



DAC advice on statues and memorials in churches and their relation to slavery

July 2020

A word from Bishop Rose:

Covid-19, and racism are both a kind of pandemic. They are invisible, yet highly dangerous, with the power to wreak havoc physically, psychologically and economically – often targeting those who are most vulnerable. The murder of George Floyd in the USA has travelled around the world on our screens, evoking something deep within us which cannot be ignored or wished away.

As we have cause to re-examine our heritage and our present realities, everything is up for discussion - and the statues and memorials that can be found in our sacred buildings provide us with an opportunity to engage in this debate. I hope that churches will use this as an opportunity to start a discussion; to question all that we have learnt – and consider what we have yet to learn - about our past and to commit to working out how we go forward in honesty to build a better church for a better world.

The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin

Bishop of Dover and Bishop in Canterbury





DAC advice

Recent events have raised again the legacy of the slave trade and the question of the role of monuments in and around our churches to individuals who participated in slavery. Our Diocese, and the Church of England more widely, acknowledge the real and justified anger of those who believe that the placing of and narrative accompanying such monuments should be assessed.

Canterbury Diocesan Advisory Committee agrees with the Church Buildings Council that the best way to respond to these concerns, and to concerns within local parishes, is to enable local conversations about the future of those monuments and the stories that they tell.

The embedded history of the slave trade in England and in the Church, both socially and economically, was significant and deep and remains so. It is not therefore clear to the DAC that to focus only on monuments to the most obvious slave owners is likely to be sufficient. The legacy of the slave trade remains with us today and cannot be denied. Nor will a wholesale removal of monuments help us to understand the consequences of the trade down to the present day. We will not learn from history just by blotting it out.

We therefore recommend that, where a PCC becomes aware that a memorial may raise some of these concerns, discussion within churches and their communities is a vital response. Much of the public discussion of this matter has assumed that removal of such monuments would be the most appropriate answer. However, we must be determined to learn the lessons of our history. Rather than removal, it may be that expressing that history through clear and honest interpretative material next to the monuments themselves, on-line and in church histories, would better address these concerns and set the decisions and their consequences down through the years to the present day in context.

Any decisions about removal or alteration of monuments themselves will remain a matter for faculty on which the DAC would, with others, advise and which would be for the Commissary-General to decide.





Therefore, as part of the acknowledgment both of how we must learn from our past, and of the open wounds in our present, the DAC suggests the following actions:

1. Parishes with concerns about a particular memorial should ask the DAC for advice on how to take forward a church and community consultation. Part of this might be a proposal for interpretation of the memorial or for its removal. The relevant Archdeacon should be told by the parish that a concern has been expressed and that the DAC is being asked for advice.
2. The DAC will then assist with ideas on interpretation, how best to place such interpretation and explanation within the church and/or electronically.
3. Finally, if the parish decide that they wish to see the memorial altered or removed, the DAC will be in a position to advise the parish on that course of action and, where an application is received, the Commissary-General.

Parishes should be aware that ‘a memorial, once erected, does not become part of the freehold of the church, nor does it vest in the churchwardens, but remains the property of those who erected it and, after their death, of the heir at law of the person in whose memory it was erected.’ [Faculty Jurisdiction Measure 1964 s 3(4) see Hill’s Ecclesiastical Law]. The heirs-at-law will therefore need to be a part of the consultation and the Archdeacon and DAC can advise how this might be started.

If you would like to have help from the DAC on any of these matters, and particularly in enabling discussions to try to understand what happened then and what should happen now, or of explanatory material which could point out the context against which a particular monument must be set, please contact Edmund Harris, Care of Churches Officer, First Floor, Old Palace, The Precincts, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2EE.

Dr Richard Morrice

Chair of the DAC

Canterbury Diocesan Advisory Committee

21 July 2020

