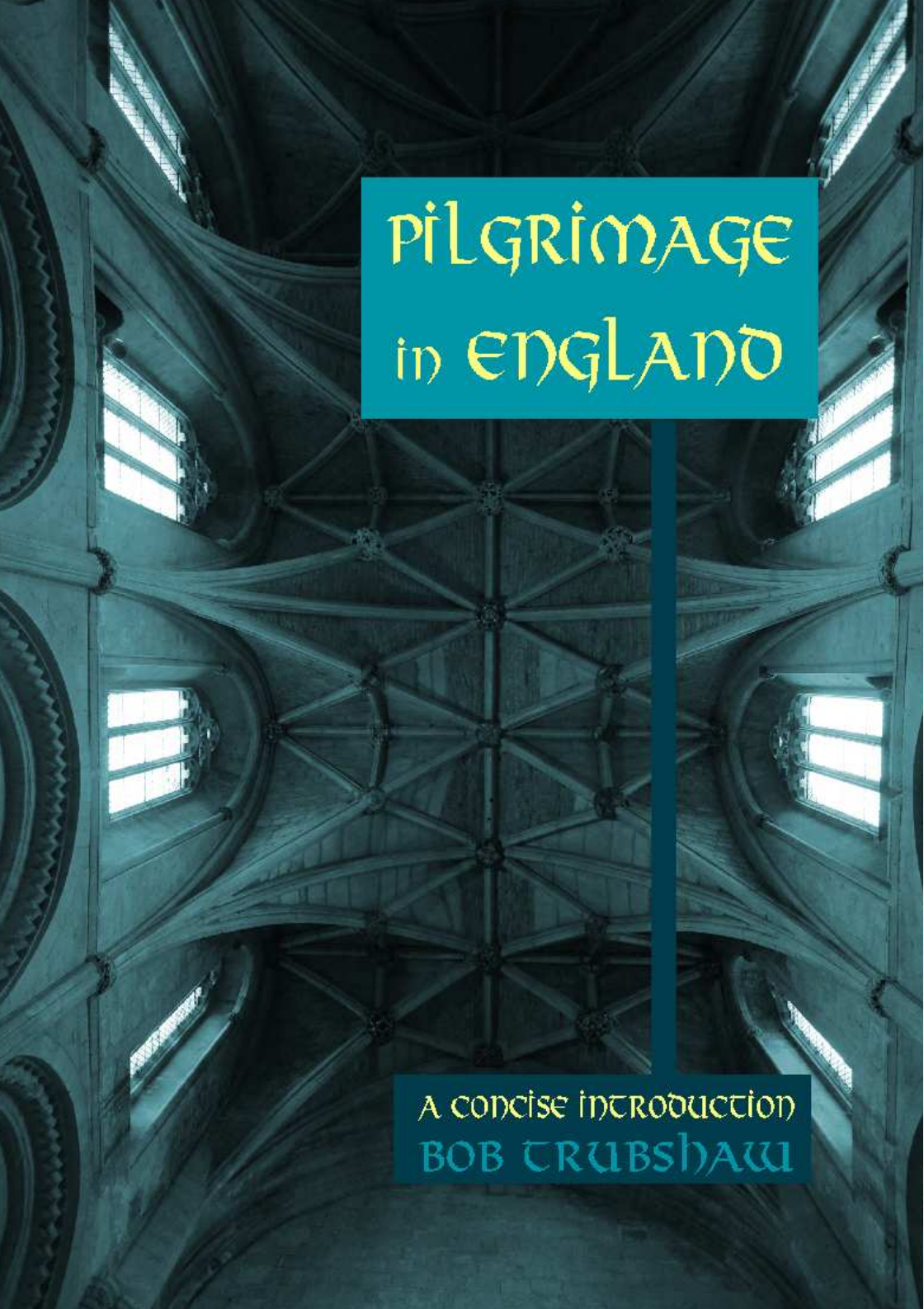

Pilgrimage in England

A concise introduction

Bob Trubshaw

This overview attempts to summarise current academic thinking about pilgrimage in England, and to provide bibliographical details of relevant sources.

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Heart of Albion

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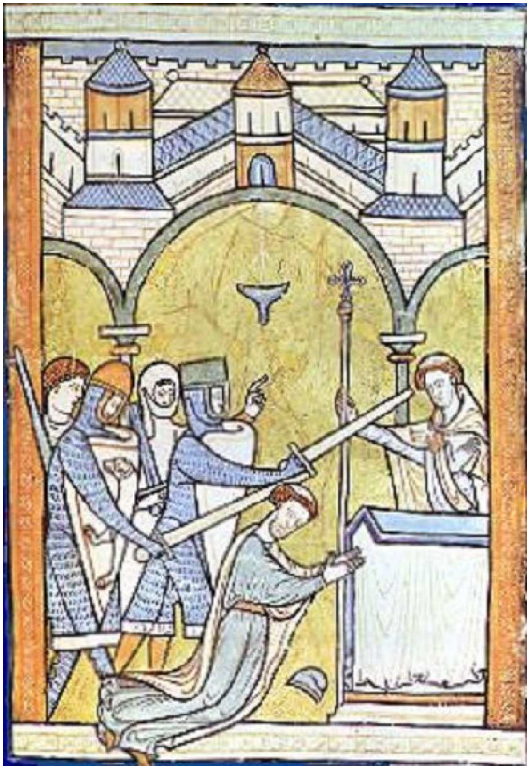
Preface

On the face of things medieval pilgrimage seems straightforward. People set out, usually along well-established routes, to visit the shrines of saints. The significance of the saints was retold in legends. The routes themselves linked together secondary shrines, suitable resting places and hostelries, and as such would have their own 'legends' – both secular and sacred. Everything about pilgrimage was about recalling previous events and people, emphasising their meaning and significance for those who were making the pilgrimage. In other words, in the late medieval era the origins of cults to St James and such like were kept alive – and sometimes reinvented – according to the needs of the 'present day'.

While we no longer think of the later medieval era as the 'present day' we too, in all sorts of ways, have revived the meaning and significance of pre-Reformation pilgrimage according to all manner of different contemporary 'needs' and ideals. Historians and other researchers have brought their own assortment of agendas and paradigms to the party. The consequence of all this contemporary interest in pilgrimage is that, frankly, little about pilgrimage is straightforward. Instead we should think of a great complexity of interwoven ideas.

This overview focuses mostly on pilgrimage in England. Inevitably most of the attention will be devoted to how pilgrimage develops up to the heyday in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. In England pilgrimage was effectively killed off in the late 1530s when Henry VIII destroyed all the shrines which had been the pilgrims' destinations. However a combination of circumstances led to revival during the twentieth century and pilgrimage is once again part of religious practice in England, straddling denominations and faiths.

A substantial number of academic works have looked at many aspects of medieval Christian pilgrimage and also at traditional pilgrimages by



A fourteenth century depiction of the death of St Thomas à Beckett.

followers of other major faiths. A few academics have also taken an interest in modern Christian pilgrimage. The published research covers a surprisingly broad range of specialisms and, inevitably, older ideas and assumptions are challenged by more recent thinking.

This summary of the literature was written to assist understanding medieval pilgrimage in Wiltshire. However most of the research summarised herein either has a wider scope or relates to specific places in other parts of Britain.

The golden age of English pilgrimage

> Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
> My staff of faith to walk upon,
> My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
> My bottle of salvation,
> My gown of glory, hope's true gage,
> And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.
>
> From *The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage*,
> attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh.

Pilgrimage was one of the most conspicuous acts of devotion in medieval England. From precedents going back to the Anglo-Saxon era, the idea of going on pilgrimage reached its zenith from the late twelfth century to the early fifteenth century. Within that broader timeframe there is a 'golden age' from the accession of Henry II in 1154 to the death of his grandson, Henry III, in 1272.

Two specific events dominate English pilgrimage: the murder of St Thomas à Beckett in 1170 during the reign of Henry II and the abrupt suppression of saints' shrines by Henry VIII in the 1530s.

In contrast to the well-defined demise of English pilgrimage, the origins are much more vague. Several Anglo-Saxon kings visited Rome, although none ventured to the Holy Land. Their journeys did not, however, conform to later ideas of pilgrimage. The purpose was as much political as pious. Early medieval kings may have established cities such as Winchester as their 'power bases' but their lives were essentially peripatetic, continually moving throughout the lands of their subservient lords. Journeys to Rome were little different to their normal existence.

An illustration from 1433 depicting worshippers at the tomb of St Edmund.

This was a time when the lives of British saints were being compiled. As depicted in these rather formulaic hagiographies, many of the early saints – especially those in Ireland and Wales – could be thought of as itinerant, founding churches and then moving on to convert another social group. While the Latin word *peregrinus* was used of these missionaries, just as it was for later pilgrims, we should not be confused. Pilgrims journeyed to a shrine in the expectation of returning home, suitably rewarded with indulgences. The proselytising saints simply moved on and started the process of converting and saving souls somewhere new.

Before the cult of saints in the eighth century onwards, Christianity did not have any sense of 'sacred places'. Only *people* could be sacred. However the shrines built for the saints after their deaths became the destinations of pious journeys and so, by extension, the churches, cathedrals and abbeys where these shrines were situated became sacred places somewhat in the manner we now regard them.

This angel was carved about AD 1000 and is now inside the tower of the church at Breedon on the Hill, Leicestershire.

His right hand forms a gesture of blessing commonly used at the time. The pair of opium poppies at his feet suggest he was associated with 'dream incubation' or other forms of healing.

The research Dr Dee Dyas has revealed that surviving Old English literature contains a number of sophisticated discussions about pilgrimage, mostly based on discussions of the scriptures. 'Life as a pilgrimage' was a concept known in the early English church, although it often manifested as voluntary exile on the Continent or as 'stationary pilgrimage' in a monastery. Early pilgrimage idealised the journey to Jerusalem but in practice was more commonly a journey to Rome. The earliest reference to Christian pilgrimage in Britain is a reference to the shrine of St Alban, at St Alban's Abbey, being visited in the fifth century.

The Old English literature sheds a little light only on the activities of the clergy. Presumably the laity maintained pre-conversion practices which eventually mutated into the local pilgrimages and Rogationtide

processions of Catholicism, but the direct evidence is lacking. People would also have travelled to monasteries and other religious establishments specifically to seek healing. There is circumstantial evidence that the Roman practice of 'dream incubation' – or healing through prophetic dreams – continued through until the late thirteenth century. Such practices are indistinguishable from later concepts of pilgrimage, but the discussions of pilgrimage in Old English literature seemingly have no overlap with visiting shrines for healing. Two 'conceptually' distinct practices may have become conflated over the centuries.

From penitence to indulgence

When we look in more detail at the origins of pilgrimage we seen an even bigger difference. Penitential pilgrimage is referred to in various early medieval law codes from Ireland and England. Initially there is little difference between being sent on pilgrimage and being banished (or made an 'outcast').

The earliest references to penitential pilgrimages suggest they were invented in Ireland soon after the sixth century. The idea steadily catches on throughout Britain and the Continent and remains the predominant way of thinking about pilgrimage until the eleventh century.

For serious crimes – where capital punishment might otherwise be expected – the destination of the penitential pilgrimage would be Rome or the Holy Land. The penalty for the most heinous offences was perpetual pilgrimage – little different from being an outcast. Where we have records it seems however that not all those convicted in this way kept to their vow. Indeed there are instances where the vow of pilgrimage is passed on to a son and then a grandson. In other instances the person who had 'dodged' the pilgrimage was summarily executed, as they would have been if they had not taken on the vow of pilgrimage.

Although there is no direct evidence in English sources, based on Continental parallels we should assume that penitential pilgrimages for

A seventh century reliquary in the form of a miniature shrine.

lesser offences were mostly to English shrines. Indeed an eleventh century list of such shrines, written in Old English rather than Latin, survives. However during the ninth century Viking raids badly disrupted established pilgrimages and these would have been only slowly re-established in the Danelaw. Wessex, by comparison, would have been one of the least-affected regions.

By the end of the twelfth century enforced penitential pilgrimage was becoming secondary to voluntary pilgrimages rewarded by indulgences. However the characteristic medieval belief in the remission of sins by formal visits to specific shrines evolves unbroken out of the earlier penitential pilgrimages which 'absolved' a crime. The difference is that penitential pilgrimages were not voluntary, but imposed as by the judiciary as punishment, whereas the decision to travel to seek indulgences was a personal and voluntary one. From modern day perspectives this seems akin to 'going on the run'.

Early missionaries, such as the Anglo-Saxon Egbert (*c.*650–729), considered themselves as fulfilling voluntary exile by going overseas to preach the gospel. By this time English clerics were seemingly a little fed up with the number of Irish missionaries taking this approach. They were deemed to be 'self-determined wanderers' and disruptive to the emergent diocesan hierarchies. These Irish *peregrenes* soon became less welcome on the Continent too. Clearly the wandering

Irish were perceived differently from, say, St Boniface (*c.*675–754), the Anglo-Saxon cleric who initiated organised Christianity in many parts of Germany.

Penitential pilgrimage was, by its very nature, something of an exception to normal life. Only when voluntary pilgrimages come to the fore from the eleventh century onwards are we beginning to see activities which fit common perceptions of medieval pilgrimage – travelling in groups between tolerably well-organised accommodation, with piety mixed with convivial jollity in the face of shared dangers and inconveniences.

Seeking miraculous cures

Along with the formally-sanctioned indulgences sold by the shrines at the pilgrimage destinations, there was a much less formally-approved quest for miraculous cures at the shrines of saints. Bear in mind that, unlike today, being declared a saint was a local process. But then as now, one of the key criteria was that the saints' relics performed miraculous cures. Clergy were often ambivalent about ongoing miracles at the shrines. They needed the income from pilgrims seeking cures, so they needed reports of cures. But the downside was that the significant numbers of sick, infirm and terminally ill tended to stay until they had been cured – or died. And that placed practical and pecuniary pressures on the clergy.

Think of Lourdes, where Bernadette Soubirous's visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1858 transformed a small market town into a major pilgrimage destination. Today Lourdes has a population of around fifteen thousand, but it is able to take in about five million pilgrims and tourists every year. The only place in France with more hotels per square kilometre is the centre of Paris! Even in an age when access to effective healthcare in Europe is almost universal, substantial numbers of people still follow their faith when seeking a cure.

The site of St Thomas à Beckett's death inside Canterbury Cathedral.

Miracle or black magic?

Medieval opinions about miracles seemed to span almost as broad a spectrum as today. The key difference was underlying concepts of causality. Medieval minds followed Augustine's proclamation that 'God does nothing against nature.' Miracles were not something 'outside' the realm of God's will or creation, just a more remarkable manifestation. Saints were the 'go betweens' who, living in Heaven alongside Christ, could intercede on behalf of the prayers of the faithful and request a miraculous cure or favour.

Not even the clergy were necessarily convinced that miracles had taken place. Even in the ninth century there is some doubt about the miracles attributed to St Foy of Conques. By the eleventh century many more miracles were being doubted. And, by the time miracles were being claimed for the relics of St Thomas à Beckett towards the end of the twelfth century, there was serious suspicion that these were invented to aid the political opponents of the king. Some detractors went so far as to suggest that, far from being miracles caused by Thomas's relics, they were the outcome of black magic practised by some of the monks at Canterbury!

Think global, act local

Chaucer informs us that the Wife of Bath has been once to Rome and Santiago de Santiago but three times to Jerusalem. Had she been a non-fictional person then she would have been unusual. Fewer English people had been to the Holy Land than Santiago, while Rome was the most frequent destination. Surprisingly, at least to modern minds, Nidaros (now Trondheim) in Norway was probably the fourth most common destination for medieval pilgrims, with the shrine of St Olaf (the patron saint of Norway) the main attraction. Within England Canterbury and Walsingham headed up the premier league, while St Andrews topped the Scottish rankings. But, as with modern football teams, the preponderance of activity is not at the top of the pyramid but amidst the lower levels.

Eleventh century piety was strongly local. This was the time when a widespread 'grassroots movement' for the establishment of manorial chapels (the precursors to parish churches) was taking over from the previous system of minsters, monasteries and abbeys. In contrast to most other parts of England, in Wiltshire a greater number of parish churches are direct descendants of minsters, rather than established as later 'competitors'. Wiltshire villages ending in –bury (such as Ramsbury, Westbury, Avebury and several others) were all founded as minsters, with the modern church being the direct successor to the original eighth or ninth century buildings.

Newly-built or rebuilt churches required newly-acquired or refurbished relics, reliquaries, and images of saints – whether painted or sculpted. They were the focus of considerable local devotion and piety. Few of these shrines or icons were known about outside the immediate area, yet that did not diminish their importance within it.

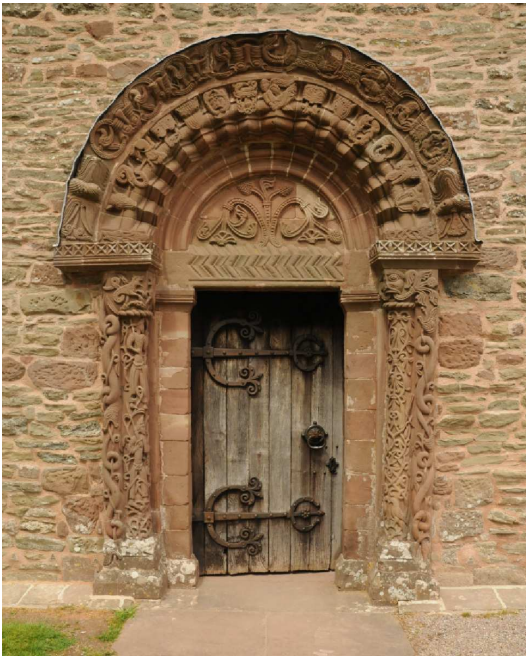
Each shrine was considered a 'manifestation' of heaven on earth, and decorated as richly as the clergy could contrive – using gold and gemstones as much as possible – to make it appear 'heavenly', a foretaste of the richness of the afterlife. Because these shrines were regarded as the intersections between the earthly and heavenly realms – a 'liminal zone', if you prefer – they were places where the

The three round windows in the north wall of St James' church in Avebury, Witlshire, survive from the tenth century.

miraculous might take place. Suffice to say there was a well-established pre-conversion practice of 'sitting out' at the burial mounds and graves of ancestors seeking either divinatory visions or intercession with the deities. The intercessionary role of local saints has no biblical precedents so must have its roots in pre-Christian thinking about tutelary ancestors and other 'spirits of place'.

The greatly-respected medieval historian Eamon Duffy has emphasised that that local shrines would have been familiar to most of the people visiting them:

> For many medieval Christians, going on pilgrimage was, it seems to me, not so much like launching on a journey to the ends of the earth, as of going to a local market town to



The south doorway at Kilpeck, Herefordshire. This is the oldest-surving Romanesque sculpture in Britian.

> sell or buy geese or chickens: shrines were features by which they mapped the familiar, as much as signposts to other worlds and other social realities.
>
> (Duffy 2002: 165–6)

This is supported by archaeological evidence as 'over half the pilgrimage badges that have been recovered from a deposit at King's Lynn were from nearby Walsingham, and similar badges found at Salisbury were mostly from southern England… people trusted in the protection of the saints of their own region.'

There is no direct evidence for when the relics and images of local saints become the destinations for local pilgrimages. We must simply assume that this practice was widespread from about the eighth century when the so-called 'age of saints' begins to gain momentum. Like so many activities which are done regularly by 'everyone' they rarely enter the historical records.

By the eleventh century pilgrimage to Rome, Santiago or even the Holy Land was becoming well-established on the Continent. The shrine of St James at Santiago was established in the ninth century and, by the mid-eleventh century, an overland route via western France and northern Spain had been established. The evidence for this still stands – a large number of early Romanesque churches. A few surviving churches in England, such as Kilpeck in Herefordshire, date back to this era, suggesting that the lord of the manor at Kilpeck had been on this pilgrimage route and been inspired to build a church in the 'latest fashion'. The first record of English pilgrims going to Santiago is not until 1105. At this time sea-routes to Santiago were seldom used by pilgrims – they come to the fore only in the first half of the fifteenth century.

Santiago, Rome and the Holy Land were the 'ideal' destinations. But the costs and 'time out' from normal existence were prohibitive for most people, at least until later in life. The annual local pilgrimage was the surrogate and, for many, the only lived experience of pilgrimage.

The experience of local pilgrimage

A fifteenth century papal indulgence and a reference in a will of the 1520s requiring the inheritor to undertake a series of pilgrimages on behalf of the testator's soul reveal that in Langham in Rutland there was a pilgrimage, presumably annually, to a hermitage chapel dedicated to St Helen a short distance north of the village. In nearby Oakham sixteenth century pilgrimages took images of the 'Blessed Mary' and St Michael the Archangel to a spring; indeed about a quarter of a mile outside the town the OS maps still show 'Our Lady's Well' where, after the Reformation, there may still have been ruins of a hermitage. Not far away, at Hallaton in Leicestershire, the remains of a chapel dedicated to St Morrell have recently been discovered less than a mile south of the parish church.

Annual parochial pilgrimages typically took place at Pentecost. The typical route was from daughter churches and chapelries to the mother

St Katherine and her wheel as depicted in medieval stained glass at St Mary's, Deerhurst, Gloucestershire.

or episcopal church where devotional rites would focus on the shrine of the patronal saint. These were so much a matter of routine that there are comparatively few contemporary records. The records we do have are when disorder led to miscreants appearing before the local magistrates, as when processions from two rival villages heading towards Evesham Abbey came to blows.

In Cornwall they did things a little more strenuously. The relics of St Piran of Perranporth, the patron saint of tinners, were paraded each year around the boundaries of the Hundred of Pydar.

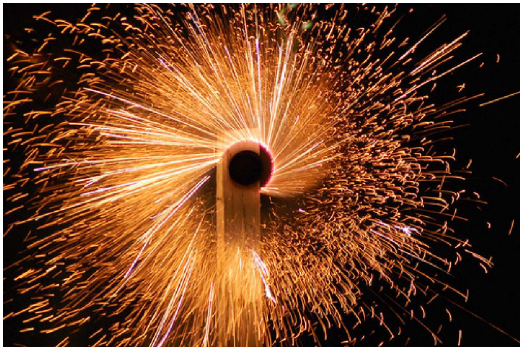
In many parts of England between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries there were local pilgrimages to shrines of St Katherine. Her cult was focused on a shrine on Mount Sinai and was an important destination for those pilgrims who made it to the Holy Land. An Orthodox monastery – one of the oldest in the world – adjoining a small modern town maintains this pilgrimage tradition.

In England Katherine's cult was associated with hill tops, mimicking the shrine on Mount Sinai. Sometimes there was a chapel or church dedicated to her but – from the scant available evidence – more often the pilgrimage destination was simply a locally-significant hill. The most interesting example is at Winchester where a large turf maze still survives on St Catherine's Hill, although the chapel dedicated to her

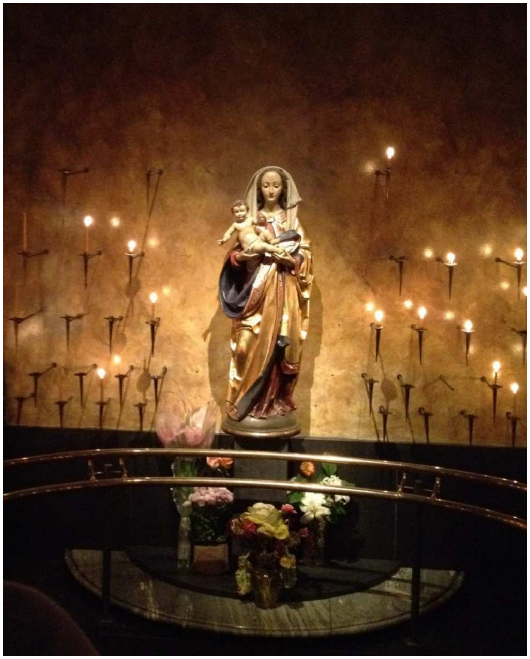
A small part of the turf maze on the summit of St Catherine's Hill, Winchester, Hampshire. Photograph by Marilyn Clark.

has been demolished. A substantial proportion of the hilltop chapels to St Katherine are in Dorset. Despite the evidence for her cult in the adjoining counties of Hampshire and Dorset, none are known from Wiltshire. St Katherine's life is depicted in a unique wall painting from about 1400 in Sporle church, Norfolk.

The popular cult associated with St Katherine was especially important to young women who petitioned St Katherine to find them a suitable spouse. Her feast day was 25th November and is still an important event in Estonia. We know little of what went on, but that is typical for 'women's rites' throughout the world as most authors of written accounts were, until recent decades, almost always male. In England the feast of St Katherine was the occasion for baking 'Catten Cakes' (various recipes based around bread dough, egg, sugar, lard or butter, and carraway seeds), as was the lighting of a revolving pyrotechnic display – which, after the suppression of her feast at the Reformation,



Catherine Wheel firework.



transferred to the 'Catherine Wheel' fireworks of Bonfire Night. We must assume that there would have been corresponding rites in the pre-conversion era which also involved female 'spirit-deities', hilltop locations and ritual fires.

While we know little about the pilgrimages associated with the cult of St Katherine, this is still more than we know about almost all other local pilgrimages in medieval England. We can nevertheless make plausible assumptions about established customary behaviour. Shrines might be approached by indirect ambulatory circuits through the church; specific prayers would probably be used to address and honour the saint; and there would be local practices of leaving votive offerings. In many shrines there would have been established procedures for those who wished to sleep overnight while touching the shrine, in the hope of waking cured or maybe after a revelatory dream.

Something as 'simple' as burning a wax candle could have carried a number of levels of meaning. At the least it was an offering to the

saint. It may have been given in fulfilment of a vow – the strict sense of a 'votive' offering. Or it may have been burnt in the hope that, as it shrunk, so too would a benefactor's illness – 'sympathetic magic' as it were.

Pioneering package tours

Those who did travel to Rome, Santiago and the Holy Land completed as much of the journey as possible overland. Until the early fifteenth century travelling by boat was simply too expensive for all but the most wealthy. Clearly all English pilgrims had to cross to the Continent by boat. The Cinque ports on the Kent coast were in their heyday and all had good overland connections to London.

Those heading for Santiago might opt to sail all the way to northern Spain, but most only sailed as far as the north-west of France. Many travelled from Lymington or Southampton, although Plymouth, Dartmouth and Fowey seem also to have been popular places of embarkation. Bristol was less attractive as in meant sailing around the difficult and stormy waters off Land's End. Indeed, before the construction of a deepwater channel in 1240, the high tidal reach at Bristol greatly restricted its use as a commercial port.

Even though the overland route to the Holy Land was re-established at the end of the tenth century, successive political instability, organised armies and large numbers of bandits made the final leg of the journey to the Holy Land risky or impossible. The first 'package tours' were organised by Venetians who took people by boat across the eastern Mediterranean to enable visits to Jerusalem.

The sea route from south-west England to Coruña, a port about forty miles from Santiago de Compostella, became the cheaper and quicker option in the early fifteenth century. Surviving documents reveal the sheer number of ships involved – these were 'package tours' on a massive scale. During the next hundred years Bristol comes to dominate this trade.

Crusader or pilgrim?

Among these political instabilities which made the Holy Land difficult to get to were, of course, the various crusades to recapture the Holy Land from the 'Infidels' – a process which steadily backfired. Despite the progressive defeats, school textbooks and the like wrote proudly about 'crusaders' banding together to form armies. What those textbooks fail to mention is that the word 'crusader' was invented by nineteenth century historians. The men who donned the 'red cross of Jerusalem' referred to themselves as pilgrims. The red cross was the most distinctive feature of how all pilgrims chose to dress.

One clear consequence of the first crusade in 1095 was that pilgrimage became a collective activity. Before about 1050 all pilgrimage had been personal – whether an imposed penance or a voluntary quest for a cure or indulgence or, as a phrase used at the time put it, 'a quantum of salvation'. Only from the end of the eleventh century did pilgrimage become principally a collective ritual.

The shifting significance

> Pilgryms and palmeres plighten hem togidere
> To seken Seint Jame and seintes in Rome;
> Wenten forth in hire way with many wise tales
> And hadden leve to lyen al hire lif after.
>
> William Langland, Prologue to *The Vision of Piers Plowman*.

I have already mentioned that Christian pilgrimage originates as judicial penitence. The absolving of crimes blurs into the sale of indulgences at shrines. Quite independently these shrines become the focus of intercessionary prayers, whether for comparatively mundane outcomes or miraculous cures.

None of these objectives have biblical precedents. The main passages in the Bible which offer precedents for pilgrimage are in the Old Testament, especially *Exodus*. But these scriptural roots seem not to

feature at all prominently in medieval thinking about pilgrimage, so much as evidence of the reasoning 'about' pilgrimage can be discerned from liturgy and hymns. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries a new fashion emerges for thinking of the life of faith as a journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. This thinking forms the underlying basis of William Langland's *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (probably written between 1360 and about 1386); these ideas were further developed in the mid-fifteenth century.

Throughout the medieval era there were clerics who were critical of pilgrimage. There were too many 'spiritual perils', especially – it was thought – for women. Others noted that when it came to venerating relics, 'Holiness did not always beget holiness'. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is a complex work of fiction which captures many of the different 'pros and cons' of pilgrimage as they were perceived in the later fourteenth century. And, increasingly from the mid-fourteenth century, there was clerical hostility to the veneration of saints and their icons. Henry VIII expressed this hostility in the most dramatic manner possible – in 1538 he ordered the destruction of the shrines.

The Reformation swept away the shrines, statues and relics of saints and undermined the need for intercessionary saints. Also swept away was another goal of medieval pilgrims, an indulgence for the remission of sin. The idea of pilgrimage lived on in Protestant thinking, but only as a metaphor for life-as-a-journey-of-faith. The publication of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678 promulgated this view, replacing the entirely different *Vision* of Langland from three hundred years before.

The perennial popularity of Bunyan, together with the frequent study of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as part of English literature school examinations, maintained pilgrimage as a 'literary idea' rather than a lived experience. As discussed later in this overview, only in recent decades has the Protestant distaste for physical pilgrimage started to give way to a revival of actual excursions.

Collective identity

In some of the academic writing about medieval pilgrimage there are references to pilgrims becoming 'liminal' (from the Latin *limen* 'threshold') and somehow apart from normal society. However, as almost all the more recent scholars are keen to argue, this is misleading. While pilgrims clearly left the confines of their own community they did so after a formal blessing from the bishop. Such formal blessings for pilgrims were a direct counterpart to the rites of entering a religious order. Pilgrims saw themselves, not as on the boundaries of social groups, but as members of a newly-formed group with its own strong sense of identity. Rather than blurring their social world, they were consolidating it.

Something of this is revealed in Chaucer's fictionalised account, although the sense of shared experience – both the physical challenges and the spiritual incentive – are reported by modern day pilgrims too, such as Henry Eliot's account of walking from London to Canterbury (Eliot 2012).

We have few first-hand accounts of medieval pilgrimages. But we do have Raghubir Singh's accounts of his pilgrimages around the Ganges valley in the 1980s. Uniquely, he focuses on his own emotions rather than the epic narratives which 'shape' the pilgrimage route. The movement, fasting and veneration all generate specific kinaesthetic feelings – the full range of tactile, olfactory, visual and auditory senses. For Singh there are frequent times when here and there, now and then, I and not-I all become blurred – through dreams, offering Ganga water to his dead father, even hallucinations and being under spells. However new experiences are assimilated within the Hindu worldview he inhabits collectively with other believers. The emotional responses aroused during the period of pilgrimage became incorporated into his long-term sense of self and the purpose of life (Singh 1994).

All Singh's experiences have direct parallels to medieval Christians pilgrimages and we can assume that their responses would have been similar. Changes in identity and perception were possible when 'away

Classic pilgrim attire.

from home'. From my own experience I can confirm that the emotive aspects of long journeys form enduring memories.

What pilgrims famously shared was their way of dressing: a tunic with a red cross, a metal-shod wooden staff, a leather scrip or satchel, a broad brimmed hat, and a long scarf wound around the body as far as the waist. Most of these are practical items for such journeys. The exception – the tunic – only appears in the twelfth century.

Practical as most of these items might have been, this did not stop them becoming wrapped up in symbolic meanings. According to a sermon of about 1125 using the staff drive off dogs and wolves symbolises avoiding the snares of the Devil; the staff is the pilgrim's third leg thus symbolises the Trinity; and it recalls the wood of the Cross, and thus

the hope of salvation. By 1430 the staff, pouch and tunic were emblems of faith, hope and charity (respectively) 'for reasons which are pursued as far as scholarly subtlety will permit.' (Sumption 1975: 173).

Supposed pilgrimage graffiti

Medieval graffiti can be found in a significant number of churches in Britain. These include initials, circular motifs drawn with compasses, a surprising number of ships, and a much smaller number of human figures. But the largest number are crosses. These are most often found in doorways.

According to suggestions put forward at the end of the nineteenth century by vicars with antiquarian inclinations, these crosses were made by pilgrims, either as part of their vows when departing or as an expression of gratitude after returning. The people who suggested that the association with pilgrims used words such as 'may' and 'possibly'. However over the intervening century or so all such qualifications have been lost and it is now a 'fact' that such crosses are made by pilgrims.

The medieval historian Matthew Champion is the Project Director of both the Norfolk Graffiti Research Group and the Suffolk Medieval Graffiti Survey. He has looked long and hard for any documentary evidence of medieval pilgrims making crosses. And failed. The earliest suggestions that graffiti crosses were made by pilgrims were made in the 1890s. And they were just that: suggestions. Later writers have endlessly recycled this as a 'fact' when, in reality, these crosses were made by all sorts of people, not just pilgrims.

The reason people made crosses in church doorways was because the church porch was where legal transactions customarily took place. Sometimes we have surviving contracts – such as exchanges of land or goods, or marriage contracts – and even when people could sign their name they make a cross as well or instead. In other words, making a cross was a key part of the 'ritual' of a legal agreement. You might

Medieval graffiti in the form of crosses, Berwick Basset church, Wiltshire.

want to think of it as a predecessor to Stamp Duty and signing over a postage stamp.

Plenty of legal agreements would have been made verbally, in front of witnesses. In the absence of a written agreement it would make perfect sense for the two parties to combine their efforts to mark out a cross on the doorway. Most such agreements – and their crosses – would have had nothing whatsoever to do with pilgrimage.

Nevertheless *some* legal agreements would have been made before going off on overseas pilgrimages. Margery Kempe's account of her pilgrimages reveals that she settled her affairs before leaving for the Holy Land but made no such arrangements before setting off on various 'local' pilgrimages in England. This is consistent with a few lesser-known accounts which reveal that wealthier medieval pilgrims

either sold their land to raise funds for the trip, or 'mortgaged' their land to the church for the duration of their journey. For entirely pragmatic reasons pilgrims would often make a will before setting off.

All these legal agreements prior to pilgrimage would be part of the same customary practices as any other, so plausibly might have been marked by a 'graffiti' cross. But this falls well short of thinking of all such inscribed crosses as the work of pilgrims. Just possibly the distinctive 'Jerusalem crosses' were indeed linked to agreements made before setting off on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. But no evidence supports this supposition.

Famously, all pilgrims wore a cross on the outside of their clothes, or a cross-shaped badge (see later section). Others went to rather extreme lengths to 'cross themselves'. A thirteenth century painting in Admont Abbey, Austria, depicts St Roche as a pilgrim. He had incised a cross into his chest deeply enough to draw blood. While this may reflect the imagination of the artist more than actual practice, seventeenth century Continental sources refer to a tradition of crusaders and other early pilgrims to the Holy Land being tattooed with a cross or other emblem of the shrine they had visited. A detailed first-hand account of a Dutchman being tattooed in Bethlehem in 1614 has survived which reveals that this was still a thriving trade. Further evidence comes from 1572 when a number of Catholics were hanged by Protestants at Gorcum (modern Gorinchem in Holland) and the hangman brutally cut a Jerusalem cross out of the chest of one of the victims before completing his execution.

However while being tattooed was clearly a common activity for pilgrims to the Holy Land, and buying lead badges as souvenirs was known throughout the Continent and Britain, these are all associated with the pilgrims reaching their destinations. Medieval graffiti such as crosses are found in a much wider range of churches so the association with pilgrimage is not as obvious as has been assumed in the last hundred years.

The pilgrimage experience

When in 2012 Henry Eliot and friends walked from London to Canterbury, his account was published in a magazine and the article is available online. Neither of these options were available to medieval pilgrims. But nevertheless at least some were keen to pass on their experience. William Wey, a canon at the Augustinian house at Edington in Wiltshire, visited Santiago in 1456 and subsequently made two pilgrimages to Jerusalem, in 1458 and 1462. He compiled various short 'guides' directed at both the practical and devotional needs of a wide range of pilgrims.

A medieval pilgrim travelling out of England was most likely to make his or her way to Rome. This was, after all, the focus of the Catholic church. In recent decades pilgrimage has come to the fore among Protestants who have no ties to the Vatican. For them the Holy Land is the most logical destination. *El Camino* to Santiago is followed by Protestants too, even though the destination, cathedral at Santiago, is Catholic. Rome, then the Holy Land, followed by Santiago were the consistent rankings for popularity before the Reformation among both British and Continental pilgrims travelling abroad.

There are references to guest halls for pilgrims on the Continent going back to the eighth century, although even in the heyday of pilgrimage around the twelfth century such facilities were infrequent. Pilgrims mostly stayed in inns, despite the problems with overcrowding, bed bugs and other vermin, poor food, and innkeepers who rather too often robbed (or even murdered) their guests. Where there were no other options pilgrims would 'camp out' in the naves and aisles of churches. There is little contemporary documentary evidence of this practice which suggests – although does not prove – it was so commonplace as to be unremarkable.

The dangers of pilgrimage meant that wealthier people might pay for a 'proxy' to do the trip for them. Those delegated to go to the Holy Land proved that they had actually been there by bringing back a frond of palm. As a result they became known as 'palmers'. Strictly they should have been bringing back a written indulgence, so perhaps there

were 'bulk imports' of palm leaves to British ports such as Bristol, which were shared among a coterie of palmers who faked their obligations. The remission of sins by the sale of 'indulgences' begins in the eleventh century and continues until the Reformation. Clearly the main aim was to raise money for the church issuing the document – although one suspects that a great many were forged. Rather than being seen as simply an excessively 'commercial' aspect of pilgrimage, such transactions were just towards one end of a broad spectrum of practices which sought to part the hordes of pilgrims from their cash.

As already noted, most pilgrimages were local. Even when travelling abroad, English pilgrims would have shared their intermediate destinations with local pilgrims. This would be especially true when local churches and cathedrals were celebrating the feasts of patronal saints. Clearly an excellent time for pilgrims, local and otherwise, to congregate. The downside was that these could be exceptionally crowded events, with many thousands of people jostling to get near to the relevant saint's shrine. Disorderliness was to be expected and even violence was not exceptional. Small groups of pilgrims would be inside the churches singing and 'partying' in their own ways, each group adding to the almost deafening din inside the resonant acoustics of the nave. Quiet devotion was not among the options!

Historians writing about pilgrimages, understandably, write about pilgrims. But they were only ever one part of the whole picture. The clergy who maintained the shrines and offered accommodation, along with sellers of pilgrimage badges and the like, together with innkeepers and other victuallers in the towns and along the roadsides were just as much part of the broader social history. Piety would easily be swamped by the assorted purveyors of provisions, medieval precursors to 'patent medicines', tawdry trinkets, people paid to literally drag the wealthier sort into their inns, and the ladies of 'easy virtue'. Modern day notions of pilgrimage as predominantly acts of individual piety fit poorly with the broad spectrum of society which made up the 'lived experience' of medieval pilgrimages.

Sauntering and cantering

There are many words in English for walking. We amble. We stroll. We march. We trudge. We perambulate. Best of all, perhaps is to saunter. This word comes into English via French.

Apart from the palmers there were also people who made pilgrimage their lifestyle – in more secular times they would be deemed vagrants or tramps. Throughout Britain and Europe they wandered from town to town, from church to church, begging for alms, like *sadhus* and holy men do in India today. When asked where they were going, they would say, 'to Saint Terre' – 'to the Holy Land'. In the way language corrupts and evolves, 'to Saint Terre' became 'to saunter'. Well, that's how folklore says the word 'saunter' originates – etymologists are considerably less confident!

Those who could afford to travel by horse might adopt the 'Canterbury gallop', a natural gait for all horses, faster than a trot but slower than a gallop. By 1706 this had been contracted to 'canter', a word which will be familiar to all equestrians.

Pilgrims' badges

Before the return home the pilgrim added a badge or token showing where he or she had been – a cockle or scallop shell for Santiago, a palm leaf for the Holy Land, or the keys of St Peter for Rome. In practice real shells or leaves gave way to mass-produced badges made of lead. Badges sold at Canterbury typically showed the mitred head of Thomas à Beckett between two upright swords. Reportedly, some pilgrims' hats were bent down with the weight of such badges. Pilgrims could also buy small lead 'bottles' or *amphorae* which contained a small amount of water from a well associated with a saint.

They are all the precursors to modern day souvenirs. But, unlike the tat from a seaside resort, these badges were prized as amulets – magic charms with the ability to protect or heal. They were also evidence that pilgrims were exempt from tolls or taxes. As a result demand often outstripped supply and the making of such badges could be very

Pilgrimage badges came in many different forms. These were all made between about 1350 and 1525 and were recovered in the Netherlands.

profitable. Bishops at major pilgrimage destinations tried to control and tax the trade – but sometimes a neighbouring bishop, envious of such a source of revenue, would be happy to sell 'copies' of badges too!

Many examples of medieval pilgrims' badges have survived because, once the pilgrim was back in his or her own locality, some of them 'deposited' their badges in churches, perhaps as evidence that they had fulfilled a vow made in that church. However a great many pilgrims must have stood on a bridge and deliberately consigned the badge to the river. Whether there was ever a Christian exegesis of this rite is an open question – it seems a close counterpart to Iron Age ritual depositions. Dredging and 'mud larking' near historic bridges has produced many thousands of examples of these badges. Among the many routine motifs are a smaller number of bawdier or downright obscene examples – the saucy seaside postcard is seemingly a late flowering of this genre!

A pewter badge from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century found in the Netherlands depicting a vulva dressed as a pilgrim, complete with hat, staff and rosary.

All pilgrimage badges were amulets as much as souvenirs and this one offers the 'protection' of the vulva – although presumably the bawdy irony is also intentional. The irony can go further as another version of this motif has the vulva with the depiction of a phallic brooch pinned to the 'lapel', where such badges were usually worn.

Canterbury and the cult of St Thomas à Beckett

England had many famous pilgrimage shrines, among them Glastonbury and Walsingham. But only Canterbury ever acquired sufficient international status to bring pilgrims from abroad – although St Andrew's in Scotland was also a destination of choice for Continental pilgrims. Despite Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* etching this destination into the national psyche, the reality is that Canterbury's fame peaked in the first thirty years after Becket's death in 1170.

The main reason is fairly obvious. St Thomas was murdered if not at the request of Henry II at least at his behest. The reason was not religious but political: Thomas was becoming the focus of considerable anti-royalist sentiments. Thomas's death was perceived by his supporters as a martyrdom, and his cult became the focus of increased ire as Henry's reign collapsed into a revolt led by the future Richard I.

The annual feasts for St Thomas initially drew substantial crowds, but there was no sustained pilgrimage from the thirteenth century onwards. In the twentieth century modern tourism, partly fuelled by the

During repairs to the south wall of St Augustine's, Brookland, Romney Marsh, Kent, in 1969, fragments of a thirteenth century wall painting were discovered depicting the martyrdom of St Thomas of Canterbury.

popularity of Chaucer on school exam reading lists, has reactivated interest in St Thomas, and the cathedral has – quite understandably – evoked those aspects of its past which best fit popular understandings of history.

Three churches in Leicestershire are dedicated to St Thomas – Frisby on the Wreake, Tugby and Skeffington. I have been informed that they form part of a pilgrimage route from Nottinghamshire to Walsingham. Frisby is also on an important coaching route from Leicester to Melton Mowbray (although subsequently bypassed by a turnpike road, now the A607) while Skeffington is on a presumably prehistoric ridgeway route from Melton Mowbray to Market Harborough. Tugby is the next settlement to the east of Skeffington and situated on a separate north-south routeway. Both Skeffington and Tugby are on the east-west route from Leicester to Peterborough (the modern A47).

Suffice to say that these three Leicestershire churches dedicated St Thomas are on the crossings of important routeways. Their location would have made them important stopping places for pilgrims. I cannot help but suspect that the acquisition of relics of St Thomas – presumably soon after his martyrdom in 1170 – was an attempt by the local clergy to 'cash in' on the 'passing trade'.

Three Leicestershire churches dedicated to St Thomas.
Left to right: *Frisby on the Wreake; Tugby; Skeffington.*

Interestingly there are three St Thomas dedications in Wiltshire: Box, Tilshead and Salisbury. Box and Tilshead are both on important routeways. The church of St Thomas á Becket in Salisbury is at the north end of the High Street and the original building predates the cathedral. Before the subsequent growth of the city this too would have been a 'routeway' church – and later adapting to a secondary but nevertheless important role in the pilgrimage to the cathedral.

The significance of St Andrew for pilgrims is exemplified at Chitterne, Wiltshire, where there was a nunnery with a chapel dedicated to St Andrew. The building next to the chapel was perhaps a pilgrim's hostel (see photograph on next page). Further work on St Andrew's dedications in southern England is needed however.

Pilgrimage in and around Wiltshire

As already noted, William Wey of Edington was one of the first people to write a 'travel guide' for Santiago and Jerusalem. While his written notes are rare survivals from the fifteenth century, we can be sure that he was not the only person living in Wiltshire to have made these journeys.

The chalk downland in the centre and east of Wiltshire is the westernmost part of a ridge of chalk which continues almost unbroken along the south side of the Thames valley towards Canterbury, where it turns south-east towards Dover. A modern traveller using the M4, then the M25 anticlockwise to the M20 is following this geology almost exactly. Around Reading the chalk is known as the Chilterns, and in Sussex and into Kent it is known as the North Downs. The similarity of Neolithic tombs either side of the River Medway in Kent with those in Wiltshire reveals that this has been used as an overland route for at least five thousand years.

The chalk upland around Avebury sits on a watershed between three river systems. Avebury is drained by the River Kennet, which joins the Thames at Reading. To the north there is a steep slope associated with the villages of Wroughton and Chiseldon; this drains towards the upper Thames valley and the numerous small streams which flow from the Cotswolds. To the immediate west, marked by Cherhill, Calne, Wotton Bassett and a string of villages around Compton Bassett and Cliffe Pypard the drainage is westwards down towards the Bristol Avon and thence the Severn estuary. These rivers and their valleys would have been major routeways during the Mesolithic and Neolithic.

People travelled upstream to gather together, presumably annually. This must be the reason for the early Neolithic causewayed enclosures

The possible pilgrimage hostel at Chitterne.

on Windmill Hill, Knapp Hill and several other locations. The henge and stone circles at Avebury follow on during subsequent centuries.

In other words people were gathering together in central Wiltshire on an annual basis for millennia before Christianity. Whether we should think of these prehistoric gatherings as 'pilgrimages' is debatable – they were presumably when dispersed kin-groups gathered together to trade, renew acquaintances, form partnerships, and a whole host of other pragmatic reasons.

Wiltshire is easy to get to simply because it is between so many other places. Evidence that most medieval pilgrimage was local comes from Salisbury where a substantial number of pilgrimage badges were found, mostly brought from shrines in southern England. During medieval times we should think of people travelling the various routeways from homes in any of the adjoining counties – or even the ones beyond – en route to major shrines at places such as Chichester, Cirencester, Edmundsbury (Bury St Edmunds), Exeter, Glastonbury, Gloucester, Malmesbury, Reading, St Albans, Salisbury, Tewkesbury or Winchester, via any number of more minor shrines.

Significantly a Roman road running from the east of Marlborough goes through the surviving remnant of Savernake Forest and almost directly to Winchester – the only detour is around an especially hilly region and the road there is known as the Chute Causeway. 'Chute' is the name of the now-lost forest which straddled the Wiltshire-Berkshire border. While direct evidence is lacking, this route linking the London to Bath road with Winchester must have been a popular medieval pilgrimage route.

The longer the pilgrim's journey, the more lesser shrines would be visited en route. And there were indeed a great number of lesser shrines, often set up in competition to already-successful destinations and stopping places. For example, the monks at Mottisfont Priory (after the Dissolution mis-named an abbey) encouraged pilgrims going to Winchester to 'pass by' to venerate their relic, said to be the finger of St John the Baptist.

The presence of 'skew passages' between the north aisle and chancel is indicative of 'crowd control' and thus large numbers of pilgrims at

feast days. The distribution of these passages in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire reveals two routeways ending at Marshfield and Avebury, both also on the London to Bristol road (see Trubshaw 2015a).

Further research would readily produce a long list of parish churches and minor monastic sites which 'touted' their relics in the expectation of donations from passing pilgrims. While individual donations from pilgrims would usually be modest amounts, in total they would add up to a substantial part of the churches' income. However the evidence can be slender as even once-significant shrines can slip into the proverbial mists of time. Were it not for the Domesday Book of 1086 referring to Stow on the Wold as 'Edwardstow' we would have no idea that the church there once contained a shrine to King Edward. Presumably the relic was brought from Shaftesbury sometime after his assassination at Corfe in 979. With minor local shrines the evidence can be as scant as a poem found in the binding of a book in Hereford library, which is the only reason we know of pilgrimage to the shrine of the decidedly obscure St Arilda at Oldbury on Severn in Gloucestershire.

Because of the chalk upland route we now think of as the A4/M4 and southern half of the M25 then mid-Wiltshire was a good 'mustering point' for anyone heading to Canterbury too. Before the emergence of Bristol then those intent on going to Santiago would be heading through Wiltshire down towards the Solent to get boats from Lymington to north-west France or even northern Spain. Others might plan on walking to Fowey to get boats to ports on the *Camino*. For those heading to Rome or the Holy Land then their journey would most likely involve an overland walk along the chalk upland all the way to one of the Cinque ports in Kent, for a boat making the shortest crossing to the Continent.

The significance of St James dedications

St James was, *de facto*, the patron saint of all pilgrims – not just those heading to or from Santiago. So a church dedicated to him, with a shrine and altar devoted to him, would be understood to mean

'pilgrims welcome here'. Indeed, in medieval times St James dominated the quayside at Bristol – Barton Priory, dedicated to St James, stood at the landward end of the quay. As will be discussed in more detail later, four churches on the London to Bristol road (the modern A4) are similarly dedicated: Marshfield, Cherhill, Avebury and Ashmansworth (near Newbury). Furthermore Reading Abbey, also on the same route, had a shrine to St James housing a major relic.

I am blithely referring to St James as if there was only one such saint, St James the Great. However there are also dedications to St James the Less – often conflated with St James the Just, first Bishop of Jerusalem and alleged brother of Jesus. Where churches are dedicated simply to 'St James' then we can indeed presume that the dedicatee is likely to be St James the Great, on the basis that St James the Less is mostly encountered with his fellow apostle Philip. When in doubt the church's feast day will shed light – 1st May for James the Less and 25th July for James the Great. Interestingly both feasts are important dates in the agricultural calendar, with James the Great's festival coinciding with numerous traditional fairs, some of which shifted to 5th August after the calendar reform of 1752 (Tan Hill Fair, which took place just to the south of Avebury and Cherhill, is a good example, although the patron of that hilltop fair was presumably St Ann, contracted to 'Tan').

St James the Great is indelibly associated with medieval pilgrimage to both Santiago and more local shrines. While St Christopher is the patron saint of more day-to-day travellers, St James may be thought of as the patron saint of pilgrims. In practice no doubt the protection of both patrons would be sought by pilgrims – belt and braces, if you like.

Numerous English parish churches are dedicated to St James. In total there are 363 (over three percent of the total known dedications) with a strong bias to the west of England. While this percentage may seem low, nevertheless St James ranks eighth among patronal saints in England as St Mary is the only saint to get into double figures (with about twenty percent of all English churches).

Dedications to St James are associated with smaller parishes and chapelries. There was only one major shrine to St James, at Reading Abbey where there was a hand-relic, given to Henry I by the Empress

This modern footpath follows the line of the Anglo-Saxon burh at Avebury. Evidence for a mid-Saxon settlement was discovered when the school (in the centre of the photograph) was built in 1970. Photograph taken from the western side of the prehistoric henge bank.

Matilda in 1125 or 1126 (though often erroneously stated to have been given at the founding of the abbey in 1121). If we can trust an account of the miracles attributed to this relic, compiled *circa* 1200, then people of all social classes came from far and wide to this shrine. Reading, as now, was situated on the road from London to Bristol.

Reading Abbey was initially part of the Cluniac order, particularly associated with the care of pilgrims to Santiago. But, despite the major relic of St James, the patronal saint of the abbey was St John the Evangelist. This is characteristic, as there were few monastic communities dedicated to St James. In contrast, no less than twenty-seven hospitals are known to have been so sanctified – including the

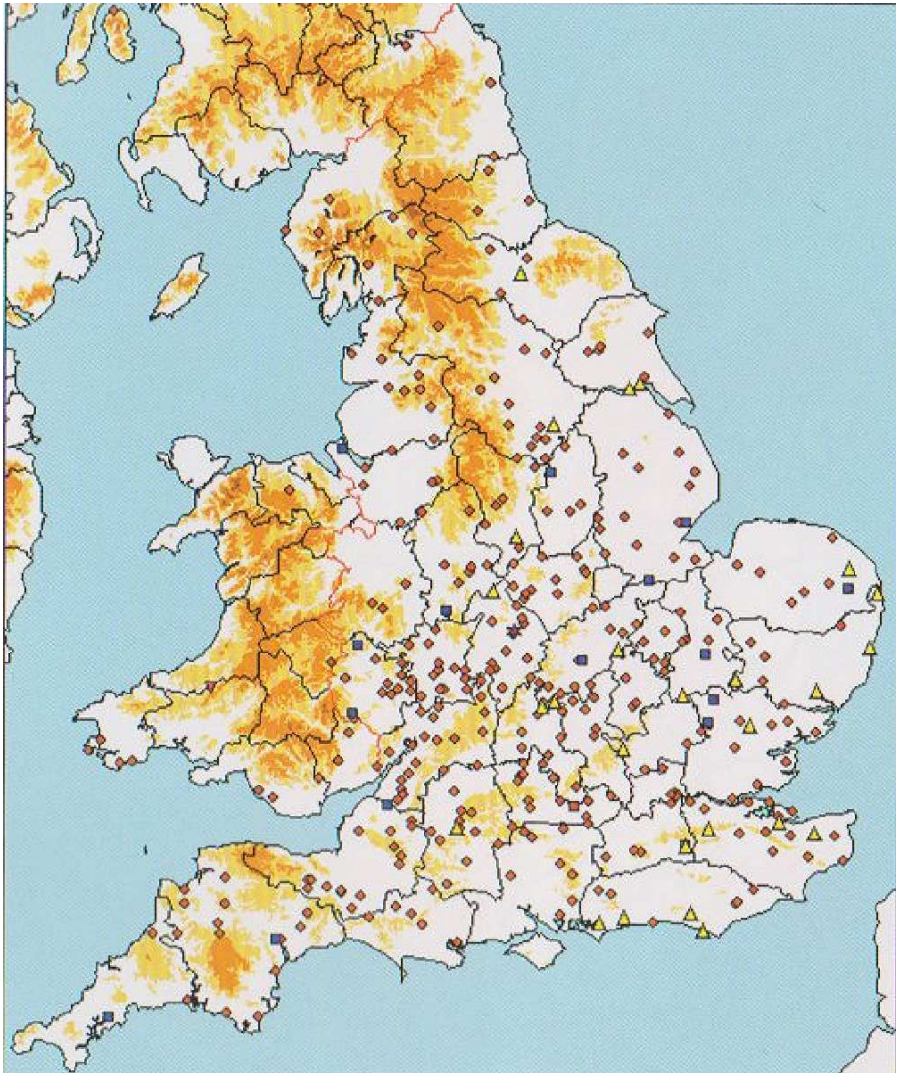
partially-surviving Hospital of St James and St John at Brackley in Northamptonshire, where there are surviving twelfth century Romanesque features. St James is also the patron of a surprising number of fairs. (Jones 2007: 122–3)

Parish churches have often been re-dedicated over the centuries. There are very discernible 'fashions', as the painstaking work of Dr Graham Jones and his colleagues has revealed. Obscure founding saints whose cult had been forgotten would be replaced by better-known apostles and martyrs. When aisles were added to churches there would inevitably be a new altar at the eastern end, which would involve a new dedicatee. In time these 'secondary' patrons sometimes usurped the 'old guard'.

Overall, dedications to St James are comparatively late. This does not mean that the churches were necessarily newly-built. A good example is Avebury; there has been a minster here since about the ninth century as key parts of the structure are still visible. The place-name seems to derive from 'Afa's *burh*' suggesting that the church might have been founded by a 'St Afa'. Most of the minsters in Wiltshire take the form of a personal name followed by *burh*; the only exception is Westbury. The *burh* is the defensive earthwork which would originally have protected the community from both bandits and wild animals, such as wolves. We can reasonably deduce that St Afa was the founding saint of the minster at Avebury. Yet there are no surviving dedications to her (yes, this is a female name) apart from one example in France. Quite likely she had been all-but forgotten by the mid-eleventh century, as the Domesday Book entry confusing gives 'Avonburh' which combines the Welsh ('Celtic') generic word for river with the Old English *burh* in a manner quite atypical of place-name formation.

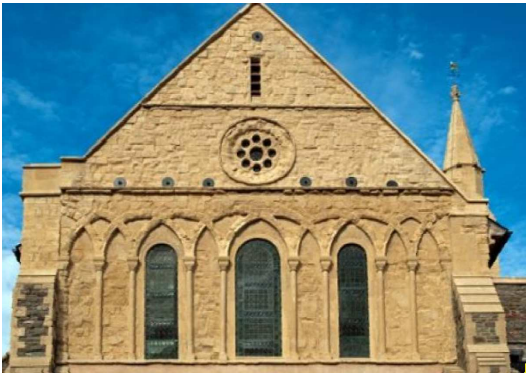
Although there are no hard facts to go on, quite likely Avebury church was re-dedicated to St James in the later twelfth century. Avebury is one of five James dedications forming a notable cluster in the cente of Wiltshire – there are only seven more in the rest of the county (discussed in the next section).

Graham Jones has identified a 'corridor' of churches dedicated to St James the Great running from Bristol up through Stoke Orchard (near



Known dedications to St James. From Graham Jones' Saints in the Landscape.

Gloucester), across through Warwickshire and Leicestershire. Another cluster links together eastern Herefordshire to northern Buckinghamshire via Worcestershire and southern Northamptonshire.



The former Benedictine Priory of St James, Bristol.

The biggest clue to the significance of St James to travellers is the abundance of hospitals once dedicated to him in the east coast ports, such as Seaford, Dover, Dunwich and all the way up to Kingston upon Hull. This precludes a close association between St James and Santiago, as pilgrims setting off from the east coast are least likely to be heading to northern Spain and are most likely to be *en route* to Rome or the Holy Land.

With that in mind, perhaps it is no coincidence that the former Benedictine Priory of St James is claimed to be the oldest-surviving building in Bristol. Overall, St James seems to have been closely associated with ports of embarkation. This adds further significance to his shrine at Reading Abbey as the overland route between the two is, of course, the modern A4. The medieval course passed at least three St James dedications: Marshfield, Cherhill and Avebury. Further investigation may reveal more associations along this route. The church at Cherhill seems to have been more of a 'chapel of ease' as it did not possess burial rites until the fifteenth century. It was a dependency of St Mary's minster at Calne by the twelfth century and this association may well go back earlier.

Other St James dedications in Wiltshire have been researched by Graham Jones and summarised by myself (Jones forthcoming; Trubshaw 2015b).

Late medieval pilgrimage

> The first thing to grasp about late medieval pilgrim centres is that they were legion, and that most of them were localised or regional in their appeal.
> (Duffy 2002: 166)

Eamon Duffy continues his discussion of later pilgrimage by noting how many of these late shrines were focused not on a body, or on relics, but on an image of the saint, whether a painting or – more probably – a statue (Duffy 2002: 171–2). While the belief was that the relics transmitted the 'potency' – Latin *potentia* – of Christ, in practice the shrines and reliquaries, rather than the relics within them, were the focus of devotional practices. The reliquaries, often in the

Late fourteenth century head reliquary of St. Martin from the church of Soudeilles (Corrèze, France).

Rolvenden church.

shape of the body part they protected, could be thought of as images just as much as paintings or carvings.

When the wife of John Baylis strolled to her own parish church in Rolvenden (to the west of Tenterden in Kent) on Relic Sunday in 1511 she described herself as going on 'pilgrimage at the relics'. Relic Sunday fell on the third Sunday after midsummer's day. For her efforts, routine as they may have been, she gained the annual indulgence for venerating the parish's relics as reward.

The end of pilgrimage

From the mid-fourteenth century onwards the iconoclasm of John Wycliffe and the Lollards raised awareness that the images should not be confused with the saints themselves. But, suffice to say, that confusion was prevalent until it was forcibly extinguished during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Lollards also objected to the cost of going on pilgrimage, arguing that the money should instead be given to the poor. They were among a diverse range of clerics who considered the sale of indulgences as either doctrinally unsound or downright unethical.

Just as in the twelfth century the pilgrimage to Canterbury was more an expression of political attitude than a devotional one, so too in 1536 pilgrimage became engulfed by politics. The northern uprisings in Lancashire and Yorkshire, together with the Lincolnshire rebellions are

often thought of as inter-linked events. Certainly they all took place in October 1536 and were given the nickname the 'Pilgrimage of Grace'. There were, in practice, different objectives and very different outcomes. It was a neat bit of PR to present a revolt as a pilgrimage, even more so to seek the 'grace' of the king (inflating him, no doubt ironically, to quasi-divine status). The northern rebels were rebelling mostly against the imposition of then-radical Protestant changes to religious practices.

Henry VIII had already issued an injunction the previous August ordering priests to discourage pilgrimages as this led to people venerating saints as gods. Henry's response to the Pilgrimage of Grace was to order the destruction of all the saints' shrines, sequestering all the gold and jewels, thereby helping to fulfil Thomas Cromwell's boast of making Henry VIII the richest prince in Christendom. Without these shrines as the destinations for pilgrimage there was no basis for the journeys. As if this were not enough, in 1538 Henry formally banned pilgrimage. By 1540 the monasteries – the established custodians of many of the shrines – had also gone.

The end of pilgrimage in England was therefore both sudden and complete. The relics of the saints – together with their shrines and reliquaries – were abruptly swept away by Henry VIII's reforms in the late 1530s. Scotland followed suit in the 1550s, France and the Netherlands in the 1560s. Secular tourism had already begun in the previous century and evolved into the Grand Tour of the Enlightenment.

On the Continent pilgrimage evolved steadily into such practices as enacting the Stations of the Cross. In contrast, the idea of pilgrimage lived on in England after the Reformation only in literature – either the bawdy accounts in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or the complex allegories of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1678, long after the Reformation had excised 'real' pilgrimage from anyone's experience.

Pilgrimage revival in England

On the Continent the Reformation did not sever traditional pilgrimage to the same extent as in mainland Britain. In 1858 a series of apparitions led to the creation of a shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes, France. Analogous experiences in 1917 resulted in the shrine to Our Lady of Fátima, Portugal. Both of these became the focus of massive pilgrimage activity and, indirectly, to a revival of more traditional destinations.

The restoration of a Catholic shrine at Walsingham in August 1897 once again gave England a national pilgrimage destination. An Anglican shrine there followed in 1931, and more recently a small Orthodox chapel has been added. This overview of pilgrimage cannot do justice to the re-invention of medieval Christianity which took place in the mid-nineteenth century as a direct result of the Oxford Movement (or Tractarians) and the Cambridge Camden Society. Between the 1830s and the 1870s the Anglican liturgy reverted to the Book of Common Prayer – itself modelled on medieval precedents such as the Use of Sarum – and the interiors of almost all parish churches were totally transformed to accommodate the revived rites. Suffice to say that the creation of the Anglican shrine at Walsingham might best be regarded as one of the more 'maverick' aspects of late nineteenth century Anglo-Catholicism. However, even though its origins were an expression of individual zeal, by a hundred years later the shrine had become almost 'mainstream' in its appeal to the laity.

In recent decades the practice of pilgrimage come to the fore in both the Anglican and non-conformist denominations. The key event was the revival of the Lych Wake Walk in 1955. The instigation of Whitsun 'Walks of Witness' in 1821 (although only in northern mill towns until after the Second World War) and the revival of Rogationtide (without the original procession of relics and all-too-often confused with the originally quite distinct ritual of 'beating the bounds') from the 1980s onwards can also be thought of as modern day variants of local pilgrimage. Since the revival of interest in holy wells in the late 1980s, some benefices have revived local pilgrimages to nearby springs dedicated to saints or otherwise regarded as holy wells.

The invention of English rural idyll – initially fuelled by the railways and then the motoring industry – evolved into an inter-war obsession with cycling and rambling. After the Second World War the motor car started to dominate but by the end of the 1980s rambling groups, 'earth mysteries' enthusiasts, modern pagans, ecological groups and proponents of 'green politics' all had overlapping interests in the landscape. The 'countryside' became invested with a broad range of invented meanings. Both specific places and the routes in-between became woven into this modern day myth-making. While these meanings did not, initially at least, coincide with those of pre-Reformation Christianity, they have provided a popular culture in which modern concepts of pilgrimage find fertile ground. Any number of organisations will organise tours around sites of historic and contemporary Christian importance, either with secular experts in archaeology and history or with a more devotional focus.

At the same time changes in British society have opened up awareness of the more central role of pilgrimage in other faiths, notably the *hajj* of Islam. People of all faiths – or even those of no certain faith – have written about their experiences while on pilgrimages. Some of these

are formally published books but increasingly such accounts appear on web pages and 'blogs'. Some researchers, such as the cultural anthropologist Nancy Frey, have actively sought out the experiences of modern pilgrims. Her sympathetic analyses focus on the return home, and the integration of the pilgrimage experience in the pilgrims' subsequent everyday life.

Despite outward similarities, the piety expressed by Protestant pilgrimage seems quite different from pre-Reformation devotion to relics of saints. Only a minority of people on modern day pilgrimages are seeking a miraculous cure, and few, if any, are seeking the indulgences which are what brought medieval pilgrimage to the fore, nor have the tribulations been imposed as a confessional penance.

Modern day pilgrimage might be thought of as 'tourism with inner meaning'. The concept embraces Christian churches and cathedrals but includes visits to surviving Neolithic megalithic monuments such as Avebury, Stonehenge, Rollright and the many lesser stone circles which are also regarded as 'sacred prehistoric sites'.

And where do we draw the line between visiting prehistoric sites and visiting museums? The leading national museums, such as the BM and

V&A, indeed house a great many of the reliquaries and statues which were once objects of veneration by pre-Reformation pilgrims. In such museums modern *objets d'art* are displayed and revered with some of the pomp and awe which would have been associated with medieval shrines. Just where do we draw the line between the undoubtedly secular esteem afforded to the Mona Lisa and, say, devotion offered to Orthodox icons of St Mary?

Tourism and pilgrimage are, at times, barely distinguishable. Even Thomas Cook's 'invention' of package tours in 1841 was religious in nature. The pioneering day-trip on a train from Leicester to Loughborough was organised to promote his faith in teetotalism. While puritanical zealotry may seem as far from the excesses of medieval pilgrimage as is possible to get – and would have been incomprehensible to the real-life counterparts of Chaucer's Wife of Bath – this is more a case of ideas going full circle before coming around again. (And came around again with what seems to be consummate irony in 1998 when the company founded by Thomas Cook acquired Club 18–30; a greater contrast with the teetotal obsession of the founder is hard to imagine.)

While perhaps 'pilgrimage' is not the word used by visitors to the 'UFO hot spots' at Warminster and Rendlesham Forest or other contemporary 'cult sites' such as crop circles, nevertheless the reasons for these visits share 'inner meanings' which are redolent of other modern day pilgrims. Pilgrimage is the word used, albeit perhaps ironically, by those who visit pop musicians' former homes and/or their places of death. Elvis Presley, John Lennon and Mark Bowlan are perhaps the longest-established examples. There is also an enduring interest in the graves of politicians and writers. Others go for the 'dark tourism' of war graves, concentration camps and the even locations of recent terrorist attacks.

Preceding pages: *Avebury Neolithic henge at sunrise and the archaeology gallery at Salisbury Museum.*

Modern spirituality and pilgrimage

Among modern Anglicans there is an interest in the notion of Jesus as a 'pilgrim-stranger' and the associated ideas – and ideals – of 'xenophilia'. The scriptural references are mostly from the three synoptic gospels and the first epistle of Paul, but influenced by post-Reformation notions of 'life as a pilgrimage'. Intriguingly, the research of Dr Dee Dyas reveals that some of the Old English biblical interpretations also pick up on the 'way of Christ' and, more importantly, early Christian concepts of pilgrimage are specifically derived from commentaries on the descriptions of Christ as a 'pilgrim-stranger'. This continues into Middle English literature. This sentiment is present in Langland's *Weye of Paradis* while the final part of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, 'The Parson's Tale', explicitly favours living as strangers and pilgrims. These are not 'neutral' statements as implicitly this is a rejection of indulgences and the more typical contemporary perceptions of pilgrimage.

This long-recognised 'way of Christ' is now entangled with a growing awareness that the doctrine of salvation is absent from the synoptic gospels (excluding an obvious later insertion at the end of Mark). In other words this 'core' Christian doctrine only appears in the later, Graeco-Roman-influenced fourth gospel and the *Acts* and the letters of Paul. The synoptic gospels instead use various terms which can be translated as 'the way of Christ' and refer to the 'followers of Christ'. These passages of the gospels are also discussed in various chapters of the Acts of the Apostles – although often shifting the original sense. The terse remarks in the gospels are surprisingly close to how *dharma* was understood in Buddhism at that time, spanning both 'cosmic law and order' and 'the right way of living'. The multiple meanings of the English words 'rule' and 'ruler' have a similar spread.

Additionally there are obvious parallels with the eponymous *dao* ('way' or 'process') of Daoism. While Daoism is thought of as quintessentially Chinese, most probably it was imported into China along the 'Silk Roads' from somewhere in the Persian empire. This would also neatly explain why seemingly-Daoist concepts and metaphors are found in pre-Socratic Greek writers such as Heraclitus.

Heraclitus lived between *c.*535 and *c.*475 BC in Ephesus, a Greek-speaking trading colony at the western end of the Silk Roads on the coast of modern Turkey – and destined to be one of the early churches to which St Paul sent one of his epistles.

Early Daoist literature is contemporaneous with Heraclitus. Indeed this was a formative period as Gautama Buddha is thought to have lived between the sixth and fourth centuries BC. The notion of Jesus spending the 'missing years' in a Buddhist community (presumably, but not necessarily, in India) is not new. The key evidence is the arrival at Epiphany of an unspecified number of 'wise men from the east' (in medieval popular culture specified as three magi or, even more improbably, three kings). We must assume that, as well as a supernova star to inspire them, in practice they followed the western end of the many 'Silk Roads'.

The Wise Men are in accord with more recent recognition that, at the time, the nearest parallels to the Essenes' coenobitic communities were Buddhist 'monasteries' in India. The *dharma*-like 'way of Christ' in the gospels adds further 'evidence'. Indeed, from this speculative perspective, early Christian concepts of salvation seem surprisingly close to how enlightenment was regarded in early Buddhism. In other words, were the gospels a mangled version of the Buddhism of the time – an attempt to 'translate' Indian culture into Semitic society perhaps? When we consider how Chinese religions such as Daoism have been badly mangled by Western attempts at translation and popularisation then this is far from an implausible scenario. However, while the historical reality of Buddhist influences on Jesus just might be plausible, such influences are absent from later New Testament books (e.g. the *Acts* and letters of Paul) so did not influence the development of early Christianity.

I mention this because some of the strands of modern pilgrimage draw, perhaps unwittingly, from such notions. They offer an 'extra-denominational' approach to Christianity, presumably appealing to those who have been brought up as Christians but find themselves 'outside' the doctrines and creeds of the different denominations simply because the doctrine of salvation is not core to their beliefs. The emphasis on the 'way of Christ' – with all its connotations of life-

as-pilgrimage as well as the wish to 'find oneself' (and maybe God too!) through 'practical' pilgrimage – becomes an attractive alternative. Such 'spiritual wanderers' may well have encountered Westernised accounts of the *dharma* of Buddhism, which have been widely promoted since the 1950s, perhaps adding further meaning and significance to their personal peregrinations.

I suspect that there may well be other 'grass roots' Christians with their own approaches to pilgrimage that I have no way of knowing about. Within the limits of my awareness the Jesus as pilgrim-stranger and the synoptic 'way of Christ' stand out as those contemporary ideas which most enrich and elaborate on earlier concepts of pilgrimage.

Rambling with 'inner meaning'

Within the last hundred years walking has become less of a necessity for most European people. At the same time recreational walking, or 'rambling', became a widespread activity from the 1930s onwards. This is in complete contrast to earlier travel which was thought of as a series of destinations. Even intrepid travel writers such as James Boswell rarely mention the 'bits in between'. They were no doubt uncomfortable and best forgotten. Nowadays, whether we travel by car, train or plane, the 'bits in between' normally pass by too quickly to be properly experienced.

The words rambling and hiking have, at least in England, become all-but synonymous with 'walking'. For many people today the idea of 'going for a walk' implies a ramble in somewhere less urban or suburban than their normal locality. Such is the contrast between suburban existence and the imagined otherness of rural England that on arrival in the car park where 'the walk' will start and end, ramblers change into an 'Otherworldly' attire of special socks and boots, with coats and hats different from those normally worn when going to the shops or to work, with equally 'shamanic' rucksacks containing 'spirit guides' (whether old fashioned maps or smartphones with GPS apps), thermos flasks and no doubt various other personal choices. For an anthropologist from another planet the logos on all this equipment –

Left: *Tungus (Evenk) shaman. From Johann Gottlieb Georgi,* Bemerkungen einer Reise im Russischen *(1775).*

Right: *Cartoon of rambler by Paul Davies (2014).*

whether Berghaus, Rab, North Face, Craghoppers, Rohan or whatever – would seem indistinguishable from the sigils and amulets on a shaman's costume.

All of this attire and equipment helps define the 'otherness' of venturing into the countryside in exactly the same way as, say, a Siberian shaman's drum and regalia define him as suitably equipped to venture into the Otherworld. Those who argue that such material clutter is essential for walking through fields are not old enough to have gone rambling in the 1960s or 1970s. Then most people would have simply chosen 'suitable shoes' and a coat from their usual wardrobe and set off. While special walking boots were available they were beyond the budget of most people. (In 1977 I spent over £30 of my first few months' wages on just such boots – allowing for inflation that would be well over £600 today. And they were much less comfortable than boots now costing about £100!)

In the last decade or so the notion of rambling as pilgrimage – 'rambling with inner meaning' – has taken hold. Henry Eliot, whose work I have already mentioned, is one of a number of professional writers who have helped set this trend. However I suspect their inspiration is from the well-known work of two essentially secular authors: Will Self and Ian Sinclair. Self appropriated the term 'psychogeography' to give a semblance of substance to his mix of shallow history and truculent social commentary (despite the word originally describing something decidedly less prosaic). In a similar vein, Sinclair's account of his 'psychogeographical walk' mimicking the course of the M25, published in 2003 as *London Orbital,* was a best-seller. A number of other writers, notably Peter Ackroyd's books about London and the River Thames, have adopted similar approaches to Sinclair and Self.

Pilgrimage as an embodied experience

Late twentieth century conceptualisation of rambling as something other to urban or suburban walking, together with the obfuscating discourse of supposedly pyschogeographical authors have given the simple act of walking – whether piously or practically – rather too many levels of added meaning (or added meaninglessness, depending on your quota of cynicism).

The simplest way to subvert over-intellectualisation is simply to go out for a walk! Turn off the smartphone, do your best to leave all 'purposeful thoughts' at home, and simply *experience* the walk. The more you feel, smell, listen to and fully observe things right at this moment in time the less easy it is to carry any 'intellectual baggage'. True, 'staying in the moment' in this manner for more than a brief moment requires practice – the tendency to 'fill the void' with thoughts and interior monologues too easily prevails.

For nearly a hundred years Zen Buddhist practitioners have promoted the benefits of *za zen* – 'sitting Zen' – which requires both stilling the mind as well as sitting still. What this Westernised version of Zen rarely acknowledges is that in Japan there is the parallel discipline of

'walking Zen' – just going for a 'purposeless' walk and allowing one's experiences and thoughts to merge into the background. 'When walking, just walk,' is the dictum of walking Zen. But pilgrimage is far from purposeless so is almost as far from walking Zen as it is from sitting Zen.

Walking**,** as with other ways of moving our bodies such as crawling, climbing, jumping, stumbling, and so on, is an 'embodied experience'. What we experience depends on the season of the year, time of day, quality of the light, the weather and much else. Misty or clear, windy or still, sunny or rainy – they all effect not only what we can see (and hear and smell) but also affect our own visceral responses to the act of walking. Walking uphill into strong wind driven rain is a far more challenging experience than skipping along a firm sandy beach in the full sun with just a gentle cooling breeze. While we may walk further along the idyllic beach we have a greater sense of achievement from having 'beaten' the tougher terrain in inclement weather.

Such idyllic experiences of walking are not necessarily those of the pilgrim. Elaine Peña describes the modern day devotees of the Virgin of Guadalupe who embark on a lengthy pilgrimage to the site of her apparition at Tepeyac in northern Mexico who endure the pain and discomfort of blistered feet, injured knees, cramped legs, growling stomachs, salty saliva, too much sun and too little sleep (Peña 2011: 37).

Pilgrimage: the richness of meanings

Just as the 'embodied experiences' of pilgrimage cover a broad range, so too do the thoughts and aspirations of pilgrims. Academics studying medieval pilgrimage refer to the 'richness of meanings' which pilgrimage had at the time. This seems to be as true of, say, Anglo-Saxon pilgrimage as it was for the later medieval era. The ideal of acting out an 'exile on earth' prior to a 'homeland in heaven' was blended with far less idealistic opportunities for 'adventure' and the widespread trade in indulgences, amuletic badges and so forth. By the time of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation the range of

meanings had extended considerably – not least including a complete suppression of physical pilgrimage in mainland Britain between the mid-sixteenth and late-nineteenth centuries and the substitution by literature.

The re-invention of medieval Christianity in the mid-nineteenth century created many popular misunderstandings about earlier faith and doctrine. When Protestant pilgrimage began to become re-established in England – and, with the exception of Walsingham, this has been only in the last fifty-or-so years – then modern ideas about pilgrimage have been based on decidedly muddied popular thinking about medieval precedents. The 'rediscovery' of Jesus as the pilgrim-stranger, together with grassroots innovations such as following the 'way of Christ', and entirely secular 'myths' about rambling have added further complexity to modern day notions of pilgrimage. So varied are the possible meanings and significances that almost anyone can associate with being a pilgrim in some manner. Indeed, the most remarkable development in modern pilgrimage is the extent to which it appeals to those of little or no faith!

So, on the one hand there are academics revealing in ever-greater detail the complexities of pilgrimage in earlier times. And on the other there is the substantial augmentation of modern day notions of pilgrimage. This comparatively brief overview cannot do justice to either, but hopefully has taken you on the first few steps on a journey towards discovering more.

The 'shrines' of this intellectual pilgrimage in which further enlightenment can be found are listed in two bibliographies. The first is a list of sources used in compiling this summary while the second is a copy of one compiled by The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at the University of York, and published online.

Acknowledgements

The sections on Anglo-Saxon pilgrimage benefited greatly from the published work of Dr Dee Dyas. However in this brief summary I have been unable to do justice to the depth of her ideas so anyone interested in pilgrimage during this era is strongly recommended to read her work.

Dr Graham Jones generously responded to my request for more information by researching the churches dedicated to St James in Wiltshire. Without his understanding of patronal saints, and his unique insights into the relationship between St James and the roads and ports of England, this summary would have been much more difficult to compile. I am especially grateful to him for devoting his attention to Wiltshire and for sending a copy of an unpublished draft.

The medieval historian Matthew Champion (Project Director of both the Norfolk Graffiti Research Group and the Suffolk Medieval Graffiti Survey) provided essential advice regarding medieval graffiti. However he probably does not agree with my 'get out clause' regarding the possibility of 'pilgrimage crosses'. I hope that his ongoing work sheds even clearer light on this topic.

I regret not asking the name of the person who attended one of my lectures and kindly informed me about the pilgrimage route linking churches dedicated to St Thomas á Beckett in Leicestershire; my grateful thanks should he read this summary.

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Useful websites

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www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/bib.html
www.csj.org.uk/bibliog.htm

pilgrim accounts through the centuries

University of Colorado Department of History 'Travelling to Jerusalem' website
http://chass.colostate-pueblo.edu/history/seminar/seminar97.html

pilgrimage art, architecture and literature

The International Society for the Study of Pilgrimage Art
`http://peregrinations.kenyon.edu/

'Pilgrims were they all?' Aspects of pilgrimage and their influence on Old and Middle English literature Dr Dee Dyas's PhD thesis; online at etheses.nottingham.ac.uk/2618/1/285746.pdf

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