

Guide to a Heritage Assessment

Plan for Parishes

Useful for statements of significance

Introduction

An accurate heritage assessment is essential in the Church of England's Faculty process, helping parishes recognize, preserve, and leverage their historic and cultural assets. This guide provides a structured approach to a heritage assessment, culminating in a Statement of Significance, crucial for funding applications, legal compliance, and community engagement.

1. Taking Stock: Inventory of Church Assets

1.1. Understanding the Importance of an Inventory

Begin by cataloguing all assets, including architectural features, moveable objects, artwork, and historical documents. Utilize any existing Terrier or inventories to establish a foundation. A basic table of simple name, description and location will suffice. A deeper look can happen if anything unique is found on internet research.

2. Researching Your Heritage Assets

Before assessing the significance of heritage assets, thorough research is necessary. Here are some tips to guide your research:

- **Photography:** Take detailed photographs of the asset from various angles. Pay attention to key features, such as inscriptions, maker's marks, and unique architectural details. Photographs can serve as a visual record and help in comparing the asset with similar items.
- **Internet Research:** Utilize online databases and resources to gather information. Websites like Historic England, local archives, and specialized databases like Antique Jewellery University for maker's marks are invaluable. Search for similar items to understand their history and significance.
- **Identifying Maker's Marks:** Maker's marks, often found on metalwork, furniture, or textiles, can provide essential information about the origin and age of an item. Use online tools and databases to decode these marks. For example, Antique Jewellery University offers a comprehensive guide to identifying these marks, which can help trace the item's history and origin.
- **Consulting Professionals:** When possible, seek advice from museum professionals, conservators, or auctioneers. Many offer free consultations or can provide insights that are not readily available online. For example, local museums or auction houses might offer appraisals or identification services. Check with CBSO who is trained.
- **Archival Research:** Visit local archives or utilize online collections to find documents, maps, photographs, and records related to your church and its assets. Resources like PRONI (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland) or the Historic Environment Record (HER) can be particularly useful for uncovering the history and context of your assets.
- **Engaging the Community:** Speak with long-time parishioners, local historians, or members of historical societies. Oral histories and community knowledge can provide unique insights and contextual information that may not be documented elsewhere.

By combining these research methods, you can build a comprehensive understanding of your heritage assets, laying a strong foundation for assessing their significance.

3. Assessing Significance

Once the research is complete, assess each item's significance using the following categories:

- **Exceptional:** Important at national to international levels.
- **Considerable:** Important at the regional level or sometimes higher.
- **Some/Moderate:** Usually of local value only but possibly of regional significance for group or other value.
- **Little:** Of limited heritage or other value.

3.1. Criteria for Assessment

Evaluate items based on their historical, aesthetic, social, and research value. Historic England provides guidelines for assessing the significance of heritage assets, considering factors such as archaeological, architectural, artistic, and historic interests.

4. Utilising Heritage Assets

4.1. Funding Applications

Heritage assets are vital in securing grants, such as those from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF). Emphasize the historical and cultural significance in your applications to demonstrate the broader public benefit.

4.2. Selling Assets such as for pew disposal

The sale of church assets is tightly regulated by the Church of England. According to the **Church Property Measure 2018**, any sale of assets must comply with specific legal requirements and be justified within the Statement of Significance. The **Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)** must be consulted early in the process, they advise on appropriateness of any proposed sale.

4.3. Generating Interest

Heritage assets can also attract visitors, academic interest, and community engagement. Organize tours, promote stories on social media, and collaborate with researchers to leverage these assets.

5. Preparing a Statement of Significance

5.1. Template Structure

The Statement of Significance should follow a structured template, which is often available from your diocese for parish use. The template typically includes sections such as:

1. **Basic Facts:** Includes the parish name, dedication, benefice, diocese, and relevant statutory designations.
2. **The Church in Its Urban/Rural Environment:** Describes the setting of the church, its architecture, and its role within the community.
3. **The Church Building in General and Detail:** Provides an overview of the church's history, including architectural phases, and assesses the significance of each part of the building.
4. **Contents of the Church:** Lists and evaluates the significance of movable items, such as altars, fonts, and memorials.
5. **Significance for Mission:** Describes how the church's heritage contributes to its mission within the community.
6. **Impact of Proposals:** Assesses how proposed changes will impact the significance of different elements and whether these changes are reversible.

5.2. Legal Compliance and Ethical Considerations

Ensure the Statement of Significance aligns with the Church of England's legal requirements, particularly when discussing the sale or modification of assets. The DAC and relevant Church legislation must be consulted to ensure all actions are legally and ethically sound.

6. Conclusion

A well-prepared heritage assessment plan not only preserves the legacy of your church but also opens doors for funding and community engagement. By following this guide, you can effectively document and utilize your church's heritage, ensuring it remains a valued part of the community for generations to come.