

# SLATE HOUSE SIGNS

## FIXING & MAINTENANCE GUIDE



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# FIXING & MAINTENANCE GUIDE FOR NATURAL SLATE HOUSE SIGNS

## INTRODUCTION

Engraved slabs of solid slate have been used for centuries for memorials and signs. Slate is a very strong, durable and maintenance free natural material ideally suited to external usage. Think about the millions of slate roofs around the world!

In the UK slate is naturally occurring and widely used in the south west of England, Wales and Cumbria. Here in Cornwall, slate is commonplace. In other parts of the country it may be considered a more unusual material.

We must stress that no specialist skill or knowledge is required to fix or maintain slate. If handled properly and fixed in accordance with this guide, your sign will more-or-less look after itself!

Please do not be overawed by this guide. It may seem long, but we have purposely tried to cover every situation we can think of and added in a number of tips along the way.

Of course, if you have any questions or need clarification on certain steps, please call us during normal working hours on 01840 212 373. We'll be pleased to offer any additional advice necessary.

## HANDLING TIPS

Slate is a very strong and durable material. However, like all stones it's also heavy and brittle. Do not drop or treat roughly.

The face of the slate can become scratched if handled badly. Do not place your sign face down, unless onto a suitably clean and ideally soft surface. Never leave tools, screws or other objects on the face of the sign as they can cause scratching.

We recommend leaving the sign in its delivery packaging until you're ready to fix it into place – the box and polystyrene will protect the sign.



## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

**Drill** – with a 7mm diameter masonry bit.

**Screwdriver** – when screw fixing. You'll need a flat bit and if you're using an electric screwdriver set it at its slowest speed.

**Spirit Level** – to ensure your sign is fixed level.

**Hammer/mallet** and **bradawl/masonry nail** – for marking the wall if you're using traditional fixing screws.

**Marker Pen, Chalk or Pencil** – to mark the hole positions on wall for hidden fixings.

**Safety Items** – for instance, safety goggles to be worn when drilling into masonry.

**An extra pair of hands** – with anything other than small number plates, assistance makes fixing easier, quicker and much safer. Larger signs can also be quite heavy... make life easier by sharing the load!



For standard screw fixing, suitably sized screws and wall plugs are enclosed in the box with your order. They are placed in a small plastic bag and sellotaped on top of the uppermost polystyrene packing sheet.

For hidden fixing, threaded steel bars and a strong epoxy resin based adhesive are provided instead of screws.

## PREPARATION

Make sure you have the items listed above and that they are close to hand.

The polystyrene packing sheets used to package your sign will sometimes leave a slight pattern on the surface of your sign. This is easily removed by gently buffing the face of the sign with a soft, clean cloth. Note; we do pack a sheet of white paper on the face of your sign to help prevent these polystyrene marks.

Ensure your hands are clean. Finger marks can be left on the face of the sign if you have been handling adhesives or oils. If you have sand, cement or anything gritty on your hands, these can cause slight abrasions whilst handling the sign.

## SCREW FIXING

- Present the sign to the wall in your preferred position.
- Use a spirit level to ensure the sign is horizontal.



- Mark the position of the fixing holes by inserting a bradawl or long masonry nail through each one and tapping gently with a hammer or mallet to leave a mark on the wall.



- Drill holes at each marked position using a 7mm diameter masonry bit. Ensure the holes are at least 30mm deep.



- Insert the supplied wall plugs into each hole and gently tap into place using your hammer or mallet.



- Position the sign back over the fixing holes and carefully screw into place.



- Do not over-tighten the screws. Each screw should be firmly in place, but not over-tight.
- Do not slip whilst screwing the sign into place... this runs the risk of putting a scratch across the face of the sign or worse still, causing an injury. Approach the job carefully and slowly – do not rush!

We supply with your order quality brass or stainless steel fixing screws known for external durability. Eventually though (depending upon the amount of weathering due to exposure) the screws will tarnish and change colour. When this happens, a stain which is difficult to remove can run down the face of the sign.

The easy solution is to replace the screws as soon as any sign of tarnishing is evident. Replacement screws should cost just a few pence from a builder's merchant or hardware/DIY shop.

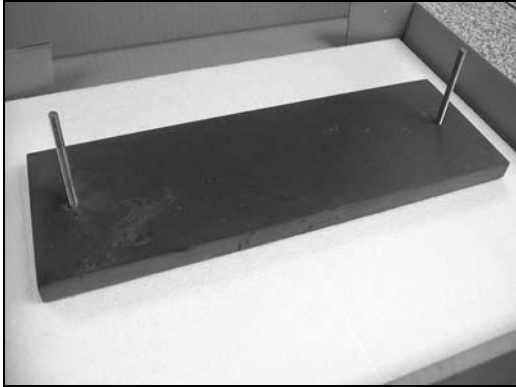
For fixing signs onto pebble dashed and/or uneven walls, please see "Additional Tips" at the end of this guide.

## HIDDEN FIXING

For “hidden fixings” holes are drilled into the back of the sign, which go two thirds of the way through the slate slab. Threaded stainless steel bars are provided along with a strong epoxy-resin based glue.

Note; the supplied glue will set rapidly - as quickly as 10 minutes in warm conditions. Please ensure you've read and understood each step in these fixing instructions before mixing glue and hardener!

- Carefully place the sign face down onto a clean surface. For added protection, lie the sign on something soft and clean, such as a towel or polystyrene sheet.
- Check that the holes and pins are the right size by inserting each pin into each hole. The holes are only slightly bigger than the pins – we do this on purpose so that the pins should sit as upright as possible.



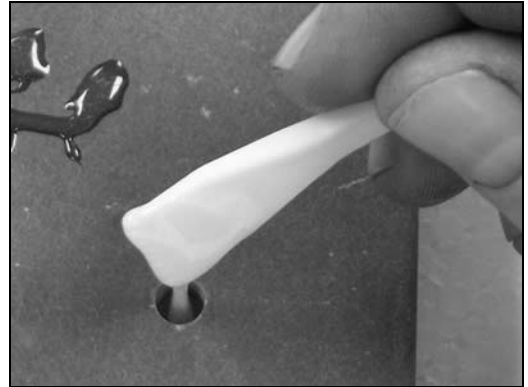
- If the pin seems very tight and doesn't easily go into the hole, you should twist the pin with your fingers. As the pins are threaded, this screwing motion will dig into the slate making the hole slightly bigger.



- Never over-tighten the pins or try to force them downwards as you could break through the face of the sign. The glue will be securely holding the pins in place.
- Mix a small quantity of the glue and hardener according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use a piece of wood or card (or even the back of the sign!) to mix the glue on.



- Remove the pins from the holes and carefully pour the glue mixture into the holes until each hole is almost filled.

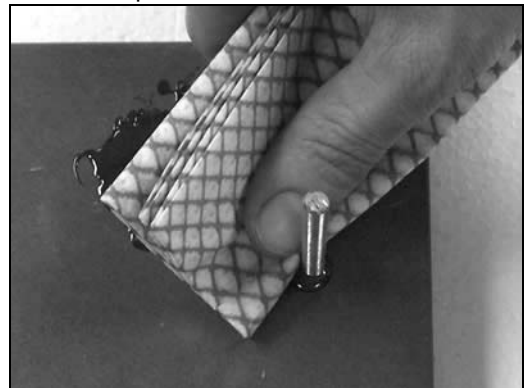


- Gently push the pins into place. If the pin is tight, or you can feel the pin bouncing back upwards due to an air bubble, twist the pin as if you're screwing it into place.

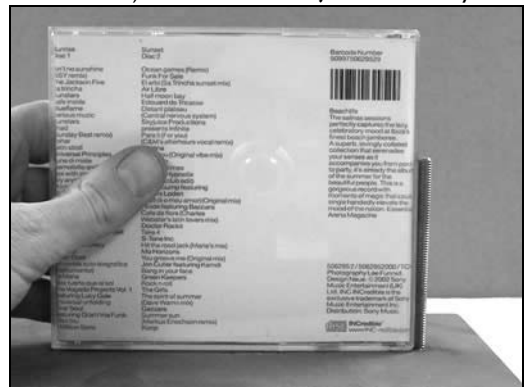


- If you can still feel the pin bouncing, remove it and re-insert with a twisting motion. Repeat until any air bubbles have been removed.

- Use a rag or kitchen towel to clean any excess glue from around each pin.



- Check that pin is standing straight, at 90 degrees to the back of the sign. We use cassette and CD cases (even matchboxes!) to check this. Adjust if necessary.



- Leave to set for at least 12 hours, ideally 24 hours.

## FIXING THE SIGN TO THE WALL

- Present the sign to the wall in your chosen position, pushing the pins against the wall.
- Use a spirit level to make sure the sign is horizontal.



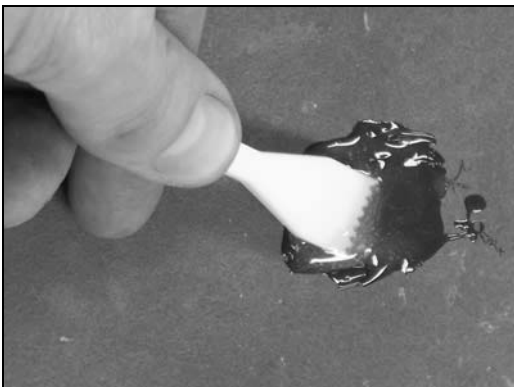
- Mark the position of the pins on the wall by drawing around each one with a marker pen, chalk or pencil.



- Drill holes at each position using a 7mm diameter masonry bit. Ensure the holes are at least 70mm deep (or the distance the pins protrude from the back of your sign).



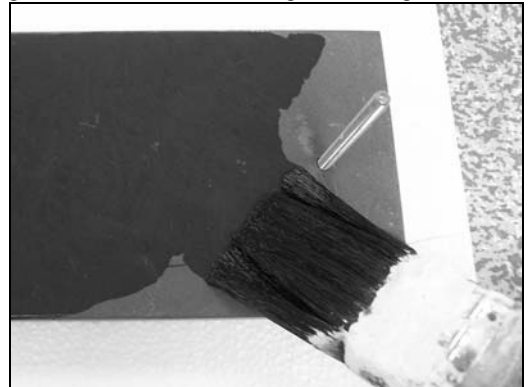
- Mix a small quantity of the glue and hardener according to the manufacturer's instructions.



- Carefully fill the screw holes with the glue mixture. A small wooden or plastic spatula (even a rigid piece of cardboard) is ideal for forcing the glue into the holes.



- If your wall is very flat and even, a neat cement slurry or PVA glue can be applied to the back of the slate sign for additional bonding strength. Please be very careful not to get this on the surface or edges of the sign.



- Slide the sign into place. The pins are long to prevent the sign from 'sagging' away from the wall when in position.



- You may wish to support the sign whilst the glue sets off. One or more wooden props wedged securely in the ground should be sufficient. Place an old blanket or other soft material between the wood and the sign to protect the face of the slate.



- Allow to set for at least 12 hours, ideally 24 hours.

## OTHER FIXING

### FITTING INTO AN ALCOVE

- The alcove should have a reasonably flat face and be at least 40mm in depth. If you want the face of the sign to be recessed, the alcove should be deeper. For example, if you want the sign recessed by 10mm, make the alcove at least 50mm deep.
- The alcove opening should be at least 10mm taller and wider than the sign, therefore allowing a 5mm gap all around.
- Fill the back of the alcove with fairly dry 3:1 sand and cement mortar mix. Remember to allow sufficient depth for the sign. Most signs are 20mm thick, but they can vary – please check your sign before filling the alcove.
- Place 5mm high support spacers (made from wood or plastic) at the bottom of the alcove to carry the weight of the sign whilst it sets off.
- For additional strength, a neat cement slurry or PVA glue can be applied to the back of the slate sign. Please be very careful not to get this on the surface of the sign.
- Push the sign firmly into place, ensuring it sits centrally in the alcove.
- The sign should be supported whilst it sets off. Wooden props wedged securely in the ground or battens screwed into the wall and crossing the alcove should be sufficient. It is important that you take suitable steps to protect the face of the sign when propping. Use an old blanket or similar material between any wood and the sign face.
- Leave for at least 24 hours.
- Remove any props and gently remove the support spacers below the sign.
- Grout the gap around the edge of the sign using reasonably dry 3:1 sand and cement mortar mix or any kind of tiling grout. This should be done very carefully to ensure your grouting material does not get onto the face of the sign.
- If at any point during this entire process, you get mortar, adhesive or grout on the face of the sign, clean it immediately using a damp sponge and warm soapy water. Any staining or soiling on the surface isn't permanent – but it's much easier to clean straight away rather than later.

### FIXING TO A GATE, FENCE BAR OR WOODEN PANEL

- If fixing to wood, do not use the supplied wall plugs.
- For strength and safety the screws we use are quite long, protruding around 30mm out of the back of the sign. Therefore, we suggest putting a batten of wood to the rear of the gate or wood panel and screwing through into the batten. This will prevent the screws from showing at the back (and therefore being dangerous) and also increase the strength of the gate or panel by 'sandwiching' it between the slate and the batten.

## IMPORTANT NOTE

We do not recommend fixing slate signs directly to a wall using only an adhesive.

Whilst there are very strong instant bonding glues available that may well hold the sign in place at first, the chances of later failure are high as slate signs are particularly heavy.

Slate is a strong but brittle material. If it should fall, your sign is almost certainly going to be damaged.

## MAINTENANCE

Your slate sign should last for many years without need of maintenance. An occasional cleaning with soapy water as and when the sign gets dirty is all that's needed.

Before despatching your slate sign we treat the face with a specialist oil-based product that makes the stone somewhat darker and adds a slight shine to the surface. This sealant will weather off over a period of time leaving the sign slightly lighter in colour and duller in appearance. If you're happy with the weathered look of the slate there is no need for further action as your sign will not be adversely affected in any way.

If you should decide to re-seal your sign in future years, please follow these steps:

- Prepare a 1:1 mixture of boiled linseed oil and white spirit. These items can be obtained from a builders merchant or hardware/DIY store. You'll need very little – a tiny amount goes a long way.
- Remove any dirt or dust by cleaning the sign with hot soapy water and a clean cloth. Ensure the sign is completely dry.
- Apply the linseed mixture using a soft, clean, lint-free cloth. Apply a small amount at a time. Dab a thumb print of the mixture onto the sign and spread as far as possible.
- Continue until you've covered the entire face of the slate.
- An improved finish will be achieved if you buff the sign before the oil mixture dries. You'll have to be quick though! Using a clean sponge (obtain from a garage or supermarket for a few pence) buff the sign with fast circular motions for fifteen to twenty seconds until the surface is completely dry to the touch. This is exactly the same principal as polishing shoes.

## ADDITIONAL TIPS

### FIXING ONTO A PEBBLE DASHED WALL

- It can be difficult to accurately drill a hole in a pebble dashed wall – the small round pebbles will cause your drill to "drift" when the drill bit first makes contact. The easiest solution is to carefully knock off the pebbles from the fixing positions before starting. Your sign will cover these bare areas.

### FIXING ONTO AN UNEVEN WALL

- When presenting the sign to the wall, consider moving it slightly until you find the most even spot. A few inches in any direction can make a big difference!
- The most important consideration is the positioning of the fixing points. These should be as tight to the wall as possible.
- A small gap between the sign and the wall at the fixing point can be 'filled' by putting a rubber washer over the screw, between the wall and the sign.

## **TROUBLE SHOOTING**

### **SCRATCHES ON THE SURFACE OF THE SIGN**

Apply a tiny quantity of oil-based sealant to the scratch and buff well. See the "Maintenance" section of this guide for more details on how to re-seal slate.

Scratches will be lightly coloured against the dark slate. Applying a sealant will darken the scratches, making them almost invisible to the naked eye.

Whilst the scratch hasn't been removed, from a short distance away your sign should look perfect again!

### **DAMAGED SIGN**

If your sign has been dropped, damaged or vandalised, we may be able to salvage it.

Large chips to the front edges can be resolved by adding a larger chamfer to the front edge and/or polishing the face down.

If paint has got onto the face, we can remove it and make the surface of the sign like new again. In most cases, we can even strip the paint out of the engraved letters and re-paint in the same, or another colour.

In the unfortunate event of serious damage occurring to your sign, please send us pictures of the damage and we will advise you how we can help.

## **ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS?**

If you should have any further questions, or need clarification of anything in this guide, please do contact us. We'll be pleased to assist further.

You can call us on 01840 212 373 during normal working hours.

## **ABOUT ATLANTIC SIGNS**

Atlantic Signs is a small Cornish company with just four employees. Every slate sign is crafted here, by us. We are not an agency!

Should you have any suggestions about how we can improve our products or service, please do let us know. Whilst we receive many compliments from customers every week, we want to improve still further. All comments from our customers are greatly valued.

If you are happy with your purchase and your sales experience with Atlantic Signs, please let other people know about us. As a small business we appreciate the many orders we receive from word of mouth and personal referrals. Thank you all.

## **DISCLAIMER**

Atlantic Signs assumes no liability resulting from errors or omissions in this guide, or from the use of the information contained herein.

## **AND FINALLY...**

Thanks to our Steve who simultaneously posed for and actually took all the photographs in this guide. We're sure you'll agree it must have been a tricky balancing act. The second picture on page three still puzzles us immensely.

Many thanks should also go to Annie and Jo for proof checking this guide – a task that proved to be both dull and surprisingly difficult!

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