

Information Network on Religious Movements



inform

Annual Report

April 2021 – March 2022

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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. As usual, we were able to help a wide range of enquirers and service users, largely through email, with follow-up phone calls as appropriate. Enquirers included government departments; the media; students and academics; members and former members of religious, spiritual and other ideological movements, and their relatives; and members of the public. Staff have continued to update the Inform database of religions.

Much of the work of Inform during the year has focused on specifically commissioned research projects. A large amount of time has gone into the Culham St Gabriel's commissioned project on exploring attitudes to the Religion and Worldviews proposal with external stakeholders including students, teachers, parents, community groups, SACRES, school heads, university researchers and policy professionals. Inform sees the provision of high-quality education on religion in UK schools as part of its work to promote the teaching of accurate information about all religious groups in order to prevent harm stemming from misinformation. We have enjoyed collaborating with the Faith and Belief Forum and the Open University's Religious Studies Department on this project.

Experiences of harm in religious contexts continued to be a focus of research interest for Inform staff through this period. Dr Sarah Harvey and Dr Suzanne Newcombe participated in the Religion and Spiritual Abuse conference at the University of Chester in September, continued to collaborate with the Religion and Sexual Abuse Project in the USA; and we continued to attend regular meetings of the National Working Group on abuse linked to accusations of witchcraft and spirit possession (NWG ALWSP) as well as special working groups organised by UK police departments. In March 2022, Dr Harvey began working as a Research Associate on the Arts and Humanities Council funded project, Abuse in Religious Settings, led by Professor Gordon Lynch at the University of Kent.

Among other activities during this period, we have completed work for different government departments, written blog posts, articles and fact sheets. Inform has also continued to develop its partnership with the Theology and Religious Studies department at King's College London, collaborating on academic research, outreach, training programmes and seminars as well as continuing to offer work placements for KCL students. Our creative and engaged interns completed several fact sheets and leaflets for Inform and the Religion Media Centre during this period.

Inform continued to hold its seminars online during this year, partially due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation but also because there was significant support and an international audience for these events. We held two online seminars and two online book launches during this period.

Some Significant Developments within Religious Movements

In this period, the effects of Covid-19 have continued to impact religious movements. Although most Covid-19 measures have subsided in the past year, the digitalisation of many religious movements remains widespread. Online platforms, such as Zoom, have continued to be used for virtual worship meetings and social media engagements; one example includes the 'Zoom Faith' trend among some Christian Churches. The online migration of many religious movements highlights the adaptation and progression of contemporary religion in a mostly post-pandemic world. Academic research projects include the 'British Ritual Innovation under Covid-19' (BRIC-UK) project at Manchester Metropolitan University (final report in September 2021); Benjamin Zeller's focus on the connection between new religious movements and their responses to Covid-19 (Lake Forest College, Illinois); and Giulia Isetti's research into digital religious practice during the Covid-19 outbreak (EURAC, Italy).

Furthermore, government awareness and engagement in this area has continued. In June 2021, the UK Parliament published a research briefing on the 'Effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on religious and ethnic minority communities throughout the world', concluding that the Covid-19 restrictions had a detrimental impact on religious minorities worldwide.

In addition to the influx of digital religious movements, the growth of online platforms has also increased the media coverage of new religions. For example, since 2021, Netflix has published successful content on a variety of new religions: *A Sinister Sect – Colonia Dignidad*, a six-part series that includes original footage and images from the German Christian movement in Chile founded by Paul Schäfer; *Searching for Sheela*, a one hour follow up documentary to *Wild West Country* that explores the life of the spokesperson for Rajneeshpuram, Ma Anand Sheela; and *Our Father*, a single episode documentary on the scandal of a fertility doctor named Donald Cline. who is part of the widespread Quiverfull movement within the United States.

In this period, certain new religious movements have continued to remain in the academic and media spotlight. In 2019, the NXIVM leader had been sentenced to 120 years in federal prison in America with charges of child sex trafficking, possession of child pornography, slavery, and corporal punishment. He has now begun the process of appealing against these charges.

The QAnon movement has continued to spread, with new conspiracy theories arising. A prominent example of this includes the adoption of the phrase 'Birds Aren't Real'. a phrase that was originally created by Peter McIndoe as a satirist stand against irrational contemporary conspiracy theories but has since been reformulated by QAnon. Some QAnon followers now actively promote the theory that American birds are secret government drones used to spy on citizens. The debate about whether to label QAnon a 'new religious movement' remains prominent, and over 800 academic research articles on this movement can be found on Google scholar, published since 2022.

The Twelve Tribes, a millennial Christian movement with roots in the 1970s Jesus Movement, was the focus of media stories when a wildfire that destroyed more than 900 homes broke out on or near their compound in Colorado, Arizona.

The role of religion in the potential overturning of the *Roe vs Wade* law in the United States has received vast media coverage during this period. The 1973 *Roe vs Wade* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court ruled for the protection of pregnant women's liberty to choose to have an abortion. A Public Religion Institute Survey found that over 60% of white evangelical Christians supported the overturning of the law. In comparison, spokespeople for the National Council of Jewish Women and Islamic Heart Women and Girls organisations voiced support of the law and the right to legal and safe abortions.

Since February 2022, much attention has focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the schism within the Orthodox Church. The Moscow-based Russian Orthodox Leader, Patriarch Kirill, has been threatened with sanctions by the European Union for providing spiritual support for President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. In contrast, a leading authority in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, has condemned the attack on Ukraine.

From 2020/21, the UK Police Recorded Crime figures published statistics of religiously motivated hate crimes and concluded that over 45% of the hate crimes recorded were Islamophobic, and approximately 21% were antisemitic. The charities Tell MAMA and Community Security Trust are still playing active roles in combatting hate crimes against Muslims and Jews.

Inform's Governors

Professor Kim Knott (Chair)
The Reverend Andrew McGuire (Treasurer)
Dr George Chryssides (Chair of Management Committee)
Professor Eileen Barker
Professor Graham Harvey
Mark Hill QC
The Reverend Stephen Hollinghurst
Bishop William Kenney (retired October 2021)
Dr Marat Shterin
The Reverend Alan Walker
Dr Anne-Rhiannon Richards (Observer)

Inform's Staff

Inform is under the Directorship of former Research Fellow Dr Suzanne Newcombe, who is also a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at The Open University. Other member of the permanent team are:

Dr Sarah Harvey, Senior Research Officer, who worked three days a week this year, more when required, and was responsible for the day-to-day work of Inform – contributing to and managing projects, responding to enquiries and ensuring the database of information is as up-to-date as possible;

Silke Steidinger, part-time Research Officer, who this year primarily provided invaluable assistance and support with online seminars, book launches and post-event video production;

Warwick Hawkins, Office Manager, worked with Andrew Maguire on financial management.

Former staff members Dr Shanon Shah and Jane Cooper returned on a contractual basis to work on specific projects;

Ruby Forrester, a student intern, was able to take on a short-term contract for a paid role in contributing to one of Inform's commissioned projects.

Staff now have full access to the Inform office again and have adopted a form of 'blended working', going into the office for meetings. Dr Newcombe and Dr Harvey tend to be in the office once a week, Mr Hawkins once a month for the financial reconciliation.

Student Placements

Ruby Forrester has continued her student placement at Inform which began in September 2020. In September 2021, she began a Master's degree in the Theology and Religious Studies Department, King's College London, and she has been able to come into the office occasionally. Ruby is responsible for Inform's social media profile and does an excellent job of advertising our work through Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. She also helps with project work as and when needed.

In addition, we have been joined by Anna Kira Hippert, a PhD candidate located at the Center for Religious Studies in Bochum, Germany. Anna mostly helps us remotely, but she made a trip to London to visit the Inform offices in September 2021, and will visit again in May 2022. Anna's PhD is on media self-presentation of New Religious Movements via images on websites, focusing on

American ‘cowboy churches’ and the Church of Scientology. Anna has written a fact sheet on New Religious Movements for the Religion Media Centre.

Jo Banks, who had a student placement with us in 2019 when he was a Master’s student at King’s, is now applying for a PhD in the department and has returned to assist us. He has written an Inform leaflet on QAnon, which is to be the focus of his PhD, and is writing another on the Baha’i.

Another Intern, Farzeen Shahzad, is a current Master’s student at King’s and was able to help with one of the baseline reports for the Culham’s project work in the autumn.

KCL students are very enthusiastic about the work of Inform generally, and could be seen as a greater resource to integrate further into Inform’s work. Inform staff have also been speakers at the KCL student-organised online seminar series ‘Religion Outside the University.’

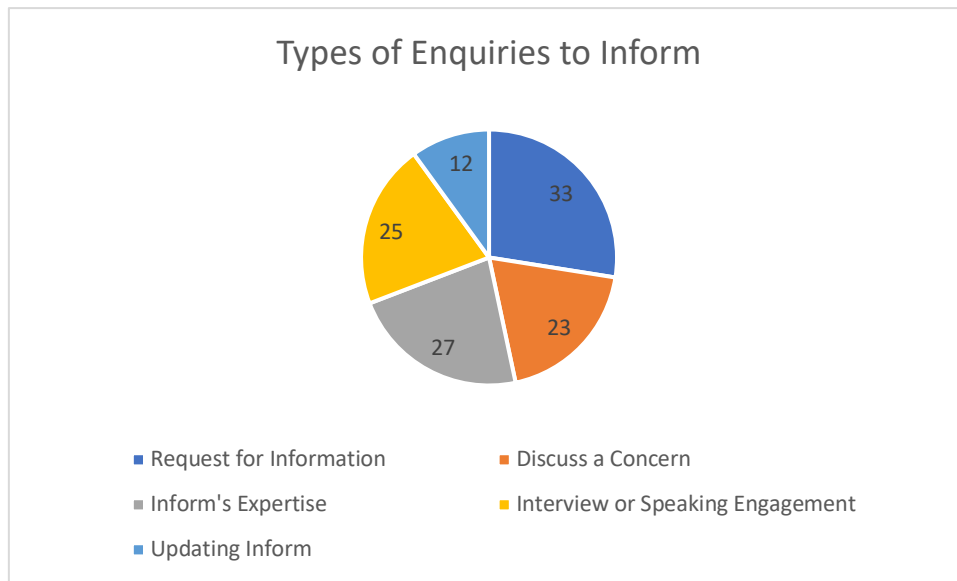
Enquiries

120 enquiries were received in the year April 2021-March 2022 about nine different general themes and 44 different groups. We were asked about a greater number of different movements in this year, as compared to last year. We only received one enquiry about most groups throughout the year, so it is difficult to track patterns, areas of public concerns or media stories which might have generated enquiries. The groups about which we did receive more than one enquiry are as follows:

Name of Group	Number of Enquiries
Unification Church	6
Jehovah’s Witnesses	4
New Kadampa Tradition	4
Kabbalah Centre	3
Lighthouse Chapel International	3
Eckankar	2
ISKCON	2
Sahaja Yoga	2
The Family International	2
Twelve Tribes	2

The enquiries about general themes account for 50 of the 120 enquiries. Of the general themes, the majority (31) were about the work of Inform and/or requests to interview Prof Barker or other Inform staff, or to arrange speaking engagements.

The content of the 120 enquiries covers a number of themes: requests for information (33); discussing a concern (23); asking for Inform’s expertise on a group or situation (27); requests to interview staff or arrange a speaking engagement (25); and updating Inform on a group, situation, book, event etc (12).



Consistent with previous years, the greatest number of enquiries were received from the media. Types of enquirer were as follows:

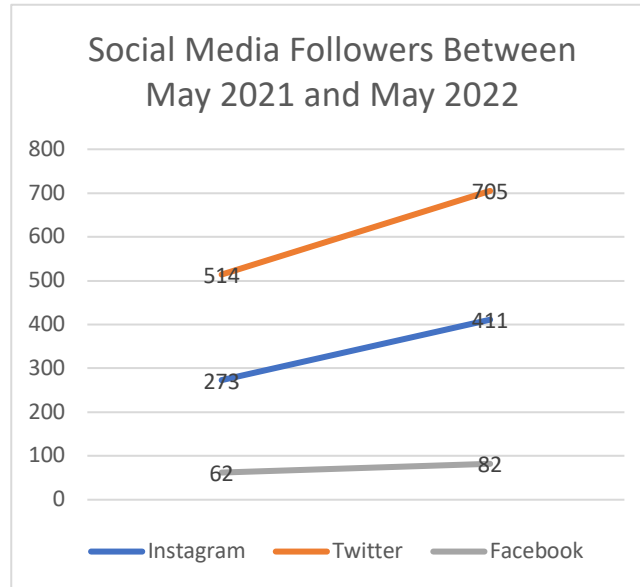
Enquirer	Number of Enquiries
Media	23
Former members	15
Relatives and friends of members	14
Students	11
Current members	9
Academics	7
Chaplains and church networks	7
Government bodies	6
Cult watching groups	6
Anonymous	6
General public	6
Writers	4
Other	3
Teacher / education institutions	2
Law	1

16 international enquiries were received: nine from the USA and one each from Austria, Canada, France, Iran, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland.

As with previous years, over one-third of our enquirers (45) had previously enquired with us; two-thirds (75) were new enquirers. The majority of enquiries (86) were received via email. 31 enquiries went to Professor Barker initially. She either answered these directly or asked Inform to respond.

Social Media

In this period, Inform’s social media presence across Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter grew dramatically. Since May 2021, followers on each platform have increased: Instagram by over 50%, Facebook by 30.6%, and Twitter by 31%. This growth has resulted in a more significant online presence for Inform, and our engagement is continually rising because of this.



The demographic of our social media followers is diverse; however, on average 32% are aged between 25-44 and from the United Kingdom. We actively use social media for advertising leaflets and factsheets, ongoing projects and surveys, and seminars. This is a particularly important way of engaging student-aged audiences.

Inform’s YouTube Channel has 113 subscribers and currently hosts 16 videos produced by Inform since 2020 (<https://www.youtube.com/c/Informreligion>).

There are limited interactions on social media and any enquires have been redirected to the Inform email account. Additionally, social media has allowed us to be more aware of internet trends that involve new religious movements. We hope that our social media platforms will continue to grow over the next year.

Project Work and Partnerships

A major project we have worked on in this period is **Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews (RW) in Schools** – a project funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust and undertaken in partnership with the Open University and the Faith and Belief Forum. The aim of the project is to create resources to generate a better understanding of Religion and Worldviews for stakeholders outside of the classroom – including community groups, parents, school heads and leaders, school governors, and policy makers.

Phase One of the project involved background research, compiling and analysing existing reports on the state of Religious Education, and surveying teachers and students to explore their thoughts on RE and the Religion and Worldviews (R&W) proposal. This research was published as two reports:

- [Baseline Report 1: Setting the Context](#)
- [Baseline Report 2: Public Perception: Student and Teacher Views](#)

Phase Two of the project involved 12 online focus groups with stakeholders, and an additional two surveys, again exploring participants' thoughts on the current state of RE, the R&W proposal and potential ways forward and resources needed. Analysis of the data collected can be read in the following report:

- [Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools: Insights Report](#)

In Phase Three of the project (summer 2022), we will launch an Open University Open Learn Course entitled '[An Education in Religion and Worldviews](#)'. This will provide an introduction to R&W for parents, community group members and anyone else with an interest in the field. The project will conclude in July 2022 with a final evaluation report.

In addition, Inform has continued to work on projects for Government agencies, providing in-depth reports, executive summaries and presentation materials on a range of topics.

Dr Sarah Harvey is a researcher on the Arts and Humanities Council funded project, **Abuse in Religious Settings**, led by Professor Gordon Lynch at the University of Kent. This two-and-a-half-year project aims to deepen knowledge of factors that shape the context and experience of abuse in religious settings and the ways in which communities and organisations respond (see <https://research.kent.ac.uk/airs/>). Sarah will complete a work package on 'abuse in new religious movements' by analysing Inform data. This will be published as a short monograph.

Dr Harvey also won funding to complete the project **Mapping the Sociology of Religion in Britain via the history and development of SOCREL**. This will involve interviews with around 20 past and present members of SOCREL (the British Sociological Association's Sociology of Religion study group), reflecting on their experience in the study group and its relevance to the wider discipline. Sarah is still conducting secondary research at this stage.

Dr Suzanne Newcombe and Dr Harvey are both involved in the King's Together project, **Understanding the Experiences and Brain Processes of Spirit Mediums**. Dr Harvey was a researcher on this project between September 2019 and April 2021 and Dr Newcombe is an advisor. The project, conducted by different KCL departments, seeks to investigate how revelatory experiences, like hearing divine voices, are experienced, and how they are socially understood. Dr Harvey interviewed 40 spirit mediums about their experiences as part of this project. The brain mapping aspects of the project have been delayed due to the Covid pandemic. Dr Newcombe and Dr Harvey still participate in regular online meetings and Sarah is drafting an article from the interview data.

Dr Sarah Harvey is also an advisor on the Canadian project, **Narratives of Identity: Spirituality in the Modern World**, led by Clive Baldwin at St Thomas University. This project explores the spiritual identity of people from different spiritual, religious, and faith groups across Canada (see <https://narrativesofidentity.org/>). Dr Harvey participates in the project online meeting every few months, advising on research design and, more recently, analysing a selection of interview transcripts.

Collaboration continued with the **Religion and Sexual Abuse Project**, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and led by Amanda Lucia at the University of California Riverside, USA with Dr Newcombe presenting at their first conference in March 2022, providing an overview of Inform's engagement with issues relating to sexual abuse over its 30-year history. Inform is looking forward to Amanda Lucia being in London as a Visiting Scholar during the next academic year and collaborating further on this project.

Dr Newcombe turned much of her attention to the pedagogy and methods of teaching about religion in both school and university level, leading on an OU-based scholarship project entitled 'Decolonising Religious Studies and Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)' and acting as a Co-Investigator for an Open University project on 'Census Stories: Identity, religion and demographic change in 21st century Milton Keynes.' She was elected to the Yoga Theory and Practice Steering Committee at the American Academy of Religion and as a Board Member to the SOAS Centre of Yoga Studies; she continues to act as an educational advisor to **CenSAMM**.

Dr Newcombe also joined the Scientific Advisory Board for the **Dekk Institute** (est. 2020), an independent social stability research centre based in Bratislava, Slovak Republic. She continued to be involved with organising and chairing Inform's online events and representing Inform at meetings with external stakeholders. She also led on coordinating Inform's commissioned projects and in seeking future sources of grant funding.

In this period Inform continued its partnership with the **Religion Media Centre** (<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk>), where Dr Newcombe and Dr Harvey are both advisors. We are in regular contact with RMC's Director and assist with its media enquiries whenever we can. Anna Kira Hippert prepared two factsheets in this period, on the Raelians and on NRMs in general.

Inform is also part of the **National Working Group for Abuse Linked to Witchcraft and Spirit Possession (NWG ALWSP)**; Suzanne and Sarah attend their online meetings.

Annual statement on research integrity

Inform has affirmed its commitment to the principles of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity and has registered with the Information Commissioners Office.

We primarily refer to the ethical frameworks provided by the [British Association for the Study of Religion](#) (BASR) as guidance on best practice for research. All staff and interns conducting research on behalf of Inform discuss best practice for research integrity with either the Honorary Director of Inform and/or Inform's Senior Research Officer. Ongoing dialogue on emerging issues regarding research integrity while conducting and writing-up research is actively encouraged.

During the past year, Inform's Director, Senior Research Officer and Research Consultants for specific projects have undertaken a review of best practice on research integrity, with special attention to online research ethics, by revising the research ethics codes of [The Association of Internet Researchers](#) (2019), the [UK government guidelines on social media research \(SMR\)](#) and the methodological and ethical reflections in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 33 (2021).

Processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct in research

These have been updated in the past year and are available to the public within our statement on Data Protection and Research Ethics on our website: https://inform.ac/gpdr_and_ethics/. The first point of contact for concerns about research integrity is Inform's Office Manager, Warwick Hawkins (Warwick.Hawkins@kcl.ac.uk). Concerns about any research misconduct can be raised the Chair of Inform's Management Committee in the first instance, Dr. George Chryssides (GDChryssides@religion21.com).

Allegations of research misconduct

There have been no allegations of research misconduct in the reporting period.

Funding ethics

Since its inception, Inform has been committed to avoid taking any funding from sources which might seek to influence the nature of the information it provides on minority religious movements. Inform will not knowingly accept funding from any religious, spiritual or other group about which it may be asked to give a report.

We accept small non-anonymous donations from individuals as 'friends' who offer a monthly commitment in support of Inform and who receive regular updates and invitations to our online and offline events. We also accept anonymous donations (which *can* be gift-aided). The anonymous donations go through Stewardship.org and the identities of donors are not revealed to Inform.

We have traditionally accepted small amounts in support of our work from mainstream churches and religious organisations, e.g. The Church of England, the Free Churches and the Catholic Archbishop, about whom we do not directly research or provide information.

Most of our work is supported by grants and funded research projects from various UK government departments and academic funding bodies. Details of funding sources and spending year-on-year can be found in our accounts and annual returns which are available on the charity commission website.

Speaking and other Engagements

Inform Governors

Professor Eileen Barker

9/4/21 Respondent for Zoom conference on The Ghent Decision and the Shunning Practice of Jehovah's Witnesses

15/4/21 Paper in ISORECEA Zoom conference: "Fight, Fright or Freeze? Reactions to the law by Minority Religions"

29/4/21 Inform launch of Reactions to the Law

14/6/21 Zoom lecture for Queen Mary, University of London: "Ways in which performance studies might offer productive methodological approaches for the analysis of cultic practices"

01/07/21 Zoom lecture for the International Cultic Studies Association: "Doing Objective Sociology? What Kind of a Joke is this now?"

14/7/21 SISR Zoom Losses and legacies in the sociology of religion

9/8/21 Association for Sociological Research - talk in memory of Jay Demerath III

20/8/21 Keynote lecture, EASR, University of Pisa: "Why Can't we Stay Just as We Are? Challenges Faced by First-generation Religions and Their more or less Successful Solutions"

6/9/21 Zoom lecture for British Association of Sociological Research: "Keeping an Eye on 'The Cults': A Comparative Look at Contemporary Cult-Watching Groups in Europe and their Role Setting the Scene"

10/9/21 MASSOLIT Educational films for schools – five short films on New Religious Movements

28/9/21 LSE Chaplaincy: eulogy in memory of Michael Oliver

12/12/21 Keynote lecture for the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Shanxi University: "Common Values and Cult Governance"

20/1/22 Confreres Zoom talk on Antivaxxers

31/1/22 Talk for Associateship of King's College London: "Choosing to Follow Radical Religions"

3/2/22 Zoom talk on Sangje, God of the Ninth Heaven

17/03/22 Zoom conference Louvain-la-Neuve: "Changes in public interfaith dialogue arrangements over the last 10 years in the UK"

24/3/22 Zoom Respondent on Taiwan: "The Right to Truth on Human Rights Violations, The Tai Ji Men Case in comparative perspective"

Dr George Chryssides

09/04/21 Center for Studies and New Religions and Human Rights Without Frontiers webinar: "The Shunning Practice of Jehovah's Witnesses" (Video published online at <https://youtu.be/sMoMpgLXLIU>)

29/06-01/07/21 CenSMM Annual Conference 2021: "Beyond Armageddon: Jehovah's Witnesses' concept of Paradise Earth" (online)

6-7/09/21 BASR Annual Conference, University of Edinburgh: "Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion" (online)

08/03/22 Post-graduate seminar, University of Bristol: "40 Years of New Religious Movements"

23/03/22 Friends of Lichfield Cathedral: "Christianity as Lived Religion"

29/03/22 Asian Conference on Psychology & the Behavioural Sciences (ACP), Tokyo, Japan (online)

Prof Graham Harvey

June 2021: Keynote lecture: "Before Nature: perspectives from new animist world-making", online conference of the Center for Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies, Florence, Italy

June 2021: "Indigenous performance in/to the imperial centre: The ORIGINS Festival of First Nations", Indigenous Mobilities: Travellers at the Heart of Empire conference, Paris (online)

July 2021: Invited panel contribution: "On alternate views of human-animal communication" Encountering Urban Wildlife | International Festival Milton Keynes (ifmiltonkeynes.org)

Inform Staff

Dr Suzanne Newcombe

26/4/21: Invited respondent to Stuart Ray Sarbacher's [online book launch](#) *Tracing The Path of Yoga*. SOAS Centre of Yoga Studies.

8/6/21: Interviewed with Karen O'Brien-Kop on the *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* by Finnian M.M. Gerety for [Sensing the Sacred](#) podcast

30/6/21: 'Reframing Yoga and Meditation Studies' Workshop at SOAS Centre for Yoga Studies Online summer school

11/8/2021: Interviewed by Hazami Barmada for a [Finding Humanity](#) podcast on 'cults'

9/09/2021: 'Creating a Pranayama Body: BKS Iyengar's *Light on Pranayama*' at Practices of Embodied Reception: Adoptions and Adaptations of South Asian Spiritualities through Performance held online by the University of Bergen, Germany.

3/11/21: 'What does the popularisation of yoga tell us about religion in modern Britain?' Modern Religious History Seminar Series, Institute of Historical Research, School of Advanced Study, University of London. Online.

10/11/21: 'Prophecy, Millenarianism and Gender: Inform Observations' King's College London's department of Theology and Religious Studies seminar series on Religion Outside the University

12/11/21: Chaired online book launch for Karen O'Brien-Kop's *Rethinking Classical Yoga and Buddhism: Meditation, Metaphors and Materiality*. Bloomsbury. 2021.

22/11/21: Contributor to 'Yoga Pedagogy' Session (featuring the *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, sponsored Yoga in Theory and Practice session, American Academy of Religion Annual Conference

14/2/22: Discussant on the 'Spiritual Abuse Roundtable' on [The Religious Studies Project Podcast](#)

5/3/22: 'New Religions, Abuse and Inform: Reflections on over 30 Years of Institutional History' at the *Religion and Sexual Abuse Conference* held at the University of California, Riverside.

Dr Sarah Harvey

22/06/21 AULRE Annual Conference online day event on Researching RE, Changing Times for Religious Education: "Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews: Baseline Reports"

30/06/21 Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements, Annual Conference 2021: "Jehovah's Witnesses: Enquiries to Inform"

03/09/21 (with Suzanne Newcombe) University of Chester Conference on Spiritual Abuse: Coercive Control in Religions: "Empowerment and Abuse: The Complexity of Gender Dynamics in Religious Groups"

09/09/21 BASR Annual Conference: "Worldviews in Practice – from Religious Studies to the Study of Religion/s: Disciplinary Futures for the 21st century"

29th September 2021 'Public Perception, Religion and Worldviews'. In Conversation event with Kathryn Wright, Culham St Gabriel's Trust.

12/11/21 SocRel Chair's Response Day 2021, Teaching Religion: "Religion and Worldviews and university-school curriculum connections"

07/12/21 Talk for Oregon State University Students: "Introduction to Inform, Case Study: Millenarianism, Violence and Gender"

Resources

Throughout the year we updated and added to Inform's resources. By the end of March 2022, our electronic database held information on 5143 organisations. 19 new groups were added to the database during the period covered by this report, less than usual as no students could work in the office and hence on the database, due to the pandemic.

Work remains ongoing to secure the archives a permanent home at King's. Although we have the use of two storerooms in the basement of Kings College's Norfolk Building, these are too small for books, journals etc to be displayed or easily accessed. King's Archives are keen to integrate our archives into their own, providing they are professionally catalogued. We are hence looking for sources of funding to pay the salary of an archivist to catalogue our materials.

Publications by Inform Staff and Governors

With Professor Eileen Barker continuing 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: Singler and Barker (eds) (2021) *Radical Transformations in Minority Religions*. The final volume in this series will be *Health and Healing in Minority Religions* edited by Eileen Barker and Sarah Harvey.

Inform now has a new book series with Bloomsbury, entitled **Religion at the Boundaries**. Suzanne Newcombe and Sarah Harvey are series editors, Aled Thomas and Edward Graham-Hyde are assistant editors and George Chrystides is senior editorial consultant. The first book in this series will be Thomas and Graham-Hyde (eds) *Cult Rhetoric*.

Inform Governors

Professor Eileen Barker

Eileen Barker, 2021 'Othering': A Necessary but Dangerous Practice', *Journal for the Study of Beliefs and Worldviews*. Special edition Limitations of Religious Freedom: On Stereotypes, Prejudice and Social Discrimination, edited by Gerhard Besier pp. 25-48.

Barker, Eileen. 2021. "Fight, flight or freeze? Reactions to the Law by Minority Religions." Pp. 1-22 in *Reactions to the Law by Minority Religions*, edited by James T. Richardson and Eileen Barker. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. Chapter available at: <https://www.routledge.com/Reactions-to-the-Law-by-Minority-Religions/Barker-Richardson/p/book/9780367484323>

Barker, Eileen. 2021. "Why Can't We Stay – Just As We Are? Challenges faced by first-generation religions and their more or less successful solutions." Inaugural lecture EASR Resilient Religion, University of Pisa 30 August 2021 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hEffea_kfc

Barker, Eileen, and Sarah Harvey. 2021. "Children of God / The Family International." in *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, edited by James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart. 15 January: www.cdamm.org/articles/children-of-god.

Barker, Eileen. 2021. "Even New Religious Movements have Legacies" *e-Rhizome* 2(2):65-80. e-Rhizome: Even New Religious Movements Have Legacies (upol.cz)

Barker, Eileen. "Contemporary Creations and Re-Cognitions of Sacred Sites." In *Scared Sites and Sacred Stories across Cultures: Transmission of Oral Tradition, Myth, and Religiosity* edited by David W. Kim, 25-62. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Barker, Eileen. "The Scriptures of Daesoon Jinrihoe: The Canonical Scripture, the Guiding Compass of Daesoon, and Essentials of Daesoon Jinrihoe." *Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia* 1, no. 1 (2021): 155-59.

Singler, Beth, and Eileen Barker, eds. 2022. *Radical Transformations in Minority Religions*. London, New York: Routledge.

Eileen Barker and Richardson, James T., (Eds.). 2021. *Reactions to the Law by Minority Religions*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Barker, Eileen. 2022. Choosing to follow radical religions AKC Lecture, SO6 E03. 7 February. King's College London <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/akc-podcast/id1483047577>
<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/s06-e03-choosing-to-follow-radical-religions/id1483047577?i=1000550302695> <https://keats.kcl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=91554>

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Professor Kim Knott

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Response to public keynote by Anne Koch and Karsten Lehmann: The Transmission of Religion during Adolescence. Preliminary Results from an Empirical Study in Austria, European research workshop: 'The Transmission of Religion', Greifswald, 28 October 2021.

Dr Marat Shterin

International Conference Russia and EU, organised by the BEAR-PONARS network, George Washington University, Washington DC, April 2022: paper on 'Religion and the War in Ukraine: engaging with the postcolonial perspective'.

December 2021: "The Diversity Of Worldviews Among Young Adults - Contemporary (Non)Religiosity And Spirituality Through The Lens Of An International Mixed Method Study", New York: Springer, (edited volume. with P. Nynäs, P and M. Lassander),

Prof Graham Harvey

Harvey, G. (2021): "Academics are kin, too: transformative conversations in the animate world" in Gavin van Horn, Robin Wall Kimmerer and John Hausdoerffer (eds). *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations*. Vol 4: 133-41

Harvey, G. (2022) "Afterword: what staffs and paths do - a new animist contribution to studying pilgrimage", *Religion, State & Society* 50.2: 199-207.
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Blogs:

2021

Religious Studies department blog: "Totem Latamat has retired"
<http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=1330>

OpenLearn COP26 Hub blog: "Indigenous ceremonies and climate change"
<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/nature-environment/creative-climate/indigenous-ceremonies-and-climate-change>

Religious Studies department blog: "Returning to Earth: Climate Change, COP26 and Indigenous Voices" <http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=1282>

Thinking in the World film 6: Elizabeth and Graham, for the Consortium of Environmental Philosophers: <https://thinkingintheworld.com/projects/thinking-in-the-world-films/>

2022

Religious Studies department blog: "Research Excellence in Religious Studies at The Open University" Research Excellence in Religious Studies at The Open University

"Animism for the people" panellist, Ancestral Medicine online movement,
<https://ancestralmedicine.org/vault/animism-for-the-people/>

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<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/religious-studies/what-religion-and-the-growth-religious-toleration>

Dr George Chryssides

Chryssides, George D. (2022). *Jehovah's Witnesses: A New Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury. ISBN 978-1-3501-9089-4.

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Chryssides, George D. (2021). *Handling Things Unseen: Tactile Aspects of the Christian Faith*; in Welch, Christina and Amy R Whitehead, *Religion and Touch*. Sheffield UK: Equinox: 253-275.

Encyclopaedia entries:

Chryssides, George D. (2021). *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.

Entries on: Migration III.D.; Milk and Honey, Land Flowing with III.D.; Minister, Ministry IV.E; Miracles V.D.; Misogyny IV.D.; Molech, Moloch III.D; Monasteries II.F.; Monasticism I.E; Moneylending V.D; Monotheism V.D; Moon, Sun Myung; Morning Star IV.D; Mother, Mothers, Motherhood V.F.; Mourning V.D. Vol.19: 83-84; 134-136; 225-226; 283-285; 409-410; 670-671; 704-705; 725-727; 783-784; 881-883; 978-979; 1045-1046; 1226-1228; 1328-1329.

Professor Mark Hill QC

(2021) with S Ferrari, A Jamal and R Bottoni (eds) *Routledge Handbook on Freedom of Religion or Belief*. Routledge, 2021.

(2021) with R Sandberg, N Doe & C Grout (eds) *Law and Religion in the United Kingdom*. Wolters Kluwer, Third edition.

(2021) with K Thompson (ed) *Religious Confession and Evidential Privilege in the Twenty-first Century*. Sydney: Shepherd Street Press.

Prof Hill's article 'Coronavirus and the Curtailment of Religious Liberty' (2020) was cited with approval by the Supreme Court of Brazil in *Mendes vs Ministers of State* (7 April 2021) and he has been appointed Visiting Professor and Distinguished Fellow, Notre Dame University London Law Program.

Inform Staff and Interns

Dr Suzanne Newcombe

Barois, Christèle, Wujastyk, Dagmar and Suzanne Newcombe (2022): 'Introduction to new vernacular translations of the Usman Report (1923)' *eJournal of Indian Medicine*. Supplement 4, pp. ix-xxxi, Groningen, The Netherlands: Barkhuis & Groningen University Library. (33% contribution to introduction)

Newcombe, Suzanne (2021): 'L'Āyurveda au temps des Yogasūtra' in Ysé Masquelier (ed). *Yoga L'encyclopédie*. Paris: Albin-Michel, pp. 209-211.

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Blogs:

March 2022 Blogpost: '[Decolonising Religious Studies and Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Preliminary Findings](#)' Open University Religious Studies Departmental Blogpost

October 2021 Blogpost: '[Promoting Better Public Understanding of Religion and Worldviews](#)' Open University Religious Studies Departmental Blogpost

Dr Sarah Harvey

(2021) with Eileen Barker. "Children of God / The Family International." in *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, edited by James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart. 15 January. Available at: www.cdamm.org/articles/children-of-god.

(2021) 'Baseline Report 1: Setting the Context' 15 July. Inform website. Available at: <https://inform.ac/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Baseline-Report-1-Setting-the-Context.pdf>

(2021) with assistance from Dr Suzanne Newcombe, Silke Steidinger, Ruby Forrester and Farzeen Shahzad 'Baseline Report 2: Public Perception: Student and Teacher Views' 25 November. Inform website. Available at: <https://inform.ac/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Baseline-Report-2-Public-Perception-Student-and-Teacher-Views1.pdf>

(2021) with Anna Kira Hippert. 'Factsheet: New Religious Movements' *Religion Media Centre*. 22 December. <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/factsheet-new-religious-movements/>

(2022) with Carrie Alderton, Amy Ark, Phil Champain, Suzanne Newcombe and Anna Lockley-Scott. *Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews in Schools: Insights Report*. 4 April. Faith and Belief Forum Website. Available at: <https://faithbeliefforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Insights-Report-Final.pdf>

Ruby Forrester

(2021) 'The Zoom Takeover - How the Internet Has Enabled The Continuation of Inform Seminar Events' *BASR Bulletin* 138 (May), p. 10-11. Available at: <https://basrblog.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/bulletin-138v2.pdf>

Anna Kira Hippert

(2021) 'Riding, Roping, Resurrected. When Christianity meets Horsemanship' *Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft* 15 Dezember [Online], Vol. 16, January 2021: 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/zjr.1964>

(2021) with Sarah Harvey. 'Factsheet: New Religious Movements' *Religion Media Centre*. 22 December. <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/factsheet-new-religious-movements/>

(2022) 'Factsheet: The Raelian Movement'. *Religion Media Centre*. 7 January. <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/factsheet-the-raelian-movement/>

Jo Banks

(2022) 'QAnon' Inform Leaflet. Jan. Available at: <https://inform.ac/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/QAnon-2022.pdf>

Inform Seminars

Inform was able to hold numerous online events in this period, including two book launches and two public seminars. A reflection on the shift to online seminars was written by our intern and Assistant Research Officer Ruby Forrester and published in the *BASR Bulletin* 138 (<https://basrblog.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/bulletin-138v2.pdf>), p. 10-11:

April 2021, Book Launch: 'Reactions to the Law by Minority Religions'

edited by Eileen Barker and James Richardson.

We were joined by a panel of three speakers:

- Milda Ališauskienė, Department of Political Sciences at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania
- Mark Hill QC, The Open University Law School
- Marat Shterin, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London

Their presentations were followed by a chance for contributors to the volume to respond briefly to some of the issues raised, and then a general Q&A. A recording of the event can be seen at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGbcZpwy13A>

About the book:

Much has been written about the law as it affects new and minority religions, but relatively little has been written about how such religions react to the law. This book presents a wide variety of responses by minority religions to the legal environments within which they find themselves.

An international panel of experts offer examples from North America, Europe and Asia demonstrating how religions with relatively little status may resort to violence or passive acceptance of the law; how they may change their beliefs or practices in order to be in compliance with the law; or how they may resort to the law itself in order to change their legal standing, sometimes by forging alliances with those with more power or authority to achieve their goals. The volume concludes by applying theoretical insights from sociological studies of law, religion and social movements to the variety of responses.

June 2021, Seminar: 'Cult' Rhetoric in the 21st Century'

organised in association with Aled Thomas and Edward Graham-Hyde.

The seminar explored the term 'cult', reflecting on the history of its usage, how it is currently used in different contexts, and the implications this has for contemporary society. Presenters contextualised their specific context by reflecting on this term through their own experiences and research.

The seminar was multi-disciplinary with a view to capturing a wider snapshot of the usage of the term, informing the academy with suggestions of how we might move forward.

The speakers were:

- Rod Dubrow-Marshall, PhD, MBPsS - "The recognition of Cults and inter-changeable and overlapping terms in the age of undue influence - a focus on harm and survivors"
- Erin Prophet, Visiting Assistant Professor, University of Florida, Department of Religion - "Rhetoric and Stigma: Lessons from the 'Cult Wars'"

- J. Gordon Melton, Distinguished Professor of American Religious History, Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University - "Christians, Californians and Communists -- Inadequacies in Using the C-word in Describing Religions."
- Philip Deslippe, PhD Candidate, Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara - "Uses and Applications of the Word "Cult" in American Newspapers in the 1990s."
- Moojan Momen, Independent Scholar - "Sect, cult or world religion: positioning the Baha'i Faith."

Respondent: Catherine Wessinger, Rev. H. James Yamauchi, S.J. Professor of the History of Religions, Loyola University, New Orleans.

A recording of the event can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtPGNevfXyQ>

December 2021, Seminar: 'Transformations of Paganism: Identity and Practice'

This seminar focused on the transformations of Paganism in Europe and on the internet over the past twenty years. Speakers, including members and academics representing a variety of Pagan movements and perspectives, addressed the following questions:

- How do recent developments in Paganism relate to questions of identity and practice?
- To what extent are identities and practices developed primarily in relation to local ancestors and lineages?
- To what extent are Pagan identities and practices cultivated as opposition to other groups?
- What are the relationships between new Pagan movements, political or not, and the older, more established Pagan organisations?

The speakers were:

- Professor Michael Strmiska, Department of Global Studies, SUNY Orange - 'Depersonalizing Paganism'.
- Dr Suzanne Owen, Reader in Religious Studies, Leeds Trinity University - "Is Druidry an indigenous religion?"
- Dr Melissa Harrington, press officer for the Pagan Federation, and a trustee of the Pagan Federation International, and Lucia Harrington, student at Glasgow University and outreach link for Extinction Rebellion Glasgow - "Transformations in identities and ideologies in Wicca, from Witchcult to saving the world".
- Sarah Kerr, President of the Pagan Federation - "Diversity in Paganism and the Pagan Community".
- Dr Rune Rasmussen, independent scholar and founder of <https://nordicanimism.com/> - "Un-Vikinging the past".
- Ross Downing, independent scholar - "Tropic Thunder: Germanic Paganism in a new global context".

Respondent: Professor Graham Harvey, Religious Studies, Open University.

The recording is available on our YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwcrOFa_lck&t=16s.

February 2022, Book Launch: 'Radical Transformations in Minority Religions'

edited by Beth Singler and Eileen Barker.

We were joined by a panel of three speakers:

- Professor Emeritus James A. Beckford, University of Warwick
- Michael Langone, Executive Director, International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA), USA
- Professor Linda Woodhead, King's College London

Their presentations were followed by a chance for contributors to the volume to respond briefly to some of the issues raised, and then a general Q&A. A recording of the event can be seen at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1L9NIXTxTI&t=856s>

About the book:

All religions undergo continuous change, but minority religions tend to be less anchored in their ways than mainstream, traditional religions. This volume examines radical transformations undergone by a variety of minority religions, including the Children of God/ Family International; Gnosticism; Jediism; various manifestations of Paganism; LGBT Muslim groups; the Plymouth Brethren; Santa Muerte; and Satanism. As with other books in the Routledge/Inform series, the contributors approach the subject from a wide range of perspectives: professional scholars include legal experts and sociologists specialising in new religious movements, but there are also chapters from those who have experienced a personal involvement. The volume is divided into four thematic parts that focus on different impetuses for radical change: interactions with society, technology and institutions, efforts at legitimisation, and new revelations.

The Future

Inform remains committed to its charitable objective of helping enquirers, through providing accurate, up-to-date and contextualised information about minority religions to the wide range of enquirers who approach us every year. We shall continue to gather material to add to our unique collection of resources, and to further a greater understanding of minority religions through our publications and events.

In addition, we will continue to work on funded projects, work on government enquires and seek out new sources of funding and project work. In the next financial year, Inform will be working on 'Promoting the Exploration of Religion and Worldviews (RW) in Schools' continues until July 2022 and it is hoped that we can work on future projects with the Faith & Belief Forum on the subject of Religion and Worldviews. Sarah's time will be mostly ringfenced for the 'Abuse in Religious Settings' project between September 2022 and September 23. There will be numerous publications and events associated with this project. We are also planning our Summer 2022 online seminar on the topic of 'New Religions and New Media' and project work on the history of the Sociology of Religion in the UK will also continue.