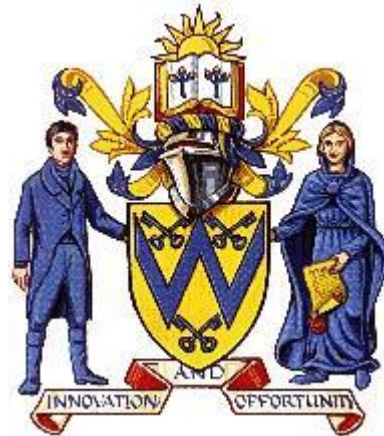


**The British Association for the Study of Religions  
Annual Conference**



**‘Religion Beyond the Textbook’  
The University of Wolverhampton  
5-7 September 2016**

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Welcome to Wolverhampton, for the 2016 Annual Conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions. Our theme this year is 'Religion Beyond the Textbook', and we have a varied and fascinating selection of panels and papers that we hope will facilitate much discussion and debate.

This booklet contains all the information we hope that you will need for the conference, but please do not hesitate to ask any of the Wolverhampton-based staff, or BASR Exec Committee members for any help or guidance during your stay with us.

Enjoy the conference!

**Wolverhampton Organising Committee & BASR Exec Committee:**

**Stephen Gregg**



**Opinderjit Takhar**



**George Chryssides**



**Steve Jacobs**



**Steven Sutcliffe**



**Suzanne Owen**



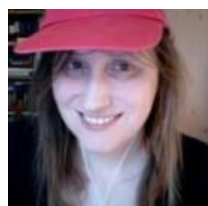
**Dominic Corrywright**



**Chris Cotter**



**Claire Wanless**



**David Robertson**



## Directions to Wolverhampton City Campus

### Travelling by car

Junction 10 of the M6 is the nearest motorway junction. Follow the signs for Wolverhampton along the A454. Upon reaching the ring road (A4150), follow signs for the city centre, public car parking is available at the Civic Centre and Broad Street.

### Parking

The nearest **public car parks** are as below, and are signposted off the ring road.

- Civic Centre car park - postcode WV1 1RA
- Broad Street car park - postcode WV1 1JD

### Travelling by public transport

#### By Train

Wolverhampton station is well served with trains from Birmingham every 10-15 minutes. Trains from London, Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol, north Wales and Edinburgh also call at Wolverhampton. For timetables visit: National Rail Enquiries.

#### By Bus

The city is well connected by local and national services. Most local bus services will arrive into Wolverhampton bus station, with routes from Birmingham, Walsall, Dudley, West Bromwich and other parts of Wolverhampton. Information about bus tickets and timetables.

National Express long distance coach services also call at the bus station.

Walking directions from the train and bus Station - 10 minutes approx

- **From the train station** - when you exit the station, walk straight ahead and veer right across the road bridge going over the ring road. At the crossroads continue straight ahead down Lichfield Street .
- **From the bus station** - walk straight ahead as you exit, passing Costa on your on your left. When you reach the crossroads (with the Chubb Building ahead of you) turn left down Lichfield Street.
- You will see the Britannia Hotel and the Grand Theatre on your left as you continue down Lichfield Street.
- At the next junction when you reach the Royal London Buildings turn right – you will see The George in front of you. This marks the beginning of the 'University Quarter'
- When you get to The George, turn left and then follow the road around to your right, and MA building is opposite St Peters Church.

## **By Metro**

The Midland Metro tram runs between Birmingham and Wolverhampton via West Bromwich and Wednesbury. Leave the tram at the terminus – Wolverhampton St. Georges. See Network West Midlands for timetables and more details.

Walking directions from the Metro - 10 minutes approx.

- Upon exiting the Metro stop, walk straight ahead towards Primark, cross the road and then take a right alongside Marks and Spencers
- Continue along this road (Market Street) – it will bend slightly to the right then back to the left. Keep going until you reach a crossroads – you will have Indi bar on your left and the Royal London Buildings directly in front of you.
- Cross over and continue in the same direction until you reach another crossroads – you will see The George in front of you. This is the beginning of the 'University Quarter'.
- When you get to The George, turn left and then follow the road around and to your right, MA building is opposite St. Peters Church.

## **Accommodation and Meals Information**

### **Accommodation**

Simple, student-style accommodation is situated in the Student Village, just behind Asda on the North side of campus – this is a 10 minute walk from MA building, where the conference is hosted on the South side of campus. Each room is a single, with private en-suite facilities. Shared kitchen facilities are in each corridor.

### **Meals**

A hot buffet breakfast will be served each morning in the Chancellor's Hall in MA Building.

Buffet lunch will be served each lunchtime in the Chancellor's Hall in MA Building.

An evening meal will be served on the Monday evening in Chancellor's Hall in MA Building.

The conference dinner, with table service and entertainment, will be served on the Tuesday evening in the Chancellor's Hall in MA Building.

Vegetarian and Vegan options will be available at all times for those that have indicated this preference during their online booking for the conference.

Tea & Coffee will be served at regular intervals, as outlined in the Conference Timetable, in the Chancellor's Hall in MA Building.

## **Conference Dinner Details**

**Selection of mini bhaji, pakora and samosa**

**Mini poppadum's and chutney and dip**

**Chicken Rogan Josh**

**Sweet potato, spinach and chick pea curry**

**Aloo Gobi**

**Pilau rice, naan bread**

**Matcha green tea and raspberry delice**

**Tropical Fruit Salad**

## **Entertainment**

**We are delighted to announce that we will be entertained at our Conference Dinner by members of Gabhru Panjab De, winners of the UK Bhangra 'Best Dance Group' 2014 & 2015, and BritAsia World Music Awards 'Best Dance Group' 2015. Enjoy!**



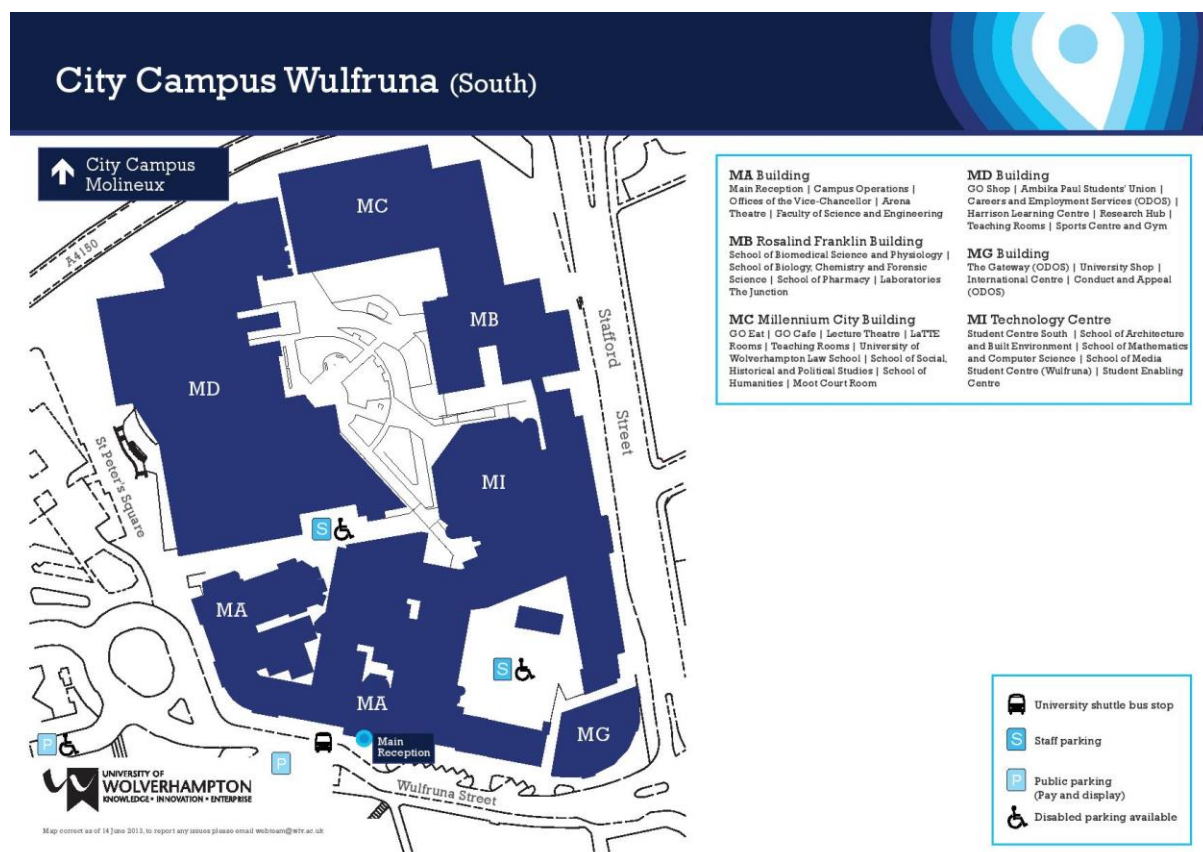
## Campus Maps

For an interactive map of campus, please click on the following link:

<http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/interactive-map/location/wolverhampton/>

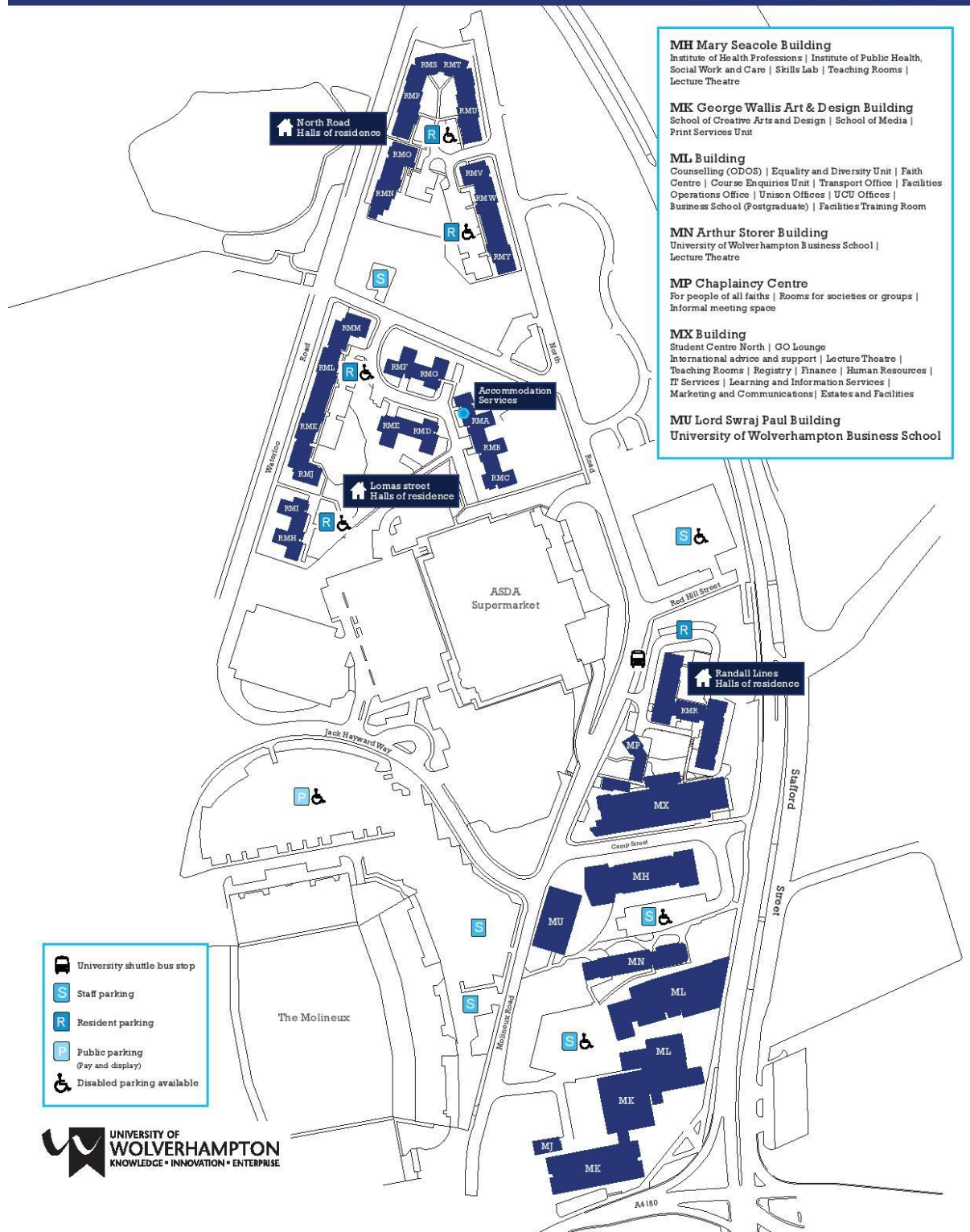
Locations to look out for include MA Building, the home of the conference, and the RMA: Accommodation Office, which is located next to the student rooms we will be utilising for our guests.

Traditional style maps follow on the next two pages. The campus is split between 'North' and 'South', but they are right next to each other – they are simply separated by the ring road, which has numerous safe crossings and an underpass.

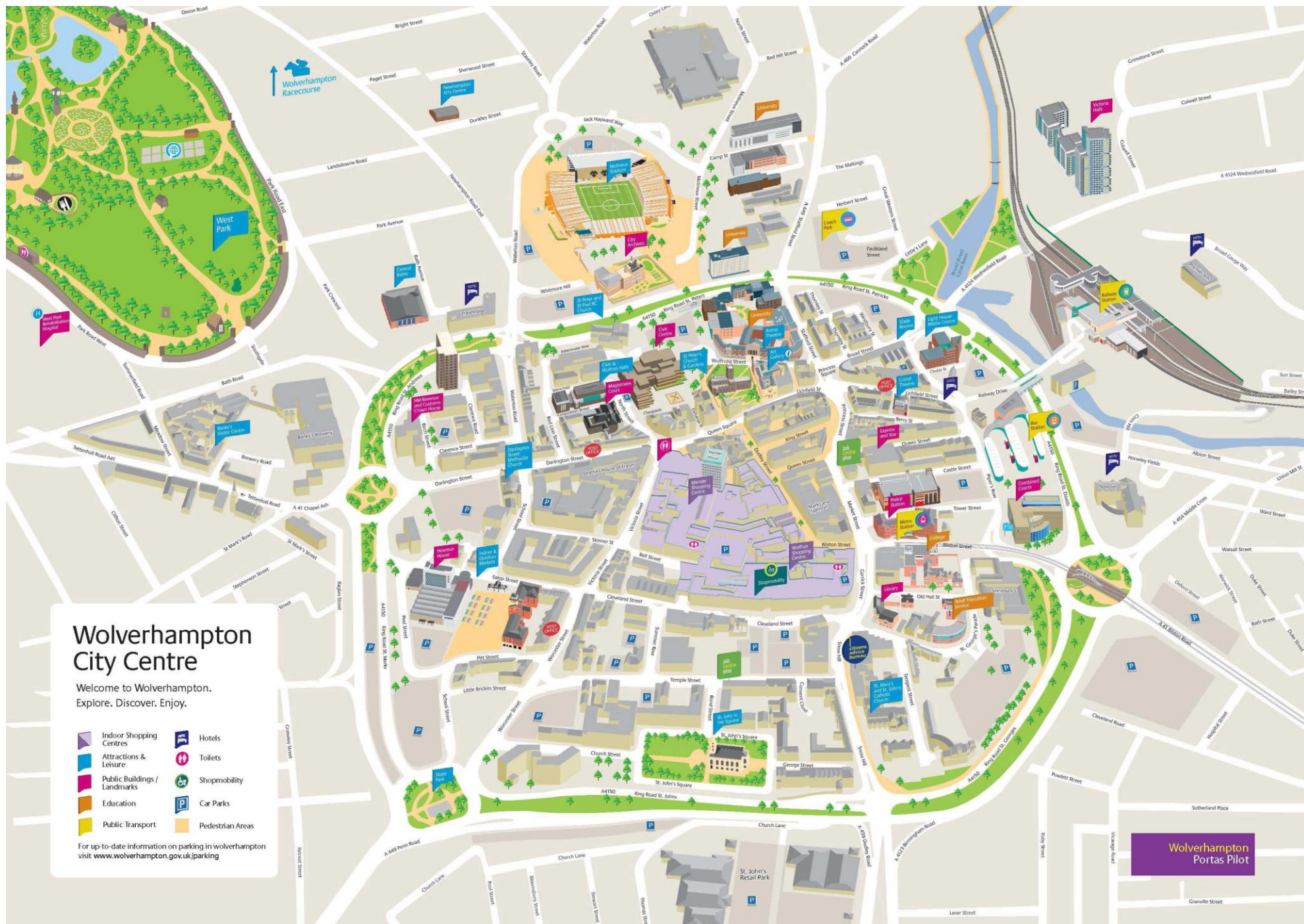




# City Campus Molineux (North)







## Timetable

### **Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September**

12.00-13.15 Registration - MA Building First Floor (Tea & Coffee provided)

13.15-14.00 Welcome session: Vice-Chancellor's Welcome (Prof. Geoff Layer), Wolverhampton & BASR Welcome (Stephen Gregg, Opinderjit Takhar & Steven Sutcliffe), Introductory Talk 'Religion in Wolverhampton' (George Chryssides) (Council Room)

14.00-15.30 **Panel Sessions 1 (See panels list for rooms)**

15.30-16.00 Tea & Coffee (Chancellor's Hall)

16.30-17.30: Plenary Session with Professor Marilyn Deegan, Digital Humanities, King's College London: 'The Academic Book of the Future: A review of two years of intense activity with academics, librarians, publishers, booksellers and policy makers'.

17.30-18.15: Reception hosted by Bloomsbury Publishers

18.30-19.30 Evening Meal (Chancellor's Hall)

19.30 Free Social Time

20.00 Religious Studies Project Festive Midwinter Recording (Council Room)

### **Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September**

8.00-9.00 Breakfast (Chancellor's Hall)

9.00-10.30 **Panel Sessions 2 (See panels list for rooms)**

10.30-11.00 Tea & Coffee (Chancellor's Hall)

11.00-12.30 **Panel Sessions 3 (See panels list for rooms)**

12.30-13.30 Lunch (Chancellor's Hall)

13.30-15.00 **BASR AGM (Council Room)**

15.00-16.30 **Panel Sessions 4 (See panels list for rooms)**

16.30-17.00 Tea & Coffee (Chancellor's Hall)

17.00-18.30 **Keynote – Beyond Diversity: Mapping a Future for Religious Studies, Prof. Martin Stringer (Council Room)**

19.00 Conference Dinner with entertainment followed by free social time (Chancellor's Hall)

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September:**

8.00-9.00 Breakfast (Chancellor's Hall)

9.00-10.30 **Panel Sessions 5 (See panels list for rooms)**

10.30-11.00 Tea & Coffee (Chancellor's Hall)

11.00-12.30 **Panel Sessions 6 (See panels list for rooms)**

12.30-13.30 Lunch, then depart, or: (Chancellor's Hall)

13.30-16.30 Optional Tour of Religious Sites in Wolverhampton.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To be booked at registration – numbers limited; first come, first served. Please note a small charge will be made per person to cover minibus hire.

## Keynote Lecture

We are delighted to welcome Prof. Martin Stringer, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at Swansea University, and formerly Head of Theology & Religion at the University of Birmingham, to deliver our 2016 keynote lecture.



**Title:** Beyond Difference: Mapping a Future for Religious Studies

**Abstract:** What is the role of religious studies where people are openly killing those who do not share their religious outlook, are preventing publishers from publishing material they disagree with, and are threatening mass terror in the name of a religious ideology? This is not just those who claim to be Muslim but is equally true for those who identify as Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and followers of other religions. Even a candidate for the President of the United States can threaten to exclude people from his country because they claim to be of a particular religion. We live in a world of heightened tensions and threats, the vast majority of which are made by those who claim to be religious, against those who they see as of the wrong religion, or of no religion. Sitting at the core of many of these terrifying situations is a statement of 'difference'. How, I want to ask, should we, as academics and scholars of religion, respond?

In answering this question, I want to raise two specific questions. The first relates to the way in which we define and talk about our subject matter. Do we essentialise religions? Do we enable a discourse of difference by the way in which we present our material? Is our very definition of religion predicated on difference? Secondly I want to learn the lessons from the study of race in the early years of the twentieth century, to ask whether we are currently falling into the same kinds of trap that led to such horrific violence in the name of racial difference (and continues to do so in many places), and to ask whether the debate about religion, and scholarship on religion, has anything to learn from these studies and the stances made by certain figures within them. How, I want to ask, should we study religion in a world where religion has become so toxic? What is our duty as scholars?

**BASR Annual General Meeting Agenda – 13.30-15.00 - 06/09/16**

**University of Wolverhampton**

**British Association for the Study of Religions**

**Registered Charity Number 801567**

**(Affiliated to the IAHR and EASR)**

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of the previous AGM
4. Matters arising
5. Presidential Address (Steven Sutcliffe)
6. Secretary's Report (Stephen Gregg)
7. Treasurer's Report (Chris Cotter)
8. JBASR Co-ordinating Editor's Report (Suzanne Owen)
9. Bulletin Editor's Report (David Robertson)
10. Website and Social Media (Claire Wanless)
11. Religious Studies Project (David Robertson & Chris Cotter)
12. Teaching and Learning (Dominic Corrywright)
13. BASR Teaching Award (Dominic Corrywright)
14. BASR Seed Funding (Steven Sutcliffe & Chris Cotter)
15. Mission Statement – Proposed Changes (Steven Sutcliffe)
16. Logo – Proposed Changes (Claire Wanless & Stephen Gregg)
17. BASR Conference 2017 (Suzanne Owen)
18. Any Other Business
19. Date, time and location of next AGM.

# **Panels and Abstracts<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Subject to changes beyond our control: any changes will be advertised as soon as possible.

**Session 1**  
**Monday 5<sup>th</sup>**  
**14.00-15.30**



**Number: 1A**

**Room: Council Room (MA221)**

**Chair: Suzanne Owen**

**Panel Name: Roundtable: Research Ethics and the Study of Religions**

Whilst sociological and anthropological associations provide research ethics guidelines, and AUDTRS (now TRS-UK) had created one in the past, these do not address adequately specific institutional requirements (usually tailored to the needs of science and psychology). It is time to revisit this topic, especially with the increasing complexity of digital data and the introduction of the UK government Prevent strategy leading at least one institution to require all research into terrorism-related topics, including undergrad essays, to go through ethical review.

Two of the participants (Owen and Jacobs) are currently chairs of school/faculty research ethics committees and another (Chryssides) was involved in creating the AUDTRS research ethics guidelines. The other two participants (Singer & Robertson) will each speak for ten minutes on one ethical problem and their own experience negotiating the research ethics approval process. At the end, it will open up for general discussion.

Roundtable speakers:

Suzanne Owen (Leeds Trinity University & University of Chester) – ‘Introduction: institutional research ethics requirements’

George Chryssides (York St. John University) – ‘Codes of practice in the study of religion’

Beth Singer (University of Cambridge) – ‘Digital research ethics’

Alison Robertson (Open University) – ‘Researching stigmatised and legally ambiguous behaviours’

Stephen Jacobs (University of Wolverhampton) – ‘A Faculty Ethics Committee Chair perspective’

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**Number: 1B**

**Room: MA112**

**Chair: Stefanie Sinclair**

**Panel Name: Feminism and Religion**

**Using Food to Create a ‘Safe Space’ for Engaging with Religious Diversity in a Women’s Interfaith Book Group (Louise Gramstrup)**

Can participants in formalised interfaith encounters engage with the inherent religious diversity in a manner that engenders interreligious understanding?

Aiming to foster interreligious understanding and relations, Daughters of Abraham brings together Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women at monthly book group meetings. My proposed paper explores the role of food towards creating a sense of 'safe space' that encourages engagement with religious difference in Daughters of Abraham's interfaith setting. I use ethnographic data collected in 2014-15 towards this end. Food is a stable ritual at Daughters of Abraham meetings. I argue that the repeated socializing over food provides a recipe for engaging with religious diversity, and so serves to bring together Daughters members who hold distinct religious worldviews. Specifically, due to its repetitiveness the shared eating practice generates an impression of the Daughters' interfaith space as 'safe', and consequently as a place where religious differences can collectively be explored without fear of being hurt or hurting others. This impression of 'safe space' is supported by the sense of belonging to this interfaith community that the gathering around food produces. I conclude that the ritual of food contributes to fulfilling the organization's aim of generating interreligious understanding and relations because it guides members to engage with the religious diversity inherent in Daughters of Abraham.

### **From fashion blogs to religiously fashioned (Ella Fitzsimmons)**

The proposed paper will look at blog posts by women who have written about how their attraction to religious clothing was an element of their religious conversion or "returning" to the religions they were born into. Rather than an afterthought, religious dress is shown to be something which serves as an attractive aspect of conservative religion for these bloggers.

Looking at blog posts by Muslim or Jewish women, I will use the idea of women being drawn to traditional religion because or, rather than in spite of, religious dress and its implications for clearly defined gender roles. Researching religious practices online shows contradictory and complicated counter-narratives to prevailing understandings about what might draw people to different forms of religious practice. I will use this as the foundation for a discussion about how blogging about religious dress is one of the ways of which women use the internet and online networks as part of what Orit Avishai terms "doing religion" within traditional religious structures, showing that these blogs are women-dominated hybrid spaces where authority is drawn from facility with online media and the written word, rather than from formal, predominantly offline structures.

### **Feminist Folk, Christian Folk and Black Madonnas (Melanie Landman)**

Black Madonnas are not only figures of devotion within Roman Catholicism but are also popular figures within the fields of goddess and feminist spiritualities. Within these fields, there is a substantial body of works in the form of books, articles and websites dedicated to the exploration of the phenomenon. This paper will consider the following: It suggests that the literature created by goddess/feminist spirituality movement can be seen as type of feminist vernacular knowledge. However, issues arise when this rubs up against other sorts of vernacular knowledge or understandings. Who are the 'folk' when it comes to looking at the ways in which the figure of the black Madonna is interpreted and incorporated into religious practices? The paper will therefore consider some of the issues raised by examining the concept of folk or vernacular religion in relation to empirical work conducted at a black Madonna shrine. This particular shrine challenged some of the existing assumptions regarding these figures and their place in both Christianity and alternative spiritualities. In thinking on the ways in which both goddess feminists and Christians engage with the

figure of the black Madonna, this paper will suggest that the feminist folk and Christian folk are both being creative in terms of how they bring together various strands and elements of religious practices.

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**Number: 1C**

**Room: MA211**

**Chair: Claire Wanless**

**Panel Name: Religion, Health and Well-being**

**Alcoholics Anonymous: On the limits of SBNR (Wendy Dossett)**

Members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) claimed the epithet 'Spiritual but Not Religious,' several decades before it came into academic vogue (Fuller, 2001). This paper traces engagement with religion, non-religion, Christian and therapeutic spirituality around the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous in the US in the 1930s. It draws on qualitative data from a research project amongst contemporary members to argue that the label 'SBNR' has, in the AA context, substantive and strategic connotations, both of which are limited. The contours of AA engagement cannot be captured under a single classification. Substantively, 'SBNR' misses both those whose 'style' strongly articulates AA's Oxford Group roots, and those who down-play 'spirituality' in favour of a behavioural/communitarian approach to recovery. 'SBNR' can be useful 'strategically' in enabling AA to negotiate secular space. At the same time 'spiritual' can leave in place the same apparent obstacles as 'not religious' hopes to remove. The paper notes that AA is an obvious omission from much literature on contemporary spirituality, and argues that it offers a helpful case study which highlights the problematic 'blanketing' effect of the label 'SBNR'.

**'Wild experiences and healthy spirits.' (Nicole Holt and Miles Greenford)**

Globally, obesity levels and mental illnesses are at an all-time high and rising. Healthy physical activities have traditionally inoculated us, to a degree, against these conditions. The situation is further confounded with rising health disparities linked to poverty and multiple deprivation. Depending on which the end of the health inequality spectrum a person is, some live longer whilst others shorter. Similarly so for shrinking and increasing quality of life experiences. Current methods to promote healthy physical activities do not appear to have yet started to reverse these trends. Present evidence does not support the likelihood of these methods reducing obesity and improve mental health, without further increasing the health divide.

Nursing training, practice, experience and academic literature identifies that some people, when experiencing major health life crisis, turn inwards towards their own spirituality, enabling them to effectively manage aspects of their health. The question becomes, whether or not spirituality can be effectively and efficiently mobilised in a form that promotes health through; reducing obesity and improving mental health, whilst reducing the health divide? Taking this question a stage further; 'what could as such a method of spiritual health promotion look like?' Is the focus of this paper.

**An end to suffering? On the diversity of nonreligious narratives around pain, death and afterlife.  
(Katie Aston)**

This paper will discuss how nonreligious populations in Britain today conceptualise, and deal with, pain and death. The paper first outlines the growing literature on the secular body and death (Aston, 2015; Copeman and Quack, 2015; Farman, 2013; Gutowski, 2012; Lee 2015; Engelke 2015). Such studies, including my own doctoral research, have shown that there is a dearth of existential language appropriate for dealing with death and suffering outside of a religious (typically Christian) framework (Aston, 2015; Engelke, 2015). Moreover, humanists, who profess a materialist and naturalistic worldview face particular anxieties when dealing with dead bodies which are not quite human but not quite 'mere matter' (Engelke, 2014; Copeman and Quack, 2015). In the second part, I will draw on existing visual data collected during eighteen months' fieldwork in the UK with two non-religious organisations; the Rationalist Association and the British Humanist Association. Using visual data, I will show how pain and death are ideally articulated by the organisation in their out puts. I will then show, through interviews with their members, how the reality of these existential questions is much messier and anxiety provoking.

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**Number: 1D**

**Room: MA213**

**Chair: Opinderjit Takhar**

**Panel Name: Religious Encounter in South Asia**

**Inter-Religious Competition and the Spatial: post-colonial and post-war perspectives from Asia.  
(Elizabeth J. Harris)**

In the summer of 2015, I returned to Dambakila Potuna, on the coast of the Jaffna peninsula in Sri Lanka, where a Buddhist site has been created in the recent past, in a predominantly Hindu and Roman Catholic area, to commemorate the coming to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE of a sapling from the tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. I had first visited the site in 2012, when I was collecting data on the 'Buddhicization' of non-Buddhist areas in Sri Lanka after the ending of the country's bitter internal war. In 2012, the nascent Buddhist site dominated the landscape. In 2015, the situation had changed. Adjacent to the Buddhist site, at a long-established Hindu shrine, Jambu Koleswaram, home to an aged siddha, a magisterial image of Siva was being erected by public subscription. In height it dominated the Buddhist complex, so much so that I had at first thought it was an additional Buddha image. Then, on one road leading to the Buddhist site, a 'Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes' had grown up, adjacent to an older Roman Catholic Church. It was magisterial and life-size. Both initiatives seemed to compete with the Buddhist shrine, contesting its right to 'own' land in a non-Buddhist area. More widely in the Jaffna peninsula, there had been an upsurge in the building and renovation of Hindu temples.

This paper examines the factors that condition contemporary, spatially-expressed, inter-religious competition, using examples from Asia, most particularly Sri Lanka. It will argue that these factors only rarely relate to the doctrinal, or to academic categories that have been used to capture the nature of religious boundaries in Asia - multiple religious belonging, for instance, or inclusivism. In contrast, they

concern the lack of win-win settlements to conflict, perceptions of victimhood and disempowerment, identity politics, colonial legacies and the imperative to mask the horror of war in meritorious activities. The paper draws on fieldwork carried out between 2010 and 2015 into issues connected with religion, space and conflict in colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka.

#### **Institutions Encounter Adivasis : Debating religious conversions in Western India (Maharshi Vyas)**

Observers studying conversions of marginalized Adivasi (tribal) communities by institutional religious movements have engaged debates - academic, political and religious - that attempt to adjudicate the authenticity of these conversions. The concern has been whether these conversions are voluntary or forced. The motive is to separate sincere religious intentions of adherents or institutions from material possibilities with which adivasis can be seduced or exploited. While emphasizing a genuine concern against such exploitation, I question the assumption framed in the current debate that religious and material concerns of the adivasis cannot be commensurate. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Indian state of Gujarat amidst Warli Adivasi communities' encounters with an institutional Hindu organization, this paper attempts to think beyond the religion-material dichotomy in the "authenticity debate". Instead of assuming adivasis as mute participants in this institutional project, I analyze the ways in which they negotiate, imagine and redraw socio-religious boundaries while thinking both materially and religiously. By illustrating how affects and disciplines are both enacted and engendered in the programs of this religious institution, I examine the conditions and processes by which certain adivasis actively participate while others steadfastly resist any conformity with this institution. In conclusion, I argue that any analysis of "authenticity" of conversions consider both the adivasi subjectivities formed by these agentic processes of resistance and engagement as well as the ways in which the organization strategizes its own institutional growth.

#### **Blessings beyond time and place: The fluid nature of narrative tradition in contemporary Hinduism. (Martin Wood)**

For the devotees of Gujarati saint Jalaram Bapa (1799-1881) the publication of his hagiography 'Bhakta Shree Jalaram' in 1958 marked a transition from a largely oral narrative tradition to one whereby a written, printed text became the authoritative point of reference for his life and the miracles associated with him. For today's devotees, however, Jalaram has stepped over rigid historical, cosmological and religious thresholds; he is ever present and regularly performs healings and other miracles, not only for Gujarati Hindu devotees but also for non-Hindus and non-Gujaratis, in India and beyond.

Today, accounts of these post 'Bhakta Shree Jalaram' miracles are widely disseminated in various traditional, and non-traditional, ways such as popular/commemorative literature, theatrical plays and through online/ internet media illustrating the tradition's ability to move beyond fixed geographical, religious and textual boundaries. This paper will examine accounts of some of these contemporary miracles and consider how they highlight the Jalaram tradition's commitment to religious universalism. The paper will also consider numerous discussions with devotees of Gujarati and non-Gujarati descent, concerning the importance of these new narratives, and the ways in which they are presented when it comes to the continuity and evolution of a fluid and dynamic hagiographical tradition in a contemporary diasporic context.

**Session 2**  
**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**09.00-10.30**

**Number: 2A**  
**Marion Bowman**

**Room: Council Room (MA221)**

**Chair: Krittika Bhattacharjee &**

**Panel Name: Exploring the 'Special': Places and Processes of 'Specialness'**

How are places marked out and spoken about as special? York Minster, the island of Iona and Westminster Cathedral each have a hefty reputation, attracting different narratives about their significance. Each is a storied place in its own right. In these places and in other places of significance, reputations are built, spread, perhaps even fulfilled, partly through the medium of stories: by visitors, caretakers, tourist organisations, even by the scholars who study them. How are 'official' and 'alternative' stories about a special place formed and how do they interact with each other? What is the role of the narrative in the making of special places?

This panel responds to these questions. By offering snapshots of three places reputed to be 'special' – York Minister, Iona and Westminster Cathedral, the panel will show the different ways in which these places have been narrated and by whom. It is fundamentally interdisciplinary in its approach, bridging Religious Studies, Human Geography, Anthropology and Folklore Studies. Its data-orientated focus will take 'religion' out of the textbook by presenting three exercises in place-making in action. Finally, its attention to the 'special' seeks to widen the conversation surrounding 'religion' by encouraging a new and challenging vocabulary.

**York Minster at Night (Tiina Sepp)**

York Minster is one of the case study cathedrals of the 'Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals, Past & Present' project. We have noticed that when answering questions about their favourite and least favourite feature or area of the cathedral, several people do not just specify a place but also a time to visit that place, so it seems to be a question of the intersection of the two. Many people say that they enjoy the cathedral most when it is empty – early in the morning or late at night. It was during the night that the York Minster fires, stories about which play a significant role in the presentation of the cathedral, started. This paper will look into the 'rivalry' of stories – competing narratives that are told about various features and events.

**Seeking, finding and experiencing the special in Westminster Cathedral (Marion Bowman)**

This paper will explore the ideas of the special place and experiencing the special within the context of Westminster Cathedral. Westminster Cathedral is observably special, due its status as mother church of English and Welsh Catholics, its imposing size and Byzantine architecture. However, field work carried out in relation to the Pilgrimage and England's Cathedrals, Past & Present project enables a granular approach to how people experience the special in terms of sub-spaces, devotional hotspots, particular associations and significant experiences, underlining what Primiano describes as three characteristics of vernacular religion: creativity, ambiguity and power.

**Story-telling Iona (Krittika Bhattacharjee)**

Abstract: Iona is a small Hebridean island that, in the present day, is driven largely by its tourist economy. Its reputation comprises many strands -- historic, scenic, religious, powerful, Romantic -- which, on their own and collectively, contribute to the perception that Iona is a 'special place'. In part, Iona's 'specialness' is borne of and circulates through narratives about the island. Using qualitative data obtained on fieldwork, this paper will analyse some of these narratives, produced by visitors to the island. By presenting the stories that visitors construct about and on the island, it will analyse the role of story-telling in the construction of a 'special place'.

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**Number: 2B**

**Room: MA112**

**Chair: Dominic Corrywright**

**Panel Name: Methodology in the Study of Religion**

**Participating in the study of religion – amoeba sex, inter-subjectivity and entrainment (Lynne Scholefield)**

Building on my recent work on 'engaging with living religion' and a 'contemplative approach to the study of religion' this paper explores what it might mean to be more fully 'participating' in studying diverse forms of religion. Drawing on a variety of very different research and scholarship, the paper primarily develops ideas about epistemology, with some reference to the methodological implications and possibilities for fieldwork. The sources to be brought into the discussion include Ursula le Guin on communication, the HiveMind project, research connected to the HeartMath Institute, subjugated knowledges, contemplative pedagogy, and poiesis. Beginning with reflections on the poem 'Glastonbury (visited by the British Association for the Study of Religion)' by ethnographer of religion, Eleanor Nesbitt, the paper discusses ways of knowing that use the heart, that come from sharing experience with other people, that are embodied, mindful, imaginative, personal, and receptive. Although related to ideas and practices of reflexivity, what I am focusing on here are aspects of human experience that are, or can be, brought into play in the participant part of 'participant observation'. I am not suggesting that researchers participate 'fully' in the way that practitioners do. These ideas are briefly explored and illustrated by focusing on different experiences of a visit to a mosque.

**Seeing through a glass, darkly: a visual methodology in the study of lived religion (Eleanor Course)**

The use of visual methodology is a vital tool in the study of religion. Images have a power "to arrest the mind and deliver it from the anxieties that fragment consciousness", allowing the viewer "engagement with oneself, with others, with the past" (Morgan). In this paper, I will explore visual methods of data elicitation I will use in my research in Hull in 2017, when Hull will be the UK's City of Culture. My research will focus on the beliefs and practices of ordinary Christians in Hull in 2017, discovering how and why they engage with City of Culture 2017, and how they understand relationships between their religion and the culture of the city. My paper will cover visual methods of data elicitation including the use of selected photographs to memories, associations or connotations that related to the image, and inviting participants to take photos, videos or make images in the course



of 2017 to use as focus points for discussion. I will explore why photo elicitation is an effective method to gather lived and hidden religious experiences of marginalised groups.

**Beyond 'religion' and 'spirituality': The consequences of a 'meaning systems' understanding for the study of 'religion' and 'nonreligion' (James P.S. Murphy)**

Recent research has demonstrated that academic and popular distinctions between 'religion' and 'spirituality' are unfounded. Each concept can mean many different things, with considerable overlap between the two terms, and the distinctions that are made are primarily theological and/or political. Emic distinctions in this area can hinder etic understanding and obscure the complexity and diversity of phenomena. It is argued that recognising that 'religious' and 'spiritual' are part of the same broad category does not go far enough and that religious/spiritual worldviews are also not fundamentally different to other worldviews. They are socially-constructed 'Meaning Systems', which help practitioners create their own worlds and give purpose to their lives. These 'Meaning Systems' are constructed out of the cultural and social resources available to an individual. All humans use their experiences to create the best mental models of reality that they can. The same psychological and sociological processes are involved in the creation of 'nonreligious' belief systems as in the creation of 'religious' ones. Recognising that both 'religion' and 'nonreligion' are part of the same human efforts to understand ourselves and our world can enrich and assist the study of each.

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**Number: 2C**

**Room: MA211**

**Chair: Steve Sutcliffe**

**Panel Name: The Psy-Disciplines and Religion**

**There's method in the madness: Religious Studies, Psychiatry and Mad Studies (Richard Saville-Smith)**

In the secure psychiatric units of the Western World 25% articulate their experience in religious terms. Historically, some Western psychiatrists retrospectively diagnosed the likes of Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, a host of saints and whole traditions, Sufis, Sadhus and the Spirit Possessed, finding them victims of mental disorders. Some contemporary Psychiatricians suggest that, apart from language, "there is no difference between a religious experience (with psychotic phenomenology) and other psychotic experiences." If there might be something 'not mad' about religious 'innovators and entrepreneurs' like Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, etc., might there be something 'not mad' about some of the 25% in secure psychiatric units. What are we supposed to do with this idea? One obvious approach might be to listen to the people in secure units, beyond the text. However recent evidence shows NHS ethics committees reluctant to support non-medical research among 'very sick people'. Whilst raising questions about whose interests they serve, it perpetuates the silence of the mad. Mad studies suggests another response. By including the voices of the Mad within the Academy it may be possible to engage in different ways of seeing which are not so obvious to the Religious Studies text(s).

### **Spiritual Torment: The Role of Supernatural Evil in Victorian Spiritualism (Sarah Bartels)**

During the Victorian era, a subset of the English population came to view Spiritualism as a viable religious alternate, either to Christianity or to a form of Christianity they found unfulfilling. While neither its supporters nor its critics presented a united front, contemporary debates regarding Spiritualism offer a unique insight into Victorian religious issues, including discussions about eternal punishment and the existence of the Devil. Accusations of diabolism were a perennial problem for Spiritualists, subjecting them to both irritation and insult, especially as they tended to be among the growing segment of the population, who were dubious regarding the existence of hell and the Devil. They were often, however, still troubled by questions regarding spiritual evil, especially as many had encounters with spirits, which were malicious or troublesome. In their attempts to confront both external and internal threats, Spiritualists formulated arguments to defend their beliefs and to account for the darker side of the spiritual world, with troubled human spirits often stepping in to serve as modernised demons. Ultimately, the issue of the demonic provided a powerful impetus for Spiritualists to more clearly define both the borders of their own belief and their place within Victorian society.

### **Psychology and the Formation of the Science of Religion(s) (Matei Iagher)**

This paper examines the ways in which psychological concepts played a foundational role in the constitution of the science of religion(s). Textbook narratives about the formation of the scientific study of religion (such as Eric Sharpe's classic *Comparative Religion*) usually highlight the role played by comparative linguistics and evolutionism in the formation of the new discipline, and do not dwell on the formative role of psychology. In contrast to such narratives, this paper argues that a detailed investigation of the works of figures like Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), E.B. Tylor (1832-1917), C.P. Tiele (1830-1902), Ernest Renan (1823-1892) or Albert Réville (1826-1906) and others shows that psychology was just as important as, for example, linguistics in a variety of late 19th century formulations of the science of religion(s). The paper will start by outlining several kinds of psychological theories that were espoused by the aforementioned founding fathers and will then comment on their relationship to the contemporary psychological disciplines. I will end by spelling out some of the consequences that this early psychologising of religion had for the study of religion in the 20th century.

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**Number: 2D**

**Room: MA213**

**Chair: George Chryssides**

**Panel Name: Minority Religions – Old & Young**

**Minority and muted voices: Challenges in identity construction for second generation and former members of unpopular new religions (Eileen Barker)**

What if I can't invite my school friends back home, or can't even accept their invitations and cannot explain why either because I have been told not to talk about my religion, or I do not want to confess

to my religion? What if I have left a religious movement after having worked for it full-time for the past twenty years, and am desperate to apply for a job or to a university that will give me some qualifications, but I do not know how to fill in the gap in my cv? This paper examines some of the problems faced by those who either did not themselves choose to join, but were born into, an unpopular religion or who, having become disillusioned with the religion to which they once chose to devote their life, now feel they need to hide from others what is or has been an integral feature of their identity. The dilemmas in which such people find themselves is compared with the more frequently studied characteristics of those who have converted and are still members of an unpopular minority religion.

### **Developing the Theory and Physical Technology of Scientology: Approaching the Study of Hubbard's Auditing 'Tech'. (Aled Thomas)**

Scientology is known for auditing – a technology used by Scientologists to check their progress in attaining various psychological hierarchically structured states and goals. The practice was developed by the founder L. Ron Hubbard and drew discursively from fields such as psychology and computing to establish its authority but steadily shifted to using religious discourses for its legitimacy. This paper will determine these changes through Hubbard's lifetime and beyond, including the production of E-Meters, devices that are used to assist with auditing, which the Church of Scientology continues to develop with new models. Drawing from research among Free Zone practitioners who audit outside Scientology as well as research about auditing procedures exclusively practiced at the church's headquarters in Clearwater (Super Power and Cause Resurgence Rundowns), I will argue that auditing is a hybrid practice that brings together discourses of religious/spiritual accomplishment (Weber's *virtuosi*) with technological material culture of objects and devices. This study benefits from examining Scientology beyond the confines of written accounts, and as such I will also discuss some of the methodological challenges and opportunities presented when engaging with both the Church of Scientology and the Free Zone.

### **Multiple Religious Affiliations: The Case of the Jewish Baha'is in 19th Century Hamadan in Iran (Moojan Momen)**

This paper is written with a theoretical framework that posits that just as human beings have to find space within the geographical landscape within which to live, so as social animals, they have to find a space with the social landscape in which they can exist (see Pierre Bourdieu and others). Whereas modern Western societies are fairly amenable to a wide range of social space alternatives, traditional societies present individuals with a much smaller range. An alternative to this narrow range of social spaces is outside the conceptual world of most denizens of traditional societies. This paper presents an example of this phenomenon in a group of Jews in late nineteenth century Hamadan in Iran. These Jews wanted to convert to the Baha'i Faith. While this was a conceptual possibility, it did not exist as a social space possibility. In order to try to live with the social spaces available to them, they moved from one social space to another. Thus at various times, the local Muslim population considered them as Jews, the local Christian missionaries considered them to be Christians, and the Jews considered them to be variously Jews, Christians or Muslims. While trying to live in each of these social spaces, they selectively concealed and revealed parts of their beliefs.

**Session 3**  
**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**11.00-12.30**

**Panel Name: 'It doesn't say that in the book' – Fieldwork in Learning and Teaching in Religious Studies**

Students learn in a variety of ways but fieldwork of different kinds plays an important part in promoting deep learning, providing a real insight into being researchers in their own right and thereby leading them to approach textbook accounts of religion more critically with a sense of diversity and awareness of context. Whether in Britain or internationally, whether a placement or a study visit, whether for a day or longer, students gain not only academic knowledge and understanding but also a range of other skills in terms of, for example, interpersonal and communication skills along with confidence and, of course, in many cases an enhanced appreciation of the value and relevance of the subject.

**Making the Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange: Fieldwork Placements in Religious Communities (Catherine Robinson)**

Religions, Philosophies and Ethics at Bath Spa University (in various incarnations) has been sending students on week-long placements in religious communities since the 1970s. The continuing commitment, financial, administrative and otherwise to placements has been driven by a recognition of the transformative potential of the experience, certainly academically but often in much broader terms. This paper examines the experiences of a recent cohort of third year students, discussing the opportunities and challenges of the placement in order to identify some common themes and issues. It makes the case that this is one way to engage and enthuse students and also to find out what it is really like to live and work as, or at least with, members of religious communities.

**From a Fixed Boatel in Prague to a Slow Boat on the Ganges: Awakening all the Senses through Study Trips Abroad (Lynn Foulston)**

Since 2006 students taking the Religious Studies degree at University of South Wales (formerly Newport) have been offered the chance to embark on study trips abroad. These trips started in North India and now include South India, Nepal, Istanbul and Prague. This paper will analyse some of the deep learning opportunities that have arisen from taking students on these trips. It will focus on two trips/experiences in particular, a four-night trip to Prague following a talk from a child Holocaust survivor who was held nearby and a 1380-mile tour across North India. As well as highlighting some of the expected and unexpected benefits of these experiences, this paper will also share some of the logistical and procedural hurdles that have to be navigated in order to take such trips. It will conclude with a rationale for why such experiences are so enriching for all the participants.

**Welcome to my Church: Religious Voices in secular education about religion (Emma Salter)**

Similarly, to BSU and USW, Huddersfield students attend study-visits to enhance their learning about religion. My paper flips the focus from the student experience to the experience of the religious practitioners who host our visits. Curious to know how practitioners feel about engaging with secular

RS and RE at their own places of worship, my paper reports on the findings of four semi-structured interviews conducted with Christian Ministers and Church leaders across four different Christian denominations: Catholic, Church of England, Christian Fellowship and Methodist. The participants were selected purposefully because they are religious practitioners who host secular, educational visits at their churches for students, but are not trained teachers. The rich interview data provides valuable insight into how the participants believe Christianity - including their particular denomination - is, and should be, represented in secular education. Paying attention to these emic perspectives on the representation of religions (Christianity in this instance) leads me to reflect on the custody of religious representation in the inevitably interpretive, and therefore hegemonic, processes of secular education about religion.

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**Number: 3B**

**Room: MA112**

**Chair: Graham Harvey**

**Panel Name: Religion and the Senses** (Roundtable discussion with no fixed speakers – all invited)

Everyday and vernacular religion are now at the cutting edge of the study of religions. The agenda of Religious Studies, as well as that of other disciplines interested in religion (e.g. Classics, History, Sociology, Anthropology and Philosophy), has been revitalised by this focus on lived reality. This resonates with a growth in interest in materiality and embodiment which have both provoked “turns” in academic debate and teaching. Criticisms, however, have been levelled against the ways in which “materiality” does not always engage with materials (stuff) and “embodiment” sometimes suggests the priority of some interiority (mind, agency, etc.).

Equinox publishers have contracted a new series which aims to push further the project of placing lived, material and bodily religion at the definitive centre of studies of religion. It will do this by foregrounding bodily sensation and material practice as religion (rather than as expressions, experiences or representations of something prior to bodies, acts and things). It will develop the interdisciplinary conversation encouraged by Paul Stoller’s *Sensuous Scholarship* (1997) and, especially, present and promote research about real life religion approached through performative and materialist methods, as illustrated by, for example, Manuel Vasquez’s *More than Belief* (2011) and Graham Harvey’s *Food, Sex and Strangers* (2013).

In this open roundtable session, I invite colleagues to bring ideas about the sensuality of religion that might make excellent book chapters or even become the basis for proposals to edit books for the series. The “senses” of the series are not limited to senses of taste, touch, sight, hearing, and smell but may include senses of place, deportment, decency, humour, the uncanny and others. Bring your ideas and we’ll talk about publishing them!

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**Number: 3C**

**Room:**

**Chair:**

**N.B. DUE TO PANEL RE-ORGANISATION, THIS PANEL SESSION IS NOW NON-ACTIVE.**

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**Number: 3D**

**Room: MA213**

**Chair: Opinderjit Takhar**

**Panel Name: Marriage and Religion**

**Lived Religion in Sikh Studies – Interfaith Marriages (Jagbir Jhutti-Johal)**

Over a period of 60 years, religious practices associated with marriage of the Sikh diaspora have been maintained and (re)constructed in response to the influence of diverse cultural and religious practices of host communities. This paper moves away from the traditional analysis of Sikh texts on marriage and focuses on the 'real and lived' world, examining how religious texts are being interpreted and re-interpreted to address changes in cultural norms. It is evident that there are tensions between lived and prescribed religion, and although religious texts are still recognised as having a central place, most Sikhs interpret teachings to reflect the society that they reside in and their socialization into it. The paper explores how the community is responding to a religious decline within its ranks, and in particular how it deals with the increase in interfaith marriages. It considers the role of religious 'leaders' in regulating change and the importance of the religious ceremony. The impact of regulation introduced by various Sikh bodies on Sikhs of different religiosity shows that meaning and identity is in continuous flux. The conclusion presents a contextual reflection on interfaith marriages, framed by a critical reflection of Sikh theology and lived reality.

**Re-examining 'faith' in Interfaith marriage: Ethnographic Cases of Muslim-Christian Unions (Audrey Allas)**

The phrase 'interfaith', in addition to 'multi-faith' and 'interreligious', is becoming increasingly common in culturally plural Britain (see for example the Inter Faith Network UK, the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme, and the Dialogue Society to name a few larger activist and research organisations). Yet when describing relations such as marriage, what does 'faith' define, and is interfaith an appropriate descriptor? Using ethnographic data of marriages between British Pakistani Muslims and British Christians, I will address these definitional problems, proposing that 'interfaith' categories are fluid combinations of senses of belonging within discursive religious traditions and existential human individuality. In this sense, what is and is not 'religious' and/or 'faith' is hinged upon senses of collectivity, but it is also dependant upon the largely overlooked individual agent. As such, determinations about the future of 'religion' or 'faith' when hybrid and mixed marriages occur are determined by individuals creating new collectivities, or alternatively re-negotiating existing communities. My research reveals parallel, but also contradictory narratives which at times confirms

emic perspectives of something 'religiously' sui generis, and at other times something 'religiously' social and/or political in nature.



**Session 4**  
**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**15.00-16.30**

**Panel Name: Material Religion: Creativity, Space, and Perspectives in the making of Religion****“Theoretical perspectives and relational approaches to the study of material religion: an overview”  
(Amy Whitehead)**

Material religion is a vibrant, fertile and emergent field in the study of religions where traditional, largely text-based studies of ‘official’ versions of religions are being joined by diverse approaches to ‘everyday’ or ‘vernacular’ forms of religion to include ‘things’. Providing an overview of current approaches to material religion, this paper explores a variety of platforms from which to examine the relational dynamics found in creative and local expressions of religions. Areas of interest include (but are not limited to) explorations into ritual, performance, sacred space, time, religious technologies, ‘idolatry’, architecture, geography, pilgrimage, animism and fetishism, display, the roles of liturgical objects, and popular religious imagery (or there lack of). Materiality as an area of study not only highlights the complexity involved in the relationships between the senses, peoples, traditions, places communities, and ‘objects’; it also challenges the hierarchical and/or dualistic structures of how objects, and thus religions, are theorised and understood, e.g. the tensions between mind/spirit and matter, nature and culture, immanence and transcendence, are relieved to make room for more the emergence of more relational approaches. Thus studies in material religion invite scholars to think about the roles of things, objects and actions as they are created, upheld, or negated in the religious ‘worlds’ of popular religionists/religiousities.

**“Creativity, ambiguity and power: Materiality in the cult of Gauchito Gil” (Marion Bowman)**

Antonio Mamerto ‘de la Cruz’ Gil Núñez, (1847-1878)– more commonly known as Gauchito Gil – is the focus of considerable popular devotion, promissory prayer, ex votos, shrines and material culture in Argentina. His myth has a number of variations, but Gauchito (Little Gaucho) Gil is primarily narrated as an innocent man wrongly framed by corrupt officials and a Robin Hood type figure, widely considered the common people’s friend and protector. Having been unjustly executed in 1878, an immediate posthumous miracle spawned a popular and still burgeoning cult, the major focus of which is his shrine at Mercedes, in Corrientes province. Here there are all the material culture manifestations of a pilgrimage shrine, with votive candles, ex votos ranging from ribbons and plaques to car number plates, and a flourishing spiritual economy of devotional items and mementoes for numerous roadside shrines, cemeteries, home altars and everyday domestic use. However, Gauchito Gil is a vernacular saint without official institutional recognition. This paper explores the role and importance of materiality and relationality in this devotion, particularly with respect to Primiano’s claim that the hallmarks of vernacular religion are creativity, ambiguity & power.

**“Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Uniformity of Space” (George D. Chryssides)**

Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs) would find problems with Mircea Eliade notion that there are special sacred spaces that act as an axis mundi to open up the sacred. Being an aniconic form of Protestantism, the meeting places and forms of worship are kept as simple as possible. However, Israel and its surrounding countries have obvious interest, being the lands of the Bible, and there are tour

companies that specialise in spiritual tourism for JW's. A number of issues arise regarding JW's visiting the so-called Holy Land. Pilgrimage confers no special merit; many sites have dubious authenticity; and many are controlled by mainstream churches, who are part of "Babylon the Great". Nonetheless, the Holy Land is significant in several ways for JW's: it is a reminder of the biblical narrative; it is the location from which both false and true religion originated (inaugurated respectively by Nimrod at Babel, and Jesus in Israel); it is the land from which biblical prophecies are fulfilled. As with any other geographical space, it is also territory to be evangelised. Despite the distinctive features of the Holy Land, there are no sacred spaces that are needed either for the Watch Tower Society's administration, or in the coming New World after Armageddon.

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**Number: 4B**

**Room: MA112**

**Chair: Liam Sutherland**

**Panel Name: Nationality, Inclusivity and Religion**

**Modern Greek Ethno-religiosity: A Geographical and Ideological Relocation of Selfhood (Damon Zacharias Lycourinos)**

Since Greece's independence in 1829, modern Greek identity has been perceived in both scholarly and popular accounts as the ideological interrelationship of Hellenic nationhood and Greek Orthodoxy. Through state-funded representations, this interrelationship has produced the ethno-religious identity of Ellinochristianismos (Hellenic-Christianism) shaping conceptions of the 'Self' and the 'Other' in terms of emic claims to a 'lived' historical memory of topographical boundaries, cultural uniqueness, and national heritage. Rather than speak of Greek nationhood as an 'imagined community' of the modernist constructions of the nation-state (Anderson, 1991), in this paper I will argue that Greek nationhood is the product of a pre-modern process of geographical and ideological relocation of ethno-religious self-perception in response to the Sack of Constantinople by the Latin Crusaders in 1204, which reduced the Byzantine Empire to its 'Hellenic' geographical space making it a Greek state of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity. The theoretical contribution of this paper is to examine how the nationalistic enterprise of modern Greek ethno-religious identity formation constitutes synchronic relations and diachronic extensions (Lefebvre, 1991) that involve the strategic sacralisation of geographic space as a pragmatic expression of pre-modern nationalistic discourse promoting a notion of the 'Self' as a resistance to the 'Other'.

**'Faith in Community Cohesion: Religion and UK Social Cohesion Policy since 2001' (Stephanie Dermott)**

2001 marks a significant modification in state policy, away from discourses of 'multiculturalism' articulated as promoting respect for perceived 'culturally embedded differences,' (Parekh, 2000:3) towards a developing notion of 'community cohesion' (Cantle, 2001) underlined by the recognition of a 'common sense of belonging' (Parekh, 2000:341). This paper seeks to outline and explore the specific role that faith and religion has played in the reformation of the multiculturalist trope, mapping the

key moments in which policies acknowledge or utilise religion as either an asset or hindrance to social cohesion. Through detailed analysis of policy documents from 2001 to present, the paper will argue that policy makers have become entangled in conceptualisations of faith and religion as both a benefit and a barrier to cohesion, yet in strategic terms have also begun to recognise that faith communities can provide a solid base from which to pursue social action and cohesion initiatives. Through analysing the ways in which 'community cohesion,' has been increasingly interwoven with concepts related to religious diversity such as interfaith dialogue, I aim to expose the developing framework for faith engagement that continues to inform the development and implementation of contemporary UK policy at both national and local levels.

### **One Nation, Many Faiths: Representations of Banal Nationalism, Religious Pluralism and Public Space in Scottish Interfaith Literature (Liam Sutherland)**

Interfaith Scotland, the national interfaith association of Scotland with the membership of most Scottish religious associations was founded at establishment of the devolved Scottish Parliament. They have developed a close relationship with the Scottish Government and defend a vision of the public space allowing for religious participation but which also reinforces the specific bounded categories of 'religion' and 'nation'. Based on an examination of their online and print literature to analyse their place of Scottish civil society and representations of national identity and religious pluralism. I refer to their representations as the 'one nation many faiths' paradigm because it is a combination of the world religions paradigm and the banal nationalism described by Michael Billig. They evoke Scottish symbolism and traditional culture reinforcing a form of national belonging compatible with multiculturalism and religious pluralism. These constructions of the 'inclusive' nation supports their claims to participate in the public square but also depends on the world religions paradigm, a selective view of the benign, moral and personal character of 'religions' as key identifiable traditions which allows them to fit into 'national' public space.

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**Number: 4C**

**Room: MA211**

**Chair: Steve Jacobs**

**Panel Name: Religion & Activism**

### **Truth, Freedom and Justice: Sikh political voices and British Government (Opinderjit KaurTakhar)**

This paper will explore the British Sikh community's response to two recent events, both related to British Parliament. The discussion in this paper will centre around 1) the alleged involvement of the SAS in the planning of Operation Bluestar, and 2) the lobbying of British Parliament to legislate against caste discrimination under the Equality Act. Both demanded an educated and mature response from British Sikhs in the light of issues surrounding equality and human rights. This paper is based on ongoing ethnographical work since 2010. Interviews with the organisers of both the social and political activism have been analysed to explore the effect that media and globalisation have had on the younger generation of British Sikhs. This paper will discuss whether the British Sikh community have

taken on a fresh approach when confronted with issues surrounding equality and human rights and will explore how youth led Sikh groups and organisations such as Sikh Federation UK, The Sikh Council UK and Kesri Lehar have responded to contemporary challenges (and indeed opportunities) by using Sikhi in a sophisticated manner to politically and socially address such issues. To some degree, there was unanimity amongst most British Sikhs that legislation against caste discrimination was unnecessary under British law. Many Sikh organisations joined forces with the Alliance of Hindu Organisations to declare that 'caste allegiances were on their way out in the UK' and demanded a Sunset Clause. However, the handling of the alleged co-operation between Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher brought issues of collegiality amongst British Sikhs into question. What became apparent is that the many Sikh organisations claiming to be the voice of the British Sikh Community failed to become united under one common objective. Limited understanding by Sikhs of the process for the inquiry requested by the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, may also have added to the chaotic assembling of Sikh Organisations at Parliament. This paper examines the political engagement of the younger generation of British Sikhs with Britain's policies relating to equality and human rights.

### **Materializing politics: savage thoughts and objects (Paul-Francois Tremlett)**

This paper focuses on the Occupy Democracy protest that took place in October 2014 in Parliament Square, London and in particular, on the destruction of protest objects by Police and so-called Heritage Wardens. The destruction of these objects is taken as a point of departure for re-thinking politics away from rarefied notions of Western reason and rationality to focus instead on tangible protest objects and their agency in the performance of politics. The focus is not on protest objects at the expense of human participants but rather, in pursuit of Eduardo Kohn's conception of The Open Whole (2013), on situating protest objects, protestors, Police and Heritage Wardens alongside the monuments and buildings of Parliament Square, with the Square itself conceived not merely as the space in which the protest takes place but as an agentive participant in the protest. This network of human and non-human actors (Bennett 2010) is taken to constitute a hybrid assemblage (Latour 1993 and 2005) that invites a re-thinking of politics in terms of a mode of cognition that Claude Lévi-Strauss termed bricolage (1966).

### **Christians in the field, from Glastonbury to Greenbelt: Sacred alternatives of the British festival culture (Maria Nita)**

My paper will present my current ethnographic research of the Greenbelt festival, a Christian British festival that began as a small event in 1974 in the South East of England, on the backdrop of the broader British festival culture. To achieve this contrast, I will draw on both historical data relating to the free festivals of the early 1970s as well as ethnographic data from the Glastonbury festival. My data shows that many Christians were ambivalent towards the festival scene of the early 1970s. Thus reactions and interactions varied from direct opposition to embracing this new (counter) cultural phenomenon. Concomitantly the festival scene was increasingly offering competing and alternative ways of experiencing 'the sacred' in the context of an influx of global influences, ranging from drug taking to more ritualised spiritual experiences. My paper will investigate this experimentation with 'sacred alternatives' outside of the church and into the field. This will allow for a consideration of the impact of the festival network culture on traditional institutionalised religion as well as its role in cultural transmission of values, practices and beliefs. More broadly my paper will address some key academic debates, such as secularisation and re-enchantment in the West.

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**Number: 4D**

**Room: MA213**

**Chair: David Robertson**

**Panel Name: AI, Robots and Religion: An Initial Conversation**

This panel, in association with the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, will consider the impact of recent technological advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics on religion, religious conceptions of the world, and the human. It draws attention to how such advances push religion beyond how it has been commonly defined and considered. In March 2016 'AlphaGo', a Google/Deepmind programme, defeated an international champion at the Chinese game 'Go' in a five game match. This victory was, by current understandings of AI, a vast leap forward towards a future that could contain human-like technological entities, technology-like humans, and embodied machines. As corporations like Google invest heavily in technological and theoretical developments leading towards further, effective advances – a new 'AI Summer' - we can also see that hopes, and fears, about what AI and robotics will bring humanity are gaining pace, leading to new speculations and expectations, even amidst those who would position themselves as non-religious. Speculations include Transhumanist and Singularitarian teleological and eschatological schemes, assumptions about the theistic inclinations of thinking machines, the impact of the non-human on our conception of the uniqueness of human life and consciousness, and the moral boundary work of secular technologists in relation to their construct, 'religion'. New religious impulses in the face of advancing technology have been largely ignored by the institutions founded to consider the philosophical, ethical and societal meanings of AI and robotics. This panel will be an initial conversation on this topic, with the intention for wider dissemination and publication.

**AURA 2.0: The Techno-Scientific return of Art's religious value (Michael Morelli)**

In 1936 Walter Benjamin observed the "fading of [art's] aura" as it underwent mechanical reproduction. According to Benjamin, technological advances had initiated a shift in art as a medium of "cultic value" to art as a medium of "display value." Eighty years later, do his observations retain their validity in a world on its way to discovering the singularity and changing the genetic makeup of humanity, or, is art's aura beginning to burn brightly again with the joining of science, art, and religious-like liturgies in operating room theatres, mythical labs, and magical tech companies which aim to produce chimeras, clones, cyborgs, transhumans, and intelligent robots which seem to inspire religious awe? According to theorist Paul Virilio, the answer is yes, art's aura is returning: "After all great periods of art, after the great schools such as the classical and baroque, after contemporary expressionism, are we not now heading for that great transgenic art in which every pharmacy, every laboratory will launch its own 'lifestyles,' its own transhumance fashions?" But if art is regaining its religious value, it now originates in schools much different than those of old. This paper will explore the return of art's aura in the paradigm of techno-science, and in the process, develop an ethic that helps one understand and respond to this new art's aesthetics and its curious new religious liturgies.

**The possibility of a Religion: Artificial Intelligence, Science Fiction, and New Religious (Beth Singler)**

"We have been, so far, unable to "market" our ideas to wide audiences, in a way that is emotionally and aesthetically appealing, but I think we can do much better." Gulio Prisco made this appraisal in a presentation given at the 2014 Mormon Transhumanist Conference. Prisco, a computer scientist, futurist and transhumanist, was presenting on a "Religion for The Cosmic Frontier", discussing what he saw as the need for "new positive, solar, action-oriented spiritual movements": New Religious movements based upon a positive attitude towards science and technology, particularly life extending ideas and the potential of AI. Prisco also called for a return to theism from cold deism but a theism in which the gods have been created by man: the superintelligences promised by advancing technology and science fiction. In his paper he gave the example of the now failed 'Order of Cosmic Engineers' (OCE), an intentional 'UNreligion' that he founded with sociologist of religion William Sims Bainbridge, which used the methods and modes of religion with a secular agenda. He also recognized the success of "irrational" but emotionally appealing NRMs such as the Raelians, and the flaws of the fictional Elohimites based upon them in Michel Houellebecq's novel "The Possibility of an Island". Beginning with the example of the OCE, its antecedents, and subsequent forms such as the Turing Church, this paper will examine the wider creation of New Religious movements from the often linked realms of Science Fiction and Artificial Intelligence.

### **The Talos Principle: Philosophical and Religious anthropology in Science Fiction (Jonathan Tuckett)**

In the video game Talos Principle an Artificial Intelligence bot is tasked with proving its "humanity". On the surface it does so by solving the various puzzles set by its Creator, Elohim. But in fact, the "proof" of humanity is determined by dialogue options with a "snake" Milton and the choice of one of three endings to the game. Similarly, films like I, Robot, Automata and Ex Machina have all raised questions of the dividing line between AI/robot and "the human person". Utilising the sociological phenomenology of Scheler (1980) and Shutz (1962), it is possible to suggest the Science Fiction medium is a means of tackling the philosophical anthropological question: "What is man?" In this paper I will discuss how, in examples like Talos Principle, the use of "religious" imagery is incorporated into this treatment. Further, what unifies these different examples is that in general what defines the "person" is deviance, something which contrasts with both religious and scientific definitions.

**Session 5**  
**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup>**  
**09.00-10.30**



**Panel Name: Bodily Innovations in Religious Practice****Hatha yoga and the alchemy of pain (Theo Wildcroft)**

Within both cultural and academic understandings, conceptions of what pain is and how we experience it are complicated by moral, social and medical interpretations. Religious understandings of both the human self and the wider universe commonly negotiate an end to pain or suffering within this life or another. Beyond scripture and philosophy, ritual practice has been used by some to explore the physicality of pain, and the lived experience of its transcendence, to both personal and political ends. This paper will consider the evolution of medieval Indian alchemy as a response to caste pressures; into modern transnational asana and its links to neo-Tantric doctrines of abundance. It will explore hatha yoga's role in legitimising, reconciling and resisting illness, injury, and social suffering through the sympathetic magic of peak experiences, applying elemental metaphysics to the body as both crucible and transformed substance.

**Contemporary Tantra: Embodied Practice in Women's Groups (Sammy Bishop)**

The movement of Tantra from the South Asian context to the contemporary alternative spiritual milieu has led to a proliferation of different constructions of Tantra, sometimes with little recourse to textual or geographical origins. Exhibiting the well-known eclecticism of the alternative milieu, practitioners interpret Tantra relatively freely, which has led to few studies and relatively little understanding of this phenomenon. This exploratory talk aims to present the main features of contemporary Tantra as displayed by UK practitioners, and to suggest how and why women choose to engage with this form of alternative spirituality. Building on discussions of the development of Tantra throughout the last 150 years, this presentation will illustrate how it has become embedded in the popular imagination, and how Tantric practices and teachings continue to be reconstructed in the alternative milieu. By focusing on themes of embodied practice and sexuality, and how these tie into the creation of identity, it is possible to discuss why certain elements of Tantra continue to be important and useful to individuals. Specifically looking at women's constructions and uses of contemporary Tantra highlights commonalities with feminist spirituality, whilst also revealing how key Tantric ideas in the contemporary context - specifically those concerning gender essentialism - aren't necessarily compatible with popular strands of feminism.

**Beating the Boundaries: BDSM and the Crucible of Context (Alison Robertson)**

On the edges of religious experience there have always been those who deliberately explored pain and suffering. Within contemporary cultural and academic understandings conceptions of such exploration are complicated by moral and medical pathologisation, legal ambiguity and social stigmatisation. The deliberate engagement in practices seen as 'self-harming' is thus intimately connected with questions of power and resistance to power, and challenges culturally embedded concepts of self and other, of bodies and of physical experiences such as pain. This paper brings together the concept of religioning as a process of lived religion and the lived experiences of individuals engaging in practices of Bondage, Domination, Submission and Masochism (BDSM) in order

to explore how the ways in which profound BDSM experiences are created and understood. BDSM may be engaged in with overt spiritual aims, but even when this is absent the practice can still result in profound experiences which enable the negotiation of boundaries, the creation and expression of relationship and intimacy and which contribute to personal processes of meaning- and/or story-making.

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**Number: 5B**

**Room: MA211**

**Chair: Marion Bowman**

**Panel Name: The Problem of 'Spirituality' in the Study of Religion/s (Roundtable)**

The category of 'spirituality' has been widely deployed in public life in the last quarter century, and also increasingly in the study of religion/s and sociology of religion where it can function as an adjunct or even replacement term for 'religion'. But what does the word mean and why has it become so popular for certain groups in late modern societies? Evidence suggests spirituality is an attractive category which is used across a range of practices and traditions spanning religious, non-religious and secular uses. But does it pick out anything sufficiently distinctive and cross-cultural to enable it to work as an analytical category? This panel will explore emic and etic uses of the category and implications of the discourse, drawing on empirical examples from fieldwork and text as well as theoretical perspectives. In particular we will try to identify how useful 'spirituality' is as an etic category for the study of religion/s.

**'Pick and Mix Spirituality in the Art of Living Foundation' (Stephen Jacobs)**

**'Emergent spirituality and traditional religion amongst Italian youth' (Stefania Palmisano)**

**'Spirituality as a Placeholder Category in Popular Discourse' (Steven Sutcliffe)**

**Structure of Roundtable**

The chair will introduce the session and the panellists, followed by three informal short position papers (10 minutes) by each of the participants who have engaged the term in different ways in recent research. There will be brief questions and discussion following each paper, followed by a roundtable discussion open to all in which we will aim to develop common themes and questions.

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**Panel Name: Teaching & Learning - Pedagogy in RS & RE****Beyond the Textbook: Inter-disciplinary Projects in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Dominic Corrywright & Tom Cosgrove)**

The purpose of the presentation is to exhibit the processes and products from a 6 year project to enhance student learning, that began in the disciplines of Religion and Theology but has expanded to other undergraduate fields in the subject areas of Humanities and Social Sciences at Oxford Brookes University. This presentation will examine some of the key features of the project to encourage wider undergraduate engagement through innovative learning and student experiences. The discussion will also include important themes arising from Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social mobility and Student Choice (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, May 2016) especially with regard to TEF and the new emphasis on pedagogy and interdisciplinary working. The focus of the discussion will be on sharing good practice and on positive and widening opportunities and methodologies used in pedagogical practice at Higher Education institutions in the UK. Examples of good practice and changes in modes of delivery indicate a rich area of deeper engagement, growth and new learning experiences beyond the text.

**Creativity in Religious Studies in HE: Pedagogic challenges and opportunities (Stefanie Sinclair)**

According to the HEA's Employability guide for Theology and Religious Studies, the development of creative skills forms an important part of Religious Studies degrees in Higher Education. This guide comes to the conclusion that "in an increasingly global economy, the skills of vision, creativity and religious sensitivity, which are developed through the study of TRS, will be at a premium" (HEA, 2009, p. 4). However, is our teaching really living up to this claim? How can 'creativity' be taught in HE? Does digital technology enable or stifle creativity in teaching and learning in HE? What does 'creativity' mean in the specific context of the subject discipline of Religious Studies? Drawing on relevant scholarship (such as Jackson (ed.), 2006), this paper critically reflects on notions of 'creativity' and considers a range of strategies how Religious Studies students can be supported in the development of creative skills through and beyond textbooks. It focuses predominantly, though not exclusively, on the teaching of Religious Studies in blended learning environments, drawing on examples from the specific context of the Open University.

**Lived Religion and Childhood: Rethinking Religion in Schools (Rachael Shillitoe)**

As part of a wider Leverhulme Trust-funded project, this research focuses on collective worship as experienced by primary school children. Collective worship has been a compulsory feature of maintained schools in England and Wales since the 1944 Education Act. This legal requirement has caused decades of confusion and controversy, with many questioning its educational suitability and appropriateness within an increasingly diverse society. Drawing on theoretical approaches from both the sociology of childhood and the sociology of religion, this paper will foreground the child's perspective on this form of 'civil religion' (Bellah, 2005) and will examine the influence of adult-generated constructions of such events. Using ethnographic research which foregrounds the agency

of children, this paper will highlight the everyday lived reality of collective worship in schools. This paper will focus on how children reimagine and negotiate the boundaries between religion and non-religion and will go on to discuss how such events are revealing of the dynamic and fluid nature of religion in schools. Ultimately, this paper will challenge some of the adult-centric assumptions which dominate this discourse and reveal how children's own experiences do not always fit so neatly into the analytical categories constructed by adults.

### **Tawhid and the textbook: learning from Muslim teachers (Matthew Vince)**

It has been widely acknowledged that the representation of religion has been problematic in the curriculum. Often, religion is seen in static, homogenous forms that do not appreciate or express the true diversity of religious experience (Jackson, 1995; Geaves, 1998; Hayward, 2006; Barnes, 2006; Revell, 2008). The WRERU's audit of materials used to teach Religious Education (RE) (Jackson et al., 2010) summarises that religions are 'often compromised by inaccuracy, imbalance and lack of depth in their portrayal' (3). In this paper I explore how Muslim teachers are contextualising textbook accounts of religion with 'lived' religion; their own experiences of their faith. I posit that this is motivated from a desire to bring tawhid, or Oneness, into the classroom by bringing everyone closer together. This offers some interesting pedagogical interplay with Everington's (2013, 2015) notion of 'personal life knowledge', and Ipgrave's (1999) 'weak form of critical openness'. This is based on the narratives of a small number of Muslim RE teachers from my own research, as well as the findings from a number of other studies (Everington, 2013, 2015; Mogra, 2008, 2010, 2014).

**Session 6**  
**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup>**  
**11.00-12.30**

**Panel Name: Technology and Religious Change****The Slender Man Mythos: a structural analysis of Internet mythology (Vivian Asimos)**

In June of 2009, Something Awful forum user “Victor Surge” posted two digitally manipulated photos with a small narrative caption regarding a supernatural creature he dubbed “The Slender Man”. The Slender Man quickly became an Internet meme, shared widely through forum posts, YouTube videos, and even video games. This paper will look into the beginnings of the Slender Man mythology on the Something Awful forum, giving attention to several early narratives with the purpose of understanding what these narratives are doing for the Internet community which keeps them in circulation even seven years after its creation. A revised structuralist approach is employed, which updates the structural method by applying it to a more functionalist endeavour, as well as giving much needed agency to the storytellers. The amended structural method allows us to study multiple narratives together, which better simulates the narrative web of the community, as well as adding other non-textual forms of storytelling, such as video games and YouTube videos, as narratives adding to the spread of contemporary mythology. The analysis will allow us to gain a much needed insight to how the Internet community views itself, the offline communities surround it, and how it perceives the supernatural.

**The technological revolution in promoting Sikh arts (Gurinder Singh Mann)**

Religion as defined by textbooks can lead to misconceptions and possibly lead to a one sided view. With the advent of new technologies, we are now witnessing a paradigm shift in terms of how religion is viewed but more importantly how religion can be embraced by adherents. Sikhs have traditionally viewed their sacred relics and artefacts as being an embodiment of its faith. However with the use of 3d modelling and augmented reality, new technologies can provide a platform for ‘far removed’ communities to have a closer visualisation of these ideas. These communities may not traditionally visit museums or view history by considering material heritage. This paper discusses the how the Sikh Museum Initiative is using new technology to encourage Sikhs to participate in the arts.

**Re-membering the Dark Goddess: Transformations of the Morrígan through the Connective Memory of the Pagan YouTube Community (Áine Warren)**

This paper posits the development of a collective/connective memory—and its creative re-storying power—in and through the Pagan YouTube community, by examining discourse therein on the cult of worship of the Irish war goddess, the Morrígan. This discussion will draw on the discourse across this community, but will focus on three videos in which three YouTube contributors discuss their relationship with, and worship of, this goddess. The Morrígan has become increasingly prominent as a figure of worship in contemporary western Paganism: the only four emic Pagan texts which constitute instructional guides on her worship were published in the last five years, the most recent of which was independently published in 2015 through a highly successful crowd-funding effort. The unprecedented success of this campaign highlights the current popularity of the Morrígan, particularly evident across the Pagan e-community, and demonstrates a reciprocity and blurring of boundaries

between online discourse and offline practice. The complex synthesis of collective and autobiographical memory evident in these videos constitutes an ongoing, collective act of →re-membering: the creation of a unique interpretation of the Morrígan that empowers these practitioners and enables them in turn to re-story their own autobiographical memories, and thus their own life narratives.

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**Number: 6B**

**Room: MA211**

**Chair: Steve Jacobs**

**Panel Name: Religion and The Land in Contemporary Britain**

**Transmission of Individualized Religion in Hebden Bridge (Claire Wanless)**

This paper reports on the early stages of an ethnographic investigation into the association and transmission of individualized forms of religion (especially neoPagan and New Age) around the former mill town of Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire. Secularization theorists have argued that because these forms of religion locate authority at the level of the individual, they cannot inspire commitment, create consensus or cohesion, or motivate evangelization, and are thus rendered unable to transmit their ideas, values and practices over time, or to have significance impact on wider culture or society. Such a view assumes that effectively functioning religion requires a top-down, hierarchical organizational structure in which members are passive and obedient recipients of objective knowledge rather than being its active and dynamic co-creators. I will argue that instead of hierarchical structures, these forms adopt unplanned and undirected rhizomatic networks, which both result from and enable their culture of radical personal autonomy. Instead of transmitting themselves along objectivist lines, they do so in social constructivist ways, for example through the creation of spontaneously generated communities of practice. In this way, they are able to sustain themselves effectively, and transmit themselves both within and between generations.

**“Freeman-on-the-land” in Contemporary Britain: Alternative Law and Civil Spirituality (Nick Toseland)**

“Freeman-on-the-land” refers to a living belief-system found within the Anglo-American world that rejects the dominant legal system. Individuals who subscribe to this perspective call themselves “freemen”. Denounced by one legal professional as ‘organised pseudo-legal commercial arguments’, these subversive voices view the British State and its legal institutions as corrupt, calling into question its legitimacy and authority; they refuse to pay council taxes or court-ordered fines on moral grounds. Within this worldview the courtroom becomes a site of clashing worldviews, where freemen “take the fight” to a perceived enemy. The Magna Carta is held to trump statutory law by guaranteeing the liberties of its ‘sovereign’ citizens. This paper moves beyond the secondary data on this contentious phenomenon and instead draws upon first-hand ethnographic research into ‘alternative knowledge networks’, whose affiliates are often labelled pejoratively as “conspiracy theorists”. Utilising participant observation in the courtroom alongside interviews with real-life freemen, this paper will unravel the worldview and argue that it represents the stirring of a ‘civil spirituality’ – in Robert

Bellah's sense of a prophetic 'civil religion' – amongst its misunderstood adherents on the margins of British society.

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**Number: 6C**

**Room: MA213**

**Chair: Chris Cotter**

**Panel Name: Religion and Secularism**

**Is Secularism a World Religion? (Donovan Schaefer)**

Recent work in the field of critical secularism studies has challenged the conceptual division between the secular and the religious. Scholars such as Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, Charles Taylor, and Craig Calhoun have proposed that secularism be seen as a particular offshoot of western modernity. It replicates a historically located set of priorities rather than a set of neutral and universal values. Queer theorist Michael Warner has asked whether liberalism is itself a religion. In the spirit of Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape*—a primatological study of human beings—this essay considers the proposal that secularism should be taught alongside other world religions as a tradition with a particular set of beliefs, foundational texts, values, and practices. The advantage of this manoeuvre is that it calls attention to the arbitrariness with which the category of religion is drawn around particular ensembles of action and denaturalises the cultures of western secularism. On the other hand, it misses the way that the category 'religion', although itself historically constructed, nonetheless has real political effects in organising social relations in global politics. On balance, a carefully framed presentation of secularism as a world religion would seem to offer productive resources for teaching.

**Buddhist Secularism: A Contested Identity (Bair Puig Zhamaganov)**

Secular Buddhism is a relatively new western approach to the Buddhist practice with an ever increasing number of followers. Like other trends within modernist interpretations of Buddhism, it is characterized by special stress on reason, pragmatism, meditation, scepticism towards religious beliefs, hierarchy, ritual and image worship. Furthermore, this secular redefinition presupposes the bracketing out of teachings traditionally considered central to Buddhist thought such as the law of karma and the cycle of rebirth. Thus the proponents of Secular Buddhism consider the possibility of a spiritual practice oriented to this life only, that would nevertheless maintain a connection with the original dharma even discarding these basic doctrinal elements. However, this proposal seems to be problematic since these doctrines represent the key motivation factors for the practice of the path of liberation. Contrary to the non-essentialist interpretations the aim of this paper is to analyse the indispensable features of Buddhist identity in order to question this kind of secular reinterpretations. It is concluded that without the ideas of rebirth and karma Secular Buddhism is being reduced to an ethical system and a kind of psychotherapeutic technique, that is far from the path of transcendence which the Buddhist dharma is claiming to be.



## **Religious Identity on Trial: Ethical Veganism, Human Rights Law, and the Fiction of Religious Freedom (Allison Covey)**

In September 2015, the Ontario Human Rights Commission issued an updated policy on discrimination, removing the exclusion of non-religious belief systems from the legal protections afforded organised religion and offering a five-part definition of “creed.” Barristers with Animal Justice Canada see in these recommendations the potential for “ethical veganism” to be recognised under provincial human rights law as creed. Such non-traditional, non-religious systems of belief challenge the category of religion itself, begging reflection on whether and where the line can be drawn between the religious and the secular. They push also at the boundaries of existing legislation, asking that statutes guarding the free exercise of religion be reinterpreted to include the hazy practices of real lives. This paper considers the case of ethical veganism in Ontario as an illustration of what religionist Winnifred Fallers Sullivan calls the “impossibility of religious freedom.” In asking the courts to protect religion, one requires the courts to define religion and, in so doing, to authoritatively endorse or reject particular forms and practices thereof. British and American test cases offer a problematic picture of lived religion on trial, claimants burdened with demonstrating that veganism is religious enough and their practice authentic enough to warrant protection.