



3–8 May 2025

# Dean's Report

English Cathedral Visits  
Professional Development &  
Visioning Insights for  
Grafton Cathedral



**The Very Reverend Naomi Cooke**  
Dean of Grafton

## Table of Contents

Introduction

St Paul's Cathedral, London

St Martin in the Fields, London

Southwark Cathedral, London

St Alban's Cathedral

Coventry Cathedral

St Andrew's Church, Rugby

Manchester Cathedral

Reflections



# Introduction

Since commencing as Dean of Grafton in 2023, I have been aiming to deepen my understanding of the rich traditions of Anglican Cathedrals as part of my professional development. Over the past two years, I have followed the ministry of English Cathedrals closely, paying particular attention to their special events. I made contact with The Association of English Cathedrals and now receive their regular newsletters, which showcase initiatives across their country. At their suggestion, I arranged a Zoom conversation in 2023 with The Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore, Dean of St Albans and Chair of the Association, which was informative and helpful.

I had been seeking an opportunity to visit cathedrals in the UK to experience and learn more about their liturgical traditions, to observe how their staffing teams work, to see some of their cultural events in action, and to observe some of the ways they're adapting to the changing role of the cathedral and church in society.

In May 2025, my daughter represented Australia in the Under 14 Futsal Team on a tour of the UK. As I planned to take some annual leave to meet her at the end of her tour, it created the perfect opportunity to set aside time beforehand for research visits to English cathedrals and churches. This professional development opportunity was made possible through the support of the Grafton parish, who generously allowed me time away and contributed towards my accommodation during the cathedral and church visits, along with a contribution from the Bishop's Discretionary Fund towards my expenses.

# St Paul's Cathedral, London

Visit to the giftshop and attendance at Evensong  
(Saturday afternoon 3 May 2025)

## Observations

### Gift Shop

- Books form only a small proportion of stock.
- Good-quality children's books are a core feature, including titles on significant social and faith heroes (e.g. Martin Luther King), global issues such as refugees, mindfulness, values, and world religions.
- Extensive range of merchandise showcasing the art and architecture of St Paul's (mugs, bags, tea towels, coasters, stickers, cards).
- Wide selection of fair trade items.
- I photographed their bookshelves to share ideas with our own bookshop.

### What I Noticed – Evensong

- Seating consisted of sturdy but lightweight, stackable wooden chairs with kneeling cushion storage—clearly designed for regular reconfiguration.
- A large tourist congregation (approx. 200 people) attended.
- Clear and welcoming signage, with service booklets readily available.
- Donation points displayed transparent information, e.g. *"Every day we need over £44,000 to remain open."*

## Insights

Many European cathedrals have adapted to flexible seating arrangements, allowing reconfiguration for different events—unlike traditional fixed pews.



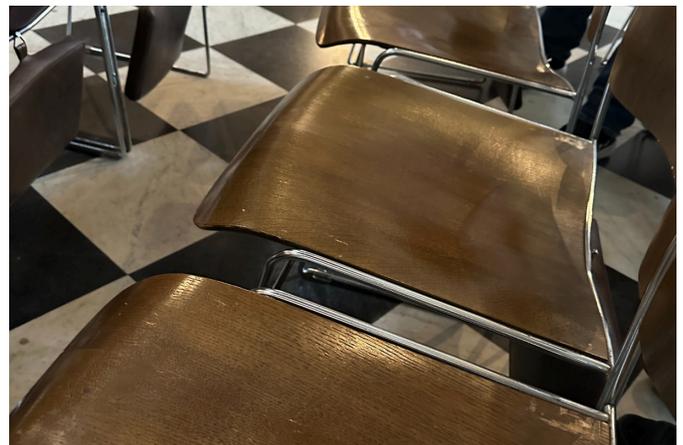
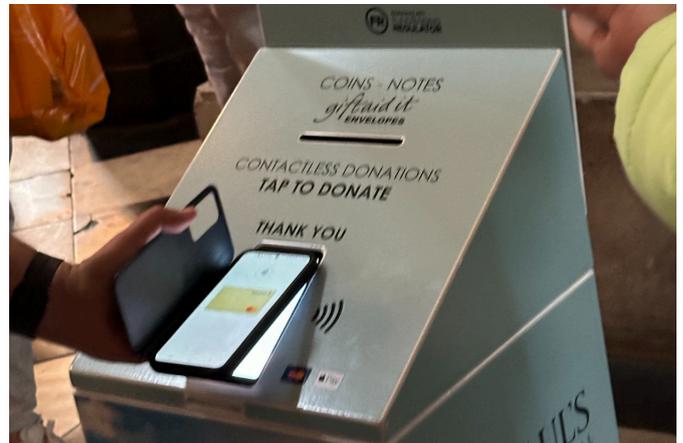


Flexible seating also draws attention to decorative tiled flooring.

Our current chairs are heavy, making reconfiguration difficult and limiting event flexibility.

Traditional choir stalls remain in place in European cathedrals; our choir seating differs notably from this arrangement.

Our chancel area is currently quite underused - perhaps we could look for opportunities to use the high altar.



# St Martin in the Fields, London

Vivaldi by Candlelight (Saturday Evening 3 May 2025)

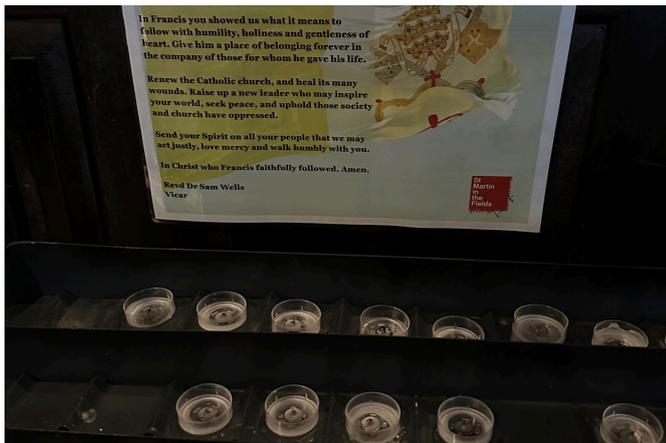
## Observations

- This church is much smaller and more intimate than the big Cathedrals, square shaped, with a focal window behind the altar with a striking cross design. This musical event seemed to be self managed rather than run by an external event company. The candlelight was provided by the candles of this church including candelabra style chandeliers.
- There was probably 200 people in attendance with tickets sold at different price points depending on where they were. This church has traditional pew seating, and they were numbered for this event. I bought the cheapest ticket for £16 (most expensive was £32) and sat in the side aisle and still had wonderful vision and audio. The musicians were impressive.
- At the back of the church there was a noticeboard with "Prayer Requests" pinned to them so all could read them, with a promise that the prayers would be included in the church's daily prayer schedule. This prayer request stand prayerfully acknowledged Florence Li Tim-Oi, the first woman priest ordained in the Anglican Communion.
- A remembrance book was on display in a locked stand, almost identical to our stand. The book however had a day to a page, so was turned daily for remembrance.
- At their votive candle stand, "A Prayer for Pope Francis" written by the vicar, was on display.
- Outside of this church when I arrived there was a community meal being served with many people lined up to receive. There was a big team involved in this charity work.



## Insights

- Advertising an event “by candlelight” can add a sense of special occasion without requiring significant additional resources, beyond what we already have in place.
- Selling tickets at different price points, according to their location, is worth considering for our musical events.





# Southwark Cathedral, London

I shadowed the clergy and vergers team for the Sunday, attending: 8.30am Morning Prayer, 9am Eucharist, Mid-morning Information session on Modern Slavery, 11am Choral Eucharist, Giftshop, Lunch in Cafe with clergy, Meeting with the Head Verger, 3pm Evensong, and 6pm Star Wars Themed Organ Recital. (Sunday 4 May 2025)

## Observations

### Visitor Information

- Clear standing-board signage outside the cathedral with service times and visitor information.
- Simple, museum-style signage inside, providing information about architectural and historical features.

### Worship and Liturgical Space

- The Cathedral has four chapels at the east end, each with different coloured frontals— I surmised that worship is possibly rotated seasonally rather than changing frontals.
- The Garden of Repose was positioned prominently in the chancel between the altar table and choir stalls.
- The Choral Eucharist was celebrated at the nave altar rather than the high altar.
- Flexible seating with sturdy, stackable wooden chairs; surplus chairs discreetly stored behind branded movable panels.
- The Chapel was set aside after the Choral Eucharist for the “Cathedral Listeners” ministry—offering confidential conversations.
- Resident cathedral cat “Hodge,” with free rein of the chancel and choir stalls, beloved by the community with his image incorporated into merchandise.
- The Head Verger spent an hour with me, sharing insights into their processes and reflecting on his



lifelong lay calling to serve as a vergers. His ministry employment has spanned many decades, starting at Coventry Cathedral, followed by 33 years as Head Verger at Southwark Cathedral, from which he was shortly preparing to retire. He spoke with deep passion about the vergers' ministry of hospitality, enabling liturgical worship, and caring for the cathedral precinct. His responsibilities are vast—for example, each year he prepares 1,200 bottles of oil for the Chrism Mass. He leads a team of approximately five full-time vergers, some of whom have housing included in their roles.

- The Choir for the Choral Eucharist and Evensong for this day was composed of enthusiastic and confident male adult singers (paid per service) and a large group of schoolboys.

### Art and Culture

- Opportunity to contribute a written prayer for peace on a paper dove, part of a large-scale suspended art installation of 15,000 paper doves in the Cathedral nave which has since been launched.
- Star Wars organ recital (for "May the Fourth") featured costumed attendees, a bar, and was staffed by cathedral event staff and a verger—no clergy presence.
- The Cathedral gardens feature installations by Hestia (awareness raising about modern slavery), labyrinth-inspired rock designs, and a monastic herb garden open to all.
- One of the East End Chapels featured a modern art installation of stained-glass panels mounted on moveable light boxes.
- A modern style stained glass window was recently installed and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth II

### Social Justice and Outreach

- In between the two morning Eucharists, there was a workshop raising awareness about Modern Slavery which was led by Hestia, a charity that works in this area. It was attended by approximately 30 parishioners.



## Gift Shop

- Anecdotally, the highest-selling product lines are books and gifts featuring “Hodge,” the cathedral cat.
- There was a variety of Southwark Cathedral Branded items (tea towels, candles, pens, playing cards, Christmas decorations, T-shirts).
- Artist Alison Gardiner–designed products (cups, tea towels, tea) featuring cartoon cathedral characters, which are sold in most English Cathedral gift shops,
- Social enterprise and fair trade products (e.g. Labre’s Hope handmade soaps supporting people experiencing homelessness).
- Carefully curated book selection addressing contemporary social issues (e.g. Ukraine war).
- Novelty items such as bishop-dressed rubber ducks and general London souvenirs.

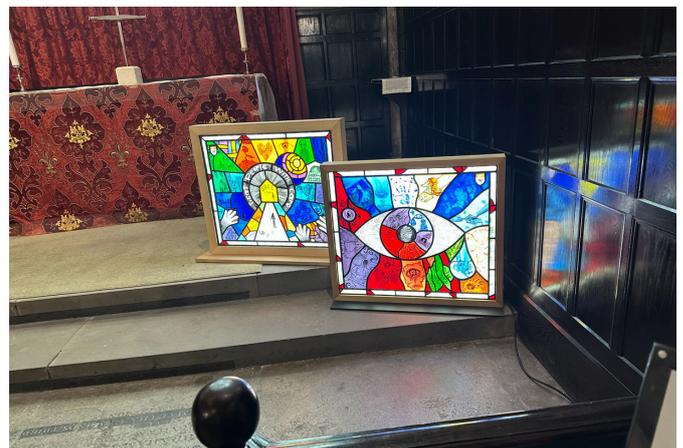
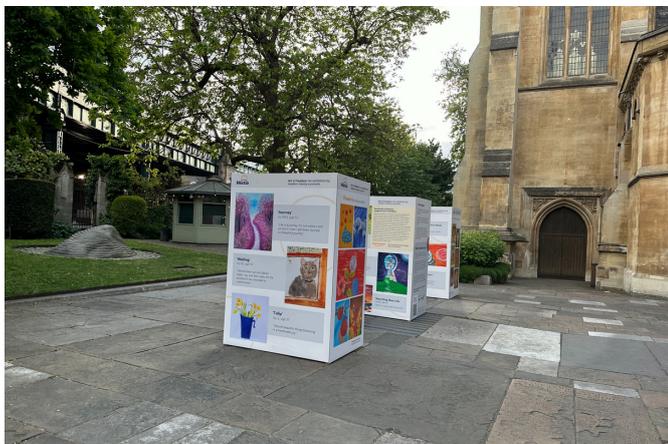


## Insights

- Stained glass design is not uniform in English Cathedrals. Modern designs sit alongside traditional windows; war damage in London has led to creative renewal as replacement windows have been designed.
- Flexible seating greatly increases space adaptability for events.
- Low-cost themed musical and cultural events (e.g. £5 Star Wars organ concert) can draw in diverse audiences.
- Social enterprise and fair trade products could form a distinct section in our bookshop which would align with our vision of compassionate action for the common good..
- Importing Alison Gardiner’s cathedral-themed range or creating our own branded products is worth exploring.
- Verging readers to the lectern for key services, such as ordinations, is a beautiful practice.
- Arranging a Zoom meeting with the retiring Head Verger for staff and sanctuary servers would be valuable professional development for our Grafton Cathedral team.



- Garden installations can communicate cathedral values, We could consider having signage in various parts of our gardens and developing more overtly religious parts of the garden.
- Explore with the Director of Music the feasibility of culturally themed music events, and possibilities for upgrading choir seating and stands.
- Renovating parish halls to be more modern and welcoming could increase community use.
- Assess furniture for ease of movement and space flexibility.



# St Alban's Cathedral, London

I attended a free history tour of the Cathedral (60 mins), visited the coffee shop, was hosted by Dean Jo Kelly-Moore for tea in the Deanery, and sat in the congregation for Evensong. (Monday 5 May 2025)



## Observations

### Facilities and Tourism

- Stackable chairs allowed for flexible set-up.
- St Alban's is a site of major historical significance incorporating Roman ruins. History tourism is integrated into cathedral visits through features such as light installations showing how ancient art would have originally appeared.
- Excellent information displays indicate dedicated funding for history-focused tourism.
- Gift shop, though small and located in the entrance, carried a variety of items including books, St Alban's-themed gifts and the Alison Gardiner cathedral range.
- Coffee shop ("Abbot's Kitchen") had charming signage and historical references such as "The Original Hot Cross Bun."
- Temporary contemporary art installations added visual interest.

### Worship and Liturgy

- The music for Evensong was provided entirely by a visiting choir.
- Nave altar displayed a striking rainbow altar frontal.
- Statues of modern saints, including Oscar Romero and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, were incorporated into the nave worship space.
- Noticeboard for written prayers was visible to all.

### Visitor Engagement and Fundraising



- Signage clearly communicated operating costs (*"It costs £7,000 a day to keep this historic cathedral open and free of charge. Please support us. Suggested donation £10. Thank you"*).
- Each candle votive station had a fire blanket and EFTPOS machines pre-set to £3 candle donations.
- Tour guide was outstanding—guides are rostered only a few times a month, indicating a large volunteer base.

### Notable Features

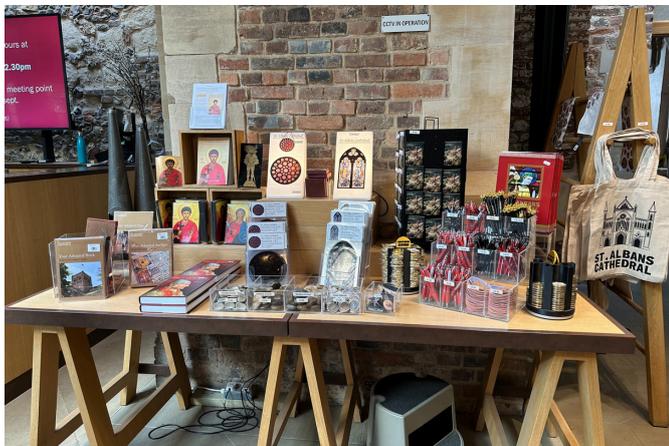
- Striking modern rose window opened by Princess Diana (admired by some, controversial to others).
- Several floor tiles closely resembled those in Grafton

## Insights

Tourism can be cultivated intentionally—could we explore ways to further highlight our own historical significance?

While our location and foot traffic are different, the success of St Alban's café makes me wonder whether a smaller-scale cafe option could work here.

Consider training a team of volunteer tour guides to offer high-quality, engaging cathedral tours—possibly in partnership with the Historical Society.



# Coventry Cathedral

Brief walk around; Midday Prayer of Reconciliation  
(Tuesday 6 May 2025)



## Observations

The shell of the bombed old cathedral stands as a historic monument, with the new cathedral built adjacent to it.

The new cathedral departs from traditional designs, featuring modern stained glass and a more square-shaped layout rather than the typical long nave.

A strong focus on reconciliation and forgiveness is evident, with a daily prayer for reconciliation read from the lectern at midday.

Various art installations, including statues and textiles, were on display throughout the space.

Stacks of wooden chairs indicated efforts to maximize open space, accommodating both worship and exhibitions.

The gift shop was small, located at the entrance with a limited range of items.

## Insights

The striking modern stained glass and art installations provide a powerful contemporary worship environment worthy of appreciation and inspiration.

The vision of Coventry Cathedral for peace and reconciliation is evident in their building and their liturgical practice. Is our vision evident to visitors to Grafton?



# St Andrew's Church, Rugby

Visit with Rev Peter Privett, Head of Godly Play in the UK, and his Godly Play room set up in St Andrew's (Wednesday 7 May 2025)



## Observations

This church is more similar in size to Grafton Cathedral than larger UK cathedrals.

The back third of one aisle has been converted into a café serving affordable meals, staffed by various assisted disability employment groups.

The café featured a large "Talking Table" where anyone wishing to chat is invited to sit. This ministry fosters community and supports those experiencing loneliness. Parish members are rostered throughout the café's opening hours to facilitate conversation. During my visit, the table's theme was bereavement, with a skilled parishioner guiding discussions on that topic.

The Midday Eucharist took place centrally while café conversations continued in the rear aisle.

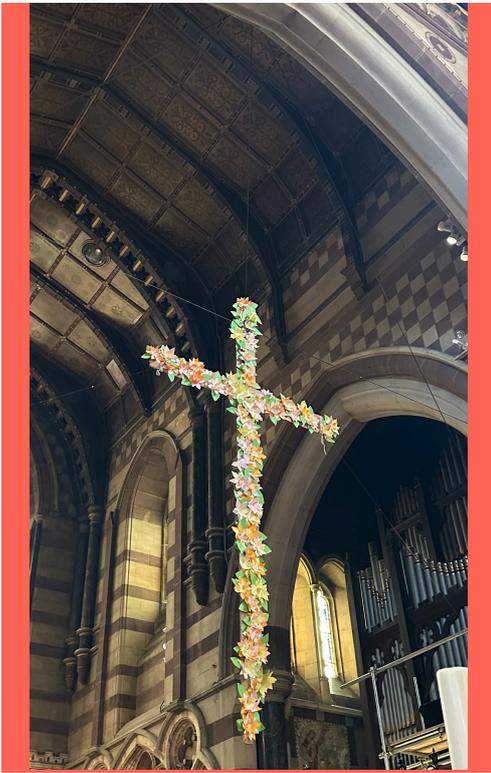
Community art installations were displayed throughout the church, mounted on wall panels.

A children's area similar to Grafton's was set up in a slightly larger space in one of the aisles, located at the front of the aisle seating rather than the back.

The chapel featured a beautiful tapestry altar frontal and altar backing with community-made art.

A large cross suspended above the chapel was decorated with paper flowers for Easter season.

A remembrance book and stand, similar to Grafton's, was displayed with a one-day-per-page format.



The Godly Play room was located in the vestry, separated by a glass wall from the chapel, where children's ministry is conducted during services.

## Insights

I'm keen to display the Godly Play materials in Grafton Cathedral and am considering the best location within the building.

Clearing chairs from parts of the aisles provides flexible space for activities.

Community art projects add a bohemian, town-connected feel, emphasising the church's close relationship with the local community.



**The costs of maintaining our wonderful church are high, around £3000.00 each week.**

The generous giving of our congregation, friends and visitors enables our church doors to stay open throughout the year. It makes possible every service of worship, and our extensive community activities in Rugby.

- 1 GIVE ONLINE** - using your debit, credit card or Apple/Google Pay wallet. Scan the QR code to make a one off donation to St Andrew's today, or to set-up a regular gift. (Our parish code is 11061116)
- 2 GIVE BY TELEPHONE** Monday to Friday, 9am - 6pm. Make a one off donation to St Andrew's, or set-up a regular gift by calling the helpful & friendly Church of England Parish Giving Scheme helpline on: **0333 002 1260** (Our parish code is 11061116)
- 3 GIVE BY A GIFT FORM** Collect a gift form from our Churchwardens Joyce and Hash, or our Generous Giving Officer, Simon. Fill in the details and they'll do the rest. Or, email: [warden1@rugbychurch.org.uk](mailto:warden1@rugbychurch.org.uk)

SCAN ME! [www.paritygiving.org.uk](http://www.paritygiving.org.uk)

# Manchester Cathedral

Evensong (Thursday 8 May 2025)

## Observations

Several striking modern stained glass windows were installed following the IRA bombing that destroyed some original windows. One window featured stone engravings with powerful words: *DIVERSITY, HEALING, GLORY, WHOLENESS, INCLUSION*.

One of the Cathedral's chapels was dedicated as a Children's Chapel, thoughtfully designed with no adult chairs—only children's chairs, tables, play mats, and prayer spaces to engage young visitors.

Much of the Cathedral was cleared of chairs, creating a feeling of space.

A pub called "Cathedral Gates" was located next door.

Evensong featured a visiting choir.

## Insights

Our cathedral has some windows yet to be stained; this presents an opportunity to incorporate meaningful values in future stained glass designs.

Together with the Director of Music, we could investigate possibilities for welcoming visiting choirs or facilitating tours for our own choir to other Cathedrals.

Consider packing away chairs during the week to facilitate a spacious open environment for visitors.





# Reflection

This experience has been an excellent opportunity for professional development, enabling me to learn from different practices and engage with the leadership teams at these cathedrals and churches.

It's important to continue exploring how we can develop our Cathedral as a flexible space able to accommodate community and cultural events.

There is potential to expand the retail offerings of our bookshop with cathedral-themed products and giftware from social enterprises that support positive community impact.

I'm grateful to our Cathedral community for supporting this time of learning.

I'm grateful to the generous ministry staff who shared their time and insights with me, especially:

Rev Michael Rawson, Rev Kathryn Fleming, and Head Verger Paul Timms (Southwark Cathedral);

Dean Jo Kelly-Moore (St Alban's Cathedral);

Rev Peter & Mrs Rosemary Privett (St Andrew's Rugby).



Dean Naomi Cooke

Christ Church Cathedral Grafton

2025

