

**9th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference:  
‘Going Around and Connecting Dots: Landscape Monuments and Pilgrimage-  
Tourism in Wales and Celtic Britain’**

**Author**

**Professor Jonathan Wooding**

University of Sydney, Australia

jonathan.wooding@sydney.edu.au

**Biography**

Jonathan Wooding is Sir Warwick Fairfax Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney in Australia. His research interests span religious history and Celtic Studies, with a focus on church heritage, monasticism, and literary narratives of pilgrimage. He has advised on developments for religious tourism in and pilgrimage in Britain and Ireland and is a patron of Sanctaidd (formerly Churches Tourism Network Wales).

**Abstract**

Celtic Britain, especially Wales, is unusually well-served by the extent to which landscape monuments of medieval and modern religion have been catalogued and recorded. Significant recorded data-sets for pilgrimage include early and medieval inscribed stones, holy wells, and saints’ dedications. Influential geographical studies have created both explicit and implicit routes of connection between many of these. These data-sets and narratives have played, and continue to play, substantial roles in development of interpretations and routes created for religious tourism. This presentation, reflecting on a number of case-studies of trails and sites, will (mostly) resist the historian’s instinctive interest in deconstruction on points of authenticity, though we will see that there is room for reflection on resource-gathering and whether interpretation projects consistently accesses a critical knowledge base. The analysis will focus on identifying those aspects of contemporary uses of monuments and narratives that offer potential to further

develop the religious dimension of pilgrimage tourism. It will also offer some reflections on the problems of accommodating a diversity of faith and heritage issues in religious uses of sites.

## **Introduction**

In Wales and Celtic Britain since the 1980s there has been significant investment in landscape infrastructure for pilgrimage. A factor in local developments is a heritage resource of field monuments that are drawn in as destinations, way-points, and signifiers of implicit trails. The Christian field-monuments of Wales have been catalogued to an unusual extent. V. E. Nash-Williams (1950) produced a comprehensive corpus of early medieval inscribed stones—termed there ‘Early Christian Monuments’—and a new corpus has been produced in the last few years (Redknap, Edwards et al.). Soon after, Francis Jones (1954) produced a national corpus of holy wells in the 1950s, which has been reassessed and partially enhanced in the last decade by the regional trusts and local researchers (e.g. DAT 2011-12; Cope 2009; Gruffydd 1999). A recent CADW project catalogued all medieval churches, including their dedications. Romanesque sculpture is also very well-documented (Thurlby 2006; CRSBI). Gazetteers of Welsh church buildings proliferate from commercial and academic publishers (e.g. Kinross 2007; Jenkins 2008; Wooding and Yates 2011). A significant number of place-name elements (*llan*-, *eglwys*-, *cell*-, *betws*) directly identify ecclesiastical connections of sites and also incorporate names of early saints who share in wider ‘Celtic’ mythos of ‘wandering saints’ (Bowen 1969). Also a significant factor is the visible diversity of commitment to faith in Wales, such as the multiplicity of places of worship even in tiny communities, the prominence of hymn-singing outside the context of worship, and the commitment to St David as a national symbol. Investment in religious tourism as a national and local enterprise in Wales and neighbouring regions has been notable since the beginning of this century. Churches Tourism Network Wales, founded in 2000, has played a central role in this process. Councils and dioceses have established Faith Tourism committees. The national heritage agency (CADW) in 2011 commissioned specialist action plans to provide a framework to interpret the history, architecture and landscapes associated with Wales’ Christian heritage. In 2013 the Welsh Assembly Government produced a national *Faith Tourism Action Plan for Wales*, which posits that ‘Wales offers the opportunity to experience the full range of Christian and other faiths’ beliefs and practices’ and inviting activity in ‘identifying why Places

of Worship, saints, sacred sites and landscapes play an important part in promoting Wales as a destination’.

In terms of the landscape heritage, these recent national initiatives represent a significant revision of the earlier approach to medieval Wales through high-medieval castles and the abbeys of the reformed orders, to an extent a legacy of older antiquarian paradigms. New approaches in some ways reflect a greater consciousness of the spiritual dimensions of these sites. Changing approaches to landscape archaeology are, *inter alia*, also complementary to a more holistic understanding of questions of spirituality and liturgical performance.

## **Literature Review**

Assessments of the narrative bases of pilgrimage tourism arise from studies in the fields of both tourism and religion. The conceptual frameworks on which ‘routes’ for personal and corporate pilgrimage-tourism activities are developed have been the subject of reflection in multi-disciplinary studies of framing concepts for pilgrimage (e.g. Coleman and Eade, 2004; Norman 2013). The reflection by Cusack (2013) on a Northumbrian trail identifies the competition between spurious histories and the affirming experience of the pilgrimage itself. Celtic British pilgrimage trails evince a similar matrix of site-types and narratives (e.g. Eastham 2012) and similar issues of contestable historiography (Meek 2000; Busby 2004; Jankulak 2009; Wooding 2017). How, or whether, revisions of historiography impact on religious initiatives is a matter for further reflection. Maddrell and Scriven (2016) suggest that ‘the ongoing role of Celtic-informed pilgrimage within mainstream Christian practice ... needs to be more fully and rigorously interrogated’ and offer some headlines for such an investigation.

## **Methodology**

The methodology adopted here is a critique of the models on which pilgrim trails have been based, considering briefly the historical basis for such trails, but also assessing the theologies that both inform the creation of such routes and which eventuate from their reception and use.

## Results

A range of examples of local initiatives will be discussed. A key interest is the identification of transferable experiences that may serve to enhance further develop of existing and new initiatives. The theological dimension of both design and reception is also a matter for reflection.

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