C.I.D.A.C.
Commission of Inquiry into Discrimination Against Christians

REPORT for CIDAC Panel: Christian Holden (CH)

CIDAC hearing date:	November 20th, 2025
Year of events:	2025
Issue:	CH sought permission from the National Trust to film at St Cuthbert's Cave, a heritage site under their custodianship, as part of a documentary. His request was rejected in writing on grounds of "religious affiliation."
Occupation:	M.D., St Anthony Communications. Filmmaker.
Was there a legal outcome?	No. However, soon after CH's online testimony to CIDAC, a series of events unfolded, leading to nationwide reports about his case. This led to the National Trust declaring that there was never a policy of refusal on grounds of "religious affiliation". He was eventually given the opportunity to film but his documentary had by then been completed.[1]
Sex:	Male
Denomination:	Catholic
Use of data:	Unrestricted
Evidence:	Evidence bundle

Background

CH has been doing videography for the last 16 years. As part of any filming project he does, on-location venues will be considered, and he will apply for permission to film, if and when required. As a Christian filmmaker, he explains that the "vast majority of my work would be for the Church, in various aspects, whether it's for [the] diocese or for my own productions that would cover aspects of the history of the Church, of lives of saints, of theological issues."

Seeking permission to film at National Trust site

In connection with producing a documentary, *The Way of St Cuthbert*, one of the sites CH was interested to film was St. Cuthbert's Cave[2] in Northumberland. He discovered it was the National Trust (NT) who managed the site. CH notes that, "the route, the St Cuthbert's Way, is a formally accepted and demarked route by Northumberland County Council, so it's obviously valued by them as part of the history and culture of the area."

CH believes that in addition to Christians, anyone keen on culture and history could find his film about St Cuthbert of interest. In June 2025, he emailed the National Trust Filming and Locations Office (NTFLO), giving an outline of what he hoped to achieve, what the film was about, and asked for permission to film. Their immediate response, he says, was that they don't host filming of a religious or political nature. CH believed this wasn't true because he explains that he had worked at one of their sites ten years previously, though he recognizes that policy could change over time.

Following this email, CH phoned NTFLO and provided more details about his proposed film. He explained this was not primarily about religious convictions or a religious story, saying "that this film would also have cultural and historical value, and would be accessible not only to people of faith, but to others who are just curious about history and culture." The NTFLO employee, Sarah Payne, asked for more information about what CH planned to do with the film, its distribution, etc. During this conversation, she referred to CH's website (saintant.com), saying that she and a colleague had viewed it, that they had then "looked at each other", and CH recalls how she then expressed to him a disapproving audible sound, accompanied by 'no'.

Subsequently, CH spoke to the film's sponsor to acquire further clarification from him as to his intentions and the film's storyline. CH then forwarded this information to Sarah Payne. After several emails, she responded, saying that the NT will stick with their initial decision not to allow the filming because of the "religious affiliation". CH says that in email correspondence, she also told him that, "these directives were coming from the highest level" of the Trust.

Impact and follow-up

CH felt "stunned ... not least because they host a site which is only of real significance because of its relation to St. Cuthbert, so it's unavoidably of religious significance. But furthermore, for myself professionally, it's almost like I've hit a brick wall just because of my religious background." He says that he felt shocked that, "I can't fulfill my role, my job ... as best I can to tell that story."

CH spoke to a lawyer friend who suggested the possibility that the NT were in breach of the Equality Act 2010. CH, not being a lawyer, didn't know the law on this, but still drafted a letter to the NT "to that effect". He asked them to reconsider their decision. This time, CH received a response from a more senior person, Harvey Edgington. CH explains that he was now given the same answer as previously that, "they believe they have the right to refuse access to their site, and that they're not bound by legislation."

CH says that it "strikes me as a very odd" that while the NT manages sites directly connected to Christian history, they don't "want that story to be told." CH suspects that if he had approached the NT, seeking permission to film instead for a documentary about the geology of the area of St Cuthbert's Cave, "they would be open to that, but not telling the story of what it's really about and ... why it's significant historically." Preventing "these stories from being told," CH believes this decision makes the NT "out of touch" with the majority of people in the country.

(Harvey Edgington, he later discovered, was the same individual he had dealt with in 2015, when he was given permission to film at another location, St. John's Jerusalem in Kent.[3] CH notes that before this previous approval was granted, he was initially informed by Harvey Edgington with a similar reply, namely that they "don't normally have religious or political filming." When CH had followed up this refusal with a phone call, and having further explained what he had hoped to achieve, he was given authorization to film).

CH made significant headway producing the documentary about St Cuthbert, saying: "we did that to the best of our ability," filming from public footpaths around the area of St. Cuthbert's Cave. "It's impoverished, sure, because it's not as good as it could have been." *The Way of St Cuthbert* follows an American university professor, his friend who is a priest [brother of CH] and several students, who began their journey in the Abbey in Melrose in Scotland, and did the 65-mile trek across the well-known Way of St. Cuthbert. Their journey, which includes hiking up hills and valleys, combines Lindisfarne Island, and ends at Durham Cathedral.

[1] Editor's note. Following CH's online testimony, the National Trust (NT) was contacted by numerous VfJUK

supporters who expressed concern about the NT's refusal to grant him permission to film. VfJUK's support of CH's case was also reported by two national newspapers. This was subsequently followed by the NT Director-General writing a letter to all those who had complained, in which it was stated: "We were founded to serve the whole of society, regardless of anyone's background or beliefs." The letter concluded: "We are reviewing what has happened in this case. We do not have a formal policy about religious filming at our places."

[2] Editor's note: St Cuthbert was a 7th century monk and bishop.

[3] Editor's note: The National Trust says that this "rare surviving chapel is the only remaining structure of the Preceptory of the Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St John of Jerusalem formed in 1113."