



M A T E R I A L I T Y & T E C H N O L O G Y

Paper Abstracts

* Alphabetical by presenter

William Barham

The Beauty of Worship: An Anglican missionary Sisterhood Use of Imagery to Enhance the Experience Of Worship

Amongst church parties that sought to reconnect the Church of England's practices with its Catholic and medieval roots during the mid-nineteenth century, ritualism appealed as an aesthetic expression of the values of the Oxford Movement. The ornamentation of altars with candles, flora and artwork to give an intimation of the divine was just one component of ritualism. Together with ceremony, vestments, music and architecture, these enhancements intended to elevate the experience and attractiveness of Anglo-Catholic worship within its protestant framework. With ritualism initially appealing across the upper and middle classes of English society, just the echelons from where large numbers of aspirants for Anglican sisterhoods came, the adoption of ritualistic practice by many Anglo Catholic communities as a natural expression of their beliefs. With these values in mind, this presentation will reflect on the priority placed by the Grahamstown Sisters on maintaining richly decorated altars and sanctuaries. Furthermore, it will example how, through the gift of one of their own, Sister Margaret C.R., artwork not only added to the beautification and experience of worship in the Community's finely built chapels but also served to impart religious reverence and awe in remote and rugged settings.

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Mary T. Brien, PBVM

Designs and Lifelines: Lacemaking and Empowerment in Nano Nagle's schools

Did Nano Nagle, founder of the Presentation Sisters, introduce lacemaking to Ireland? And if she did so, why? These are questions to be addressed in this short paper. It will be argued from her letters and from secondary sources that lacemaking of some sort was part of the curriculum in five of Nano Nagle's schools in Cork in the mid-eighteenth century. While there is no evidence that Nano herself was expert in crochet



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lace, her years in Ypres and in the courts of Paris must have brought her into contact with some of the best examples in Europe. It has been said that she employed teachers from France to teach lacemaking skills in her schools. A first? But why lacemaking? Perhaps to introduce the poorest of the poor to creative art, but surely to equip them with skills which would enable them to develop a cottage industry and a livelihood for families. Lacemaking was a home-based industry. It was cheap, requiring only thread and bobbins, and the product was saleable. Nano's initial commitment to the education of girls is not unrelated to her dream for the empowerment of women.

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Sara Charles

Making Ink in The Early Medieval Period

This paper will explore the processes of medieval manuscript production in the early medieval period, with a particular focus on iron gall ink. Iron gall ink was the main ink used in the medieval period before the printing press and has a unique ability to bind with parchment to form an indelible record of the past. It was made from natural ingredients and along with the codex format, came to symbolise the early Christian movement. In this paper I will consider the practical realities of sourcing the ingredients and how they would be made in a medieval religious house, before moving on to the natural and metaphysical relationship that manuscript makers had with their materials. It will discuss the differences (if any) between male and female religious scribes and highlight the existing evidence we have for female manuscript production centres in the early medieval period, suggesting that women religious' scribal culture was regarded as equally important.

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Flora Derounian

Filling In the Blanks: How Questionnaires Help Us Understand Women Religious' Response to Vatican II (1965-1975)

This paper will examine questionnaires sent to all members of the Daughters of Charity worldwide in 1967. The sprawling consultation of members happened in response to the Second Vatican Council's call to resource and renew, and specifically to Pope Paul VI's 1966 motu proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. *Ecclesiae Sanctae* stated that each institute of religious life would organise its renewal through extraordinary or ordinary General Assemblies (Pope Paul VI, 1966, pp. Part I, I, 3), held no more than three years after its publication. As well as discussing how and whether to change communities' Constitutions, these Assemblies were designed to take stock of how religious were living. The questionnaires and answers produced by this process give us a precious glimpse into the joys, trials, and mysteries of what it was to be a women religious living in the post-Vatican II period. Typically discussed as a period of secularisation and crisis, this paper will explore how the 1960s were experienced by sisters on an individual level. Questionnaires are wide-ranging, interrogating sisters on subjects from prayer to television consumption! The paper will also explore the blank spaces frequently left in sisters' responses, triangulating archival evidence and historiography to suggest possible answers for these silences

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Becky Flowers

The Preservation of Objects of Catholic Ritual by Female Ex-Religious During the Post-Dissolution Period Through The Analysis Of Wills And Inventories.

This paper will be a first attempt to explore how the presence of religious and ceremonial objects within the wills and inventories of displaced female religious, who remained in England following the dissolution of the 1530s, can provide an insight into religious beliefs, personal identities and experiences long after their owners exit from their religious communities. The paper will draw on a number of wills from religious women of different rank from communities throughout England. By analysing wills, it is possible to gain a wealth of information regarding an individual's personal situation at the time of its composition. For



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many individuals from the early modern period, their wills may be the only record of their lives that has survived. This is particularly true for the female population who left behind limited written documentation about their lived experiences. The wills of early modern women are significantly rarer within the archives than those of their male counterparts, with the wills of female ex-religious being even fewer in number. However, those that do remain provide a rich glimpse into the level of attachment many ex-religious continued to have with items of catholic ritual and their efforts to preserve them long after the dissolution.

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Silvia María Pérez González & Alejandro Ríos Conejero

Objects and power in the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Sijena during the Late Middle Ages

The object of study of the present work is the royal monastery of Santa María de Sijena, founded at the end of the 12th century by Sancha of Castile, Queen of Aragon and wife of Alfonso II, which was attached to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem from the outset. The community was largely made up of the daughters of the most distinguished families, both royalty and the lineages of wealthy Aragonese men. This is why the objects in this monastery took on a special charisma as, among other things, they served to denote the social and economic status of their owners, while at the same time becoming a powerful symbol of their power. The monastery was also a royal pantheon, and it is this function that will also determine another field of analysis. Let us recall that, starting from the premise that objects can be perceived as actors within a common cultural space, some of them stand out as more powerful agents than others, becoming "charismatic objects". From this perspective, we will analyse some of Sijena's material collections, paying attention to the capacity of the objects to act according to the specific values that the society of their time attributed to them. In this way we will be able to understand and differentiate the different forms of action of the objects and their biographies.

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Dr Scholastica Jacob

Creativity From Within the Cloister

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed an expansion in English Catholic material culture. From behind the cloister walls enclosed contemplative women were reaching out to contribute to this through a range of artistic expressions. This paper will examine the lives of four Benedictine nuns who drew on their deep experience of prayer to shape their creativity through a variety of materials. Arts and craft work inspired by their monastic environment, not only deepened the nuns' own relationship with God and each other but also shaped theological and spiritual life in the wider community. Taking the case studies of four women, this paper will explore their expressions of lived faith through modelling in stone and wood, textile design, painting using various mediums and work with the natural environment.

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Rosalind Janssen

Untangling Freda Harmer's Book of Common Prayer

A leather bound 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) was gifted to aspiring medical missionary Freda Harmer on 13 April 1934, the occasion of her twenty-sixth birthday. A dedication page records the gift giver as 'her loving Old Pops'. This presentation uncovers his identity and fatherly relationship with the young recipient. Freda was about to commence her training at Dalton House, the Anglican women's training college of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, before heading to its hospital at Nanning in South China as the only doctor. My methodology is Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT), in which non-human entities function on the same level as human actors in their ability to affect a social system. Probing further pages in this treasured BCP uncovers networks moving alternately between England and China. Then, in 1937, two remnants of sprigged georgette – one pink and the other blue – enter the stage as full-blown inanimate actors. Posted from China to England, these textile fragments disrupt the strong social network that had once existed between Freda and her Old Pops. The end result is that ANT



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has reassembled the developing, changing, and interacting network behind Kopytoff's 'cultural biographies of things'.

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Anne Jusseaume

Does the habit make the nun? Wearing and Seeing Female Religious Clothing in Nineteenth Century France

Tailored in convents by the nuns, blessed and received as the "holy habit" by the novice, the religious dress is a symbol of vocation and community and partakes in the incorporation of the norm and rules which accompany one's taking of the vows. It indicates to the world the religious identity; should the nuns leave religious life, they must return their habit. This paper will analyse both the materiality of the dress, the bodily practices which can be considered as "acts of belief", and it is all seen – or aim to be considered – in the public sphere. We will question how the religious habit can – or may fail to – "make" the nun at a time when nuns are a common and visible figure in XIXth century France, but also crooks and beggars misuse religious garb for fraudulent purposes.

Based on convent textile and manuscripts archives (Carmel, Daughters of Charity) and printed sources, the paper will examine the specifics of religious garment production and maintenance, and the religious and gendered injunctions involved in wearing a religious habit. Through the study of "fake nuns" unveiled in the press, the paper will then examine the influence and the limits of this outfit in the public sphere, shedding light on the crucial importance of learnt religious bodily hexis and the preservation of patrons and dresses in religious communities.

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Sarah Joan Moran

The Materiality of Miracles in Het wonder-baer Leven van Joanna Dedemaecker of 1662

In 1662 the Aalst canon Franciscus van Schonenberg published a biography of his former confessant, the Beguine Joanna Dedemaecker (1600-1631). This represented the first step towards having Dedemaecker canonized, and as proof of her holiness Van Schonenberg detailed how she had used a combination of touch and prayer to miraculously heal dozens of her Beguine sisters. And that touch had remained potent even after death: the material 'relics' of Dedemaecker's clothing and jewelry, and even plants from her grave, continued to cure illness when brought into contact with suffering bodies. Joanna Dedemaecker never became a saint, but her *vita* offers remarkable insights into how Counter-Reformation theology of the miraculous - which inherently involved a disruption of the laws of the material world - intersected with ordinary people's understanding of animate and inanimate, as well as with their ideas around the physical body. This paper focuses on the various objects involved in the transfer of divine essence as described in the text, considering how the material qualities of fingers, teeth, the soft flesh of the throat, cloth, metal, wood, leaves, and flowers were understood by early modern readers and used by Van Schonenberg to enhance the persuasive character of the *vita*.

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Joanne E. Myers

Devotional Authorship and Graphic Design in the Prayer Books of the English Poor Clares in Exile

My proposed paper examines graphic elements of the manuscript prayer books created in the continental convents of the English Poor Clares, particularly by two long-serving scribes, Cecily Cornwallis of Rouen and Mary Mylott of the Aire convent. Both women produced beautiful, possibly bespoke books for their communities. These books had pragmatic functions, for they allowed scarce devotional texts and translations to circulate more widely. Yet while I will sketch some of those pragmatic functions, I will focus on how the books' meaning is not only pragmatic: they exemplify a devotional and spiritual practice as much as they seek to foster it. Both women pasted hand-tinted illustrations into their books, and both



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also included printed texts, often creatively bound into the manuscript book. My paper will explore how these graphic elements and the use of mise-en-page make meaning in the books; the kinds of reading they elicit; and the nature of the spiritual practices to which they offer witness. My work builds on the burgeoning examination of convent writings by women by proposing that these manuscripts help us understand how the emotional lives of sisters were engaged not only spiritually but materially in and through the books they made and read.

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Anselm Nye

Material Culture: What the Archives Reveal

Having undertaken research in the archives since 1993 and having been commissioned to write the history of the current English Dominican Congregation and its antecedents in 2008, published in 2011. However, my research, limited by time constraints and working to a predetermined structure, I made only fleeting references to the material culture intertwined in their history. Through my prolonged and thorough work with the collections I learned just how broad the spectrum was: correspondence with Hardmans over stained glass in the 1850s, watercolours and oil paintings, cartoons by the Sisters and architects' drawings, real fabric samples and patterns for guimps, ecclesiastical embroidery, illuminated liturgical and devotional works. Then, of course, there were those old tea caddies or other containers labelled "items of historical interest" which cause archivists to tremble. This paper will provide a whistlestop tour through this magnificent variety. It will also introduce two key players in the curation of the built and creative heritage of the congregations: the bursar general – a role of enormous importance, though seldom studied in depth, and the archivist. The period since the 1970s when numbers began to fall relentlessly and when properties had to be handed over and buildings emptied created an enormous amount of work which was carried out quietly, efficiently and with little acclaim.

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Ellie Pridgeon

Patronage and Panel Paintings: The Cult of St Osyth in Essex

This paper will examine the cult of St Osyth – the royal saint, virgin martyr, Mercian noblewoman and prioress who died around 700 AD. According to medieval legend, St Osyth became a nun and founded a convent at Chich in Essex. The village later took her name – St Osyth. This paper will discuss the high status 'Green Lady' painting acquired by Colchester Museum a century ago. The panel was discovered at Park Farm on the estate of St Osyth's Priory – the Augustinian Abbey founded in St Osyth c.1120 by the Bishop of London. The fourteenth century panel is linked to two additional paintings from the St Osyth estate, including a high-status image of the Virgin painted on wood. This paper will discuss the identity of the 'Green Lady' figure – possibly a representation of St Osyth herself – and the connection of the painted panels with women religious. It will also examine panel painting function, location and context, and consider whether they were originally located in the abbot of St Osyth's private chapel and created to mark his promotion.

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Professor Nicola Ring

A Novel Approach to Tracing Women Religious Using Scotland's Online Witchcraft Trial Records (1563-1736).

This paper presents findings from a study of Scottish healers/midwives accused of witchcraft indicating a potential connection to Edinburgh's Sciennes convent post-Scotland's 1560 Reformation. Using the online Scottish Survey of Witchcraft database (1563-1736), 142 healers/midwives were identified and their online witchcraft trial records reviewed. Healer/midwife accused witches are portrayed as folk-practitioners but, our analysis of pre-1610 practitioners revealed practices which indicated education. Our novel conclusion is that whoever taught these healers was connected to Scotland's monastic hospitals pre-Reformation. A four-women healing group (Edinburgh 1597), all found guilty of witchcraft, were of particular interest. One woman, Christain Saidler, treated leprosy using mercury. She was recorded as being from Blakhous settlement, near East Lothian's Haddington convent and St. Lawrence leper hospital. In 1532 St. Lawrence



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was annexed to Sciennes convent. From various secondary sources we have found circumstantial evidence suggesting this group had inherited rights to Sciennes land that men with family connections to Sciennes nuns wanted post-Reformation. These intangible links have been found via online sources but, our exploration will continue using primary paper archives. Accusations of witchcraft marginalised these women and their healing/midwifery work, resulted in the execution of three and banishment of one, and appears to have benefitted Protestant men through Sciennes land acquisition.

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Núria Jornet-Benito & Concepción Rodríguez-Parada

A Funerary Performance Ritual and The Choice of a New Abbess: New Possibilities For Research And Public Engagement

The purpose of this paper is to present an experience of historical re-enactment (a video) in the framework of a research project that focuses on aspects of materiality and performativity in monastic space in medieval and early modern times. It was re-creating in the present the ritual which took place in the Sant Pere de les Puel·les monastery of Benedictine nuns in Barcelona, from the time the abbess died until the choice of her successor. The documentary foundation of the research was the information contained in a late manuscript (17th century) which summarises the main scenes that unfolded at this essential time in a monastic community (death of the prelate and choice of the new one) and the archival documentation (14th century) which sheds light on the people, roles and spaces and also gestures, clothing objects and songs. We want to present this product of historical dissemination, framed within the digital humanities, promoted at the university, in collaboration with existing monastic communities, a monastic archive service and a monastic museum. And analyse what it has meant for academic research and public engagement.

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David Ryan

Telling The Stories of Women Religious Burials in South Presentation Convent, Cork

The burial ground in South Presentation Convent, Cork is the final resting place of generations of Presentation Sisters, Ursulines and a number of other women religious. The burial ground is now part of the larger Nano Nagle Place complex. However, aside from Nano Nagle herself and some of the other founding Ursuline and Presentation Sisters, relatively little research had been conducted on the other burials. In collaboration with Nano Nagle Place, I began to research the stories of some of those buried in the convent graveyard. This quickly grew into a larger project that told not only the story of the women religious buried in the graveyard but of the times they lived in and the work they did. Using sources such as the historic Irish census and newspapers, along with records in the archives of the Presentation Sisters, many fascinating stories and some mysteries were uncovered. This paper will highlight a selection of the stories revealed as a result of this research and explore some of the potential means of bringing these stories to the public, such as through technology and guided tours.

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Maria Soler Sala

Life And Death in A Female Monastery. The Tomb of Jerònima De Gort, Prioress of The Hospitaller Convent of Santa Maria d'Alguaire

The female monastery of Santa Maria d'Alguaire is the most important convent of the Hospitaller Order in Catalonia and has been the subject of archaeological excavations since 2016. One of the most significant finds corresponds to the location of a tomb with a tombstone inscribed with the name of the prioress Jerònima de Gort, indicating her date of birth and death (1527-1601), and bearing her family's coat of arms. An interdisciplinary team of archaeologists, anthropologists and restorers participated in the opening of the tomb. Their work made it possible to document the wooden coffin of the tomb, remnants of the prioress's bones, fragments of her mortuary vestment and various rich objects (rosaries, crucifixes, rings). Besides this, the study of the archaeological remains and written texts has allowed us to know that she was a central figure in the history of the convent, and a staunch defender of enclosure



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when customs relaxed. Our work aims to offer a comprehensive interpretation of archaeological remains and objects, based on an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account archaeology, physical anthropology, written documentation and restoration techniques within the framework of a true dialogue between sources.

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Margaret Susan Thompson

"To Gain the Highest Excellence in Their Work": Ministry, Innovation, and Professionalization

This paper draws upon the ninth and final chapter of my forthcoming book, *Prophets of Grace; American Nuns in the Long Nineteenth Century*. My intent, in keeping with the conference theme, is to interrogate the ways that active sisters evolved as professionals during the long nineteenth century, innovating in the progress and advancement of educational, health-related, and social-service ministries. The "technologies" here are both physical and conceptual, and suggest ways in which women religious responded to and overcame many of the structural and institutional challenges they faced, both within the church and within the arenas in which they developed and utilized their professional expertise. As is always the case with my work, it draws upon my research into and the experiences of a range of religious congregations, from the highly specialized to those which engaged in a variety of fields, and from those which broke new ground to those which "modernized" work they had pursued for generations. While my approach is analytical, it will be enlivened through example and story.

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