

Insights:

What do we know about visitors' experiences of
“The Light Before Christmas”
(2022-2023)



Liverpool
Cathedral





The Light Before Christmas: The Angels Are Coming, which ran from 02 to 09 December 2022, was a Luxmuralis production Son et Lumiere. It drew on the skills of sculptor Peter Walker and composer David Harper to create an immersive experience.

The second in the Son et Lumiere series was 'Light Before Christmas: The Manger,' a visual representation of the Manger from 1 to 8 December 2023.



What do we know about who bought tickets to visit these immersive experiences?

The data revealed.

- 15% of visitors were older adults in semi-detached houses. (In the Northwest, there are, on average, 11% of people in this category)
- 11% of visitors were Well-off older families living in detached houses close to cities, (this compares to 11% on average in the Northwest).
- A further 11% of visitors were families in owner-occupied semi-detached housing (again above the average 7% for this group in the Northwest).

Interestingly people at the other end of the social scale were underrepresented. For example, 10 % of visitors came from the group designated 'cash-strapped families' compared with a local average of 13.7%; there were even fewer from the groups 'Stretched society', 'low income' and 'non-private housing'.

Data source: Liverpool Cathedral Light Before Christmas
Postcode data Report 2024 acorn.caci.co.uk



What did people do?

An opportunity to just sit, think and enjoy the space

'I love the Cathedral just to be able go in there and sit and wander round I never tire of that ... It's a wonderful cathedral and I'm so glad I can go there anytime even if just want to reflect on my life and family and the world outside.' (Female, 80s+)

We find the cathedral a special, peaceful, and deeply moving place to attend and your art installations are a wonderful way of bringing people into the building. (Female, 50s)

Although I'm not religious, the building and its grounds make me feel tranquil.' (Female, 60s)

Quotes from: McKenna, U., Francis, L.J., Village, A. & Stewart, F., 2024, 'Exploring the responses of non-churchgoers to a cathedral pre-Christmas son et lumiere', HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 80(1), a9347. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9347>



How did people feel?

'I had the best experience ever as I have been going through a difficult time alone and I always have to stay strong for my boys and this really cheered me up and put a big smile on my face ... Me and the kids absolutely loved every minute we felt very welcomed ... it was actually the best time of my life, the best memory of my children.' (Female, 30s)

'I find the Cathedral a very beautiful, inspirational, peaceful, and healing place.' (Female, 60s)



A sense of belonging and pride

'Whatever reason I attend the Cathedral, I always feel at home ... It is lovely to see other people also enjoying it with all of the shows and installations that have been taking place.' (Female, 30s)

Just that I really enjoy my visits and take pride in showing it to family from America when they come over. I learn something new every time I come.' (Male, 60s)



Sense of welcome and inclusion

“I really hope that further events like this will be held in the cathedral as it reached so many people throughout the community ... It felt very inclusive, like it really was for everyone.’ (Female, 50s)

‘Events in the cathedral unite people as the world has many faiths it can still bring people together in accepting their different faiths and can inspire creativity and happiness ... Would like to see more shows like this it can unite people regardless of their faith.’ (Female, 40s)



A thought-provoking event

‘Very enjoyable event which made you reflect on what is really important in life.’ (Male, 60s)

‘Although not a religious person myself, I felt moved by the sounds, images and colours and it left me thinking about the possibility of something greater and unknowable existing in the universe.’ (Female, 60s)



Transcendence

'[I]t was a very special evening spent with my 13-year-old son ... It was a magical spiritual evening and really did touch my heart. Thank you!' (Female, 30s)

I am not particularly a religious person, as I do not attend church services, but feel connected with God or a higher being whilst in the cathedral (Female, 50s)



What were the benefits for the visitors?

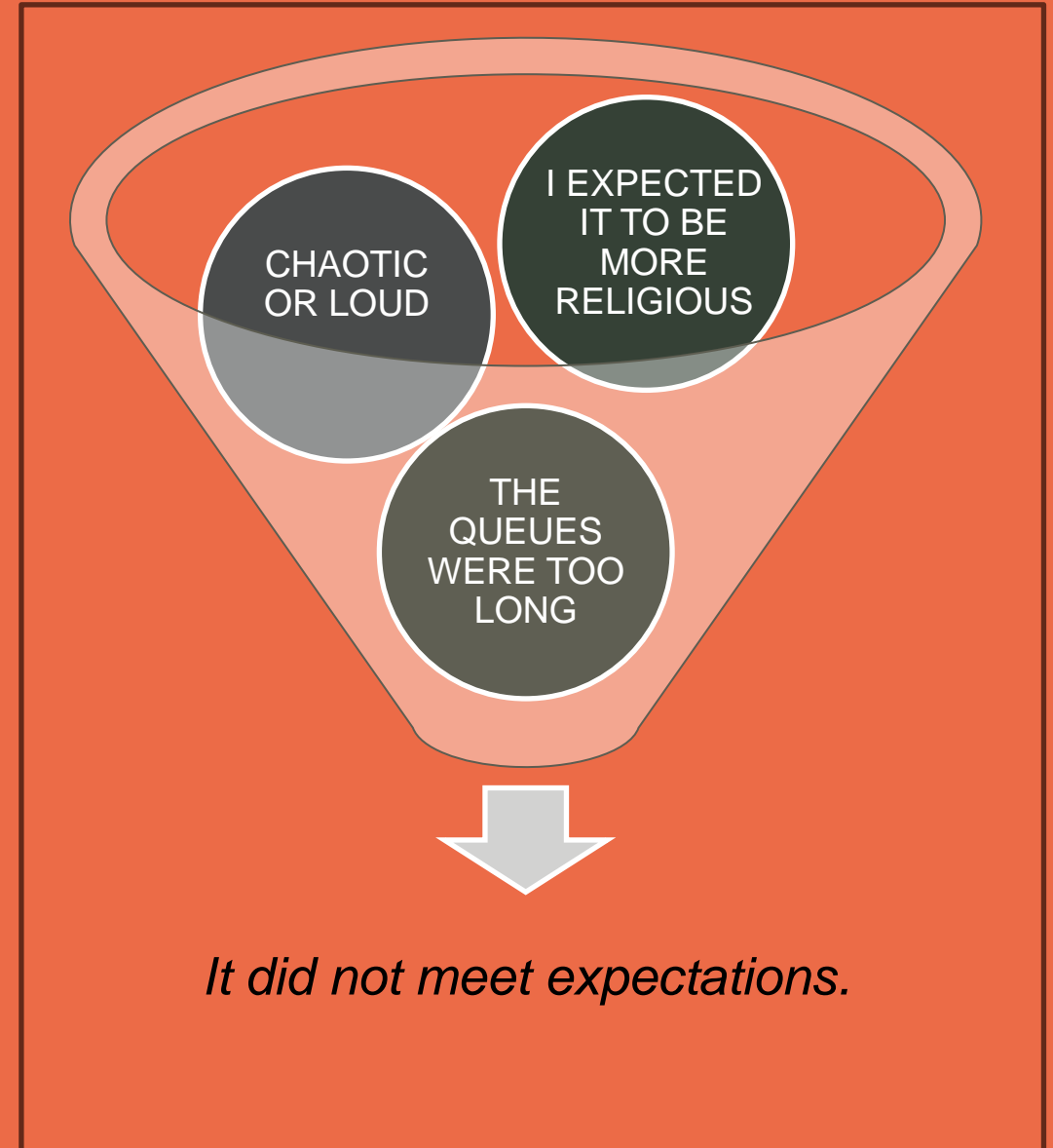
- Connecting with the spirit of Christmas
- Valuing the space
- Connecting with others
- Opportunity for personal reflection
- Gratitude
- Uplifting



Negative Feedback

- Do we need to know more about what people expect from a Christmas Son et Lumiere in a Cathedral?

Quotes from: McKenna, U., Francis, L.J., Village, A. & Stewart, F., 2024, 'Exploring the responses of non-churchgoers to a cathedral pre-Christmas son et lumiere', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 80(1), a9347. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9347>



What did we learn?

Is there a connection between the Lights Before Christmas and increased numbers at the Cathedral Christmas services?

Over two-fifths of the participants surveyed at the 2023 Son et Lumière 'The light before Christmas' in Liverpool Cathedral said that their experience made them more likely to attend a carol service in the cathedral, and one-fifth said they were more likely to attend a Christmas Eve or Christmas Day service.

By coincidence, the 4,749 attendance at the Christmas Eve carol services was a 21 per cent uplift on the pre-Covid 2019 attendance; the 1,232 attendance at Midnight Mass was a 73 per cent uplift on the 2019 attendance.

Francis, L. J. (2024). Evaluating the missional impact of an advent son et lumière in Liverpool Cathedral. *Theology*, 127(3), 169-178





What do you think are the benefits to visitors of the Lights Before Christmas experience?

What can Liverpool Cathedral do to enhance the Lights Before Christmas experience for visitors?

This is the first of a series of Insight papers into the Views and Values of people who encounter Liverpool Cathedral as visitors, volunteers, and members of the worshipping community.

Please email questions and comments, ideas about what topics you would like covered to
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