

GIFTS AND MEMORIALS



T^HE GLORE O GOD in myn daye JOHN BARBOUR, wither o scois prose
 archdein here for gairth gear, abo't 1395, yit in this aisle he screivit 'the birnis'
 a' credene is a dooble thing!
 screivne mair than twa to have thine;
 screivne all sounes to man eiris
 the devye of ois that screit livis!

An information leaflet from the
Committee on Church Art and Architecture
 of the Church of Scotland
 October 1998 updated August 2008

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When we want to remember someone special who has served the church well, we are hoping that their memory will help us continue the work they have done. This means that the best memorial may not be a plaque, which records the past, but something to enhance and resource the daily life and mission of the church in the present day.

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The cover reproduces the carved wooden panel recently erected in St Machar's Cathedral as a memorial to the Scottish poet, John Barbour, who was also Archdeacon of the Cathedral. The artist is Roland Fraser. Reproduced by permission.

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These can be obtained from:

The Committee on Church Art and Architecture, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN, tel 0131 225 5722 x359, fax 220 3113; wordoc@cofscotland.org.uk

Comments and suggestions for inclusion in any revision of this pamphlet are welcomed.

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>A rich and varied choice</i>	4
<i>Advice and approval</i>	4
<i>Going about it</i>	5
<i>Something good which will last</i>	5
<i>The first step</i>	6
<i>Starting points</i>	7
<i>Inscriptions</i>	7
<i>Nothing lasts for ever</i>	7
<i>Dedication</i>	7
<i>Ideas for gifts or memorials</i>	8
<i>The worship of the church</i>	8
<i>The furnishings</i>	9
<i>The building itself</i>	10
<i>The church grounds</i>	10
<i>The music of the church</i>	10
<i>The ministry of the church</i>	11
<i>The church's outreach</i>	11
<i>Memorial plaques</i>	12
<i>Caution advised</i>	12
<i>When congregations unite</i>	13
<i>A suitable location</i>	13
<i>The importance of good design</i>	13
<i>Useful information</i>	14
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	14
<i>About the Committee</i>	15

INTRODUCTION

A rich and varied choice

Church of Scotland buildings tend to be simple. We worship without needing too many 'props'. When, therefore, someone wishes to give a gift to the church, or there is a desire to erect a memorial to someone whose contribution to the local church (or community) has been much valued, we tend to fall back on one or two ideas only - such as a plaque or a stained glass window.

Nevertheless, there are a remarkable number of possibilities available to a congregation who wish to respond to the offer of a gift or to set up a memorial. This leaflet sets out some of these, and local circumstances may suggest many others. It also outlines the ways in which the Artistic Matters Committee can help.

Advice and approval

Where the ideas listed here do not involve alteration to the structure of the church building but only to its appearance, the General Trustees dispense with the need to give approval so long as the Committee on Church Art and Architecture is satisfied with what is proposed.

This means that any memorial or gift which will be a permanent 'fixture' inside or outside the church - i.e. pulpit fall, window, furnishings, memorial book or garden (but not, e.g., community projects or a set of hymn books) - needs approval from the Committee.

Gifts and memorials are one category of item on the agenda of the Committee on Church Art and Architecture as it meets on the first Thursday of every month. Items for consideration can be received up until the day before.

A proposal should be accompanied by enough information to help the Committee understand the purpose and the location of the proposed item. A design should be accompanied by some explanation of what is behind it and the materials to be used. It is useful to have one or two interior photographs of the church, so that the location of a new item

can be clearly seen in relation to the church as a whole. (It may be the Committee already has photographs on file; it is worth checking.)

This may be sufficient but it is often the case that one or more members of the Committee will visit the church and talk with those most concerned with the proposal. They then bring back a report to the Committee. Arrangements are made through the Committee's office in Edinburgh (see back page).

However, the Committee is glad to be involved in such matters much earlier than the approval stage, even when an idea is first mooted. Telephone or on the spot consultations can assist the local congregation in the initial stages of a project.

GOING ABOUT IT

Something good which will last

Whether the gift is in memory of a distinguished life or comes with a different intention – a 'thank offering' perhaps, both congregation and Committee will want it to be both well-conceived and well-made. In its design, it should be fresh and stimulating, carrying a 'message' for the people of the church of the challenge and support of their faith, and the importance of sharing it with others.

This is why the Committee is as concerned about the small as the large, the design on the pulpit fall as well as the effect of the removal of pews, the wording on a plaque as much as the outline and finish of a new vestibule. A church building is not just a shell with seating; many elements, large and small, come together to give the space its special character.

This means that the Committee will want to discuss and approve not just the *idea* but also the *design* of a proposed new item. It means too that an early approach to the Committee, before a designer is selected and a design commissioned, is better than to come after everything is

in place. It causes disappointment when effort is put into work only to find that it was along the wrong lines.

Ideally, it is best to approach skilled artists or craftspersons whose work will meet the required objectives and stand the test of time. The Committee keeps lists of artists in a number of media. Of course, there can be a place for the work of gifted local people, and members of the Committee are available to support and, where necessary, advise them.

The first step

Being involved in such decisions is exciting for congregation and donor alike. They will seek a way forward acceptable to the donor in the light of the identified needs and aspirations of the local church.

They may discuss the provision of a new item, or the replacement of an existing worn out item. Sometimes the best way ahead is to transfer the required items from redundant church buildings, items which may be historic and add to the sense of the importance of those who have gone before us, or artefacts which are of very good quality and need a new home.

Before replacing an existing item, it is important to consider whether it might have historic or other importance to the congregation and its removal therefore leave a 'blank' in the church's story or cause hurt or disappointment.

Starting points

Consider the nature of the person who is to be commemorated. Would the proposed memorial gift reflect the sort of person she or he was and the distinctive contribution made?

Take into account the needs of the church. A gift must be relevant to the life of that particular church both at the time of commissioning and for the future.

Inscriptions

Appropriate inscriptions can be carefully incorporated into objects or placed beside them. It would benefit future historians if the date, name of donor, person commemorated, as well as that of the designer or maker, were recorded, not necessarily all on the inscription - which could be quite small - but in a gift book or record.

Nothing lasts for ever

Don't forget that even a gift which has a limited life can sometimes be appropriate – like a sound system for instance. For the foreseeable future, such a gift may make all the difference in the world. In these cases, it is all the more important to keep a record of the donor or the person in whose memory the gift is made.

Dedication

Gifts are most often dedicated at a normal Sunday service. *Common Order* (1994) has orders of service for a range of items. The Committee always appreciates it if a congregation lets it know of a forthcoming dedication, as it is sometimes possible to be represented.

IDEAS FOR GIFTS OR MEMORIALS

When we want to remember someone special who has served the church well, we are hoping that their memory will help us continue the work they have done. This means that the best memorial may not be a plaque, which records the past, but something to enhance and resource the daily life and mission of the church in the present day. It is surprising when you think of how many other things we rely on to beautify and enable our worship, our life together in the church, and our outreach to others. Here are just a few.

Some suggestions

The worship of the church

Alms dish, offering plates or bags - although these should not replace perfectly good ones in existence which may have historic interest.

Bibles may be supplied to be given to each person baptized, or for availability for worshippers in the pews. Care should be taken to choose the right translation since some (e.g. the Good News Bible) are especially good for small group or personal reading while other translations 'read well' in the public way necessary in worship.

Books and materials for the visually-impaired will open doors to those who may not come because they cannot take a full part in worship. Sound systems for people who are hard of hearing are another possibility.

Communion vessels or linen, not necessarily to replace what you have but perhaps to assist a new development such as more frequent and informal Communions. A communion set for home or hospital

Communion is another possibility, as is linen for table and pews (real linen is still the best and longest lasting, but good cotton or cotton damask is an alternative).

The furnishings

Furniture could include Communion Table, chairs, pulpit, baptismal bowl or bracket, font, lectern, table lectern, hymn boards, flower stands. These need not always be new; the most suitable for the purpose might be found in a church which is no longer in use. The Committee's quarterly publication *Exchange and Transfer* lists furnishings which are looking for a new home, or congregations seeking similar. Don't forget the need for a welcoming entrance to a church where there might be a hymn book table, book cases or display stands.

Memorial chairs may be appropriate where pews have been removed to give more flexibility for worship or where a chancel/platform area has been re-ordered to allow for a better focus and more participation.

Textiles, along with painting and decorating, are the main means available to congregations to create and vary the atmosphere of the space in which they worship. Some textiles are a vehicle for Christian symbol or story, i.e. pulpit fall, minister's stole, textile hanging, Communion table cover, kneelers and cushions. Some of these may change to follow the Christian year as the gospel drama unfolds. Carpets, pew cushions and curtains add colour and comfort and practical protection from

A memorial book may be established which lists those who gave their lives in the two world wars, or in subsequent conflicts, or who have rendered special service to the local church (see page 13).

The building itself

A window of stained or engraved glass is a popular choice, assuming that the building is suitable. Part of the appeal of some buildings rests on the clear glass of the windows and this should not be altered. Others are too dark to risk being made darker. Fuller guidance is given in the Committee's pamphlet on Windows.

Disabled access could be provided, a facility churches are increasingly feeling is essential.

A door, screen or other similar fixture might replace an old or ineffective one already in place.

The church grounds

Trees and bushes, carefully chosen, could enhance parts of the church grounds as a beautiful natural memorial.

A garden could be established (with plants and seating) which would bring beauty to the exterior of the church. This can be added to for further specific commemorations.

The music of the church

A new hymn book or supplement may be purchased for the congregation, or music copies for the choir or organ.

A book of organ music or set of anthem books could greatly refresh the music of Sunday worship. ('Anthem books' may include such collections as Wild Goose Songs etc.)

The commissioning of a new hymn or anthem is a lasting memorial which 'keeps its freshness' by being performed only from time to time; these cost money to commission since good composers generally live by their work.

The organ may require replacing or rebuilding. A pipe organ will keep serving the church for another century. Sometimes the best way forward when an existing pipe organ needs to be replaced is to install a good redundant organ from another church which can be built in as a new instrument. (See our pamphlet on *Church Organs*, and page 14 of this pamphlet.)

Give some instruments. Nowadays, hymns are sometimes accompanied by a wider range of instruments. Although most players will possess their own, there are a range of instruments (e.g. percussion) which those who do not study a particular instrument might be able to play.

The ministry of the church

A bursary for ministerial training (for a bursar from the congregation or the presbytery) could be established, especially in these days when grants are harder to come by. This would be a great encouragement to people who might feel such a possibility was out of their reach in spite of feeling a strong call to ministry.

The church's outreach

The sponsoring of an overseas student in this country will not just help the student but bring something of the life and experience of the church in another country to the local church.

Establish a project within the church complex - a Bible village or a Third World village for example, to give people, especially local school children and Sunday School children, a lively feeling of identification with Scripture or with the needs of the world.

A social action project which serves a particular local need (unemployment, homelessness etc.) will not only help the church carry out its mission of caring and healing but also carry the Gospel into the community at large.

Endow a local arts festival which enlivens the community and at the same time draws local attention to the church in its midst.

Finance a young citizen of the year project or similar where local worth is recognised and good values encouraged.

MEMORIAL PLAQUES

Caution advised

Memorial plaques so often seem the right way to commemorate a distinctive personal contribution to the life of a local church that it comes as a surprise to know that caution is advised. The General Assembly of 1960 discouraged the mounting of plaques within the worship area of churches, and this has been more recently repeated.

Reasons include the undoubted fact that there is a limited suitable wall space in any building. It will be appreciated that over time plaques could proliferate and begin to dominate the interior.

Another reason arises from a desire for equal treatment for all the valued members of a congregation, whether or not their families have the resources to provide a plaque. It is for these reasons that alternative suggestions which both help us to recall someone's contribution as well as contribute to the ongoing life of the church are offered in this pamphlet.

When congregations unite

Where there is a danger of an accumulation of plaques and memorials over the years, such as when a union is to take place, the Committee is very willing to advise on relocation or help in the discussion of alternatives. For example, some congregations, rather than move war memorials to join others in the shared building, endow a book of photographic record so that the appearance of the original plaques is

preserved. Others also include in such a book information about the persons commemorated. It would seem possible to extend this idea beyond the matter of war memorials to record the contribution of others whose memory the congregation would like to keep alive.

A suitable location

When, however, there is general agreement that the mounting of a plaque seems the right and the only thing to do, the Committee will assist the congregation to consider first of all if there is another place it might be mounted, in a vestibule or corridor or in an appropriate room in the complex, or even set in the floor according to ancient custom.

Where plaques already exist within the worship area, and the new plaque bears a definite relationship to one of these, it may be approved if a suitable balancing position can be found for it. Plaques relating to the history of the church itself (such as a board listing the names of all previous ministers) are acceptable if positioned on the rear wall.

The importance of good design

When memorial plaques are created, the careful choice of lettering and the spacing of the inscription will make it a thing of beauty. This is true whether the plaque is large or small, and whether it is worked in metal, stone or any other material.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Craft Scotland c/o Innovation Digital, 155 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4SQ
Tel: 0131 447 6575 www.craftscotland.org – Maker Directory

National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies, NADFAS House, 8 Guilford Street, London WC1N 1DT, tel. 020 7430 0730. www.nadfas.org.uk (This body encourages good design in church artefacts, is concerned with conservation, and is preparing a database of existing artefacts in churches throughout the UK.)

Scottish Arts Council, 12 Manor Place, Edinburgh EH3 7DD, tel. 0131 226 6051; fax 0131 225 9833. www.scottisharts.org.uk

Exchange and Transfer is available electronically on the Church's web site – www.churchofscotland.org.uk It contains lists of items 'wanted' and 'offered', with addresses and phone numbers to enable a direct approach to the advertiser. Entries can be posted on the website free of charge by contacting the web editor.

Communion vessels The Committee on Church Art and Architecture has taken over from the Board of Practice and Procedure the responsibility for giving permission, on behalf of the General Assembly, for the disposal of Communion Vessels. Forms and information from the Committee's office.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This pamphlet has its origin in a discussion which took place at a Probationers' Conference at Carberry during March 1997 when imaginations ran free! The Committee warmly acknowledges this input as well as the comments and suggestions of its own members, particularly Crissie White, textiles consultant to the Committee.

From the 1997 Report to the General Assembly

Over the years, the Committee has gathered much experience as it has seen alterations made, designs commissioned and put in place, colour used, new buildings erected. There has been time to study the outcome of many enterprises; some general principles emerge which relate to what works and is appreciated in the long run, and what has not worked and is now experienced as disappointment. The Committee desires to put this experience at the disposal of local congregations, especially where such a project might never have been approached before, so that the enthusiasm, commitment, creativity and resources which are on offer may be helped towards the happiest outcome.

Another task for the Committee is to act as a 'second pair of eyes' for those who are engaged on the task locally. Certain limitations (for example financial, spatial considerations) may nudge knowledgeable local members, and the professionals who are assisting them, away from the direction they feel is the best one. An outside view may underline a principle or spot an opportunity which was elusive when many voices had views to put.

Above all, the Committee has a responsibility not only towards the present occupants of a particular building but also to those who have been and those who are to come. On the one hand the Committee understands itself as existing to serve the church of today, to assist when it is desired to make a building more responsive to current trends or even to set them! The places in which the people of God gather help shape the style of its life and the effectiveness of its witness.

However, although conservation 'at all cost' is no part of the Committee's work, it is sometimes necessary for someone to interpret the intentions of those who have handed on to us our heritage - donors and designers, those who have commissioned and made things, those who have had visions and seen them come to life. Often there is need to balance what we have been given with the new opportunities we are offered.

Equally, the Committee sees it as its unavoidable responsibility to 'speak for' those who have yet to come, the future custodians of a building. The window we put in today, the building we put up, the plaques we erect, the Communion Table we replace - all these have to be 'lived with' by those who will gather there and seek inspiration and meaning. The Committee must approach this from two not unrelated directions.

On the one hand, there are **theological and liturgical issues**. We have to ask what any proposed change will say to people about God and whether it will enrich and aid the worship of God. It is the responsibility of the Committee to be familiar with the fundamental principles - drawn both from the Reformed tradition and from that of the whole church - regarding the ordering of places of worship, and to be able to apply these imaginatively to particular situations.

On the other hand, there are **aesthetic considerations**, and while tastes obviously vary there are some basic principles which will apply. For example, for designs to be fresh in a hundred years they have to be fresh now. Do they 'hark back' in their style and subject matter, or do they beckon us on? Do they simply represent or show us something we see all the time, or do they draw the eye through to feel in our souls God's presence in all of life? Are they just flat illustrations of the journey the church has followed or do they let God take us on new paths? Or, in the case of a new and innovative design or construction, is this merely an 'overnight sensation' which in a few years will be a spent force and be seen through as gesture rather than insight, 'posturing' rather than prayer.

Here is not just a task for a Committee but a challenge to the Church.

The Committee on Church Art and Architecture is based in the Church Offices in Edinburgh. It is staffed by the Rev Nigel Robb, Ms. Lynn Johnson, Anna Reid and Ms Anne White. Its address and telephone number are: The Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN, tel 0131 225 5722, fax 0131 220 3113. Faxes should be marked for the attention of the Committee. Email address is wordoc@cofscotland.org.uk. Extra copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from the office, price 50p.