

Guidance on acquiring new historic artefacts

From time to time your church or heritage site may be offered historic artefacts by gift, loan or sale, or sometimes through a bequest or when a church is closing. Taking on responsibility for caring for historic artefacts is a big commitment and should not be undertaken without careful consideration. This guidance sheet aims to help you make good, informed decisions for your church or heritage site when you are considering a new acquisition.

This forms part of a suite of guidance information for the Management of Historic Artefact Collections and is informed by the Heritage Committee's Collections Management Policy and Standing Orders 212 (11) and 936.

The four key heritage sites are all Methodist museums that are 'accredited', under the 'UK Standards Scheme for Museums'. As such they are all required to have a 'Collections Development Policy' to outline what they will and won't acquire. You may want to seek advice from them on how they deal with this.

Work through these questions with colleagues. Only when you are confident that you are the right place for the artefact you have been offered and you can look after it properly, should you say 'yes'.

Questions to consider

If you work through these questions (preferably in a small group) when considering an acquisition it will help you come to the best conclusion for your church/site and the object.

1. What are you going to use it for?

Can the object be used for interpretation or education work? Can you be sure it won't just sit in a cupboard? Is it of missional value to you?

Does the object have clear missional value? **YES / NO**

Is there a clear use for the object? **YES / NO**

2. How much information do you know about it? The provenance of an object- ie the story behind it, its previous owners and its previous use is very important. An object with no information is of very little value.

Do you have good background information about the object? **YES / NO**

3. Why should YOUR church or heritage site acquire it? Is there a direct connection to your site? YES / NO

4. Can you be sure that you will be acquiring it legally/ethically?

Is the source that it is coming from the legal owner of the artefact? **YES / NO**

5. Can you offer the security it needs?

Eg if it will need to be displayed in a case, will you have the resources to provide it? Are there any insurance implications that you need to take into account? **YES / NO**

6. What condition is it in? And can you care for it properly? Is it in very poor condition that will it need expensive conservation work in order to be preserved or used? Or is it an object that needs special conditions, such as low light levels, if it is very fragile (eg a textile)? **YES / NO**

7. Use the Guidance and Grid on Assessing Significance

Is the object(s) of either site, local or Connexional Significance? If you are acquiring an artefact of Connexional significance, you need to speak to the Heritage & Collections Officer and inform the Heritage Committee.

8. Is there a better home for it?

In the first instance, you should consider whether the object(s) fit best with the Collections Development Policies of one of the Methodist museums- contact them to discuss.

You should also consider local history museums (particularly if the artefact is assessed to be of local significance), other Methodist heritage sites, a Methodist School or the local studies collection (library).

It may be that you cannot recommend an alternative home for an artefact. This does not mean you should accept something does not fit with the mission or purpose of your site! Or that you cannot care for or use it.

If you do say yes...

1. Make sure that you have a written record of the gift/ purchase so that you have a paper trail to prove ownership/ record where it has come from. File this record away safely using the object(s) inventory number(s) as a reference.
2. Obtain appropriate corporate approval for the acquisition, typically through your Church Council or at a District level for artefacts of Connexional significance.
3. Create an **inventory** record for the new object(s). If they are of Connexional significance, this information should be passed on to the Methodist Heritage Officer to record in a central database.
4. Follow the **Guidance on Caring for your Historic Artefacts**.

Saying no thank you...

It can be hard to say no to a potential donor but it is unethical to say 'yes' to an artefact that cannot be cared for properly or will not have a use. That isn't fair on the church, the donor or the object. Although people may be disappointed if you explain your reasons they will hopefully understand your reasoning- they would be much more disappointed to come back in the future to find that their artefact has not been well cared for or cannot be located, this would be a betrayal of their trust in the Church. Thank them for their kind offer and make alternative suggestions if possible.

NB If you are offered a bequest, which you do not consider to have missional value or a potential use you, can also gracefully decline the offer, stating your reasons.

Finally - BEWARE LOANS!

Do not accept any artefacts on a loan basis unless it is for a very specific, short-term purpose (eg an exhibition). It can be very difficult to keep track of lenders on a long-term basis and your Church may end up with responsibility for an artefact it does not even own. Contact the Heritage & Collections Officer for further guidance in this area if required.