

# Bowls In A Fragile World

*Temporal - Spatial - Spiritual*

## Art Exhibition Trail



Follow this exhibition trail (which will take you around our church, down into our crypt and through our museum) to discover how artist Debra Shipley has responded to our history, sense of place and to our mission.

At each location on the trail, the artist tells you her motivation and the inspiration for her art.



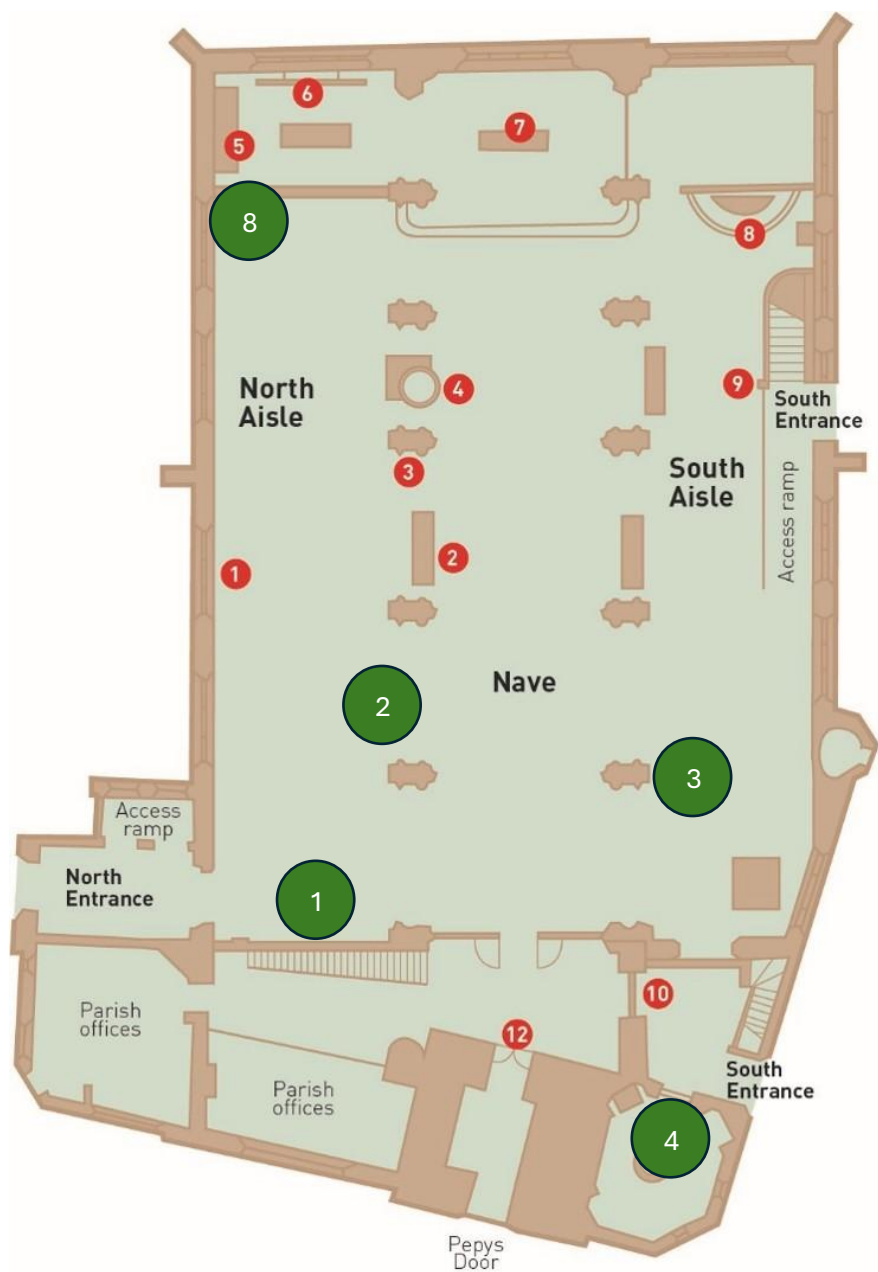
# Bowls in a Fragile World

“Bowls in a Fragile World” national, multi-year, multi-venue project. Every culture, all around the world make bowls from their local materials: clay, reeds, glass, metal. As an artist seeking to use eco-friendly material in my work, I realised that my most readily available local material was in my recycling bin - junk paper, packaging, used envelopes. After much experimentation, I decided to make paper bowls. I chose the bowl shape because all around the world an empty bowl is a sign of human need. I soon realised that the recycled paper I was utilising was polluted with specks of plastic and residual chemicals from the paper printing processes. So my work has evolved to be a statement about pollution and how climate change is affecting the poorest around the world the most. My exhibition combines this inspiration with my work as Artist in Residence at the Julian of Norwich Shrine and my specific response to being a Visiting Artist at All Hallows. Finally, and importantly, I aim to make art which gives something beautiful to enjoy.

Debra Shipley has been a full-time artist and writer for over 20 years. She has had her writing, drawings, illustrations and photography in books, newspapers and magazines. She is currently Artist in Residence at the Julian of Norwich Shrine in Norfolk. She was selected as a Thames Festival Artist in 2023, and again this year - the exhibition trail is part of the 2026 festival.

Follow her on Instagram [@debra.artist](https://www.instagram.com/debra.artist)





## **Location I – NW wall of the church.**

*Begin your journey at the back of the church, by the main street door, on the shelves by the big table.*

# **We Recycle**

I designed my exhibition to open with an installation which combines a small selection of my junk-paper bowls along with images and words which celebrate the active response, by All Hallows, to the issues of environmental pollution and climate change. I framed photographs of their initiatives to emphasise their value, relevance and importance. By integrating it with my own work I was seeking to create an installation which both highlighted the problems we are facing with pollution and climate change and which also showcases the steps we, as individuals and as organisations, can take. Whilst my own work is concerned with national and global consequences, local and individual action is an important mechanism for change.

## **Location 2 – by the ornate sword rest in the North aisle.**

*Turn around and take a few steps towards the front of the church. The sword rest is on your right, just past the first pillar.*

# **Hazel Bowl**

I originally created “Hazel Bowl” for the Julian of Norwich Shrine in Norfolk, where it was displayed near the location of the medieval anchoress’s cell.

Julian chose a life of permanent confinement, living in a simple cell attached to St Julian’s Church in Norwich. Today, the church is situated in a quiet part of the city, surrounded by attractive peaceful gardens, but in Julian’s time the area was at the heart of the busy port of Norwich. The nearby River Wensum was the major transport highway for goods from around the globe. It would have been a place bustling with activity, noise and dirt. Interestingly, Julian selected to be an anchoress (thought of as a quiet, contemplative way of life) in a place of immense activity which was populated with the widest possible variety of people: rich and poor, local and visiting from overseas.

Julian is known today for her writings “*Revelations of Devine Love*” which is considered by academics to be the earliest surviving English-language work to have been written by a woman. In it she talks about the hazelnut which, for her, symbolised everything.

Pondering on her words, which mean so much to the many who read and think about them, I wondered how to convey their symbolism. The result is “Hazel Bowl” which incorporates hazelnuts from the Julian Shrine.

The art work displayed alongside “Hazel Bowl” also draws inspiration from the hazel, this time from a hazel tree growing today in the Julian Shrine gardens. I used gold to reference the medieval icons which Julian, as an anchoress, would have been very familiar with.

The display case itself is a recycled light box from old church fittings

### **Location 3 – First pillar in the South aisle of the church**

*Walk across the back of the church, towards the shop desk. The pillar is immediately on your left.*

## **Bubble-Wrap Banner**

This 3.5 metre banner is made from a single piece of bubble wrap which was rolled round one small item delivered in a too-large box by Amazon. I was totally shocked to see it being unrolled and immediately knew I wanted to make an art work in protest!

The banner is designed to be a conversation piece, I want to offer an opportunity for dialogue. My core idea was to create something attractive which would carry a message about unnecessary over-use of plastic. There are more than 250 individual images attached to the bubble-pillows, each is a tiny work of art. Look closely and you will be able to spot my depictions of flocks of birds, bright sunshine, oceans, dark night sky and stars. There are also shells, leaves and flowers - all small reminders of how much we have to lose if we fail to tackle climate change.

As you walk around the art trail you will see more of my two-dimensional work which, like the small images you see on the banner, are also about our shared natural world. I paint seas and rivers, trying to capture in a semi-abstract way their power and energy. I also love to sketch flowers and trees which give us all so much pleasure.

## Location 4 – The Baptistry

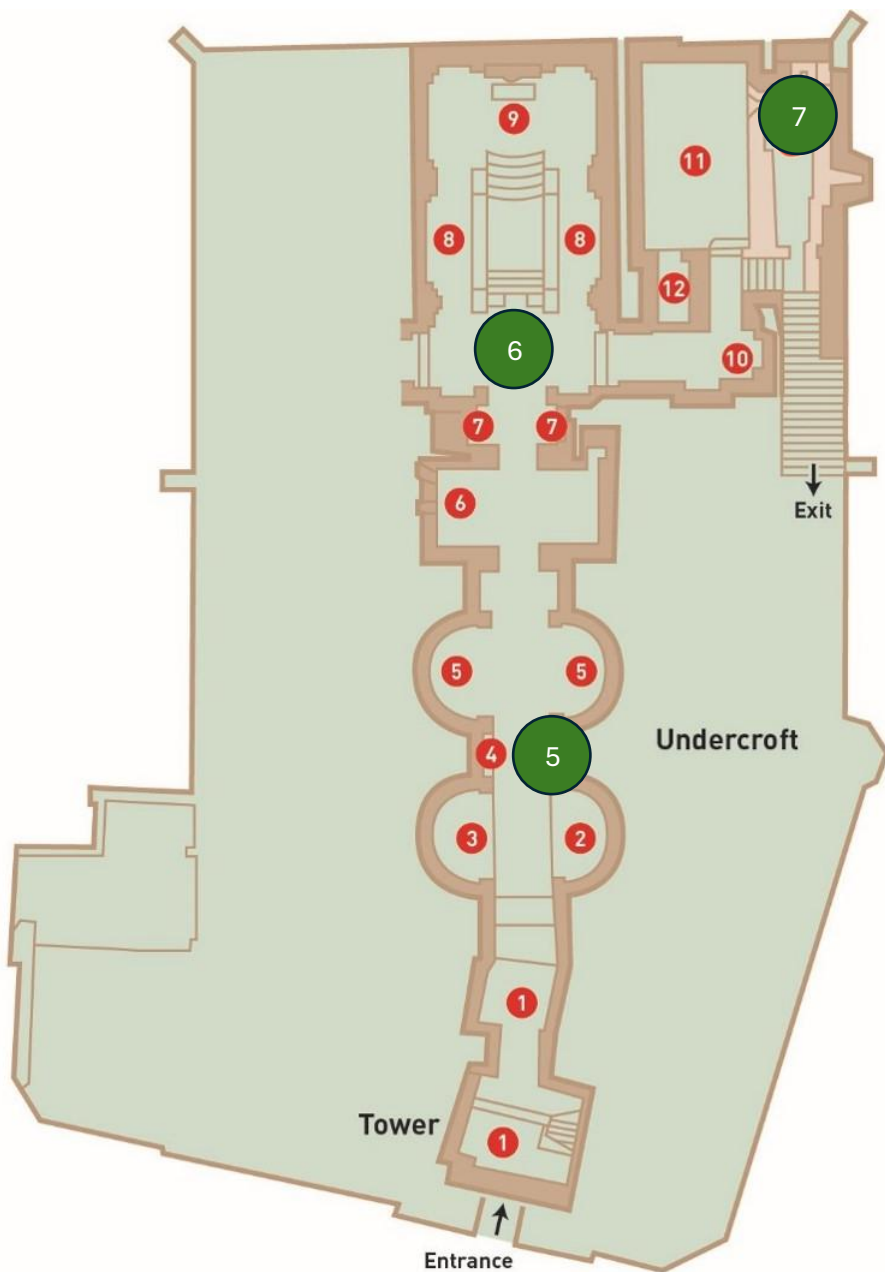
*Turn towards the back of the church once more and go past the shop desk, through the arch and down a couple of steps. The Baptistry is just by the South plaza door, behind the iron gates.*

# River & Ocean Bowls

Here, in the Baptistry, I have presented bowls made originally for various locations in England associated with water - our most precious global resource. For me, it is a fitting location to take a moment to think about water and the impact its scarcity and/or pollution is having on the poorest around the globe.

The Baptistry is the setting for a wonderful carved font cover (1682), made by the master craftsman and sculptor Grinling Gibbons, and it is in front of this eye-catching work that I made my artistic intervention. I have grouped together bowls which I have previously made in association with specific rivers and seas including the River Wensum, the River Thames and the North Sea. Some of them incorporate a variety of seaweeds associated with healthy oceans but, sadly, whose water is rapidly being contaminated with plastic. On British beaches and on shores visited on holidays abroad, we have all seen plastic bottles, old flip-flops, plastic bags, plastic rope, and more. However, the items which we see littering the beach and floating in the water is just the smallest tip of a much, much, bigger issue. Down to extremely great depths, our seas are polluted with minute specks of plastic as fine as sand. Whilst large items of plastic are choking wildlife, an even greater unseen contamination is causing untold irreversible harm in the form of almost invisible particles.

Seeking eco-friendly ways to display the bowls, I repurposed church flower stands to replace display-plinths. Then, for purely visual reasons (to draw the bowls together to make a single installation), I utilised vintage linen napkins which I came across at a City of London Refuse Department recycling event



## **Location 5 – Display case in the Crypt Museum**

*Return to the centre aisle of the church, then turn around and go through the wooden doors underneath the organ loft. Proceed straight through another set of doors and down the staircase on your left. At the bottom, turn into the Museum and walk to a display case about half-way along the passage.*

## **Museum Display**

The flat quality of this little display case was an ideal opportunity for me to create a small exhibition of bowls which can be scrutinised in detail. I originally designed my paper bowls to be looked down into, and here you can very easily do just that. I invite you to look closely into these bowls. You will quickly see dozens of tiny bits of plastic along with dozens more specks of colour which are from the various different coatings on junk paper. There are in fact not dozens but hundreds, if not thousands of specks of pollution in these few bowls. A frightening example of how much pollution has contaminated our world.

## **Location 6 – The Columbarium**

*Continue along the Museum passage right to the end. The Columbarium is the chapel facing you with the curved iron gates.*

# **People & Bowls**

The Columbarium is a place for the internment of ashes and I initially thought that I would display art here which had a history connection, but the more time I spent in the space, looking at it in detail, the more I concluded that I wanted to say something about people.

I decided to display a “gathering of bowls”, flowing from the altar steps to the entrance of the Columbarium, to symbolise people from around the globe. They are of many differing sizes to symbolise the men, women and children who are experiencing the worse aspects of climate change and global pollution. Increased global warming, crop failure, fires and famine are affecting us all, but the greatest impact is upon the poorest. “Temporal, Spatial, Spiritual” is my title for the overall exhibition in All Hallows and, in the Columbarium, all three strands come together. Here the bowls are situated a little way away from you, the viewer; you can’t quite see their detail, just as the poor who are impacted most by pollution and climate change are a long way away from us and we can’t fully grasp the magnitude their suffering.

## Location 7 – The St Clare Chapel

*Turn to your right and walk round to the exit door and the stairs. Passing the St Francis Chapel on the lower level, go up the stairs on your right. The St Clare Chapel is through the small archway on your left, at the turn in the staircase.*

# Votive Bowl

Votive Bowl is one of several on display which was made originally for the Julian of Norwich Shrine. Visitors to the shrine often light small candles and for many this is a votive action. Most then take a moment of personal reflection. As the Artist in Residence at the Julian Shrine, I wanted to capture this quiet moment. When the candles burn, they drip, I asked a volunteer to collect this residual wax for me which I later incorporated into what became “Votive Bowl”. First, I made the bowl from junk paper and old envelopes which had accumulated in the Julian Shrine Visitor Centre. Like all my bowls it is polluted with specks of unwanted plastic and chemicals, but I also incorporated some dried plant material from the Julian Shrine garden. Once the bowl was fully dry, I melted the wax collected from the candles and spun it into the interior of the paper construction. I thought that the hot wax might burn through the paper, but instead it created a delicate surface pattern.

“Votive Bowl” is displayed within a very special space. This tiny Chapel of St Clare is situated in what was actually a burial vault, with Saxon stonework to one side. Though visited by hundreds of people daily, this ancient space still feels private and very special. I chose it as the ideal space to exhibit “Votive Bowl” which is about personal reflection. Due to my incorporation of melted wax, it is a particularly fragile bowl which chimes well with my national project “Bowls in a Fragile World” which is concerned with the fragility of our shared globe under threat from pollution and climate change.

## **Location 8 – The Lady Chapel**

*Climb the stairs back up to the main church floor and cross over to the other side, passing the High Altar and the brass altar rails on your right. The Lady Chapel is the space at the East end of the North aisle, behind the wooden rail.*

# **Temporal, Spatial, Spiritual**

## **Sedum Bowl (on the left)**

“Sedum Bowl” is symbolic of the efforts which All Hallows takes to try to do something towards helping the environment. I was lucky to be shown onto the sedum roof, a precious area of high-level greenery which inspired me to make this bowl which incorporates some dried sedum gathered from the roof. “Sedum Bowl” presents to the viewer, in symbolic form, both the problem and the solution. The problem is that all around the globe the poorest are suffering the most from pollution and climate change. The solution is that we, here and now, need to take whatever actions we can, which I symbolise with the action taken by All Hallows to plant a sedum roof.

## **History Bowl (middle)**

No-one can visit this church without becoming acutely aware of its long and fascinating history. I wanted to make a bowl which would give a tantalising glimpse into that history. “History Bowl” is in some ways a record of my own increased awareness of the story of this particular place, its people and its history. I have incorporated a small fragment of Roman glass and a little piece of Roman mosaic along with some 21st century cement. There are also fragments of tobacco pipe discarded after use and found within the church. Combining stone and paper was a challenge, adding sharp glass an additional difficulty. Yet it seems to me that this place has faced much difficulty (multiple invasions, plague, cholera, fire to name a few), but it has prevailed.

### **Prayer Bowl** *(on the right)*

When first sitting down to discuss the possibility of an exhibition of my bowls in All Hallows with its vicar, The Reverend Nicol Kinrade, she tentatively asked if I might be able to use the prayers which visitors, at Christmas, had written on recycled luggage tags and hung on the festive Christmas Tree. Over 900 prayers had been written by visitors from all over the world. I started by reading as many of the tags as I could and I quickly realised that the vast majority were saying a prayer for someone else. So, I selected words from a few of the prayers to signify this and requested that the rest were burned. From their ash I subsequently made "Prayer Bowl" and you can read the words I retained by looking into the bowl.

This display case was remade from old display furniture, no longer used, from the Crypt Museum.

Associated with the Prayer Bowl is yet another creative recycling journey, The Prayer Tree Project, the story of which can be followed on the screens behind you in the North aisle.

**Debra Shipley, summer 2026**

Follow on Instagram [\*\*@debra.artist\*\*](#)

