

# Pilgrimage & England's cathedrals

## PAST & PRESENT

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2014-17

### Background

In 2012 the *Spiritual Capital* report estimated that 27% of the resident adult population of England (approximately 11 million adults) had visited a Church of England cathedral at least once in the previous year. Moreover, over 40% of those visitors came from faith traditions other than Christianity or had no religious affiliation. This suggests that cathedrals are seen as shaped by, but transcending, Christianity, offering unique access to the 'spiritual' in the context of history, heritage and culture, and providing meaningful spaces for people of all faiths and none. One of the report's key findings states:

*Cathedrals are not just tourist destinations but places that can convey a sense of the spiritual and sacred even to those who are on the margins of Christian faith, or who stand some way beyond... this presents cathedrals with enormous potential.*

This 'enormous potential' for engaging with visitors is hardly news to those responsible for the life, worship, and ministry of welcome of cathedrals. Yet most would agree that the rise in visitor numbers, together with the growing interest in spirituality and 'special' places shown many different groups, present not only great opportunities for mission but also challenges in terms of resources and strategy.

### Project aims and outputs

This project seeks to address the multiple challenges faced by cathedrals as they seek to balance meeting the needs of congregations and pilgrims, with being accessible to wider communities and tourists, and funding the maintenance of their historic buildings. To do this it has brought together a unique interdisciplinary team, with expertise in the areas of history, theology, religious studies, social anthropology, art and architectural history, archaeology and 3D visualisation of historic buildings. Their aim is to provide fresh insights into the historical and contemporary significance and use of spaces in and around cathedrals, and to analyse connections between spiritual openness and practice, cultural and historic interest, and individual and community senses of belonging. The project has been a partnership with the Church of England, the AEC, Cathedrals Plus, Historic England, and the four Case Study cathedrals: Canterbury, Durham, York and Westminster. Outputs include books, articles, conferences, visualizations of medieval pilgrim experience, and a website.

### Some key issues addressed by the project:

- Cathedrals are about worship, welcome and witness, yet they are now welcoming increasingly diverse audiences for whom both worship and witness may seem alien. Is the answer to keep worship and tourism apart or allow worship to speak to all visitors?
- Cathedrals have multiple identities. How can they combine being major heritage sites and civic resources with retaining their core role of offering worship and being 'spiritual' places rather than museums? What is the balance between access and control?
- Cathedrals are places of 'spiritual heritage'. How do they explain their meaning to visitors who may come from any faith or none and have little if any Christian understanding?
- Cathedrals are single spaces inhabited by many groups: staff, guides and other volunteers, visitors of all ages, pilgrims, regular congregations and other worshippers. All affect each other; all are affected by the shared space. How helpful is it to categorise them or should every group, whatever their reasons for being in the space, be seen as 'potential pilgrims' capable of spiritual response?

- Cathedrals now often speak of ‘pilgrims’ but what or who *is* a pilgrim? In Christian tradition pilgrimage can be a journey through life, an inner journey, and a journey to a holy place. All who cross cathedral thresholds are on a life journey, with many keen to take the chance to reflect on it or spend time in quiet. Evidence shows a wide range of interaction with sacred places, past and present, which includes formal ‘pilgrim’ activity but may also be fluid and subject to change, even within a visit. What does this mean for managing visitors and the use and presentation of buildings?
- Most cathedrals today present a ‘stripped back’ appearance compared to the rich splendour of their medieval predecessors yet human beings learn and respond through their senses. What can cathedrals offer today to enhance learning, encounter and response?

## Project Team Conference Speakers



### Principal Investigator: Revd Dr Dee Dyas

Dee is Reader in the History of Christianity and Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity & Culture (CSCC), and the Centre for Pilgrimage Studies at the University of York. Her publications focus on the meanings of pilgrimage through the centuries and the interaction of Christianity with Western culture. She is co-editor of the Routledge Studies in Pilgrimage, Religious Travels & Tourism. Dee oversees CSCC’s faith-centred heritage interpretation work with cathedrals and churches and contributed to ordination training for 10 years.



### Co-Investigator: Dr Marion Bowman

Marion is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the Open University, visiting Professor at the University of Oslo, and Vice-President of the European Association for the Study of Religions. Her fieldwork based research includes Protestant and non-traditional pilgrimage; material religion; new expressions of mourning and memorialisation; and a long-term study of Glastonbury. Publications include *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*. (New York & London: Routledge 2012), co-edited with Ulo Valk.



### Co-Investigator: Professor Simon Coleman

Simon is an anthropologist and Chancellor Jackman Professor in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. He has worked in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Nigeria. His research includes pilgrimage (Walsingham), Cathedrals as city spaces, charismatic Christianity, hospital chaplaincy, and intersections between spiritualized and medicalized space. Simon is currently co-editor of the journal *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* and of the Routledge Studies in Pilgrimage, Religious Travels and Tourism series.



### Research Assistant: Dr John Jenkins

John Jenkins is a Research Assistant on the Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals project, and a Teaching Fellow at the University of York. He is a medieval historian who focuses on ecclesiastical institutions and their relationship with the laity. He is also currently researching the importance of the cult of St Thomas Becket in medieval London, and editing the 15th century *Customary of the Shrine of St Thomas* from Canterbury Cathedral.