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Margaret Thatcher did little for Grantham. Forget a statue

The former PM doesn't need a memorial. It's far better to honour those who stayed, worked and died in their home town



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Sculptor Neil Simmons with his statue of Margaret Thatcher. A man knocked its head off in 2002 in London's Guildhall Art Gallery. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Too little care is often taken over placing statues, over the veneration of a particular historic figure and of associations with their birthplace. It is hardly surprising to read that some people in the Lincolnshire town of Grantham are still looking for a place to put a two-tonne statue [of Margaret Thatcher](#) that has finally been repaired after its 2002 decapitation in a London art gallery. Other locals suggest that erecting it in Grantham would only be asking for trouble: the white marble surface seems to invite graffiti, and her self-assured gaze may lead people of a certain age to ask themselves why they didn't do more to stop her rise to power.

It's worth remembering that Grantham did not gain greatly from the Thatcher revolution: it is tucked away a little too far north. It did not benefit from her motorway building programme, the one that spurred on that individualist car culture she was so in favour of. It's highly questionable how much empathy she would have felt for those of her childhood friends who did not, like her, leave Lincolnshire before their twenties and then married into a class above their own. Thatcher, we shouldn't forget, never returned to live among her grammar school contemporaries.

There can be a temptation, if your town is small and hence the number of notables are rare, to clutch at building memorials for whoever was born there. When, in 2010, some of the residents of Denbigh in north Wales wanted to commemorate their most famous son, Henry Morton Stanley (the man who spoke the famous words:

"Dr Livingstone, I presume"), the Telegraph reported [similar difficulties in erecting a statue](#) because some feared the associations would have been more negative than positive. Henry had told his men that when it came to Africans they should "... fire on them as if they were killing birds". His statue in the Congo was torn down in 1971 and its hands cut off as a reminder of [what carnage his actions helped promote there](#).

The people of Grantham might be wise not to risk notoriety by allowing that statue of Margaret to become a target again for those who want her worst actions to be better remembered. Just as Henry Morton Stanley did not appear to feel much guilt over his actions, so too it has been claimed that "former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had ['psychopathic tendencies'](#) because she did not feel as much guilt over her actions as she ought ...". She was one of the few members of parliament to vote to support the restoration of birching in 1961.

Above all, a Thatcher statue in Grantham would go against the trend. We are slowly getting better at putting up plaques and statues in memory of life's victims and survivors, rather than in celebration of those who got to hold so much power over others. Jimmy Savile's ostentatious memorial in a Scarborough graveyard was [hurriedly removed](#) in October last year to protect other gravestones, most of which were smaller memorials to the people remembered only by their friends and families. The Savile inscription read: "It was good

while it lasted." All the statues of powerful people in one way or another mock those they held power over.

Margaret Hilda Thatcher will not be forgotten for a long time, with or without that statue. Many others deserve far more than her to be remembered and, mostly, they have no memorial. What is harder to commemorate are all the people who did not leave their home towns, but stayed and worked and died in them. [There is a great memorial in Yorkshire](#) dedicated to those children who died in a factory fire a long time ago and whose deaths inspired better factory regulation, and eventually led to an end to child labour. Perhaps Grantham could celebrate some people who stayed in the town and whose stories we can be inspired by, even if they were tragic.

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