

# CONTESTED HERITAGE IN CATHEDRALS AND CHURCHES



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# CONTESTED HERITAGE IN CATHEDRALS AND CHURCHES

THE CHURCH BUILDINGS COUNCIL AND THE  
CATHEDRALS FABRIC COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

2021



Cover: **Manchester Cathedral**  
Opposite: **St Barnabas, Dalston**

## **Imprint**

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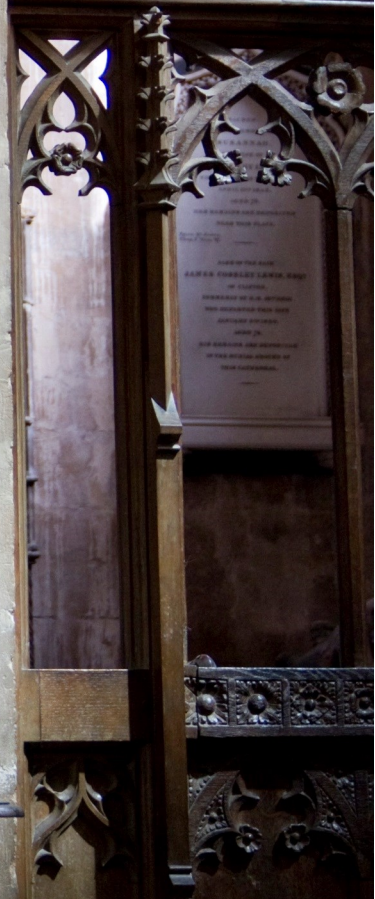
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# INTRODUCTION

This guidance addresses issues of contested heritage in the Church of England's cathedral and church buildings, their settings and their historic interiors.

It is written primarily for parishes and cathedral chapters who need to address their contested heritage, and for the advisory and decision-making committees and individuals that support them within the Church and in the heritage sector. This is a complex subject that requires a thorough discussion of the issues and this guidance is necessarily long. A shorter guide, intended as an introduction for those considering this subject for the first time, is available on our [website](#).

The 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 may establish a methodology with which other forms of contested heritage in our cathedral and church buildings 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 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 transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.**

The purpose of the guidance is to provide a practical framework for addressing issues of contested heritage in relation to specific historic objects in a church or cathedral context. The passions around this—on all sides—mean that there needs to be open dialogue. Our aim has been to find ways of mediating discussion that will help churches and cathedrals and their wider communities to develop solutions that will ultimately tackle the issues behind the feelings that contentious memorials evoke. It is important to remember that 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The guidance sets out principles, processes and options

for those addressing contested heritage to consider. It begins by discussing the context and underlying philosophy that have shaped our development of this framework. It recognises that under-represented histories can be difficult for parishes and cathedrals to uncover, and it emphasises the importance of undertaking robust, inclusive research to understand as much as possible about the heritage in question. Research and discussions of contested heritage may involve facing uncomfortable truths, in both the past and the present, and our framework suggests how productive and respectful discussions on individual cases might be achieved. Each case needs to be considered individually, and the purpose of the framework is to aid rather than to pre-empt the decision-making process: it neither insists upon nor rules out any particular course of action as the result of such conversations.

The type of heritage primarily focussed on in this document is memorials. We recognise that guidance may also be needed on other types of heritage, including buildings or parts of buildings erected using profits from the slave trade and colonial exploitation, and materials in books, manuscripts and archival documents held in cathedral and church libraries and archives that relate to contested heritage and could be used to increase understanding of under-represented histories. However, these categories present distinct issues that are not covered in this guidance, and which we hope will be areas for future consideration.

Feedback on earlier versions of this framework was sought from key stakeholders in the Church of England and the heritage sector including Archdeacons, the Cathedral Architects Association (CAA), cathedral Deans & Administrators, cathedral Fabric Advisory Committees (FACs), the Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists (CIFA), the Church Monuments Society, the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC), Diocesan CMEACs, Diocesan Advisory Committees (DACs), the Ecclesiastical Architects & Surveyors Association (EASA), the Ecclesiastical Judges Association, the Ecclesiological Society, the Georgian Group, Historic England, the Institute of Conservation (Icon), Revd Professor Keith McGee, the Society of Church Archaeology, the Society for Protection of

Ancient Buildings (SPAB), the Twentieth Century Society (C20), and the Victorian Society.

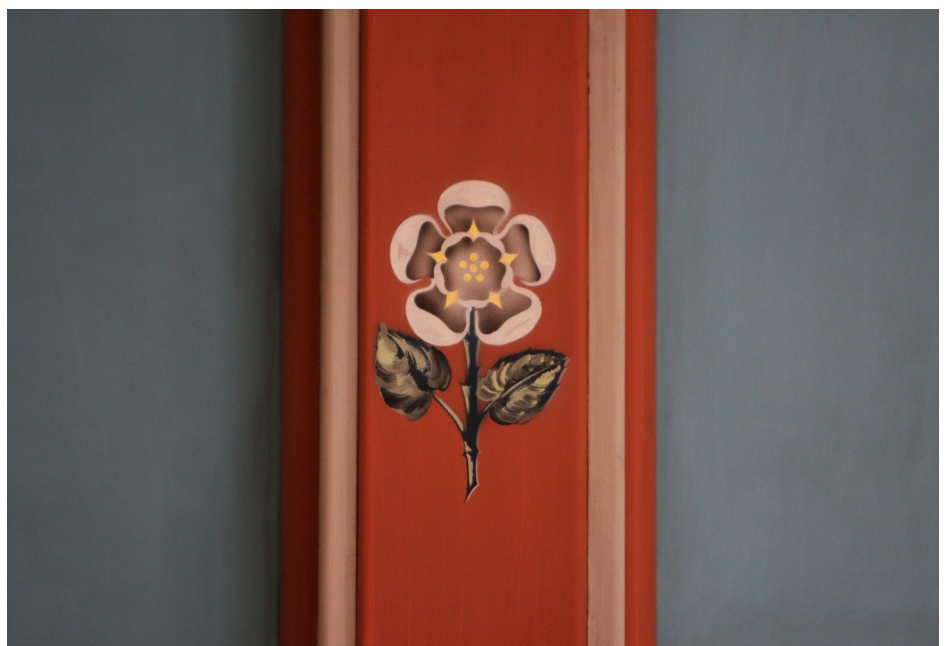
We are grateful to all who sent us written comments or attended our round-table discussions. Some found much to disagree with in the intellectual framework underlying the guidance and the approach that it suggests, and we were as appreciative of their candid feedback, which highlighted areas of thinking that we needed to strengthen or reconsider, as we were to those who assured us that we were on the right track. A clear majority both within and beyond the Church expressed support for the aims of this guidance and the approach it sets out.

Conversations around the roles of memorials necessarily touch on the Church's own complicity in structural sin. This guidance takes into account the priority area of worship and iconography raised by the Windrush Group in a letter to the House of Bishops (12 June 2020, priority area 2), and the work by the Church's Anti-Racism Taskforce on the creation of the Archbishops' Racial Justice Commission, due to start work in 2021 as the body charged to implement 'significant cultural and structural' change on race within the Church of England. This Commission will also monitor progress in implementing change.

A number of people have been consulted during the writing of these documents. We wish to thank in particular Novelette-Aldoni Stewart, member of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England, for her extensive contributions to this work.



Below: **Bradford Cathedral**









# CONTEXT

- 2a The context for this guidance
- 2b What is contested heritage?
- 2c Legal and historical considerations

## 2a The context for this guidance

Churches and cathedrals are, above all, places dedicated to the worship of God. They should be places where all people are able to worship God, and be welcoming to all for the activities that they undertake for communities. However not all people do feel welcome. This could be for a range of reasons, one of which may be the presence of objects that they find troubling because of their depiction or commemoration of, or association with, the oppression or marginalisation of people on the basis of their race, gender, religion or sexual orientation. This paper focuses on issues of race, though the principles it articulates would be adaptable to objects associated with other forms of contested heritage.

Much-needed attention is being drawn to racism and ethnic inequality in our society. [Systemic and targeted discrimination is still faced by UK minority ethnic communities today](#), and some of the anger felt is directed towards material culture glorifying people who were a part of this in the past. Sometimes, demonstrations demanding change lead to actions—such as toppling statues—with huge symbolic meaning, especially for those who feel voiceless and marginalised. Sometimes, it takes such potent symbolic acts to change the terms of public debate. Recognising this does not entail complicity in attacks on the rule of law. Unilateral action is inevitably divisive and will be perceived differently by different people. If such actions cannot be condoned, the feelings behind them can be understood, and we can consider how to react.

In a Church context, examples of such material culture can be found amongst the monuments, memorials, gravestones, imagery and texts both inside our buildings and in our churchyards. The effects of enslavement continue to impact the lives of many UK ethnic minority communities to whom, at best, these objects may be reminders of an ‘overcome’ past, a horror from which we celebrate our extrication; at worst, for these objects to remain in place with no discussion or interpretation could be taken to imply that the oppression and disenfranchisement they evoke for many in affected communities is socially and theologically acceptable to the Church.

At the same time, the high regard in which others hold these monuments and memorials can also be understood: these objects have over centuries become part of the fabric and fixtures, and of the histories, of individual places of worship. They provide evidence of persons and wider society of the past and their opinions and beliefs. They may be considered artistically significant for reasons that have nothing to do with their contested status.

On the one hand, the presence of memorials associated with contested heritage in churches today may be at odds with the message of the Church and its regard for its diverse congregation; on the other, this diverse congregation may also include those who would regard the removal of this material culture from their place of worship as objectionable.

It is within this context that this guidance proposes principles and processes for considering for contested heritage.

## 2b What is contested heritage?

Contested heritage is a complex concept. As the [Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation](#) states, “It is in the nature of almost all heritage that it holds different values to different people.” [Historic England](#) has defined contested heritage as objects or places that can be seen as “symbols of injustice and a source of great pain for many people.” For the Church it is of particular importance that our buildings are welcoming to all, and that such symbols of injustice and sources of pain are acknowledged and addressed.

The congregations of our churches and cathedrals, and their local communities, continue to change, bringing different histories and new perspectives to the perception of church heritage. Addressing contested heritage involves considering these as well as more traditional narratives and working towards a more inclusive understanding of church heritage.

For many who have been disenfranchised it can be difficult to start a conversation on this subject, and their histories may remain hidden. Those in positions of responsibility in churches and cathedrals should not assume that because reports of people feeling unwelcome have not reached them, this means that no such problem exists: pro-active effort is required to engage people. The onus is on all members of the Church to be truly welcoming in how we seek to share our beliefs with all people, of whatever background. Ignoring different and under-represented narratives once they have been revealed may be viewed by some as being complicit in the structural discrimination that exists in UK society, and may continue to contribute to the hurt and pain felt by those affected.

There are many different and complex layers within contested heritage. Different levels of historic (and current) power structures and degrees of complicity in them can be perceived in those involved in contested histories. Different degrees of involvement may be perceived between direct perpetrators of discrimination and subjugation (e.g. slave traders), those who financed associated companies and industries (e.g. companies that used slave labour) and beneficiaries (e.g. those who inherited enslaved people or wealth derived from



slavery, or charitable organisations who were given wealth derived from slavery). There may also be different levels of impact felt by affected communities in relation to historic objects *commemorating* an individual compared with those *celebrating* a person or event.

These different degrees of involvement in contested histories may lead to different strengths of feeling today, to different conversations, and ultimately (when combined with considerations of other aspects of an item's historical and aesthetic significance, and the principles of heritage conservation) to different outcomes for the heritage items in question. The range of possible outcomes is explored further in the framework for decision making below (Section 3), to provide guidance for those considering these issues.

Discussions of contested heritage should be framed to avoid starkly binary thinking that classes anyone as wholly good or evil. A theology of forgiveness is not reducible to simplistic categorisations. From a Christian perspective every memorial is a memorial to a sinner, however fulsome any tribute to their life, character and achievements may be, and the final moral reckoning on all our lives is known to God alone. The focus of discussion should be the impact of a piece of material culture on a church or cathedral's ability to be a place of welcome and solace to all, and how this should best be addressed, not on whether an individual deserves to be expunged from the historical record.

It is recognised that while building consensus and reaching a shared understanding may be the aims when addressing contested heritage, this is an iterative process, and consensus may not be reached. It is hoped that open, honest and gracious discussion, listening and learning happens, with people being able to disagree well and with kindness and ultimately to respect the decisions made.

The Church's [\*Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together\*](#), devised to assist with conversations around LGBTI+ issues in a Church context, provide helpful guidance on engaging in what can be difficult exchanges, in order to enable strong conversations that matter.

## 2c Legal and historical considerations

The framework for considering contested heritage set out in this guidance is not an alternative to or substitute for the process of obtaining formal permission under the Faculty Jurisdiction or the Care of Cathedrals Measure.

Change within church buildings and churchyards is nothing new. The Ecclesiastical Exemption works well to ensure that change is regulated, and that changes which affect the significance of historic buildings only take place after full consideration of all relevant issues. Legislation focuses on weighing the harm of any proposal to a place's significance against the benefits that might be gained, with a presumption that things will remain as they are unless the benefits outweigh the harm.

There is more detail on assessing significance in the guidance on researching contested heritage below (Section 3b). In terms of attempting to justify a physical intervention such as altering or removing a memorial what needs to be proven is not principally that a memorial is to somebody (or perhaps donated by somebody) whose views or actions we would now condemn, but rather that the presence of the memorial has a demonstrable negative impact on the mission and ministry of the church or cathedral; and, in the case of a proposed course of action that may be considered harmful to the heritage of a building, that substantially the same benefits could not be achieved by a less harmful option. It is therefore essential that a thorough appraisal of the available options is undertaken before any formal application is made.

While secular discussion of contested heritage has focussed on public statues, there are few free-standing statues in churchyards and precincts, most of them being relatively recent additions. However, there are numerous eponymous statues, generally reclining and kneeling figures which are often an integral part of monuments, within churches and cathedrals. There are also other types of memorial such as stained-glass windows. Memorials may have been installed long after the death of the person commemorated. Each church has control over the installation of memorials, although the exercise of this will not have necessarily concerned itself with the texts of eulogies, and even when it has, attitudes towards what is appropriate change over time.

Within churches and churchyards there are legal issues to do with the rights of any descendants (and others with a valid interest) which mean that grave markers and memorials cannot simply be removed. They belong to the heirs at law of the deceased, who must be actively traced and consulted. It should be borne in mind that it may be difficult to locate them, and they may have no knowledge of their connection to the deceased or be aware of the issues involved.

There is also an obligation to look after designated heritage assets, and for relevant legal permissions to be obtained after appropriate consultation with statutory consultees. It might however be difficult for the Church, or an individual church or cathedral, to be perceived to be protecting a contentious memorial without at least opening a space for dialogue with affected communities. The statutory processes affecting historic buildings and memorials demand justification for changing things, not for leaving them as they are—they ask “Why should things change?” From a pastoral point of view it may be equally important to pose the counter-question: “Why should things stay the same?”

This guidance is intended to aid consistency in the approach taken to these issues in churches and cathedrals across the country, though not necessarily uniformity of outcome, as this will differ depending upon the individual circumstances.





Below: **Manchester Cathedral**

Above: **Birmingham Cathedral**



3



# A FRAMEWORK FOR DECISION MAKING

- 3a A framework for decision making on contested heritage
- 3b Researching contested heritage
- 3c What is the heritage significance of the object?
- 3d What is the need for change?
- 3e What are the options for change?

## 3a A framework for decision making on 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 parish 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.

This should be considered both from the perspectives of the church or cathedral team themselves, and those in the congregation and wider community (including tourists and others) who are affected by the presence of the object. What is the level of negative impact on those detrimentally affected by the object? How does the object affect the church or cathedral's ability to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom? How does the presence of the object detract from the cathedral or parish church's ability to teach, baptise and nurture new believers? In what ways is the church or cathedral not being used by the wider community because of the object? How does the offensive nature of the object detrimentally affect liturgical use of the space? What will be the potential impact of different levels of intervention on the missional, pastoral and liturgical activities of the church or cathedral? What would be the impact on affected communities if there was no change to the object? If the conclusion is that action may need to be taken it will also be necessary to consider the actual or potential *positive* impact of the object, in terms of its historical or artistic significance, as an item of interest to tourists and scholars, as an item associated with local identity, and as a possible tool for raising awareness of under-represented histories and present-day injustice.

This framework considers objects which may be fixtures or fittings (or parts of a building, in the case of glazing or



wall paintings). Although some of the issues raised may also be applicable to whole buildings, library and archival materials, and intangible items such as financial endowments, a different range of considerations and remedies would apply in such cases, which are not explicitly addressed here.

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 sought for the changes proposed.

The process of working through the framework should be a collective activity in which the church or cathedral community and other interested parties can participate and exchange views. Consultation, in particular with the communities most affected, is a key part of the process. It is important to consider carefully how this consultation will be undertaken, and how the results of consultation will feed into the decision-making process, so that people's expectations are managed. The people you most want to reach may not be part of your existing networks, and may not volunteer—how will you involve them? How will you combine the results of your research into the significance of an object with the outcome of your consultation? How will you weigh opposing viewpoints, and avoid the process being felt to have produced 'winners' and 'losers'? How will you weigh the views of national advisory bodies such as the Church Buildings Council or Historic England with more local voices? A majority amongst those engaging with consultation may support an outcome that the PCC or cathedral Chapter is not comfortable with, or which is unlikely to obtain permission under the Faculty Jurisdiction or Care of Cathedrals Measure – how will you proceed? Further information on undertaking surveys is not provided in this document but will be considered for future guidance.

Whilst the ecclesiastical planning systems aim to provide for open, transparent discussions, conversations may be difficult and sensitive, and consensus may not be reached.

Addressing contested heritage works best if objects are considered holistically in their context. At its simplest this may simply mean considering, for instance, both a donated stained-glass window and the plaque commemorating the donation, but it could extend to a wider survey of the contested heritage in the building. It is recognised, however, that in some situations it may not be possible to undertake such a comprehensive survey before decisions need to be made about one item, for instance because of the need to address a specific query or situation.

If a decision on a proposed course of action has been reached and permission is sought, the Church of England's existing statutory processes are well-suited to dealing with these issues. The basis of any consideration of change regarding contested heritage would, as always, be a robust Statement of Significance, founded on an appropriate level of research into the object in question and its physical and historical context, and a Statement of Needs, considering the need for change from liturgical, theological, missional, and community perspectives. Insufficient understanding of the significance of the object and the need for change, if the research is deficient in depth and quality and/or the interests of any party are ignored or not given appropriate weight, is likely to lead to distress and recriminations, as well as the possibility of the refusal of any proposed interventions.

Within the limits provided by the legal and historical considerations set out above there are various approaches that can be taken to objects of contested heritage. Parish churches and cathedrals have already taken several such different approaches, some of which have been dictated by circumstances and others through open dialogue with affected people. Examples of these approaches are provided below.

### 3b Researching contested heritage

Taking on board all of the considerations above to frame an enquiry on contested heritage, the following sections provide advice on undertaking research on an object with contested or under-represented histories. They could form a flow chart or decision tree for those researching their contested heritage (see Section 4 below) and could be the basis for a statement of significance for the object.

Knowing what you have and where it is should be the starting point for any discussions around contested heritage. It can be beneficial to be proactive about seeking to research the histories of people and events commemorated in your buildings: the earlier that objects are identified, the more scope there may be to take appropriate action and where possible to develop a meaningful dialogue. Key to this is robust and open research into the histories of objects. Such research will also be of ongoing value if a decision is ultimately taken to 'retain and explain' a controversial item.

**St Paul's Cathedral** has a three-year project in partnership with the University of York researching the role of the monuments, statues and memorials in the cathedral in British, European and imperial art history, and what these histories tell us about Britain's history as a nation and colonial power in the period 1795 to 1914. It will use this research to consider how its 'pantheon' might be democratically represented, reinterpreted and understood by a diverse national and international public today.

The initial project outcomes include conferences, a guide book, digital interpretation from diverse voices, and an online interactive map which links individual monuments to parts of the world in which the commemorated individuals fought or administrated. The Pantheons Project research will also be a resource for the cathedral to draw on as it develops further layers of interpretation for visitors on site.

### 3c What is the heritage significance of the object?

Which of the following categories best describes the object? It may fall into one or more of the categories below:

- The object marks a burial (tomb, gravestone, other grave marker)
- The object commemorates one or more individuals or an event
- The object marks a gift or donation to the church (or a related charity) 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)

It is important to distinguish between tombs, gravestones and other grave markers (usually on consecrated ground), which mark the resting place of a fellow human being, and celebratory monuments, dedicatory inscriptions and statuary intended to make statements of civic or community values. Occasionally an object may perform both roles.

Research the significance of the object. You may find the following areas useful to break down research on the object:

- What evidence does the object provide about the past (inscription etc.)? How and by whom was the object made? Was it made for the purpose it has now (for example, was a plaque on a wall once a grave marker)? Was it erected around 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 (pieces added or removed, position moved in the building, etc.)? Is it unique?
- What is the object's historical interest? Is the object associated with a particular event or period in history, for example through commemoration of the event or of a person involved in the event? What does the object currently *not* say about that event or period of history, or the involvement of a person with that event or period?
- Does the object have particular artistic merit? Was it designed and/or made by a known artist? It should be borne in mind that an object's artistic history may be



completely separate from the history of the individual commemorated. It may be of interest as part of a group of memorials or in its wider aesthetic context in the church or cathedral building.

- What is the significance of the object to the local church, community and more widely? Does it have a different resonance for different groups of people? Different people in the community may have different perspectives on this, therefore finding out their views is important. The object may have been donated by a local group or person, it may have been made locally.
- Does the object relate to a specific individual or individuals, and what is its significance for living family members now? As with different community groups, it is important to seek their views.

Thinking about the significance identified above, what makes the object contested today? For example, this might be because of the known actions of an individual commemorated or because of how the wealth that paid for the object was obtained. It is important to be accurate and precise. There may be a need to do some research. There may be special cases such as artefacts 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 will be rare in the church context.

How does the object refer or respond to its problematic nature or contested origin? If the answer to this is not clear, it is important to state this in any documents relating to the research.

- 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 celebrates it
- It refers to it without judgement
- It refers to its origin and condemns or disparages it or indicates penitence

### 3d What is the need for change?

Having researched the significance of the object, the next question to ask is whether there is a need for change. How does the object in its current position in the church building, churchyard or other space affect the church or cathedral's ability to undertake worship and mission? To consider this question, think about how the church or cathedral is used now (and how it isn't), and whether this could be improved through change.

Consider how the building is used now for worship, and how the object affects this. Does the prominence of the object and its message make worship difficult?

Think about which groups use the church or cathedral for community and civic functions, and which don't. Would a change to the object change the nature of that relationship positively enough for the building to be used more widely?

What is the role of the church or cathedral as a pilgrim or tourist destination or for scholarly, historical and educational interest, and how would this be affected by any changes?

### 3e What are the options for change?

There are a number of options available, presented below from the least to the most interventionist. Section 4a, below, provides information on the potential positives and negatives of each option. After considering each option and the benefits and disadvantages, if this indicates a poor outcome, a different option should be considered. If the options are assessed in this way, the answers provided for each option might form the basis for a statement of significance.

Broadly speaking, from the perspective of the ecclesiastical permissions process, the greater the level of intervention, the greater the potential harm to significance and thus the more compelling the justification that will be required to implement it. In blunt terms this means that it is generally easier to gain approval for works to objects of low significance than of high significance, and for works that will have a low impact on the significance of the object than for works that will have a high impact. This is true of all works to historic buildings, particularly when the building is listed, and not only works associated with contested heritage.

Some may feel that where an object causes *any* degree of pain or offence then should be removed without delay, just as others might believe that present-day feelings could never justify the removal of an historic monument. The public interest in ensuring the sustainability of our historic buildings, embodied in the historic buildings legislation under which we operate, demands that we resist knee-jerk responses in order to do the more difficult work of responding in a balanced and nuanced way to the tension that may exist between a building's heritage and its present-day Christian mission, taking into account both the historical and aesthetic significance of an object and the painful feelings it may provoke.

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 balancing the narrative. This might be particularly relevant where the object marks a

donation or endowment to the church or cathedral itself or a connected charity or school and where it is not feasible or practical to make any meaningful intervention otherwise.

For all options, consideration may be given to applying an option to the whole object, or part of it; for instance, the text on a monument may need to be considered separately from its sculptural elements.

It is important to consider how the preferred option will be communicated. Your decision-making processes should be open and transparent and you should have a clear communications strategy. In addition to documenting your research and decision-making, consider who you are telling about it and how (in meetings, on your website, in local newsletters, etc.).

#### No change vs no action

After a robust process of research, consultation and reflection the decision may be made that no change is needed to an object, its context or location, or how you interpret it for visitors.

**No change** is not the same as **no action**. If concerns have been raised then not taking action of any kind, even by way of research or consultation, could be viewed as unwillingness to address or even acknowledge the issue, and as going against Christian teachings on racism.

If you decide on no change it will therefore be important to document and record your decision-making process and to communicate your reasons clearly so that the outcome is not misinterpreted as inertia.

#### Interpretation / explanation

The significance we ascribe to heritage is not fixed, and does change. The question is the criteria by which we assess significance: how we can ensure that value judgements are based upon a balanced and nuanced understanding of significance, and how the stories we tell both with and about our heritage can be made more inclusive and representative.

Interpretation can be used to add different narratives to the object and explain different perspectives. For example, this might be through providing a label or information board. Other cases may warrant a fuller display to give narrative and context. Whether you seek



to state the facts as plainly and dispassionately as possible or to express repentance is a matter for consideration. This may be an opportunity to explore ethical and theological issues and promote better understanding of the history of the church or cathedral. Such understanding should be reflected elsewhere, for example in any guidebook, leaflet or website. Interpretation also offers an opportunity to tell more diverse stories and reveal under-represented histories: this may involve putting a controversial individual's actions in a wider historical context or telling the stories of people who are not memorialised in the same way, such as enslaved people. Interpretations by affected communities can be part of a cathartic healing process.

Interpretation does not only mean physical notices but also the account provided by tour guides, educational staff, and online or printed guides, and in the practice of worship, particularly preaching and intercessions. It may be necessary to help people understand the context in which these actions are being taken.

The quality of interpretation is vital to its effectiveness. Insufficient or insubstantial interpretation of contested heritage, or interpretation based on poor-quality research, can be worse than no interpretation at all. Interpretation should therefore not be an afterthought but should be undertaken with care by, or with the assistance of, knowledgeable and experienced people.

There are many monuments and historic items memorials in cathedrals, churches and churchyards relating to those involved in the slave trade and the administration of Britain's colonies. There are however, only a few known to enslaved people, some of whom were given or attained their freedom.

One case is of a man named Nestor, whose memorial can be seen in the churchyard of **St Peter & St Paul's church in Teston, Kent (Diocese of Rochester)**. Nestor was the servant of James Ramsay, vicar of the church and one of the first and most prominent Anglican opponents of slavery. They had met in the plantations of the West Indies, which Ramsay was forced to leave after criticising the brutal treatment of the enslaved workers there. The church has an exhibition which explores the issues.

## Addition

Can an addition be made to the object or its context in such a way as to appropriately address its contested nature or negative associations? For example, this might be through adding text to an inscription. These additions should normally be made in a reversible or non-destructive way. Another approach is to commission an artist to make a site-specific piece, whether temporary or permanent. This piece, which could stand in juxtaposition to the contested heritage item, might be for instance a memorial to those who have been under-represented or oppressed, or a re-telling of a Bible story using more diverse and inclusive imagery. Such additions can make a positive statement, forward-looking statement for the church or cathedral.

## Non-permanent alteration

Can the object be altered in a non-permanent way to appropriately address its contested nature or negative associations? This could be through covering a piece of text or a symbol that has offensive connotations. This may overlap somewhat with the previous option. Bear in mind that alteration may not be feasible for some objects without seriously undermining their artistic or historic significance, such as paintings, sculpture or mosaics, and that some adhesives may cause permanent damage to an object: always seek professional advice.

## Relocation...

Safe and professional removal of material to a place of less prominence, into storage, or by loan to another institution are ways to remove offensive material whilst still retaining it for reference and research are ways to remove offensive material whilst still retaining it for reference and research.

It is important to consider the potential physical harm that may be caused to a monument through relocation, either in the course of moving it, or as the result of vandalism if it remains controversial and is put within more easy reach of protestors.

Relocation should normally be accompanied by the conservation of the object. Internal monuments should not be relocated outside. In general there should be a presumption against relocating a burial marker from a grave. Any relocation must be recorded in the inventory.

Relocation needs to be considered holistically, taking account of whether it is technically feasible and the suitability of the new setting or storage location. You must also consider the relationship of the object to its wider setting in the building: whether an adequate replacement can be provided (particularly in cases where the gap *must* be filled, such as a window) or, if a blank space is to be left, how it might be interpreted—for instance, as a ‘negative space’ symbolic of unwritten and under-represented histories and a spur to reflection upon the continuing impact of discrimination today.

### ...within the building

Can the object be relocated within the church in such a way as to appropriately address its contested nature or negative associations? Can it be moved, or juxtaposed with new memorials and statues, so that the place it holds within the overall narrative of place can be changed without obliterating its role as a reminder of historical fact? Sometimes the prominence of an object is part of the problem, for example placement in a position of honour in the chancel. Relocating a memorial that intimidates by its high position (having to look up to see the person commemorated) to a lower position can be a powerful gesture. This option may be usefully considered in conjunction with one of the options above (interpretation, addition or alteration).

### ...to storage

Could the object (or parts of it) be moved to storage without undermining the structure or utility of the church or cathedral or its facilities?

Relocation to suitable storage is not the same as destruction, though separating an object from its historic context has an impact upon both, which can be seen as positive or negative. Moving to storage alone is unlikely to address the underlying issues and could even be interpreted as an attempt to avoid doing so.

**Bristol Cathedral** obtained permission to remove elements of a stained-glass window recording its dedication to Edward Colston, and an associated dedicatory plaque. The parts of the window that will be removed will be retained for future educational/display use.

### ...on loan

If an object meets the collections or exhibition policy criteria of another organisation, it may be possible to loan the item to that organisation. Further information on loans can be found in our guidance on [Disposal and Loans](#) and [Loans of Objects from Cathedrals](#).

### ...by deaccessioning and disposal

**Disposal** involves the processes of moving the object, and transferring its ownership, from the church or cathedral to another organisation (or individual).

It will be necessary to deaccession items that are disposed of. **Deaccessioning** an item involves documenting its removal from the parish or cathedral's inventory. Deaccessioning does not mean destroying all of the object's information. This information is still kept in the records.

If an object meets the collections policy criteria of another organisation, it may be possible to dispose of the item to that organisation. Many heritage organisations, including museums, will be unwilling to accept an item that does not meet their collections policy criteria and that they themselves are unlikely to display: therefore, the logistics and ongoing care of the object will need to be fully worked through. If disposal is considered, guidance is available on using a [deed of gift](#) as a means of ensuring that if the recipient organisation subsequently wishes to dispose of the object, the church or cathedral has first refusal on its return, which would prevent an item being made homeless.

### Permanent alteration

In certain rare instances there may be a case for the permanent alteration of an object through limited erasure and/or replacement of offensive language from memorial inscriptions. If permission is obtained, it is important that the object is fully recorded before the change is made and that the changes are fully documented, and that these records are kept by the parish or cathedral for future reference.

### Destruction

Vigilante destruction of an object or document can never be condoned, and even as a legal remedy destruction is unlikely to be acceptable.



Our understanding of 'history' is always being revised, but when an object of 'heritage'—meaning the physical manifestation of earlier human endeavour—is destroyed, it is lost forever.

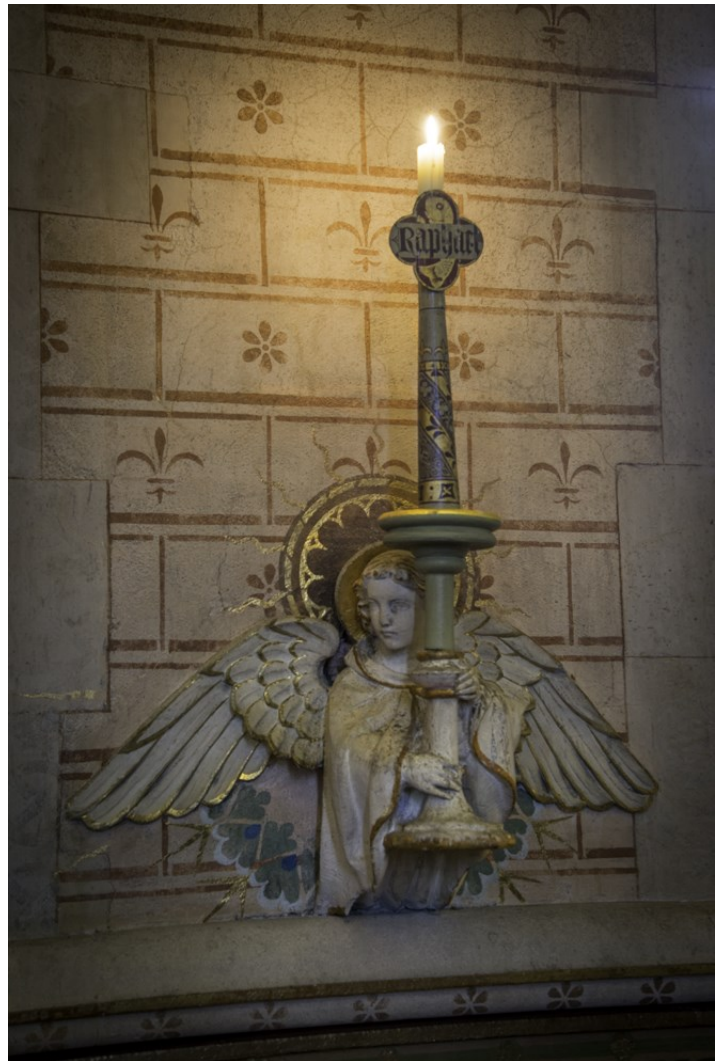
Objects are sources of information not just about individuals but about the values of the society that created them. A memorial may represent the people who subscribed to have it erected and the work of the artists who made it—there is a growing body of research into the craftspeople who built and furnished our churches and cathedrals. Such narratives may be completely separate from a perceived pro-slavery narrative provided by the memorial, and should not be erased through destruction of the objects.

Whilst we do not believe that attitudes to discrimination should ever return to those prevalent in the past, the moral evaluation of the good and the evil done by individuals can also change.

The presumption should therefore be that contested objects will continue to exist, even if reinterpreted or relocated, to retain their heritage value apart from their current context. Provision for the long-term future of any object should thus be part and parcel of any proposal for its relocation.

Damage can be inflicted by those reacting to other actions. **Henbury, St Mary (Diocese of Bristol)** contains the grave of Scipio Africanus, which is marked with an elaborately decorated headstone and footstone, the wording on the footstone beginning "I who was born a pagan and a slave..." The headstone states that Scipio Africanus was the servant of Charles Howard, 7th Earl of Suffolk, who was the husband of Arabella Astry of The Great House in Henbury. On 16 June 2020 the headstone was deliberately broken, with graffiti chalked on flagstones nearby stating the attack was in retaliation for the covering of an offensively-worded grave marker to G. H. Elliott (a music-hall singer who wore blackface) in a churchyard in Rottingdean and the toppling of Colston's statue in Bristol. The grave marker has been repaired and will be returned to its original location in the churchyard.

Below: **St Peter, Hascombe**





4





# APPENDICES

## 4a Further resources

## 4b Process checklist

## 4c Options matrix

## 4a Further resources

### Difficult conversations

The Church's [\*Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together\*](#), devised to assist with conversations around LGBTI+ issues in a Church context, provide helpful guidance on engaging in what can be difficult exchanges, in order to enable strong conversations that matter.

### Interpretation

There are a number of resources available to help you when considering interpretation, including the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England and the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at the University of York's guidance on [\*Developing Visitor Engagement in Cathedrals\*](#); the National Trust's guide to [\*Interpreting Your Building\*](#); Renaissance Yorkshire Museums' [\*10 Top Tips for Museum Interpretation\*](#); and the Greedy Squirrel's [\*10 Top Tips for Interpretation\*](#). The [\*Association for Heritage Interpretation\*](#) maintains a list of suppliers undertaking interpretation and design.

### New Art

Guidance is available on the ChurchCare website on introducing new art to [\*churches\*](#) and [\*cathedrals\*](#).

### Loans and disposals

Guidance is available on the ChurchCare website on loans and disposals of objects by [\*churches\*](#) and [\*cathedrals\*](#).

### Seeking permission

Guidance is available on the ChurchCare website on seeking permission under the [\*Care of Cathedrals Measure\*](#) (for cathedrals) and the [\*Faculty Jurisdiction\*](#) (for parish churches).

## 4b Process checklist

This flowchart sets out the stages that should be worked through in order to assess the significance of a contested object and the need for change; to consider the options for change; to prepare to seek permission (if necessary); and to communicate your proposals to stakeholders.

Consult and communicate throughout the process	
<b>Stage 1: Assess the object</b>	A number of these options may be possible, e.g. interpretation and addition
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
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>	



## 4c Options matrix

The options matrix overleaf is intended to assist parishes and cathedrals considering the possible options for addressing an object of contested heritage that are discussed in section 3e, above.

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.



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	Increased knowledge and understanding of the object and its values through research and consultation											
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	Accusations of 'erasing history' / iconoclasm											
	Object is focus of protest and/or vandalism											
Potential opportunities		Potential threats										



