

Animals, Anglicans and Cultures of Prayer and Worship in England, c. 1900–c. 1950

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Studies of Christian worship understandably present churches as institutions that minister to human communities. The article shows that worship in the Church of England has a non-human history. Key developments between 1900 and 1950, notably war, the growth of pet-keeping and heightening concerns about the countryside, encouraged groups, inside and outside the Church, to push for rituals and liturgies that engaged with animals and animal issues in varied ways. The incorporation of animals in worship is an unappreciated aspect of broader changes in cultures of prayer, and an overlooked element in Anglican efforts to reconnect worship with the natural world.

For centuries the *Book of Common Prayer* has structured what has been said during divine service in the Church of England. The book provides worshippers with occasional services to mark moments in the

BBC = British Broadcasting Corporation; BCP = *The Book of Common Prayer*; CT = *Church Times*; LPL = Lambeth Palace Library, London; PDSA = People's Dispensary for Sick Animals; RSPCA = Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; SUPPCA = Society for United Prayer for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

This article recognises that humans are an animal species and to talk of 'humans' and 'animals' is harmful because it can habituate us to thinking in terms of barriers separating species. For stylistic reasons the paper uses 'animal' to mean species other than humans. The article is primarily concerned with English Anglicanism, and in most cases 'Anglican' is used to refer to a member or adherent of the Church of England in England.

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life cycle, as well as a calendar of prayers and services to follow through the seasons of the year. The sequence of services has some link to the natural world and changes in the seasons, most obviously at Easter, the celebration of birth and resurrection, and Christmas, the midwinter festival. In other ways the *BCP*, when contrasted with pre-Reformation liturgies, detached churchgoers from nature. In medieval times, the saints' days in early summer had associations with the harvest, and light was a key theme in the feast days in September and October, when nights lengthened. Medieval liturgies contained prayers for the blessing of fruits, and processions, another kind of service book, provided chants for use when communities offered prayers for God's blessing on the growing crops during 'rogation' perambulations in early summer.¹ The Reformation, and the Protestant aversion to the 'religion of material things', brought changes, and the 1549 and 1559 prayer books cut the number of feast days. These books did not contain liturgies for agricultural festivals.² It was not until the late nineteenth century that High Church Anglo-Catholics reconnected the Church of England calendar with natural world cycles when they revived rogation processions and created harvest thanksgivings. A third Victorian initiative, the spread of flower services and missions, was an Evangelical project, but it resembled the other two in that it too harnessed the potential of the natural world to 'draw people back to their Creator and Redeemer'.³

Another aspect of this reconnection with the natural world, and one that has largely escaped notice, was the tendency for church services, after about 1900, to make increasing reference to non-human animals, both symbolic and living ones. Indeed, in some places, worship in the Church of England took place in proximity to animals in ways that English Anglicans might have associated with non-Christian religions, or religion in earlier periods of English history, when humans had often brought companion animals to church services.⁴ Worshippers offered prayers for animals in quiet moments. Vicars sometimes blessed farm animals in fields. Later, from the 1930s, there would be a growing taste for 'pet

¹ Nicholas Orme, *Going to church in medieval England*, New Haven 2021, 298–301.

² Brian Cummings, 'Introduction' to *The Book of Common Prayer: the texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662*, Oxford 2011, p. xxiv. The 1662 *BCP* contained prayers for rain and for fair weather to be used at the discretion of the clergy.

³ Bob Bushaway, *By rite: custom, ceremony and community in England, 1770–1880*, London 1982, 265–74; Mark Smith, 'The mountain and the flower: the power and potential of nature in the world of Victorian Evangelicalism', in Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (eds), *God's bounty: the Churches and the natural world* (Studies in Church History xlvii, 2010), 307–18 at p. 317.

⁴ John Craig, 'Psalms, groans and dog-whippers: the soundscape of worship in the English parish church, 1547–1642', in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (eds), *Sacred space in early modern Europe*, Cambridge 2005, 113–21.

services'. Historians, Chien-hui Li in particular, have recognised that animals and animal subjects, such as cruelty, vivisection and hunting, became the subject of Sunday church services more regularly in the late Victorian period.⁵ What Church of England clergy said on these occasions has received some attention too, although the fullest studies of Anglican (and Nonconformist) preaching on animal subjects have focused on earlier periods.⁶ But the sermon was just one way in which animals figured in worship. There is need for a better understanding of how, in the early twentieth century, prayers that referenced animals became acceptable to Anglicans, and how a widening range of animals, first domestic animals and then wildlife, were incorporated in the texts, rituals and practices of everyday Church of England worship. This article examines the growing visibility of animals in English Anglican worship in the period from 1900, when special religious days for animals became common, up until the late 1950s, when animal services, sometimes involving living animals, became quite customary.

This article moves through three sections that each focus on a different period and a different way in which English Anglicans tried to find time in church calendars for non-human animals. The first section considers the period from 1890 to 1914 and the co-operation that emerged between the Church and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals when the two organisations organised an annual special religious day for animals, the so-called 'Animal Sunday'. The second examines how, after the First World War, Anglicans – particularly laypersons – considered this special Sunday insufficient, and recommended the inclusion of animals in the prayers, liturgies and services that structured weekly worship. The third section turns to the 1940s and a group of Anglicans who believed that a more substantial reworking of the liturgical year was required, so that human lives – both in town and country – could be patterned around the agricultural year, the seasons and plant and animal life.

In explaining why worship in the Church of England in the twentieth century increasingly referenced animals, this article distinguishes between wider contextual factors and the developments within English Anglicanism that provided the conditions for a fuller consideration of animal issues in church services. Wider contextual factors included animal service in war, the spread of pet-keeping among all classes of

⁵ Chien-hui Li, *Mobilizing traditions in the first wave of the animal protection movement*, Basingstoke 2019, ch. ii.

⁶ Jane Spencer, "Love and hatred are common with the whole sensitive creation": animal feeling in the century before Darwin', in Angelique Richardson (ed.), *After Darwin: animals, emotions, and the mind*, Amsterdam 2013, 24–50; John Morillo, *The rise of animals and the descent of man, 1660–1800*, Lanham, MD 2017, ch. iii. Nonconformist sermons provide some of the source material considered in Philip Sampson, *Animal ethics and the Nonconformist conscience*, Basingstoke 2018.

society⁷ and a growing preoccupation with the renewal of the countryside. Within Anglicanism, the period during and after the First World War was an era of heightened sensitivity about the Church of England's comprehensiveness, its leadership credentials and its status as a national institution that was available to everyone.⁸ There was a tendency for the Church to present itself as the upholder of 'shared public values', such as tolerance, co-operation and a generalised Christian morality.⁹ Care for animals was another value, and senior Anglicans recognised that the national Church had to engage with animal issues, such as the broadening culture of pet ownership (more controversial concerns, such as animal experimentation and so-called 'blood sports', tended to be avoided). While the growing visibility of animals in worship seems not to have been unique to the Church of England (further research is needed to reveal similar stories in other denominations), the Church slowly claimed for itself a special, national role to speak on animal issues. And the largest animal welfare societies, notably the RSPCA, recognised the Church's leadership.

Early twentieth-century Anglicanism was also characterised by considerable liturgical debate, revision and experimentation. Worship, which was traditionally prescribed and scripted, became freer and more personal, and clergymen had more discretion to arrange services that suited local needs and tastes.¹⁰ Liturgical revision, which resulted in the new *BCP* of 1928, is usually associated with Anglo-Catholics, and it is striking that High Churchmen – admittedly a large and diverse group – were so prominent in the twentieth-century efforts to centre church services around animals and animal issues. This Anglo-Catholic contribution had implications for how animals appeared in prayers, liturgies and services. Nineteenth-century Evangelicals had tended to focus on what animal cruelty meant for human morality. Anglo-Catholics, by contrast, brought an emphasis on ritual, the sacraments and the divine quality of creation, and they encouraged prayers and liturgies that, on the one hand, made

⁷ Working-class pet-keeping is considered in Julie-Marie Strange, 'When John met Benny: class, pets and family life in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *History of the Family* xxvi (2021), 214–35.

⁸ Philip Williamson, 'Henley Henson and the appointment of bishops: state, Church and nation in England, 1917–1920 and beyond', this JOURNAL (2023), 1–24 at pp. 18–19.

⁹ Matthew Grimley and Philip Williamson, 'Introduction: the Church of England, the British state and British politics during the twentieth century', in Tom Rodger, Philip Williamson, and Matthew Grimley (eds), *The Church of England and British politics since 1900*, Woodbridge 2020, 30.

¹⁰ Philip Williamson (ed.), *National prayers: special prayers since the Reformation, III: Worship for national and royal occasions in the United Kingdom, 1871–2016*, Woodbridge 2020, pp. xc–xci.

animals the subject, and, on the other, gave more consideration to the interconnections between people, animals and nature.

This study of the growing visibility of animals in worship in the Church of England has much importance for students of Anglicanism and animal protection, as well as contemporary churchgoers. The Church of England's engagement with animals and animal issues provides a new perspective on the Church of England's public status in the twentieth century, as well as the continuing Christian basis of much modern animal advocacy.¹¹ A history that demonstrates how Anglican calendars and liturgies have developed in relation to the natural world has much relevance today, because the climate crisis has pushed Christians to debate how religious calendars can be adapted so that worshippers have time to engage with environmental issues.¹² This history also represents one way for historians of Anglicanism to engage with the recent 'animal turn' and the question of how far church histories have been shaped by animal 'agency'. Animal agency is difficult to find in Christian rituals.¹³ This article argues that animals shaped Anglican worship, not as 'agents' or 'actors', but because they were visible presences in human communities. The visibility of animals in urban spaces diminished in the twentieth century, but pet-keeping and war, and the continued use of horsepower in agriculture, sharpened the sense that labouring and companion animals inhabited what Mary Midgley, the philosopher, called a 'mixed community'.¹⁴ The liturgies considered in this article encouraged the idea of a multi-species community. It has long been known that individual Anglican clergy wrote theological and scientific works that encouraged readers to rethink the supposedly unbridgeable divide separating humans from non-humans.¹⁵ It was not until large social changes combined with shifts in cultures of prayer in the twentieth century that everyday Anglican ritual, involving a much broader community of worshippers, reflected ways of thinking that

¹¹ Li notes the Christian basis of late Victorian and Edwardian animal advocacy, but implies that the Christian influence had diminished by the 1920s, the end point of her study: *Mobilizing traditions*, chs ii–iii. The current article notes the enduring Christian outlook of the most mainstream protection society, the RSPCA. Further research might reveal how far the society's Christian associations complicated its efforts to engage with ethnic and religious minorities, both before and during the post-1945 period of colonial immigration.

¹² Karen Armstrong, *Sacred nature: how we can recover our bond with the natural world*, London 2022.

¹³ Laura Hobgood-Oster, *Holy dogs and asses: animals in the Christian tradition*, Urbana, IL 2008, 5; Anna Peterson, 'Religious studies and the animal turn', *History of Religions* lvi (2016), 232–45 at p. 238.

¹⁴ Mary Midgley, *Animals and why they matter*, 2nd edn, Athens, GA 1998, ch. x.

¹⁵ James Turner, *Reckoning with the beast: animals, pain, and humanity in the Victorian mind*, Baltimore, MD 1980; Keith Thomas, *Man and the natural world: changing attitudes in England, 1500–1800*, 2nd edn, London 1984.

considered animals as active subjects that possessed characters and wills, and whose independent existences were interconnected with human lives.

A special day for animals

After 1850 it became common for Protestant churches to set aside Sunday services for special causes and appeals. By 1900 ‘special Sundays’ for hospitals, temperance, overseas missions, children, military veterans and harvest festivals had become fixed in the calendars of many Anglican dioceses. ‘Hospital Sunday’ – an occasion when churches raised money for local healthcare institutions – demonstrated the value of organised religion for wider society.¹⁶ It is probable that the success of Hospital Sunday, which originated in Birmingham in 1859 and spread to other towns and cities, inspired a special Sunday for the care of animals. The Society (later Royal Society) for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the other animal protection societies that emerged in the 1820s had a history of approaching Protestant clergymen to deliver animal protection sermons. Clergy delivered such sermons at varying times in the year, and only in the 1860s, when the RSPCA gave more attention to education,¹⁷ did the society, working through provincial branches and ‘ladies’ committees’, appeal to the clergy to preach against cruelty to animals on a particular Sunday. Something like a national day for animals occurred on Sunday 17 November 1861, an unremarkable day in the Anglican calendar which had little immediate relevance for animals.¹⁸ In subsequent years, however, RSPCA officials found it too difficult to coordinate the preaching of sermons, and from the later 1860s to the mid-1890s there was a return to the piecemeal approach, with clergymen invited to deliver sermons on Sundays of their choice.

In 1896 the RSPCA, alongside an Anglican body, the Church Society for the Promotion of Kindness to Animals, undertook the enormous, and costly, effort of posting circulars that urged all the Anglican clergy listed in clerical directories to observe a fixed ‘Animal Sunday’. The chosen day, the fourth Sunday after Trinity (which fell in June or July), was considered appropriate because the animal protection theme suited the services that the *BCP* prescribed for Anglicans on that day. The Collect and Gospel for the day emphasised a language of mercy that, as James Gregory and Li

¹⁶ Roger Ottewill, “‘Alleviating the sum of human suffering’: the origins, attributes and appeal of Hospital Sunday, 1859–1914”, in Charlotte Methuen and Andrew Spicer (eds), *The Church in sickness and in health* (Studies in Church History lviii, 2022), 352–71.

¹⁷ Brian Harrison, ‘Animals and the state in nineteenth-century England’, *EHR* lxxxviii (1973), 786–820 at pp. 793, 815.

¹⁸ *Morning Post* [London], 22 Nov. 1861.

point out, was a vital element in nineteenth-century animal-welfare discourse. Humans had a duty to imitate God and to be kind and merciful towards the animals he had created.¹⁹ The observance of this specified ‘Animal’ or ‘Mercy Sunday’ was repeated in subsequent years with some success: in 1901, for instance, the RSPCA issued a map that showed that 2,000 sermons had been preached on Animal Sunday that year.²⁰ Predictably, given the urban basis of much animal protection activity, sermons tended to be delivered in towns and cities, but there was strong representation, too, in country parishes. Another animal-themed day that became popular in this period, Bird and Tree Day, was never integrated in ecclesiastical calendars. This day for nature study was an initiative of the Society for the Protection of Birds, and although Anglican clergy gave much support, the event was targeted at children in a way that Animal Sunday was not, and it always occurred on a school day.²¹

Two aspects of Animal Sunday require emphasis. The first was its strongly Anglican character. The RSPCA claimed that Animal Sunday was observed by Nonconformists, but while this was the case, the London headquarters only communicated with Anglican clergy.²² This reveals the society’s Anglican tendencies, something that was strengthened by its royal patronage and its elite and establishment links.²³ The Church’s comprehensive system of parishes and parsons in England and Wales, and its potential to communicate anti-cruelty messages nationally, made it attractive to the society. The society recognised that the British public identified with a plurality of religions, and it made some effort to reach a national community through other means. Senior Jewish rabbis sometimes attended RSPCA meetings in London.²⁴ A model sermon, preached by a rabbi, was published by the society in the early 1900s, and presumably was designed to encourage others to do likewise.²⁵ In places where Anglicans were a minority, RSPCA branches tried to present an ecumenical face to the public. Since the late 1890s the Liverpool branch had issued multi-faith appeals in the newspapers,²⁶ and from 1914 the branch communicated directly with the city’s Jewish and non-Anglican Christian ministers. But Animal

¹⁹ James Gregory, *Mercy and British culture, 1760–1960*, London 2021, 69; Li, *Mobilizing traditions*, 35. The Collect appealed to God to ‘increase and multiply upon us thy mercy’ and the Gospel (Luke vi.36–42) included the line ‘be ye therefore merciful’, which later became a key anti-vivisection slogan.

²⁰ *Animal World* (Dec. 1901), 180–2.

²¹ Julie Hipperson, ‘“Come all and bring your spades”: England and Arbor day, c. 1880–1914’, *Rural History* xxiii (2012), 59–80.

²² *Animal World* (Dec. 1896), 180.

²³ Harriet Ritvo, *The animal estate: the English and other creatures in the Victorian age*, 2nd edn, London 1990, ch. iii.

²⁴ *The Times*, 29 June 1880.

²⁵ G. S. Belasco, *Power and trust: a sermon preached at the Montefiore Endowment Synagogue, Ramsgate*, London n.d.

²⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, 23 June 1899.

Sunday and the RSPCA struggled to shake off an association with the Anglican establishment. In Liverpool, only two Catholic clergy responded to the 1914 Animal Sunday appeal. No Catholic minister replied to the appeal a year later, and in 1919 the branch temporarily abandoned its efforts to reach the city's Roman Catholic population.²⁷

Second, Animal Sunday was primarily a preaching occasion. This limited lay involvement and had implications for the representation of animals. Although a full analysis of the sermons reported in newspapers is not possible here, it is striking that most preachers continued the Evangelical tendency and focused attention on the significance that care of animals had for the moral and spiritual improvement of humans. As the dean of Ripon said in 1912, 'our care for the animals which served us was both a test of our character and a training of our hearts'.²⁸ Most sermons emphasised a hierarchy of creatures, humanity's stewardship of creation and the obligation to imitate God's benevolence and to be kind and merciful towards animals. A Knightsbridge preacher said that 'Christianity exalted reverence to the place of pity, because the Christian revered the likeness of Christ in the lowest, and therefore treated the lowest as his neighbour.'²⁹ Ideas about human superiority, obligation and sacrifice had been, as Li notes, key elements in the religious justification for animal protection in the nineteenth century, and such discourses continued to be preached from pulpits in the early twentieth.³⁰

Frequent references in the sermons to the possibility of animal afterlives, and the notion that the promise of redemption was extended to animals, represented a break from traditional Christian teaching, but it was perhaps a sign that clergy tried to respond to the popularity of pet-keeping.³¹ By late century, the more radical elements in animal protectionism increasingly denounced the language of mercy and kindness as vague and weak, and it was the case that newer languages, that emphasised the rights of animals, and which stressed kinship and common origins instead of human superiority, are represented in Anglican preaching on Animal Sunday.³² Nevertheless, the sermons tended to present animals as passive objects that served and submitted to people. Only occasionally was reference made to animal instincts, behaviours or recent discoveries in natural history. And the range of animals mentioned in the sermons

²⁷ Records of the RSPCA, Liverpool branch, Liverpool Record Office, 179 ANI, 6/4 ladies committee minute book, 1914–39, entries for 13 Mar., 2 Oct. 1914; 13 Oct. 1915; 19 May 1919.

²⁹ *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 29 June 1897.

³⁰ *Hexham Courant*, 29 June 1907; *Essex County Chronicle*, 9 July 1909; *County Express*, 25 June 1910.

³¹ *Surrey Comet*, 6 July 1901; *Herts. and Cambs. Reporter*, 13 July 1906; *Isle of Wight Observer*, 10 July 1909; *West Herts and Watford Observer*, 10 July 1909.

³² *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, 26 June 1910.

was limited to those that served humans and satisfied human needs. That the treatment of horses received much attention is unsurprising, given the continuing importance of animal transport. Preachers in towns and cities said much, too, about the proper care of pets and domestic animals kept in backyards.³³

By 1914 the spread of Animal Sunday had done something to fix concern for animals in the Anglican calendar. The occasion did not, however, achieve the popularity of other special Sundays or become a 'civic ritual' in the way Hospital Sunday did.³⁴ As Liverpool indicates, much of the religious public did not observe the occasion, perhaps because animal protection was considered unimportant, or because it was associated with interfering elites and attempts to strengthen the Anglican establishment. Take-up among the Anglican clergy was also patchy; presumably many believed church services should concentrate on the salvation of human souls. The Church's *Yearbooks* show that the occasion was rarely observed in cathedrals, and it may be that clergy were concerned that Animal Sunday would be hijacked by anti-vivisectionists who were frustrated that the Church of England, like the RSPCA, equivocated on the vivisection issue. On Animal Sunday 1911 members of the London Anti-Vivisection Society handed churchgoers copies of an open letter that criticised the bishops who had publicly defended experiments on live animals.³⁵ In a public speech in 1912 Archbishop Randall Davidson of Canterbury referred to Animal Sunday as 'anti-vivisection Sunday' and said the Church's Christian message was likely to 'dissipate' and 'lose energy' through such 'abnormal activity'.³⁶

Animal Sunday, then, reveals the difficult relationship that some sections of the public, and some Anglican clergy, had with organised animal protection. The occasion also suggested that a Victorian and Edwardian Church of England that enjoyed privileges in politics and education, and which was associated with conservatism, faced difficulties when it tried to provide leadership on public issues, or present itself as the upholder of shared values, such as animal protection.³⁷ There was some indication, too, that a special day for animals was coming to be regarded as insufficient. Some laypeople felt that worship on animal themes should be more routine, should include greater lay involvement and should encourage a sense of intimacy and a focus on animal sufferers. In 1914, and for the first time, animal advocates urged the Church to consider altering the *BCP* so that

³³ *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 8 July 1909; *Durham Chronicle*, 17 July 1908.

³⁴ Ottewill, "Alleviating the sin of human suffering", 366–7.

³⁵ *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1905; *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 29 May 1908; *The Times*, 6 July 1911. For the Church and vivisection see Li, *Mobilizing traditions*, 71–8.

³⁶ *The Times*, 28 June 1912.

³⁷ Grimley and Williamson, 'Introduction', 29–30.

concern for animals would be a regular feature of daily prayers and services. In March, the secretary of the Cheltenham branch of the RSPCA told a local newspaper that the inclusion of a prayer for animals in the *BCP* would help humans develop closer relationships with animals: ‘we require inspiration to gauge their feelings’, the secretary said, and ‘estimate our responsibility regarding them’.³⁸ As the next section shows, the war encouraged new, more intimate, styles of animal-themed worship that, on the one hand, featured a stronger lay element, and, on the other, represented a wider range of animals in a fuller sense, as subjects that inhabited communities and, most importantly, co-operated with humans in war.

Prayers for animals

There is a growing literature on animal service in wartime and the emotional attachments that soldiers developed with the horses and dogs that served and suffered on the western front.³⁹ Sometimes these relationships took a religious form. Historians cite examples of soldiers – quite late in the war – awarding military pigeons rough funerals and burying the birds in graves marked by small crosses.⁴⁰ War stimulated compassionate attitudes on the home front, too. As Hilda Kean points out, the animals that humans ‘conscripted’ into the war effort could be represented as possessing human emotions and qualities. Images of grieving riderless horses that appeared in animal welfare publicity were a continuation, in wartime, of the Victorian tendency to attribute to certain animals human faculties and character traits, such as thought, compassion, fellowship, sagacity, fidelity and patriotism.⁴¹

The Church of England made some effort to recognise the service and suffering of military animals. A 1915 compilation, *Forms of prayer for public and private use in time of war*, a publication authorised by Archbishop Davidson, recommended prayers of ‘intercession’ on behalf of animals ‘that suffer in the war’.⁴² Intercessory prayer was offered on behalf of others, and while such petitions had always been part of church worship (Anglicans prayed for the physical and spiritual health and wellbeing of

³⁸ *Gloucestershire Echo*, 7 Mar. 1914.

³⁹ Chris Pearson, ‘Dogs, history, and agency’, *History & Theory* lii (2013), 128–45; Richard van Emden, *Tommy’s ark: soldiers and their animals in the Great War*, London 2010.

⁴⁰ John Lewis-Stempel, *Where poppies blow: the British soldier, nature, the Great War*, London 2016, 32–3.

⁴¹ Hilda Kean, *Animal rights: political and social change in Britain since 1800*, London 1998, 165, 171–5; Li, *Mobilizing traditions*, 171–3.

⁴² SPCK, *Forms of prayer for public and private use in time of war*, London 1915, 3.

royalty, clergy and lay congregations), the wars of the early twentieth century encouraged a broader culture of intercessory prayer. The special services and days of prayer that Churches and governments set aside during the South African War of 1899–1902 and the First World War included prayers on behalf of a lengthy list of sufferers.⁴³ This culture of intercessory prayer would be extended to animals, and, as the 1915 compilation suggests, such prayers achieved a degree of recognition in the Church of England. Early in the First World War a prayer of intercession for suffering horses circulated widely, but it became controversial and generated a good deal of concern in the Church. Prayers that referenced animals may have disconcerted some Anglicans because there was a history of anti-vivisectionists using malign prayers against scientists.⁴⁴ The prayer for suffering horses raised concerns because its provenance was unclear and because it suggested that non-humans might have wills. This wartime prayer would encourage further demands for animals to be integrated in church services and liturgies, and so warrants close analysis.

Early in the war, an animal welfare organisation, the Our Animal Brothers' Guild, circulated a litany, said to have been adapted from the liturgy of the Russian Orthodox Church, and which included an animal prayer.⁴⁵ The prayer was contentious because it was not the usual petition for kinder treatment. The prayer represented animals as patriots that had spiritual souls, wills and agency in the sense that they gave their lives for their countries:

And for those also, O Lord, the humble beasts who with us bear the burden and heat of the day, and offer their guileless lives for the well-being of their countries, we supplicate Thy great tenderness of heart, for Thou has promised to save both man and beast, and great is Thy loving kindness, O Master, Saviour of the world. Lord have mercy.⁴⁶

Worshippers might then pray directly for animals, as opposed to their better treatment by humans. Some clergymen included the prayer in the services of intercession in their parish churches, and in December Edmund Knox, the Evangelical bishop of Manchester, authorised the use of the prayer among his clergy. The Guild claimed in early January 1915 that they had sold over 100,000 copies of the prayer and

⁴³ Williamson, *National prayers*, iii, p. xciii.

⁴⁴ A. W. H. Bates, *Anti-vivisection and the profession of medicine in Britain: a social history*, London 2017, 138.

⁴⁵ A copy of the litany is available in W. J. Birkbeck papers, LPL, 1/12/9, fos 33–4. Philip Johnson, in his blog, 'Animals matter to God', studies the origins and subsequent use of the prayer in prayer anthologies and animal ethics literature: <<https://animalsmattertogod.com/2012/05/09/st-basils-animal-prayers-are-a-hoax-part-six/>>, accessed 18 July 2023>.

⁴⁶ *Westminster Gazette*, 11 Nov. 1914.

litany.⁴⁷ Laypeople and clergymen wrote to church newspapers to say that the prayer met a ‘real want’, that it was ‘beautiful and touching’ and that it reflected the ‘British conception’ that animals had souls and afterlives. One clergyman admitted that it was questionable whether ‘we men may rightly pray “for” the beasts’, but concluded, none the less, that ‘we have a great need to ask forgiveness for the merciless slaughter’ of horses ‘in a quarrel which is not theirs’.⁴⁸ The prayer also circulated among soldiers in France and Belgium. Bishop Winnington-Ingram of London used a revised version of the prayer during services on a tour of the western front in spring 1915.⁴⁹

The popularity of the prayer is another example of how far Anglican doctrines and liturgical practices, as represented in the *BCP*, struggled to meet the needs of people in wartime. Prayers for the dead are an often-cited example. Before the war prayers for the departed had been uncommon; by 1918 they were widespread, and the revised *BCP*, issued in 1928, included prayers for the dead.⁵⁰ Prayers for suffering animals would never achieve this status, partly because there was always a powerful opposition to such prayers. Anglo-Catholics had encouraged the spread of prayers for the dead, but they were split on whether the so-called Russian prayer could be used. Winnington-Ingram was the most prominent Anglo-Catholic to use the prayer. In some ways it was to be expected that Anglo-Catholics would have accepted a prayer that referenced animal service and suffering, because High Church Anglicans had, in past times, entertained the idea of incorporating animals in certain kinds of religious ritual. Domestic animals might rest on Sundays; they might perhaps even be made to abstain from sustenance on public fast days.⁵¹ It was High Churchmen, too, who revived rogation perambulations, which, in some places, featured the blessing of cattle in fields, sheds and cattle markets.⁵² Anglo-Catholics gave animals more attention in ritual, because they tended to possess a ‘symbolical’ or ‘sacramental view of nature’, one in which animals, and all other material and temporal things, revealed and reflected ‘the invisible God’.⁵³

The Russian prayer was more controversial, because it raised the question of whether, theologically, it was appropriate to pray for animals that, it was conventionally supposed, could not sin, experience salvation, or be redeemed. In late 1914 the High Church Slavophile William J. Birkbeck

⁴⁷ *Guardian*, 31 Dec. 1914; 7 Jan. 1915.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 23, 31 Dec. 1914.

⁴⁹ G. Vernon Smith, *The bishop of London's visit to the front*, London 1915, 93.

⁵⁰ Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, Cambridge 1978, 176.

⁵¹ Thomas, *Man and the natural world*, 137.

⁵² Ronald Hutton, *Stations of the sun: a history of the ritual year in Britain*, Oxford 1996, 275–7.

⁵³ George Westhaver, ‘Mysticism and sacramentalism in the Oxford Movement’, in Stewart J. Brown (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the Oxford Movement*, Oxford 2017, 260.

wrote to Anglican newspapers to explain that while it was appropriate to offer prayers of blessing for animals in ‘the service of man’ in fields and sheds, rituals involving animals could never take place in church, and one could not offer a prayer that presented animals as patriots who made decisions. The notion that animals sacrificed their lives for nations was not consistent with ‘common sense’, Birkbeck added, or ‘compatible with what orthodox theologians teach on the subject of man’s free will’.⁵⁴ When it emerged that an amateur Slavophile, a woman named E. M. Hewlett, had composed the ‘humble beasts’ prayer, several Anglican bishops, among them Charles Gore of Oxford – an Anglo-Catholic who had a reputation for insisting on doctrinal conformity – reportedly ‘vetoed’ the use of the prayer in their dioceses.⁵⁵ When the ‘Russian’ prayer was used it was reworded so that there was no suggestion of animal agency. The version that Winnington-Ingram used in France referred to animals ‘whose guileless lives *are offered* for the wellbeing of their countries’ [author’s emphasis].

The ‘Russian’ prayer circulated after 1918, and indeed the public demand for prayers for animals became more evident in the interwar period. The appetite for such prayers may have been a continuation of the compassionate attitudes displayed during wartime and perhaps reflected a sharper public awareness of animal pain and suffering, as well as the debt humans owed to labouring animals. Anglicans represented the use, exploitation and suffering of animals in church buildings and church worship. The first church memorial to horses killed in war was unveiled in St Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead, in 1926.⁵⁶ Campaigners wrote to newspapers to suggest that the litany, which was read at morning services three times a week, might be revised so as to include appeals for ‘mercy’ and ‘compassion’ to ‘helpless creatures’.⁵⁷ This lay enthusiasm was reflected in the numerous letters that laypeople wrote to newspapers debating whether it was meaningful to pray for animals.⁵⁸ Animal welfare organisations tried to capture this religious concern for animals among the laity. In 1924, to mark its centenary, the RSPCA approached the public to recommend suitable prayers and hymns and then issued the results as a full service for Animal Sunday. The People’s

⁵⁴ *Church Times*, 11, 18, 24 Dec. 1914; *Guardian*, 17, 31 Dec. 1914.

⁵⁵ *Daily Mail*, 4 Jan. 1915; *Modern Man*, 16 Jan. 1915. Hewlett was disparaged in Birkbeck’s private correspondence: Birkbeck papers, LPL, 1/12/9. For Gore see Mark Chapman, ‘The evolution of Anglican theology, 1910–2000’, in Jeremy Morris (ed.), *The Oxford history of Anglicanism*, IV: *Global western Anglicanism, c.1910–present*, Oxford 2017, 30.

⁵⁶ *Daily News* [London], 16 Apr. 1926.

⁵⁷ *Gloucester Citizen*, 29 June 1922; *Gloucestershire Echo*, 3 Sept. 1932.

⁵⁸ *Hull Daily Mail*, 4 Apr. 1927; *Gloucestershire Echo*, 31 Aug., 3, 12 Sept. 1932; *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 4 Aug. 1934; *Daily Mirror*, 4 Dec. 1935; 6 Oct. 1936.

Dispensary for Sick Animals (established in 1917) did similar for a collection of animal-related prayers that it published in 1927.⁵⁹ To encourage animal-themed acts of worship, the RSPCA published more model sermons and hymn papers. In the 1920s the society also began issuing prayers on cards (one carried the ‘Russian’ prayer, in the original, more controversial, wording).⁶⁰ Such cards could be easily distributed and might be used privately at home, or in quiet moments during church services. While such prayer cards were not new – anti-vivisectionists had distributed prayer cards for ‘helpless creatures’ since the 1870s⁶¹ – their use by the mainstream RSPCA points to some of the key changes in prayer and worship in the early twentieth century. According to one recent account, worship in the postwar period provided more room for lay participation and had a noticeably intimate and personal quality. Anglican clergy allowed time for silent prayer and there emerged a culture of ‘bidding’ churchgoers to say their own prayers.⁶² Prayer cards suited these new styles of worship.

Strikingly, animal prayer and services became more common, and achieved a degree of official recognition, in the Church of England. The *Anglican missal*, a service book published in 1921, and which was used by some Anglo-Catholics as a supplement or an alternative to the *BCP*, included a prayer to be used ‘in time of murrain among the animals’.⁶³ Some clergy, such as the Anglo-Catholic Basil Bourchier, minister of St Anne’s, Soho, established regular services of intercession for animals.⁶⁴ Archbishop Davidson – a man, like many other clergy, who was much interested in birds – tempered his earlier opposition and after learning about inhumane methods of slaughter told a bishops’ meeting in 1923 that the ‘treatment of animals’ should be ‘more frequently the subject of prayers and addresses’.⁶⁵ Animal campaigners still complained that Animal Sunday was patchily observed and there was frustration that the revised *BCP* that appeared in 1928 made no mention of animals.⁶⁶ Yet less formal animal services received official support. In 1934 William Temple

⁵⁹ (RSPCA) *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1924; (PDSA) *Shields Daily News*, 18 May 1927. RSPCA, *A short form of service containing hymns and prayers suitable for use on animal Sunday*, London 1924. Another example is SUPPCA, *A collection of prayers for the welfare and protection of animals*, London 1934.

⁶⁰ Examples are available at the RSPCA archives, Horsham, West Sussex.

⁶¹ For example, SUPPCA, *Our dumb animals* (Dec. 1876), 52.

⁶² Williamson, *National prayers*, iii, pp. xcii, xcv.

⁶³ *The Anglican missal*, London 1921, G105.

⁶⁴ *Weekly Dispatch* [London], 26 Apr. 1931.

⁶⁵ Bishops’ meetings, LPL, BM 7, fo. 337. For Davidson’s interest in birds see George Bell, *Randall Davidson, archbishop of Canterbury*, London 1935, ii. 1221.

⁶⁶ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 3 Feb. 1934; *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Dec. 1929.

of York became the first English archbishop to endorse Animal Sunday. Other senior Anglicans, among them Archbishop Cosmo Lang of Canterbury, recommended the occasion to their clergy, and by the end of the decade Animal Sunday had become a fixed special Sunday in some dioceses.⁶⁷

Heightened concern for animals was, perhaps, an aspect of what some historians have called the ‘process of rejustification’ that preoccupied members of the Church of England in the interwar period. According to Matthew Grimley, as the political threats to the Church receded, senior Anglicans made a new case for why they, as the representatives of the established Church, had the right to comment on national questions and to lead and represent the ‘whole Christian nation’.⁶⁸ Although it is hard to confirm, it appears that more of the Church’s leadership recognised that animal protection had become too popular and too difficult for a national institution to ignore. Archbishop Lang recognised the need for the Churches to take a lead in forming a public opinion on animal welfare when he told a 1937 university debate on animals that ‘all our people, and especially our Christian people’ should be ‘impressed by the responsibility of their trusteeship for the animal world as an essential principle of our religion’.⁶⁹ The rising profile of the PDSA reflected the popular growth of pet-ownership amongst the urban working class, and it is notable that in 1936 a procession celebrating the organisation’s work concluded with a service in Canterbury Cathedral.⁷⁰ It possibly helped, too, that much of the heat went out of the vivisection controversy in the 1920s: antivivisection waned because scientists could now cite examples of how animal experimentation had helped win the war and had made modern life more comfortable.⁷¹

The prayers and services warrant close analysis because they were often composed by laypeople, and so can reveal something about the nature of animal concern in the interwar period. Companion, working and farm animals remained the focus. The 1936 prayer book for the British Broadcasting Corporation’s *Daily service* radio programme, a publication endorsed by Lang, contained a prayer for animals ‘in whose companionship and service we find joy and help’, while the litany in the 1924

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 31 May 1934; *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Sept. 1936; *CT*, 3 Sept. 1937. Durham was one diocese with a fixed Animal Sunday: H. H. Henson, *Disestablishment*, London 1929, 210 (the author wishes to thank Philip Williamson for providing this reference).

⁶⁸ Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, community, and the Church of England: liberal Anglican theories of the state between the wars*, Oxford 2004, 14.

⁶⁹ University of London Animal Welfare Society, *Christianity and the welfare of animals: report of a meeting held at King’s College University of London on October 28, 1937*, Bedford 1937, 4.

⁷⁰ *Whitstable Times*, 22 Aug. 1936.

⁷¹ Kean, *Animal rights*, 180; Bates, *Anti-vivisection*, 158–9.

RSPCA service referred to ‘the companionship and affection of animals in our Homes’. The BBC prayer was conventional in the sense that it focused on human behaviour and prayed that those who worked with animals would have ‘a heart of compassion, gentle hands, and kindly words’.⁷² Parts of the RSPCA liturgy also emphasised the old themes of mercy, animal service and human stewardship. One prayer asked God to ‘put into the hearts of all men a spirit of humanity’ towards ‘the lower creatures’, another asked ‘that all cruelty may cease out of our land’ and a third, a prayer for guidance, sought support for ‘the efforts of all who seek to reduce such unnecessary pain’.⁷³ References to animals both ‘wild and tame’ indicated that concern broadened to include wildlife, a development that was perhaps influenced by rambling and countryside tourism. The references to hunted wild animals in prayers and services showed how far the abolition of so-called ‘blood sports’ had become a national issue in the interwar period. The RSPCA defended hunting for sport, and its Animal Sunday litany only prayed that people would have ‘tender and merciful hearts’ towards ‘all hunted animals, for stags and hares, for trapped rabbits and for any wounded creature left to die’.⁷⁴

The interwar forms of service show, too, that more radical representations of animals, as independent and active subjects that possessed wills, had become mainstream. The ‘Russian’ prayer appeared in a 1922 pamphlet of ‘prayers for animals’ that the RSPCA recommended for use in schools, and Eric Milner-White, the Anglo-Catholic dean of York, included a version in his 1941 compilation of devotions, *Daily prayer*.⁷⁵ Crucially, too, animals became more directly the subject of prayer and worship. Instead of speaking exclusively of the infliction of suffering on animals by human cruelty and neglect, prayers increasingly recognised that animals’ welfare could be a direct objection of intercession. A prayer, taken from the *Girl Guides’ prayers and hymns*, and which featured in the 1924 RSPCA liturgy, included the line ‘We entreat for them Thy mercy and pity’. Elsewhere God was asked ‘to alleviate the sufferings of Thy creatures’ and that he ‘wouldest ever bless and defend all beasts of the fields, and fowls of the air’. A prayer used in the Chester diocese during a foot-and-mouth outbreak in 1923–4 appealed to God to ‘have pity on our cattle in Cheshire’, and when the disease appeared in 1938 a Salisbury diocese prayer referenced Psalm xxxvi.6 and said ‘the loving Father’ was ‘willing

⁷² BBC, *New every morning: the prayer book of the daily broadcast service*, London 1936, 10–11.

⁷³ RSPCA, *short form of service*, 9–10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 4. Emma Griffin, *Blood sport: hunting in Britain since 1066*, New Haven 2007, 180–1; SUPPCA, *A collection of prayers*, 14, prayed for the end of the ‘torture and death of animals for sport’.

⁷⁵ RSPCA, *Prayers for animals*, London 1922; Eric Milner-White and G. W. Briggs, *Daily prayer*, Oxford 1941, 79.

to save both man and beast'.⁷⁶ Archbishop William Temple – he had moved from York to Canterbury in 1942 – told the bishops in December 1942 that he could not understand why 'we should not pray to God to look in mercy on His dumb creation', and he cited the Psalm as evidence that God could intercede for animals. Milner-White included the line from Psalm xxxvi in his reworked version of the 'Russian' prayer in his 1941 compilation, and the phrase appeared in animal prayers in the 1950s.⁷⁷

More striking innovations in worship followed. The spread, from the mid-1930s, of church services involving living animals is a good example of the increasing freedom and experimentation in Anglican worship. There was a long history of companion animals attending church services; there was, too, a history of clergymen barring dogs and other pets from coming to church. Although some twentieth-century clergy even refused entry to guide dogs,⁷⁸ country clergy had to be more accommodating, and well-publicised examples of 'pious' animals, such as the presence of Caesar, the king's terrier, at the funeral of Edward VII, did something to encourage a culture of animals attending services and graveside rituals.⁷⁹ The spread of harvest festivals in churches, which commonly featured decorations of sprigs, boughs and flowers, was said to have encouraged sparrows, and such winged visitors were sometimes described as 'members' of congregations, especially if they accompanied the singing of hymns. The presence – invited or uninvited – of birds and dogs in churches on harvest thanksgivings and Animal Sundays prompted press commentators to reflect on whether animals possessed rational souls, were in some way closer to God, and could express a religious sense.⁸⁰

Children took pets to church for Animal Sunday from about 1934,⁸¹ but only after 1945 did such services become common. Here, perhaps, is another indication of how war might strengthen the emotional bonds between people and their animals. Leland Snell, the vicar of Holy Trinity church, Hereford, and a local RSPCA representative, pioneered a 'pets' service in 1947. The occasion grew so popular and noteworthy that in 1949 and subsequent years film companies sent cameras to record the packed services and mixed congregations. The liturgy that Snell followed suggests that companion and working animals were the focus of the occasion, and there was a strong emphasis on friendship and neighbourliness,

⁷⁶ *The Times*, 29 Dec. 1923; *CT*, 25 Feb. 1938.

⁷⁷ Paul Welsby, *Services and prayers for country use*, London 1955, 52.

⁷⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 30 Sept. 1943.

⁷⁹ For accommodations see *Notes & Queries*, 13 Apr. 1912; for later criticisms of dogs accompanying funeral processions see *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 8 Mar. 1935. The question of whether clergy should permit dogs to attend church services was a popular subject of debate in the letters pages of *The Times* in August 1932.

⁸⁰ *Cannock Chase Courier*, 19 Oct. 1912; *West Herts and Watford Observer*, 10 July 1909.

⁸¹ *Daily Mirror*, 5 Feb. 1934; *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Oct. 1936.

and what animals meant for humans. In this sense Snell's animal service, like earlier Animal Sunday occasions, did little to help churchgoers to appreciate the particularity of the lives of farm and wild animals. Indeed, by gathering such a mixed congregation, the pet service reinforced the harmful tendency for humans to regard dogs, cats, tortoises and sheep as generalised 'animals' and not as distinct species. The blessing, for instance, referred generally to 'our friends the animals'.⁸²

The Second World War also strengthened the special relationship between the Church of England and the mainstream animal protection movement. Before the war there had been signs that the RSPCA's relationship with organised religion had grown more pacific and ecumenical. In 1932 the society asked the heads of the Christian and Jewish denominations to publicly support Animal Sunday.⁸³ When, in 1936, an international congress of animal protection societies in Brussels agreed to observe a 'world day for animals' on the Sunday nearest the feast day of St Francis, the RSPCA, with support from Archbishop Lang, agreed to discontinue the old, Anglican-orientated, Animal Sunday in favour of this new, more ecumenical, early October occasion.⁸⁴ But, during the war, the RSPCA recognised and took advantage of the tendency of British Churches to gather around the leadership of Anglican archbishops. As Philip Williamson has shown, other religions accepted Anglican leadership because archbishops had close access to sovereigns, government ministers and the BBC, and because senior Anglicans proposed, and organised, national days of prayer.⁸⁵ In September 1942, Leonard Noble, the vice-chairman of the RSPCA, suggested to Archbishop Temple that a prayer for animals be included in the order of service for a future national day of prayer.⁸⁶ Temple recommended the idea in his circular to the bishops in December 1942, although nothing came of this, and no animal prayer was included in any form of service issued by archbishops or bishops.⁸⁷ Following the war, however, large services of thanksgiving and intercession for the 'animal creation' were held in Westminster Abbey in 1946 and then Canterbury Cathedral (1947) and York Minster (1948). Still, senior clergy would not make animal prayers routine. In 1951 the RSPCA suggested to

⁸² A copy of the Hereford service is in RSPCA archives: CM/144, education and publicity committee minutes 1952–5, fos 74a–74b.

⁸³ RSPCA archives, council minutes, Aug. 1927 to July 1934, entry for 21 Apr. 1932, fo. 204.

⁸⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Sept. 1936.

⁸⁵ Philip Williamson, 'Archbishops and the monarchy: leadership in British religion, 1900–2012', in Rodger, Williamson and Grimley, *The Church of England and British politics*, 71–3.

⁸⁶ Leonard Noble to William Temple, 18 Sept. 1942, W. Temple papers, LPL, 1, fo. 329.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 9, fo. 251. Clare Campbell, *Bonzo's war: animals under fire, 1939–1945*, London 2013, 252–3.

the heads of British Churches that a ‘prayer for animals’ should be included ‘in church services every Sunday throughout the year’. Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury, in many respects a conservative figure who was resistant to revision of the *BCP*, refused, possibly because regular prayers might set a precedent for altering the calendar of worship to meet contemporary social needs.⁸⁸

The Church of England’s association with animal protection was reflected in popular culture. In the 1944 patriotic comedy film, *Tawny pipit*, an eccentric vicar helps mobilise a village community to protect the nesting site of a pair of *Anthus campestris*. To celebrate the arrival of these rare visitors the villagers sing a hymn, specially composed by a local woman, in the vicar’s church. It is significant, too, that an egg collector who threatens the nest disguises himself as a Methodist preacher.⁸⁹ The film gestures to a developing association between the Church of England and nature conservation, ecological awareness and rural reconstruction. It is not much commented on, but the planners, preservationists and organicists that offered visions of a postwar regenerated countryside commonly acknowledged that vicars, churches and parishes had a role to play in reconstruction. The final section of this article turns to consider the Anglican contribution to a rural reconstructionism that was rooted in what David Matless has called ‘an organic vision of agriculture and society’.⁹⁰ Through their involvement in organicism and rural revival, some Anglican clergy conceived a new calendar of Anglican worship, one that went beyond previous efforts to incorporate animals in worship, because it emphasised human-animal co-operation and interconnections, and because it patterned both human and animal lives around the changing seasons and the agricultural year.

Animals and calendars

In the 1940s a group of Anglican clergy concerned with rural issues used a small and short-lived organisation, the Council for the Church and Countryside, to revive and promote four agricultural festivals: the blessing of the plough at the start of the harvest year in January (‘Plough Monday’);

⁸⁸ RSPCA archives, education minutes, 1935 to 1952, entries for 21 Feb. and 15 May 1952. This representation of Fisher follows Alan Webster’s ‘Fisher, Geoffrey Francis, Baron Fisher of Lambeth (1887–1972)’, *ODNB*, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/refodnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-31108>, accessed 3 February 2023.

⁸⁹ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 1st edn, London 1998, 224–5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 103.

the blessing of the growing crops in early summer ('Rogationtide'); the consecration of the first fruits of the harvest in early August ('Lammastide'); and the thanksgiving at the in-gathering of the harvest in late autumn ('harvest festival').⁹¹ In medieval times the first three had been observed as a matter of custom in the Christian Church in parts of England; in many places they even survived the Reformation, despite the Protestant aversion to the blessing of things and efforts by reformers to separate worship from popular festivals. By the later eighteenth century, however, the three harvest festivals had disappeared from most local liturgical calendars. The fourth, harvest thanksgiving, was a Victorian invention.⁹² The council issued liturgies for use on the four rural festivals, and in following years collections of 'country services' appeared.⁹³

The council was formed in 1943 at a time when war concentrated attention on the importance of agricultural labour and the food supply. It served as an advisory body to guide the archbishops and bishops on rural affairs, and was a kind of Anglican version of the schemes for rural regeneration that Roman Catholics and Quakers, and some secular individuals, had pursued on farms and estates in the English countryside since the 1920s.⁹⁴ Neville Lovett, bishop of Salisbury, was a key figure, and had provided a model for the council earlier in the war when he had established a 'church and countryside association'. He also issued services for the agricultural festivals. Other lay and clerical figures in the council were rural revivalists whose Anglo-Catholic religiosity encouraged a concern with God's creation and the perception that nature and living creatures were a manifestation of God. As Bishop George Bell of Chichester put in a 1944 Rogationtide pastoral, 'God is the God of nature'.⁹⁵ This love of nature, and belief in God's 'immanence' in a beautiful and harmonious creation, was mixed with a concern for organic husbandry, a repopulated and revitalised countryside, and a Church that was closer to nature, cultivation and rural life. A chief concern was to reconnect the nation to the rhythms of the agricultural cycle and what council members liked to call 'the natural order'. Religious services at key moments in the farming year might also help publicise the virtues of organic farming and an agriculture that was based on humility, an appreciation of limits and co-operation

⁹¹ R. J. Moore-Colyer, 'Rolf Gardiner, English patriot and the Council for the Church and Countryside', *Agricultural History Review* xlix (2001), 187–209 at pp. 203–5.

⁹² Hutton, *Stations of the sun*, chs xi, xxvi, xxxii, xxxiii.

⁹³ D. L. Couper, *Country services*, London 1948; F. C. Hamlyn, *Seed-time & harvest*, London 1945.

⁹⁴ Kit Kowol, 'An experiment in conservative modernity: interwar conservatism and Henry Ford's English farms', *Journal of British Studies* lv (2016), 781–805.

⁹⁵ Council for the Church and Countryside, *Occasional paper: Rogationtide 1945*, London 1945, 9.

with God and nature. Concerns about exhausted and eroded soils, and memories of recent ecological disasters, notably the dust bowls in the United States, loomed large in all this. The ‘green’ aspect of the council’s work – coupled with the Fascist links of many organicists – explains why it, and the wider organic farming movement, have attracted recent scholarly interest.⁹⁶ What has not been emphasised is the significant place animals occupied in the council’s work.

The liturgies encouraged churchgoers to acknowledge the place of animals in the ecology of the countryside, agricultural labour and the rural community. The services also communicated familiar ideas about the proper care and treatment of the animals on which rural livelihoods depended. A 1948 Rogationtide service recognised the labour of animals that shared ‘the burden and heat of the day’ and said it was the duty of agricultural workers to treat with ‘gentleness and consideration all living creatures entrusted’ to their ‘care’.⁹⁷ A 1947 Lammastide service recognised the ‘patient trudging of the horses’, and the Plough Sunday service reproached those who ‘ill-treat the land’, who were ‘careless with the beasts’, and who forgot that the animals were ‘God’s creatures’.⁹⁸

Today, such country liturgies seem naïve and nostalgic for an idealised past when rural society in the English ‘south country’ had supposedly been in harmony with nature, and when the English people, and their Church, had lived, worked and worshipped in closer proximity to animals. Even in the 1940s and ‘50s these services were not much used outside southern England, although in some places the liturgies had a reasonably lasting usage, and one collection was recommended in a key Anglican statement on the environment issued in 1970.⁹⁹ The council’s vision of England may have struck many as narrow, exclusionary and rooted in dangerous notions of ‘blood and soil’.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the liturgies are an example of how a Church of England that had grown into a global ‘Anglican communion’ could, in some contexts, represent itself in highly insular and English terms. As Matless notes, the organicist vision of a revived English countryside ‘had relatively little effect at a national scale’.¹⁰¹ The council was wound up in 1952 because of lack of funds, and although aspects of its work and some of its ecological messaging would be taken up by other Anglican and Christian organisations (notably the Industrial Christian Fellowship), the generation of Anglican

⁹⁶ Philip Conford, *The origins of the organic movement*, Edinburgh 2001; Philip Coupland, *Farming, Fascism and ecology: a life of Jorian Jenks*, London 2016.

⁹⁷ Council for the Church and Countryside, *A service for Rogation-tide*, London 1948, 5.

⁹⁸ Couper, *Country services*, 5, 27.

⁹⁹ Board for Social Responsibility, *Man in his living environment*, Westminster 1970, 80.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”: English culture and the limits of rural nostalgia, 1850–1940’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* vii (1997), 155–75 at pp. 170–5.

¹⁰¹ Matless, *Landscape*, 170.

organicists seemed to have been forgotten until the General Synod discussed ecological issues as part of a 'man in his living environment' debate in 1970.¹⁰²

Yet, these texts have great significance because they represented an early effort by modern Anglicans to develop a liturgical year that connected humans to the seasons and the natural world, and to cycles of birth and life. Animal protectionists in previous decades had made some effort to orientate human lives around cycles in the natural world. In the 1880s and 1890s, for example, the RSPCA had issued poster almanacs for the use of Bands of Mercy and Sunday schools that brought together the ecclesiastical calendar of feasts, fasts and festivals with happenings in the animal world, such as the days when migrating birds arrived, and tortoises emerged from hibernation.¹⁰³ The council's liturgies represented a much bolder effort to remind humans that they too were dependent on sustenance from a healthy earth. As Matless notes, English organicists regarded humans in 'animalistic' terms and frequently made comparisons between human and animal bodies. According to organicists, humans, like other animals, were elements in a common cycle of life and decay, in which living things generated the waste that would make the soil fertile, food wholesome, and the national community healthy.¹⁰⁴ The liturgies gave thanks for God's creation and encouraged an awareness of the seasons, the cycles of birth and life represented in the harvest and the intimate relationships between humans, other animals and plants. The 1942 Salisbury Rogation service included a prayer to be used outside, in meadows, that petitioned God to 'bless the meadows and woods around us here so that they may minister to the cattle and the birds, who in their humble service to mankind give us of their strength and nourishment'.¹⁰⁵ The council's 1944 Rogation service petitioned God to keep the pastures and meadows 'healthy and unspoiled' and 'devoted always to the service of man and beast'. And a 1948 Plough Sunday service suggested the commonalities between human farmers and working and wild animals when it referred to 'men's breath, and horses, steaming', and 'the wheeling of the birds / men's shouts and laughter' as all 'coming from God'.¹⁰⁶

This article has shown that in the first half of the twentieth century Anglican laypeople and clergy tried, and struggled, to fix concern for non-human animals in their calendars of worship. The growing visibility of animals is an unexpected and unappreciated aspect of broader

¹⁰² *General synod: report of proceedings*, London 1970, 199. Moore-Colyer notes the council's legacy: 'Rolf Gardiner', 207–8.

¹⁰³ *Band of Mercy almanac*, London 1880–1905, British Library, London, general reference collection, 14000.s.1.

¹⁰⁴ Matless, *Landscape*, 108, 155–7, 166–8. See also Kean, *Animal rights*, 188.

¹⁰⁵ W. Temple papers, 43, fo. 13. ¹⁰⁶ Couper, *Country services*, 6.

changes in English cultures of prayer and worship in the twentieth century. As worship in the Church of England became more personal, less prescribed and scripted, and more focused on the wellbeing of human and non-human sufferers, so animals might become the focus for services, or even, indeed, attend church. Across the three periods studied in this article, representations of animals changed markedly, with more attention given to human-animal intimacies and interconnections. Prayers increasingly recognised that animals' welfare could be a direct object of intercession. Further research might show how far prayer was influenced by developments in animal science. Intercessions for the wellbeing of animals seem to have anticipated developments in animal behavioural science in the 1950s that helped to move attention away from human cruelty and treatment and towards a concern for animal needs, feelings and welfare.¹⁰⁷ Future studies could also reveal the growing visibility of animals in worship in other countries and denominations. The developments that encouraged more frequent references to animals in Anglican worship – animal service in war, a broader culture of pet-keeping and anxieties about the social, economic and ecological condition of the countryside – were certainly not unique to England or just the concern of the Church of England. Scholars of Christian agrarianism and religious environmental thought in the United States have, for example, shown how concerns about nature, conservation and rural life encouraged the creation of new agricultural festivals in the early twentieth century, such as 'Rural Life Sunday'. The liturgies, prayers and hymns used on such occasions urged worshippers to develop a 'sense of fellowship with all living things', a better understanding of God's 'immanent' presence in nature and a more reverential attitude towards creation.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Robert Kirk, 'Recovering *The principles of humane experimental technique*: the 3Rs and the human essence of animal research', *Science, Technology, & Human Values* xliii (2018), 622–48 at pp. 625–6.

¹⁰⁸ Panu Pihkala, 'Rediscovery of early twentieth-century ecotheology', *Open Theology* ii (2016), 268–85 at pp. 271–2; Kevin Lowe, *Baptized with the soil: Christian agrarians and the crusade for rural America*, Oxford 2015, ch. iii; Leigh E. Schmidt, 'From Arbor Day to environmental sabbath: nature, liturgy, and American Protestantism', *Harvard Theological Review* lxiv (1991), 299–323 at pp. 312–16. The modern American history of animal blessings and rituals in churches is considered in Amelie A. Wilmer, 'In the sanctuary of animals: honoring God's creatures through ritual and relationship', *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* lxxiii (2019), 272–89. For centuries, cattle blessings had been a feature of rural life amongst Roman Catholics in continental Europe, and it is likely that the continuation of such practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was an inspiration for the English churchmen who included animals in revived English rogation rituals. Little research has been done on the modern history of cattle blessings, or the story of how in some places, notably southern France, St Roch came to be associated with the care of diseased animals as well as

Bringing non-human animals into the history of Christian worship provides a new perspective on the public status of the Church of England. The tendency for some clergy to reference animals in church services reflected a new kind of Anglican establishment. Historians now consider the Church in the post-1918 period to have been more popular, and more publicly relevant, than the hard facts of declining church attendances, clergy shortages and disestablishment of the Church in Wales in 1920 might suggest.¹⁰⁹ The largest, most mainstream, animal protection societies continued to look to the Church of England for leadership. A Church that claimed to represent and lead British Christianity had to respond to the culture of pet-keeping and animal service in war. Matthew Grimley has argued that some interwar Anglicans conceptualised a new kind of ‘cohesive and inclusive’ national community.¹¹⁰ The church services considered in this article indicate that some churchgoers and clergy included non-human animals in their understandings of community. Although mention was sometimes made of wildlife,¹¹¹ attention focused on the companion, farmed and military animals that were closest to humans. Increasingly, services and prayers represented companion animals as active subjects that possessed wills and expressed something like agency. In terms of labouring and food animals, themes such as cooperation and interconnection competed with the older ideas of human mastery and animal service.

The evidence presented in this article also supports a larger argument about the historical roots of modern Anglican efforts to reconnect worship with the non-human and the natural world. The spread of ‘environmental sabbaths’, special prayers for the environment and seasonal ‘creationtides’ in western Christianity since the late 1980s might suggest that environmental liturgical reform is a recent development, but this would miss an earlier history of agricultural services and animal prayers. The incorporation of non-human animals in the Anglican calendar began, as has been shown, uncertainly, with special Sundays and occasional special prayers. Standalone special Animal Sundays, forced into liturgical calendars on saints’ days, remained reasonably common in the 1960s and 1970s, but observances remained patchy, requests for animals to be included in a revised *BCP* continued to be rejected, and in the 1950s

humans. Some comment on the history of cattle blessings is provided in C. W. Hume, *The status of animals in the Christian religion*, London 1956, 94–8.

¹⁰⁹ The arguments, and evidence, are summarised in Grimley and Williamson, ‘Introduction’.

¹¹⁰ Grimley, *Citizenship*, 12.
¹¹¹ In 1954 the RSPCA urged congregations to pray that God would ease the pain of wild rabbits suffering from the ‘man-made plague’, myxomatosis: *West Sussex County Times*, 1 Oct. 1954.

clergy still had to make a theological case for prayers ‘for’ animals.¹¹² Anglican engagement with animals and animal issues took on a new quality from the later 1950s when there began to be a greater focus on parliament, experts and committees. Bishops spoke on whales and performing animals in the House of Lords,¹¹³ and a new body, the Board of Social Responsibility, helped clergy to draw on professional and expert advice from animal welfarists and behavioural scientists. Nevertheless, the work that Anglican organicists did in the 1940s to rework the Anglican calendar was an important and lasting development, both because it encouraged an awareness of human animality and the interconnections between human and animal lives, and because it provided a model for how Anglican services could be attuned to the changing seasons and could better address ecological and environmental themes. It is notable that in their environmental engagement the modern Christian Churches have moved away from special days and towards ‘seasons’. While the former might encourage brief reflection, the latter can, perhaps, do more to reconnect people with nature and the place of humans in a multi-species ‘mixed community’. Today, the focus for the Church of England’s ecological concern is the ‘season of creation’ from 1 September to 4 October.¹¹⁴ This season, which is timed to coincide with harvesting crops, represents the first time the Church of England has itself made provision for a ‘celebration of animals’ in the authorised materials for church worship.

¹¹² In 1958 the body that managed new forms of service, the Liturgical Commission, was asked by animal welfare groups to include intercessions for animals in daily services and a revised litany, but the matter was never officially discussed: *Westminster & Pimlico News*, 15 Aug. 1958. For prayers ‘for’ animals see the judgement of R. V. Sellers in M. Ramsey papers, LPL, 91, fo. 40.

¹¹³ Hansard, 31 Jan. 1956, cols 668–717 (bishop of Norwich on performing animals) and 25 June 1258–88 (bishop of Portsmouth on cruelty to whales).

¹¹⁴ Details at <<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/season-creation>>, accessed 2 February 2023.