

Statements of Significance for the Online Faculty System

A Guidance Note for Parishes

The purpose of this document is to provide parishes with information for completing the *Statement of Significance* form when submitting a full faculty application on the Online Faculty System.

Introduction

The Church in Wales has over 1,000 listed churches, half of which are grade I and II*. All churches are important, but those that are listed are deemed to be of special architectural or historic interest. This makes many of them of national importance and means their continued care and maintenance needs to be managed sensitively to ensure they continue as places of worship and for the enjoyment of the wider community for generations to come.

The maintenance, repair and day-to-day management of all churches and churchyards owned by the Representative Body of the Church in Wales is carried out at a diocesan level. Any changes to these churches and churchyards requires permission in the form of a *faculty*. The process by which this is obtained is known as the *faculty process*. The operation of the faculty process means that PCCs¹ do not need to apply for separate listed building consent for their listed churches to the Local Planning Authority (LPA). This is because the Church in Wales is classed as an exempt denomination and has demonstrated that their own internal system of building permission (ie. the faculty process) is equivalent to the secular system. This “ecclesiastical exemption” is part of national legislation as described in the *Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Wales) Order 2018*.

Any change to a church needs to be considered carefully. This simply means gaining an understanding of its significance and assessing the impact of the proposed works on it and its setting. Changes should be justified and weighed against any potential damage to the historic fabric of the church and its setting.

The completion of a *Statement of Significance* form is required for a full faculty application. The form contains three sections to help applicants assess the significance of their church and the impact of the proposed works on it. The amount of information which should be included will be proportional to the significance of the church and the degree of proposed change.

¹ The term “Parochial Church Council” is used within this document to describe the local church trustee body responsible for the management of the church, hall and churchyard. These bodies may also be known as the Ministry Area Council, the Local Ministry Area Council, Rectorial Benefice Council, Mission Area Conference, or any other term designated by diocesan policies.

Contents

The following sections are designed to assist you with the completion of a *Statement of Significance* form, which is one of several forms that collectively make up a full faculty application.

Part 1, *Understanding your Church's Significance*, introduces the concept of significance and heritage values.

Part 2, *Researching your Church's Significance*, describes readily available and reliable sources of information that you can use in your *Statement of Significance* form.

Part 3, *Creating a Statement of Significance*, describes the online *Statement of Significance* form and its three sections, and discusses how to use the information from your research (Part 2) and relate it to the four heritage values (Part 1) when completing the form.

Appendix I contains an example of a completed online *Statement of Significance* form using the information discussed in Parts 1 and 2.

Appendix II contains a list of reliable and factual sources of information you can use for the creation of a *Statement of Significance*.

1. Understanding your Church's Significance

Churches represent an important part of our shared heritage and occupy a special place within our towns and countryside. Many have been in existence since the medieval period and represent the oldest building in continuous use in a community. Most have been altered at some point in their existence and bear the visible evidence of this through their distinctive architecture forms, internal fixtures and fittings and decorations. Some have local and nationally important historical associations, while others have been built by well-known architects or follow a particular artistic or architectural style. Some may form part of a group of similar buildings or are set within a historically important landscape. All of these things contribute to the significance of a church, and the production of a *Statement of Significance*, which highlights them, will help you, and the people who assess your faculty application, to understand what is special about yours.

Heritage Values²

Cadw (the Welsh Government's historic environment service) describes "heritage assets" (churches in our case) as having four heritage values: evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal, and an assessment of each of these should be taken into consideration when creating a *Statement of Significance (SOS)*.

Evidential

This refers to the surviving physical evidence of your church, such as how and when it was constructed, what materials were used and how this has changed over time. Any hidden or buried elements also contribute to its evidential value.

Historical

This relates to any historical associations your church may have with specific people or events. Perhaps it was designed by a famous architect or it contains a monument or tomb commemorating a historic event, or dedicated to a historical figure. Maybe it was built by a prominent local family who played an important role in shaping Welsh or British history, or during the industrial revolution, when the population of many towns and cities increased dramatically.

Aesthetic

Many churches were designed and constructed in a particular architectural style or illustrate good craftsmanship, and this heritage value attempts to capture this. It can also include a church's setting ie. how it relates to its immediate and wider environment. How it contributes to its landscape or townscape and these things collectively contribute to the character of the area. It could be part of a coherent group of similar buildings (eg. church, vicarage and school) that were constructed at the same time, or designed by the same architect.

Communal

This value attempts to capture any special meaning your church may have to its community. For example, what part does it (or did it) play in the local spiritual and cultural life of the community?

² Conservation Principles (for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales), understanding heritage values and assessing significance, p16.

2. Researching your Church's Significance

When researching the significance of your church, it is important to consult reliable and factual sources of information. One of the best online resources is the Historic Wales website where you can access Listed Building Records, Historic Environment Records, National Monuments Records, Scheduled Ancient Monuments Records and the National Museum Archaeology collection. Here, you can search by place name (village, town, city, etc), Ordnance Survey grid reference or postcode. The website can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

The following briefly describes the Historic Wales website resources and what they are useful for when creating a SOS. A further list of resources is also available in Appendix II.

Listed Building Reports (LBRs)

LBRs come in a standard format and usually contain a brief history of the building, a description of its exterior, interior and a reason for listing (designation). The core of the evidential heritage value should come from this document, in addition to information on the historical and aesthetic values. The “reason for listing” section is extremely useful for highlighting what is special or significant about a building and you should pay attention to this in your SoS, especially if the proposed works will affect it.

A wide variety of structures are listed, not just churches and other buildings. War memorials, lychgates, churchyard walls, etc, can all be listed in their own right. This is useful to know when planning any external works to your church, as you will be expected to describe how the setting (aesthetic heritage value) of any listed structures within its curtilage will be affected, in addition to the building itself.

Historic Environment Records (HERs)

HERs contain information about historic landscapes (urban and rural), buildings and archaeological sites, and are maintained by the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts. They can also contain reports of surveys (such as the *Welsh Historic Churches Survey*), archaeological excavations and investigations, and historical studies, or at least reference or link to these so you can conduct further research yourself.

Don't be put off searching HERs if your church is not listed, as both listed and unlisted churches can have an HER. They are particularly useful for archaeological information and may be able to tell you if you have any important “hidden archaeology” in the church or churchyard. They can contain useful information for evidential, historical and aesthetic heritage values.

National Monuments Records (NMRs)

These records are maintained by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW). However, it is not just monuments that the RCAHMW record. They also have records of churches and other buildings and structures, so it is always worth searching their records. Many of their records often have photographs and links to associated sites and monuments, such as lychgates and churchyard crosses. They are useful for evidential and historical heritage values.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs)

Churches cannot be SAMs, although there may be some in the churchyard, like a preaching cross or early Christian stone. Unlike listed churches and structures within their curtilages, SAMs do not fall within ecclesiastical exemption. They are given much greater protection than

listed buildings and any works to them will need scheduled monument consent from Cadw. You need to be mindful of any external works to your church, churchyard and any structures within its curtilage, which may affect the setting (aesthetic value) of a SAM. If this is the case, make sure this is recorded in your SOS.

[National Museum Archaeology collection](#)

These are records of archaeological finds. No information is available via the Historic Wales website directly, although a location and a find number are recorded. They are of limited use in describing significance, but may give an indication of the presence of a historical site, which in turn means that you may have to take this into account if your proposed works could disturb any hidden archaeology. However, if the site itself is important, it will have been recorded as an HER, so always check this too.

[Other sources of information](#)

The *Pevsner Buildings of Wales*' guides are particularly useful for both listed and unlisted buildings as they often contain information about the architecture, history, building materials and contents of a church. They can be good sources of information for all heritage values (evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal). In addition, they will often include some background information about your village/town/city, which can sometimes be useful to include in a SOS. They are widely available in bookshops and libraries or can be ordered from an online book seller (eg. Amazon).

Your church should have an inventory of its contents. These were compiled some years ago (along with the logbook and terrier) and are kept in each parish. They often contain an architectural history of the building as well as a detailed inventory of its contents and can prove very useful for highlighting the most important features of a church. They can be good sources of information for all heritage values (evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal).

Quinquennial Inspection reports often contain a description of the architectural history of a church and its building materials and construction (in addition to highlighting areas that need attention). This can make them a useful source of information when assessing evidential heritage values. They should also contain a note of any designations that apply (eg. listed building, conservation area, etc).

Church Heritage Cymru is a church record database for all Church in Wales' churches. There is an ongoing project to populate it with useful information to assist parishes when preparing a faculty application. Although the content of each record may vary, it is always worth checking to see what data it contains about your church.

3. Creating a Statement of Significance

All full faculty applications require a SOS and there are two options for preparing one. Which option you choose will depend on your proposed works and the significance of your church. The simplest option, which this document describes, is to complete the SOS form on the Online Faculty System (OFS). This contains three sections which ask you to describe your church and its history, highlighting any special architectural, artistic or archaeological features, plus an assessment of the impact of the proposed works. This is the recommended option for most straightforward works.

For larger more complex works, the preferred option would be to upload a separate SOS document to the OFS. This allows you to include more details than those required for the online form and would normally be prepared by a conservation professional as part of the supporting documentation for the project (eg. for an extensive church reordering). Further guidance on preparing this type of SOS will be available in the future.

The information you enter into the online form will remain on the OFS, so the next time you apply for a faculty, you won't have to rewrite it. You will however, need to make some minor changes to support your new works. The three sections of the form that you will need to complete are described below:

Section 1. Brief history and description of the church building(s), contents, churchyard and setting

If your church is listed, you should be able to get most of the required information from the listed building report ([LBR](#)). This contains sections on history, exterior (description of the church building) and contents (the interior), thus addressing the *evidential* and *historical* heritage values. If the church was constructed in a particular architectural style (eg. Gothic, Italianate, etc) this may also be found in the report and should be included in your description ie. the *aesthetic* heritage value.

The LBR may contain a brief description of the churchyard, especially if the walls or any structures within it are listed. If not, then you will need to supply a description of it yourself, including any listed churchyard structures or [SAMs](#).

A very brief description of the setting of the church is also sometimes included in the LBR (usually found in the location section if there is one) and you can use this as a starting point to give a fuller description of your own. Only a brief description of the setting will be required if your proposed works are internal. However, if your works will affect the exterior appearance of the church, you will need to think about how it relates to its immediate and wider environment ie. its *aesthetic* heritage value. You should therefore consider the following and include them in the form:

- Is the church in a rural or urban setting? Briefly describe the surrounding area.
- What is the size (scale) of the church in relation to nearby buildings or landscape features (parks, trees, hedges, etc)? Does it dominate these or is it dwarfed by them? Briefly describe this relationship.
- Are adjacent buildings of similar age, style and construction or more contemporary? Briefly describe them.

- Does the church form part of a coherent group of similar buildings (eg. church, vicarage and school) that were constructed at the same time, or designed by the same architect? If so, include a description of them.

Lastly, if your church has any special relationships (past or present) with the local community, then describe them here. This will address the *communal* heritage value.

If your church is not listed, it should still have a historic environment record ([HER](#)) and possibly a national monument record ([NMR](#)). These will contain some information you can use (even if it is limited there are often references to other sources). Also consult the *Pevsner Buildings of Wales*' guides, your church inventory and quinquennial inspections reports.

Unlike the contents of the LBR, the history and description of the church building, its contents, churchyard and setting, will not be so well set out in other sources. You will therefore need to extract the appropriate information to include in Section I, bearing in mind the four heritage values: evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal, which should be addressed if possible. If you are really struggling with this, consult your DAC Secretary who may be able to help.

Section 2: Describe the significance of the church (including its contents and churchyard) in terms of:

- i) Its special architectural and historical interest**
- ii) Any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest**

After completing Section I, you should now have a good understanding of the history, architecture, contents and setting of your church. The next step is to assess the significance of your church in terms of parts (i) and (ii) above. The "reason for listing/designation" section of the LBR is extremely useful for highlighting what is special or significant about a building, so make sure you include this in the form.

Pay particular attention to the elements that will be affected by your proposed works *especially* if they are included in the list description (not just in the "reason for listing" section of the LBR, which is usually only a sentence).

Remember that the amount of information you should include in this section will be proportional to the significance of the church and the degree of proposed change.

Section 3: An assessment of the impact of the proposals on the significance defined in Section 2.

In Section 2 you will have assessed the overall significance of your church and identified any special features or elements. The next step is to assess the impact of your proposed works on these. If they will have a damaging effect, another solution should be sought. However, if this is unavoidable, you will need to have a mitigation strategy to minimise the damage. You must always show that you have fully considered all alternatives and be able to justify your course of action, especially if the benefits of carrying out the work outweigh the damage.

The justification for your proposed works should be described in the *Statement of Needs* form, which is also part of a full faculty application.

In addition to completing the three sections of the online SOS form, you can also use it to upload a plan, exterior and interior image of your church. However, it is better to supply as many photographs as you can of the areas of the church or churchyard that will be affected by the proposed works. These should be uploaded on the *Supporting Documents and Images* tab on the *Details* screen of the OFS.

See Appendix I for an example of a SOS using the online form.

Please note: If you need any help or advice completing the online form, you should consult your DAC Secretary.

APPENDIX I: Example Online SOS

The following is an example of a completed SOS form (used in a training exercise) for a faculty application to replace the kitchen units and floor tiles in the kitchen/meeting room at the west end of St Mary's Church, Dolgellau.

Section I: Brief history and description of the church building(s), contents, churchyard and setting

The Church of St Mary, in the Benefice of Bro Cymer, is situated in the south of the Diocese of Bangor. It is a grade II listed building surrounded by its churchyard and located in the central conservation area of the town of Dolgellau, within the Snowdonia National Park. The churchyard contains a variety of tombs and monuments, with a grade II listed sundial opposite the south entrance of the church and grade II listed churchyard gates & railings.

The church dates from 1716, although there is documentary evidence of an earlier medieval one on the same site in 1254, and the presence of a chantry altar recorded in 1558. The "new" church was reputedly built around the old one so that services could continue, although no physical evidence of this earlier structure remains, apart from a window mullion set into the churchyard wall and a fourteenth century effigy of a local Lord (Meurig ab Ynyr Fychan of Nannau), sited in the northeast window recess.

Architecturally, the church is Georgian in style (and thus a rarity in Wales), with tall arched windows in the north and south aisles, an apsidal chancel at the east end and tower at the west end. Unusually, the nave and aisles are divided by an arcade of wooden columns. The church is built from a locally quarried brown grey slatey stone cut into regular blocks (more commonly used in lintels on the other buildings in the town), which overlap at the corners to form quoins. The window quoins have a similar treatment. The crenelated tower is of rubble stone construction – possibly medieval in origin and remodelled in the early 17C. The vestry (adjoining the tower) was added in the early 19C.

Internally, St Mary's has a wide "flattened" barrel vaulted timber ceiling with numerous 18C and 19C wall monuments. The aisles and nave retain the majority of their dark wood late 19C pews. The beautiful stained glass windows are a particular feature of St Mary's with three by the well known firm of Clayton & Bell, dating from the 1860s. A restoration in 1864 (commemorated by an inscription in Welsh on a slate tablet over the south door) saw the windows in the chancel altered and a new central window inserted in 1901 by the Gothic Revival Architect, G F Bodley. The last substantial remodelling at St Mary's were completed in 1992 when a multi-purpose first floor meeting room and kitchen was inserted at the rear of the church with robing room beneath. The bow fronted meeting room with arched windows, mirrors the apsidal chancel and overlooks the nave. It is approached via a wide staircase (with chair lift) from the south porch with a disabled toilet opposite.

The shape of St Mary's churchyard suggests it may once have been curvilinear in form, although it is now more irregular, possibly due to encroachment by neighbouring buildings over the years. It has entrances in Lombard Street and Marian Road, both with wrought iron gates and

a mixture of railings and stone walls along its perimeter. The churchyard contains a variety of headstones, box tombs and monuments.

Section 2: The significance of the church (including its contents and churchyard) in terms of:

i) Its special architectural and historical interest

ii) Any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest

(i) The Georgian Church of St Mary is built from locally quarried stone. It has a nave and aisles divided by an arcade of wooden columns. The chancel is apsidal and the wide barrel vaulted timber ceiling matches the dark wood of the late 19C pews. It contains many stained glass windows and wall memorials. The bow fronted first floor meeting room with arched windows, mirrors the apsidal chancel and overlooks the nave.

(ii) The current church is believed to have replaced an earlier medieval one on the same site, with the tower possibly incorporating some of this earlier building fabric. St Mary's is noted for its beautiful stained glass windows with three by the well known firm of Clayton & Bell, dating from the 1860s. A restoration in 1864 altered the windows in the chancel and saw the insertion of a new central window in 1901 by the Gothic Revival Architect, G F Bodley.

Section 3: An assessment of the impact of the proposals on the significance defined in Section 2.

The proposed works will not affect the exterior of the church, or the external face of the multi-purpose meeting room and kitchen as viewed from the interior of the church. The works are confined solely to the interior of the meeting/room kitchen. The proposal is to completely replace the existing kitchen units which were installed when the meeting room/kitchen was created in 1992. They are now no longer fit for purpose and will be replaced by modern units. The floor tiles will also be replaced at the same time. Supporting documents for the new units and flooring, and photographs showing the areas affected by the proposed works, have been uploaded to the OFS.

Sources:

Dolgellau: Understanding Urban Character, published by Cadw.

Cadw Listed Building Records for (a) St Mary's Church Dolgellau (Ref: 5064), (b) Sundial in St Mary's Churchyard (Ref: 5065) and Churchyard Gates & Railings to St Marys Parish Church (Ref: 5063).

The Buildings of Wales: Gwynedd, published by Yale University Press.

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales' online database (Coflein) entry for St Mary's Church Dolgellau.

APPENDIX II: RESOURCES

There is a lot of information readily available to help you research and prepare your *Statement of Significance* (SOS). The following lists the most easily accessible and reliable sources.

Historic Wales Website

As mentioned earlier, one of the best online resources is the Historic Wales website where you can access Listed Building Records, Historic Environment Records, National Monuments Records, Scheduled Ancient Monuments Records and the National Museum Archaeology collection. Click [here](#) to go to the website

Pevsner Buildings of Wales' Books

There are seven regional volumes of the Pevsner Buildings of Wales' books now available. They cover the whole of the Principality and are published by Yale University Press. Most local libraries will hold the volume relevant to their particular region. They can also be bought directly from local bookshops or online (eg. from Amazon).

Welsh Historic Churches Survey

All pre 19th century churches in Wales were surveyed by the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts in the late 1990s, with each covering its own region. The online availability of the survey data varies from trust to trust, although all will supply you with the information if you contact them. Click on the links below to go to the Trust websites:

[Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust](#)

[Dyfed Archaeological Trust](#)

[Gwynedd Archaeological Trust](#)

[Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust](#)

In addition, many have *Historic Landscape Characterisation* and *Historic Towns, Communities and Settlements* studies which may be useful in helping you to understand the wider archaeological and historical significance of your area.

The Archwilio Website

All [HERs](#) can be accessed via the Historic Wales website, although they can also be accessed on the Archwilio website. The advantage of using Archwilio directly is that you can search by geographical area, local authority, historical period and using free text. You can also see if your church is located in a conservation area, designated park & garden, world heritage site and historic landscape, by locating its HER on a map. This is useful if you are planning any external works within these historic areas. Click [here](#) to go to the website.

Local Record Offices

The Archives Wales website contains contact and location information, opening hours and the types of records held, for all local authority records offices across Wales. Click [here](#) to go to the website.

Welsh Historic Towns Characterisation Studies

Cadw and some local authorities have produced a series of characterisation studies for towns across Wales. These studies will give you a good general overview of your area before you start to “home in” on what contribution your own church makes to the local distinctiveness. If you are not certain what is available in your area, try an internet search as most studies are readily available to download or view online.

Local authorities call their characterisation studies by many different names, so you may need to do some creative searching before you find anything relevant to your area! Try searching on keywords like *urban townscape study*, *urban characterisation study*, *historic characterisation study*, etc, for your town.

Don't be put off by the amount of information typically contained in a characterisation study. Only a small part will be relevant to your needs. The studies usually divide the town, city or area they cover into smaller segments (often conservation areas), so look for the information specific to the area or location of your church. If you still cannot find one for your area, contact your local authority, archaeological trust or Cadw directly.

If there is no characterisation study for your area, you will need to do some “field work” yourself. This is not a difficult task and is still a good exercise to do even if there is a suitable study available. It will help you look critically at the setting of your church and how it relates to the other features in the area. Walk around the outside of the church and its immediate environs armed with a notebook and digital camera, and record what you see. Do this as a group if possible and then discuss your findings collectively.

Design Guides & Supplementary Planning Guidance

In addition to characterisation studies, local authorities (and district councils) often publish design guides to help people understand what is special and distinctive about their local area or community. Anyone submitting a planning application, whether it be for listed building consent, conservation area consent or planning permission, should read the guide to ensure that the design of their proposal is in keeping with the local distinctiveness and character of the area. The guides can therefore help you understand what is special about your particular area when preparing a SOS.

Design guides can be standalone documents or form part of larger ones, such as *Unitary Development Plans (UDPs)* or *Local Development Plans (LDPs)* published by local authorities. They are sometimes designated as *Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)*. Most of these documents can usually be downloaded from the planning or building control section of your local authority website.

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6th November 2019