

Information Network on Religious Movements



# Annual Report

## April 2017 – March 2018

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Inform is a registered charity (No. 801729) and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (No. 2346855).

## Introduction

Inform has continued to fulfil its charitable objective of collecting, assessing and disseminating reliable information about minority religions, and, as usual, we were able to help a wide range of enquirers and service users. The enquirers included government departments, the police, chaplains, members and former members of religious, spiritual and other ideological movements, their relatives, students, academics, journalists and documentary makers, as well as a variety of members of the public. Inform staff have continued to update the database of religions and the Inform library with publications.

However, this year has also proved quite different for the work of Inform. Owing to government cutbacks in funding, we have had to prioritise work on specific, funded projects. In this period, we have had three main projects: one with the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM) to create profiles of millennial religious movements for their website; one for the Department for Education creating three guidebooks on the main faiths and on minority religious movements' attitudes to education; and another with Culham St Gabriel's to write profiles of four minority religious movements, as well as an introduction to the study of new religions, for their RE Online website.

We also won an 'in-kind' grant from the Home Office's 'Building a Stronger Britain Together' programme, through which M&C Saatchi are designing a new Inform website and providing staff with PR and media training.

Inform has continued its day-to-day work of responding to enquiries while working on these research projects. However, for the first time we were unable to hold our two annual public seminars through lack of financial resources and staff time. However, a public talk given by Professor Eileen Barker at the London School of Economics, organised by the Sociology Department to celebrate thirty years of the work of Inform, attracted over 400 attendees.

Sadly, we received notification that we would have to leave the LSE as, because of the vast building project the School is undergoing, our office space was required – this was despite the efforts of the Sociology Department to keep Inform on site as a 'Recognised Unit'. After exploring a number of possibilities, we were eventually offered a home in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College, London, with a view to completing the move in May 2018.

## Some Major Events

The Jehovah's Witnesses continued to experience difficulties in Russia where they were banned as a legal entity in April 2017. The Russian Supreme Court ruled that the Jehovah's Witnesses were an 'extremist' religious group, defining this as a group which teaches that its theology is the only way to salvation. The Supreme Court liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities and banned their activities.<sup>1</sup> The Jehovah's Witnesses have reported increasing hostility in Russia, including verbal attacks on school children, physical attacks on adult members, disruption of religious services and arson. By April 2018, there were 25 Witnesses

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/court-opens-way-20171211/>

being held in pre-trial detention and nine under house arrest.<sup>2</sup> An appellate court upheld a ban on the Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, in the Russian language as an 'extremist' publication and ruled that their headquarters near St Petersburg could be seized as the contract to the property which was owned by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (the religion's official name) was invalid. Jehovah's Witnesses are also imprisoned for their position of conscientious objection in Eritrea, Singapore, South Korea and Turkmenistan.

Historical sexual abuse claims against Jehovah's Witnesses continue to appear in the media in the UK, USA, and Australia. Whilst the Jehovah's Witnesses were one case study in the 2015 Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, they have not been included in the UK's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse despite a campaign by critics for their inclusion. *The Guardian* for instance, in March 2018, claimed that over 100 people had contacted them with allegations of abuse.<sup>3</sup> A Charity Commission investigation into the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain's safeguarding policies is ongoing.

A story which preoccupied the media and cult-watching groups in the USA was the arrest of the NXIVM leader, Keith Raniere, and a number of his female followers including the actress Allison Mack and the Seagram heiress Clare Bronfman. NXIVM, founded first as Executive Stress Programs in 1998, is a self-improvement, human-potential movement which has taught techniques for creating a new ethical system and civilisation. In October 2017, *The New York Times* interview with a former member detailed a sub-group within NXIVM called DOS. This was described as a sorority of women (some of whom acted as 'masters' with the newer recruits as 'slaves'), and who engaged in sexual relations with Raniere and were branded in their pubic regions with his initials.<sup>4</sup> The group has been described by the media and police investigators as a 'sex trafficking operation', and Raniere and Mack have been charged with sex trafficking and forced labour.

There were controversies in a number of Buddhist organisations during the period, influenced partly by the wider #MeToo campaign. Over the summer of 2017, a group of former members of Rigpa International published an open letter to its founder and leader, Sogyal Rinpoche, detailing the abuse experienced by monks and nuns at his hands, especially the sexual abuse of women within the movement. Rigpa's 11<sup>th</sup> August statement claimed that Rinpoche would immediately retire from his position of Spiritual Director, that a new Board of Spiritual Advisors would be appointed, that Rigpa would create a code of conduct and grievance process, and that an independent investigation would be conducted into the allegations.<sup>5</sup> The 'Vision Board' became effective in March 2018, the code of conduct, grievance process and independent investigation are due to be published later in 2018. This controversy generated many enquiries to Inform, including several from women wanting to record their stories.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/25/jehovahs-witnesses-accused-of-silencing-victims-of-child-abuse-uk>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/nyregion/nxivm-women-branded-albany.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://rigpa.org.uk/home/about/press/>

In February 2018, a similar controversy surrounded another Tibetan Buddhist organisation, Shambhala International, and its leader, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. A former member published a report of her own and others' experiences of 'sexualised violence' within the movement.<sup>6</sup> Mipham Rinpoche published a letter apologising for his behaviour, but the ramifications of the report look set to continue throughout 2018.

In India, in August 2017, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, leader of the 'social welfare and spiritual organisation' Dera Sacha Sauda, was convicted of the rape of two female members and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The BBC reported that 200,000 of his loyal followers flocked to Chandigarh, where the trial was held, and began protests when the conviction was announced; 2,500 followers were arrested, and between 20 and 40 died in clashes with the police according to various media articles. Furthermore, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh is due to be tried on two counts of murder in 2018.

In the UK media, there were numerous articles raising concerns about unregistered, illegal schools, including those associated with Islamic and Haredi organisations. Among the concerns that Amanda Spielman, HM Chief Inspector of Schools, stressed in the Ofsted Annual Report were segregation of the sexes, lack of education and opportunities given to girls, the neglect of science and sexual education, the use of corporal punishment, unsafe environments – and more.

In July 2017, The Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley, one of the flagship Steiner Schools, received a de-registration order from the Department for Education following concerns raised about child safeguarding and an inadequate performance reported in Ofsted inspections. In 2018, the School was appealing the decision.

Charles Manson, leader of the notorious Manson Family in the 1960s and convicted murderer, died on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2017. This particular event did not itself generate enquiries to Inform, but it did seem to spark a general media interest in the 'cults'. Netflix ran a number of successful series: *Wild Wild Country*, a six-part documentary series about Rajneeshpuram, including original footage and interviews, began in March 2018, resulting in huge critical acclaim; *Waco*, a six-part drama, which began in February 2018 to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the siege, was less well received. Some media outlets ran lists of what they considered to be the best cult-related documentaries, dramas and fiction.

## Inform's Governors

No new governors were appointed in this period; however there were a number of changes to the Board. In September 2017, Dr Marat Shterin took over from Professor Eileen Barker as the Chair of the Board of Governors. Professor Barker remains a member of the Management Committee, the Honorary Director and an Honorary Research Fellow for Inform. Dr George Chrystides was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Board alongside Professor Jim Beckford. Warwick Hawkins resigned from the Board of Governors when he accepted the position of Inform's part-time Office Manager, beginning in December 2017.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.andreamwinn.com/pdfs/Project\\_Sunshine\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.andreamwinn.com/pdfs/Project_Sunshine_Final_Report.pdf)

The Board met twice in this period, once under the Chairmanship of Professor Eileen Barker and once under the Chairmanship of Dr Marat Shterin. Inform's Treasurer, the Reverend Andrew Maguire, presented Inform's annual accounts, which had been audited by Knox Cropper, at the Annual General Meeting in September 2017 and, following approval by the Governors, these were submitted to the Charity Commission and to Companies House.

The Management Committee met in person or by Skype on four occasions under the chairmanship of Professor Beckford; however, most of its work was conducted on a weekly or, often, daily basis by email, which enabled quick responses to issues arising over the practical running of Inform.

## Staff

In March 2017, three new Research Officers were appointed. Dr Susannah Crockford, appointed as the only full-time member of staff, worked with Inform from April to December 2017. She focused on writing profiles for the CenSAMM and the Culham St Gabriel's projects, as well as responding to enquiries and performing administrative and accounting tasks. In January 2018, she took up a post-doctoral position at Ghent University, Belgium. In December 2017, Warwick Hawkins was appointed as the part-time Office Manager in order to take over administrative and accounting duties.

Dr Shanon Shah worked as a part-time Researcher from May 2017, focusing on the Department for Education project, but also writing profiles for the CenSAMM and Culham St Gabriel's projects. Dr Catherine Loy worked part-time for Inform from June 2017 to March 2018, focusing on the Department for Education project and liaising with M&C Saatchi with regards to the new website.

Sarah Harvey, appointed as Senior Research Officer in April 2017, has overseen the work of the projects, alongside Professor Eileen Barker. From January 2018, she increased her days at Inform from two to three and is responsible for contributing to and managing projects, responding to enquiries and ensuring the database of information is as up-to-date as possible.

Silke Steidinger continues in her post as a part-time Assistant Research Officer, and Dr Suzanne Newcombe, whilst working half-time as a lecturer at the Open University, continues, for the other half of her time, to work out of the Inform office as a Research Fellow on her European Research Council funded project, AYURYOG. She is also invaluable in helping staff with projects and enquiries whenever she has time.

## Student Placements

Inform has had four student placements in this period.

- Emily Nicolle, a Masters student at King's College London, worked one day a week between June 2016 and December 2017.
- Josie Richardson, another Masters student at King's College London, began working one day a week in June 2017.

- Aksa Saghir, who had just completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Birmingham, completed a two week placement in July 2017.
- Aled Thomas, a PhD student at the Open University writing his thesis on Scientology with a special focus on the Freezone, had a four-week placement in June and July 2017. He updated some of our Scientology files and enjoyed numerous trips to our basement archives to look at our collection of Scientology materials.

## Enquiries

The highest number of enquiries to Inform between April 2017 and March 2018 concerned Buddhist movements, most notably Rigpa, the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) and Triratna (formerly called Friends of the Western Buddhist Order - FWBO). The majority of contacts concerning these groups came from former members. The high number of enquiries about Rigpa was the result of the allegations of abuse outlined in the introduction to this report. Inform received numerous enquiries throughout this particular episode from all sides, including former members, current members, the media and government bodies.

One group, about which we received five enquiries, consists of followers of Sai Maa, who describes herself as ‘a world-renowned spiritual master, healer, and humanitarian’. With a unique fusion of Eastern spiritual wisdom, Western therapeutic knowledge, and energetic mastery, Sai Maa offers teachings to uplift and empower others to master their lives as she has her own. The five enquiries, received throughout the year, were almost identical and we suspect they might have come from the same individual. They outlined the individual’s opinion that Sai Maa was running a ‘cult’, with its associated allegations of abuse. Inform conducted some research into the movement, adding it to the database, and has since received a media enquiry about Sai Maa.

Inform was not able to prepare as many long, unpaid reports during this period as it had in previous years. However, shorter reports were written for government bodies on an evangelical Christian group and Haredi schools.

Inform staff gave a number of media interviews. For example, Sarah was quoted in an *Evening Standard* article about Scientology (July 2017); Susannah gave a filmed interview to CNN India about Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, leader of Dera Sacha Sauda, who was imprisoned in August 2017 for rape, which led to protests by his followers in some areas of India; Suzanne gave a BBC Radio 4 interview about Archangel Michael (January 2018); Sarah and Suzanne were quoted in a *Guardian* article about the recent controversies in Rigpa and other Buddhist movements (February 2018). Eileen gave several interviews both in the UK and overseas and was asked to act as an expert witness on a number of occasions.

## Some Statistics

Between April 2017 and March 2018, 169 enquiries were received about 37 different groups. These do not include either enquiries about groups we classified as ‘unknown’ (five of which have since been, or are in the process of being, researched, classified and filed), or any of the 76 enquiries concerning 19 different general themes.

It should be noted that the number of enquiries received about a particular group is merely a statistic relating to which groups are generating the most enquiries; it does not indicate either negative or positive evaluations.

The groups most enquired about between April 2017 and March 2018:

Rigpa	20
New Kadampa Tradition	8
Triratna (formerly FWBO)	8
Sai Maa	5
Church of Scientology	4
Universal Medicine	4
Jehovah's Witnesses	3
Mohan Singh	3
School of Economic Science	3
Unification Church	3

**Enquirers**

Inform responded to a wide range of enquirers, with former members now making the highest number of enquiries, followed by relatives and friends. This is a change from the previous year (2017-16) in which academics and media were responsible for the highest number of enquiries, and the year 2015-16 in which it was government bodies.

The greatest number of enquiries between April 2017 and March 2018 were from:

Former members	42
Relatives and friends	18
Media	17
Academics/writers	17
Students	16
Government bodies	10
Chaplains and church network	9
Current members	7
Lawyers/ legal organisations	7
General public	6
Cult watching groups	4

Enquiries were also received from educational institutions (3), interfaith organisations (2), organisations categorised as 'other' (2) and one each from a counsellor, a medical practitioner, a prospective member, and a teacher. As always, we received some enquiries from anonymous sources unwilling to identify themselves (5).

Thirty-two international enquiries were received, an increase from the previous year's 19 international enquiries. The 32 enquiries were received from the USA (12), Germany (5), France (4), Canada (3), Denmark (2) and one each from Australia, Austria, China, Finland, Spain and Sweden.

## Speaking and other Engagements

### Inform Governors

#### Eileen Barker:

- 'Religious Imaginations and Global Transitions: New Religious Movements as Resources in a Changing World', Ginkgo and LSE Faith Centre conference on 'Religious Imaginations', 13-15 May 2017.
- 'New Religious Movements in Contemporary Societies', After 8s (Hampstead Garden Suburb), May 2017.
- 'The Unification Church: A Kaleidoscopic History'. FVG conference: 'The Life and Legacy of Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Movements in Scholarly Perspective. Faculty of Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism Antwerp, 29-30 May 2017.
- 'What Do They Do About It? Reactions by Minority Religions to Internal Abuses', ICSA Annual International Conference in Bordeaux, France, 28 June - 1 July 2017.
- 'Beholding New Jerusalems: Holy Lands, Holy Cities, Holy Grounds and Holy Hopes', Keynote lecture, CESNUR conference, Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, 2-6 July 2017
- 'From the Margins to the Centre: The Social Mobility of New Religions', British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Annual Conference: 'On the Edge? Centres and Margins in the Sociology of Religion', Leeds, 12 – 14 July 2017.
- 'Post-charismatic Narratives within Unificationism: How followers of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon select and create opposing understandings of his legacy'. British Association for the Study of Religion Annual Conference, Chester, 4 – 6 September 2017.
- 'Some Notes about the Concept of *Xie Jiao*', University of Hong Kong, September 2017.
- Seven lectures on 'Methods of Social Science and Religion in The West', at the People's Public Security University of China, Beijing, September 18 – 1 October 2017.
- 'Religions of Peace', Daesoon Academy of Sciences, South Korea, 12 October 2017.
- 'The State and Religion', Ottawa University, 26 October 2017.
- 'Where Have All the Cults Gone?' LSE Alumnus Society, Washington DC, 2 November 2017.
- 'The FBI and Religion Scholars: Reflecting on the Past 25 Years—What Lessons Might Be Drawn?', Harvard University, Cambridge MA, 17 November 2017.
- Talk for Prison Chaplains, American Academy of Religion, Boston, 12 November 2017

- ‘Soldiers for God? New Religions and New Jerusalems’, University of Graz, Austria, 14 December 2017.
- ‘Is God Really Dead? Why Belief Matters’, LSE Public Lecture, 12 February 2018. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/lse-player?query=eileen+barker>
- ‘Whatever Happened to the Cults?’, U3A, Royal Free Hospital, London, 19 February 2018.
- ‘Religious Freedom and the New Religions’, University of Joensuu, Finland, 24 February 2018.
- ‘The Honeymoon and After: Religion in Central and Eastern Europe after 1990’, American University of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, 19 March 2018.
- Professor Barker also gave lectures about INFORM and its work to LSE alumni in Philadelphia; Boston and Israel.



*Professor Barker giving a public lecture at LSE, 12 February 2018.*



*Professor Conor Gearty talking about Inform at the farewell lecture, held in LSE's Old Theatre, 12 February 2018 (on the right is Professor Nigel Dodds, Head of LSE's Department of Sociology)*

**James Beckford:**

- Professor Beckford gave presentations at academic conferences in Kristiansand, Norway in May 2017; in Lausanne, Switzerland in July 2017; and in Montreal, Canada in August 2017.
- He received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for the Sociology of Religion at its annual meeting in Montreal in August 2017.

**George Chrystides:**

- 'The Welsh Connection – Pastor Joshua McCabe's role in the Unification Church's early history'. CESNUR conference: 'The Life and Legacy of Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Movements in Scholarly Perspective. Faculty of Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism (FVG), Antwerp, 29-30 May 2017.
- 'Is Nothing Sacred? Jehovah's Witnesses and the significance of Bible lands' Conference organized by CESNUR, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem, 2-6 July 2017.
- 'Changing Your Story: Assessing Ex-Member Narratives'. British Association for the Study of Religions; University of Chester, 4-6 September 2017.

- 'Be Not Conformed – A Historical Survey of the Watch Tower Society's Relationships with Society'. University of Eastern Finland & Sigmund Neumann Institute, 22-27 February 2018.
- He also attended the Editorial Board of De Gruyter's Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception, Boston USA, November 2017.

#### **Graham Harvey:**

- 'What might Animism contribute to Ecofeminism?', invited presentation, Institute for Theological Partnerships, University of Winchester, October 2017.

#### **Kim Knott:**

- 'Edges: territoriality, sociality and the sacred', keynote lecture, British Sociological Association sociology of Religion Annual Conference: 'On the Edge? Centres and Margins in the Sociology of Religion', Leeds, 12 – 14 July 2017.
- 'Thinking spatially about Islam in Europe', public lecture, workshop on *Rethinking Islam and Space in Europe*, University of Cambridge, November 2017.
- Kim was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Helsinki in June 2017, she gave a lecture in November: 'On the boundaries of theology and religious studies and beyond', Faculty of Theology Graduate Conference, University of Helsinki.
- With Professor Lorne Dawson (University of Waterloo), she co-organised a workshop on new research on radicalisation and extremism for government stakeholders in Ottawa, Canada, in October 2017 (on behalf of the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats and the Canadian Research Network on Terrorism, Security and Society).

#### **Alan Walker:**

- 'Strange Cults and Secret Societies of Modern London' for London Esoteric (April 2018)
- 'Strange Cults and Secret Societies of Modern London' for the London Fortean Society (July 2018)
- 'Emanuel Swedenborg: Conversations with Angels' at the London Month of the Dead (October 2018)

#### **Inform Staff**

In February 2018, Suzanne, Sarah and Shanon presented a panel on the work of Inform at the Open University Conference, 'Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective: Publics and Performances'. Suzanne's paper was entitled, 'Changing contexts, changing cults – reflections on 30 years of Inform'; Sarah's was 'Perceptions of Paganism: 30 years from the

Inform Archives'; and Shanon's was 'Sex and British Muslims: 30 Years After the Rushdie Affair'.

**Susannah Crockford:**

- Gave two papers at the ESSWE conference in Erfurt, Germany, 1-3 June 2017, the first as an invited panellist on the use of ethnography in the study of western esotericism, and the second on her doctoral research concerning New Age spirituality.
- She also attended SOAS's annual day conference on 'Anthropology in London' in June 2017, where she gave a paper called, 'Aliens among us: Arizonan perspectives on a post-Trump social reality'.

**Shanon Shah:**

- 'Faith and LGBT', 3FF (Three Faiths Forum) Interfaith Summit, London, 16 Nov 2017.
- 'Is LGBT activism Islamophobic?', British Islam Conference, London, 25 February 2018.
- 'Being Gay and Muslim: Navigating Faith, Identity and Everyday Experiences', Houses of Parliament, Westminster, 15 March 2018.

**Suzanne Newcombe:**

- Panellist in Public Philosophy in Contemporary Yoga Symposium at Triyoga (London), 3 May 2017.
- 'Engaging with people who hold conspiratorial beliefs', Workshop on 'Conspiracy theories, disinformation, and security threats: How should governments respond?' organised by Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), University of Lancaster and Research Information and Communications Unit (RICU) within the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, 15 May 2017.
- Panellist in the Vienna International Centre for International Yoga Day, organised by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, 21 June 2017.



*Dr Newcombe contributing to a panel discussion on International Yoga Day, Vienna.*

- 'A Historical Overview on Yoga as a Medical Intervention', at The Nehru Centre in association with The All Party Parliamentary Group - Indian Traditional Sciences, 23 June 2017.
- 'Longevity practices in India during the modern period: public health imperatives and individual aspirations' at Medicine and Yoga in South and Inner Asia: Body Cultivation, Therapeutic Intervention and the Sowa Rigpa Industry, international conference at the University of Vienna, 2 August 2017.



*Dr Newcombe giving a presentation at the August 2017 AYURYOG conference in Vienna.*

- 'Yoga, Ayurveda, Magic and Alchemy', Public Talk at Rudolf Steiner House, Part of the lecture series: 'Beyond Asana: Asceticism, Alchemy, & The Tangled Roots Of Yoga.'

Lecture Series Exploring The History & Philosophy of Yoga run by Advaya Initiative, 17 October 2017.

- ‘Disengagement: Lessons from Cults and Sectarian Groups’ presentation at Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST)/Home Office conference on Desistance, Disengagement and De-radicalisation, Wilton Park, Surrey, 20-22 November 2017.
- BBC Radio 4 interview for iPM on ‘leaving cults’, 9 February 2018 .
- Interview ‘Authenticity and Transformations in Yoga Traditions’ at the online conference: Embodied Philosophy: Yoga Reconsidered, 18 February 2018.
- ‘Changing contexts, changing cults – reflections on 30 years of Inform’ at the *Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective: Publics and Performances*, The Open University, Milton Keynes, 19-21 February 2018.
- Panel Discussion on ‘Practitioner-Academic Identities: Applications and Implications’ with Graham Harvey, Alison Robertson, and Theo Wildcroft (all The Open University) at the *Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective: Publics and Performances*, The Open University, Milton Keynes, 19-21 February 2018.
- Panellist for Triyoga (London) Yoga and #MeToo Symposium, 8 March 2018.
- Guest Lecture – ‘Yoga and Health in Modern India’ for students on SOAS's MA in Traditions of Yoga and Meditation, 19 March 2018.

## Inform’s Visitors

Inform has welcomed many visitors to its office, ranging from academics, writers, researchers for media institutions and think tanks, to members and former members of religious movements, and more. Several of these visits were concerned with the Rigpa investigations; some were academics and students using our resources and expertise to work on their own projects; and others were concerned with networking and funding. Eileen and Sarah met with numerous people from the police and other government bodies in this regard. A former Home Secretary (Charles Clarke) and the Acting Bishop of London (Pete Broadbent) also visited the office, as did a Chinese ‘cult-watching’ legation from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

## Resources

Throughout the year we updated and added to Inform’s resources. By the end of March 2018, our electronic database held information on 5,049 organisations; 46 new groups were added to the database during the period covered by this report, and details of countless others were updated by Inform staff and students during their placement with Inform.

Our library had also increased and, by the end of March 2018, our Endnote bibliographic database had a total of 23,271 entries, 9391 of which are entries of publications located at Inform; 5474 entries refer to publications among those which, owing to lack of space in Inform's accommodation, are located at Professor Barker's house.

## Funded Projects

As noted above, this period differed from earlier years in that the staff focused primarily on three specific projects.

In the period January – December 2017, we were commissioned by the **Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM)** to write 16 profiles of millennial religious movements for their website ([www.censamm.org](http://www.censamm.org)). Each profile had the same sections: summary; history/origins; beliefs; millennial beliefs; practices; controversies; personal reflections; further information. Each profile also included some audio-visual material. Inform staff were free to select the profiles based on personal interests and with a view to providing a diverse range of movements. Inform staff wrote 14 profiles; one was written by Inform's Honorary Research Fellow, Dr Bernard Doherty, with Dr Stephen Knowles; and another by Dr Massimo Introvigne of CESNUR ([www.cesnur.org](http://www.cesnur.org)). The profiles selected were:

- Brahma Kumaris <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/brama-kumaris>
- Branch Davidians <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/the-branch-davidians>
- Christian Zionism <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/christian-zionism>
- Church of Almighty God <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/church-of-almighty-god>
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints>
- Environmental Millenarianism <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/environmental-millenarianism>
- ISIS <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/isis-islamic-apocalypticism>
- Neturei Karta <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/neturei-karta>
- Peoples Temple (Jonestown) <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/peoples-temple>
- Plymouth Brethren Christian Church <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/plymouth-brethren-christian-church-1>
- Rastafari <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/rastafari>
- Sadrist Movement <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/sadrist-movement>
- Standing Rock Sioux <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/standing-rock-sioux>
- Strauss-Howe Generational Theory <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/strauss-howe-generational-theory>
- Survivalists <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/survivalists-and-preppers>
- Technological Millenarianism <https://censamm.org/resources/profiles/technological-millenarianism>

CenSAMM reported that this resources section of their website was gathering the highest number of visits.

From August 2017, we were commissioned by the **Department for Education** to write three information booklets: one focusing on the potential qualifications and credentials of faith leaders; one on inviting external speakers to schools; and one providing introductory profiles of different religious movements.

The smallest project, begun in May 2017, was with **Culham St Gabriel's** and involved writing four profiles for the website RE Online, as well as a short essay considering the importance of the study of NRMs in Religious Education. In consultation with Professor Denise Cush, the four religions chosen were: Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Rastafari and Soka Gakkai. The profiles are due for completion later in 2018.

In addition, Professor Eileen Barker has received funding for a number of smaller projects for which she has been employing Inform researchers. She was awarded a BA/Leverhulme Small Research Grant for a project entitled 'Varieties of Models of Health and Healing in Minority Religions', and the Jack Shand Research Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion for updating research with a view to producing a new edition of *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction*. She was also awarded travel and accommodation funds by the American Academy of Religion for her research into the schismatic movements that have emerged from the Unification Church following the death of its founder, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

## Other Research

Professor Barker had a busy year, which included visiting and/or interviewing people connected with the following religious movements, as either members or former members: The Ahmadiyya Community; Baha'i; Brahma Kumaris; Christian Science; Church of Almighty God (Eastern Lightning); Dialogue Centre (Gülen/Hizmet Movement); Emin; Falun Gong; ISKCON; Jesus Christians; Jehovah's Witnesses; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Plymouth Brethren Christian Church; Rigpa; Russian Orthodox Church; Sanctuary Church; Scientology; Shinto; Sufi movements; The Family International; and The Unification Church.



*Professor Eileen Barker with colleagues, Professor J. Gordon Melton and Edward Irons wearing the appropriate garments for visiting a temple in Korea, October 2017.*



*Professor Eileen Barker interviewing a doctor who practices Traditional Chinese Medicine at a hospital in Beijing.*

She attended the CenSAMM ‘Violence and the Millenarian Movements’ conference at the Panacea Museum, Bedford, in April 2017. In May 2017, she attended a meeting in Brussels of representatives of Inform and CIAOSN,<sup>7</sup> CIC,<sup>8</sup> and Infosecte (Canada)<sup>9</sup> – an annual meeting of members of these four ‘cult watching groups’, who get together to share information and discuss the challenges that they find themselves encountering – an initiative first instigated by Inform nine years ago.

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<sup>7</sup> The Belgian Centre d’Information et d’Avis sur les Organisations Sectaires Nuisibles. [https://justice.belgium.be/fr/service\\_public\\_federal\\_justice/organisation/services\\_et\\_commissions\\_independants/ciaosn](https://justice.belgium.be/fr/service_public_federal_justice/organisation/services_et_commissions_independants/ciaosn)

<sup>8</sup> The Geneva-based Centre Intercantonal d’Information sur les Croyances. <https://www.cic-info.ch/>

<sup>9</sup> The Canadian Info-Secte/Cult. <https://www.infosecte.org/>



*Mike Kropveld (Info-Secte); Eileen Barker (Inform); Brigitte Knobel (CIC); Eric Brasseur (CIAOSN)*

Eileen also attended several talks/seminars on fundraising, data protection and safeguarding issues, as well as looking for alternative accommodation for Inform and its archives.

Susannah attended some of the conferences organised by CenSAMM, held at the Panacea Museum in Bedford. These were the 'Violence and the Millenarian Movements' conference in April 2017 and the 'Climate and Apocalypse' conference in June in 2017. She also visited a Survivalist shop in Roxford, Bedfordshire as part of her research for the CenSAMM profile on Survivalism.



*Interior of the UK Preppers Shop, Bedford. Photograph taken by Susannah Crockford as part of her research for the CenSAMM profile.*

Shanon attended a number of talks and roundtable discussions including 'Reflections on public benefit and impact readiness for faith-based organisations' on 11 May 2017 at Bates, Wells & Braithwaite; 'The Turbulence between the Turkish Government and the Gülen Movement – the African Case' on 22 June 2017 at the Centre for Hizmet Studies; and, in the aftermath of the London Bridge attack, along with other BSBT partners he attended a consultation with the Home Office and M&C Saatchi on 27 June 2017 as part of the 'Building a Stronger Britain Together' programme.

Catherine attended Aston University's Centre for Critical Inquiry into Society and Culture (CCISC) inter-disciplinary symposium on Contemporary Sikhism, on Friday 9th March 2018.

Sarah visited the Jehovah's Witnesses UK headquarters in Mill Hill, London, in order to conduct further research in preparation for the RE Online profile.

In March 2018, Sarah and Warwick attended the conference 'Exploring Belief: The Inaugural Religion and Media Festival' at JW3, the Jewish Community Centre, London.

## Publications by Inform Staff and Governors

### Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements

With Eileen Barker as the series editor, work has continued on the 'Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements' <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Inform-Series-on-Minority-Religions-and-Spiritual-Movements/book-series/AINFORM>. One volume was published in this period: *New Religious Movements and Counselling: Academic, Professional and Personal Perspectives* edited by Sarah Harvey, Silke Steidinger and James Beckford. Three other volumes are due to be published later in 2018 or early 2019: *Minority Religions and Uncertainty* edited by Kim Knott and Matthew Francis; *Radical Changes in Minority Religions* edited by Eileen Barker and Beth Singler; and *Minority Religions in Europe and the Middle East: Mapping and Monitoring* edited by George Chrystides.

### Publications by Inform Governors

#### Eileen Barker:

2017. "Religious Freedom and the 'New Religions'." *Religious Freedom: Its Confirmation and Violation During the 20th and 21st Centuries*. Special Issue of *Religion - Staat - Gesellschaft: Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews* 18(1-2): 109-32.

2017. "New Religions of Peace" in *Peace and the Path of Mutual Beneficence*. Yeosu, S. Korea: Daesoon Academy of Sciences. Pp. 85-99.

2017. "Some Notes towards Conceptualising and Contextualising Xiejiao" *Proceedings of a Conference on The Concept of Xiejiao and the Case of the Church of Almighty God*, Hong Kong University, 15-16 September.

2018. "The Unification Church." *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 9(1): 91-105. Online First: <https://www.pdcnet.org/asrr/onlinefirst>.

2018. "The Unification Church: A Kaleidoscopic Introduction." *Acta Comparanda VI* (Special Issue on The Life and Legacy of Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Movements in Scholarly Perspective). Pp. 19-55.

2018. "Reflections on the Trajectory of My Work." *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 9: 16-23. Online First <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/abstract/journals/religion-and-society/9/1/arrs090102.xml>.

2018. "Unification Church, Moonies" in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions*, edited by H. P. P. Gooren: Springer. P. 5.

2018. "New Religious Movements as Resources in a Changing World" in *Religious Imaginations: How Narratives of Faith are Shaping Today's World*, edited by James Walters. London: Ginko. Pp. 159-76.

### **James Beckford:**

2017. "Preface", in *Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity*, edited by E. Arweck. Abingdon: Routledge. Pp. ix-xi.

2017. "Hope and Creativity. The shifting nexus between religion and development", in *Death, Life and Laughter. Essays on Religion in Honour of Douglas Davies*, edited by M. Guest and M. Middlemiss Lé Mon. Abingdon: Routledge. Pp. 141-60

(with Sarah Harvey) 2018. "Minority Religions and Counselling: an Overview", in *New Religious Movements and Counselling: Academic, Professional and Personal Perspectives*, edited by Sarah Harvey, Silke Steidinger and James A. Beckford. London: Routledge. Pp.1-16.

2018. "Challenges Facing the Sociology of Religion: the past and the future are not what they used to be", in *Foundations and Futures in the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Luke Doggett and Alp Arat. Abingdon: Routledge. Pp. 195-214.

### **George Chryssides:**

2017. "Ethical Scholars and Unethical Committees." *Fieldwork in Religion* 12 (2): 223-238.

2017. Editorial. *Fieldwork in Religion* 12 (2): 143–147. Special Issue: Ethics and Fieldwork.

2017. "The Welsh Connection: Pastor Joshua McCabe's role in the Unification Church's early history." *Acta Comparanda Subsidia* VI: 85-100.

2017. *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. Entries on: Krishna; Labor (Work) IV.E; Land IV.C; Last Supper II.C; Law V.E.; Leader, Leadership IV.E. Vol.15: 474-477; 576-577; 794-795; 839-840; 1015-1016; 1143-1146.

2017. Engaged Research: How far should we go? De Gruyter Conversations, 20 June. Accessible online at <https://blog.degruyter.com/engaged-research-far-go>.

### **Kim Knott:**

(with B. Lee) 2017. *Ideological Transmission II: Peers, Education and Prisons*, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats. P.51.

<https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/peers-education-prisons/>

2018. 'Musing on a Muse: An Image Encounter', *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions*, 19, 2018: 18-35. <http://ibasr.com/ojs/index.php/ibasr/issue/view/2>

2018. *Muslims and Islam in the UK: A Research Synthesis*. Centre for Research and Evidence

on Security Threats. P 87. <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/british-muslims-full-report/>.

A series of short CREST guides, on the history of British Muslims, communities, demographics, mosques, sectarian groups and other organisations, families, gender and generations, available from <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/BritishMuslims/>.

### **Inform Staff**

#### **Susannah Crockford:**

2018. "Thank God for the Greatest Country on Earth: white supremacy, vigilantes, and survivalists in the struggle to define the American nation." *Religion, State and Society*, 46:3, 224-242.

2018. "How Do You Know When You're in a Cult?: The Continuing Influence of Peoples Temple and Jonestown in Contemporary Minority Religions and Popular Culture." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 22:2, 93-114.

#### **Sarah Harvey:**

(with James Beckford) 2018. "Minority Religions and Counselling: an Overview", in *New Religious Movements and Counselling: Academic, Professional and Personal Perspectives* edited by Sarah Harvey, Silke Steidinger and James A. Beckford. London: Routledge. Pp.1-16.

#### **Suzanne Newcombe:**

(with Dagmar Wutastyk and Christèle Barois, Eds.) 2017. *History of Science in South Asia* 5(2) Special Issue on "Rejuvenation, Longevity, and Immortality Practices in South and Inner Asia".

2017. "Yogis, Ayurveda and Kayakalpa— The Rejuvenation of Pandit Malaviya", *History of Science in South Asia* 5(2): 85–120. DOI: 10.18732/hssa.v5i2.29

2017. "The Yoga Revival in Contemporary India" *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia* (Online). DOI: [10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.253](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.253)

2017 "Disengagement: Lessons from Cults and Sectarian Groups", *CREST Security Review* 7 (Winter 2018): 16-17. <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/csr/#CSR7>

20 November 2017 "From Ayurveda to Biomedicine: Understanding the human body", *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/from-ayurveda-to-biomedicine-understanding-the-human-body-85631>

**Shanon Shah:**

2018. *The Making of a Gay Muslim: Religion, Sexuality and Identity in Malaysia and Britain*. Palgrave Studies in Lived Religion and Societal Challenges. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

2018. "Muslim Veggies", in *Critical Muslim 26: Gastronomy*, edited by Ziauddin Sardar and Samia Rahman, London: Hurst. Pp. 86-102.

2017. "Name Your Innovation" in *Critical Muslim 24: Populism*, edited by Ziauddin Sardar, London: Hurst. Pp. 217–25.

2017. "Introduction: Probing the Paradox" in *Critical Muslim 23: Bangladesh*, edited by Ziauddin Sardar and Shanon Shah, London: Hurst. Pp. 3–21.

**Silke Steidinger:**

2018. "Enlightened or Insane? Insights and dilemmas of wearing a psychotherapist's hat and a sociological hat in the field of new religious movements", in *New Religious Movements and Counselling: Academic, Professional and Personal Perspectives*, edited by Sarah Harvey, Silke Steidinger and James A. Beckford. London: Routledge. Pp. pp. 32-49.

## The Future

Inform looks forward to settling into its new home, still in the University of London, but now at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London. Although we are sorry to be leaving LSE after 30 years, King's is a much more appropriate College for Inform as it has a large and thriving interest in religion and related public policy issues. We shall be exploring further funding opportunities with the King's fundraising team. It is planned to hold a public seminar before the end of 2018.

We also look forward to the launch of the new Saatchi-designed Inform website in Autumn 2018. It is hoped that this will give us a better online presence and generate new work.

Despite the realisation that much of our time will now have to be spent on specific, funded projects, Inform remains committed to achieving its charitable objective of helping enquirers through its collection, assessment and dissemination of reliable information about minority religions. We shall continue to gather material to add to our unique collection of resources and we plan to organise events that will contribute to further a greater understanding of minority religions.

## Appendix I

### **Patrons**

The Right Reverend Graham James, Lord Bishop of Norwich (Church of England)  
The Reverend Dr Hugh Osgood, The Moderator of the Free Churches' Group  
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George D. Chryssides, DPhil (from September 2017)  
The Reverend Andrew Maguire, MA, BD  
Marat Shterin, PhD (from September 2017)

### **Staff**

Susannah Crockford, PhD (Research Officer March 2017 - December 2017)  
Sarah Harvey, MSc (Senior Research Officer)  
Warwick Hawkins, MBE (Office Manager from December 2017)  
Catherine Loy, PhD (Research Officer June 2017-March 2018)  
Suzanne Newcombe, PhD (Research Fellow)  
Shanon Shah, PhD (Research Officer from May 2017)  
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