

Methodist Heritage Committee: Heritage 3.0 (Heritage Strategy 2019-2024)

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Action Required	For approval
Resolution	40/1. The Council endorses the strategy.
Methodist Council objective that this paper supports	3. Resources for the Church: the use of God's good gifts 6. Social holiness 7. Evangelism

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To present the new strategy for the work of the Heritage Committee 2019-2024
Main Points	The role of heritage in the Church's response to Our Calling
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	MC/14/40 Report of the Methodist Heritage Committee proposing strategic direction 2014-2019, MC/10/56 Report of the Methodist Heritage Committee providing a theological rationale for Methodist Heritage
Consultations	Trustees, managers/curators of heritage sites; District/Circuit Archivists; Methodist Heritage network; Chairs of Listed Buildings Advisory Committee and Property Development Committee; connexional officers.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism.
- 1.2 This document sets out the strategic intentions of the Methodist Heritage Committee in its response to reaffirming *Our Calling* for connexional years 2019-2024. It seeks to summarise the approach the Committee will take to its aims and responsibilities as laid out in Standing Order 337. It is not a detailed plan of activities, but will provide a framework for the development of such plans for the five year period.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 When the Heritage Committee was established in 2008, it initially focused on stabilising the financial position of four named heritage sites¹ and, by the provision of annual funds for a curator/manager, professionalising their delivery for mission. This was first obtained through connexional grants between 2008 and 2011, until securing commitment from the 2014 Conference to provide 'core funding' to the sites from the Connexional Priority Fund.
- 2.2 The remit of the Committee has evolved to take on responsibility for oversight and advising on all the Methodist Church's historic assets, including archives and artefacts, and has widened the expertise of the membership to support properly the conservation and promotion of these valuable mission resources. The Committee meets twice a year and reports annually to the Methodist Council.
- 2.3 Heritage 2.0, the current five year Development Strategy, comes to an end in 2019. This has consolidated the successes of the first Development Strategy, and has developed many new areas of work. During this time there have been significant changes in the various areas of the Committee's responsibilities, as well as in the wider life of the Church.

3.0 Current context

- 3.1 Methodist Heritage as a 'brand' and network is now better known in the life of the Connexion. The biannual newsletter (Methodist Heritage News) and guide to places of interest (Methodist Heritage Handbook) are more widely recognised. Methodist Heritage has a visible presence at the Conference, holds regular public events and is linked into the wider professional heritage sector.
- 3.2 The work of the Committee, its subgroup the Archives and Records Advisory Group (ARAG) and its two Liaison Officers (for Methodist Archives and Historic Objects respectively) have become a valued resource through the provision of a range of expert advice and specific projects. Examples include disposal of the Wesley College Bristol collection (largely to Methodist museums); advising on retention schedules for records and compliance with GDPR; and the development of Service Level Agreements with the two university libraries holding the two connexional archive collections.
- 3.3 The four main heritage sites differ significantly from one another in terms of governance, constitutional status and scale of operation. Their overall 'offer' has changed dramatically since 2008.

¹ Epworth Old Rectory; Wesley's Chapel & Museum of Methodism, London; the New Room, Bristol; Englesea Brook Chapel & Museum

Successful fundraising in some of the sites has led to major capital improvements and additional staff capacity. Not all sites are at the same stage; New Room Bristol has opened a £4.5m new museum and visitor facilities, whereas Epworth Old Rectory has not yet been as successful in securing external funding, although there have been substantial changes to its governance. Whatever disparity exists between the sites, this is not to diminish the scale of the “distance travelled” by all over the last decade.

- 3.4 Many local churches have sought to use their heritage more actively since 2014, such as Wesley Memorial Oxford, Mount Zion (Calderdale) and Tolpuddle, among many others. Such sites form a ‘second tier’ identified as such in previous strategies and reports. Precedents have been set of connexional grants being used to develop local capacity to use heritage for mission. Further work is underway on the criteria, process and implications of recognition as a new heritage site (outside the four main sites).
- 3.5 The success of the Methodist Heritage ‘brand’ has increased local expectations and the demand for support and resources, however, this has sometimes resulted in a perception that it is separate from other related areas of work. Heritage is often seen as a discrete specialism, a concern of its own. While the Heritage Committee was set up to ‘bring into one body’ the Church’s responsibility for heritage, Listed Buildings and Property Development fall under two additional separate Committees. This has reinforced the perception of ‘heritage’ as a separate entity.
- 3.6 The potential breadth of application of ‘heritage as a tool for mission’ in the local church is still not widely understood across the Connexion. The immediate association of heritage with certain places, together with the discourse of ‘significance’, has given rise to a perception that only those places ‘have’ heritage.
- 3.7 The emphasis on individual places has perhaps also led to a circumvention of usual connexional communication channels of church, circuit and district. Involvement with the Heritage Committee or Officer has frequently been direct to a local church.

4.0 Heritage definitions

- 4.1 Methodist Heritage has been defined as ‘churches... buildings and historically important locations and collections (including archives and artefacts) associated with the historic background and origins of the Methodist Church. It also includes ‘intangibles’ such as doctrines, and traditions’². These ‘intangibles’ are often overlooked, but comprise the distinctive cultural, moral and social influence of Methodism on society, which is far greater than any one building. Heritage contains all that Methodism has brought to the present that it wishes to pass on to the future.
- 4.2 This broad definition of heritage acknowledges that it is constructed from a vast range of material, and as such is open to selection, interpretation and generalisation. Yet this flexibility enables it to be a dynamic tool for public engagement; rather than presenting a monolith, it invites discussion, participation and reflection. It is not simply a case of passing something on, but drawing out the stories that will inspire, provoke, enlighten, and above all, engage, people inside and outside the Church.
- 4.3 This leads to a great diversity of stories. Some of these have not been explored in previous years, such as the contribution of migrant communities to British Methodism throughout its history. While some of the regionally distinctive stories, such as Methodism in Cornwall, have received focus, others have had less specific recognition, such as Methodism in the North East. Similarly, while the Primitive Methodists and (to a lesser extent) the Bible Christians are widely celebrated, the stories of the

² Job description, Methodist Heritage Officer

smaller Methodist denominations, such as the New Connexion and the United Methodist Free Church, are easily overshadowed.

- 4.3 Part of the legacy of Methodist heritage is continual evolution in response to contextual change. Drawing out the relevance to today's issues from the story of Methodism makes heritage a powerful tool for contemporary mission. It is not veneration of the past, or hagiography of heroes, but by interrogating the past and learning from our story that we equip the Church for its future.

5.0 Heritage and *Our Calling*

- 5.1 The relevance of heritage to *Our Calling* was expounded in a report to the Conference as early as 2010³. Previous strategies and reports have always emphasised heritage as a tool for mission. The central aim of a new Heritage Strategy must be to embed this idea more widely across the Church by providing tangible demonstrations of what it means. We need to show how we can use the richness of heritage to resource the Church in worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism. We need to show that these gospel imperatives are themselves traceable within the heritage of Methodism.
- 5.2 This tangible demonstration can only be achieved in close collaboration within the newly reconfigured connexional structures around evangelism, learning, and the management of property, where so many of the tangible aspects of heritage are at stake.
- 5.3 Collaboration with wider partners, beyond the Church, is also essential. This is not just within the wider heritage sector or academia; many aspects of built Methodist Heritage are owned by other organisations, and the 'intangible' stories are shared with other movements, such as trade unions. For example, Tolpuddle draws many thousands of people to its annual festival and march each year – this heritage provides a unique opportunity outside the church to proclaim gospel values and relevance to contemporary concerns.

6.0 Strategic priorities

- 6.1 The overarching aim for the Heritage Strategy is to demonstrate the active role of heritage in the Church's response to *Our Calling*. The Heritage Committee and connexional officers will do this by collaborating with the four main heritage sites, across the Connexion and with wider partners.
- 6.2 **Priority 1: Develop the sustainability of the four main heritage sites to flourish as flagships for delivery of heritage as mission and to consolidate the 'distance travelled' mentioned above.**

Rationale: Ongoing sustainability of the four main sites and their collections, as recognised showcases, remains a concern for the next stage of the Heritage Strategy. The system for monitoring and review of the connexional funding has changed since 2014, as the basis on which the funding is given has changed. Monitoring now takes place through existing Connexional Grants processes, with reports shared with the Heritage Committee. The four sites have trustee representatives on the Committee. As the Connexional Grants system undergoes review, we anticipate further developments on the process of reporting in 2019-2024.

- 6.3 **Priority 2: As a strategy for evangelism and growth emerges, to work with colleagues in the new team, our heritage sites and through district networks to provide and facilitate practical examples⁴ of heritage being used as a tool for mission in local churches.**

³ Conference Agenda 2010, Methodist Heritage Committee Report
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-31-heritage-160211.pdf>

⁴ Practical examples include use of heritage engagement in mission plans, worship materials using heritage themes and resources for the identification and telling of local stories.

Rationale: The Church has made significant investment in leadership of evangelism, apologetics and engagement, introducing new roles within the Connexional Team. Heritage provides one of the most accessible platforms for active and creative engagement with the gospel, as seen in our heritage sites, but also through sharing stories of the people called Methodist in every place. These voices and stories are made tangible through the actions of individuals and communities, and the buildings, objects and records left behind. The heritage of Methodist mission shows how it continually responded to its context.

6.4 Priority 3: As new systems for the care and management of property emerge, to work with colleagues in Conservation and Property Development to incorporate active engagement with heritage into new processes.

Rationale: Property includes land, buildings and the collections of objects they contain, as well as its associated records. Advice about care for, or disposal of, all such property is frequently sought of connexional officers. Particularly for historic or listed churches, the processes of closure and disposal often present a mismatch between local expectations of Methodist Heritage interest and influence and any real mechanism or capacity to respond constructively. Examples of this proliferate across the Connexion; Newbiggin, High House, and a host of sites in Cornwall are just some of the most high profile recent cases.

The Connexional Property Strategy places emphasis on mission plans and improved processes for purchases and disposal. The Listed Buildings Advisory Committee is focused on its statutory function of ensuring appropriate adaptation of listed buildings. These provide a clear meeting point for the new heritage strategy. The use of heritage is not purely concerned with conservation and listing, but in the identification of good opportunities for telling the story of Methodism in local communities through our buildings, our archives and our objects.

6.5 Priority 4: Work with colleagues, the heritage sites and academic partners to gather and share good practice for the wider Church in talking and learning about the Methodist story.

Rationale: The heritage sites have expertise in working with schools, visitors and community groups from outside the Church to explain the story of Methodism and its relevance today. The Service Level Agreements with the two university libraries (John Rylands and SOAS) for the care of the connexional archive collections necessitate a close relationship between Methodist Heritage and academic research as we seek to make our resources available, visible and attractive for research at every level of interest. These archive collections, and those of the heritage sites, attract a vast range of research interests which brings many opportunities to raise the profile of the Church, draw new audiences and create wider engagement. For the connexional training institutions (The Queen's Foundation and Cliff College), enabling students to tell our story is a key contribution to ministry.

7.0 Ways of working

7.1 The Heritage Officer is the main resource for coordination of the strategy's implementation. The Heritage Committee provides some direct involvement, and advocacy within other forums, but its predominant role is oversight. It will take the following steps to ensure effective implementation:

- Develop an action plan for each year of the strategy, aligned with Conference themes (eg Year of Testimony) and Council objectives
- Form a strategy implementation group to meet twice a year in between Committee meetings, to review progress and provide closer oversight
- Any events or new areas of work which require Connexional support to be approved by implementation group to ensure alignment with strategy, determine adequate resources and appropriate project management measures

- Form time-limited task groups of Committee members for given work areas, to which non-Committee members could be invited
- Develop appropriate partnerships outside the Church
- Develop a protocol for working with local churches within district structures

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 Methodist Heritage has undergone a period of rapid development into a 'brand' which has increasing resonance within the Methodist Church and beyond. This next phase of the Heritage Strategy is offered to the Connexion in response to the reaffirmation of Our Calling.

'As God is one, so the work of God is uniform in all ages. May we not then conceive how he will work on the souls of men in times to come by considering how he does work now? And how he has wrought in times past?'

John Wesley, *The General Spread of the Gospel*

*****RESOLUTION**

40/1. The Council endorses the strategy.