

**RECONCILIATION
IN A POLARISED AGE
2025 ANNUAL REPORT**



St Ethelburga's
Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

“ At St Ethelburga’s, we sense a widespread hunger for spaces that are neither performative nor polarised; spaces where disagreement does not automatically collapse into hostility or silence. We want to invite people out of echo chambers, out of despair, and out of algorithm-led debate—into an analogue world where real people can have real conversations with one another again. ”
 – from Towards a Radical Centre: A Manifesto, published by St Ethelburga’s



Contents

Executive Summary	4	Spiritual Ecology Festival	18
Reconciliation in a Polarised Age	4	Depolarisation	22
Mission and Principles	6	Training	24
Our Projects	8	Engaged Contemplation	26
Project Portfolio	9	2025 in Numbers	28
Lifelines:	10	2025 in Words	29
Community Reconciliation:	12	Caring for a Sacred Space	30
Listen to the World	14	Venue Hire	31
People of the Earth	16	Our Supporters	33

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Executive Summary

Reconciliation in a Polarised Age

2025 saw public protest skyrocket across the UK. From June to August alone, there were more than 3,000 public demonstrations, while digital activism soared to the millions. Widespread discontent, spilling out onto the streets on a scale not seen in this country since the time of the miners' strikes, has presented huge challenges for policing, civil society, political and public life. As 2025 came to a close, 81% of Britons polled said they believed the country was more divided than united, with only 15% believing the country was united.

At St Ethelburga's, we welcomed 4,195 participants to 104 events, both on-site and off, to come together to swim against the tide of division, towards what we've come to call the Radical Centre. By the Radical Centre we don't mean a particular political agenda, set of talking points or an imagined end-game of ultimate consensus. Rather, it's a practice, a willingness to engage in dialogue for the sake of our shared future. Our concept of the Radical Centre takes inspiration from our Bedouin-inspired peace tent. It's a circular

space, humble in size, but holding the whole breadth of the cosmos in its sights, with its ring of stained glass windows, each figuring the moon in different phases of its orbit. Here, sensitive conversations become possible, encounters across perceived divides regularly take place, and people tend to come out more hopeful than when they went in.

Depolarisation training, a Spiritual Ecology Festival, and more!

Inspired by meticulous research and using evidence-based tools, our depolarisation workshops offered participants a chance to step out of echo chambers to explore our shared challenges from a different angle. In June, we were delighted to host the first ever Spiritual Ecology Festival, with talks from luminaries like Helena Norberg-Hodge, Sicelo Mbatha, Alastair McIntosh, and more — all available to watch now on YouTube. Our overnight planting pilgrimage saw 40 pilgrims walk a loop from St Ethelburga's to St Paul's, stopping at diverse faith sites and community gardens along the way to plant beautiful trees!

Listen to the World, our popular world music programme, dazzled audiences with the harmonies of musical traditions from across

the globe. Our flagship Spiritual Ecology programme Lifelines saw over 300 volunteers plant 16,000 trees, or 2,900 metres of hedgerow across the English countryside. Our community reconciliation work grew during this period, and we were pleased to offer consultancy support to a range of NGOs, charities, and education institutions. These are just a few of the projects we ran in 2025!

Land, faith and belonging

St Ethelburga's history, forged in the fires of sectarian conflict, is a reminder that stories of land, identity, faith and belonging are at the root of most conflicts throughout history and today. Now, St Ethelburga's stands as a symbol of hope that even the most intractable conflicts may be overcome. For us, our motto "Bridging divides, loving Earth" is more relevant than ever before. It reminds us that renewing shared stories of land and belonging can point a way forward, even in the darkest of times.

Financially resilient

We offered an exciting programme of training, workshops and events in 2025. Our venue hire business continued to thrive, as we welcomed

numerous charities, private individuals and corporate customers to enjoy our tent, nave space and garden. Economic uncertainty in the UK continues to present significant challenges for the charitable sector. We are grateful to all those funders who have supported our charitable activities throughout 2025.

Looking forward to 2026

We hope you'll join us at an event online or in person in 2026! We'll continue to open our space for interfaith contemplative practice monthly, and for our regular Listen to the World music events. With more varied training on offer, we'll be hosting participants in person and online to gain skills in depolarisation, dialogue, facilitation and conflict transformation. And we'll be hosting our second Spiritual Ecology Festival in June, with talks, workshops, music, food and more. We hope to see you at one of our online or in-person events sometime soon!

Do read on to find out more about our projects in 2025.

Tarot Couzyn and Clare Martin

Co Directors, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace



Mission and Principles

St Ethelburga's works at the intersection of climate and peace. We believe there can be no peace on Earth unless we also realise peace with Earth. We offer events, training, leadership programmes and multimedia content which equip and inspire people to become peacemakers in their own contexts.

Our work is organised around four key principles, which are reflected in the fabric and history of our building. These underlie all our programmes and guide what we do. We illustrate these principles by telling the following four stories.



Values into action

St Ethelburga was a courageous and selfless 7th-century religious leader. When the plague came to Barking Abbey, she inspired all of the monastics in her community to face the crisis with purpose and resolve. She put her deepest values into action in very dark times and encouraged others to do the same.



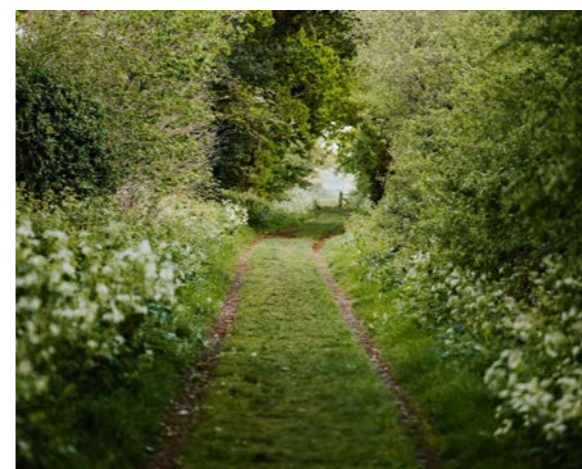
Renewal in crisis

In 1993, an IRA bomb exploded on Bishopsgate, almost completely destroying the mediaeval church of St Ethelburga. Rebuilt as a centre for reconciliation and peace, this story reflects the opportunity for renewal, change and evolution that lies at the heart of every conflict and crisis. This principle is the foundation of all our work with division and disagreement.



Community across differences

Our Bedouin Tent is a unique and beautiful space, originally built in response to 9/11. Its circular design offers a container for non-hierarchical dialogue, where all perspectives are welcomed equally. The Eastern structure alongside the Western architecture of the church reflects the vital need to build community across differences. This theme is fundamental to all our work.



Protecting the sacred

The site of St Ethelburga's has stood on consecrated ground for over 800 years, remaining true to its ancient purpose amid offices and skyscrapers. This speaks to us of the need to protect what is sacred. Not just spaces for prayer and reflection, but also our deepest human values, and the sacred space of nature. Reflection, spirituality and love for Earth are woven through everything we do.

Our Projects



Project Portfolio



Lifelines

Connects community and faith groups with farmers to plant wildlife corridors that strengthen biodiversity and social cohesion



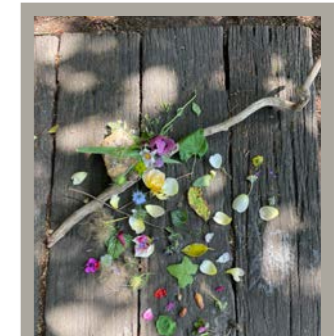
Community Reconciliation

Transforms community conflict and equips people to become peacemakers in their own context



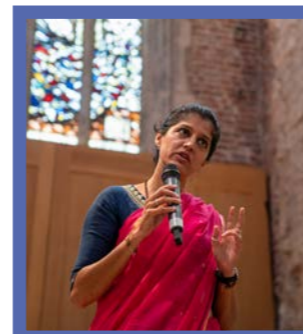
Listen to the World

Creates welcoming live music spaces where themes of home and belonging are expressed through the traditions and talents of migrants, refugees and sanctuary seekers, alongside local artists



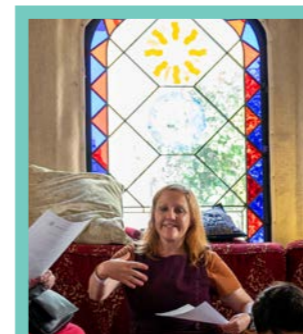
People of the Earth

Strengthens UK communities by fostering connection between local people and those with recent experience of migration or displacement



Spiritual Ecology Festival

Brings people together across differences of faith, culture and worldview for a vibrant event with a range of internationally renowned speakers, musical artists and workshop facilitators



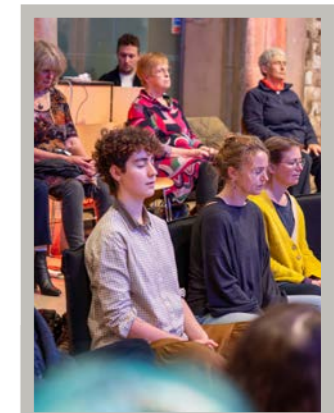
Depolarisation

Equips people with the skills, resilience and relational courage to bridge divides in a polarised age



Training

Trains people in essential conflict transformation skills



Soul Space and Contemplative Practice

Spaces for reflection and inner resilience

Lifelines:

planting woodland and hedgerows
with reverence and connection



Purpose:

Connects community and faith groups with farmers to plant wildlife corridors that strengthen biodiversity and social cohesion

Activity:

Lifelines brings together faith and community groups to plant hedgerows and woodland on collaborating farms across England and Wales. In autumn, we train participants from diverse backgrounds to become Lifelines Leaders, equipping them with practical tree-planting skills and the confidence to lead volunteer groups.

Leaders work in pairs and each recruits volunteers from their own communities. Together they lead residential weekend planting events, typically planting up to 1,500 trees while creating space for conversation and shared reflection across traditions.



In 2025, we delivered 16 weekends across eleven counties in the UK, working with independent growers, farms transitioning to organic production, and land-based

spiritual communities. In addition to hedgerows, we planted almost three hectares of woodland.

Beyond environmental restoration, Lifelines strengthens relationships between urban communities and rural land stewards, building ongoing partnerships rooted in shared care for land.

Impact:

- Engaged 32 communities and around 300 volunteers across 16 weekends in 11 counties
- Planted 16,000+ trees this season; 62,000+ since 2022, forming around 12,000 metres of hedgerow
- Estimated carbon capture at maturity from all Lifelines trees planted to date: around 470–1,900 tonnes of CO₂ per year, based on typical absorption of 10–40 kg CO₂ per tree annually
- Strengthened collaboration between faith groups, farmers, and land-based organisations



“ Lifelines was an incredibly rewarding, restorative and thought-provoking weekend away with a really lovely group of people. I only wish it was longer! ” Lifelines Participant

We are deeply grateful to the Kalliopeia Foundation for their support of this project.

Community Reconciliation:

Equipping people to transform conflict and strengthen community cohesion



Purpose:

Transforms community conflict and equips people to become peacemakers in their own context

Activity:

In 2025, our community reconciliation work reached over 900 participants through five strands: centre visits, youth and young adult workshops, facilitated listening processes, Communities of Practice, and bespoke workshops and consultancy.

We welcomed 200 domestic and international visitors through guided visits, introducing St Ethelburga's history and values, and offering an experiential introduction to the centre's spaces and ethos. In addition, we delivered workshops for 275 young people, tailored to each group and focused on values-based peacemaking, conflict awareness and dialogue skills for today's social and political climate.

Through Communities of Practice, we sustained our alumni network with ongoing professional development, peer learning and shared best practice.

We supported a wide range of organisational partners—including faith institutions, universities, NGOs and corporate teams—through bespoke workshops and consultancy covering trauma-informed practice, dialogue skills, values-based leadership and depolarisation. We also facilitated listening processes for 74 participants across six organisations, providing structured, non-aligned spaces to explore tension, repair relationships and clarify next steps.



Impact:

- Welcomed around 500 visitors and young people to the Centre, strengthening public understanding of values-based peacemaking
- Sustained and extended our peacebuilding network through Communities of Practice, bespoke workshops and consultancy, reaching over a dozen organisational partners and a further 423 participants across sectors
- Consultancy provided for the following organisations: Croydon Community Mediation, Jamyang Buddhist Centre, Mission Housing Charity, the NHS, Project Dandelion, and XLP Youth Charity



“ I wanted to personally thank you for such an impactful session (I've already used the listening techniques you taught us to help resolve a disagreement in my dorm!). Thanks again for bringing your important work to our campus. ”
Youth & Young Adult Workshop participant

Listen to the World:

celebrating musical traditions of diverse artists



Purpose:

Creates welcoming live music spaces where themes of home and belonging are expressed through the traditions and talents of migrants, refugees and sanctuary seekers, alongside local artists

Activity:

Rooted in our peacebuilding ethos, Listen to the World creates welcoming public spaces where music becomes a means of connection across difference.

In 2025, the programme platformed artists representing West African griot storytelling, Ladino song, Uyghur instrumental music, Afghan and Hazara repertoire, Mediterranean polyphony and South Asian devotional forms. Several performances marked professional milestones, including premieres and first-time collaborations.

Audiences remained diverse and often intergenerational, bringing together diaspora communities, local residents and people with lived experience of displacement. For many, the concerts offered a dignified setting to reconnect with cultural heritage; for others, an entry point into cultures and histories underrepresented in mainstream venues.

At a time of heightened anxiety around migration and identity, Listen to the World models social cohesion through artistic excellence.



Impact:

- Reached wide audiences, welcoming 742 people in person and 8,550 online
- Platformed artists from diverse diaspora communities, including endangered and underrepresented cultural traditions
- Supported artistic development through premieres, collaborations and first-time performances, with artists securing follow-on opportunities
- Strengthened belonging and social cohesion by celebrating cultural heritage in a shared welcoming civic space across differences

“ This has reminded me of home in the best way; that we are so much more than the bad things that are happening in my country. ” Listen to the World participant

With thanks to our funders for this programme:
Arts Council England and Tides Foundation



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Photo credits: Hervé Nourisson

People of the Earth:

practising hospitality,
welcome and community



Purpose:

Strengthens UK communities by fostering connection between local people and those with recent experience of migration or displacement

Activity:

In 2025, People of the Earth deepened our work on belonging, bringing people together into shared spaces of nature and culture.

At Home in Nature delivered a six-week programme with North London Recovery College (NHS), engaging 14 participants from diverse cultural backgrounds in London's green spaces. Sessions combined sensory awareness, guided reflection and facilitated sharing, strengthening connection to place and to one another.

We delivered Belonging to Earth, an overnight countryside retreat co-facilitated with wilderness guide and author Sicelo Mbatha.

The programme also included bilingual Nowruz and Yalda celebrations co-created with Afghan and Iranian partners, using music, poetry and storytelling to strengthen cross-cultural relationships.

Impact:

- Delivered an evidence-informed nature-based social inclusion programme in partnership with North London Recovery College (part of the NHS)
- Strengthened belonging, wellbeing and trust by bringing displaced people and local Londoners together through six structured sessions and an overnight retreat rooted in nature connection
- Convened 250 people in celebratory intercultural events

With appreciation and thanks to our funders and supporters: Tides Foundation, Natural Academy, North London Recovery College and Camden Park Services (Waterlow Park)



“ When you're a refugee from your home country, you're looking for anything to connect you to the culture you come from. When I come to events like this one, it's very nostalgic and I feel good. So, I want to thank you for providing such a home for those who have had to leave their homes. ” Yalda Night participant

Spiritual Ecology Festival:

a three-day festival exploring the interconnections between faith, ecology and peace



Purpose:

Brings people together across differences of faith, culture and worldview for a vibrant event with a range of internationally renowned speakers, musical artists and workshop facilitators

Activity:

In 2025, we hosted our three-day Spiritual Ecology Festival, welcoming leading thinkers, artists, musicians, faith leaders, activists and peacemakers from around the world.

The festival launched with a 12-hour Planting Pilgrimage across London—a symbolic and participatory act of care, connecting sacred and community sites through tree planting, ceremony and shared ritual.

Contributors for the festival weekend included Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee, Kalyanee Mam, Tiokasin Ghosthorse, Pooja Bhale, Nessie Reid, Solutions Not Sides and many more.

Across the weekend, participants engaged in talks, workshops, film screenings, live music and contemplative spaces.



Impact:

- Delivered 28 programmed events with 36 contributors, engaging 180+ participants in person across three days
- Welcomed people from 22+ faith backgrounds, demonstrating strong public appetite for spiritual ecology and dialogue across differences
- Convened 30+ peace and climate organisations, strengthening networks and collaboration at the intersection of climate, spirituality and peacebuilding



“ The festival was soul-nourishing and battery-charging. I was reminded that there’s a whole community of change agents, dreamers and peacemakers doing the work. ”
Spiritual Ecology Festival Participant

Spiritual Ecology Festival



Overnight Planting Pilgrimage

The Spiritual Ecology Festival opened on Friday 6 June with our Overnight Planting Pilgrimage. Forty pilgrims set out from St Ethelburga's at 8pm and walked through the night, beginning on busy streets and moving into quieter hours, with stretches of silence interwoven with conversation and song. Along the route we stopped at a range of London faith and community sites—churches, mosques, temples, hidden gardens and rooftop terraces—where hosts offered warm hospitality and joined us to plant a tree and mark the moment with a simple ceremony honouring the sacred nature of creation in their tradition. The pilgrimage concluded in the early hours by crossing the Millennium Bridge to St Paul's Cathedral, where we planted a dove tree and were given private access to sing beneath the dome. The night held a rare sense of shared purpose and wonder and we look forward to making it an annual event.



“ The Overnight Planting Pilgrimage was so wonderful and it will stay with me for a long time. Sharing stories was a magical part of it, as was the kindness radiating from people. ” Overnight Planting Pilgrimage Participant

We are grateful to the Kalliopeia Foundation for their support of this project.

Depolarisation

holding a Radical Centre in divided times



Purpose:

Equips people with the skills, resilience and relational courage to bridge divides in a polarised age

Activity:

In 2025, as political and cultural polarisation continued to shape public life in Britain — from debates on immigration and climate to education, identity and global conflict — our depolarisation work responded to a growing hunger for tools that move beyond outrage and avoidance.

Rooted in peacemaking, our programme combined in-person and online training, collaborative workshops, and speaker-led events exploring dialogue across differences. Through embodied exercises, conflict mapping, pair work, and structured dialogue, participants practised how to hold tension without collapsing into silence or escalation.

Drawing on frameworks such as the “Seven Tribes” research from More in Common and our own relational models of engagement, we invited participants to explore the needs, fears and values beneath strongly held positions. Our work centred the belief that reconciliation is not about smoothing over conflict, but about creating a container strong enough to withstand it.

Across the year, we trained activists, faith leaders, educators, corporate professionals and community members — equipping them to become reconcilers within their own spheres of influence.

Impact:

- Strengthened participants’ confidence to engage constructively across social, political and cultural differences in their families, workplaces and communities
- Offered practical tools to navigate echo chambers, hold disagreement with integrity, and build relationships rooted in deep listening and shared humanity
- Nurtured a “radical centre” — a space where people can remain grounded in their values while staying in relationship across differences



“ I thought it was a brilliant day. I’d love many people to experience this training, people who are working in organisations and dealing with polarised narratives in their work – it has huge value beyond those who seek to do the work of reconciliation. ” *Depolarisation Training Participant*



Training

Purpose:

Trains people in essential conflict transformation skills

This year we trained 210 people in Conflict Coaching, Facilitation, Depolarisation, Dialogue for Peaceful Change and Embodied Peace.

Conflict Coaching

Conflict coaching is a highly effective, practical intervention suitable for people who are currently experiencing conflict or supporting those in conflict in their professional or personal lives. It prevents

tensions and differences from escalating and empowers individuals to understand and transform conflict effectively.

“ It was really helpful to see my particular conflict from a different point of view and understand the wider systems that are impacting it. I especially enjoyed working with the same person the whole day which built a sense of trust and empathy.”

Facilitation Training

This workshop offers tools for facilitating groups well in the current climate—especially when conflict or tension arises—drawing on a rich selection of methods, approaches and exercises and offering an insider look into facilitation tools used in St Ethelburga’s transformational programmes.

“ I absolutely loved the workshop, including the wonderful surroundings. The workshop was very interactive and offered a variety of activities that helped to keep me engaged and focused. The facilitators were epic!!! They have such a wonderful calming nature and are just two beautiful souls. I loved how we were given the opportunity to work with different people too. I also loved the models that were shared in the session and how these can be used when faced with conflict.”

Dialogue for Peaceful Change (DPC)

We continued our partnership with DPC Global to deliver Dialogue for Peaceful Change, a robust 4.5-day mediation training completed by over 2,000 people worldwide, equipping participants to become mediative facilitators with a practical toolkit to respond effectively to conflict between individuals and within organisations and to enhance communication, interrelatedness and conflict transformation capacity.

“ I really appreciated the balance of theory and immersive practice, which was enabled by the expertise of our lead facilitators. The approach they took in building up theory and then walking through the mediative process step by step, and ensuring each individual got the opportunity to practice was great.”

Embodied Peace

This year we piloted the Embodied Peace workshop exploring peace as a lived, embodied experience. Through somatic practices, partner work and group discussion, participants learned how nervous system regulation and embodied presence can support meaningful connection across difference.

“ It goes beyond words just how important St Ethelburga’s work is, both in holding space for the world of the spirit in a world that is increasingly moving towards AI and conflict, and having its own take on reconciliation and peace. I’m really pleased to have come away from today’s workshop feeling better resourced to be able to support others facing situations of trauma and conflict and with tools for embodying compassion and goodness.”





“This was my first time joining Contemplative Practice, which I found to be a profound experience. Welcoming, deeply nourishing, peaceful and yet invigorating in equal measure. Thank you.” *Contemplative Practice participant*

Contemplative Practice

Each month, we invite those of all faiths and none to join us in prayer and contemplative silence for the sake of our world. So far, we have been joined by people of a wide range of faiths, including those who consider themselves Christian, Sufi, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Jewish, Agnostic, and Spiritual-

but-not-religious. We’ve seen that groups who share in prayer, silence and community create a powerful antidote to the overwhelm of personal and collective crisis. They create a circle of compassion that gives shelter to fragile hopes, kindness to traumatised spirits, and the courage to live from a place that is rooted in our deepest values.

Engaged Contemplation

Soul Space

Soul Space continues to serve as an important monthly container for community and connection. A gathering open to people of all faiths and none, we facilitate an hour of reflection, prayer, and contemplation using imagery, art, music, and sacred texts. Each month is focused on a theme which resonates with what is happening in the wider world. We have a regular community of about 50 people who gather each month.

900 people directly participated in 2025.



2025 in Numbers



2025 in Words



Lifelines Participant

"Everything over the weekend flowed together as one energy: food, connection, working the land... a unified feeling of coming home to something new. A new relationship with the Earth, a new way to open your heart to strangers, a new way to explore other faiths in harmony."

Conflict Coaching Participant

"I really appreciated the course and will definitely be using the coaching model and techniques in the future. It treated something often very difficult with a lightness and gentleness and I really enjoyed meeting the other participants even for such a short time."

At Home in Nature participant

"Nature has so many answers – we just need to listen."

Listen to the World audience

"It's an intimate space – I love the atmosphere, the great music and the great mix of people in the audience."

Facilitation Training Participant

"I learned a great deal both theoretically and experientially. I also became aware of where it is hardest for me to hold space for different views, especially when I am increasingly fearful. I came away with so many practical tools to use, but also, for me, a deeper sense of the wonderful work so many people across professions are doing in this world. I also came away with more hope than fear. The workshop exceeded all my expectations."

Depolarisation Training Participant

"The environment and group dynamics felt very safe and supportive, and the overall facilitation was modelled in a very helpful way. I cannot wait to put into practice what I learnt!"



Caring for a Sacred Space

St Ethelburga's as a Grade I Listed building tells a powerful story. Reduced to ashes by an IRA bomb, it was resurrected as a centre for reconciliation and peace. The building holds a promise of hope in dark times. Surrounded on all sides by glass skyscrapers in the heart of the financial district, this ancient piece of ground has remained a protected sacred space for over 800 years. The iconic building,

Andalusian peace garden and Bedouin Tent are living symbols that inspire people from all around the world — whether they have visited in person or glimpsed them in the background on a Zoom screen!

This year we welcomed thousands of people for events and gatherings of all kinds. We are currently raising funds for some essential upgrades.



Venue Hire

We share our stunning space with a diverse range of communities, organisations and individuals. Hiring it out for weddings, blessings, parties, proposals, organisational away-days, concerts, conferences and workshops offers the Centre a stream of income that can support running costs and provide a degree of financial stability.

2025 was a fantastic year for the venue hire business with more than 363 bookings.

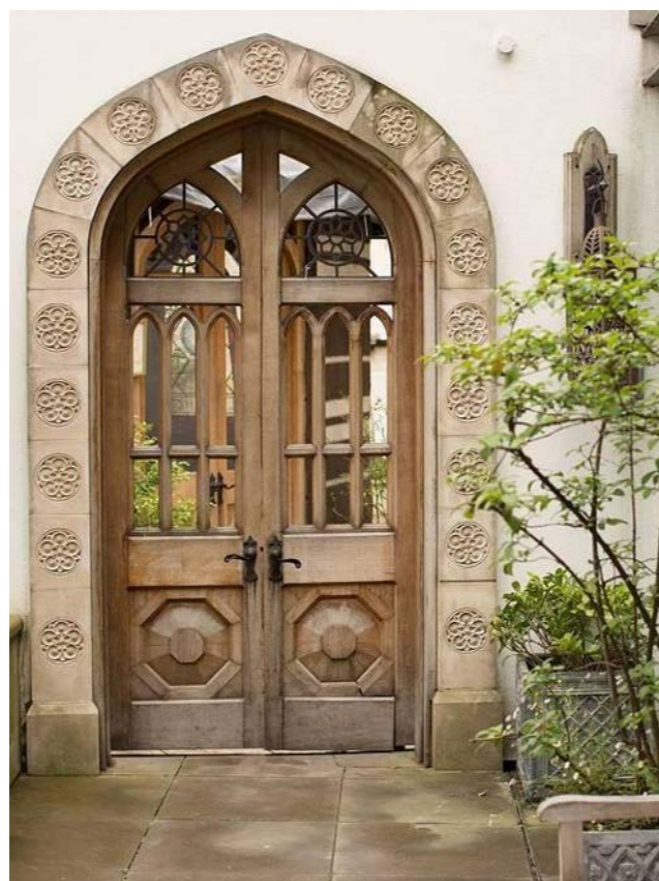
We continue to receive stellar reviews on Google Maps and a "Super Venue Status" on our main booking site Tagvenue.

“ We really had a great time at this very beautiful and welcoming place. The staff at the centre were very gracious and accommodating. The staff went out of their way to make the hosts comfortable. The set up was cute in the middle of the city and a great place to host intimate parties. ”

“ We attended an event here in August, totally fell in love with the venue. And the staff was absolutely out of this world. Very courteous, respectful and helpful. Went out of their way to assist the guests. Kudos! ”



“ We had a great experience here! The staff were incredibly nice and helpful throughout the event (Ioannis and Stamos), and the space was perfect for our needs—bright, well-equipped, and easy to set up. The audience loved the space as it is different to your typical event venue. I would definitely book again! ”



Our Supporters

A heartfelt thank you to all our Guardians, Friends, sponsors and donors who have helped to support our work this year.

We are grateful in particular to the following foundations:

- Arts Council England
- Camellia Foundation
- Counterpoint Arts
- Friends of City Churches
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Kalliopeia Foundation
- The Kitchin Trust
- Tides Foundation

And several foundations who wish to remain anonymous.



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Centre for Reconciliation and Peace