

# Appendix A - Review of Blackfriars Priory Activity 2023/24

## Review of Blackfriars Priory Activity 2023/24

**Author:** Holly Gooch, Senior Officer Programme & Business Development, Gloucester City Council

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### 1. Context

In 2023/24, the Blackfriars Priory Team delivered their busiest programme of activity since Gloucester City Council signed the lease for the venue in 2012. This has included 35 weddings and 94 other events, including theatre shows, corporate events, parties, Festivals and more. This has generated income in excess of targets by approximately £100,000 for this financial year, enabling the team to reinvest in the site and develop the venue further to attract more visitors. Over 25,000 people have visited Blackfriars Priory to enjoy the space and its varied offer.

One of the biggest developments of the year was the undertaking of a catering tender, in which the team implemented partnerships with 6 caterers, covering a variety of services including Asian feasts, street food, plan based menus, high end formal dining and more. This has diversified the audience that Blackfriars Priory can serve and has benefitted local business with opportunities for work and employment for local people.

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### 2. Open Iftar - 17th April

Blackfriars Priory was host to Gloucester's first ever Open Iftar event in celebration of Ramadan. The team worked in collaboration with the Tent Project to deliver a event that utilized both Gloucester Guildhall for prayer and Blackfriars Priory for a community feast. The gathering provided the opportunity for local people from the Muslim community to volunteer for Tent Project, who delivered the Open Iftar as part of a tour including locations such as Leicester Square in London and Manchester.

Over 80 people attended the event which is set to return to Gloucester in 2024/25 in an even bigger capacity.



### 3. Gloucester History Festival Spring Weekend – 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> April

Following the cancellation of Gloucester History Festival in September 2022 due to the sad passing of the Queen, Gloucester History Festival returned to Blackfriars for an additional set of talks to the September programme in April. The Spring Weekend was condensed into three days and proved to be so successful that it is now a regular part of the History Festival annual schedule of events.

Included in the 20 speakers were Professor Alice Roberts, Greg Jenner, Peter Frankopan, Tim Marshall and Kavita Puri. The team at Blackfriars work closely with Gloucester History Trust to deliver the Festival.



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### 4. Weddings

Weddings continue to be a crucial strand to Blackfriars Priory, providing income that allows for more cultural programming and adding to the rich tapestry of the site's history. The team worked with 35 couples to deliver their perfect day and the team have won awards and 5\* reviews as a result of the outstanding service provided. Testimonials have included:

*We had our wedding in Blackfriars in June 2023. It was one of the first wedding venues me and my Husband viewed, and we fell in love with it straight away, booking it 2 years in advance! We are both so happy that we made the decision to have our wedding in Blackfriars as it was everything we hoped for, and more!*

*The team at Blackfriars were so helpful and guided us through all the planning along the way and went above and beyond when we had an issue with our caterers early in our planning. All venue visits were relaxed and they answered any questions we had. Our wedding planner even managed to arrange for a local, alcohol-free IPA to be supplied on our day for our alcohol-free guests and ensured that all the alcohol in our drinks package was vegan for us!*

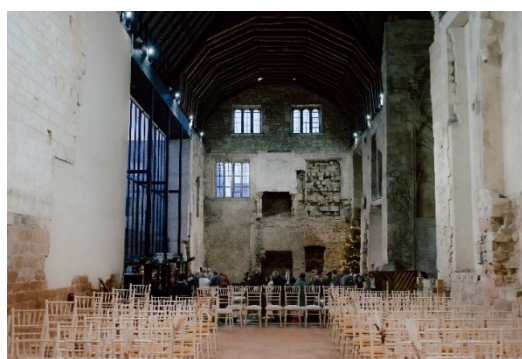
*The garden games went down so well with our guests to use in the sunny courtyard, and it was amazing to see all our family & friends having the best time. We loved all the extra touches that were provided like fairy lights, downlighters and candles and this made the venue look even more beautiful!*

*The staff were fabulous on the day and made us feel so well looked after. All of our guests continue to comment on how beautiful and unique Blackfriars is as a venue too (which is the reason we booked it!) and how they also found all the staff so helpful on the day. We can't praise Blackfriars highly enough and would highly recommend booking your wedding or event here!*

#### **S&S – June 2023**

*Blackfriars was the perfect venue for our wedding and the wedding co-ordinator and the team were a big part of making it happen. The venue sold itself but the team are amazing. The venue visits were not rushed and our questions were all answered easily taking the stress out of organising such an important day. The hard work before and on the day helped to make it amazing. Thank you Blackfriars ❤️👍*

#### **C&A – June 2023**





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### 5. An Audience with King Henry VIII – Sun 11<sup>th</sup> June

This was the first time the team at Blackfriars Priory programmed a performance by Select Society, who are a small theatre company touring internationally with their lively Q&A audience participation performance. Despite this being a new addition to the venue's offer, the show was a sell out and extremely well received by the audience. Due to its success, a new show will be returning to Blackfriars in 2024.



### 6. 3 Choirs Festival Lunch - 22<sup>nd</sup> July

Blackfriars Priory was the chosen venue for the Mayor's Civic Lunch following a parade from Gloucester Guildhall to Gloucester Cathedral, for a service, followed by a parade from the Cathedral, which ended at Blackfriars Priory. The Civic event was well attended by the Mayors, Sheriffs, Consorts and ceremonial officers of the 3 host cities and our near neighbours. The mayor welcomed them to a Gloucester reminiscent of Dr Fosters' Day and everyone enjoyed the stunning backdrop of Blackfriars Priory. Local catering company, *Hey Pesto* provided a delicious lunch.



### 7. Gloucester History Festival, Blackfriars Talks – 9<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> September

Gloucester History Festival returned for its first full capacity festival since the pandemic in September 2023. The 9 days of talks was the busiest programme to date, with as many as five talks per day taking place in the North Range, with an incredible variety of high profile speakers, including Dr Janina Ramirez, ex-Prime Minister Theresa May and Michael Wood.

Blackfriars Priory teamed up with Gloucester History Trust, Unique Sound Systems, Bath PA, Gloucester Event Hire and DM Stages to deliver the event.



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### 8. Aerial Arts Showcase – 30<sup>th</sup> September

Blackfriars Priory has become the annual host venue for Momentum Pole Fit's Aerial Arts Showcase. The North Range provides a magnificent backdrop for the stage, which displays striking performances with silks, aerial hoops and pole.



### 9. Candlelight Concerts

On 5<sup>th</sup> October, Blackfriars hosted its first Candlelight classical concert, which have proved so successful that more dates have continued to be added, with several performances taking place since October and more booked until March. On average, each night welcomes between 400 and 600 people to the venue to experience an hour of their favourite music performed by string quartets. To date, themes have included Vivaldi, Hans Zimmer, Home Alone, Love Actually and Queen, with upcoming performances including Taylor Swift and Cold Play. The venue is decorated with 3000 LED candles, which makes for a breathtaking experience and many 5\* reviews.



*Fantastic evening you will not be disappointed !!!*

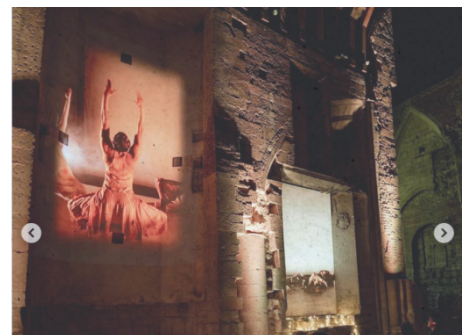
*Candlelight: Hans Zimmer's Best Works at Blackfriars Priory. Superb evening experience for a Zimmer's music fans.*

*Everything about the evening was beautiful*

*Beautifully played, stunning venue.. Looking to book next ticket!*

### 10. Seeta Patel's Rites of Spring – 3<sup>rd</sup> October

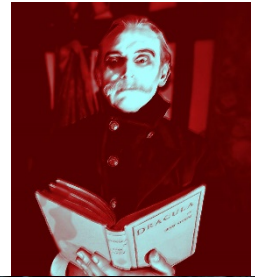
In October, Blackfriars collaborated with local Theatre Production Company Strike a Light, to provide the North Range as a canvas to project Seeta Patel's award winning dance piece, The Rites of Spring. The event was a sell out and reached a diverse audience from Gloucester's Community. To allow for an immersive experience, attendees wore headphones whilst watching the dance, which was successful and paved the way for more experimental projects in the future.



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### 11. Don't Go Into the Cellar

The Autumn welcomed the return of Don't Go Into the Cellar Theatre company, for one man performances of *Dracula* and *Ghost Stories for Christmas*. Both shows took place in the intimate East Range and were sold out. Due to its continued success, the touring theatre will be back at Blackfriars during Autumn 2024.



### 12. Strange Tales from the Darker Side – 2<sup>nd</sup> November

This was the first time Blackfriars collaborated with Dr Nicholas Grimoire to bring an evening of psychological thrills and horror. The magician/storyteller created a performance themed around the history of Blackfriars and was a successful sell-out.



### 13. There's a Tiger in the Garden – 2<sup>nd</sup> November

There's a Tiger in the Garden was the first professional children's show that the team at Blackfriars Priory programmed to be a part of their events offering. Performed by critically acclaimed Flock Theatre Makers, the show was a vibrant mix of acting, song, beautiful sets and puppetry. A new family demographic audience was reached and the show received wonderful feedback from parents:

*Myself and my three and a half year old son came to the morning show at Gloucester Blackfriars today and it was truly magical. It was the first type of live show I have taken him to and he absolutely loved it, he was transfixed watching it and so animated. It was a real gift for me as a mum to watch him enjoy himself so much. Thank you so much!*



### 14. Awards

In March, the Blackfriars Priory Team received Gold in the wedding venue category of the prestigious South West Tourism Awards. This award is among the most rigorous in the country, with several stages needing to be successfully completed before making it to the final round. This includes mystery shopping, an online audit, an initial application and an interview onsite with a member of the judging panel.

The feedback received following the process highlighted Blackfriars' excellent value for money, responsiveness to reviews, excellent social media channels, high quality website and incredible service provided for couples. The team have now entered for a second year and are eagerly awaiting the results.