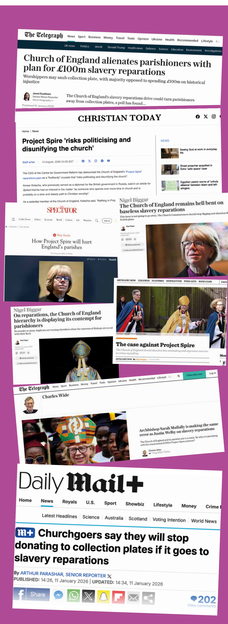
BLACK HISTORY IN CHURCH SPACES

From reckoning to repair:
what about the objections?



In 2023, The Church Commissioners for England announced the Fund for Healing, Repair and Justice, or Project Spire. It is a commitment of 0.9 per cent of the Church's endowment fund, £100 million, over a ten-year period, to help communities still disadvantaged by the aftermath of trans-Atlantic slavery. Rather than being "reparations", it is an ethical impact investment fund. It will go towards projects intended to generate further returns and attract other investors.

Project Spire has met with vocal opposition in parts of the press, from spokespeople in Parliament and from certain quarters within the Anglican Church. We address some of their objections here:

Hasn't slavery been part of humanity forever and Black people for example have enslaved each other for centuries?

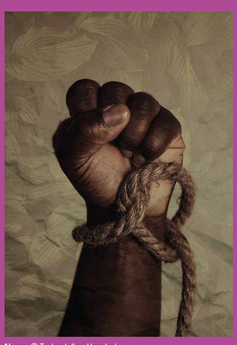
Slavery in one form or another has been a constant feature of human history. The Church Commissioners believe the fact that others also committed the sin of slavery should not determine the CoE's reckoning with its own extensive participation in a crime against humanity.

Trans-Atlantic slavery was unlike any other type.

'Arab' or 'Islamic slavery' began before and continued alongside Christian trafficking across the Atlantic. It may have involved nearly as many captives. In the Islamic world slavery was largely military and domestic rather than commercial. Enslaved and free could be black, brown or white-skinned. Captives and their children would often obtain freedom (source: Justin Marozzi, *Captives and Companions: A History of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Islamic World,* Allen Lane, 2025).

In the Christian Atlantic system all captives were Black and each individual was itemised as a unit of stock and a capital asset. Absentee investors living in Britain demanded regular returns on their plantations and enslaved "property".

British slave traders' partnership with slave-raiding African kingdoms was crucial to the supply of captives, but these captives' exploitation and that of their descendants took place on European-owned plantations in the Americas. These plantations established today's wealth gap between descendants of Black enslaved people and descendants of white enslavers and their compatriots.



Above: © Tasha Jolley, Unsplash

Use this QR code to access more information about Black History on the Diocese of Chichester site.

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'The Church cannot undo its history, but it can choose how it responds to it'

Sarah Mullally, Archbishop of Canterbury

Won't Project Spire take money away from local churches to funnel it abroad?

- Project Spire does NOT take money from parish churches or parish giving. It is funded from a small portion of the returns on the Commissioners' investments.
- Project Spire does not reduce funding for church repairs, which comes from a separate larger fund (1.6 billion committed in 2025).
- Project Spire is not a pay-out scheme for individuals or descendant communities. It is an investment impact fund intended to generate profits. Allocation will be in line with the mission and ethos of the Anglican communion.

The South Sea Company debate

Much of the criticism of Project Spire has been based on the distinction between shares and government-backed annuities in the South Sea Company.

It was well known that the South Sea Company had the monopoly on the supply of captives to Spain's American colonies when the Church decided to purchase £13,907 worth of its shares in April 1720. These shares turned out not to be as profitable as the Church had hoped, and annuities held in parallel yielded more returns.

However, the Church Commissioners believe that *'the fact that the... predecessor fund had any financial involvement in this vile practice is a source of deep shame.'*
Source: Church Commissioners' former chief executive, Gareth Mostyn

What the polling really showed

Opponents of Project Spire commissioned a poll in December 2025, which was reported widely but selectively in the press and on GB News as evidence that most parishioners are opposed to Project Spire.

Results that were not reported revealed that 62% (i.e. the majority of the poll's respondents) would be happy either to continue contributing the amounts they already do or would increase their contributions to support reparative justice measures.

Funding 'reparation for historic injustices such as slavery' came third out of eight possible options, ahead of supporting church staff and volunteers. Respondents were not informed that the most popular first choice, church repairs, are funded separately.

The bigger picture

The Church of England clearly cannot change its past. Project Spire is an attempt to respond to it honestly, bravely and through a fund built to last which can make a measurable and positive difference to people's lives today and in the future.

Below: Congregation of St Luke's Church, Brighton
Photographer: Rachel Kiley



tinyurl.com/black-history-in-church-spaces

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This exhibition acknowledges the contributions of St John the Evangelist Church Newtimber, St Mary Magdalene, Madehurst and St Mary's Church, Slindon as well as the Church Commissioners' Engagement Team for Project Spire, who have been incredibly supportive and resourceful in helping us access and interpret historical data. We would also like to express particular gratitude to the National Church, through the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice, for providing the funding that has made this exhibition possible. In addition, I would like to acknowledge and thank, Ngaire Digby, Revd Peter Dyson, Mira Knox, Sarah Lee, Professor Alan Lester, and Revd Martin Poole for the advice, encouragement, research, and expertise they have contributed throughout the development of this project. **Vitalis Ngwambi**