

REPORT TO CONNEXIONAL PROPERTY COMMITTEE

ECCLESIASTICAL EXEMPTION

Report on the work of the Conservation Officer and the operation of Section 98 Procedures, 2001

This is the seventh annual report on the operation of the adopted procedures of the Methodist Church in respect of Ecclesiastical Exemption.

In December 1992 the Department of National Heritage issued a Code of Practice for the control of works to places of worship which are listed buildings or are within conservation areas and indicated that those Churches which adopted the Code would continue to enjoy ecclesiastical exemption from listed building and conservation area control by local planning authorities. Subsequently, The Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Order 1994 came into force on 1 October 1994. Section 98 of Standing Orders sets out the detailed procedures to be followed before the connexional Property Committee considers whether to approve a scheme for "listed building works".

Although this report is primarily concerned with schemes that had to be considered under Section 98 of Standing Orders during 2001, this represents only a "snapshot" of the work of the Conservation Officer. The full picture is one of a process which stretches over a number of years as many of the schemes approved in any one year started the process in the previous year or years. Similarly, the visits and preliminary discussions carried out during 2001 will often result in schemes being submitted in later years.

During 2001, schedules were received for 206 schemes affecting listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas. These all had to be checked to determine whether Section 98 would apply. The Conservation Officer visited thirtythree chapels during the year, either to discuss ideas for schemes or potential schemes or to see completed schemes.

These initial discussions are an important element of the process. It is often possible to advise churches not to proceed with inappropriate options at an early stage and thus save time and energy. Similarly, schemes can often be modified to reduce the impact of changes to historic fabric. This is much easier for everyone to accept if discussions are held before the scheme is finalised.

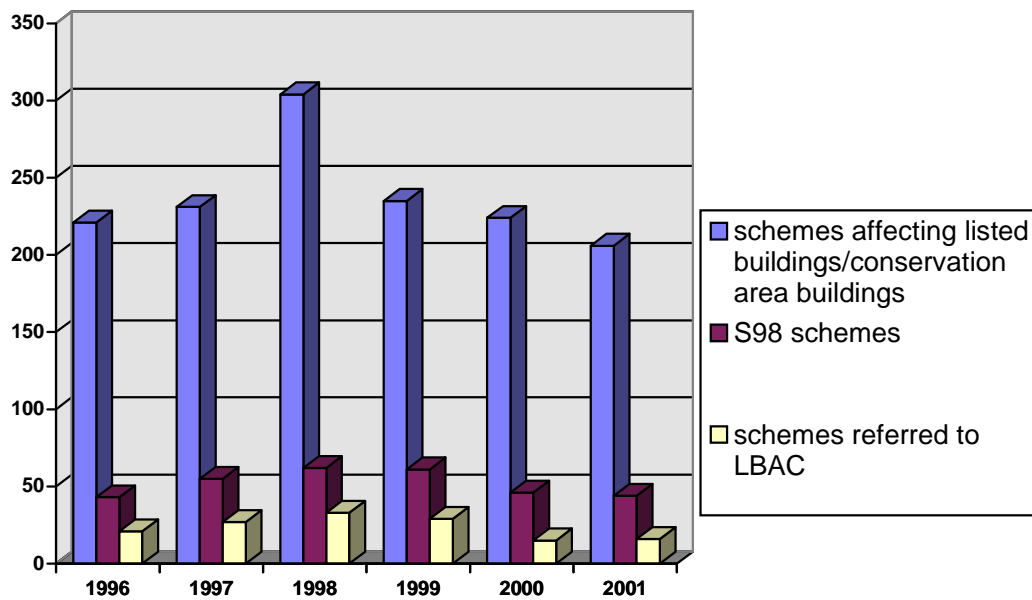
Forty-four schemes successfully completed the procedures set out in Section 98 of Standing Orders during 2001 and these are listed in the Appendix. It should be noted that successful completion of these procedures is not the same as full scheme approval. A scheme is only approved when all outstanding matters, e.g. financial

viability and grant submissions, have been resolved and Section 98 only relates to the listed building or conservation area element of a scheme. For large schemes it is usually finance which is the last matter to be resolved.

Of the forty-four schemes, one was in respect of a Grade I building, two for Grade II* buildings, the remainder Grade II.

Table 1 below shows that there has been a further reduction in the overall number of schemes affecting chapels which are listed or in conservation areas. The reasons for this reduction are still unclear and further monitoring is being carried out. The reduction in Section 98 schemes may to some extent be explained by the fact that, with a relatively constant number of listed buildings, many buildings have now been the subject of a major scheme.

Table 1



Listed Buildings Advisory Committee

The established procedure of the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee (LBAC) is that schemes that only involve minor alterations of limited importance to the character of historic chapels do not need to be individually considered by the LBAC, providing they fall within policy guidelines specifically approved by the LBAC or established by previous LBAC decisions. As a result, sixteen of the forty-four schemes completing the procedures during the year were considered by the LBAC. This number is comparable to the number of schemes dealt with by the LBAC in the previous year. Again, far more schemes in total were referred to the LBAC, but not all of them completed the Section 98 procedures during the year. There has to be the application

of some judgement as to what should be referred otherwise the agendas for the quarterly meetings would be overloaded.

The LBAC was notified, however, of all of the schemes received and was free to request details of any of them. This occurred in several cases.

Consultations

Under Standing Order 982, in addition to the advice of the LBAC, the connexional Property Committee has to consult with the Local Planning Authority, the National Amenity Societies and either English Heritage or Cadw. In addition a public notice has to be displayed for 28 days outside the affected building and a similar notice published in a local newspaper, so that interested parties can comment on the proposed scheme. As a result of the Newman Report into Ecclesiastical Exemption it was agreed that it would only be necessary for a newspaper advertisement to be placed when the scheme affected the external appearance of the building.

Although there are six National Amenity Societies, it has been agreed that the connexional Property Committee only needs to send details to the Ancient Monuments Society, the Georgian Group and the Victorian Society, and they will in turn inform the other three societies as appropriate. This arrangement is particularly beneficial in reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and paperwork as we have almost no chapels that pre-date 1715 (the end date for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings), a small but increasing number of listed chapels post 1914 (the start date for the Twentieth Century Society) and, although Methodist sites are of general interest to the Council for British Archaeology, there is no formal requirement to consult them over proposals.

During 2001, three of the forty-four schemes that successfully completed the Section 98 procedures were within Wales. Cadw responded on all schemes raising no objection to two and requesting more information on the third. Of the remaining forty-one schemes, English Heritage commented on twenty-nine, eight of those comments expressing some reservations about matters of detail. In most cases the concerns were dealt with by negotiation or by imposing conditions on the approvals. In only one case, at **Woodhouse Trinity - Sheffield (East)**, was there an objection to a scheme for the installation of bird deterrent measures. In this case the details were modified and the scheme approved.

The Ancient Monuments Society responded on thirty-six schemes; giving comments on ten of them, of which nine related to matters of detail and one was an objection. The Georgian Group commented on only three of the schemes, in one case raising no objection and commenting on details on the other two. On twenty-nine occasions they deferred to the views of the other Amenity Societies. This is hardly surprising given the relatively small number of our chapels which pre-date 1837, although on six occasions no response was received even when the scheme was within their period of interest. The Victorian Society responded to thirty-five of the consultation requests, with one deferral to the Georgian Group. One scheme was opposed. Last year we commented on the very low response rate from the Victorian Society (four) so it is appropriate to note that the response rate has improved significantly. This is welcomed.

Local Planning Authorities responded to thirty of the requests for comments. Sixteen of these representations merely indicated that they had no objection. Thirteen comments were made on matters of detail. One objection was raised. On the other hand, two comments were in support of proposals.

Two schemes produced representations from the general public. At **Tickhill - Doncaster**, two letters opposing the removal of pews were received from church members. The Catholic priest whose congregation occasionally uses **Bruton - Somerset Mission** for worship, wrote in support of the new heating scheme.

Time-scale

One of the concerns regularly expressed about the Section 98 procedures is the delay that it will create. For major schemes this is seldom a problem as the financial issues are generally the last to be resolved. The procedures do, however, build in an automatic delay for small schemes because of the four week consultation period. Sometimes delays are caused by the applicant trustees because they do not follow the correct procedures or fail to respond promptly to requests for more information or delay posting the site notice.

If everything runs smoothly, all the information is to hand when the Schedule arrives in the office and no objections or comments are received, it is possible to minimise delays. Eleven schemes completed the Section 98 procedures in only eight weeks, compared with nine in 2000. Eight of the forty-four schemes completed the procedures within nine to twelve weeks, with a further five taking between thirteen to sixteen weeks. The remaining twenty took over sixteen weeks, an increase from nineteen in 2000. The schemes with the longest delays were generally major proposals that required modification as a result of objections or comments. In other cases there were considerable delays waiting for information necessary to carry out consultations. The longest delay was at **Four Oaks, Birmingham (Sutton Park)**, where it took twenty-two months before the scheme was approved. This was mainly because the scheme was being phased and not all the information was available at the same time, consequently repeated consultations were necessary. Conversely, some major schemes received approval in a relatively short timescale because of the extensive negotiations, perhaps including an informal consultation, which were carried out before a submission was made.

As already indicated, the majority of schemes were not of a major nature and did not prove to be particularly controversial. A few, however, proved to be more complex as indicated below:

Bradmore - Nottingham (South) 22/02

This scheme involved the demolition of the hall adjoining the chapel and its replacement with a new building set further back on the site. The interior of the chapel was also being altered. Concerns were expressed, firstly about the necessity of demolition of the hall and secondly over the positioning of its replacement further back on the site and the subsequent impact on the conservation area and the exposure of

the concealed gable wall of the chapel. A site visit was made by the Conservation Officer together with a member of the LBAC.

It was agreed that the hall was in poor structural condition and that demolition was justified. Different views were expressed about the siting of the replacement, being welcomed by the Local Planning Authority but questioned by the LBAC and Ancient Monuments Society. In view of the necessity to provide wheelchair access the setting back was agreed subject to a condition on the reinstatement of the gable.

Bethesda, Cheltenham - Tewkesbury and Cheltenham 07/10

This was a relatively minor scheme involving the demolition of two gable chimney stacks on the hall to the rear of the chapel. Unfortunately this was a retrospective application. Both the Local Planning Authority and the Victorian Society objected. It was thought that because the chimneys were not prominent and on an ancillary building, their removal did not significantly affect the appearance of the listed building or the character of the conservation area. The scheme was approved.

Wesley's Chapel - London City Road (Leysian Mission/Wesley's Chapel) (01/01)

It was thought that the proposal to replace an existing window with a memorial window might be controversial because of the potential impact on one of Methodism's three grade I buildings. A site visit was carried out by the Conservation Officer together with a member of the LBAC. The consultees raised no objection, however, with English Heritage noting that the glass to be replaced was of no great historic interest. The LBAC had concerns about the detail of the frame and fixing and these were revised.

One potentially complex issue which was discussed but did not become a problem was that of the design of the window. In this case it was by a noted artist, Mark Cazalet. Had the design or materials been less appropriate there could have been a lively (and possibly protracted) debate relating to the aesthetic merits of the proposal and who should assess them.

Burley in Wharfedale - Otley and Aireborough 16/15

This is a scheme which evolved over a lengthy period. Having been advised that a horizontal sub-division would not be acceptable, the managing trustees explored a number of options. The favoured option was the basis for the current scheme, namely the extension of the entrance vestibule further into the worship area and the creation of a vertical sub-division at this point to allow the provision of a new hall at first floor level. Although the principle of the scheme was considered acceptable, much of the detail was unsatisfactory. Lengthy negotiations were carried out with the trustees and their professional advisor and as a result most of the details were revised. A conditional approval was issued.

Treveighan - Camelford and Tintagel 12/20

In some respects this was a relatively minor scheme to remodel the interior and to provide kitchen and toilets. The chapel is a largely unaltered, early example of a Bible Christian wayside chapel. Although the Local Planning Authority raised no objection, English Heritage and the Ancient Monuments Society had concerns over the loss of an unusual internal arrangement with leader's pews adjacent to the communion area. The details of the scheme were amended to retain these features with the ready agreement of the managing trustees and the scheme was subsequently approved.

Easton - Portland 26/22

As part of a major scheme of repair and restoration of this imposing II* building it was proposed to restore the cupola to its original appearance, the detail for the restoration being taken from contemporary drawings and photographs. This scheme was welcomed by the consultees.

General Principles

As a result of our experience with these schemes and other schemes which are still under consideration, it is possible to make some general comments about the type of alterations which are generally acceptable in listed buildings.

Alterations to entrance areas, vestibules and other spaces inside the main doors of chapels are generally acceptable to the conservation bodies, particularly when they are sited under galleries. This appears to be largely as a recognition that the interior of chapels were generally designed to be seen when seated and looking forward and therefore alterations around the entrance do not significantly affect their character.

There is rather more concern about alterations to communion areas, although it appears to be generally accepted that the need for greater flexibility justifies the enlargement of communion areas, provided that original communion rails are retained, usually by being made capable of temporary removal. The removal of some pews from the front of chapels is generally acceptable. The loss of pulpits and organs is generally, however, strongly resisted as these provide the major focal points of historic interiors.

The total removal of all pews (or all ground floor pews) usually results in some objections, particularly when the pews are of an early date. The removal of later pews is often regretted because of their contribution to the character of the interior, but seldom results in a strong objection, particularly when representative examples are retained. Each case is examined on its merits. Some examples are given below:

Knowle - Bristol (South) 07/04

This proposal included the removal of all of the pews to allow greater flexibility of use. Because the pews were not original, having been installed in the 1950s, no objections were raised.

Sandford - West Mendip 07/16

The initial preference of the managing trustees was for the removal of all the pews. They were advised that because the pews were original and made a positive contribution to the character of the chapel it was unlikely that approval would be granted. They therefore revised the proposal, removing approximately half of the rows immediately in front of the communion area. No objections were raised but their loss was regretted by the Victorian Society.

Tickhill - Doncaster (25/14)

The proposal to remove all the pews, which were installed in 1963 from another chapel, brought no objection from any of the consultees but two letters of objection were received from individual members of the church.

An advice note on the subject of removal of pews was agreed by the connexional Property Committee on 1/10/96.

It is the general practice that where consent is given to remove fittings it is a condition of the consent that a photographic record is made prior to removal. Also, it is a condition that fittings are to be offered for sale if they are not to be used elsewhere. In the case of the wholesale removal of pews, samples are to be retained within the building.

The idea of a full horizontal sub-division of galleried chapels, with an upper-level worship area and ancillary rooms below, remains a popular approach for many of our congregations. It is seen as a particularly practical way of reducing the maintenance and running costs of a large volume. Such an approach is often the most damaging type of alteration that can be considered for a historic chapel interior, as it usually destroys the sense of space, alters the proportion and results in the loss of the majority of the fittings. It is therefore not surprising that the various consultees almost always put up very strong objections to such schemes.

A preliminary scheme at **Mumbles - Swansea and Gower 08/18**, however, has been an exception. Proposals for a major scheme which included a horizontal sub-division were well advanced when the building was spotlisted. A visit to the chapel to discuss the proposal resulted in a review of the details, followed by an informal consultation to the Amenity Bodies and the LBAC. In this case, no objection was raised to the principle because of the specific physical characteristics of the building which meant that the insertion of a floor could be achieved without seriously compromising the building's special interest. A final scheme has yet to be received

Internal alterations to ancillary premises are generally uncontroversial, but extensive demolition or new extensions can be more difficult. Many of our schoolrooms and ancillary spaces are of later date than the associated chapels, are to the rear, and are of lesser architectural value. If however, they form part of the curtilage of a listed building then they too are effectively "listed" and may not be altered or demolished without consent under Standing Orders. Again, buildings in conservation areas may make a valuable contribution to the character of the area and careful consideration will need to be given for proposals to alter or demolish them. In some cases, however, the schoolroom is the earliest building on the site, having originally been the chapel. Also by the late nineteenth century whole complexes of chapel, halls, vestries and other spaces were being designed as a unified whole. In these situations alterations and extensions may not be straightforward.

As a result of the Disability Discrimination Act, accessibility is an issue of growing significance. Many of our older chapels were badly designed in terms of providing access for all, and finding ways of overcoming shortcomings may not be straightforward. Twelve of the schemes dealt with were solely or principally concerned with the provision of facilities for those with disabilities. There is sometimes a tension between the need to provide access and the impact on the character of a listed building. Difficulties often occur where the main elevation of the building is symmetrical. Such a case was at **Misterton - Gainsborough (17/09)**, where the Local Planning Authority and the Victorian Society found the location of the ramp regrettable. There was, however, no other solution which would allow access to the main entrance.

The details of the scheme had to be revised before consent could be granted. At **Mount Tabor - Halifax (27/01)** an improved materials specification was also required. In two schemes, **Central, Monkton Hill - Chippenham (07/22)** and **Watchet - West Somerset (24/25)**, it was necessary to provide a lift to give access to the worship area because of the levels involved.

A guidance note is available "Disability Access Provision In Historic Chapels", which gives guidance on the range of measures which should be considered.

Liaison with English Heritage/CADW

The impact of the opening of the nine English Heritage regional offices on the consultation response rate has been maintained. In 1999 there was a response rate of 39% to consultations. During 2000 the rate had shown a marked improvement, up to 61%. In 2001 there was a further improvement to 70%. The development of closer working links with case officers in the different regions has been beneficial and has probably contributed to the increased response.

Marion Barter in the Manchester office of English Heritage continues as the officer responsible for liaison with the Methodist Church. Regular contact is maintained on both specific and general matters.

During 2001, Government began a major review of the role of English Heritage to which we were invited to contribute.

One major initiative undertaken with English Heritage was the conference held in Truro: **Bane or Blessing: the Future of Historic Chapels in Cornwall** This was a three day event chaired jointly by Revd Stephen Dawes, then Chairman of the Cornwall District of the Methodist Church and Peter Beacham, Head of Urban Strategies and Listing, English Heritage. From the outset it was made clear that it was not a conference but a consultation. It brought together different bodies and individuals with an interest in chapels including English Heritage, Methodist Ministers and lay people, amenity groups, historians and practising architects and surveyors. The main purpose was to widen the debate about the future use and management of the historic non-conformist chapels of Cornwall, the majority of which are Methodist in origin. A second purpose was to launch a book on Cornish chapel architecture, published jointly by English Heritage and the Methodist Church.

The Conservation Officer presented a paper which outlined the process by which the Ecclesiastical Exemption process is managed by the Methodist Church. It is the management of change which seeks to reconcile the sometimes conflicting demands of heritage and mission.

Visits to several chapels were made by conference delegates, including two former Methodist chapels in private ownership but still used for worship. The visits brought home the difficulties faced by some congregations struggling to maintain large buildings with dwindling membership and financial resources.

Representatives of the Methodist Church and English Heritage agreed that the consultation had been helpful and productive in identifying common ground, but that it was essential for the dialogue to continue.

In Wales, Cadw has continued to give us advance notice of buildings proposed for listing. This welcome procedure has enabled dialogue to take place with managing trustees so that the implications of listing are fully understood. It has also resulted in revisions to list descriptions and clear statements of the extent of the listed items.

Review of Ecclesiastical Exemption

It had been expected that the second review of Ecclesiastical Exemption would take place during the year. It was postponed, however, and is now expected to be carried out during 2002.

Photographic Database

The Property Office has an extensive collection of photographs and slides of chapels. In the long term it is intended that the photographs of listed buildings will be available for viewing via the Internet. The photos will be linked to data about the buildings themselves, including the list description. The process of digitising the photographs has started but it is likely to be some time before the final system is available.

Conclusion

In general terms the system appears to be working well. Continuing publicity seems to have been effective and there is a general recognition of the way the system works. It must be recorded, however, that despite regular reminders, there is still ignorance in some quarters about the correct procedures to be followed. It is vital that District and Circuit Officers continue to give procedural guidance as appropriate to improve the level of awareness. A careful check of Schedule 1 generally identifies potential problems with listed and conservation area chapels. It continues to be the case that most schemes considered under the Ecclesiastical Exemption procedures are uncontroversial and can be approved without any appreciable delay. Where the concerns of the conservation bodies and the LBAC have been raised it has generally been possible to find a way forward which respects the character of the building and still meets the aspirations of the congregation. This has been achieved as much by the ingenuity of architects as the commendable willingness of the managing trustees and congregation to consider other solutions.

Inevitably there are aspects of some schemes where it is not possible to reconcile the requirements of the local congregation and the wishes of the statutory consultees. To help minimise such areas of potential conflict we recommend early consultation with the Conservation Section whenever a scheme is being considered.

IS/PH, April 2002