crime Volunteers.

## Where does heritage crime fit within the police?

Heritage crime generally sits under the remit of the Rural Crime Team for most police forces. In Leicestershire the Rural Team covers agricultural crime, equine crime, wildlife crime and heritage crime.

This highlights why Heritage Crime Volunteers are so important, as each of the four categories are a specialist subject in their own right! Heritage Crime Volunteers form a specialist body within the police and the team report to the Rural Sergeant but focus entirely on all aspects of heritage crime.



Heritage Watch volunteer conducting a site security visit. Credit: Leicestershire Police

### What does a Heritage Crime Volunteer do?

The main aims of the Heritage Crime Team are to monitor all reported instances of church and historic monument crime and offer a second layer of support to those sites, supporting local officers. The team identify historic monuments that are at high risk of heritage crime and offer the site owners and custodians proactive crime prevention advice. This involves working closely with partnership agencies such as the Diocese of Leicester and Historic England.

The team are aware that crime does not stop at the Leicestershire border and spend time actively building relationships with cross-border forces and organisations. However, the most important role of the Heritage Crime Team is to raise awareness of heritage crime both within the force and with the general public.

### Churches

In 2016, a rise in lead theft saw the development of the Heritage Crime Team and since then churches have taken a lot of the team's focus. There are over 300 churches in Leicestershire and Rutland and to prioritise those most at risk, a database was made of those with lead roofs. This list was then sent to all neighbourhood policing commanders, so the police would know where to target their resources.

The team then approached all churches with lead present, offering them a site security risk assessment. This involved working through a risk assessment form (designed by the team) to provide the church wardens with quick-win opportunities to improve the security of their church.

These are all low-cost solutions, as although roof alarms are the best deterrent, many churches don't have the funds to install and maintain one. Quick wins to help churches with their security include signage, lighting, locking up tools and bins, developing community networks and applying forensic markings.

To encourage church wardens to call the police, the team put together a crib sheet, guiding the church warden on what to say to the call handler when they call the police. This really empowered the church wardens and boosted their confidence when dealing with the police and reporting crime.

To support this initiative the team also put together a training guide for call handlers, helping them in turn speak the language of a church warden. Leicestershire Police also went one step further and created a 'heritage flag' within their reporting system. Using the heritage flag means that all heritage crimes can be easily tagged on the police recording system, thus helping the police to allocate their resources efficiently.

### Illegal metal detecting

In 2021 the Heritage Crime Team turned their attention to illegal metal detecting, commonly known as 'nighthawking'. The team put together a specialist working group to explore the problem and identify the key issues.

The group quickly identified that under-reporting was the main issue, with

landowners not realising the police were interested and wanting them to get in touch.

In Leicestershire there are over 300 metal detectorists registered with the Portable Antiques Scheme (registration is voluntary). To reach out to them and the landowners, the team took on the following tasks:

- encouraging metal detectorists to carry ID cards detailing a permission agreement with the landowner
- providing slides on how and when to call the police for when the Finds Liaison Officer and local archaeology groups give local community talks
- writing an article for the National Farmers Union newsletter and attending rural events
- including representatives from the metal-detecting organisations/councils in their heritage meetings to help bridge the communication gap
- planning this year to host a conference for metal detectorists, focusing on best practice and building relationships with the police

Nighthawking flyer by Leicestershire Police. Credit: Leicestershire Police



### Case study: Rutland Roman Villa

In 2021, a Roman villa of national importance was discovered in Rutland. The villa contained a series of exceptionally well-preserved mosaics and was featured on the TV programme *Digging for Britain*.

The University of Leicester and Historic England ran a summer excavation on the site in 2022, which prompted concern about the site's safety following all the publicity.

In an excellent example of partnership working, the University of Leicester, Historic England, the Heritage Crime Team, police and local volunteers pulled together to wrap the site in a Heritage Watch bubble. Thirty volunteers stepped forward to help protect the site. They conducted 17 security visits over three months and installed new fencing and signage round the site.

The excavation has since finished and the site returned to a grass field, and there were no security breaches on the site while the excavations were being carried out. The project was a huge success and really showcased volunteering at its best.

*Roman Rutland Villa mosaic. Credit: Historic England*

### How do I find out more about becoming a volunteer?

If you are interested in becoming a police support volunteer, visit your local force website. You will need to fill in an application form and go through a security vetting process to ensure you are suitable for the role. <https://www.leics.police.uk/>



### Jenny Kent

Jenny has over ten years' experience within the archaeology sector, specialising in maritime archaeology, and currently works for MSDS Marine. Jenny is a commercial diver and specialises in protecting both terrestrial and maritime heritage sites from heritage crime.

Jenny spent eight years working with Leicestershire Police and currently chairs their Heritage Crime Team. Jenny is on the committee for the Protected Wreck Association and the ClfA Heritage Crime Special Interest Group and is passionate about protecting our heritage.

