

Methodist Heritage Committee Report

| | |
|--|--|
| Contact Name and Details | The Rt Hon. the Lord Beith, Chair, Methodist Heritage Committee Email: beithalanj@gmail.com Jo Hibbard, Director of Engagement, The Connexional Team Email: hibbardj@methodistchurch.org.uk |
| Action Required | For decision |
| Resolutions | 44/1. The Council receives the report. 44/2. The Council thanks all local church archivists for their work in conserving the historic records of the Church and helping to make them accessible for research and mission, and urges districts to appoint a district archivist as soon as possible where a vacancy exists. 44/3. The Council is pleased to send greetings and express appreciation for the work of Dr Gareth Lloyd and Mr Lance Martin in caring for the Methodist archival collections and promoting their access over many years. |
| Methodist Council objectives that this paper supports | 2. Inclusive Church 3. God for All: Evangelism 5. Resources for the Church: the use of God's gifts |

Summary of Content

| | |
|--|---|
| Subject and Aims | A review of the work of the Methodist Heritage Committee (and related groups on archives, artefacts, museums and community websites) since September 2019 towards delivering on their four strategic priorities, as agreed by the Council in April 2019. |
| Main Points | Work achieved towards strategic priorities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sustaining our key heritage sites; 2. providing guidance on the use of heritage as a tool for mission, especially evangelism; 3. engaging with the care and management of Methodist property; 4. supporting education and research that uses our resources and shares the Methodist and gospel stories. |
| Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function) | Report 34 Methodist Conference 2008 <i>Methodist Heritage and Contemporary Mission</i> : established the purpose and constituency of the Heritage Committee; MC/19/40 <i>Methodist Heritage Committee: Heritage 3.0 (Heritage Strategy 2019-2024)</i> ; MC/17/106 <i>Methodist Heritage Committee Annual Report</i> : approved the Committee's recommendations for the re-location of artefacts from former Wesley College Bristol |

Background

1. The Methodist Heritage Committee was established by the Methodist Conference 'to bring into one body the Church's responsibility both for preserving its heritage and for using it for mission'¹. The overarching aim of the 2019/2020–2023/2024 Heritage Strategy² is to demonstrate the active role of heritage in the Church's response to *Our Calling*. It does this through working with Methodist museums and archives, historic chapels and other connexional and heritage partners, and aims to deliver on four strategic priorities approved by the Methodist Council in April 2019. In summary:
 1. sustaining our key heritage sites;
 2. providing guidance on the use of heritage as a tool for mission, especially evangelism;
 3. engaging with the care and management of Methodist property;
 4. supporting education and research that uses our resources and shares the Methodist and gospel stories.

Introduction

2. This report provides an overview of the achievements and challenges for the Methodist Heritage Committee over the past two years arranged according to the Committee's delivery on the agreed strategic priorities.
3. There has been sustained growth in the work of the Heritage Committee for more than 10 years, with increasing understanding and engagement across the Connexion with how heritage can support the Church to respond to *Our Calling*. However, capacity and the pace of work have been significantly affected since late 2019 by being unable to recruit a Heritage Officer to the Connexional Team, as well as coping with the impact of COVID-19 in 2020 on visitor attractions and access to record depositories for archival work. Thus, it is two years since the Committee's last 'annual' report was submitted to the Methodist Council, but we can assure you that the Methodist Heritage Committee and related Archives & Records Advisory Group, have continued to engage in the meantime with the work entrusted to them by the 2008 Methodist Conference.
4. The initial recruitment process to replace the previous Heritage Officer proved unsuccessful and that disappointment coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As soon as it was considered financially prudent to do so, the process to recruit a new officer was restarted late in 2020 and we are delighted to announce that Sarah Hollingdale joined the Connexional Team in February. Most recently, Sarah has been working at Hereford Cathedral.
5. In addition, it was necessary for the Heritage Committee's chair, Lord Beith, to step away from his role for the summer of 2020 on compassionate grounds. We thank the Council for its understanding and support.
6. We are particularly grateful to the Heritage Committee Liaison Officers for Methodist Archives, Mr Jon Purcell, and for Methodist Collections, Mrs Alison Butler, for their tireless commitment throughout this time, especially on engagement with public enquiries and for maintaining and encouraging our heritage networks across the Connexion: of museum staff, of family history web editors and of local church archivists, to help them conserve Methodism's heritage and continue to share our faith stories.
7. **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.
 - 7.1. The crisis in the hospitality sector and for visitor attractions caused by the pandemic has been widely reported. The key Methodist heritage sites have been equally affected;

¹ Report 34 to the Methodist Conference 2008, *Methodist Heritage and Contemporary Mission*

² MC/19/40 *Methodist Heritage Committee: Heritage 3.0 (Heritage Strategy 2019-2024)*

necessarily closed and, therefore, without tourism or catering income, and some trustees/management committees having to take the difficult decision to 'furlough' staff.

- 7.2. The 'core' funding, approved by the 2014 Methodist Conference for each of the four key sites to receive annually from the Connexional Priority Fund, has proven to be a lifeline, for which the sites' trustees are extremely grateful. It has been possible in some cases to supplement this by accessing local and national 'recovery' government grant schemes.
- 7.3. While the development of their heritage offer has undoubtedly been significantly disrupted, the teams at our sites rallied and have, not surprisingly, systematically moved their activities online for the foreseeable future – do engage via their websites with their topical talks, for example, 'From Susanna's Kitchen' from Epworth Old Rectory³ or with 'WES Talks' from the New Room in Bristol⁴. Englesea Brook offers monthly heritage-themed talks and services⁵, which have included a series of four talks for Black History Month, and there have been family activities at half-term recently, virtual tours and crafting workshops provided by the Museum of Methodism and John Wesley's House, at Wesley's Chapel, City Road⁶.
- 7.4. The sites – like most, new online content providers – are still experimenting with income generation from such online activity. There is a concern that priced content will be rejected, given the persistent perception that all content on the internet is free, but creating it carries a significant investment in staff time and may require, at least initially, new equipment. Some of our sites' events are being offered for free with a request for donations; for others, the sites are selling tickets (such as the New Room for their 'WES Talks'). We will continue to monitor and feedback on the success of online income generation.
- 7.5. Regular face-to-face meetings of the site managers were curtailed by the lack of a Heritage Officer and then the pandemic, but one online gathering has been convened by Director of the New Room, David Worthington, and a pattern of 'termly' or quarterly meetings online will be re-established as a priority by the new Heritage Officer to encourage more mutual support between the sites again. An initial focus will be promoting the visitor experiences and mission opportunities they can provide, ready for welcoming back physical visitors.
- 7.6. During lockdown, the Liaison Officer for Historic Collections has convened a new Artefacts Group to bring together the site managers and other site staff concerned with the collections at our museums, and the care of artefacts and historic artworks across the connexion. Topics for discussion have included collection development, online access to the collections and where we might focus collecting and tell our 'missing stories'.
8. **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 examples of heritage being used as a tool for mission in local churches.
 - 8.1. We are delighted to report that the plans for display and interpretation as part of the atrium development at Oxford's Wesley Memorial Chapel will demonstrate exciting and imaginative ways to use heritage to underpin outreach and engagement with visitors.
 - 8.2. A new welcome booklet for church visitors has been developed by the Evangelism & Growth team. It has two versions, with one created with input from Heritage colleagues and aimed

³ <https://epwortholdrectory.org.uk/events/from-susannas-kitchen/>

⁴ https://www.newroombristol.org.uk/event/wes-talks-hannah-more-moral-reformer-or-political-manipulator/?event_date=2021-03-15

⁵ <https://engleseabrook.org.uk/heritage-services/>

⁶ <https://www.wesleysheritage.org.uk/our-events/>

at our museum audiences and for those attracted initially to our historic chapels by their architectural value.

9. **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.
 - 9.1. The Heritage Committee was pleased to be able to comment during the development process for a new Connexional Property Strategy.
 - 9.2. It is the intention of the chairs and officers supporting the Heritage, Listed Buildings Advisory and Property Development Committees to liaise more closely and work together on issues of mutual concern; for example, to integrate protocols for the management of records, art and artefacts as well as the main building fabric when chapels close. The three committees have already begun to consider together the implications of the proposed new legislation on 'contested heritage' such as statues and memorials, and we are keen to contribute to a wider Methodist discussion on what our approach to this issue should be.
 - 9.3. Plans for a joint meeting and site visits in North-East England in March 2021 for the Heritage Committee with the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee necessarily had to be postponed, but a joint online meeting is to go ahead.
 - 9.4. Work on redistributing the artefacts from the former Wesley College Bristol as agreed by the Council in October 2017⁷ has stalled during the lockdowns. We will return to this work now we have a Heritage Officer in post and as restrictions on access to the museum store at Upper Heyford and limitations on travel to relocate items are eased.
10. **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.
 - 10.1. Throughout 2019, we celebrated the 350th anniversary of Susanna Wesley's birth, with a yearlong programme of events including a pilgrimage around London to her graveside, specially written prayers and the publication of a 'gift book', *From a Mother's Pen: Selections from the spiritual writing of Susanna Wesley*, with extracts chosen and set in context by the Revd Dr Charles I Wallace Jr, foremost expert and transcriber of Susanna Wesley's writings. The culmination of these events was a conference about Susanna's life and legacy, held at the University of Lincoln: *A Bright Succession - gender, faith and heritage*, with a memorable and moving service of Holy Communion held partly in the garden and partly in Susanna's kitchen at the Old Rectory, Epworth.
 - 10.2. Throughout the pandemic our volunteer web editors have continued adding pages to the community ('family history') websites, linking with worldwide contributors, and meeting as a team online for mutual support. They have welcomed 'Wesleys Oxford' as a new member of the community website family⁸ and have shared responsibility for developing the 'My United Methodists' website⁹. This website is a development of the one set up for the Bible Christians' 200th anniversary and is now a place to collect and share online the history of the British United Methodist Church and the nineteenth-century Methodist movements that came together to form it: Bible Christians (1815-1907), Methodist New Connexion (1797-1907) and United Methodist Free Churches (1857-1907).
 - 10.3. Three project archivists have been working on the (largely early 20th century) residue of Methodist Missionary Society (MMS) archives still remaining in the basement archive of

⁷ MC/17/106 *Methodist Heritage Committee Annual Report*

⁸ www.wesleysoxford.org.uk

⁹ www.myunitedmethodists.org.uk

Methodist Church House (MCH), to prepare these for transfer to SOAS Library, or where relevant, to the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester. Ms Catherine Wakeling has been concentrating on the missionary personnel records, while Ms Annaig Boyer and Ms Kate Doughty have dealt with, for example, books, committee papers and, surprisingly, the finance series dating back to 1812. A steering group involving members of the Heritage Committee's Archives and Records Advisory Group (ARAG) has been set up to monitor their progress. We are pleased to be able to report that, through the archivists' creativity and determination, the project has continued through lockdown albeit at a slower pace.

- 10.4. The first transfer of prepared archives boxes was planned for early summer 2020, but has had to be repeatedly delayed. It cannot happen now until the current lockdown restrictions, and also building works at SOAS, allow. As of 1 February 2021, 489 MMS archive boxes (out of 1400) have been catalogued, checked and labelled ready for transfer to SOAS; 522 additional boxes are listed waiting for physical preparation work. There are also 53 maps and building plans ready to be repackaged upon the team's return to MCH, and several boxes of printed books are ready for transfer. MCH/Mission House building records have also been catalogued at item level, but will not be transferred to SOAS until the end of the project, as having onsite access to them might be helpful while the future of the building is being debated. Finally, a small number of archive files have been identified for transfer to the conference collection at the John Rylands Library.
- 10.5. This project is dependent for timely completion on additional volunteer help, which had to halt in March 2020. We are hugely grateful to our archive volunteers and hope they can re-join the team soon at MCH.
- 10.6. During this project, the managing of confidential and sensitive records has been reviewed, with the approval of a revised document outlining the reasons and periods for box-closure. The team are liaising with our colleagues in the EDI team to highlight potentially challenging records that appear to describe situations that might be considered contrary to our current policy and values on racial and gender equality and inclusion, for example.
- 10.7. The Heritage Committee is also variously beginning to engage with a number of other heritage of EDI issues, primarily so far relating to racial justice.

For example, providing content for Black History Month, and supporting research into the legacy of transatlantic slavery on the Church. With the support of the Connexional Team, we have provided a letter of support as a potential project partner for the research of Dr Ruth Slatter and her team, based at the University of Hull, into *The Colonial Heritage of Christianity and its Actions: mobilisation, impact and re-mobilisation*.

- 10.8. There are a number of vacancies across the connexion for district archivists (a role recognised in standing orders 015, 332/4, and 473). We request the Council to affirm the importance of volunteer archivists within circuits and for districts and the value of the work they do (especially in the face of chapel closures), and to urge the appointment of volunteer archivists where vacancies exist. The Heritage Committee proposes to consult with the District Chairs to understand the issues behind filling these vacancies and explore how we might offer further support. We will report on this with any proposals in 2022.
- 10.9. The Council is requested to express appreciation for the work of Dr Gareth Lloyd and Mr Lance Martin in caring for the Methodist archival collections. Dr Lloyd's 20 years of curation of the Methodist Archives at the John Rylands Library has done much to publicise and promote the missional and research value of the Methodist Archive & Research Centre, and we wish him well in his retirement. Similarly, Mr Martin, Archivist to the Methodist Missionary Society Archive at the SOAS Library, University of London, for his sterling work on this very important archive over many years, most recently to support the team now working to transfer the records from the MCH basement.

10.10. The Archives and Records Advisory Group (ARAG) has met on average three times each year.

Other key areas of activity during the period of this report have included:

- 10.10.1. Re-negotiation, revision and implementation of new Connexional archive Deposit Agreements / Service Level Agreements with the Universities of Manchester (January 2020) and SOAS, University of London (August 2020) encompassing new GDPR / Data Protection provisions and revised fee structures. Annual review meetings with both universities were carried out by the Revd Dr David Hart, chair of ARAG, and the Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives, Jon Purcell, to ensure due diligence and monitoring of the operation of both Agreements.
- 10.10.2. Responsibility for ensuring the development and delivery of actions and activities contained in the John Rylands Library Manchester, SOAS Library and MMS archive project work plans.
- 10.10.3. Liaison with c100 volunteer circuit and district archivists via regular newsletters, training events, guidance documentation and resolving queries.
- 10.10.4. Liaising with potential donors and facilitating the donation of Methodist-related archive and print collections offered to the Church.
- 10.10.5. Digitisation and transcription of the C18th 'conversion testimonies' and the Gibbons' Great War diaries were excellent examples of collaborative activity, harnessing the use of volunteers for transcription (the 'Testimonies' project involved a team of 70, managed by the former Heritage Officer), the digital expertise of the John Rylands Library, and academic involvement. The transcribed testimonies can be seen on the University of Manchester's 'Reason and Rapture' website: <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/digitisation-services/projects/rapture-and-reason/>
- 10.10.6. Already, the testimonies have been the subject of scholarly papers, educational studies and small group conversations to develop discipleship and fellowship. ARAG members (Drs Hart, Cheatle and Lloyd) with Manchester and Liverpool Hope Universities have contributed to the American Academy of Religions annual conferences for five years promoting 'Reason and Rapture', as well as presenting other material highlighting the availability of the Connexional archives to the US academic community.
- 10.10.7. In order to promote the missional, research and engagement value of Methodist archives, ARAG is in the process of planning to produce video content exploring the 'treasures' of the collections, and hopes to engage with members of the Connexional team working in the area of research and development to link Methodist archives and their potential value to and with the academic community.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

44/1. The Council receives the report.

44/2. The Council thanks all local church archivists for their work in conserving the historic records of the Church and helping to make them accessible for research and mission, and urges districts to appoint a district archivist as soon as possible where a vacancy exists.

44/3. The Council is pleased to send greetings and express appreciation for the work of Dr Gareth Lloyd and Mr Lance Martin in caring for the Methodist archival collections and promoting their access over many years.