



Historic England

Methodist and Nonconformist Chapels in Cornwall

Guidance and Assessment Framework





Summary

Historic England, in collaboration with Cornwall Council and the Methodist Church, has produced guidance to help congregations, new owners and professional advisors make informed decisions about how to adapt and make changes to nonconformist chapels.

The Assessment Framework provides a stepped approach to establish what is special about chapels and their associated buildings, as well as the contributions made by their surroundings to the experience of place. This is in order to understand the significance, the contribution made by its setting and the historic character of each chapel. Understanding these factors early in the process will help to determine what capacity there is for change and indicate the nature of change that will be least harmful. Real examples of different types of works undertaken in nonconformist places of worship is provided within this guidance to show that even where change has occurred, the buildings can continue to contribute positively to what makes them special.

The document is aimed at:

- congregations that are looking to use their buildings differently;
- new owners in cases where worship has ceased, who are considering alternative uses;
- professional advisors who are helping to inform congregations or new owners on the approach to change.

The focus of the guidance is on Cornwall which has a rich Methodist history but is experiencing a growing trend of chapel closures. This is placing an increased pressure on the buildings and their fabric to accommodate new roles and uses. Although, the emphasis of the Assessment Framework is on Cornwall, the same format can be applied to all nonconformist places of worship throughout the country. The case studies reflect the national impact of these issues but with no one example being the single exemplary model of conversion or alteration.

The examples demonstrate that an assessment-based approach is the most productive way to finding locally appropriate solutions to the challenges and issues that congregations and new owners face.

This document has been prepared by Rhiannon Rhys with contributions from the Methodist Listed Building Advisory Committee at the Methodist Church and Cornwall Council's Strategic Historic Environment Team. This is the second edition and is based on the work undertaken in 2010 by Jeremy Lake and Francis Kelly (Historic England, formerly English Heritage), Nick Cahill and Bryn Tapper (Cornwall Council), and Ian Serjeant and Rev Julyan Drew of the Methodist Church. This revised edition published by Historic England June 2019. All images © Historic England unless otherwise stated.

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1

Introduction

This guidance document is produced by Historic England in collaboration with Cornwall Council and the Methodist Church.

Cornwall has a high number of Methodist Chapels, many of which are listed for their special interest and rarity as well as being important distinctive landmarks within the county's settlements and wider countryside. As a movement, Methodism was not tied to traditional settlement patterns and, consequently, suited the dispersed character of Cornwall's population. Chapels were founded in newly formed mining communities, in older established urban centres, coastal fishing towns and rural landscapes such as individual farmsteads. Once established, the chapels became part of the community, offering a range of activities beyond their spiritual role, including education, sporting and social events. Their survival within towns, villages and the countryside is evidence of the social impact of the movement in Cornwall, in both industrial and non-industrial communities, and as such holds an important role in Cornwall's history.

Figure 1:
The large granite Grade II* listed Wesleyan chapel of 1843 at Ponsanooth dominates this former industrial village, known for its gunpowder mills.



Since World War II, Methodism has been declining in Cornwall and this has resulted in the growing trend of chapel closures. There is also increased pressure to adapt buildings to allow for modern practises of worship, to accommodate alternative secular uses and – in rare cases – for their total demolition.

The purpose of this guidance is to secure sustainable development within a chapel complex. This is through a staged approach, which will allow a congregations or owners to:

- **Understand the character of the building and what makes it significant.** Often there are a range of factors that need to be understood before considering change to a building. This includes the chapel's architectural design, any associations with notable people or events, the age of the building and the level of intactness. Other factors to consider are the associated buildings on the site, the contribution made by the chapel's surroundings and its role in creating a local sense of place. It is often a range of these elements that contributes to the building's significance.
- **Consider where change could be accommodated.** Once the significance of the building is understood, it will be clearer where change can be accommodated within the complex. Depending on the sensitivities held by the place of worship, this will determine what capacity there is for change and indicate the nature of change that will be least harmful. In rare instances it may become apparent that any change to the building would cause significant and irreversible loss to the special architectural or historic interest of the chapel. Therefore, it will be more difficult to undertake works that result in substantial alterations which conflict with the significance and character of the site.
- **Create an informed proposal.** Those schemes that understand what is significant about the building and the contribution made by the site and its surroundings early in the process tend to be more successful in developing sensitive proposals for change. This can save time and costs in putting together an application as well as identifying where professional advice and support may be required.

Once the parameters for the development have been set, detailed design should be undertaken to ensure that the proposals respond to the character of the building and its surroundings. This guidance contains advice on what to consider when undertaking development in a nonconformist place of worship and presents examples of good practice that demonstrate how change can be accommodated.

Significance, setting and heritage values

When discussing what makes a building special, this is referred to as its significance within national policy.

The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) Glossary](#) defines **Significance (for heritage policy)** as ‘the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest’. It further clarifies that ‘the interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting. For World Heritage Sites, the cultural value described within each site’s Statement of Outstanding Universal Value forms part of its significance’.

The NPPF Glossary goes on to explain that **Setting** is ‘the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral’.

[Conservation Principles](#) is Historic England’s over-arching philosophical framework which sets out the principles, policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment. The four **Heritage Values**: evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal, **are** introduced in this document to help break down the concept of **significance** to provide a tangible response to what makes the building special.

Figure 2: Plain an Gwarry Chapel by James Hicks of Redruth (grade II) now converted.



Ecclesiastical exemption and the secular system

Many chapels are listed on the [National Heritage List for England](#) for their special architectural and historic interest. Consequently, when changes are proposed to those buildings that might affect that special interest, these works are often subject to greater scrutiny than works to non-designated structures. Certain denominations have their own consent process that is considered to be as effective as the secular planning system. If a chapel or church is still used for worship, it is thus exempt from the provision of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Area) Act 1990. This is known as **Ecclesiastical Exemption** and the exempt organisations operate in accordance with DCMS' *The Operation of the Ecclesiastical Exemption and related planning matters for Places of Worship in England: Guidance* (2010). Further advice can be found in Historic England's [Places of Worship](#) webpage on [Getting Permission to Make Changes](#).

The Methodist Church is covered by the provision of ecclesiastical exemption. Applications are determined by its Listed Building Advisory Committee. There are four other exempt organisations that operate their own statutory permissions systems. These are: the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, Baptists Union and the United Reform Church. Links to their websites can be found in the [Where to get information](#) section of the document.

If the church is no longer used for worship or is used for worship by a denomination or organisation not given ecclesiastical exemption, the works will fall under the secular planning system and may require listed building consent. This can be applied for at the local planning authority.

Even if the chapel is exempt from listed building consent, if planning permission is required for the works, consent will need to be sought from the local planning authority.

2

Using the assessment framework

Chapel sites can be made up of different structures, features and associated land. A proper understanding of the significance of the site and its potential for change is best gained by carrying out the assessment of the site as a whole rather than looking at the component parts in isolation. This can help inspire innovative and exciting new designs and uses, to make these complexes more valued, more viable, more interesting and more sustainable.

The assessment process is made up of three key stages. Stage 1 is to understand the significance of the site. Stage 2 is to understand where and how change could occur on the site. Stage 3 is to design and work out the details of the proposal.

The Assessment Framework also acts as a checklist when preparing an application.

Stages		Steps
1	Understanding significance	Collection of data – Identify the assets and character of the site, including wider setting.
		Assess heritage significance – Assess the contribution made to the building through its exterior, interior, individual features, associated buildings, setting and contribution to place. Useful information can be found in Appendix A and the Heritage Information green box below.
2	Capacity for change	Site assessment – Utilising a basic plan of the site, mark the areas or features of interest identified. Also mark those areas where the significance is not yet understood. This provides a basic outline of where the significance lies.
		Capacity for change – The marked-up plan provides an initial assessment identifying areas of greater or lesser sensitivity to particular types of change. This helps to inform the congregation or new owner of the site's significance and character. The assessment should be used to help develop the proposals for the chapel in discussion with their professional advisor. A more detailed assessment of significance may need to be undertaken at this stage by an appropriately qualified specialist to inform the detailed proposals.
3	Design	Scheme development – By using the knowledge gained on the building's significance, a scheme can be developed. This should consider the site holistically and look for opportunities to conserve and enhance the historic character and significance of the buildings and their setting.

Stage 1: Understanding significance

Collection of data

The first step is to collect the relevant information about the site. This needs to include basic information such as:

- Property boundaries, as existing, and historic if different
- Principal and associated buildings or structures
- The ownership or tenancy
- Site access
- Services, in particular water, sewerage, electricity and telecommunications
- Designations, including listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, battlefields and World Heritage Sites
- Non-designated heritage assets including archaeological remains and historic buildings which are entered onto the local Historic Environmental Record (Further advice can be found in the [Heritage Information](#) box).

This can then be developed further to include more detailed information that can start to identify the historic character of the site. Areas to cover include:

- **The external architecture:** the building styles, materials and architectural details as well as associated structures.
- **The interior:** plan, volume of space, orientation.
- **Details:** fixtures and fittings including organs, pews, galleries and staircases. Decorative features, such as decorative glass and light fittings. It should be noted that not all furniture removal/alteration will require consent as it may not be considered a fixtures and fittings – clarification should be sought from the advisors at the relevant denomination.
- **The extent of historic change:** alterations to the buildings, extensions and change to internal fixtures and fittings.
- **The setting:** the current and historic relationship of the building to its surrounding. This can include its boundaries, whether it is urban or rural, association with other buildings or structures and its relationship to roads, lanes and open spaces as well as its wider landscape and townscape contributions. When trying to understand the setting of the building, this should include views both from the site and also to it from within the surrounding locality.

Heritage information

Information on nonconformist chapels can be found in a range of sources. These sources can be used by congregations and owners to build an understanding of what is important about their chapel in terms of its historic and architectural interest, its contribution to the local historic character, its association with notable people and how the building and site have changed over time. This information forms the basis to identifying the chapel's significance.

If a building is listed it is included on the [National Heritage List for England \(NHLE\)](#). Each building listed has a short description to identify the structure and in more recent list entries it will explain why the building has been included on the list.

There is a range of publications available that can help to provide background to the importance of chapels and to assist in understanding what makes these buildings special:

A good place to start is Historic England's [Introductions to Heritage Assets: Nonconformist Places of Worship](#). This provides an overview of the historic development of nonconformist chapels as well as an extensive reading list for further background information on the subject. This includes:

- *Chapels of England: Buildings of Protestant Nonconformity* by Christopher Wakeling is a comprehensive work that looks in more detail at the buildings and sets them against the architectural, religious and cultural context of the development of English Nonconformity.
- *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses* by Christopher Stell systematically describes virtually all surviving Nonconformist places of worship from before 1800, as well as a good selection of later examples.
- *Pevsner Architectural Guides* cover the country in regions, providing an introduction to the architectural history and styles of the area, followed by a town-by-town account of individual buildings. In the case of larger settlements this can also be street-by-street.
- In terms of regional studies, *Diversity and Vitality: The Methodist and Nonconformist Chapels of Cornwall* by Jeremy Lake, Jo Cox and Eric Berry explore the importance of chapels to the Cornish landscape and culture.

The illustrated Appendix to this guidance, referred to as Historic Chapels in Cornwall, provides a guide on the historic significance and character of chapels within the region.

In terms of local resources and primary material, the local **Historic Environment Record (HER)** is an excellent resource and can be found for each county. In Cornwall, information on archaeological and historical sites, including those within the World Heritage Site, is held on the [Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record](#). This can also be consulted online via the [Heritage Gateway](#). It maintains an extensive collection of aerial and ground photographs, an archive of maps, plans and surveys, the county Historic Landscape Characterisation map and more detailed characterisations of parts of Cornwall, as well as an extensive reference library.

If the chapel falls within a **conservation area** that has an appraisal, information on the chapel may be contained within the assessment. In the case of the World Heritage Site (WHS), reference to chapels that contributes to the Outstanding Universal Value of the designation maybe referred to in the [WHS Management Plan and Appendices](#). There are other important character-based studies in Cornwall, for instance Cornwall and Scilly Urban Survey and the Cornwall Industrial Settlements Initiative. These, and conservation area appraisals, can be found at on [Cornwall Council Guidance](#) pages.

Ordnance Survey Maps (OS) can help to build up a picture of how the site developed and when structures were added or removed. Historic maps can be found in local archives and in most local libraries. They can also be found online at <https://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch-england-and-wales/> and www.old-maps.co.uk. Local Record Offices also hold tithe maps which date from 1836, estate surveys mainly dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, and other records including those for individual chapels. Some counties have made these available online. Modern maps can be viewed at [Ordnance Survey](#) website and online mapping by [Google Earth](#) and [Bing](#).

Newspaper accounts can be a particularly useful source of primary material. The British Library has an online [newspaper archive](#). **Historic photographs** are also available in most libraries. In Cornwall the main collection of historic photographs can be found in the [Royal Institute of Cornwall](#) and [Kresen Kernow](#) in Redruth, an archive centre to open in 2019.

Local congregations may also hold their own archive of materials through minutes of meetings or events, as well as property deeds and building plans that can be a useful source of information.

Listing

A heritage asset is defined in the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Glossary* as ‘a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.’ Those assets identified as having special interest or being of national importance can be formally listed which gives them statutory protection. This takes the form of listed buildings, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, battlefields and protected wrecks. Other forms include conservation areas designated by the local planning authority and World Heritage Sites – an international designation undertaken by UNESCO. In some cases there are assets that may not be formally listed but maybe identified by the local planning authority as holding a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions. These are identified as non-designated heritage assets.

In terms of Chapels, they can be given a listed building status due to their special architectural and historic interest. The listing is based upon their external architectural treatment, the qualities of their interiors, the level of survival and their historic association. Chapels can also form an important element to the historic character and distinctiveness of settlements and the rural landscape. They may be located within a conservation area or World Heritage Site, or be identified as a non-designated heritage asset.

12% of listed Methodist chapels in England are in Cornwall, and 40% of all chapels in the county are either listed or in a conservation area. The statutory list in respect of chapels of all denominations within Cornwall was re-evaluated in 1999. 184 chapels in this part of the country were listed at Grade II, on the grounds of their special architectural or historical interest. 19 were listed at Grade II* because they were either exceptionally complete for their early date (those of the 1860s and earlier being very rare) or of exceptional quality in terms of their craftsmanship, architectural treatment and rarity of interiors. One chapel (the Quaker chapel at Come-to-Good, Kea) is listed at Grade I.

Assessing significance

This next step uses the information collected to develop an understanding of what makes the building significant. This can be derived from the exterior and interior of the chapel, as well as its setting.

When considering what features of the building hold greatest significance, you will need to take into account the **completeness, aesthetic contribution, historic interest and association, rarity and age**. Not all features will hold

the same level of significance and it will vary depending on its contribution to the special interest of the complex and the contribution to its surroundings.

In some cases, significance may only be recognised through this process of assessment, revealing aspects of the buildings, any archaeological remains and its surroundings which may merit more detailed investigation or even designation in order to make better decisions about a place's future.

In Cornwall, some chapels have been identified as having a special architectural or historic interest. Granting them the status of listed buildings identifies them as nationally important. In Cornwall the reasons for listing chapels included:

- The completeness of the asset, as examples of rural vernacular chapels including added Gothic and Classical detailing or as examples of Classical and Gothic designed chapels built by the 1870s. Most of these have been listed, with increasing rigorous standards in relation to the architectural quality of later chapels.
- Because they are chapels of the 1860s and earlier which have retained rare box pews together with other features of a contemporary or later date. Chapels that retain examples or combinations of box pews, leaders' pews and/ or loose 'free' pews are particularly rare (see green box on [Congregational seating](#) for more information). These have been identified through a survey in the late 1990s and listed at Grade II, the finest of them – at Grade II*.

It should be noted that in chapels that date from the 1870s and later, those internal arrangements that retain the pews as well as the leaders' and choir pews flanking the rostrum will become increasingly rare as the pace of refitting and closure accelerates. Consequently, they may hold greater importance and understanding this at an early stage can be beneficial in informing the capacity for change.

Chapels can also make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. They may be situated within a conservation area, World Heritage Site or other designated area, where their role in the landscape or streetscape can be identified as significant. In some cases, it may be that they are not subject to formal designation but do make a positive contribution to the landscape. In those instances they will be regarded as non-designated heritage assets in their own right and be subject to a detailed assessment and consideration, in order to appropriately conserve their positive contribution.

Further advice can be found in Appendix 1: Historic Chapels in Cornwall as well as the green box on [Heritage information](#).



Figure 3:
The early 20th century
Grade II listed Illogan
Highway Methodist
Church is the third of
three successive chapels
built on the site and
illustrative of the progress
of Methodism. © Cornwall
Council, photographer:
Eric Berry



Figure 4:
Grade II* listed Gwennap
Pit, a Methodist Open
Air Meeting Space, used
by John Wesley to preach
from in 1762, turned
into a memorial in the
19th century

Stage 2: Capacity for Change

Site assessment summary

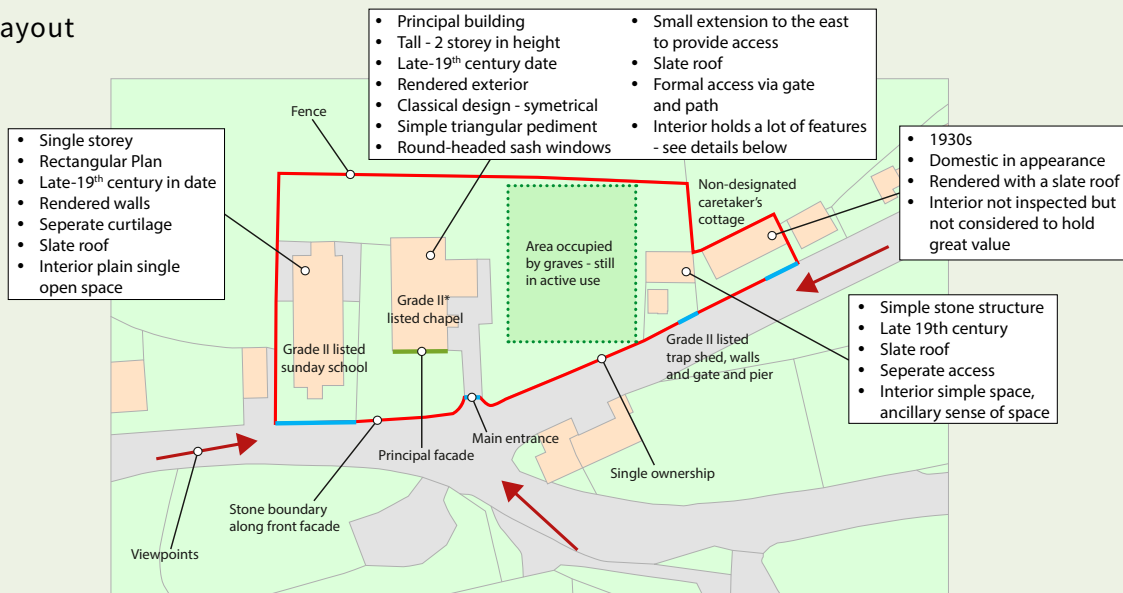
From all the information collected and assessed, a Site Assessment Summary can be put together. This aims to identify those areas of high or low significance to help inform where change could be accommodated.

Example of a site assessment summary

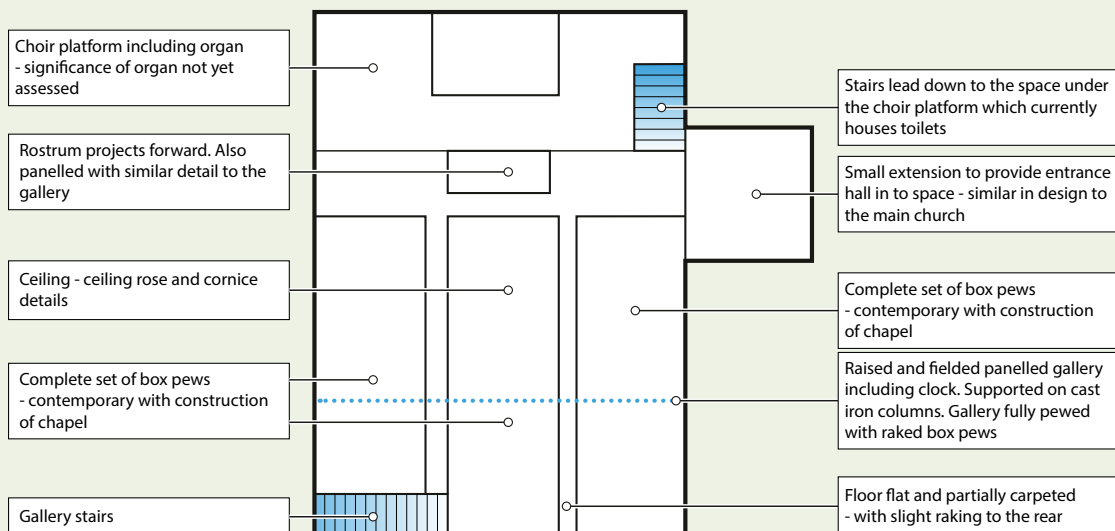
Summary

This is a small linear complex of buildings associated with a moderately sized chapel. Located on a rural road, it includes the Grade II* listed Chapel, Grade II listed Sunday School and Grade II listed Trap Shed and walls, as well as non-designated Caretaker's Cottage.

Site layout



Internal layout of chapel



Significance

- The group retains all the constituent parts of a chapel complex – school room, caretaker's cottage, trap shed.
- The buildings are read as a single entity along the road side due to their layout and consistent architectural appearance through the design, materials and simple approach.
- Due to its scale and architecture, the chapel is the principal building within the complex as well as within views along the streetscape.
- The chapel's formal classical design is unusual within a rural location.
- The chapel retains a near complete interior with 1860s box pews, gallery and rostrum of fine quality.
- Unified in appearance and rare examples of the pews.
- Surrounding buildings hold limited interest internally.

Capacity for change

Retaining chapels for worship allows the building to remain in the use that it was intended for. However, there is increasing pressure for change to chapels. This is either through the congregation's efforts to engage with the community by making the building more adaptable for a wider range of activities, changes to worshipping practises or following a closure, to accommodate a new use.

The site assessment summary should make it clearer where particular types of change can be comfortably accommodated and where it may be more difficult to make alterations. Where a particular type of change may be more difficult to accommodate then help should be sought from a professional advisor. When considering change to a chapel, it is important that it is viewed along with the rest of the site in a holistic manner rather than as individual elements. This will allow for the widest range of opportunities to be considered.

There will be instances where proposals are not compatible with aspects of the building's significance. In these instances the case for particular types of change needs to be made. A proposal should set out the reasons for carrying out new work, options that were considered and how the preferred solution was arrived at. This will provide justification for the works and by setting it out along with the building's significance, it will present a well-considered proposal.

In some rare instances, there may be a building that is so significant and sensitive to particular types of change that its alteration or conversion will be exceptional and perhaps unachievable in practice. In those instances, alternative forms of funding should be explored to provide it with a sustainable future.

There are a number of practical resources that can help congregations with finding ways to open up their places of worship to more people. Details can be found on Historic England's [Places of Worship](#) webpages.

Identifying new uses

In those cases where the chapel is no longer used for worship, new uses need to be identified. These new uses vary in terms of the amount of alteration and adaption that is required to accommodate them. For example an arts space which requires only minor alterations to the building could be accommodated more easily, whilst a conversion to residential use is likely to require more extensive changes including subdivision, loss of internal architectural features and alterations to the exterior. This may result in harm to the significance of the building.

Not all solutions will be appropriate for all buildings. When considering new uses, those uses that require the least amount of change will be easier to justify. As the amount of change increases, it could place greater pressure on the significance of the building and therefore will require greater justification. Those schemes that propose extensive change to the most sensitive areas of the building will be much harder to justify.

There are cases where more intensive schemes may be acceptable – this is often best achieved when the site is viewed as a whole rather than as separate entities. Viewing the site in this manner allows for the intensive uses that require the greatest level of change to be accommodated in the least sensitive parts of the site, such as the school room or ancillary buildings. In such circumstances the principal building that often holds the greatest sensitivity can be occupied by the most compatible uses in order to retain its special interest. Consequently, it is often important that sites are sold as single entities and not broken down into smaller units.

Undertaking a sequential approach to identifying new uses for the building can minimise the impact on its character and significance. Being able to demonstrate that a sequential approach has been undertaken will help to justify proposals.

New uses in chapels

The following examples set out a range of uses that have been accommodated within nonconformist chapel sites.

Figure 5:
Grade II listed Chapel in
Constantine converted
the former worship space
into an art centre and the
Sunday school basement
into a café.

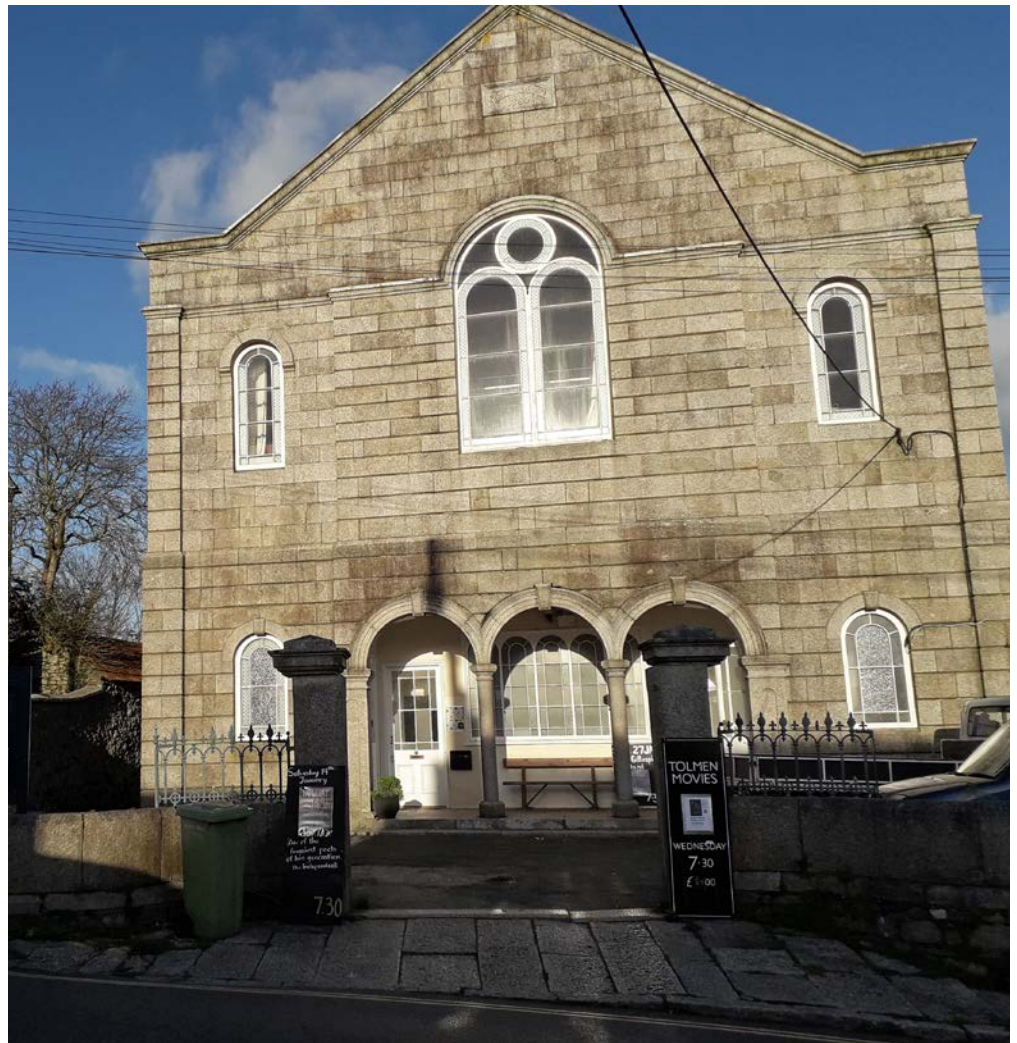


Figure 6:
Grade II listed Huntingdon
Hall has reused its box
pews and rostrum to
provide a performing arts
space and theatre.
© Worcesterlive



Figure 7:
Grade II listed Port Isaac
Methodist chapel has
been converted to a shop
and café. It allows the box
pews in the gallery to be
retained for use as shop
displays. © Port Isaac Café
and Pottery

Figure 8:
The non-designated Trinity
Centre has been converted
to accommodate a number
of different businesses
within the chapel interior.
© Trinity Centre

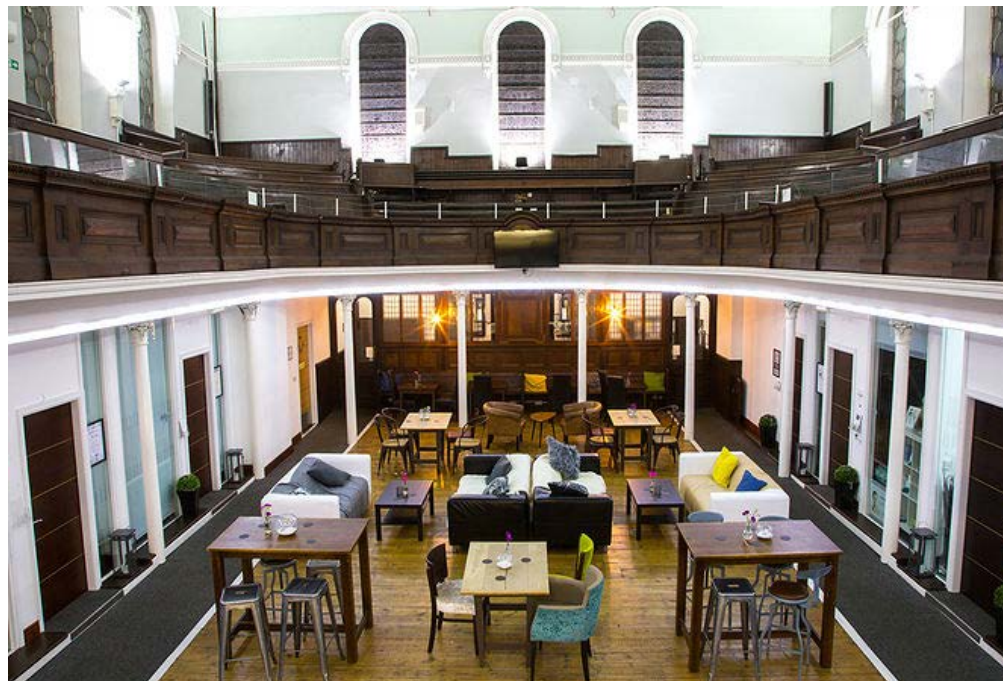


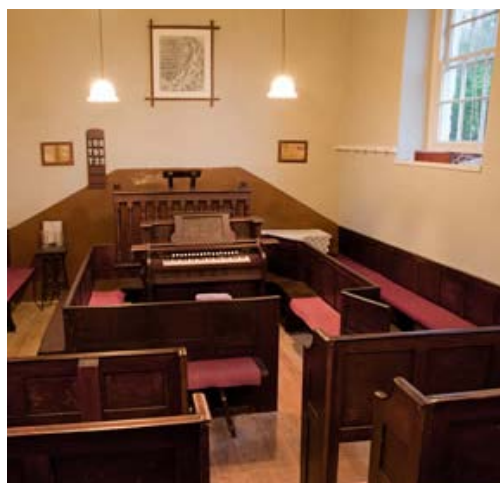
Figure 9:
Grade I listed Quaker
Meeting House in Bristol
has been converted to
a restaurant as part of a
wider regeneration project
of the city centre.
© Brasserie Blanc, Bristol



Figures 10 and 11:
Ty Capel (non-designated
heritage asset) has been
converted into holiday
accommodation. Although
residential conversions can
result in the highest degree
of change, holiday lets are
considered to require a
less intensive approach.
© Landmark Trust,
photographer: John Miller



Figure 12:
Penrose Bible Christian
Chapel, Grade II*, is an
exceptionally rare survival
of a small vernacular
chapel with complete
original interior fittings.
It was acquired by the
Historic Chapels Trust
during a period of disuse.
© Historic Chapels Trust



Stage 3: Design

For a successful scheme it is essential that any extensions, adaption or alteration to a listed chapel is informed by an understanding of the building's significance and character. The first two stages of this framework should inform the preparation of a scheme that looks to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the building. Set out below are a number of points that will need to be considered when putting together a proposal and considering the details of the scheme. We have also provided examples of similar types of works.

Setting

A chapel's surroundings are important as they help to provide the setting in which the building is experienced. Change within that setting can alter that experience and affect the character of the chapel. Typical development includes car parking or improved accessibility, as well as more intensive schemes such as new buildings or a change in use from a burial ground to a domestic garden. When considering change within the setting, several points need to be taken into account to ensure that the surroundings continue to make a positive contribution to the chapel's special interest:

- Look for opportunities to enhance historic open spaces, notably the forecourt areas in front of the chapel and the burial ground.
- Ensure that the chapel continues to make a positive contribution to the character of the area, through the enhancement of significant views to and from the site.
- Work with historical points of access to the site.
- Utilise historic structures in a positive and practical manner.
- Respect the hierarchy of buildings on the site and their relationship to any areas of open space.
- Enhance and respect the distinct character of boundaries.

Figure 13:
At Pentre Ilifore Chapel
near Welshpool (Grade II),
a former trap shed ancillary
to the chapel has been
converted and extended
to include a toilet and
kitchen/ cafe facilities.
© Morna and Katrin Rhys





Figure 14:
Tregreare Chapel (Grade II) has been converted into residential use. The foreground has been retained as a graveyard and the domestic curtilage keeps around the ancillary accommodation.
© Cornwall Council, photographer Tammy White



Figure 15:
In the case of the Grade II listed Bridport Arts Centre, the forecourt has been left for pedestrian activities and can be used as an extension to the artspace.

External works

Chapels can be prominent or landmark buildings within their surroundings. Their external appearance is often the aspect of the building most recognisable to the public and therefore can be sensitive to change. It is important that any proposals take into consideration the architecture, use of materials, location and scale. Points to consider include:

- Retaining significant historic features as identified during the assessment process.
- Keeping alterations away from prominent and significant external elevations including the roof slopes. Careful consideration should be given to internal planning, particularly on how and where to introduce new sources of light.
- Avoiding overly domestic additions, such as flues, porches and conservatories.
- Ensuring that services and insulation have no damaging impact on the exterior character.
- Existing historic openings are a key characteristic of chapels and should be retained. The size, proportion and detail of window and door design, as well as materials, have a major impact on the overall appearance.

Figure 16:
In our experience, it is rare that nothing sympathetic can be done to improve or facilitate access. At the Wesley Centre, Chester, Grade II, an external ramp was created to allow for access into the church.
© Wesley Church Centre



Figure 17:
At Boston Spa Methodist Church (Grade II) access was improved through the addition of an extension which housed a lift along with additional rooms.
© Revd Steve Jakeman

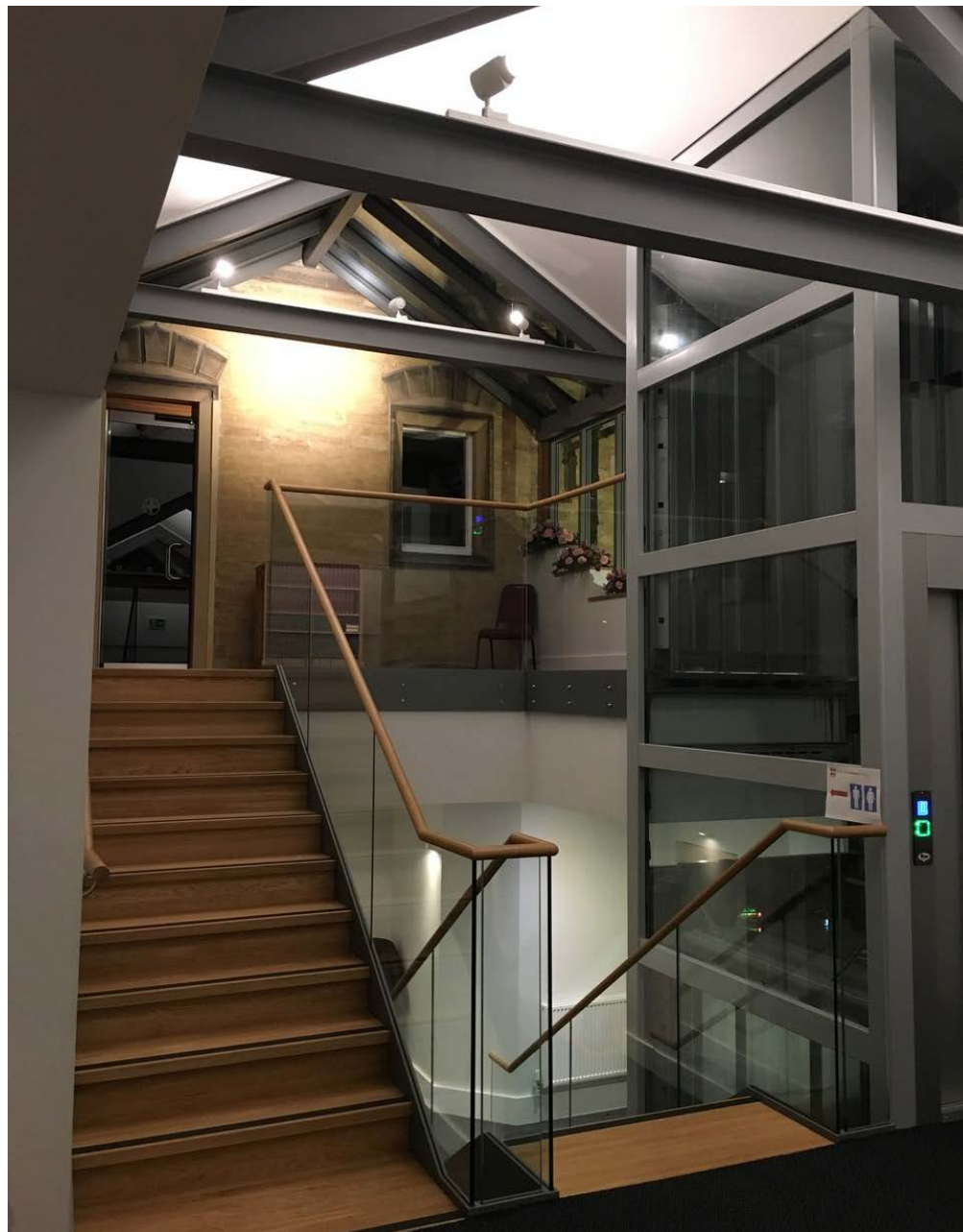


Figure 18:
The position of new openings in the main worship space at the Grade II listed Wesley Church Centre in Chester provides improved light into the the interior without compromising the external appearance of the building.
© Wesley Church Centre

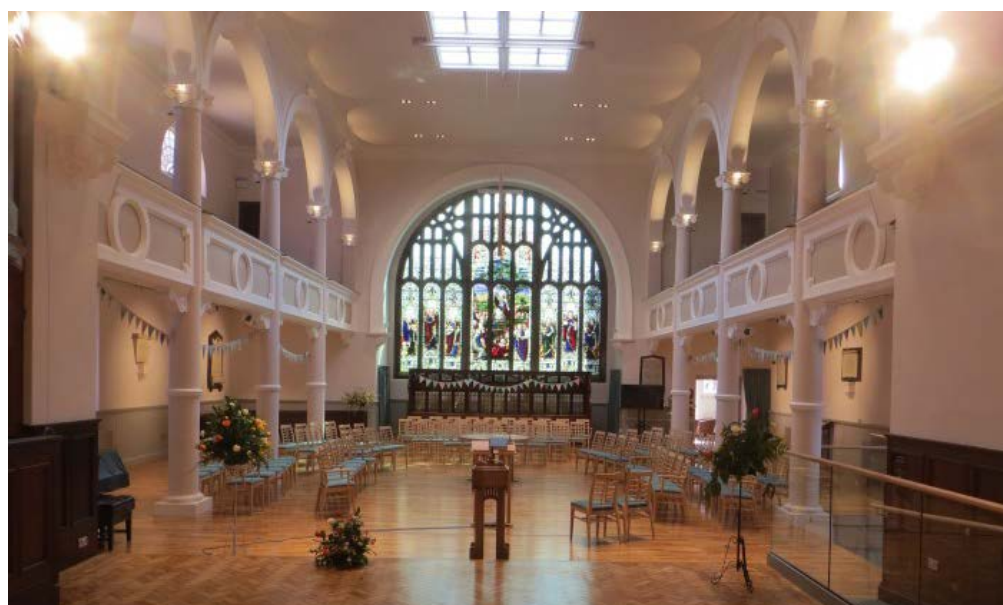
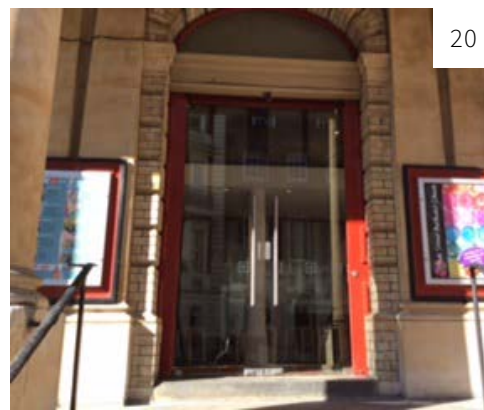


Figure 19:
At Burley in Wharfedale Methodist Chapel (Grade II), glazed doors have been installed behind the existing, so that when the church is closed the historic character is retained.
© Ian Lamond Photography



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Figure 20:
At Hinde Street Methodist Church glazed doors were installed in the main openings. The historic doors were retained, with the central pair made to slide into the wall and the two side doors modified to swing open 180°. © Hinde Street Methodist Church London



20

Figure 21:
The unlisted chapel at Ladock has been converted into a house, but is still a clearly recognisable example of chapel architecture that can be appreciated in relationship to the historic buildings of this village.
© Eric Berry



21

New additions

Extensions can provide a flexible solution for different uses. They are most successful when they respect the principal elevations and respond in a contextual manner to the architecture of the main chapel. The below points will help in informing the design:

- Utilise ancillary buildings or spaces where possible, or consider siting the extension on the footprint of lost structures or additions.
- New additions should respond and be sensitive to the historic layout of the site, its architecture and its wider setting in the landscape.
- Use the historic character of the site to inform the location, scale, massing, form and style of new buildings. The new elements should not compete with or dominate the existing structure.
- A carefully designed extension might be considered if this will safeguard the significance of the chapel's interior by accommodating more intensive uses. Overtly domestic extensions such as conservatories are alien in character and can rarely work successfully within the context of a chapel.

Figure 22:
Chew Stoke Chapel (Grade II) was extended with a traditional extension in the 1970s, which continues to respond positively to the overall character of the church.



Figures 23 and 24:
Four Oaks Methodist Church has mixed contemporary and traditional design to extend the chapel as part of the refurbishment of the hall and to provide additional accommodation. © KKE architects

Figure 25:
The extension at the Grade II listed Ilanelli Hall Street Methodist Chapel has taken a contemporary approach but reflects elements of the chapel's traditional character. © Acanthus Holden Architects



Figure 26:
Extension at the Grade II listed Boston Spa Methodist Church is a contextual response to extending the building through the use of matching stone.
© Revd Steve Jakeman



Interiors

It is often recognition of a chapel's internal architecture and its fixtures and fittings that results in the higher grade of the listed building. This is due to a number of factors including age, quality of design and craftsmanship as well as level of survival. The interior is often most sensitive to change but is placed under the greatest pressure to accommodate it. When proposing changes to the main worship space, several elements need to be considered:

- Some interiors are so significant and sensitive to adaptation that they cannot support alteration. Efforts should be made to find sympathetic uses, or otherwise preserve them (as with Penrose, Figure 12).
- Subdivision of the principal worship space can be difficult to accommodate due to the open quality of the internal space, a characteristic of the auditory plan form within this building type. We recommend that any new internal partitioning should respect the main spatial divisions and architectural constraints of the building, such as under galleries or behind rostrums. Horizontal subdivision can be difficult to accommodate as it will impact on the spatial quality of the building.
- Changes to the interior should maintain, wherever possible, the emphasis on the rostrum end, structural features such as galleries and stairs as well as decorative details such as cornices and ceiling roses.
- Organs are significant features and it is often desirable to accommodate them in some way. Denominational groups often have specialists to advise them on the significance of organs, or advice can be found at the [Institute of British Organ Building](#).

- Fixed seating in places of worship is under ever-increasing pressure. Whether to adapt to new ways of worship or to accommodate new uses, it is seen as an impediment to change. The significance of the pews needs to be understood when change is proposed – an assessment undertaken by a heritage specialist can establish the importance of the pews and the contribution they make to the church. It is not always necessary for all the pews to be removed. Consideration should be given as to how the existing seating can be made flexible or adapted to accommodate the changing use of the building. Therefore wholesale removal should not be entertained where retention or reordering is possible. (See green box on [Congregational Seating](#)).
- If pews have been removed, consideration needs to be given as to how the floors and galleries should be treated. These often include pew bases, raked floors or stepped galleries and the treatment of the floor and the changes in level need to be considered carefully.
- Continued use of galleries can raise concerns about the height of the gallery balustrades. A proportionate, risk-based approach is encouraged to manage the risk within the space. This can be through a number of proactive steps, including the use of stewards when the space is in use and keeping it locked when not, the supervision of children, warning notices and/or limiting seating along the front row. If it can be demonstrated that additional steps are needed to increase the height of the frontage, then these need to be proportionate to the risk identified and response to the character and appearance of the interior to retain a visual cohesion.
- When considering changes internally, careful planning and detailing will be needed. New owners and congregations should also seek the services of a good architect or expert craftsman with experience in historic buildings and furnishings in order to advise them on the most sensitive way to make changes to their buildings.

Figure 27:
Grade I listed Wesley's
Chapel and Leysian Mission
has used its undercroft to
provide a museum space.
© Hufton & Crow





28



29

Figure 28:
The Grade II listed Camborne Wesley Methodist Chapel has converted its undercroft into a successful café and the church is retained for worship.

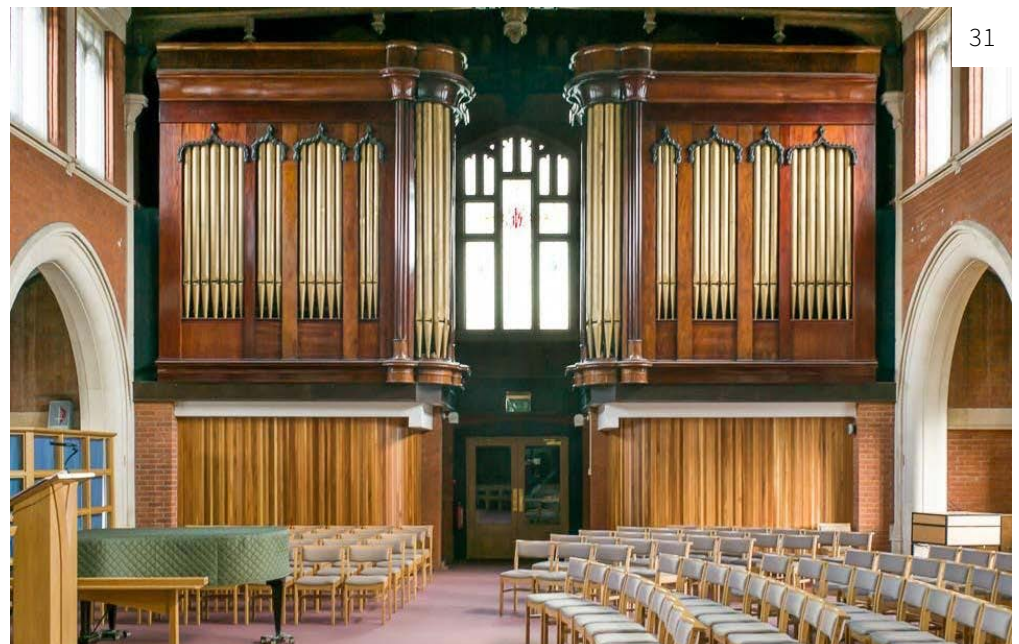
Figure 29:
The hall at Christchurch (Grade II) was converted to provide a not-for-profit soft play facility as well as meeting space, changing rooms and kitchen facilities. © Halliday Clark Architects



30

Figure 30:
Penzance Methodist Church (Grade II*) has created a kitchen and seating area under the gallery at the back of the main worship space.

Figure 31:
Wesley Methodist Chapel, Cambridge (Grade II) has accommodated kitchen and toilet facilities under the organs. The design is contemporary in style but fits with the overall character of the interior. © Archangel, Cambridge



31



32

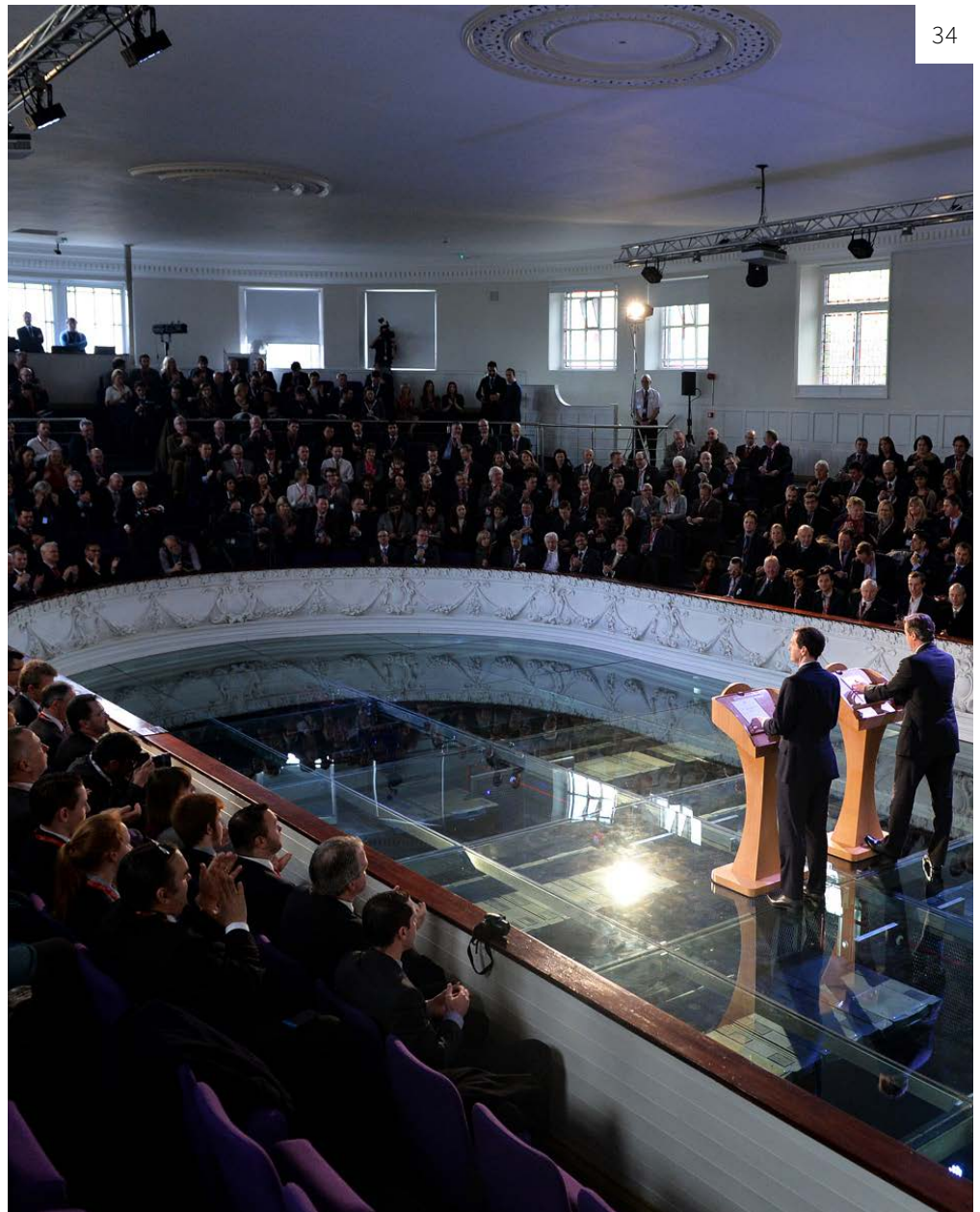


33

Figure 32:
At the Grade II listed church at Hinde, the space under the gallery to the rear of the church has been enclosed to create a draft lobby, while allowing the open character of the main body of the chapel to be retained. © Hinde Street Methodist Church London

Figure 33:
The Grade II listed former Methodist Chapel is now an art gallery. Zabłudowicz has enclosed the space under the gallery to form rooms but retains the open character of the interior for gallery space. © Zabłudowicz Collection

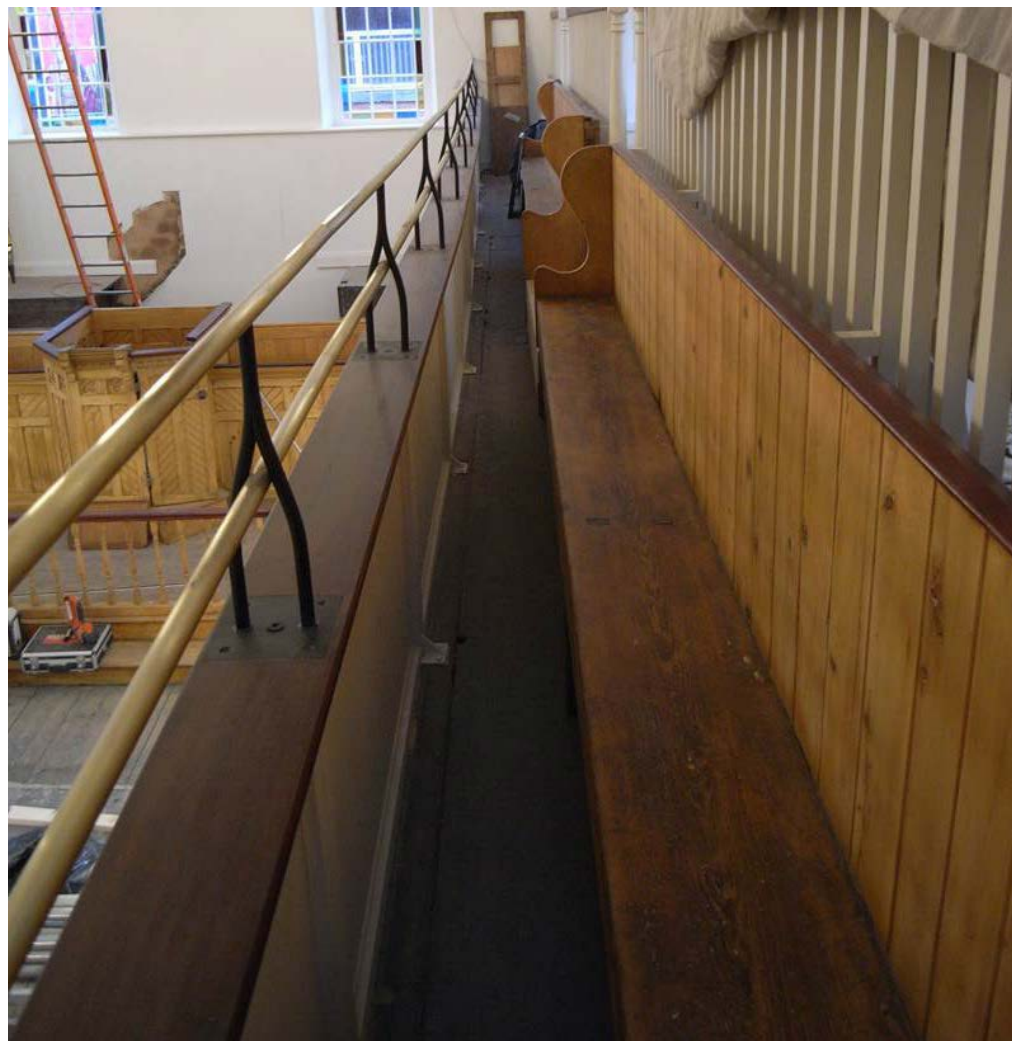
Figure 34:
Horizontal subdivision has a more significant impact on the appreciation of the space and may not be acceptable in all instances. At Salem Chapel in Leeds (Grade II), the floor has been glazed to allow for some appreciation of the former double height space. © aql



34



Figures 35 and 36:
The approach to
protection along galleries
varies depending on the
risk that is identified.
These examples show how
the response can vary.
© Chris Wakling



Congregational seating

Seating is an important feature within many places of worship and can take several forms. These include:

- benches, flexible or fixed wooden high capacity seating
- pews, identified as fixed wooden benches
- box pews, fixed pews with doors
- and chairs, built as individual seats.

Pews and box pews were often the preferred choice of seating in places of worship due to their increased seating capacity over chairs.

The design of pews and box pews in nonconformist chapels can vary and come in a range of different configurations, detailing and decoration. One point on which they generally conform is that they are laid out to comply with an auditory plan form, the fundamental principle being that every member in the congregation needs to be able to hear and see the preacher.

The seating in a chapel can contribute to the significance of the building through their **completeness, relationship to the interior, aesthetic character, historic interest and association, quality of materials and craftsmanship, rarity and age.**

In Cornwall, particular forms of seating have been identified as being of high significance. Surviving box pews dating from 1860s and earlier tend to be considered as rare forms of seating. Also surviving examples of different pew combinations can hold high significance, again due to their rarity. In Cornish Nonconformist places of worship, the combination of box pews for fee paying subscribers being flanked by loose “free” benches, for those members of the community who cannot afford the subscription, is identified as being a rare survival. There was also the provision of leader’s pews, often located at the front of the church before the rostrum. These features offer an insight into the clear social distinctions experienced within communities in the development of the chapel.

Seating can also holds significance through its association with specific architects or craftsman, its role as an integral part of a complete single phased design scheme or comprehensive phase of work as well as items of individual merit. Seating also makes an important contribution to the appearance of a chapel’s interior, and therefore these fixtures and fittings should not be viewed in isolation but as part of the interior as a whole.

Understanding the significance of the pews as individual items as well as part of the interior as a whole is fundamental to understanding where and to what extent change can be accommodated within the chapel. Expert advice maybe required to fully understand the significance of the seating.

Seating is often the aspect of the building that is under most pressure when considering change. Any proposals for change need to be based on a realistic expectation of what the congregation or a new owner is trying to achieve. Wholesale replacement should not be entertained where retention, adaption or reordering is possible. Solutions can vary in the extent and type of change proposed and these options should be informed by an understanding of the building's capacity for change and expanded upon through the design stage of the process.

In terms of minimum intervention, this could include the cleaning, restoring or adding a cushion to the pews in order to make the seats more comfortable. More involved solutions could include adapting the seat and back to improve the comfort of the pews. Shortening pews or removing a number can help to create a flexible space while retaining the critical mass of seating and the overall appearance of the chapel's interior. Where sufficient justification can be made for a more comprehensive reordering, then options that consider making the pews themselves moveable could be explored. Movement can be improved through the use of casters or rollers.

In those instances where sufficient justification has been provided for the removal of the historic seating, steps could be taken to re-use the timber for new furniture. The wood used in historic seating is often of high quality. It tends to be older and longer-grown, therefore inherently of better quality than most modern timbers. Consequently, it is a valuable commodity and can help in providing continuity to the interior's appearance through the reuse of the timber, and reduce overall cost by minimising the need for new materials.

In cases where pew removal has been agreed, the design and quality of the replacement seating requires careful consideration. In many places, the pews formed a positive contribution to the aesthetic quality of the chapel's interior. Replacing the seating can raise many challenges, particularly in respect of the design and finishes of the new additions, ensuring that they responses positively to the chapel's interior. The introduction of uncharacteristic and less durable materials such as upholstery can result in changes to the character of the interior as well as lack the longevity and durability of the former seating. New seating should continue to make a positive contribution to the interior of the chapel.

For further advice please see Historic England's Places of Worship webpages on [Interiors](#).

Figure 37:
Union Chapel (Grade II) is an active place of worship but also an established music venue. The pews are retained for seating services and events.
© Union Chapel



Figure 38:
Mousehole Chapel (Grade II*) has created spaces within the pews so that members of the congregation that have mobility assistance can sit within the main body of the church.

Figure 39:
An area of pews was cleared to the rear of the main worship space at Axbridge Methodist Chapel (Grade II) to allow for people to gather. This has provided them with the flexibility required, while retaining the character through the critical mass of pews in the church.



Figure 40:
In Penzance Methodist Chapel (Grade II*), the central block of pews have been removed to allow for flexible use. The pews on either side have been retained.



Figure 41:
Grade II* listed St George's Chapel, Oldham, is a multi-use venue. Box pews along the side of the main space have been occupied with tables to create areas to sit. It also retains the rostrum as a focal point within the space. © Age UK Oldham





Figure 42:
Port Isaac Chapel (Grade II)
has used its gallery pews
to display products from
the shop. © Port Isaac Café
and Pottery

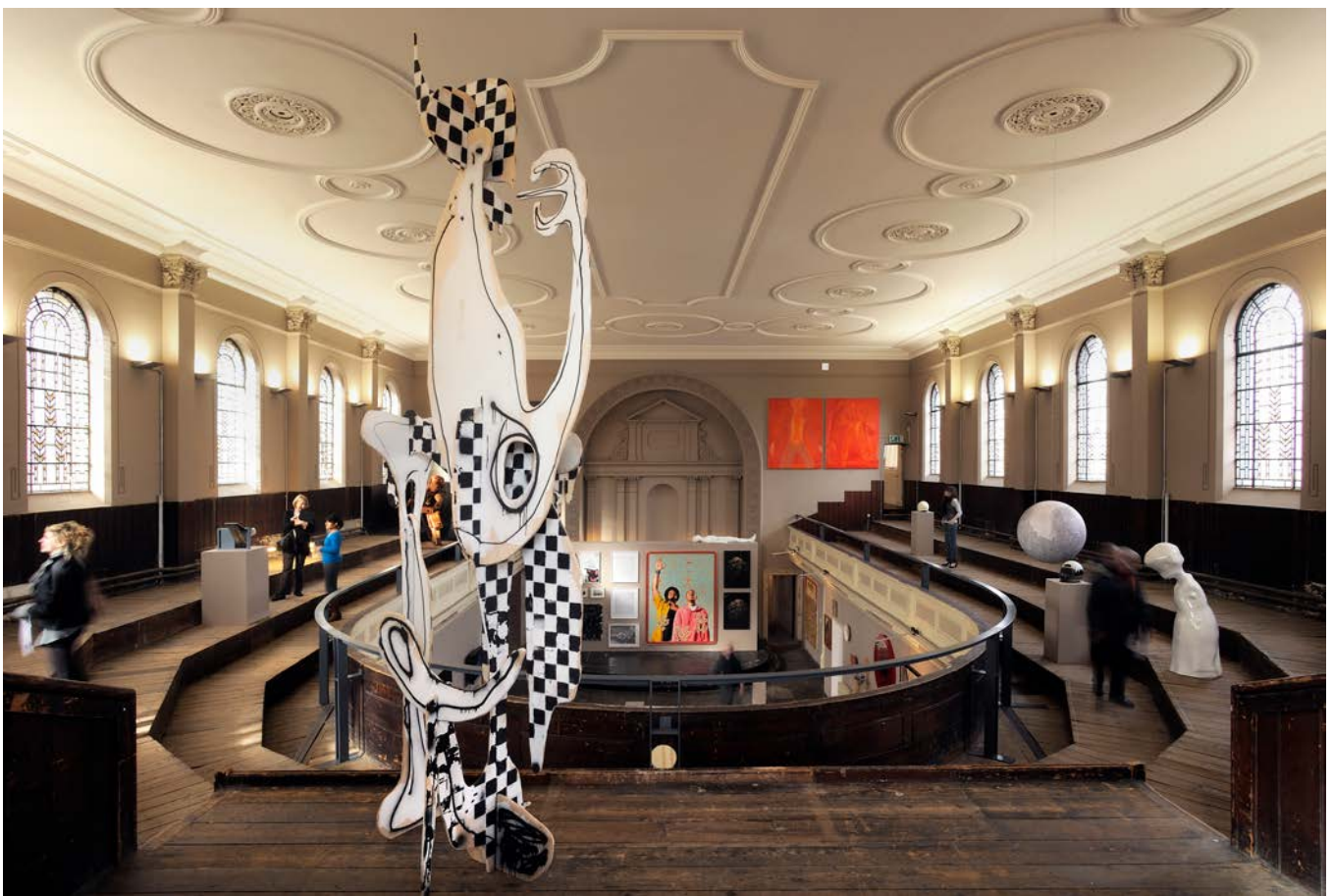


Figure 43:
At Zabłudowicz (Grade II)
the pews in the gallery
have been removed. This
has created a stepped floor
and has been utilised to
display the artwork.
© Zabłudowicz Collection

Figure 44:
At the Trinity Centre, the
stepped gallery has been
used to create staggered
desk space for co-working.
© Trinity Centre



Disposing of chapels

With the increased rate of chapel closures, it is important that the subsequent disposal of the chapel is undertaken in line with best practice and following denominational procedures:

- Engagement with the local community and stakeholders is an important step when looking to diversify or to close a chapel to worship. This local engagement needs to be undertaken at an early stage to help build resilience in planning for the future.
- Undertaking an assessment in line with the framework set out in this guidance can identify where there is current opportunity for change to allow chapels to diversify their uses. If the point is reached where the chapel is sold, then providing an assessment as part of the sale particulars will allow prospective owners to make an informed decision over what may be possible to accommodate within the building and avoid the ‘hope value’ that can be associated with the sale of these properties.
- Early engagement through the pre-application process (preferably before the point of closure) with the secular advisory bodies is advisable. This is primarily with the local authority (for example Cornwall Council) and, on higher graded heritage assets, with Historic England. With the assessment of significance provided, this can help inform the discussion around potential works and alternative uses, identifying those solutions that are less harmful to the significance of the heritage assets.
- In those highly graded properties that are so significant that change cannot be accommodated without causing significant harm, it may be that the special interest of the building would satisfy the criteria of the [Historic Chapels Trust](#). They are a charitable organisation set up to care for non-Anglican churches, chapels and places of worship within England.

When considering the value of the site and its property, its monetary value is an important consideration. However, other values, including community and heritage, should not be ignored. Proposals should address all values and give them equal consideration. This will allow for a scheme that responds successfully to the constraints and opportunities of the site. It is easier to achieve a scheme that addresses all the associated values if the site is viewed as a whole rather than as separate entities.

Alternative methods of disposing of places of worship can be found in the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Historic England’s document *Options for the Disposal of Redundant Churches and Other Places of Worship* (January 2010).

3

Where to get information

Historic England Guidance

[Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment](#), English Heritage (2008)

[Designation Selection Guide: Places of Worship](#), Historic England (2017)

[Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 - The Setting of Historic Assets](#), English Heritage (2017)

[Introductions to Heritage Assets: Nonconformist Places of Worship](#), Historic England (2016)

[Making Changes to Places of Worship](#), Historic England (2019)

[The National Heritage list for England](#), Historic England (2019)

[Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice](#), Historic England (2016)

Denominational organisations and guidance

[Methodist Church](#)

[Baptist Union](#)

[Catholic Church](#)

[United Reform Church](#)

[Church of England](#)

[Historic Chapels Trust](#)

Useful websites

[Bing Maps](#)

[British Newspaper Archive](#)

[Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape WHS](#)

[Cornwall Council – Appraisals and Surveys](#)

[Cornwall Council – Historic Environment Record](#)

[Cornwall Council – Record, Archive and Cornish Studies](#)

[Google Maps](#)

[Heritage Gateway](#)

[The Institute of British Organ Building](#)

[Royal Institute of Cornwall](#)

Additional Guidance

[The Operation of the Ecclesiastical Exemption and related planning matters for places of worship in England: Guidance](#), DCMS (2010)

[Options for the disposal of redundant churches and other places of worship](#), DCMS and Historic England/formerly English Heritage (2010)

Amenity societies

[Victorian Society](#)

[Georgian Group](#)

[20th Century Society](#)

[SPAB](#)

[Ancient Monuments Society](#)

Contact Historic England

Contact our South West office for more information on Cornish places of worship:

For further information contact your [local office](#)

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