

CARING FOR CORNWALL'S HISTORIC CHAPELS

INTRODUCING THE GUIDANCE ON METHODIST AND NONCONFORMIST CHAPELS

This document summarises and draws attention to guidance on Cornwall's Methodist and Nonconformist chapels.

- They are of national significance, and most are heritage assets which through all types of use make a positive contribution to Cornwall's cultural landscape.
- Chapel communities are critical to the care of many of the most significant chapels, but many of these are closing due to declining congregations and the costs of maintenance.

This guidance will inform a strategic approach to this increasingly acute problem. It will help planners and all interested parties, including applicants and local communities:

- Consider the importance of chapels as heritage assets, places of worship and community facilities.
- Plan for the changes required to secure their future.
- Will help direct grants for urgent works for all listed chapels in use.



The chapel at Port Isaac, which dominates views of this historic fishing village, is now in commercial use. It is one of 184 chapels which are listed at grade II. Photo © Eric Berry



The chapel at Little Trethewey, which is listed grade II*, is one of the most significant in Cornwall but also at risk of decay and eventual collapse without further help and funds. It has retained a fine interior with a full set of box pews, and sits within a burial ground with a Sunday School and a trap house. Photo © Eric Berry



ENGLISH HERITAGE

The **Methodist Church**



GUIDANCE FOR METHODIST AND NONCONFORMIST CHAPELS IN CORNWALL: A SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

Cornwall has one of the highest concentrations of Methodist and Nonconformist chapels in Britain, but they are also under great pressures for change. English Heritage, Cornwall Council and the Methodist Church have collaborated on the production of guidance to direct approaches and inform change to these important buildings. The guidance is divided into two parts.

The **Chapels Assessment Framework** suggests simple steps for informing change to all chapels, whether they are listed or not, based upon an understanding of their historic character and significance. It is aimed for use by planning officers and applicants, including agents and architects.

Historic Chapels in Cornwall provides illustrated guidance on the historic character and significance of chapels, and the present and future issues for chapel communities. It is aimed for the same audience, but it will also be of interest for those with an interest in the history and character of Cornwall.

Chapels make an important contribution to Cornwall's landscape and sense of cultural distinctiveness, and display an enormous diversity in their scale and architectural treatment. Methodism played an especially important role in the development of Cornwall's communities, including its famous tin and copper mining areas. It was exported to other parts of the world, along with the technologies for mining, in the great emigrations of the 19th century.

Over 900 chapels have now been identified on the Cornwall and Scilly Historic Environment Record, as a result of survey work conducted since the 1990s. Most of these still retain their distinctive character as chapels, and are heritage assets which make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. The most significant have been designated through listing for their special architectural or historic interest. 184 chapels have been listed at grade II. 18 are listed at grade II*, for their outstanding rarity and significance as examples of their type, date and architectural treatment. One, the Quaker meeting house at Come-to-Good, Kea, is listed at grade I.

The number of chapels in religious and community use has declined in the last hundred years from around 750 to around 200, and many more chapels will fall out of use in the next ten years. Rural chapels, particularly isolated examples, are three times more likely to be converted to domestic use, and chapels in towns and within villages are the most likely to remain in use as places of worship and/or for community use.

There are good examples of residential conversion which have retained and enhanced the historic character of chapels, but this use is associated with the greatest potential for change to the setting and in particular the interiors of chapels and their spiritual value. Some of these interiors are also of exceptional importance for their spatial and decorative treatment and the survival of early seating arrangements and fittings. Chapel communities play a vital role in sustaining them as places of worship and as community facilities, but they are often struggling to maintain them. Understanding the issues that they are facing, and working in partnership with them, is critical in planning for the future.

USING THE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The Assessment Framework will help users understand issues at an early stage and thus save time and costs when it comes to preparing applications. These will stand a better chance of success if the potential impacts on significance and other key issues have been identified and considered in advance, in particular how to:

- Retain and enhance the external character of chapels in their local setting, including that of associated ancillary buildings.
- Reveal opportunities to conserve and enhance the setting, boundaries and curtilage of chapels, including prominent viewpoints and elevations.
- Inform high quality design, including appropriate detailing, materials, craftsmanship and the setting of buildings.
- Ensure that any significant interior spaces and detail are identified and incorporated within a scheme, through ensuring that subdivision is focused as much as possible away from the main chapel space.

1 SITE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

- Identify the site, including access and services, and any designations.
- Identify the historic character of the chapel (its setting, exterior and interior, and any other areas or buildings) and how it has changed.
- Identify its level of significance.

2 CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

This understanding will then help you identify any issues at the earliest critical stage in the planning process. Its sensitivity to differing proposals will determine what capacity there is for change and indicate the nature of change that will be most acceptable.

3 PREPARING A SCHEME

Stages can then inform approaches to design and the drafting of a planning application. A checklist of key issues is provided, for consideration of the setting, the exterior and the interior.



This example of a domestic conversion at Trevone near Padstow shows how new uses can retain the distinctive quality and character of chapels in their settings. Most chapels will be conserved through this form of reuse. Photo © Eric Berry



Listed chapels can tolerate adaptive change if carefully and sympathetically managed. The interior of Truro Methodist Church (grade II), a fine large-scale classical chapel of 1830, was refitted in 1891 with high-quality treatment to its gallery and rostrum. Chairs have replaced the pitch pine pews, enabling a flexible use of this busy urban chapel. Photo © Eric Berry



Chapels are scattered across the county's ancient farmed landscapes, but they are usually isolated and are sited at some distance from the medieval parish church. The smallest vernacular chapels, such as this example at Tregona near Padstow (listed grade II), have been subject to the highest rates of loss and dereliction. Photo © Eric Berry



The interior of the 1862 Wesleyan chapel at Leedstown in Crowan parish (grade II) has an original gallery. However, as with so many Methodist chapels, the building was re-seated in the late 19th century with simple pitch pine pews. Photo © Eric Berry



Chapels are in contrast an integral part of the county's rural-industrial settlements. The large classical Wesleyan chapel of 1843 at Ponsanooth (grade II*) dominates this former industrial village, whose gunpowder works served local mines. There has historically been an over-provision of chapels in these areas. Photo © Eric Berry



A survey of chapels in the late 1990s revealed the rarity of chapels with interior fittings that date from the 1860s and earlier. The best examples have been listed at grade II*. Penrose Bible Christian Chapel (1861) in St Ervan parish is such a survival of a small vernacular chapel with interior fittings including box pews. It has limited adaptability for new uses, and following a period of disuse it is now in the care of the Historic Chapels Trust. Photo © Eric Berry