

PREFACE

THIS BOOK TAKES the St. Thomas Way—a new heritage route from Swansea to Hereford launched in 2018 and inspired by a real medieval pilgrimage—and explores multiple dimensions of the project and its contexts through a collection of critical essays, as well as creative and reflective pieces. In the spirit of this series, “Places and Spaces: Medieval to Modern,” the book aims to find diverse audiences, both within a range of academic specialisms and beyond, including those working in heritage and tourism, as well as individuals with a personal interest in the themes and places explored here. So: what is this book about, and who is it for?

This book is for readers interested in medieval cults of the saints and pilgrimage traditions, especially those of St. Thomas of Hereford (also known as St. Thomas Cantilupe), as well as medieval history more broadly, including the politics and culture of the medieval March of Wales (the historical border region between England and Wales). This book is also for those interested in continuing traditions of pilgrimage and in pilgrimage practices today: both academics and professionals working in areas such as faith tourism, and also individuals with their own personal interest—whether grounded in a religious faith or not—in pilgrimage. More widely, this book’s exploration of the St. Thomas Way as a visitor experience has something to offer for readers interested in heritage, heritage tourism, and tourism as a route to regional development, from heritage practitioners and professionals to those working in local government or in community projects.

This is also a book about approaches to translating academic research into real-world activities and outcomes. It presents the St. Thomas Way project as a case study in transposing scholarly research into public “impacts” or benefits, with a discussion of the objectives, funding mechanisms, and project management involved (especially in the Introduction). It is for anyone interested in the process of developing research into public-facing projects—including those working on public history, but also in other humanities contexts and beyond—and for anyone looking for transferable methodologies and insights, or simply the opportunity to think critically about the role of “impact” in scholarship today.

The book will be attractive to readers interested in the digital humanities—that is, in using digital methods, new technologies, and new media to solve critical and conceptual challenges in the humanities, and to present and think about topics in new ways. Through the case study of the St. Thomas Way, some contributions to this volume explore the challenges and critical processes involved in developing a “digital” or even “virtual” pilgrimage experience, and the relationships between this and its medieval antecedents. The Introduction to the volume includes an overview of some of the digital tools used in

creating the Way, discussing and reflecting upon its technical features to share them with other scholars and practitioners in the digital humanities and digital medieval studies.

Finally: a word on how this book is structured. The first section, “Contexts and Critical Explorations,” is a collection of fairly conventional academic essays exploring the St. Thomas Way and its contexts—although, in several cases, incorporating creative, experimental, or personal elements. This is followed by a second section, “Other Perspectives,” bringing together three shorter reflective pieces, which move further away from the focus and form of a typical scholarly essay. These include reflections from Canon Christopher Pullin, Chancellor of Hereford Cathedral, on how the St. Thomas Way has contributed to the development of pilgrimage as a spiritual endeavour at Hereford Cathedral, Michelle Rumney on her work as Artist in Residence on the St. Thomas Way, and Anne Louise Avery on her experience of walking the Way in summer 2018.

Different readers will find their own pathways through this book, and will value varying elements—there is no single “right” way to read it. Please navigate your own way through the book, pause to notice and make use of what interests you, and pass by what is less relevant to your own focus. Good journeying!