

Disposal of Historic Artefacts

This guidance sheet covers the process of disposal that may occur following the decision to close a church or might be motivated by a desire to rationalise historic artefacts that may have accumulated over time in Church property and are being considered for disposal. The reasons for this maybe:

- they are no longer of (or never possessed) missional value
- they cannot be cared for appropriately
- they have no link to your chapel/heritage/collection.

This document 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 guidance draws on both the "Roadmap for Reusing and Deaccessioning Religious Objects" 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/> and the Museums Association Disposal Toolkit <http://www.museumsassociation.org/collections/disposal-toolkit-and-training>

Key Steps

Note that this process will take time if it is to be undertaken correctly, so try to factor this into any planning as much as possible.

1. Form a project team

Decision-making of this type should not be the responsibility of one person; however, well-meaning and helpful s/he may seem. Work at least in a pair and preferably as a Church Council / trustees' appointed small group.

Be clear about why you are undertaking this exercise – what is the motivation for the disposal? Consider who you need to consult with as part of this process. You may wish to inform the Methodist Heritage Committee and Officer about your plans, so they can offer advice and assistance.

2. Inventory Work

If you do not already have an inventory record for the artefacts you are considering for disposal, you need to create one now! It is very important you can recall confidently what you had and decisions about the objects afterwards, especially if the items were gifts to the church.

Listing of artefacts

- Issue each with a number, e.g., running number 1, 2, 3 etc will suffice – use tie on luggage tags to label the artefacts.

- Complete a table or spreadsheet with inventory information that should include:
 - the inventory number that you have given the artefact
 - the name of the artefact – e.g., 'chair', 'book'
 - a short description
 - its location
 - the date
 - the name of the person making the record.

Reconcile the inventory information.

- Use your inventory list to see if you have further information (eg letters, correspondence files) about the artefacts and where they came from (eg by whom they were given and or owned)
- Ensure that the artefacts are yours to dispose of – beware 'long-term/permanent loans'
- Check that the artefacts weren't acquired with external funding that had conditions attached.

3. Carry out a significance assessment of the artefacts, using the assessment grid and supporting guidance, and record the results of this on the inventory spreadsheet.

4. Share the results of your assessment with the Church Council. You may also want to advise and or seek advice from the District Archivist and Connexional Heritage Officer who will be able to make suggestions on the need for any further research etc.

5. Ensure that you have appropriate corporate approval for the disposal of your historic artefacts. This might be from your Church Council or through the Heritage Committee for artefacts of Connexional significance, which are the responsibility of the Methodist Council.

6. Have a communication plan ready so that you can explain to interested parties what is happening/ why it is happening/ how you are following official guidance.

7. Explore options for the future for your objects. These should include possible outlets: the Methodist museums¹, other Methodist heritage sites, local museums, Methodist schools, other churches in the circuit, district or further afield.

- Advertise through appropriate channels eg Methodist Recorder.

¹ Methodism's key heritage sites are all also fully accredited museums: Epworth Old Rectory; The New Room / John Wesley's Chapel, Bristol; John Wesley's House & Museum at Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London; Englesea Brook Chapel & Museum of Primitive Methodism,

- If sale or transfer to a public organisation is not possible you may also consider sale through an auction house or recycling eg through a charity shop.
- If disposal by gift, transfer or sale is not possible you may look at disposal by destruction (ie throwing away). If this is undertaken, please ensure that items are destroyed before they are put into a bin, skip or a tip so that they cannot be identified.

8. Ensure that records of decisions taken and photographs and associated information about disposed objects are kept with the chapel records. These should be passed to the circuit office and once no longer in use to the local record office with other chapel records for that circuit.

9. Consider creating a record of disposed items on mymethodisthistory.org.uk

NB NEED LEGAL GUIDANCE ON WHETHER CHURCHES ARE OBLIGED UNDER CHARITY LAW TO SEEK SALE OF ITEMS IN THE FIRST INSTANCE

IF MONEY IS RAISED FROM A SALE HOW SHOULD IT BE APPLIED?

ARE THERE CASE STUDIES WE CAN HIGHLIGHT HERE?