

Sanctuary Roads

Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and the Church

CONFERENCE 2025

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL & SARUM COLLEGE
WEDNESDAY 28TH MAY 2025



Diocese
of Salisbury



Sarum College
CATHEDRAL CLOSE, SALISBURY





**Making
Jesus
Known**

We are proud of our history of working with and supporting members of the Gypsy Roma and Traveller community in this diocese.

The first record of Romany Gypsies in Dorset dates as far back to 1558, with a baptism in the church in Lyme Regis. However, we are not complacent, as we hope this conference will demonstrate.

How could we be, when stories of the discrimination and violence faced by members of the community in this country are so rife? A recent national survey revealed extremely high levels of racial assault, poor health, precarious employment and deprivation faced by members of the community. One in three had experienced a physical, racist attack – higher

than any other ethnic group. Misconceptions and lazy stereotypes are perpetuated almost daily in some media. Christians are called to open our hearts and minds to build relationships grounded in truth and love, and to support the diverse ways God's people express their faith and culture. I hope today's conference will find new ways to deepen understanding, break down misconceptions, and unlock next steps to ensure that the Church's embrace of 'all one in Christ Jesus' is truly evident to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller peoples.

The Rt Revd Stephen Lake
Bishop of Salisbury

Today's Programme

Opening music from members of Gypsy and Traveller Communities in the Trinity Chapel, Salisbury Cathedral.

10.00	Welcome from the Dean of Salisbury, Nick Papadopoulos, the Bishop of Salisbury, Stephen Lake, and Betty Smith Billington, Kushti Bok
10.15	Opening address, Revd Dr Steven Horne, Journeying Together: Faith & Our Next Chapter
11.15 – 12.15	Morning workshops at Sarum College (see following pages for details)
12.30 – 14.30	Lunch provided at Sarum College
12.30 – 17.00	Stalls, craft and exhibits on Marsh Close. Family friendly activities
14.30 – 15.30	Afternoon workshops at Sarum College
16.00 – 17.15	Performance by Crystal's Vardo on Marsh Close
17.30	Evening worship at Salisbury Cathedral

The Key Objectives

The Diocese of Salisbury appointed its first 'Missioner to Itinerant Van Dwellers' the Rev'd Thomas Holt in 1881 and there were five other Missioners until this chaplaincy work came to an end during the First World War.

The Chaplaincy was revived in the early 2,000s by Rev'd Roger Redding MBE, who was then a Vicar in the Chalke Valley near Salisbury and the Diocese today continues to have a Chaplain to Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople.



So it's appropriate that this groundbreaking conference is held under the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, as a result of a partnership between the Diocese of Salisbury and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches is an ecumenical organisation made up of Christian Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma and those within the churches that work with them.

In 2019 the Church of England General Synod debated a paper entitled 'Centuries of Marginalisation and Visions of Hope'. The debate centred around the racism that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face daily and on a structural level.

A motion was proposed which called on the Church of England to take three actions:

- 1. That Church leaders speak out against racism experienced by Gypsies and Travellers**
- 2. That each Diocese in England appoint a Chaplain to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities**
- 3. That the Church be encouraged to make land available for new sites**

This conference is a chance for the church to see where it has made progress against that motion and be inspired to do more to challenge racism against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches and with the Diocese of Salisbury, becoming an agent of reconciliation between settled and formerly nomadic communities. It is a call to the wider church to wake up to the extreme inequalities experienced by Gypsies and

Travellers and welcome them to be part of a church that seeks to stand and act with those who are marginalised by crude stereotyping and ongoing racism. For too long these communities have been marginalised by society and also at times by churches. This conference seeks to be a turning point in an encouragement to churches to realise the blessings that come when they begin to engage with the rich cultural diversity and deeply held Christian faith of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Today's conference is an opportunity to learn from a number of well respected members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and celebrate the wisdom that they bring.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Churches and the Diocese of Salisbury strongly support the calls to practical action in response to From Lament to Action. We support further and greater participation by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members in the life and leadership of the church,

The Key Objectives

CONTINUED

inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history in educational curriculum in theological training institutions, anti-racist training at all levels of the church, increasing involvement in church life for young people and their participation and representation in structures and governance. Before the profound inequalities Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face can be addressed, we must recognise that many still do not have safe places to live. We call upon the Church of England in particular to make good it's promise to provide land for sites in dioceses around the country. We also call upon the Archbishops' Commission for Housing to include the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites, and housing for Roma peoples, as part of its work. The church is in a unique place to challenge racism

against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, and work in partnership on the ground with members of Gypsy Roma Traveller communities. This is because so many Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are already Christians and the church is often the one institution trusted by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in an otherwise hostile world. May this conference be a place where the voices of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are heard, and where from a place of repentance, concrete actions by the church lead to deep and lasting change.

**Revd Canon Jonathan Herbert
& Revd Canon Nicky Chater**

Journeying Together — Faith & Our Next Chapter

What is your story? Does it start with your journey to the Cathedral today? Perhaps your story starts when you met God, your spouse, or when you started your career.

For Gypsies, Travellers, and Roma, there are the individual stories, there are the family stories, and then there are the historical stories whose latter chapters are still being written.

For some our story started across the world under the sun in Asia, for others in green pastures in Ireland, through rolling hills in Wales and Scotland, and down lanes and meadows in England.

Separated by land and sea but united in identities, in struggles, in faith and in movement, Gypsies, Travellers and Roma stand with a millennium of

history and faith behind them and with endless possibilities for a thousand years in front.

Today I want us to dare to dream, to think, hope and dream about what the next chapter could and should look like. How can faith help take us from a rich history often marred by injustice and struggle into a space of sanctuary? Can faith take us into a promised land? And how do we survive the next journey?



Revd Dr Steven Horne

WORKSHOP 1

Roads Through Planning

Access to secure accommodation underpins many of the inequalities faced by Gypsy and Traveller communities. The planning system is the key barrier / gate way to the provision of sites.

This session will outline how the planning system works (or does not work) for Gypsies and Travellers, the experience of the communities, and the Church of England's commitments. It will then offer a discussion on what the church and those that represent it can do to facilitate the provision of sites and support Gypsies and Travellers within the context of the planning system.

The session will be led by Josie O'Driscoll and Dr Simon Ruston. Josie is a Traveller from Ireland. She has dedicated her career to advocating for the Gypsy,

Roma and Traveller people and has taken on leadership roles in various governmental advisory and equality boards, and is the Chief Officer of GATE Herts, a not-for-profit charity led by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

Simon Ruston is a chartered town planner working on behalf of Gypsies and Travellers. He is an associate of Friends Families and Travellers and works on advocating for systemic change on a national level, and the provision of socially provided accommodation at a local level.

**Dr Simon Ruston
& Josie Driscoll**
CEO of Gate Heart

WORKSHOP 2

Meeting at the Crossroads

I am a Chaplain for Durham Diocese, and the Chair of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches.

I first worked with members of these communities as a trainee GP sent to visit a family living on a site. My medical colleagues offered me many 'be careful of...' ahead of the visit, there were no mobile phones or Sat Nav systems then and visits were done alone. I was anxious, even fearful, and my trepidation was met with such gracious welcome that grace cancelled fear. I found I loved working with the communities.

My medical career took a different path, but a seed had been sown that lay dormant until my retirement from the NHS allowed me to take up my present roles.

I will offer some thoughts and examples of the kind of Chaplaincy we are exploring and share short video clips with the views of two people from the communities.



Revd Nicky Chater
Chaplain and Advocate to
Gypsy, Traveller and Roma
Communities in the Diocese
of Durham

WORKSHOP 2

Meeting at the Crossroads

As a chaplain to the Margaret Clitherow Trust I serve mainly Irish Travellers in mediating access to the sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, First Holy Communion and Confirmation; with the main focus on the latter two.

Parish priests are often at a loss on how to prepare and integrate young Travellers into their lengthy preparation classes, which are not in harmony with the lifestyle of traditional Travellers.

So in summer 2024 we developed an online programme accessible via a phone to prepare children and young people, who often struggle with literacy and self worth. The children were supported by, usually, Mum.

The results are promising and are being shared in our workshop.



Johanna Mills
Chaplain to the Margaret Clitherow Trust

WORKSHOP 3

Roads of History & Faith

Within this session, we will explore the complex and often negative impact that “the church” had upon Romani People.

We will look at the migratory path leading Romani people to the UK. We will also look at our first interactions with the church in England, and why they were so important to us.

Moving to the present day we will look more widely at religion within the Gypsy and Traveller communities. We will explore the importance of religion, belief and spirituality internally and the obstacles faced by those wishing to engage in the wider church.



Violet Cannon
Director and CEO
of York Travellers Trust

WORKSHOP 4

Salvation Roads

This workshop reflects on the experiences of The Salvation Army in several locations where an intentional strategy of establishing Roma-accessible, and in some cases Roma-led, congregations has been adopted.

It includes an appreciation of linguistic and cultural issues, the joys and sacrifices of incarnational, holistic ministry, some of the ecclesiological challenges faced by, and presented by, Roma leaders, and the intergenerational opportunities now being realised. It is presented by one old, cross-cultural pioneer minister and one much younger Roma youth ministry specialist practitioner.

Major David Blowers currently serves in the recently-created post of The Salvation Army

(United Kingdom and Ireland) Territorial Mission Officer (Roma). He is also one of the UK country representatives to Roma Networks.

Vilem Koňa is Czech Roma, living in the United Kingdom. Married to a British wife, he brings his understanding of both cultures. He is a youth development worker, employed by The Salvation Army and trained Roma mediator.

Major David Blowers and Vilem Kona



Marsh Close Activities



Family friendly stalls and activities

From 12 noon, free stalls and activities on Marsh Close will be open to all. Many activities are child friendly, but **parents and guardians remain responsible for their children at all times**

Storytelling and paper flower making with Chris Penfold Brown

Traditional peg making with Leon Rawlings

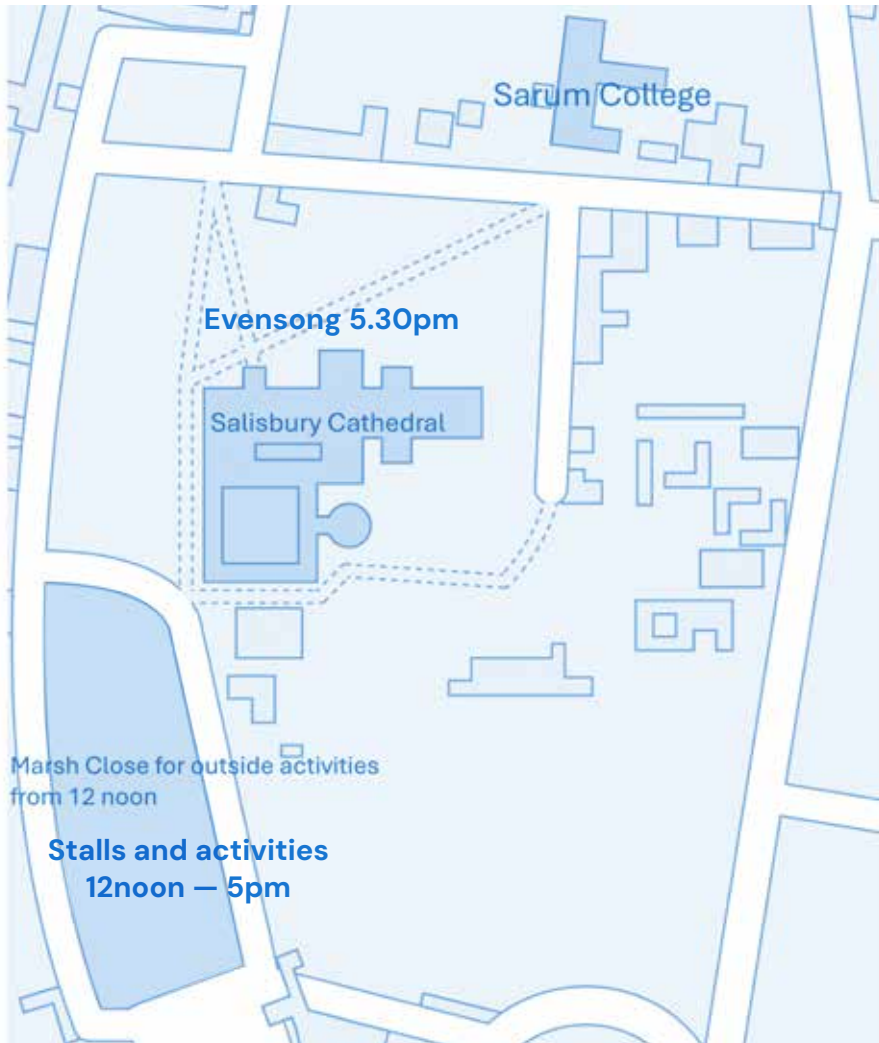
A performance by Crystal's Vardo at 4pm

Stalls include:

- Friends, Families and Travellers
 - Leeds Gate
 - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly Churches*
(*this stall is also the contact point for lost children)
 - Kushti Bok
-

Stalls will close at 5pm in time for a final evensong to celebrate the day at Salisbury Cathedral at 5.30pm

Marsh Close



What Next?

We hope what you have heard today has inspired you to think about how you could encourage change in your community and church. Here are some suggestions of next steps to take action for change:

1. Find out more about how your church or community could become a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Friendly church here www.sanctuaryplaces.co.uk.
2. Could your church offer a sanctuary stop? Check out [Sanctuary Stopping Places – Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Friendly Churches](#).
3. Ask if there is a local chaplain near you ministering to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Offer to support them in person and with prayer. Ask them what the communities they work with need.
4. If there is no chaplain, can you advocate for a dedicated chaplaincy in your diocese?

5. Sign up to training on challenging racism.
6. Look out for a follow up webinar to take forward the conversations we have continued here. All attendees will be sent a link to sign up to the webinar.

Thank you

This conference has only been made possible with the support of the Racial Justice Unit of the Church of England and we thank them for their commitment to challenging the racism encountered by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Thank you to the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral for offering their support and the venue free of charge. Thank you to Sarum College and Principal James Woodward for his support for this conference.

Southern Cathedrals festival

WEDNESDAY 16 JULY – SATURDAY 19 JULY 2025

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www.salisburycathedral.org.uk

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The logo for Sarum College, featuring a stylized four-leaf clover or cross design.

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