




# Anglican cathedrals and implicit religion: Softening the boundaries of sacred space through innovative events and installations



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High profile (and controversial) events and installations, like the Helter-Skelter in Norwich and the Crazy Golf Bridges in Rochester, have drawn attention to innovation and public engagement within Anglican cathedrals. The present study contextualised these innovations both empirically and conceptually. The empirical framework draws on cathedral websites to chronicle the wide and diverse range of events and installations hosted by Anglican cathedrals in England and the Isle of Man between 2018 and 2022. The conceptual framework draws on Edward Bailey's theory of implicit religion to classify and to explore these events and installations. Two insights from the theory of implicit religion emerged as of particular significance. First, the notion of implicit religion softens the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. This was exemplified by eight categories of events: scientific exhibitions, festivals, musical events, art exhibitions, theatre, markets, community events and installations. Second, the notion of implicit religion draws attention to the themes and activities that generate meaning and purpose. This was exemplified by seven themes: social justice and social conscience, violence and reconciliation, remembrance, migration and sanctuary, COVID-19 and lockdowns, personal well-being and nature and environment.

**Contribution:** Situated within the science of cathedral studies, this article identifies the range of innovative events and installations hosted by Anglican Cathedrals in England and the Isle of Man and assesses the significance of these events and installations through Edward Bailey's lens of implicit religion, discussing first the softening of boundaries between the sacred and the secular and then the generation of meaning and purpose through the core themes raised by these events and installations.

**Keywords:** cathedral studies; implicit religion; websites; sacred space; secular activities.

## Introduction

Bailey's concept of implicit religion softens the boundaries between the sacred and the secular (see Bailey 1997, 1998a, 2002). For Bailey, the softening of these boundaries permits the concepts and analytic tools refined by those who work in departments of theology and religious studies to be liberated from their home territory and to explore phenomena that others may conceive as secular. Bailey demonstrated this aspect of implicit religion to good effect when he took up residence behind the bar of an English pub and employed his skills as a student of religious studies to explore and to interpret what he was observing (see Bailey 1997:129–192). For Bailey, the softening of these boundaries permits the focus of observation to embrace quite diverse phenomena. In his preface to the first issue of the journal *Implicit Religion*, he was clear that 'the areas of human life for which the study of implicit religion is relevant are legion' (Bailey 1998b:4).

Following Bailey's pioneering study of the interior life of a British public house, the implicit religion of secular activities has been operationalised in diverse ways, including, for example, the practice of football (French 2002), cultural commitments (Lord 2008), the practice of belly dancing (Kraus 2009), the personality cult of Prince (Till 2010), American commercial sales organisations (Palmisano & Pannofino 2013), celebrity worship (Aruguete et al. 2014), fly-fishing (Fife 2017), knitting (Fisk 2017), straight-edge punk (Stewart 2017), consumerism (Kurenlahti & Salonen 2018), belief in science (Francis, Astley & McKenna 2018), environmentalism (McCalman 2019),

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political commitments (Lombaard 2019), cosplay (Stewart 2022), the Grateful Dead (Carrasco 2022) and British TV situation comedies (Spoliar 2022).

Expanding on this softening of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, Bailey's conceptualisation of implicit religion provides a heuristic tool for interrogating the presence of phenomena within secular societies that behave in ways analogous to religion. For Bailey, implicit religion may be characterised by (but is not limited to) three key qualities:

Implicit religion displays *commitment*; it is something to which individuals feel committed. Implicit religion provides *integrating foci*; it is something that draws together the identity of an individual (or a group) and in doing so furnishes meaning and generates purpose. Implicit religion displays *intensive concerns with extensive effects*; it is something that helps to shape a worldview and carries implications for the way in which life is lived. (Francis et al. 2013:953)

The softening of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, as explored by implicit religion, has often been implemented at a conceptual level. For example, Wilson (2011) speaks of 'the aircraft's interior as a secular sacred space' (p. 173). It is this conceptualisation of the aircraft's interior as sacred space that provided the tools for his interpretation of the dress codes for flight attendants. It is the thesis of the present paper that Anglican cathedrals offer a physical embodiment of this softening of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular and that it is precisely here where phenomena that appear to be secular may be welcomed into sacred space, and as a consequence of this welcome become accessible to interpretation through the lens of implicit religion. This thesis is grounded in discussion of three literatures and then tested more widely by an original analysis of information available on the websites of Anglican cathedrals.

The first literature is rooted in the field of implicit religion itself. Hammond (2007) selected the cathedral in Siena, Italy, to illustrate his claim about the field of implicit religion. For Hammond (2007), in 1968 the Festival of Saint Ansano (now held annually on 01 December) took on a 'dramatically' new feature (p. 283) as the life of the cathedral embraced and incorporated characteristics of the local civic festival, including a horse race around the central plaza. Hammond's point is that, because of the softening boundaries between the sacred and the secular, both the sacred space of the cathedral and the secular character of the festival were transformed.

The second literature is rooted in the science of cathedral studies, with the focus on those who visit cathedrals. Drawing on data provided by 514 visitors to St Davids Cathedral in west Wales, Williams et al. (2007) distinguished the distinctive visitor experiences of two constituencies whom they describe as religious pilgrims and secular tourists. Their point is that these two constituencies merge indistinguishably as they traverse the same sacred space but draw from it different interpretations. In a second study among 2695 visitors to the

same cathedral, Francis, Annis and Robbins (2015) changed the lens of their enquiry to explore the impact of Heelas and Woodhead's (2005) characterisation of the spiritual revolution on these visitors. Again, they recognised the softening of the boundary between the sacred space and the wider spiritual quest of the secular society.

The third literature, also rooted in the science of cathedral studies, takes cognisance of the trend for Anglican cathedrals to make a conscious effort to open their sacred space to wider constituencies. This literature has a primary focus on the economic impact of cathedrals on their local economies and the part played by visitors within that context. Ecorys (2021), in their report to the Association of English Cathedrals, *The economic and social impact of England's cathedrals*, estimated over 9.5 million tourists or leisure visitors to cathedrals in 2019, an increase of 15% over the total of 8.2 million estimated by Ecorys (2014). This report also suggested that the enhanced footfall may be associated with the range of innovative events and exhibitions being hosted by cathedrals. In particular, the report referenced the Helter-Skelter installed in Norwich Cathedral and the Crazy Golf Bridges installed in Rochester Cathedral. Here may be the further suggestion of the softening of the boundaries between sacred space and seemingly secular pursuits.

It was not within the brief of the report produced for the Association of English Cathedrals by Ecorys (2021) to investigate the demographic profile or motivational intention of visitors to such innovative events and exhibitions. This was, however, a task undertaken by Francis et al. (in press) in relation to one specific event in one specific cathedral. The focus of their enquiry was on 196 visitors to Brecon Cathedral at the time when this cathedral functioned as an integral component of the Brecon Jazz Festival. Their data demonstrated both a different demographic profile (younger) and a different psychological type profile (more intuitive types and more perceiving types), when compared with the general profile of cathedral visitors as reported by Francis et al. (2008), Francis et al. (2010) and Francis et al. (2012).

## Research question

It is against this background that the present study was designed to map the territory across which innovative events and installations were prevalent within Anglican cathedrals, as well as to reflect on the softening of the boundaries of sacred space through the lens of implicit religion. The method selected for mapping this territory drew on data currently available on cathedral websites. This is a method that had previously been employed within the field of cathedral studies by ap Siôn and Edwards (2012), Edwards and ap Siôn (2015), Curtis (2016) and Bondi and Sezzi (2021).

## Method

This study was based on the websites of the 43 Anglican cathedrals within the mainland dioceses of the Church of England and the Isle of Man. Data were collected between

January and March 2022. There were two initial recording units, each individual cathedral and the promoted events.<sup>1</sup> The information was located and saved into a separate Word document. This information consisted of the website uniform resource locator (URL), the event title along with a short description, the type of event (exhibition, installation, concert, market, etc.), when the event took place (day, evening), where (within the cathedral) the event was held, for how long it lasted (day, week, month), the cost (if known), the response (for example, visitor numbers, if provided) and the provider of the event (if detailed). At this first stage, the range of events being held in each cathedral was noted. As the material from each cathedral website was read in turn, categories started to emerge, for example, musical events, festivals, art or scientific exhibitions and community events. Rereading of the document allowed these categories to be further broken down into subcategories. For example, musical events could be split into pop concerts and classical concerts. Thus, the analysis was done on a thematic basis (reading, rereading, categorising and grouping) that allowed comparison of events occurring across multiple cathedrals. To reduce the potential for one-person researcher bias, a second researcher examined the website material captured (including perusing a sample of the websites) and suggested alternative and additional categories for recording the analysis. Grouping and regrouping the data by cathedral and by event allowed for identification of patterns in the data.

This process of analysis identified two analytic frameworks. The first framework focuses on the nature of the event as exemplifying the juxtaposition of the secular and the sacred within the cathedral. This framework identified eight categories: scientific exhibitions, festivals, musical events, art exhibitions, theatre, markets, community events and installations. Each of these categories suggests ways through which the location of such events within the cathedral softens the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. The second framework focuses on the *integrating foci* that display meaning and generate purpose. This framework identified seven themes: social justice and social conscience, violence and reconciliation, remembrance, migration and sanctuary, COVID-19 and lockdowns, personal well-being, and nature and environment. Each of these themes suggests opportunities for *commitments* to develop, for *integrating foci* to furnish meaning and to generate purpose and for *intensive concerns with extensive effects* to shape lives.

## Results

### Softening boundaries

As part of the first analytic framework, the following eight categories were identified as examples of events that softened

1. These cathedral websites contain a huge amount of potential data in the form of text. The focus in the present study was on 'events and exhibitions' recently held or forthcoming. The information about these events was sometimes listed within an online events calendar or under specific navigation links such as 'Events', 'What's on', and 'News'. Regular and special liturgical services, guided tours of the building or its grounds, regular organ recitals or cathedral choir concerts, and activities taking place as part of cathedral 'Learning' outreach with schools and universities were not collected. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic many events and exhibitions scheduled for 2020 had to be cancelled or postponed. Despite this, events taking place between 2018 and summer 2022 were captured.

the boundaries between the secular and sacred space of the cathedral.<sup>2</sup>

### Scientific exhibitions

Perhaps the most significant events for attracting large and diverse audiences were works of art and installations with a scientific theme. The hugely popular *Museum of the Moon* was hosted at Bristol, Chichester, Derby, Durham, Ely, Exeter, Gloucester, Leicester, Lincoln, Liverpool, Peterborough, Rochester and Wells. This ethereal art installation by Luke Jerram is a 1:500000 scale model of the Moon using NASA photography and is often hung in the cathedral nave. The artwork has been accompanied by a diverse programme of events and activities, including workshops, lectures and silent discos. According to Exeter Cathedral, as it travels across venues, it gathers 'an ongoing collection of personal responses, stories and mythologies, as well as highlighting the latest moon science'. This installation not only attracted thousands of visitors but also a diverse type of visitor. The Dean of Bristol Cathedral, the Very Revd Dr Mandy Ford<sup>3</sup> noted, 'The installation transformed our building .... It was wonderful to see the diversity of those who came through the doors'. At many cathedrals, visitor numbers to this event were higher than at any other exhibition held. At Peterborough Cathedral, there were 40000 visitors over the course of a 10-day showing in 2018. In three weeks at Derby Cathedral, it attracted over 45000 visitors. At Chichester Cathedral and Bristol Cathedral, visitor numbers were over 50000 and 65000 respectively. Liverpool Cathedral attracted 60254 visitors over one week in 2018. It gave Durham Cathedral its highest ever visitor numbers in 2021 with over 90500 people visiting, including proving to be hugely attractive to young families with over 15000 people of all ages visiting during half-term week alone. According to feedback on the event at Durham, visitors were 'stopped in their tracks' to take in the *Moon* installation, and it was described as 'spectacular' and 'awe-inspiring', while others defined it as 'grounding', 'spiritual' and 'reflective'. Some cathedrals made a direct link between science and faith by drawing attention to the wonder of creation. The Dean of Leicester Cathedral, the Very Revd David Monteith was quoted as saying:

[C]athedrals are places of wonder and discovery. We are very glad to provide another opportunity for people to be inspired, to explore, to pray, to have fun, to dance and to have our minds and hearts expanded to explore our place in God's good creation.

This event has proved so popular that it continues to tour and has started to return to some cathedrals for a second time (Leicester).

Another popular Luke Jerram touring installation, *Gaia* (meaning the personification of the earth), was a 3D replica of

2. Many of the sound and light installations were the creation of 'Luxmuralis', a collaboration between Peter Walker (an artist) and David Harper (a composer). For reasons of space Luxmuralis is not individually noted alongside every event discussed here, although all cathedral websites did credit each installation.

3. Citations from cathedral staff were taken from the cathedral websites at the time of data collection (January to March 2022). It is possible that some of the cited clergy may have since moved posts.

the Earth installed at the cathedrals of Gloucester, Leicester, Liverpool, Peterborough and Rochester. In 2019 at Peterborough Cathedral, there were over 22 000 visitors during a three-week residency, while at Liverpool Cathedral there were 170 000 visitors during a four-week residency. At Liverpool Cathedral, prayer stations were placed around the Cathedral to help visitors reflect on the Earth's significance in creation. It was noted that around 48 000 candles were lit while *Gaia* was in place, compared to 10 000 usually used in the same period. Rochester Cathedral website described how the installation allowed visitors to view the earth in the way that astronauts do, detailing how common features of the experience for astronauts 'are a feeling of awe for the planet, a profound understanding of the interconnection of all life, and a renewed sense of responsibility for taking care of the environment'.

Drawing further inspiration from the 1969 Moon landings, several other scientific installations with a space theme were hosted throughout 2019–2022. A *SPACE Light & Sound* installation was held at Carlisle, Exeter, Guildford and Lichfield in 2019 and in 2022 at Liverpool Cathedral. The installation transformed the interior of each Cathedral into a visual journey to the edge of the universe and back. According to Guildford Cathedral, the artwork featured a journey through space, light and time, taking viewers on a journey to the very edge of the galaxy that invited them to contemplate their own personal journeys and to reflect on the wonder of planet earth. Viewers were taken from sunrise to sunset, journeying through the beauty of planet Earth, witnessing the Sun, the oceans and the clouds 'reflected inside the majestic sacred space giving the viewer moments of awe and wonder'.

At Liverpool Cathedral, the event was subtitled *Space, the Universe and Everything*. At Carlisle Cathedral and at Lichfield Cathedral, the link with religion was more explicitly made where it was titled, *Space, God, the Universe and Everything*. At Lichfield Cathedral, it was promoted as part of a summer of science, creativity and spirituality, and was held alongside the additional events, 'Pioneers in Science', an exhibition highlighting the lives of pioneering scientists whose work has shaped the world, and 'The Laboratory', a giant laboratory held in the cathedral with activities for families.

The follow-up to *SPACE Light & Sound* was *SCIENCE Light & Sound*, held at Lichfield Cathedral in 2021, and at Winchester Cathedral in 2022. This installation was inspired by the history of science and explored the ways in which scientists have shaped the past and the role they play in influencing the future. A multisensory experience transported visitors through elements, molecules, DNA and the greatest discoveries of humanity, as they contemplated the wonders that made up the world.

There were several events using similar sound and light installations designed to commemorate 50 years since the Moon landings. At Canterbury Cathedral, *Walk on the Moon* was held during Advent in support of the Canterbury

Diocese Advent Justice Appeal. At Peterborough Cathedral, *One Small Step* allowed visitors to walk on a giant representation of the surface of the Moon and to locate the place where Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin made their Apollo 11 landing in 1969. *Space Voyager* at Rochester Cathedral was a visual walk-through projection art installation that allowed viewers to go on a journey through space and time, which gave them the chance to walk amongst the stars and provided the opportunity to explore and contemplate their own personal journeys. The *Tim Peake Spacecraft* installation at Peterborough Cathedral attracted 171 361 visitors, the second highest number at any of the eight secular venues at which it was installed. At Ripon Cathedral, as part of the *Dark Skies Exhibition: Cosmos Planetarium*, visitors were able to take part in two activities: *We Are Aliens*, to learn about extreme life forms on Earth and the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe, and the *Space Station Tour*, an immersive digital walk-through of the International Space Station with Tim Peake to learn how astronauts live and work in space. At Ripon Cathedral, *Son et Lumiere* was a sound and light show based on the Moon landing. The Dean of Ripon, the Very Revd John Dobson, was recorded as saying, 'These events are continuing an existing Ripon theme of celebrating the moon landing and human interest in the "heavens"'.

Taking the science theme in the direction of 'natural history', *Dippy the Diplodocus*, a 26-metre cast loaned from the Natural History Museum, was exhibited in Norwich Cathedral in 2021, the final stop and only cathedral on an eight-venue tour. More than 234 000 people visited *Dippy* during its 16-week stay. *Your Waves Go Over Me*, an installation alongside *Dippy* at Norwich, invited visitors to walk through a 10-metre wave of 3000 fish created in the Cathedral's Hostry. This installation put the spotlight on the importance of water through the ages, from the time of dinosaurs through to the modern age. According to the website of Norwich Cathedral, the title of the sculpture was inspired by a quotation taken from the Psalms (42:9), 'All thy waves and storms are gone over me', which they stated gave acknowledgement to the fact that 'while the Bible and modern science differ about many things, they are in entire agreement that life as we know it emerged from water'.

## Festivals

The opportunity to showcase the cathedral architecture and surroundings continued in the narrative to describe hosting popular festivals, often centred on flowers or alcoholic beverages, with these events bringing the cathedral buildings to life in unique and inspiring ways. At Blackburn Cathedral, it was noted that the 'stunning light and open architecture will provide an ideal environment to showcase beautiful and imaginative floral displays'. Flower festivals often explicitly articulated connecting the secular and the sacred. At Blackburn in 2020, the theme was 'Heaven and Earth'. At Chichester Cathedral, the 2022 festival showcased 60 spectacular flower arrangements under the theme 'Life In All Its Fullness' and explored the benefits of art, nature and

music in healing. Celebrating 950 years of Lincoln Cathedral, a flower festival celebrated 'the visionaries who had the inspiration to build such a wonderful building'. At Salisbury Cathedral, the floral art exhibition planned for 2022 used botanical materials chosen to reflect the gothic cathedral setting.

Gin and Rum and Beer and Ale festivals included Chelmsford, Manchester, Peterborough, Portsmouth, Ripon, St Edmundsbury and York Minster. At Chelmsford Cathedral, there were 843 attendees at the Gin and Rum festival in 2019, and the event was sold out in 2021. Two cathedrals, inspired by the history and heritage of their building, produced their own brands of gin. At Blackburn Cathedral, 'Cathedra Gin' was described as having taken its name from the 'Cathedra, or Bishop's Throne, which gives a church building its cathedral status'. At Bristol Cathedral, 'Charterhouse Gin' was named to reflect and celebrate the beauty of one of the oldest parts of the Cathedral.

Showcasing the beauty of the cathedral building and its surroundings was also evident in a series of diverse one-off events. Southwark Cathedral invited amateur and professional photographers to spend an evening taking photographs of the Cathedral lit by candlelight, thus 'experiencing the Cathedral as it would have been lit in the past'. A Burns Night supper was held in the transepts and under the central tower of Peterborough Cathedral, and a Valentine's dinner was held at Canterbury Cathedral. Over Christmas 2021, and as part of its status as UK City of Culture, Coventry Cathedral hosted *Coventry Glides*, an ice-rink sited in the ruins of its old cathedral. A popular BBC TV show, *Flog It*, was recorded at Blackburn Cathedral for broadcast in 2020 with over 600 people in attendance.

### Musical events

Music was at the heart of every cathedral, providing a rich variety of both sacred and secular performances throughout the year. Many cathedrals offered ongoing series of lunchtime concerts and recitals, featuring local and international musicians (Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Portsmouth). Many cathedrals embraced a wide programme of musical concerts, covering both classical and popular music. Classical concerts featuring the music of Haydn (Durham), Elgar, Britten, Mendelssohn (Salisbury), Brahms (Exeter) and performances by local Philharmonic orchestras (Chester, Southwark) were common.

Concerts by candlelight were described as events with the ability to make the most of the beautiful cathedral surroundings. The London Concertante was hosted at several cathedrals, performing *Vivaldi's Four Seasons by Candlelight* at Coventry, Ely, Norwich and Sheffield, and *Music from the Movies* at Derby, Manchester, Norwich and Sheffield. The website at Sheffield noted that The London Concertante 'boasts an impressive audience record in which an impressive 50% of spectators are first time classical concert goers!' These attendees might also be first-time cathedral visitors. At

Manchester Cathedral, a *Jazz Concert by Candlelight* paid tribute to the music of Coldplay, and at Chester, Durham and Lincoln it was *Queen by Candlelight*.

The *Aled Jones Cathedral Tour* was unique in being promoted as a 'cathedral tour'. Previously a chorister at Bangor Cathedral in Wales, in early 2022, Aled brought his concert of music and stories to the cathedrals of Coventry, Durham, Ely, Exeter, Guildford, Portsmouth, Rochester, St Albans and Winchester, these concerts having been postponed from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, Gloucester Cathedral was one of the venues for a *G4 Christmas* themed tour, performing classics such as 'When a Child is Born', 'Silent Night' and 'All I Want for Christmas'. Other touring concerts included: *21st Century Abba* at Ely, Exeter and Southwell Minster and a Jethro Tull rock concert at Birmingham and at St Edmundsbury, with the event in Birmingham identified as being held in 'aid' of the Cathedral. A common theme when promoting these events was to draw attention to the 'beautiful', 'glorious' 'magnificent', 'stunning', 'iconic' or 'historical' nature of the cathedral venues.

### Art exhibitions

The largest category of events were art exhibitions and installations, including paint, textile, wood, metalwork, ceramics, glass or stone. At Bradford Cathedral, *Artspace* offered 'high-quality performance and visual arts' events, reflecting the significance of the Arts within the Christian church'. At Wakefield Cathedral, *Artwalk*, a bi-monthly evening of art, performance, music, heritage and socialising, offered Wakefield's creative community opportunities to meet together, exhibit their work and sell to a growing number of visitors. Exhibitions of artworks or materials from local, national and international artists took place at Bradford (*Pottery*), Exeter (*Density & Lightness* consisting of 75 diverse sculptures from 24 artists using stone, wood, ceramic, bronze, plaster and glass), Guildford (various individual artists) and Norwich (*Norwich 20 Group*, showcasing the work of 50 local members, and the *Hidden Gems Exhibition*, showcasing the work of East Anglian painters). At Chester Cathedral, a mosaic titled *Constellations* brought together outstanding works of contemporary mosaic by internationally recognised artists from across the UK and abroad. Chichester Cathedral's celebrations for Advent and Christmas in 2021 hosted Bruce Munro's *Field of Blooms* (an art installation comprising 1000 stems of light), under the banner of 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (Jn 1:5). In 2022 at Newcastle Cathedral, *A Century of Wedding Gowns* was an exhibition of wedding dress design through the decades. The exhibition juxtaposed handmade, homemade, borrowed and rejuvenated gowns from past decades with the work of fashion designers.

### Theatre

At Lincoln Cathedral, large-scale community projects aimed to engage as many local participants as possible. In 2019, the production was *Oliver!*, and in 2022 it was *The Hunchback of*

*Notre Dame*. Commenting on the 2019 production of *Oliver!*, the Dean of Lincoln Cathedral, the Very Revd Christine Wilson, observed:

[P]revious productions have been great examples of the community working together to deliver amazing performances in the beautiful and inspiring setting of the Nave ... the production of *Oliver!* will also allow us to explore modern themes such as exploitation, domestic abuse and social justice through a series of lectures and educational events.

At Norwich Cathedral, an open-air Shakespeare Festival included a performance of *Macbeth*. In 2022, Southwell Minster hosted a season of outdoor theatre in the Palace Gardens, including performances of *Cinderella*, *The Railway Children* and *Twelfth Night*. At Sheffield Cathedral, the *Get Together with ShAFF* music and film festival took place in 2021, championing independent and upcoming music 'in the stunning setting of Sheffield Cathedral', as part of the Outdoor City-Sheffield Adventure film (ShAFF) programme. At Coventry Cathedral in 2022, there was a screening of *Partition*, a film about the events surrounding the Indian subcontinent's division into India and Pakistan.

### Markets

Cathedrals have frequently been used as a location for regular and one-off markets and fairs. Christmas fairs were common at many cathedrals, including Exeter and Portsmouth. At Exeter, visitors were invited to 'wander through the labyrinth of lanes that wind their way across the Cathedral green leading to a host of Christmas chalets stocked with treats for family, friends, and home'. A two-day Christmas shopping event was offered at Portsmouth Cathedral, featuring a variety of local makers and artisans with homeware, gifts and jewellery. On one of the nights, visitors could enjoy a special festive evensong service with the Portsmouth Cathedral Choir as an accompaniment to their shopping experience. At York Minster, a Christmas tree festival featured nearly 40 trees decorated to individual themes by local businesses, schools and charities. Visitors were able to vote for their favourite tree in a 'best dressed tree' competition, take part in craft activities and add their own Christmas message to a tag to hang on a prayer tree. At Worcester Cathedral, a spring fair was held within the medieval cloister. Visitors were invited to 'enjoy browsing over 20 quality craft and gift stalls in beautiful surroundings', alongside which they could listen to a series of recitals by three of the Cathedral Choir's girl choristers. In acknowledgement of interest in and awareness of the need to be more ecologically friendly, Coventry Cathedral hosted a Preloved Retail Pop-Up where clothes could be bought by weight rather than price. At Manchester Cathedral and Peterborough Cathedral, Lou Lou's Vintage Fair allowed visitors to show support for small, independent, local businesses, and at Truro Cathedral an artisan market provided over 30 stalls of 'fabulous products from gifted Cornish artisans'.

### Community events

Support for the local community was evidenced in a series of initiatives and charity events. Many cathedrals were hired for use by local universities as a setting for their graduation ceremonies. At Chelmsford Cathedral, it was stated that over 5000 students and their families were welcomed annually to celebrate their achievements in the Cathedral.

From mid-January 2021 when Blackburn Cathedral was designated as a COVID-19 vaccination hub, the Dean, the Very Revd Peter Howell-Jones, noted that 'hospitality and welcome is at the heart of Christianity ... we saw that with Jesus on the mountainside giving people food and drink'. In 2018, Blackburn Cathedral was the venue for a Children in Need Zumbathon that raised over £800. The Right Revd Dr Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster explained to those attending, 'What makes this evening so special? We are doing something close to God's heart – it's about children and we are raising money for Children in Need'. Another member of the organising team, the Revd Lesley Hinchcliffe, commented:

[Z]umba uses music and dance from all cultures, and we welcome all to this event. What a wonderful opportunity it was to witness to the love of Christ in the heart of our community.

At Derby Cathedral, a Charity Abseil in support of a local hospice gave those taking part the challenge of climbing the 189 steps to the top of the Cathedral tower before abseiling down. At Salisbury Cathedral, the welcome was to those who wanted to take a stand against homelessness. Hosting of the *The Big Sleep* challenged visitors to sleep under the stars at the Cathedral cloisters for one night. At Chichester Cathedral, *Beside the Seaside* was a day of activities for local families in partnership with local social service organisations. At Salisbury Cathedral, stone-carving workshops were hosted by the stonemason responsible for maintaining the Cathedral's medieval architecture.

### Installations

There were imposing installations that displayed an architectural or engineering theme. In 2019, a 55 ft *Helter-Skelter* was erected in Norwich Cathedral's Nave as part of the 'Seeing It Differently' project. Visitors climbing up to have a go on the ride were treated to unique views of the centuries-old building and its famous medieval roof bosses, which tell stories from the Bible. A bridge-themed adventure golf course, *Crazy Golf Bridges*, was situated in the Nave of Rochester Cathedral in 2019. The course was designed to encourage young people to learn more about the engineering behind bridges. Reflecting on the Cathedral's long history as a centre of learning for the community, the Revd Canon Rachel Phillips, canon for mission and growth at the Cathedral, maintained that installing an educational adventure golf course continued that mission, giving 'people the opportunity to learn while they take part in a fun activity, in what for many might be a previously un-visited building'. More recently in 2022, *Luma*, an outdoor light installation of a huge 8-metre-long snail, took up residence at Gloucester Cathedral, the purpose of which was to reimagine what robots

could be for. Described as a 'joyful' and 'hopeful' work championing both nature and technology, the Cathedral website stated that *Luma* loomed 'above visitors with a presence which is gentle, welcoming and otherworldly'.

## Meaning and purpose

Moving on to the second analytic framework, the following seven themes were evidenced in events with an *integrating foci* that display meaning and generate purpose. Most of these events were located within the category of 'art exhibitions' identified as part of the first analytic framework.

### Social justice and social conscience

Black History Month was celebrated at the cathedrals of Birmingham and St Albans. At Birmingham, *Being Built Together*, the photography of Vanley Burke, celebrated the diversity of the city and the UK in what was described as possibly the largest photographic record of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain. Capturing the evolving cultural landscape and social change, the aim was to stimulate debate. At St Albans Cathedral, an exhibition commemorated the *Forgotten Soldiers* of the Second World War. The exhibition provided an insight into the contributions and sacrifices made by African Colonial Soldiers on the part of the British Empire, through the perspective of the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF).

A touring workshop exhibition, *Tear and Repair*, covering sex trafficking, toured three cathedrals in 2020 (Blackburn, Manchester, Portsmouth). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tour of the remaining seven cathedrals was postponed until 2021–2022 (Bradford, Derby, Liverpool, Peterborough, Rochester, St Edmundsbury and Worcester). This textile art was a collaboration between artist Nicola Moody and Luton-based charity Azalea, an organisation that empowers 'men and women to choose to walk free from being caught up in sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation'. At Ely Cathedral in 2021, *Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking* by Syrian artist Sara Shamma highlighted the global issue of modern slavery. The 13 paintings and oil sketches were described as 'thought provoking and arresting images'. At Newcastle Cathedral, *Changing Perceptions: A Prison Art Exhibition* aimed to challenge society's preconceived attitudes towards prisoners and prisons.

### Violence and reconciliation

Shining a spotlight on violence and aggression, *Knife Angel*, a 27-foot-high sculpture by artist Alfie Bradley and made from over 100,000 knives that have been taken out of circulation, has been sited outside several cathedrals, including Blackburn, Coventry, Gloucester, Hereford and Liverpool. At Hereford Cathedral, 102,000 people visited the statue during its visit in 2021. In addition, more than 700 school children took part in associated workshops. At a peace vigil held at Blackburn Cathedral, candles were made available for anyone who wanted to make an act of remembrance, including those who had lost loved ones through knife crime

or been affected by knife crime in other ways. At Gloucester Cathedral, the dean, the Very Revd Stephen Lake, made an analogy with the religious role of angels:

[T]he Cathedral is glad to act as host of the Knife Angel, which brings an important message of peace, community safety and remembrance. Angels stand for hope and an abiding confidence in the love of God.

Continuing with this theme of public art inspired by the violence, conflict and reconciliation, *The Art of Reconciliation: Murals of the Bogside* displayed at Leicester Cathedral in 2019 addressed the complex history of Derry in Northern Ireland and the traumatic events experienced by the Bogside community during what was known as the Troubles. In 2021 at Liverpool Cathedral, the *Peace Doves* installation of 18,000 paper doves suspended from its roof welcomed over 50,000 visitors in its first month.

### Remembrance

*Poppy Field* was a 2018 installation commemorating the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War and hosted at the cathedrals of Guildford and Lichfield. This immersive experience of poppies, projected throughout the cathedral building, aimed to encourage reflection on memories and hopes. The light and sound installation was accompanied by readings from First World War poets, read by the British actor Eddie Redmayne. At Hereford Cathedral, *Poppies: Weeping Window* also gave visitors the chance to reflect on the impact of the First World War and was drawn from the installation *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* installed at the Tower of London. Over 196,000 people visited this installation at Hereford Cathedral in 2018. When discussing reactions to the installation the website of Hereford Cathedral recorded the dean of Hereford, the Very Revd Michael Tavinor, commenting that a common experience seemed to be 'one of remembrance, thanksgiving, regret and beauty', and noting that cathedral volunteers 'engaged in many deep and profound conversations' with visitors. Expanding further, he was recorded as saying:

[F]or us at the cathedral, the artwork appeared as an "extension" of the building itself. It helped to bring so many elements of the Christian faith we experience inside the cathedral, those of love, faithfulness, peace, justice and hospitality, outside into Cathedral Close.

### Migration and sanctuary

Two exhibitions focused on the themes of migration and sanctuary. At Coventry Cathedral, *Where There is Light*, an immersive sound and light installation, shared the voices and stories of sanctuary-seeking communities from across the country. It asked visitors to consider questions about where they found light in their lives, in themselves, in others and in the world around them. The same exhibition when held at Gloucester Cathedral was part of activities that celebrated 80 years since the arrival of 10 Kindertransport boys in Gloucester at the start of the Second World War. The exhibition in this context recognised the contribution made to Gloucestershire by refugees through history. A British

Museum Spotlight Loan of the Lampedusa Cross, made from the remnants of a capsized refugee boat, was displayed at Coventry Cathedral and at Rochester Cathedral as part of the *Crossings: Community and Refuge* tour. As a City of Sanctuary, the city of Coventry has welcomed the most Syrian refugees per capita in the UK, so it was fitting that the tour started in Coventry. Activities shaped around the cross, encouraged local communities to share their own migrant experiences and to engage in discussions about identity, belonging and sharing the world. Rochester Cathedral described the cross as carrying 'poignant messages about kindness, community and the indifference faced by many refugees'. A similar installation was hosted at Canterbury Cathedral to remember the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. *Under an Equal Sky* saw a boat hanging from the Cathedral Nave and asked visitors to reflect on the plight of refugees in war and migration.

### COVID-19 and lockdowns

Several exhibitions and installations drew inspiration from the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. The textile art *Seen/Unseen* and *Reborn* exhibitions at Chelmsford Cathedral were created in response to the pandemic by a clinically extremely vulnerable artist, Pauline Medinger. *Seen/Unseen* was 'stark in that it consisted of black and white stitching with sharp movements, and threads deliberately fragmented and in places broken or cut short'. The companion piece, *Reborn*, with its calming colours and golden stitches, in contrast, is described as drawing the light with its focus on cleansing and renewal. At Peterborough Cathedral, *Made in Lockdown* looked back at personal experiences of lockdowns, with a focus on the creativity and imagination that came to the fore. *Virtual Hugs* by Sally Malloy used needle felting to represent the digital icons of the apps that connected her with family and friends during lockdown. Another piece by Philippa Bandurek Bradbury captured her young son's loneliness. *A Little on the Lonely Slide* was set alongside music to remind visitors of the power of music to express feelings. Another thought-provoking item was a knitted blanket made by Vivien Stevenette to 'de-stress' while she nursed her terminally ill husband during the first lockdown.

The *Leaves of the Trees* was a touring Coronavirus Memorial designed by Peter Walker as a reflective aid to healing after this particularly challenging time. Between September 2020 and February 2022, it will have toured 12 cathedrals, including Exeter, Peterborough, Rochester and Southwell. The installation was made up of 5000 steel leaves, each featuring the word 'HOPE', laid out on each cathedral floor to create the impression of fallen autumn leaves. It was designed to provide individuals, families and communities with a focal point for their thoughts and reflections, encouraging them to take time to consider the periods of lockdown and isolation and providing an opportunity to reflect on their own personal journey and to honour those who passed away during the pandemic. A direct link to the Bible was highlighted on the website of Southwell Minster,

'The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations' (Rv 22:2), although the Dean of Southwell Minster, the Very Revd Nicola Sullivan, made it clear that it was a focal point for all, 'This is for everyone – whatever age or faith, and we invite everyone to come to their Cathedral for moments of quiet reflection'. Other cathedrals also made a direct link between the installation and faith. The Dean of Exeter, the Very Revd Jonathan Greener, noted:

[P]eople have been coming to this awe-inspiring building, seeking quiet reflection, for over 800 years. So now we are delighted to host [*Leaves of the Trees*] ... which will bring a new way of helping visitors to remember loved ones and contemplate all that has happened over the last few months.

Visitors to the installation at Exeter Cathedral were invited to write their own thoughts, messages and prayers on paper leaves. At Peterborough Cathedral, the website stated that the exhibition:

[C]ontains the Christian message about how spirituality seeks glimmers of hope and love during life's journey. It highlights the theme that there is no darkness or pain that cannot be healed by God. The decision to place the exhibition in front of the building's high altar underlines this.

### Personal well-being

A concern for personal well-being was the focal point of events at the cathedrals of Ely and Hereford. At Ely Cathedral, the *A Special Place* exhibition provided space for the work of five textile artists who were exploring the locations that they personally found inspiring, including both local gardens and faraway places. To the visitor, they were a prompt to reflect on the secret places in their own lives where they went in search of comfort, inspiration or happiness. At Hereford Cathedral, *Journey to Your Centre: The art of meditation* was an exhibition of abstract pictures exploring meditation. Ely Cathedral was also the host for a series of *An Evening with...* events, including bestselling author and comedian Ruby Wax, 'known for using her iconic wit and expertise to equip readers with a positive roadmap for a kinder, brighter world and better mental health'. At Newcastle Cathedral a *Comedy Night* was promoted with the tag line, 'Comedy is great, comedy in a cathedral is better!'

### Nature and the environment

A respect for nature and a concern for the environment was the focal point of events held at several cathedrals. At Ely Cathedral, *Toward the Light* was an exhibition of contemporary silkscreen prints on handmade leaf paper. Each sheet of leaf paper was created with an image gathered from the fields and woodlands of East Anglia and which incorporated the individual characteristics of the leaves as an integral part of each image, 'reflecting the fragile symbiotic relationship between man and the natural environment'. At Truro Cathedral, the *Unravelling Exhibition* was a series of pieces by artist Ilya Fisher, looking at the climate crisis and the emotions of anxiety, grief, fear, loss, guilt and mourning that it can give rise to. It explored the human dilemma, recognising how hard it can be for individuals to fully accept the situation,



while simultaneously wondering why they don't do more to prevent what might be coming. At Wakefield Cathedral, *Dandelions and Double Yellows* was an exhibition of paintings that celebrated self-seeded, often overlooked plants that bring colour and softness to streets, support wildlife, and contribute to biodiversity. The exhibition featured artworks inspired by urban plants in the Wakefield district.

Several cathedrals held events and activities to coincide with and support the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow (31 October 2021 – 12 November 2021) and for these events there were clear links made with sacred scripture. At Salisbury Cathedral, *Sarum Lights: Heaven & Earth* was a celebration of the wonders of Heaven and Earth. Visitors were invited to make their way around a series of abstract displays that transported them from sunrise to sunset, immersed in the beauty of planet earth and the universe. At Salisbury Cathedral, the website explained the artwork as inspired by a passage in Genesis (15:5) when God invited Abraham to look up at the stars and reflect on his legacy, with sound and light used to express the awe that Abraham might have felt looking up into the night sky. Peter Walker, the artistic director for the installation, hoped that visitors would:

[F]ind the space to reflect on their own lives, human existence and the creation of the earth and our universe. I hope it also provokes some thoughts about the ecology and the beauty of the world around us, and our impact on it.

At Newcastle Cathedral, two installations were held in support of the COP26 Conference. *River of Prayer* was an interactive textile piece encouraging prayer and contemplation. Inspired by the words from Amos (5:24) 'Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!' the aim was to inspire visitors to work and pray for climate justice, together with communities living in poverty around the world. *Make Your Mark (on our world)* was an interactive exhibition consisting of illustrations of six of the world's most endangered animals. The aim was to encourage each person to take small steps to tackle the climate crisis so that collectively those small steps might contribute to bigger change. These exhibitions were promoting positive action as a vehicle to achieve change in the world. At Truro Cathedral, a Green Fair was held and was focused on the environment and climate change. It included a speaker's corner for visitors to show others what they were doing, find out what others were doing, or to just have their say.

## Conclusion

In their report to the Association of English Cathedrals, *The economic and social impact of English cathedrals*, Ecorys (2021) suggested that the enhanced footfall reported between 2014 and 2019 may be associated with the range of innovative events and exhibitions being hosted by cathedrals. In particular, the report referenced *Helter-Skelter* installed in Norwich Cathedral and *Crazy Golf Bridges* installed in Rochester Cathedral. It was not, however, within the remit of this report to chronicle the full range of events and

installations evident within the 43 Anglican cathedrals in England and the Isle of Man or to assess the wider religious significance of such events. Against this background, the aim of the present paper was to contextualise the observations made by Ecorys (2021) both empirically and conceptually.

From an empirical perspective, we set out to glean what could be learned from a systematic review of the 43 cathedral websites about the range and diversity of events and installations hosted by Anglican cathedrals in England and the Isle of Man since 2018. This empirical approach proved to be a stimulating and worthwhile initiative. The strength of the method is that, in principle, each cathedral was given an equal opportunity for its voice to be heard. The weakness is that not all cathedrals conceptualise their websites in the same way. As cathedrals become more aware of the archival research potential afforded by their websites, so this source of information may become more fully curated.

From a conceptual perspective, we set out to explore and analyse the data generated from the websites through the lens shaped by Edward Bailey's theory of implicit religion. This conceptual approach proved to be fruitful, especially in respect of two core ideas advanced by the theory of implicit religion. Firstly, the notion of implicit religion softens the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Analysis of the data generated from the websites identified eight categories of events and installations, each of which offered evidence for the softening of boundaries between sacred and secular through the ways in which cathedrals were hosting and interpreting secular events and installations within their sacred space. Examples were offered of ways in which these boundaries were softened in relation to the following categories: scientific exhibitions, including the *Museum of the Moon*, *Gaia* (meaning the personification of the earth), *Space, the Universe and Everything*, *Dark Skies Exhibition* and *Dippy the Diplodocus*; festivals, including flower festivals, beer and ale festivals and gin and rum festivals; musical events, including Vivaldi's *Four Seasons by Candlelight*, *Jazz Concert by Candlelight* and *Aled Jones' Cathedral Tour*; art exhibitions and installations, including paint, textile, woodwork, metalwork, ceramics, glass and stone; theatre, including *Oliver!*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Railway Children*; markets, including Christmas fairs, spring fairs, vintage fairs, artisan markets, and pop-up retail units; community events, including serving as vaccination hubs during the pandemic, raising funds by charity abseil and hosting events to draw attention to homelessness; and installations, including *Helter-Skelter* at Norwich Cathedral, *Crazy Golf Bridges* at Rochester Cathedral and *Luma* (an outdoor installation of a huge 8-metre-long snail) at Gloucester Cathedral.

Secondly, the notion of implicit religion draws attention to how phenomena within secular societies behave in ways analogous to religion. For Bailey, implicit religion may be characterised by three key qualities: commitment, integrating foci and intensive concerns with extensive effect. Analysis of the data generated from the websites identified seven themes

with high saliency for generating meaning and purpose: social justice and social conscience, including themes focusing on racial justice and the Caribbean diaspora, on the forgotten soldiers of the Second World War and on modern slavery and human trafficking; violence and reconciliation, including themes focusing on knife crime, community reconciliation and peace; remembrance, including installations themed as *Poppy Field*, *Poppies: Weeping Window* and *Blood Swept Lands* and *Seas of Red*; migration and sanctuary, focusing on both historic and contemporary displaced peoples, including the Kindertransport children and Syrian refugees; COVID-19 and lockdown, including exhibitions by clinically vulnerable professional artists and accounts of the lived-experience of lockdown and isolation; personal well-being, including exhibitions designed to prompt visitors to reflect on the secret places in their own lives where they went in search of comfort, inspiration or happiness; and nature and the environment, including a series of abstract displays that transported visitors from sunrise to sunset, immersed in the beauty of planet earth and the universe and exhibitions designed to focus concern for climate change or endangered species.

Taken together, these empirical data and Bailey's theory of implicit religion have identified the important contribution that Anglican cathedrals are making to the overall ministry and mission to which the Church of England is committed. In his analysis of the distinctive position of the Anglican Church within the religious landscape in England, Walker (2017) described four ways in which belonging to God through the Church of England may be considered. Developed initially in a series of theoretical and empirical studies reported by Walker (2006, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), these four ways of belonging are characterised as belonging through activities, belonging through events, belonging through people, and belonging through place. One core strength of Anglican cathedrals concerns the way in which their doors stand open and welcoming to all. The threshold that needs to be crossed to enter this sacred space is relatively low. Softening the boundaries of sacred space through innovative events and installations may enable individuals motivated by all four of Walker's ways of belonging to meet on common ground.

The report by Ecorys (2021) suggested that growth in the numbers of those who step across that threshold may have been enhanced by the innovative events and installations that beckon visitors into that sacred space. The present analysis suggests that the impact of such events and installations should not be calculated *only* in terms of economic and social impact. Viewed through the lens afforded by Edward Bailey's theory of implicit religion, the impact should also be calculated in terms of religious and personal benefit accruing to the individuals who cross that threshold. Once inside the sacred space the religious dimension of life becomes more accessible and more broadly interpreted in line with softening boundaries between sacred space and secular phenomena. Once inside the sacred space

these events and installations are drawing attention to markers of profound human significance and open up possibilities for reflection on and engagement with keys themes carrying potential to transform perspectives, to generate commitment, to form integrating foci and to become matters of intensive concern with extensive effects.

The empirical evidence on which the present analysis has been constructed has been provided by the cathedrals themselves through their websites. What is now required is a detailed study of the visitors themselves, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative survey techniques.

## Limitations

The data presented in this paper were drawn from cathedral websites. There are three main limitations with research of this nature. Firstly, websites are ephemeral: information can change on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis. What information is chosen to share, how often each page is updated and for how long material is made available differs across websites. Several of the 43 cathedrals may well have held events and exhibitions that the current research will not have captured, because the information had since been removed from the website or its URL hidden. Secondly, there is no consistent practice among cathedrals regarding the preservation of data. Some cathedrals held 'news' archives that went back a matter of weeks (Derby, Durham), others that extended to over 40 pages (Canterbury, Exeter) and others going back years (Guildford to 2008, Sheffield to 2015). Thirdly, cathedral websites were not generally structured to serve research of this kind. The cathedral websites will have been created by the cathedral community for their own purposes both to communicate positively their event activity and its impact, and to draw visitors in. Triangulation by way of greater cross-comparison with material shared on other forms of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, local newspapers) may have provided further data but was beyond the scope and time limits of the present study.

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### Authors' contributions

L.F. took responsibility for overall conceptualisation of the paper. U.M.K. curated and analysed the data. F.S. shaped the theoretical context. All authors contributed to the writing and agreed on the final text.

### Ethical considerations

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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