

# Safer places of Worship

## Assessing Crime Risk

The most important step in reducing the possibility of becoming a victim of crime is to be fully aware of the risks which includes an appreciation of the following factors:-

- **Similar offences and crime trends in the locality** - regular liaison with the community police officer will help you to be aware of crimes taking place;
- **Certain crimes are more prevalent at particular times of the year** - for instance, criminal damage is more frequent during school holidays;
- **Know the market value of your property** - e.g. old plain wooden chests which may be in an advanced state of decay often retain very high value as antiques, (note your insurance policy may only pay for the cost of the replacement of such items in modern materials);
- **The ease with which property may be stolen** - for instance, heavy bells properly hung in a tower are more difficult to steal than audio-visual equipment, even heavy safes can be removed if criminals are given ample time to work;
- **The vulnerability of security devices** - many older safes can be easily forced open in situ. Locks need to be substantial and are only as effective as the doors and frames to which they are attached.
- **The types of activities undertaken by thieves** - most will be prepared to search for keys, which are often 'hidden' in the building; avoid leaving keys in easy to find locations.
- **The vulnerability of items to criminal damage and arson** - the likelihood of children throwing stones at windows will, in many cases, depend on the immediate availability of suitable 'ammunition'; arson is more likely when combustible items are left lying about or when intruders find cans of fuel for lawnmowers, etc.

The above list is not exhaustive, and is intended to prompt further thought in relation to your own place of worship.

The most common crimes committed against buildings occupied as places of worship are; burglary (illegal entry with intent to steal or damage), theft (no illegal entry), criminal damage and arson. The type of property attacked in each case can vary enormously. Lead from roofs is always a favourite as is copper sheeting. Popular items inside include silver and brassware as well as furniture and electrical items such as vacuum cleaners and heaters. Outside the building gravestones and ornaments are regularly subjected to damage, sometimes at great distress to relatives.