



Your Bronze Plaque Park Fact Sheet No 7

Ageing of bronze plaques

When a bronze plaque is first made, a clear finish is applied over the surface creating a seal which protects the raw metal and stops the bronze reacting to oxygen in the environment. Over time this clear finish will slowly wear from the surface of the plaque as it is exposed to the elements, especially sunlight. There is no commercially viable finish that can withstand the sun's rays long term. As the finish breaks, air and moisture reach the metal and oxidation occurs and the plaque will begin to lose its gold shine.

What is oxidation?

Bronze itself is an alloy of primarily copper, zinc and tin. When copper is exposed to oxygen the process known as oxidation begins, which is essentially a corrosion of the metal. However, due to its unique composition, bronze will not continue to corrode away. Bronze has the additional element of tin that inhibits the oxidation process and confines it to the surface of the metal only. As a result, bronze forms a natural patina that will last forever and prevent further corrosion.

Bronze's unique composition makes it ideal for memorial plaques as it will virtually last forever with this patina or verdigris acting as a protective coating. No other memorial can boast this quality. Archaeologists are today discovering Greek and Roman bronze from the Mediterranean Sea, dating thousands of years and still in good and identifiable condition.

A plaque exhibiting advanced stages of patina can be elegant and attractive in its own right. Many people prefer this look as it resembles the great bronze artworks and sculptures seen in prominent public places.

How can I make my plaque look new again?

Due to bronze's property of forming its own layer of protective oxidation it can be reconditioned back to its original lustre by grinding off the patina. When bronze plaques are reconditioned they will look like a newly cast plaque and will have a fresh layer of clear finish to help the bronze retain its golden shine for years to come. Eventually, however, the plaque will begin to develop a patina again.

If you would like for your plaque to be reconditioned, please contact RPCV for more information

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How to care for your bronze plaque

Cleaning plaques is at the discretion of the family. If you wish to clean dirt from the plaque, we recommend plaques are washed with warm soapy water, rinsed, dried and then polished using a Diamond Shield polish. It is important to never use any abrasive materials to clean your plaque as scratches to the surface will damage the clear finish, speeding up the oxidation process. Only use a soft material such as a microfibre cloth to wipe the plaque surface and never rub harshly.

Plaque cleaner sold through RPCV should only be used to remove scaly mineral deposits if they appear on the plaque, this is not for regular plaque cleaning. Always follow the directions on the bottle.

Abrasive commercial cleaning products such as Silvo™, Brasso™, chrome polishes or bicarbonate of soda based cleaners are very abrasive and will likely cause damage to the surface of the plaque.

Using any cleaner which is not designed for use on bronze memorial plaques may cause damage and speed up the ageing process.