



# A BRIEF GUIDE TO CONTESTED HERITAGE IN CATHEDRALS AND CHURCHES

## Introduction

This document provides a brief introduction to the issues raised by items of contested heritage in the Church of England's cathedral and church buildings, and possible approaches to resolving such issues. A longer guidance document containing a more thorough discussion of these issues is also available, which we would recommend to any church or cathedral considering taking action in relation to contested heritage in their building or churchyard, but we hope that this short guide will be a helpful starting point for those considering this topic for the first time.

Our guidance does not attempt to address every type of contested heritage in church buildings: it focusses on the issue of the memorialisation in tangible form of people or events connected with racism and slavery. It is hoped, however, that it will establish a methodology with which other forms of contested heritage may also be addressed.

Our guidance recognises the distinctiveness of contested heritage in a church context. This work supports the mission of the Church by helping churches and cathedrals to be places of welcome and solace for all people. At its heart is the fourth Mark of Mission, which enjoins everyone in the Anglican Communion to strive **To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.**

The purpose of our guidance is to provide a practical framework for addressing issues of contested heritage in relation to specific historic objects. This is not about judging people in the past by the standards of the present, but about how items of contested heritage, and wider issues of under-representation, affect our ability to be a Church for all in the 21st century.

*This guidance is issued by the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England pursuant to its powers under section 3(3)(a) of the Care of Cathedrals Measure 2011, and by the Church Buildings Council pursuant to its powers under section 55 (1)(d) of the Dioceses, Mission and Pastoral Measure 2007. As it is statutory guidance, it must be considered with great care. The standards of good practice set out in the guidance should not be departed from unless the departure is justified by reasons that are spelled out clearly, logically and convincingly. © Archbishops' Council May 2021.*

## Framework for addressing contested heritage

This framework sets out key principles, processes and considerations to help church and cathedral communities approach decision-making and discussions around contested heritage, with a clear understanding of all possible outcomes within the statutory legal processes of the Ecclesiastical Exemption. The framework incorporates heritage, liturgical, theological, community and missional considerations.

The framework is designed to enable churches and cathedrals to assess how, and to what extent, objects impact on their ability to undertake missional, pastoral and liturgical activities, evidence of which would need to be demonstrated in order to obtain permission to alter or remove an object under the Faculty Jurisdiction or Care of Cathedrals Measure. Working through this framework is not an alternative to or substitute for the formal process of obtaining permission under the Faculty Jurisdiction or the Care of Cathedrals Measure. Advice on permissions needed can be found in the relevant sections of the framework.

The framework can be used to explore different options, enabling them to be considered with a representative group of experts and interested parties before a solution is arrived at and, if necessary, permission applied for changes proposed. A flowchart setting out the stages of the framework is included below.

The framework is presented as a questionnaire which, when completed, will serve as a record of a process towards reaching a proposal for action. For the process to be valid, it should be a collective activity in which the church community and other interested parties can participate and exchange views. Consultation, crucially with the communities most affected, is key.

The information gained from the questions set out below could form the basis of statements of significance and needs for a formal application.

It will work best if objects are considered holistically—for example a donated item of furniture and the plaque commemorating the donation. For burial markers of all kinds, any proposal for change will need to consider the impact on the burial itself. It is here assumed that burials will remain in situ and that a burial currently marked should continue to be marked in some way.

The word ‘object’ is used, though there may be cases where the item in question is a building (or part of one).

### Stage I: Assess the object

a) What is the object?

b) What is the object’s significance? First, which of the following best describes it?

- The object marks a burial
- The object commemorates one or more individuals, or an event
- The object marks a gift or donation to the church or the community
- The object itself is a gift or donation or is the result of one (whether or not it is identified as such)

Now describe its significance in more detail. The following questions may help you to do so.

- What evidence does it provide about the past (inscriptions etc.)? How and by whom was it made? Was it made for the purpose it has now? Was it erected at the time of the person’s death or burial, or much later? Is it an object to a person’s memory, or a gift from them to the parish or cathedral? Has it been changed in any way? Is it unique?
- What is its historical interest?
- What is its aesthetic or artistic interest?
- What is its interest to the church, the local community, and more widely? Does it have a different resonance for different groups of people? Have they been consulted?
- If it relates to a specific individual or individuals, what is its significance for living family members now? Have they been consulted?

## Stage 2: Assess the need for change

- a) What makes the object problematic or contested today? For example, this might be because of the known actions of an individual commemorated, or because the money for a donation was derived from the slave trade or from the labour of enslaved people. It is important to be precise. There may be a need to do some research. There may be special cases such as objects obtained illegally, under duress, by force or in an act of war, such as trophies, or items that were themselves instruments of oppression, such as weaponry. However, these may be unusual in a church context.
- b) How does the presence and/or presentation of the object affect the ability of the church to be a place open to all as a centre of local worship and mission and/or complementary uses such as charitable works, community activities, commercial activity, or pilgrimage?
- c) How does the object refer or respond to its problematic nature or contested origin?
  - It ignores or is silent about it; there is nothing to tell you about it
  - It deliberately hides it
  - It refers to it in a euphemistic or evasive way
  - It refers to it without judgment
  - It celebrates it
  - It refers to its original and condemns or disparages it, or indicates penitence

If the answer to this is not clear, say so.

## Stage 3: Consider the options for change

Options for change are presented in the second flowchart below, in ascending order of intervention. In broad terms, the greater the extent of intervention, the greater the impact on the significance of the object, and thus the more compelling the justification that will be required for the works to be approved under Faculty or the Care of Cathedrals Measure. Further discussion of each option is given in our longer Contested Heritage guidance.

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of each option in terms of its impact on the significance of the object; how well it addresses the effect of the object on the mission of the church or cathedral; and the wider opportunities and/or threats that each option presents to the mission of the church or cathedral.

For the options to be taken forward, they need to be *appropriate*, in the sense that they address the relevant concern, even if they cannot be said to be *adequate* or *commensurate*. It is doubtful that any of the options will serve as redress, but an acknowledgement—however small and disproportionate to the harm—may nevertheless make a powerful statement and provide an important means of education. This might be particularly relevant where the object marks a donation or endowment e.g. to the church itself or a parish charity or school and where it is not feasible or practical to make any meaningful intervention otherwise.

## Stage 4: Seek the relevant permissions for your preferred option(s)

More information on the permissions for parishes can be found [here](#).

For cathedrals, guidance on making applications under the Care of Cathedrals Measure 2011 can be found [here](#).

## Stage 5: Record and communicate your decisions

It is important that your decision-making processes are open, transparent and clearly recorded, to ensure that you can communicate effectively both the decisions themselves and how they were reached.

Consider carefully how you will convey and explain your proposals to others. This may be in meeting minutes, in a parish or cathedral newsletter, on your website, in meetings with those interested in the decisions, or in the media.

All changes to the objects in a church must be recorded in the church terrier and log book; all changes to objects in the stewardship of a cathedral must be recorded on its inventory.

## Process checklist

<b>Stage 1: Assess the object</b>			
a) What is the object?			
b) What is the object's significance?			
<b>Stage 2: Assess the need for change</b>			
a) What makes the object contested today?			
b) How does this affect the mission of the church/ cathedral today?			
c) How does the object refer or respond to what makes it contested?			
<b>Stage 3: Consider the options for change</b>			
a) No action			
b) No change			
c) Interpretation / explanation	Check permissions needed	A number of these options may be possible, e.g. interpretation and addition	
d) Addition			
e) Non-permanent alteration			
f) Relocation within the building			
g) Relocation to storage			
h) Relocation on loan			
i) Relocation by disposal			
j) Permanent alteration			
k) Destruction			
<b>Stage 4: Seek relevant permissions</b>			
<b>Stage 5: Record and communicate decisions</b>			

## Options matrix

The options matrix on the following two pages is intended to assist parishes and cathedrals considering the possible options for addressing an object of contested heritage.

Not every option presents the same strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats. We have suggested what we think are the potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, to the mission of the church or cathedral in question and to the object itself, that may be posed by each option.

Where we have identified a strength, weakness, opportunity or threat that may be presented by an option we have highlighted it in blue. You may find that, because of your individual circumstances, different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are presented by the various options. In any case, these are only *potential* outcomes—whether or not they come to pass will depend entirely upon how the process of research, consultation, decision making and implementation is handled.

Our aim in providing this matrix has been to help you compare your options, to avoid pitfalls and to seize opportunities. It is intended to aid qualitative analysis of each option, and not to be used quantitatively (i.e. it shouldn't simply be a matter of counting boxes). The preferable option should always be the one that succeeds in addressing the problematic nature of the object or its negative associations whilst causing as little harm as possible to the significance of the object and its physical context.





[illegible]

Options for change											
	No action	No change	Interpretation / explanation	Addition	Non-permanent alteration	Relocation within building	Relocation to storage	Relocation on loan	Relocation by disposal	Permanent alteration	Destruction
For mission											
	New opportunities for outreach / strengthening relationships with and between communities										
	New installations to address under-representation of communities / histories										
For the object											
To mission											
	Alienation of those seeking major change, perpetuating institutional racism within the Church										
	Parish or cathedral is focus of protest										
	Consultation fails to produce consensus and reveals / entrenches community conflict										
	Poor implementation of option could exacerbate conflict										
	Perception that issues have been hidden rather than directly addressed										
To the object											
	Object is focus of protest and/or vandalism										
Potential opportunities											
Potential threats											