

MEANING-MAKING AT CHRISTMAS: UNDERSTANDING CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICES AT BIRMINGHAM CATHEDRAL

A Research Report, June 2015

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Contents

Executive summary	5
Introduction	7
Part I: Demographics: Who Attends Birmingham Cathedral Carol Services?	11
Age.....	11
Geography.....	13
Gender.....	13
Ethnicity.....	14
Occupation.....	15
Religion.....	18
Part II: What Perceptions Do Carol Service Attendees have of Cathedrals?	23
Part III: What Perceptions Do Carol Service Attendees have of Christmas?	25
Part IV: What Reasons do Attendees have for Coming to a Cathedral Carol Service?	28
Part V: Perceptions of the Carol Service Attended	35
Conclusions	38
References	41
Appendix: Questionnaire	44

Tables

Table 1: Adults attending the Family service, by age.....	12
Table 2: Adults attending the Civic service, by age.....	12
Table 3: Adults attending the Nine Lessons service, by age.....	12
Table 4: Engagement of participants with the Christian church.....	21
Table 5: Participants' number of visits to Birmingham Cathedral in the last year.....	23
Table 6: Factors influencing carol service attendance across three services.....	31
Table 7: Percentage of participants selecting religious factors motivating attendance, by service attended.....	32

Table 8: Percentage of participants selecting connection to others factors motivating attendance, by service attended.....	32
Table 9: Percentage of participants selecting aesthetic factors motivating attendance, by service attended.....	33

Figures

Figure 1: Pie chart to show age of adults attending the carol services.....	11
Figure 2: Pie chart to show occupations of those attending the carol services.....	17
Figure 3: Pie chart to show employment more generally in the West Midlands.....	18
Figure 4: Pie chart to show denominational affiliation of those attending the carol services.....	20
Figure 5: Bar chart to show attitudes to Christmas – indicating individuals who either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly’ agreed’ with the statements.....	26
Figure 6: Pie Chart to Show who Participants Attended Carol Service with.....	29

Executive Summary

1. This report presents the questionnaire results obtained at three carol services that took place at Birmingham Cathedral during December 2012. The three carol services comprised of a Family carol service, a Civic carol service, and a Nine Lessons and Carols service.
2. On the basis of the sample gathered, certain demographic groups were more likely to attend the Birmingham Cathedral carol services. Those over the age of 56 were most likely to attend, comprising 55.9% of the sample population. Despite the potential pull of Christmas, very few young people were in attendance. The majority of individuals (86.6%) lived in the West Midlands area. Women were slightly more likely to be in attendance than men (55.4% to 44.6%), and most of the sample identified as white British (87.6%). Despite the ethnic diversity of Birmingham, participation was low from individuals belonging to an ethnic minority. Those identifying occupationally as either a professional or a retired professional (i.e. those at the apex of the Registrar General's class structure) constituted the largest occupational grouping, at 41.0%, and when other middle-class positionings were noted, this increased to 76.5%. It is apparent that the carol services appealed to a privileged demographic. Finally, 87.7% identified as Christian, spanning a range of denominational categories, with Anglican and Roman Catholic constituting the largest groupings, at 75.6% and 12.2% respectively. Meanwhile 11.4% identified as being atheist or having no religion – therefore, the Birmingham Cathedral carol services appealed to a small but compelling number of individuals outside the parameters of religious identification.
3. Only 15.0% were part of Birmingham Cathedral's congregation, but the majority (88.5%) had attended the Cathedral on at least one other occasion in the last year, and 73.2% said they had attended a cathedral other than Birmingham Cathedral in the last year.
4. Participants were very positive about the role of Birmingham Cathedral in civic life, with 90.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, 'This cathedral is important to local identity'.
5. A significant number attended the carol service alone (29.2%), followed by 28.3% who attended with a partner. Those attending as part of larger groups of family or family and friends constituted a much smaller group of 17%. Meanwhile, those solely attending with friends comprised 17% of the sample.

6. Participants were highly critical of the commercialisation of Christmas (88.5% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'Christmas has become too commercialised'), and many prioritised a re-emphasis on religion and familial relationships at Christmastime.
7. Religiously-oriented reasons for attending a carol service were most prominent, followed by wanting to connect with others, and finally, wanting to have an aesthetic experience. However, there were significant differences between the services, with the Nine Lessons service being much more likely to elicit aesthetic reasons as factors motivating attendance, meaning that although religious factors dominated at this particular service, aesthetic reasons were second, followed by connecting with others.
8. Attendees were very positive of the carol services they attended, with 78.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, 'During today's service, I felt a sense of community' and 82.6% agreed or strongly agreed that 'The music used in today's service gave me a sense of the sacred'.
9. Further research is needed to map these findings in relation to other types of cathedral, different kinds of carol service, and different timings for carol services. More research is needed in order to understand the differences and similarities between those attending carol services who identify as Christian and those who do not.

Introduction

Research indicates that the status and profile of cathedrals across England has been raised in the last decade, and the purposes to which cathedrals are used have greatly expanded (Ecotec 2004; Shaw 2013; Theos and the Grubb Institute 2012). Cathedrals are now significant visitor spaces, attracting the pilgrim-tourist (Platten 2006), and generating significant amounts of income, facilitated through cafes and gift shops (Atwell 2006; Ecotec 2004; Kennedy 2006). Cathedrals are now likely to host concerts and plays, alongside the more traditional services such as Choral evensong (Inge 2006; Kennedy 2006). Cathedral congregations have grown too, with cathedrals offering something distinct to the ordinary parish church, where participation is less intensive and more transitory (Davie 2006; Ecotec 2004; Platten 2006).

An important report articulating the contemporary status of cathedrals was conducted by Theos and the Grubb Institute in 2012, entitled *Spiritual Capital: The Present and Future of English Cathedrals*. Although there is a lack of clarity in the report regarding the exact means by which data were gathered (e.g. sampling techniques), the authors obtained a significant number of responses to their survey, amassing data from 1700 adults nationally. They also conducted case studies with six different cathedral sites, utilising a number of methods such as local surveys (which included nearly 2000 participants) complemented through qualitative data collection (e.g. in-depth interviews with those directly connected with the cathedral spaces under study). This project had a broad aim - to understand the role that cathedrals fulfil in wider society - and much detail was gathered in relation to why people visit cathedrals, the role that cathedrals play in spiritual development and the relevance of cathedrals to the broader community.

The aims of this project are much more modest, and relate specifically to the meanings generated from those attending a carol service at Birmingham Cathedral in 2012. Cathedrals have always been crucial focal points for the principal Christian festivals, but along with the increased activities at cathedrals more generally, the popularity of Christmas and Easter services has been noted, with cathedrals experiencing a 37 percentage increase in attendance at Christmas services between 2000 and 2006 (Phillips 2011). Cathedrals have become key locations for individuals to participate in Christmas festivities, but little is known about motivations for participation or why the popularity of carol services has increased. While some data has been gathered in recent years on carol services (e.g. Phillips 2011; Walker 2012a; 2012b, 2012c; 2013), such investigations have had distinct purposes – although Phillips (2011) did collect illuminating data on why people came to carol

services, the main data collected related to how individuals perceive the Christmas story and the extent to which this cohered with Anglican theology. Walker's research (across various projects) has mapped a range of issues such as carol service participants' attitudes to gay marriage and homosexual bishops (Walker 2012a), the psychological type of those attending carol services (Walker 2012b) as well as whether carol service attendees have an intrinsic, extrinsic or questing religious orientation (Walker 2012c). But in the main, these studies have not mapped the specific place the carol service holds in someone's broader Christmas experience and the extent to which this specific engagement with a carol service is an explicitly religious action (although Walker (2012c; 2013) has mapped some dimensions of the religiosity of carol service attendees). Studies of carol services also tend to focus on medieval cathedrals (e.g. Walker's research centres upon Lichfield Cathedral and Worcester Cathedral), which seemingly epitomise the ideal-type of cathedrals in the popular imagination (Sadgrove 2006). Meanwhile Birmingham Cathedral does not fit this medieval cathedral pattern, being built as a parish church, and then instituted as a cathedral at a much later date; it is situated in a city centre location in an ethnically and religiously diverse city, thus broadening the range of cathedral types studied in carol service projects. Whilst Phillips (2011) did include two very different types of cathedral in her carol service study - York Minster and Derby Cathedral - (the latter also being defined by Sadgrove [2006] as a parish-church cathedral), she does not offer any comment regarding what difference (if any) this made. Thus I took up the opportunity to explore the perceptions and experiences of carol service attendees in a religiously and ethnically diverse location.

This research had two aims:

- To explore the meanings that people give to their participation at carol services at Christmas.
- To examine what carol service involvement says about current religious trends in relation to broader Christmas engagement.

This project was divided into three parts: (I) observing three different carol services at Birmingham Cathedral, comprising a Family Service, a Civic Service, and a Nine Lessons and Carols Service, all of which took place over the course of a week in mid-December 2012; (II) distributing questionnaires to all attendees at those carol services, to ask mainly biographical and attitudinal questions regarding cathedrals, Christmas, and reasons for attendance at the carol service; (III) conducting interviews specifically with individuals who were at the margins of Christianity, to explore their carol service

participation and how this fitted into their broader experience of Christmas, and how they perceived their religious positioning in relation to their participation.

This Report focuses specifically on Part II of the project: the responses to the questionnaires that were distributed at three carol services, comprising: the Family Carol Service, taking place on a Saturday at 11am, where 57 questionnaires were distributed; the Civic Carol Service, the following Tuesday at 12.30pm, where 124 questionnaires were distributed; and the Nine Lessons and Carols service, the following Friday at 17.30pm, where 178 questionnaires were distributed. So as not to disrupt the flow of the service, questionnaires were given out as attendees exited the cathedral – a team of Aston University students from the Sociology and Policy department facilitated this, to ensure that everyone received a questionnaire pack. This contained the questionnaire itself, an information sheet about the project and a consent form¹, and a pre-paid envelope in which to return the questionnaire. Of the 359 questionnaires that were distributed, 120 were returned, representing a 33.4 percent response rate. Of these, six were deemed invalid (in five cases, not enough of the questionnaire had been completed in order to constitute a valid response, and in one case, the respondent was under 18). Therefore, the final dataset comprised of 114 questionnaires. These responses were inputted into a statistical computer software package (SPSS) to aid analysis.

In the week of this project, a total of seven carol services took place at Birmingham Cathedral; we selected three at which to distribute questionnaires – all of them constituting a different service type. The Family Carol Service was child-focused, with an emphasis on telling the nativity in creative ways that would appeal to children (e.g. encouraging children to arrive dressed as a nativity character; having performative aspects during the service where children would act out the occupations of the citizens of Bethlehem). The Civic Service was attended by a number of dignitaries; its Monday lunchtime slot making it popular with those working in the surrounding offices, and the carol service was supported by some of the employers in the vicinity. Finally, the Nine Lessons and Carols service was a traditional service, centred on the nine core biblical readings that comprise the standard Nine Lessons format, drawing on narratives about Jesus from across the Bible. The choir was also a focal point, having a much broader musical repertoire compared with the other carol services, and less well-known carols were performed. This service generated the largest numbers, and was attended by a more mixed age group. The distinctiveness of each service could have

¹ Ethical approval for this project was secured from Aston University before any data collection took place. Information sheets were distributed with the questionnaire packs so that participants were clear about what the project was about, and participants were asked to sign a consent form to ensure they understood the ethical procedures around the project and how their questionnaire would be used.

impacted on responses, and during this report, where appropriate, the results have been separated out to consider this.

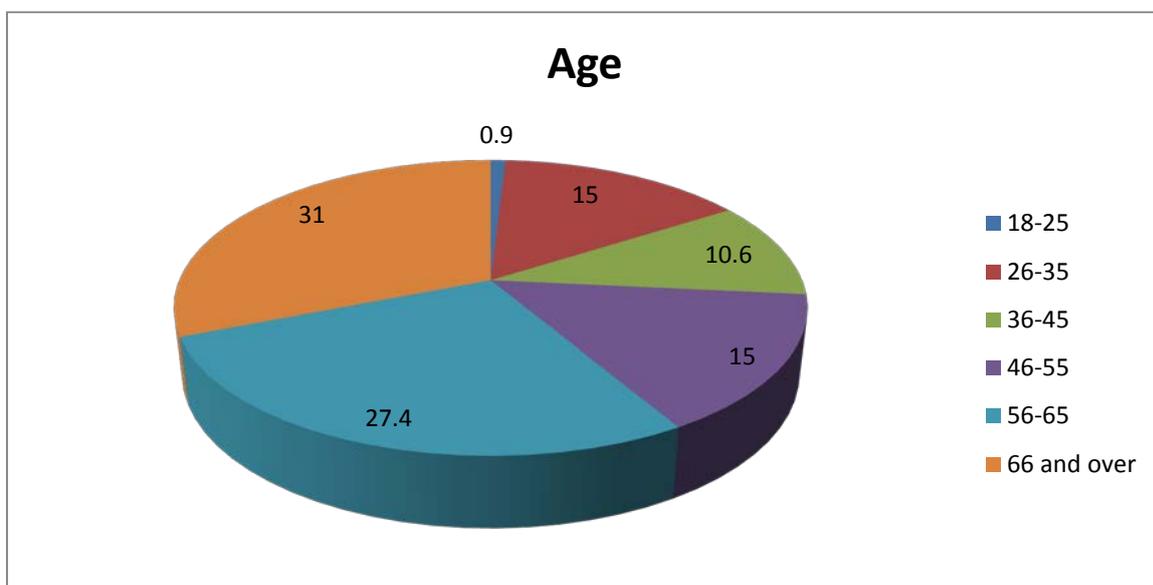
We must be cautious about generalising the findings too broadly. The response rate was fair, at 33.4 percent. Those who responded may not be representative of those attending Birmingham Cathedral's carol services as a whole, and it may be that those returning the questionnaire had particular characteristics (e.g. more time available), giving greater propensity to their completing the questionnaire. We should also be cautious about generalising this material to other cathedral settings. Birmingham Cathedral is a particular type of cathedral, emanating from the 'urban parish church' model (Sadgrove 2006) whereby in rapidly expanding industrial cities, cathedral spaces were sought through the conversion of existing parish churches. Birmingham Cathedral is therefore in common with cathedrals such as Sheffield, Bradford and Leicester, among others. Sadgrove (2006) details the artificial divide that has been created between so-called 'parish church' and 'dean and chapter' cathedrals, noting that it is the 'splendid medieval pile set in a close within a sleepy rural city' which is invoked as the 'imagined cathedral' (2006: 82). Parish church cathedrals have therefore been perceived as less able to emulate a cathedral normative. Nevertheless, like Sadgrove (2006), we must question the usefulness of such distinctions, with respondents to this questionnaire being overwhelmingly appreciative of Birmingham Cathedral as an exceptional aesthetic space, epitomised through reference to the beautiful architecture, the Burne-Jones stained glass windows, and the high quality choir. It was evident that Birmingham Cathedral was not seen as some sort of poor substitute by carol service participants. But in order to test the findings here, and to further understand the reliability of this data, more cathedral sites would need to be studied, and repeat surveys would need to be conducted at Birmingham Cathedral in future years.

Part I: Demographics: Who Attends Birmingham Cathedral Carol Services?

Age

This project did not map attendance of children, due to ethical considerations around distributing the questionnaire to anyone under the age of 18. Therefore, this Report details the age profile of adults attending the carol services who completed the questionnaire.² Overall, the largest demographic was those 66 and over, constituting 31.0 percent of the sample. Meanwhile, fewer than 1 percent of the sample were aged between 18 and 25. The age bands between those aged 26 to 55 were fairly consistent; 15.0 percent of the sample were aged between 26 and 35; 10.6 percent were aged between 36 and 45, and 15.0 percent were aged between 46 and 55. Those aged between 56 and 65 made up a much larger group, constituting 27.4 percent. In summary, very few young adults were included in the sample; there was a sharp increase at age 26, after which numbers remained fairly stable (but low), until after age 56 when there was a large jump in participants (indeed, participation nearly doubled from 15.0 percent to 27.4 percent). This continued, with those aged 66 and over constituting the largest demographic of all, at 31.0 percent.

Figure 1: Pie chart to show age of adults attending the carol services (%)



² The valid number of cases to the question, 'How old are you', was 113 out of a potential 114.

When considering the age demographic by each type of carol service, the two biggest demographics from the Family service sample were those aged over 66 (52.9 percent), followed jointly by the 36-45 year olds and 56-65 year olds at 17.6 percent (see Table 1). Conceivably, this sample was mainly comprised of parents and grandparents. Meanwhile, those aged over 66 were not the main group at the Civic service; the largest group in this sample was comprised of 35.1 percent from the 56-65 age category, followed jointly by the 26-35 and 66 and over age groups (at 21.6 percent – see Table 2). This was an event that took place in the middle of a working day, and attracted many employees from the surrounding businesses in the cathedral area, who attended during their lunch hour. It was also supported by, and promoted by, some of those businesses. This explains the slightly different age composition, in that those aged 66 or over would be more likely to be retired. However, they still comprised one of the second largest groups. Meanwhile, the Nine Lessons service was more evenly distributed across all age categories, as Table 3 shows. However, those 56 and over still comprised 55.9 percent of the sample. These findings correspond to the age categories found in other carol service studies. For Walker (2013) the 50-69 age category was the largest grouping, at 52 percent, with the under 30s comprising 14 percent. Walker mapped a greater number of young adults perhaps because his definition of young adults is very broad. Meanwhile, like this study, Phillips also had a very low number of 18 to 24 year olds, at 5 percent.

Table 1: Adults attending the Family service, by age

Age band	18-25	26-25	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 66	TOTAL
%	0	5.9	17.6	5.9	17.6	52.9	99.9
Frequency	0	1	3	1	3	9	17

Table 2: Adults attending the Civic service, by age

Age band	18-25	26-25	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 66	TOTAL
%	0	21.6	8.1	13.5	35.1	21.6	99.9
Frequency	0	8	3	5	13	8	37

Table 3: Adults attending the Nine Lessons service, by age

Age band	18-25	26-25	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 66	TOTAL
%	1.7	13.6	10.2	18.6	25.4	30.5	100
Frequency	1	8	6	11	15	18	59

Geography

The majority of participants lived in the West Midlands (86.6 percent³), with 70.5 percent identifying Birmingham and the immediate vicinity as where they lived. Therefore, the carol services can be understood as an event most salient to local people, but with some appeal to those from further afield. There was little variation between the services regarding where people lived, with 82.4 percent, 89.2 percent and 86.2 percent attending the Family, Civic and Nine Lessons service respectively, who resided in the West Midlands.⁴ This local focus was especially mediated through the Civic service, where local dignitaries such as the Lord Mayor and councillors were in attendance, and Birmingham was specifically discussed in the Dean's welcome and address; this also highlights how cathedral buildings can have deep resonance and meaning to those living in the locality. As James (2006) articulates, cathedrals can operate as a community focal point, offering a space where communities can come together – indeed, the cathedral itself can become a symbol of a community (Theos and the Grubb Institute 2012). This can be the case whether or not individuals themselves make use of the space and cathedrals can become 'iconic buildings for many who rarely enter them' (James 2006: 13). But the carol services could also be utilised for other forms of community connectivity. For example, the Nine Lessons service was the meeting point for the Christmas gathering of Durham University alumni.

Gender

Overall, slightly more women comprised the sample, with 55.4 percent of women compared with 44.6 of men.⁵ This is very similar to the gender balance that Walker (2013) mapped in his carol service project, where 58 percent of the sample was comprised of women. In terms of the different services, women and men were equal participants in the sample from the Civic service, but slightly more women participated in the Nine Lessons service (54.2 percent). The largest gender disparity was in relation to the Family service, where women comprised 70.6 percent of the sample. More broadly, women are more likely to attend church services; Lankshear's (2014) research comparing parish church attendance with cathedral service attendance at Sunday services in Southwark indicates that, compared with the parish church, cathedrals are likely to appeal more equally to men and women, with less of a gender imbalance in place. The fact that the Family Service comprised of more women could be a reflection of women's more prominent role in childcare (Gatrell 2005);

³ There were 112 valid responses to the question on where participants lived.

⁴ There were 17, 37 and 58 valid responses to these questions respectively.

⁵ There were 112 valid responses to the question on gender.

children were specifically catered for and incorporated into this service. In addition to this, mothers (and potentially, grandmothers) may be more likely to take the responsibility for introducing children to Christian rituals, cultivating religious socialisation (Levitt 2005; Trzebiatowska 2008).

Ethnicity

This was predominantly a white British sample, with 87.6 percent defining themselves in this way.⁶ When including the 'white Irish' and 'other white' categories, this percentage increased to 93.8 percent. Therefore attendees from ethnic minority backgrounds comprised a very small proportion of the sample. Black and ethnic minority groups comprise 14 percent of the West Midlands more generally (Medland 2011), indicating that ethnic minority groups were under-represented in the carol service sample. However, this numbers-based comparison ignores some of the complexities of the relationship between religion and ethnicity. Those of South Asian heritage comprise the largest ethnic minority group in the West Midlands, at roughly 8.5 percent (Medland 2011). Only a small minority of individuals of South Asian heritage are Christian (Nesbitt 2008). As the 'Religion' section will go on to outline, the carol services predominantly appealed to Christians or those of no religion; those in the sample who identified with another religious tradition were numerically low indeed. In addition, those specifying no religion were far more likely to identify as white – only one person who outlined they had no religion identified with an ethnic minority group. So it is not surprising that ethnic minority groups were underrepresented.

It is important to point out, however, that there were differences between the services. Those from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to attend the Nine Lessons service. While the sample from the Family service and Civic service was comprised of 94.1 percent and 91.9 percent who respectively identified their ethnicity as white British, for the Nine Lessons service this decreased to 83.1 percent. When all white ethnicities were grouped together, white ethnicities constituted 94.1 percent, 97.3 percent and 91.5 percent of those attending the Family, Civic and Nine Lessons service respectively. It is important to consider why the Nine Lessons service was more appealing, and why the Civic service sample comprised so few from non-white backgrounds. The focus on the Civic service is most pressing, as this is the service that is most community-oriented, emphasising Birmingham's civic life, which includes Birmingham's place as a diverse, multicultural city. This service therefore provides a function of forging a sense of community through ritual and language (Day 2011). The report by Theos and the Grubb Institute (2012) highlights the important part

⁶ There were 113 valid responses to the question on ethnicity.

cathedrals play in civic life, arguing that civic structures are consolidated through cathedral events such as Remembrance Day services, anniversary events and mayoral services. Although the Civic carol service is structured specifically around the celebration of a Christian event, it is the main carol service that we mapped that directly relates to this notion of consolidating civic life (especially given that the Lord Mayor was in attendance), and given this civic focus, it is concerning that so few from ethnic minority backgrounds participated. Further research would be needed to ascertain whether this was a discrepancy in the sample (e.g. whether those from ethnic minority groups were less likely to return the survey), or if this did constitute a real effect, whether this was a one-off occurrence or a sustained issue needing further investigation.

Occupation

Questionnaire participants were asked to manually write in their occupation. This enabled individuals to describe their occupation in their own words, unencumbered by fixed categories that might not quite capture their occupational background. A high number were retired, and these individuals were coded into separate retired categories that corresponded with their occupational grouping. All occupations (retired and current) were coded according to the Registrar General's scale of social class. Responses were therefore coded into a number of categories: professional, managerial/technical, skilled non-manual, skilled manual, semi-skilled/unskilled, unemployed.⁷ All of these categories had accompanying 'retired' categories – for example, 'retired skilled manual'. Finally, additional categories, such as student categories, those who had retired but had not included detail of their previous occupation, and those unemployed, were included.

Only three participants identified as a student (2.7 percent), which is unsurprising given the low numbers of individuals in the typical student age category of 18 to 25.⁸ By far, the largest three categories were 'professional', 'retired professional' and 'managerial/ technical', respectively comprising 20.5 percent, 20.5 percent and 17.9 percent of the sample. Indeed, the 'professional' and 'retired professional' categories – i.e. those at the apex of the social class structure – constituted 41.0 percent of the sample. All other categories were comprised of relatively small numbers (all fewer than 10 percent each), but some categories were very low, with those unemployed and those

⁷ A professional was categorised in relation to occupations such as university lecturer, doctor, lawyer, head teacher. Managerial/technical occupations related to individuals in posts such as teaching, nursing, senior administration. The skilled non-manual category related to occupations such as secretaries, clerical workers and shop assistants. Skilled manual related to work such as plumbers, electricians and builders. Semi-skilled/Unskilled related to those in occupations such as cleaning, bartending, waitressing, labourers.

⁸ There were 112 valid responses to the question on occupation.

in skilled manual occupations both comprising 1.8 percent, and the 'semi-skilled/unskilled' group comprising 3.6 percent. The pie chart in Figure 2 shows all categories. This highlights that it is relatively privileged groupings who are attending carol services. To examine this more closely, I undertook a calculation which excluded the retirees who had not specified a previous occupation, the students, as well as the 'other' category (a very small number who were not easily classifiable into the occupational schema). On excluding these less definable groups, it transpired that those in either professional or managerial/technical posts, retired or current, (i.e. the two highest occupational categorisations, comprising of posts such as university lecturers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, nurses) comprised 76.5 percent of the entire sample.⁹ We already established that the majority of respondents resided in the West Midlands, and data from the Office for National Statistics for 2013-14 on occupational groupings in the West Midlands outline that managers, directors, senior officials, professional occupations and associate professional and technical occupations (which map onto the occupational categories classified here) comprised 40.3 percent of the West Midlands workforce (see Figure 3 for a full breakdown of the ONS occupational categories for the West Midlands). Therefore, there is a significant mismatch between the broader occupational categorisations within the West Midlands and the sample obtained at the carol services. Indeed, those in the professional, managerial and technical occupations constituted almost twice the proportion expected. Further research is required in order to understand why carol services are more likely to appeal to higher income and professional demographics. Indeed some elements of carol services (e.g. the choral tradition associated with Nine Lessons) map onto relatively niche cultural forms associated with high levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984; Inge 2006), and more broadly, cathedral buildings themselves tap into a cultural habitus more associated with middle class identity (e.g. cathedral spaces experienced as tourist attractions, with connections to history, architecture and art). Inge (2006) has argued that cathedrals may be understood as exclusive spaces that privilege high cultural forms, appealing to a middle class demographic in possession of National Trust membership. Working class individuals are thus actively discouraging from participating. Meanwhile Theos and the Grubb Institute's report (2012) highlights that those on lower incomes are less likely to access cathedrals, but cite affordability and time poverty as reasons for this. The undoubted complexities of this would need to be teased out with further research, especially in ascertaining the extent to which it is cultural or economic capital (Bourdieu 1984) which is having the bigger influence.

⁹ This reconstituted calculation comprised 98 valid responses.

Figure 2: Pie chart to show occupations of those attending the carol services (%)

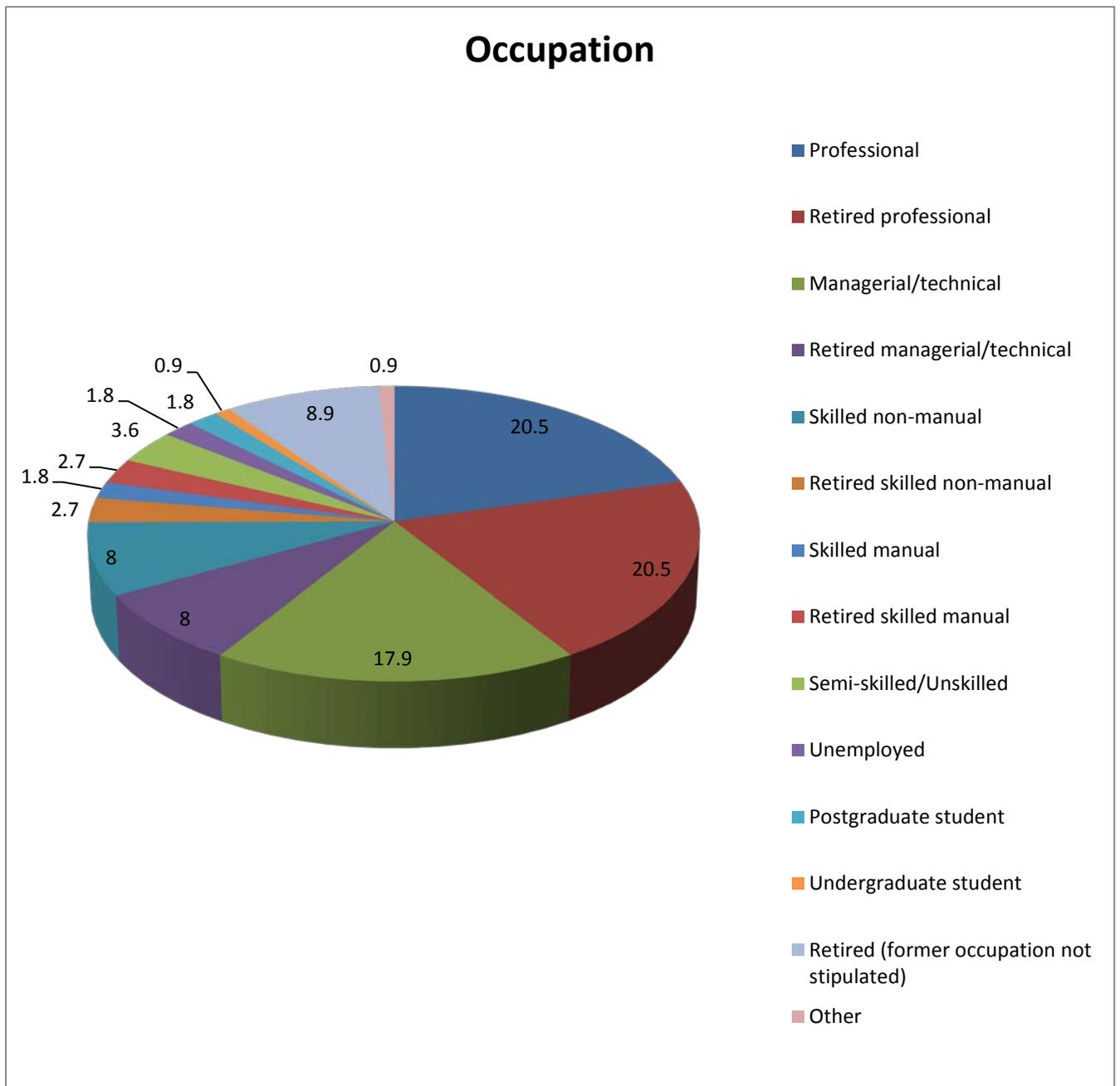
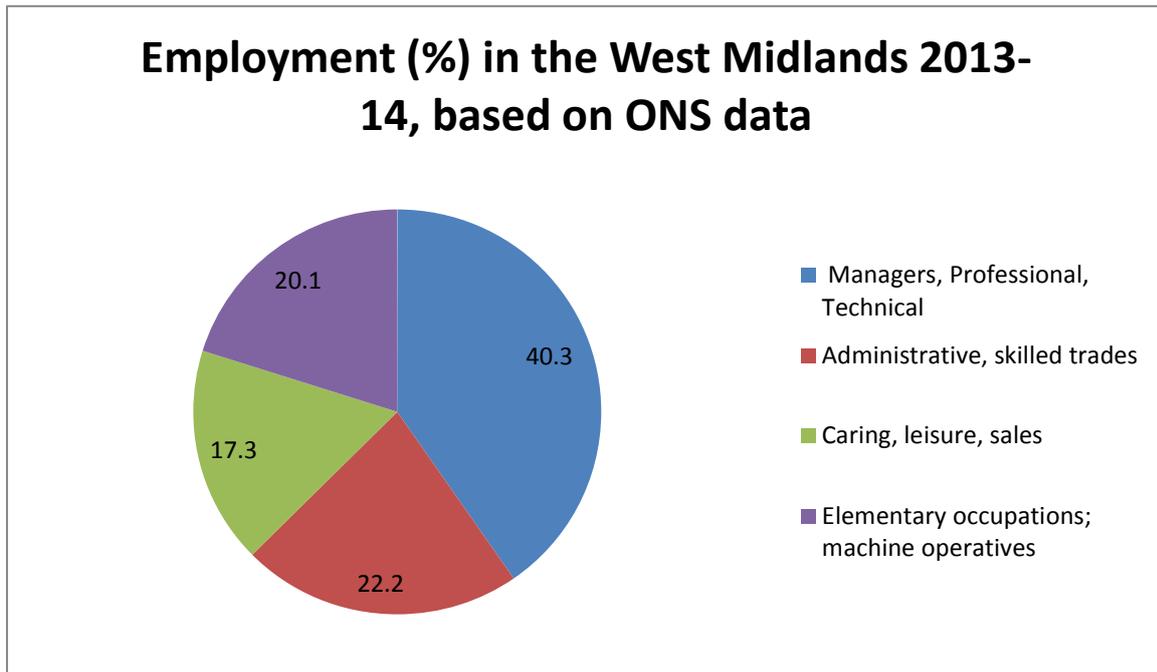


Figure 3: Pie chart to show employment more generally in the West Midlands (%)



Religion

This was a predominantly Christian sample, with 87.7 percent identifying their religion in this way.¹⁰ Meanwhile 11.4 percent identified as either an atheist or of no religion, and one person (0.89 percent) identified with Hinduism. No other religion was selected. Therefore, the carol services appealed to individuals who already identified with the Christian tradition; carol services do not seem to be used as opportunities for interfaith connections. These figures resonate with Phillips' (2011) project – in her study, she asked 'Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?' (2011: 228), and 76 percent identified in this way; 13 percent said they were not Christians, with the remainder either not completing the question or answering 'don't know'.

¹⁰ There were 114 valid responses to the question on religion.

It is significant that 11.4 percent of participants did not identify with any religion. James argues that the nature of cathedrals means that they can operate as ‘a spiritual home for those with little faith or even no faith at all’ (2006: 19). Meanwhile Theos and the Grubb Institute

*‘Cathedrals form a “half-way house”... people can belong, but in a rather more “arms-length” manner’
(Platten 2006: 5)*

(2012) found that around 20 percent of cathedral visitors more generally had no religion, which is nearly double the number mapped here, and significantly more than the numbers of non-Christians that Phillips mapped. The lower numbers of those not identifying with a religion attending a carol service perhaps indicates that as a designated religious service, the carol service is less attractive compared with events at the cathedral with no religious content. In other words, carol services are more attractive to those whom Theos and the Grubb Institute (2012) term ‘pilgrims’ rather than ‘secular tourists’. Alternatively, cathedrals may be more attractive to non-religious individuals outside of formal service times as they offer a space of calm and restoration in a frenetically-paced world. The cathedral becomes a space to sit and reflect in silence, affording those who are not religious a space which is hard to find elsewhere. In other words, it is not the historical or arts-based artefacts that appeal, as they would to a tourist, but the conduciveness the cathedral offers for quiet reflection. Loundon’s (2001) collected testimonies of young Buddhists touches on this idea; one participant, a counsellor to traumatised children, recalls seeking out the space of the church across the road after a very stressful episode at work, in order to gather her thoughts and to reflect on her situation, indicating the pull that churches have as spaces of sanctuary for those of many faiths or none. However, more interpretive work is needed to understand the reasons that those not identifying with any religion had for attending (indeed, this will form part of the qualitative analysis of this broader study and will be examined in future research outputs).

We also asked what denomination individuals identified with, and although a fair number did not respond to this question (e.g. with some identifying solely with Christianity) the majority said

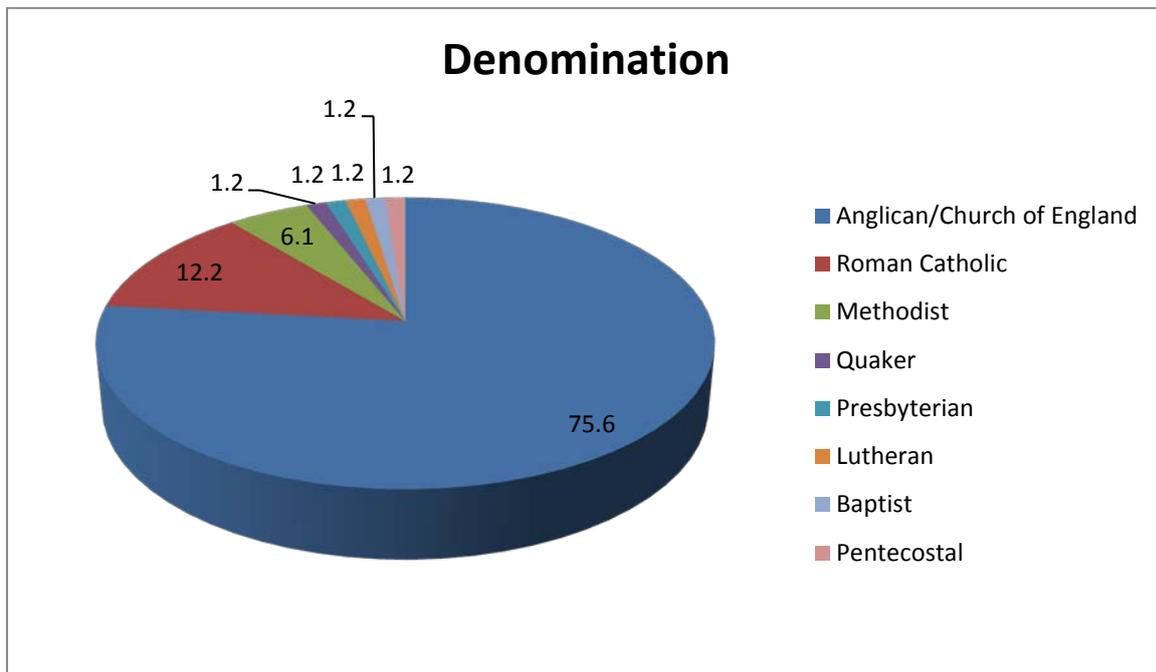
“I wasn’t a regular attender [at my local Catholic church] but find the cathedral to be much more welcoming”

Anglican/Church of England (75.6 percent) followed by Roman Catholic (12.2 percent).¹¹ The remainder were comprised of a variety of denominations including Methodist, Quaker, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist and Pentecostal (see Figure 4). It is important to note the number of attendees from outside the contours of the

¹¹ There were 82 valid responses to the question on denomination.

Anglican tradition, especially Roman Catholicism. This could be explained by the ability of cathedrals to be a central focal point that appeals to those from a range of Christian backgrounds. As Platten explains, ‘Cathedrals form a “half-way house”... people can belong, but in a rather more “arms-length” manner’ (2006: 5). In other words, cathedrals are understood as relatively open spaces that people can utilise whether they are embedded in other Christian communities or not. Indeed, open-ended responses on the questionnaire indicated that attendance at a cathedral carol service could supplement attendance at other Christmas services within non-Anglican churches. One Methodist outlined that she was ‘between churches’ and was ascertaining ‘what different churches are like’, using the carol service as an opportunity to have a ‘new experience in a different faith tradition’. A Roman Catholic woman said that she ‘wasn’t a regular attender [at her local Catholic church] but find the cathedral to be much more welcoming’. Another Roman Catholic woman said that she enjoys the Civic service so much that she ensures she attended every year. The carol services therefore fostered a sense of openness to individuals from a range of Christian denominations, and could even be utilised as opportunities for exploring the Christian faith.

Figure 4: Pie chart to show denominational affiliation of those attending the carol services (%)



Asking about people’s religious affiliation, however, does not give any indication of level of commitment or involvement in those religious communities. In the questionnaire participants were asked whether they belonged to the Birmingham Cathedral congregation, and 17 individuals (15.0

percent) said that they did.¹² A follow-on question asked whether individuals belonged to another congregation, with 53 percent saying yes.¹³ Removing individuals who said ‘yes’ to both cathedral affiliation and affiliation to another congregation elsewhere (one person) meant that 69 participants (60.5 percent) belonged to a Christian congregation somewhere, indicating a sample with a reasonably high level of religious commitment. The questionnaire also asked the extent to which individuals were involved with the Christian church. The responses are in Table 4.

Table 4: Engagement of participants with the Christian church

	Percentage	Frequency
I only attend at special events (weddings, Christenings, special services – e.g. Easter and Christmas)	15.9	18
I attend special events and some services sporadically throughout the year	27.4	31
I attend at least every month	15.0	17
I attend at least every week	34.5	39
Other	7.1	8
TOTAL	99.9	113

As can be seen from Table 4, the sample was fairly evenly split with those who attended either weekly or at least monthly (49.5%) and those attending more sporadically (43.3%). In Phillips’ study, 34 percent of the carol service participants said they attended church frequently (measured as those who attended once a month or more), so the Birmingham sample is somewhat more committed to churchgoing compared to Phillips’ data. This Birmingham sample corresponds well with Walker’s observation of his carol service sample, with his sample being ‘particularly strong in those who go to church very often or only very rarely’ (2013: 907).

Finally, a series of questions asked participants more detailed questions about their commitment to different elements of Christianity, with 71.2 percent either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, ‘God is important to me in my everyday life’.¹⁴ Meanwhile, 47.8 percent either agreed or

¹² There were 113 valid responses to the question on belonging to the cathedral congregation.

¹³ There were 100 valid responses to the question on belonging to another congregation.

¹⁴ There were 111 valid responses to this question.

strongly agreed that 'The Bible is important to me in my everyday life' and 63.7 percent either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, 'Prayer is important to me in my everyday life'.¹⁵ On the statement, 'I believe there is an afterlife/life after death', 64.9 percent either agreed or strongly agreed.¹⁶ Therefore this is a sample which is committed to God's everyday importance; the Bible was considered somewhat less important. Of interest was that slightly more people identified as Christian (87.7%), than emphasised God's importance in everyday life (71.2%).

¹⁵ There were 113 valid responses to both of these questions.

¹⁶ There were 111 valid responses to this question.

Part II: What Perceptions Do Carol Service Attendees have of Cathedrals?

In their research report on *Spiritual Capital: The Present and Future of English Cathedrals*, Theos and the Grubb Institute (2012) asked pertinent questions about national perceptions of cathedrals; similar questions have been utilised here to see how this carol service sample may be similar to, or differ from, broader national trends.

The questionnaire asked specific questions about reactions to, and interactions with, cathedral spaces. As indicated in the last section, only 15.0 percent said that they belonged to the cathedral community. Despite not necessarily belonging to the cathedral congregation, most participants showed strong affiliation with Birmingham Cathedral itself, with only 11.5 percent recounting no other visit to the cathedral in the last year.¹⁷ The most common response (at 40.7 percent of participants) was to indicate one or two other visits to the cathedral. The full breakdown of this statistic can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Participants' number of visits to Birmingham Cathedral in the last year

	Percentage	Frequency
No other visits	11.5	13
1-2 other visits	40.7	46
3-9 other visits	20.4	23
10-25 other visits	9.7	11
More than 25 visits	17.7	20
TOTAL	100	113

Meanwhile, 73.2 percent said they had visited another cathedral in the last year.¹⁸ Theos and the Grubb Institute (2012) found that nationally, 27 percent of adults have visited a Church of England cathedral in the last 12 months. At a national level, our carol service participants would feature in

¹⁷ There were 113 valid responses to the question on number of cathedral visits to Birmingham Cathedral in the last year.

¹⁸ There were 112 valid responses to the question whether the participant had visited any other cathedrals in the last year.

this 27 percent, but the very high number of carol service participants who are not only repeat visitors to Birmingham Cathedral, but who have also frequented other cathedral spaces, indicates that they are part of a dedicated group, forging strong connections with cathedral spaces more generally. In other words, those attending these carol services engage more broadly with cathedral spaces – these are not individuals for whom a cathedral visit is a one-off, occasional event.

We asked four attitudinal questions, using a Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to map participants' perceptions on cathedrals, with 21.2 percent either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement 'This cathedral is largely irrelevant in my everyday life'.¹⁹ As this would likely to be affected by where someone lives, those living in Birmingham were separated out, as they would most likely have a closer geographical connection with the cathedral. Of those residing in Birmingham, a slightly lower number, at 17.7 percent, agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.²⁰ A substantial 90.3 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'This cathedral is important to local identity', highlighting the great importance participants placed on the cathedral's links to the broader Birmingham community.²¹ Supporting this, 89.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'Cathedrals are an essential resource within cities', indicating the positive view participants had of the broader role cathedrals elsewhere had in supporting their local communities.²² Meanwhile only 3.6 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'Cathedrals are irrelevant in modern life'.²³ It is seemingly the case, therefore, that participants were enormously supportive of the role that cathedrals played in contemporary life, particularly the community role, and this support for cathedrals was a general one, being broader than Birmingham Cathedral per se. However, there was a minority who whilst residing closely to Birmingham Cathedral, did not identify a personal connection with the cathedral, so for some individuals, they were generally supportive of the cathedral and the role it played, even though they personally did not derive a strong personal connection to it. These findings support Theos and the Grubb Institute's (2012) research, who also found low support for people deeming cathedrals irrelevant in their daily lives, (their local survey recording an agreement level of 10 percent). Meanwhile, their study also found that only 9 percent agreed that their local cathedral contributed little to the community, and in their national survey, only 14 percent agreed with the statement, 'cathedrals are unimportant for cities in England today'.

¹⁹ There were 113 valid responses to this statement.

²⁰ There were 79 valid responses to this question.

²¹ There were 113 valid responses to this question.

²² There were 113 valid responses to this question.

²³ There were 112 valid responses to this question.

Part III: What Perceptions Do Carol Service Attendees have of Christmas?

We asked a series of Likert-scale questions (asking participants to select a category from strongly agree to strongly disagree), garnering the attitudes of participants towards Christmas more generally. A high number - 88.5 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'Christmas has become too commercialised',²⁴ with 41.6 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, 'Christmas is about the giving and receiving of presents'.²⁵ Meanwhile, 95.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed that 'Christmas is a time for family and friends',²⁶ and 84.1 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'Having a religious focus to Christmas is very important to me'.²⁷ Therefore, the majority of participants identified with a feeling of the over-commercialisation of Christmas, and instead wanted to reconnect the emphasis of the festive season both with religion and with family and friends. This connection to religion was also buttressed by the fact that 82.1% of participants said they were attending another religious service over this Christmas period.²⁸

²⁴ There were 113 valid responses to this question.

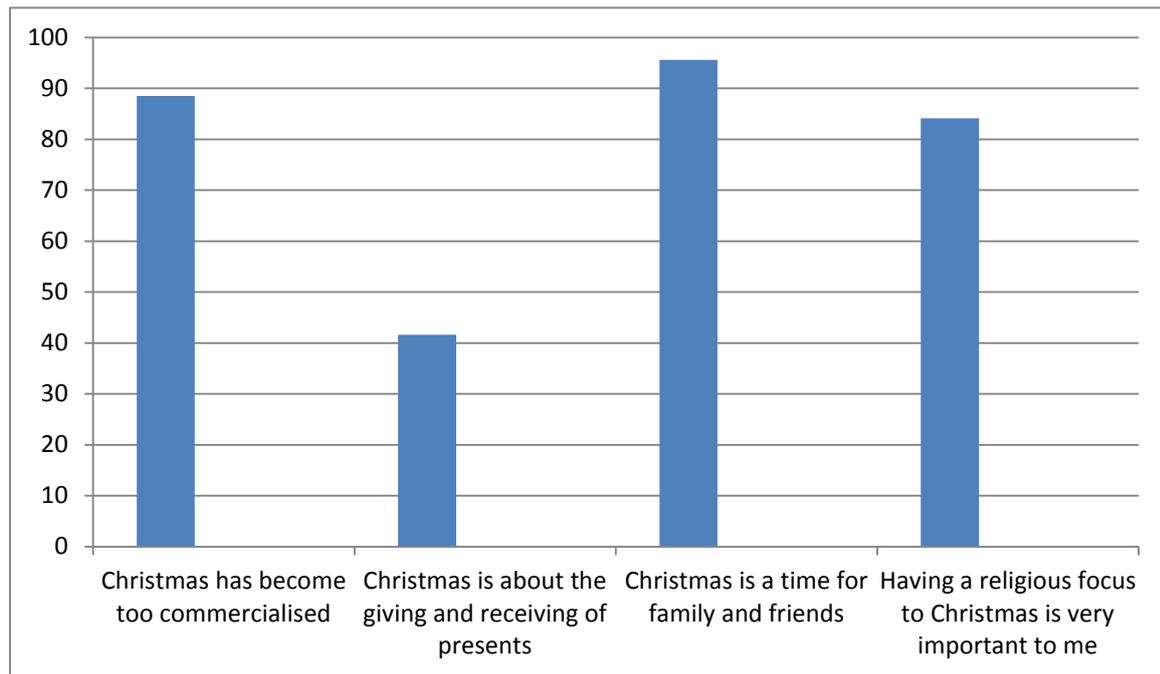
²⁵ There were 113 valid responses to this question.

²⁶ There were 113 valid responses to this question.

²⁷ There were 113 valid responses to this question.

²⁸ There were 112 valid responses to this question.

Figure 5: Bar chart to show Attitudes to Christmas –indicating individuals who either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly’ agreed’ with the statements



The debate about the commercialisation of Christmas is a long-standing one, produced in the very moment that the modern Christmas was invoked (Miller 1993; Schmidt 1995). After the Puritan parliament banned Christmas between 1647 and 1660, Christmas became a muted affair, and did not establish itself as a significant festival until the mid-19th century. It was only when people began to take Christmas much more seriously as a religious occasion that commercialised formations intensified. Indeed, there was no clear separation between the two, for the early forms of gift-giving in the Christmas season (though more typically given for New Year rather than Christmas) was the gifting of Bibles and hymnals (Schmidt 1995). And more recent commonly-heard critiques of Christmas shopping, such as not knowing what to buy for people, and the arduous nature of shopping in crowded high streets, also has a much longer history, being invoked in complaints as early as the mid-19th century (Schmidt 1995). In other words, as soon as Christmas became a significant festival, it was accompanied by a new set of rituals, and the dissatisfactions over consumerism began. But in the same time period, there were also changes in the religious rituals being enacted. It was also at this moment that many popular hymns that became part of the standard carol service were penned such as *Away in a Manger* and *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (Schmidt 1995). Indeed, the settings for carol services have not solely been churches and cathedrals, but also shopping centres and department stores – thus religious ritual has been invoked at the centre of the commercialised Christmas (Schmidt 1995). Analyses of the qualitative interview data

generated in Part III of data collection will offer further insight into the meanings the carol services had in relation to Christmas and its perceived commercialisation.

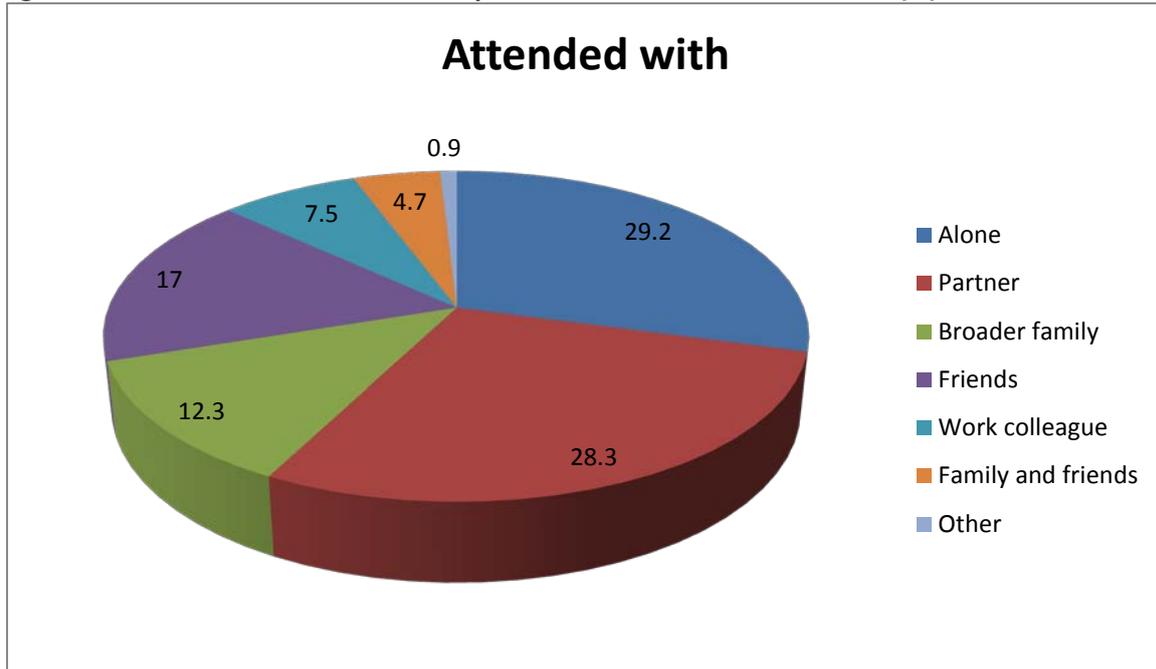
Part IV: What Reasons do Attendees have for Coming to a Cathedral Carol Service?

The questionnaire asked whether the participants had come to the carol service with anyone else. The highest proportion (29.2 percent) had attended alone (see Figure 6).²⁹ The domestication of the modern Christmas and the ensuing centrality of the family to these celebrations (Kuper 1993; Miller 1993) would indicate that carol service participation is an opportunity for individuals to celebrate family connections, especially if families spread over long distances reconvene for the celebrations. Indeed, as Part III indicated, an extremely high number – 95.6 percent – in this sample gave support to the idea that Christmas was a time for family and friends. These data somewhat refute any assumption that the carol service is being utilised as an opportunity for extended family connection, not only in relation to the high proportion attending alone, but also when considering the second largest category of responses, at 28.3 percent, who attended with a partner, who would be, in most cases, someone participants would see on a daily basis. In terms of those attending as part of a larger family/ friendship group (e.g. with children, siblings, parents, grandparents, friends), 17.0 percent fell into this category³⁰, again disputing a sentimentalised image of individuals participating in carol services as larger communal groups. Meanwhile, 17.0 percent had attended solely with friends and 7.5 percent had attended with work colleagues. It should be noted, however, that none of the carol services we mapped coincided with Christmas Eve; it may be that Christmas Eve services fostered those attending as part of larger familial and friendship groups. But on the data gathered here, there is less evidence than expected for carol services being utilised for the opportunity to celebrate broader connective relationships.

²⁹ There were 106 valid responses to this question.

³⁰ This 17 percent is comprised of the 'broader family' category of 12.7 percent (which included family members beyond just a partner) and the 'family and friends' category of 4.3 percent (which captured individuals who attended as a broader group of both family *and* friends).

Figure 6: Pie Chart to Show who Participants Attended Carol Service with (%)



As the Civic service may have acted as an outlier in terms of who people came with (e.g. it might have generated more individuals with a propensity to come alone, particularly if they came from their workplace over lunchtime), this statistic was mapped in relation to each carol service. Interestingly, it was the Nine Lessons service which generated the highest number attending alone, at 31.6 percent.³¹ This compared with 29.4 percent who attended the Civic service on their own, and only 20.0 percent who attended the Family service alone.³² Therefore, it is significant that a reasonable number of individuals are engaging with carol services at an individualised level. More research is needed to tease out the reasons for this. This may be a specific characteristic of the cathedral itself, which offers greater room for anonymity; therefore, people do not feel self-conscious about attending alone, unlike the parish church where people may be better-known and therefore feel greater embarrassment about solitary attendance. In another vein, Woodhead (2008) has argued that women’s church attendance can be utilised as an opportunity for ‘me time’, where one can focus solely on one’s spiritual and emotional needs. Is this a similar kind of engagement, whereby individuals attending alone are using it as an opportunity for personalised spiritual engagement? Given its specific orientation to the family, the Family service unsurprisingly generated the highest numbers of those attending with broader family, at 26.7 percent (this compared with 12.3 percent for the Nine Lessons service, and only 5.9 percent at the Civic service). Attending solely with a partner comprised the largest categories at both the Family and Nine Lessons, constituting

³¹ There were 57 valid responses to this question.

³² There were 34 and 15 valid responses to this question, respectively.

33.3 percent of the sample at both services. Meanwhile, only 17.6 percent attended with a partner at the Civic service. Indeed, the Civic service was constituted slightly differently: its largest category was those attending alone a 29.4 percent (reported above), followed by work colleagues at 23.5 percent, and friends at 20.6 percent. As previously noted, 17.6 percent attended with a partner, which was much lower than the other services. This indicates the different purpose to which the Civic service was set up. It was more likely to generate attendance from those in the surrounding offices, who were more likely to identify as either coming alone, or with work colleagues or friends.

The questionnaire asked participants what factors influenced their attendance at that particular service, and a number of options were included (see Table 6). Participants could select as many factors as they liked, and they were also asked to note down any additional factors not listed. The factors that are starred in Table 6 indicate those additional factors that participants added. The main reasons cited were religiously-oriented; perhaps unsurprisingly, 'Celebrating the birth of Jesus' came top of the list (62.3 percent), corresponding with Phillips' (2011) research who also found that 'Celebrating the birth of Christ' was the most popular reason for carol service attendance. Second was the desire to have a Christian experience at Christmastime (55.3 percent), and third was to worship God (51.8 percent).

Another cluster of results related to connections to others – being part of the Christian community was a factor for 49.1 percent of participants, and 47.4 percent cited that experiencing the service with family and friends was a driving factor.

Aesthetic dimensions garnered slightly lower support, with 44.7 percent citing aesthetic experiences being a factor in attendance. But when participants were asked to record any additional factors motivating their attendance, hearing a high standard of music and having the opportunity to sing were cited in 14.0 percent and 13.2 percent of respective responses. Therefore, had we specifically given options that had been more firmly oriented around the aural dimensions of aesthetic experience, it may well have been the case that more participants would have selected the musical dimension as a key factor; this type of option therefore needs to be embedded in future research in order to test this further. Allowing participants to write in their own factors that motivated attendance also highlighted some more unexpected results; 9.6 percent of respondents were attending the carol service as the focal point for a Durham alumni event!

Table 6: Factors influencing carol service attendance across three services

Factors influencing attendance	%	Frequency
Celebrating the birth of Jesus	62.3	71
Having a Christian Experience this Christmas	55.3	63
Worshipping God	51.8	59
Being part of the Christian community	49.1	56
Experiencing the service with my family and friends	47.4	54
An aesthetic experience (e.g. being in a beautiful building)	44.7	51
Thinking of people I'm separated from at Christmas	24.6	28
High standard of music*	14.0	16
Opportunity to sing*	13.2	15
A family member/friend was involved in the service	12.3	14
Durham alumni event*	9.6	11
Personal healing*	8.8	10
Not sure	0.9	1

Starred factors indicate additional options given by participants

When considering each service in isolation, there were some important differences that could be ascertained. Regarding the religious factors prompting attendance, unsurprisingly the Civic service was the outlier on all three measures (Celebrating the birth of Jesus, Worshipping God and having a Christian experience at Christmas – See Table 7). For example, while 72.9 percent attending the Family Service and 72.9 percent attending the Nine Lessons Service cited ‘Celebrating the Birth of Jesus’ as a factor motivating attendance, only 37.8 percent of those attending the Civic service selected this option. This was typical across all three religious factors.

Table 7: Percentage of participants selecting religious factors motivating attendance, by service attended

	Factor		
Service Attended	Celebrating the Birth of Jesus (%)	Worshipping God (%)	Having a Christian experience (%)
Family	77.8	77.8	55.6
Civic	37.8	35.1	35.1
Nine Lessons	72.9	54.2	67.8

Meanwhile, when considering the ‘connections to others’ cluster (comprising the factors of ‘Being part of the Christian community’ and ‘Experiencing the service with my family and friends’), all services prompted similar results on the family and friends element, but again the Civic service was the outlier, generating lower support in relation to the ‘Being part of a Christian community’ factor (see Table 8). Having an explicit religious dimension to the factor reduced the likelihood of those attending the Civic service selecting it. However, when examining all the factors given by those attending the Civic service, the one generating most support was ‘Experiencing the service with my family and friends’ at 43.2 percent. Therefore, the carol service may have been seen by some as an opportunity to forge workspace connections and consolidate employment-based friendships.

Table 8: Percentage of participants selecting connection to others factors motivating attendance, by service attended

	Factor	
Service Attended	Being part of the Christian community (%)	Experiencing the service with my family and friends (%)
Family	66.7	44.4
Civic	32.4	43.2
Nine Lessons	54.2	50.8

Finally, when considering the aesthetic cluster (comprised of ‘An aesthetic experience’, ‘Experiencing a high musical standard’ and ‘Opportunity to sing’ – see Table 9), there were few differences between the Family and the Civic service specifically on the aesthetic factor, but those attending the Nine Lessons service were much more likely to select aesthetic options (this may reflect the greater emphasis placed on the choir and music at this service). Indeed, the strength of the response to

aesthetic reasons at the Nine Lessons service exceeded the ‘connection to others’ factors (see Table 8) and some of the ‘religious’ factors (see Table 7) for this particular service. Therefore, although religious reasons still dominated as factors motivating attendance at the Nine Lessons service, the ordering of the remaining cluster of factors changed, so that aesthetic factors came second, and ‘connection to others’ came last. Nine Lessons can therefore be seen as an event that is specifically sought out to elicit aesthetic connection. Meanwhile, the results on those selecting either a high musical standard or the opportunity to sing must be taken with caution as these factors were added in by participants themselves; the robustness of this result would need to be tested through a follow-up study which included it as a main option to select. But those attending the Nine Lessons service were much more likely to state experiencing a high musical standard as a reason for attendance; an opportunity to sing was most aligned with the Family service.

Table 9: Percentage of participants selecting aesthetic factors motivating attendance, by service attended

Service Attended	Factor		
	An aesthetic experience (%)	Experiencing a high musical standard (%)	Opportunity to sing (%)
Family	33.3	5.6	22.2
Civic	29.7	5.4	16.2
Nine Lessons	57.6	22.0	8.5

In summary, across all three services, factors which more concretely cluster around explicitly religiously-motivated reasons for attendance were most prominent, followed by using the service as a means of connecting with others. Meanwhile, aesthetic reasons for attendance were bottom of the main three clusters of motivations.

But this ignores the differing placement within each kind of carol service and there were important differences regarding how responses mapped onto each service: for the Nine Lessons service, aesthetic experiences became a very important motivating factor, overtaking the ‘connecting with others’ factor. The Civic service was much less likely to be motivated by religious factors, but this did not mean that aesthetic factors played a huge role either. Instead the option garnering most support was in relation to ‘Experiencing the service with my family and friends’. Further research is needed to understand more fully motivations for attendance at the Civic service. The nature of the Civic

service may mean it has distinct features which differ from more religiously-oriented carol services. The inclusion of dignitaries and the encouragement of local firms to attend may mean attendance was motivated through more external factors, such as commitment to and a celebration of the local community, or even commitment to one's employer.

Part V: Perceptions of the Carol Service

Attended

A series of Likert-scale questions (asking participants to select a category from strongly agree to strongly disagree) were included, investigating participants' perceptions of the carol service attended. 78.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'During today's service, I felt a sense of community'.³³ Only 8.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'I couldn't connect with the service', and only 7.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'I found elements of today's service alienating'.³⁴ Meanwhile, we asked a series of questions about whether the carol service had induced a mood of sacredness. Although this is tricky to map, we prioritised questions around the sacred generally, God, as well as the aesthetic (music and architecture). Overall, 63.3 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'During the service, I felt a connection to the sacred, and 66.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed that 'Today's service helped me to connect with God'.³⁵ On the aesthetic dimension, 82.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed that 'The music used in today's service gave me a sense of the sacred' and 80.6 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'During the service, my surroundings (e.g. the buildings and architecture) gave me a sense of the sacred'.³⁶ Therefore, participants were slightly more likely to see the service as an opportunity to connect with God, over and above any notion of 'sacrality', but high numbers believed that the aesthetic dimensions to the service (e.g. music and architecture) had invoked a sense of the sacred. This latter point is important, underscoring that although the typical 'imagined cathedral' (Sadgrove 2006: 82) in popular memory is that of one of medieval origin, this is not a prerequisite for a cathedral to capture the sacred imagination; Birmingham as a civic cathedral generates enough qualities in architecture (e.g. the Burne-Jones windows were often mentioned in qualitative responses) as well as the high quality choir, for participants to generate a sacred aesthetic. The report by Theos and the Grubb Institute (2012) also gathered data on the appeal of cathedral aesthetics, and this research too highlighted that cathedral buildings and cathedral music were an important means through which cathedral attendees connected with the sacred. Indeed, in their local surveys, 88 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they derived a sense of the sacred from the cathedral building, and 86 percent from the cathedral music, buttressing the idea that cathedrals are important spaces for aesthetic experience and

³³ The total number of valid cases for this question was 109.

³⁴ The total number of valid responses to both these questions was 105.

³⁵ The total number of valid responses to these questions were 109 and 108 respectively.

³⁶ The total number of valid responses to these questions were 109 and 108 respectively.

meaning-making. Carol services consolidate and ratify this aesthetic connection, especially in relation to high-quality architecture and music.

The majority of those who had completed the questionnaire also responded to an open-ended question at the end, asking participants to elaborate on their experience of the carol service they attended. Most participants obliged, amassing a wealth of qualitative detail.

A high number of participants made reference to the music, for example, a 74 year old woman attending the Nine Lessons service said that the 'event is always a delight, beautiful music - perfectly performed. A pleasure to visit this cathedral building'.

The "event is always a delight, beautiful music - perfectly performed. A pleasure to visit this cathedral building".

Participants were not just referencing the high quality of music, but were also linking this to an emotive experience. For example, a 62 year old woman attending the Civic service said:

The choir I thought was most uplifting. I always feel that music uplifts the soul. Spoken can be dull, but singing/melody is invigorating.

Therefore, the musical element of the services enabled individuals to discuss their aesthetic, and even spiritual, connection with the service. Not all couched their experience in terms of religion, but a 69 year old male attending the Nine Lessons service was explicit when he said:

This [carol service] was outstanding in its quality, and in the range and appropriateness of the choice of music. It was a deeply moving, 'rooting' and inspiring act of worship.

Therefore an explicit connection was being made between the music as a worshipping experience; music was more broadly referenced as the vehicle through which a religious/spiritual or at least an awe-inspiring moment had taken place (Inge 2006). For some, this was a non-religious endeavour – the music was understood as profoundly moving, but was not classified in religious terms. For example, a 69 year old man attending the Civic service said:

I did find the experience enjoyable and uplifting as always but from an aesthetic point of view rather than religious.

A minority were more negative about whether the musicality had enabled a religious or spiritual connection to be made. For example, a 50 year old woman attending the Nine Lessons service said that it was 'More like a concert than a service', and, although appreciative of the choir, others attending this service, such as a 47 year old woman, 'Would have liked more opportunity to sing', emphasising the importance some gave to participative ritual.

Meanwhile others referenced the broader aesthetic of the carol service, such as the 'beautiful decorations' (66 year old man attending the Family service), being 'in a lovely building' (21 year old woman attending Nine Lessons) and 'the beauty of the setting' (43 year old woman attending the Civic service). This highlights that broader aesthetic appeal are not to be solely associated with the medieval cathedrals such as Salisbury and Durham, but aesthetic appeal is also amply generated in the 'parish-church' cathedral.

Conclusions

This report has outlined pertinent data relating to three carol services that took place in Birmingham Cathedral in December 2012. In Part I, a wealth of data was amassed on the types of individuals who attended Birmingham Cathedral carol services, and whether type of service attended (e.g. a Family, Civic or Nine Lessons carol service) made a difference in demographic makeup. Generally speaking, and utilising the sample generated here, it is an older demographic (i.e. those aged 56 and over) who were more likely to attend a carol service, with those aged between 18 and 25 very unlikely to participate. This corresponds with lower numbers of churchgoing and Christian identification among a younger population more generally (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010), but it is significant to note that even key worshipping events such as Christmas, are not enough to encourage many young people to attend. In terms of geographical reach, all carol services were rooted in relation to the local population, being significant occasions in bringing together local communities (particularly fostered through services such as the Civic carol service). Meanwhile, despite Birmingham Cathedral's location in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse city, participation in the carol services by those from ethnic minority groups was low, especially for the Civic service (which one might expect would generate greater diversity). On the whole, there was gender parity at the services (apart from the Family service), indicating that cathedrals appeal equally to men and women, and are distinct from parish churches which are more likely to attract women attendees (Lankshear 2014). Occupationally, the services were dominated by those either currently in professional, managerial and technical roles, or those retired from such roles. Carol services are therefore more appealing to a middle class demographic. In terms of religion, unsurprisingly, carol services are most likely to appeal to Christians. It is not the case that those of other religious traditions would use the carol service as an opportunity for interfaith connectivity; those of other religious traditions are highly unlikely to participate at all. On the other hand, those who say they are not religious at all make up a small but compelling proportion of all attendees. Carol services appeal almost equally to those who attend churches at least every month and those who either attend more sporadically throughout the year or just for main festivals and events. More research is needed regarding the extent to which the demographic makeup of cathedral carol services alters, depending on cathedral, and depending on the type of carol service (e.g. Family, Nine Lessons) attended.

Part II highlighted the overwhelmingly positive view participants had of cathedrals and the role they play in wider society. Individuals were highly appreciative of the community role that cathedrals

played, and saw them as a significant resource within cities. Attending a carol service was not a one-off engagement with cathedrals for this demographic; rather, they were sustained visitors to cathedral spaces with many not only citing repeat visits to Birmingham Cathedral over the past year, but also reporting attendance at other cathedral sites. More research is needed regarding the complex relationship individuals have with cathedrals, particularly teasing out the contours of the 'pilgrim-tourist' (Platten 2006) and whether the *type* of cathedral event makes a difference. For example, do individuals conceive of cathedral events in 'sacred' and 'secular' terms? Is an art exhibition situated in the cathedral space seen as less sacred than, say, a carol service? How are individuals who do not see themselves as religious at all engaging with cathedral spaces, particularly events which are demonstrably centred upon a worshipping experience?

Part III mapped perceptions of Christmas by the carol service attendees. Many highlighted concern with the commercialisation of Christmas, and indicated that Christmas should include a religious focus. There was also strong agreement that Christmas should be a time for family and friends. More research is needed regarding the extent to which Christian and non-Christian individuals experience and conceptualise Christmas. What prompts individuals who have little engagement with the church for the rest of the year to attend a carol service? Is this an attempt to challenge the over-commercialisation they perceive? Or is the relationship between commercialisation and religion more complex than this?

Part IV outlined the motivations individuals had for coming to a cathedral carol service. Interestingly, a significant number had attended alone, which somewhat refutes evidence collected elsewhere in the questionnaire which emphasised individuals' strong commitment to instituting Christmas as a time for family and friends. More research is needed to see whether solo attendance at carol services is widespread, and to explore the reasons individuals have for attending alone. Is this an opportunity to cultivate a spiritual experience on one's own terms? Indeed, religious reasons were most prominent in relation to reasons for attendance, followed by connection to others (this mapped not only individuals' personal group of family and friends, but also broader connectivity to the Christian community), followed thirdly by aesthetic experiences.

Despite aesthetic experiences coming last overall on reasons for attendance, they figured highly in individuals' appraisal of the carol services attended, as Part V demonstrated. Indeed, in the main, individuals thought that the carol service had established a connection with the sacred, aided through the cathedral aesthetics (in particular, music and architecture). More research is needed to

pin down the exact processes at work here, and whether there are differences in how cathedral spaces are experienced between those who identify as Christian and those who do not.

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Appendix

Carol Service Questionnaire



QUESTIONNAIRE

CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICES

Many thanks in advance for being willing to complete this questionnaire. If there are any questions that you are not comfortable with, please leave them blank. It would be very helpful if questionnaires could be returned by 20th January 2013, in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed (there is no need to add postage). In order for us to use your questionnaire, please also sign and enclose the Consent Form.

Thank you for your time



1. How old are you? (please state): _____

2. Gender (please state): _____

3. Ethnicity:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White British | <input type="checkbox"/> Arabic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White Irish | <input type="checkbox"/> Black Caribbean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other White | <input type="checkbox"/> Black African |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Black |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

4. Please state your occupation, or status if not employed (e.g. retired builder; undergraduate student, full-time mum):

5. Please outline your relationship status:

- | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Married | <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed | <input type="checkbox"/> Single |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil partnership | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced/separated | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Partnered | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

6. Do you have children? Yes No

If yes, do you have any children under the age of 12?

- Yes No

7. Do you live in Birmingham and the surrounding area?

- Yes No- please state where you are from: _____

8. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a particular religion? (if yes, please state which religion, including denomination (if any). If not, please state 'No religion'):

9. Are you a member of this cathedral congregation?

Yes No

If not, are you a member of another congregation elsewhere?

Yes No

10. Please give an estimate of how many times you have visited this cathedral in the last year. ____ times

11. Have you visited any other cathedrals in the last year?

Yes No

12. Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This cathedral is largely irrelevant in					
This cathedral is important to local					
Cathedrals are an essential resource					
Cathedrals are irrelevant in modern life					

13. Who have you come to this service with? (please state their relationship to you, e.g. partner/children/mother/friend): _____

14. Have you attended, or will you attend, any other religious services over this Christmas period?

Yes No

If the answer is 'yes', what other services will you attend and where will these take place? (please state): _____

15. Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Christmas has become too commercialised					
Christmas is about the giving and receiving of presents					
Christmas is a time for family and friends					
Having a religious focus to Christmas is very important to me					

**16. Please indicate your involvement with the Christian church
(please tick one option):**

- I only attend at special events (weddings, Christenings, special services – e.g. Easter and Christmas)
- I attend special events and some services sporadically throughout the year
- I attend at least every month
- I attend at least every week
- Other

17. Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I had a religious upbringing					
My religion is the same as that of my parents					
God is important to me in my everyday life					
I believe there is an afterlife/ life after death					
The Bible is important to me in my everyday life					
Prayer is important to me in my everyday life					
I am involved with my religious community					

18. Please tick any factors which you think have influenced your attendance today (feel free to tick more than one option):

- Worshipping God
- Celebrating the birth of Jesus
- Being part of the Christian community
- Having a Christian experience this Christmas
- Experiencing the service with my family and friends
- Thinking of people that I'm separated from at Christmas
- A family member/friend was involved in the service
- An aesthetic experience (e.g. being in a beautiful building)
- I'm not sure

Please indicate any additional factors which motivated your attendance today, and please feel free to give more detail to the choices ticked above:

19. Please state how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
During today's service, I felt a sense of community					
I couldn't connect with the service					
I found elements of today's service alienating					
During the service, I felt a connection to the sacred					
The music used in today's service gave me a sense of the sacred					
During the service, my surroundings (e.g. the building and architecture) gave me a sense of the sacred					
Today's service helped me to connect with God					

We would be very interested to know more about these answers; please see question 20.

20. Please tell us about your experience today, such as whether you found the event enjoyable or not, and why.

Would you be willing to be contacted for an interview to explore these issues in any greater detail? If so, please leave your name and contact details.

If anything raised in the course of completing this questionnaire has caused distress, anxiety, or provoked questions, and you would like to speak to somebody, please contact cathedral staff, who will be more than happy to offer support. They can be contacted on: enquiries@birminghamcathedral.com / 0121 2621840.

If you have any queries or comments regarding the actual study itself, or would like more detail about what a research interview would entail, please contact lead researcher Dr Sarah-Jane Page: s.page1@aston.ac.uk / 0121 2043072.

Many thanks for your time. It is very much appreciated.