

Guidance & Grid for Assessing Significance

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

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.

Methodist Church Historic Artefact Significance Assessment & Corresponding Action Grid

	Historical meaning/ provenance	Missional potential/ exploitability	Rarity/ uniqueness	Visual and sensory impact
Connexional significance	<p>Of Connexional importance- making a fundamental and long term contribution to intellectual thought or the study of Methodism, and integral to the Church's collections eg. through its iconic status or outstanding historical/cultural value</p> <p>Did it contribute to the changing course of Methodist history?</p> <p>Is it associated with a particular person, family group, event, place or activity of Connexional significance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered a 'star' object and a (potential) focal point of interpretation. • High missional value • Deemed 'iconic' within the Church • Strongly identified in the public's mind with the Methodist Church on a Connexional level • Regularly used in public events or teaching • Stimulates a strong personal/ associative response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it one of a kind, unique or rare? • Is it a particularly fine example of its type? • Does it have distinguishing features? • Is it a typical/characteristic example of its type? • Is it of a quality, class or type rarely on public view? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it an excellent example of a style, design, artistic movement or iconography? • Does it show outstanding artistic design, innovation or technical accomplishment? • Has it, or objects of its type, been used as a source or inspiration by other artists/ designers/makers?
Community Significance	<p>Of general significance to the wider Methodist Community</p> <p>Has good provenance, with clear background information.</p>	Of some missional value	Commonplace within the Methodist community	Is it a good example- in good, stable condition, needing no specialist conservation work?
Local significance	<p>Of wider local (not necessarily Methodist) importance.</p> <p>Does it embody or symbolise beliefs, ideas or customs that are important to the local community?</p> <p>Is it linked to an event, person, place, industry or activity of local, not necessarily Methodist significance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct missional value • Could be a useful support object for interpretation in terms of 'local context' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it one of the only or best examples held locally? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it a good or outstanding example within local collections? • Do its form, colour, materials or imagery have a locally significant symbolic meaning?
Site significance	Of clear Methodist site specific importance, demonstrating a direct connection to a historical event, person, place or theme linked to your specific site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can it contribute to the wider understanding and mission of your site? • Does it help to interpret specific aspects of your site? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it one of the only or best examples held within your site? • Is it seen as iconic within the context of your site? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do its form, colour, materials or imagery have a locally significant symbolic meaning to your Methodist site?

	Historical meaning/ provenance	Missional potential/ exploitability	Rarity/ uniqueness	Visual and sensory impact
Connexional significance	CONNEXIONALLY SIGNIFICANT			
Community significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact and discuss with the Methodist Heritage Officer when Connexional significance is established. • Consider whether your site or one of the Accredited Methodist museums is the best repository for this artefact • Follow Guidance on Acquiring New Historic Artefacts • Ensure that you have approval for any acquisition • Ensure that the Heritage Committee is informed of the presence of this artefact in your collection • Follow Guidance on Caring for your Historic Artefacts 			
Local significance	SIGNIFICANT WITHIN THE WIDER METHODIST COMMUNITY			
Site significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only consider acquiring/retaining if its missional value is strong, it comes with good provenance, there are not other examples available to you and it is in good condition with no conservation/resource issues • As appropriate follow Guidance on Acquiring New Historic Artefacts / Guidance on Disposal of Historic Artefacts as appropriate 			
Local significance	PRIMARILY OF LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE			
Site significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority should be to find an appropriate local repository for artefacts in this category • Would only be acquired/ retained by a Methodist site under exceptional circumstances • Follow Guidance on Acquiring New Historic Artefacts / Guidance on Disposal of Historic Artefacts as appropriate 			
Site significance	SIGNIFICANT TO A SPECIFIC METHODIST SITE			
Site significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire/retain if site significance and strong missional value is established. • Follow Guidance on Acquiring New Historic Artefacts • Ensure you have approval for any acquisition • Follow Guidance on Caring for your Historic Artefacts 			