Culture and conflict
Prof Peter Stone OBE, School of Arts and Cultures

Cultural heritage includes sites, museums, galleries, libraries and archives. Professor Stone has built up a body of work understanding the destruction of cultural heritage and cultural property during times of conflict. In particular, his work has focused on the consequences of war in Iraq and has published widely on the topic.

Professor Stone co-edited the book ‘The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq (Heritage Matters)’ (2008) which was described as ‘an extraordinary achievement that will stand as the definitive account of the desperate, avoidable cultural tragedy of Iraq for many years to come’ by The Times Higher Education. In its 28 chapters a wide range of contributors from across the world (including Iraqis) who were involved in the protection of cultural property in Iraq before, during and after the 2003 invasion, show through their accounts the ‘desperate, avoidable cultural tragedy of Iraq’. The research has provided a baseline of knowledge about what went wrong in Iraq, and about what the relationship between cultural heritage experts and, in particular, the military could be. It examines societies' attitudes towards the preservation of cultural and heritage resources and the growing political awareness of their importance. Professor Stone has now developed a four tier approach to cultural property protection (long term, immediate pre-deployment, during conflict and post conflict) which it is hoped will be taken up by military practice and the cultural heritage community (Stone 2013).

To date, this research has had a number of impacts by highlighting the importance of trying to protect cultural property in times of conflict for the benefit of communities as they rebuild their lives following conflict. Professor Stone has been invited to present his research at a number of UK & NATO armed forces symposia, including ‘Culture in Conflict’ UK Defence Academy in 2012 and the NATO Civilian/ Military Centre of Excellence (CCOE) in 2012. He has also been asked by NATO to develop a training module on cultural property protection for use with middle ranking officers.

Furthermore, Stone has influenced national policy. His work in developing understanding of the importance of protecting cultural property during times of conflict has played a role in informing the UK Government. In 2008 the Parliamentary Select Committee requested evidence from Professor Stone in their scrutiny of the Draft Cultural Property (Armed Conflict) Bill and in 2009 he was asked by the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) to draft evidence, on behalf of 13 cultural heritage organisations, to the Iraq Inquiry.

As the result of his work, Professor Stone was elected as Chair of the newly re-organised UK National Committee of the Blue Shield, as Secretary General of the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield and as UNESCO chair of cultural heritage.