

## Assessing significance

(to be used with the Significance assessment grid)

This assessment grid has been devised to help people working with historic artefacts to assess their significance. This can help inform decisions to:

- acquire new artefacts
- dispose of artefacts
- prioritise resources to care for, manage and interpret artefacts.

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 grid draws on significance assessment work of:

***Renaissance East Midlands Significance Assessment Toolkit***

<http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/programmes/reviewing-significance/1196-reviewing-significance-20>

***UCL Collections Review Toolkit*** [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/our-work/best-practice/collections-review/CR\\_Toolkit\\_Final](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/our-work/best-practice/collections-review/CR_Toolkit_Final) and

Religious Objects Assessment Guide in "***Guidance on Ways of Dealings with Religious Objects***" published by Museum Catharijneconvent in the Netherlands <http://www.frh-europe.org/netherlands-guidelines-on-dealing-with-religious-objects/>

## How do we use it?

The 'Significance assessment grid' can be applied to either a single artefact or a collection of similar objects.

The significance of the artefact/collection can be considered in terms of the criteria in the four columns:

- Historical meaning and provenance
- Missional potential and exploitability
- Rarity and uniqueness
- Visual and sensory impact

You can then read the questions and values written in the boxes below to work out where your item(s) best fit. Not all the criteria will apply to all items and sometimes there will be discrepancies. It is not an exact science!

The aim of the exercise is to broadly determine whether artefacts are of:

- Connexional significance
- general significance to the Methodist community
- significance in terms of a particular Methodist site
- wider local (not necessarily only Methodist) significance.

There will be artefacts that don't fit completely into the grid, as this is ultimately a subjective exercise. Discuss the best fit for an artefact in the context of your organisation.

It is best to carry out the assessment work as part of a small group so you can discuss decisions along the way.

At times you may feel that you need to call on specialist advice - contact the Methodist Heritage Officer/Committee for assistance in the first instance.

If you feel that you have items of particular interest that warrant further research, you may want to complete a more thorough "Heritage Assessment Form" featured in the "*Religious Objects Assessment Guide*" it is on pages 60-63 of the guide and can be downloaded at:  
<http://www.frh-europe.org/netherlands-guidelines-on-dealing-with-religious-objects/>

### **What do we do with the information?**

The results of a significance assessment should be recorded in an artefact's inventory record.

On a small scale, significance assessment can inform a decision about whether resources should be prioritised to an object or collection or inform decisions about acquisition and disposal.

On a collection scale, significance assessment can give an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of a collection and inform future collections development decisions.

If artefacts are deemed to be of Connexional significance, you should contact the Heritage Officer in order that the Heritage Committee can be informed.

The 'Action matrix' also provided in the suite of Methodist Church guidance documents suggests what future use or deposit or disposal *might be* appropriate according to the outcomes of assessing significance.

Again, using this matrix (to identify what action might follow given a particular level of significance) is not a 'water-tight' process or one that can be done with any degree of objectivity by one person. Always work in a pair or preferably small group, record your decisions and decision-making process, and remember that the Church Council should approve and minute your ultimate actions, especially disposals, beforehand, so that in the future there is openness, broadly-held knowledge and collective responsibility. This is particularly important in the case of family donations, for example so that you can tell a descendent confidently what has happened to their ancestor's gift and why, or where their relative's memorial is now located and they are remembered.