

Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Management

An International Perspective

Edited by
R. Raj and N.D. Morpeth



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Religion and spirituality are common motivations for travel, with many major tourism destinations having developed largely as a result of their connections to sacred people, places and events. Describing practical applications, models and case studies, this book provides an insight into the management of religious tourism, covering both ancient sacred sites and emerging destinations. It fully explores the pressures on sacred spaces to become commercialized and festivalized arenas, while still maintaining their religious and spiritual integrity.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers in tourism and event management, and will also serve as a practical handbook for practitioners in the industry.

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Sustaining Tourism Infrastructures for Religious Tourists and Pilgrims within the UK

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Introduction

This chapter initially explores concepts of pilgrimage, religion and tourism within a UK context, considering how visitation to UK religious sites provides opportunities for economic regeneration and community sustainability.

Pilgrimage, Religion and Tourism

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest forms of tourism and is an integral component of the tourist industry; the three terms, above, can be defined in different ways and from differing viewpoints. Pilgrimage is a journey made by a pilgrim, who travels from place to place, usually journeying a long distance and to a sacred place as an act of devotion (Onions, 1983). Harvey (2000) describes religion as structured, orderly, socially sanctioned ways of reaching out for what people want most. Cohen (1992) raises important ideas, in particular noting relationships between pilgrim and tourist as travellers.

Tourism generally relates to the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year, for leisure, business and other purposes according to Cambridge Policy Consultants and Geoff Broom Consultants (Anon., 1998). The main purpose of the trip is not an activity that will be remunerated from the place to which the trip is made. These authors combine the UK Day Visits Survey definition of a day trip (i.e. an irregular trip of 3 or more hours' duration undertaken by people travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment) with overnight stays away from home, to define a tourism trip.

The Social and Planning Research team of the former Countryside Commission (Countryside Agency, 1998a, b) described a day visit as a round trip from home or work, for leisure purposes, with return within the same day. Roe *et*

al. (1997) define tourism as any form of travel that involves a stay of at least one night, but less than one year, away from home. They note that it is generally domestic or international travel for leisure or recreation, including day trips.

From a spiritual perspective, such an experience may offer a location, place or experience to a believer that relates to someone or something that they venerate, such as a saint. Sociologically it may provide cultural access to sacred art and sculpture, which may attract atheists or those of other religions as well as the devout of a particular faith. Cultural roots may be embedded in places or images regardless of whether or not the contemporary tourist is a believer.

For the pilgrim, this experience may be to a place such as a holy shrine or a journey between two significant places; for Catholics for example, from Mont-Saint-Michel to Lourdes, or from Lourdes to Rome. It is also helpful to examine briefly the terms *visitor attraction* and *tourist attraction*, and Busby (2003) is useful in this respect. Whilst these terms are often used interchangeably, the latter may exclude leisure day visits, and this is unhelpful in addressing the issues raised here. What amounts to a *visitor attraction* is also important, and the Scottish Tourist Board definition is informative:

A permanently established excursion destination, a primary purpose of which is to allow public access for entertainment, interest or education, rather than being principally a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical or film performances. It must be open to the public without prior booking, for published periods each year, and should be capable of attracting tourists as well as local residents.

(Scottish Tourist Board, 1991)

From this definition, it is clear that many religious places such as churches and mosques are tourism and leisure visitor attractions. So are iconic sites of former faiths, such as Druidic stone circles or the pyramids of Ancient Egypt. Consideration of religious tourism and the visiting of sacred sites suggest potential for problems. At an intersection of two contrasting approaches to life, they present realities that are difficult to reconcile. The image of the mass tourist suggests consumption, triviality and leisure; that of the pilgrim is of sobriety, often with asceticism, and an engagement with deep religious process and, above all, serious. These seem to conflict.

Religious tourism and the visiting of sacred sites offer experiences to meet both demands. They can cater for those demanding spiritual retreats or provide a priest to accompany a group of pilgrims. On the other hand, they may facilitate understanding of the significance of a particular religious building, perhaps in relation to a living church of relevance to the participant. Alternatively, they can package the religious experience within a tour or study trip, incorporating the broader topics of history and heritage, food, etc. Tourism can simply provide the experience of a guide for an itinerary of artistic and cultural works from religious and sacred places, the locations serving as museums.

Religious tourism – including pilgrimage – is embedded within a complex of heritage tourism and mass tourism activities. The interrelationships are complex, and interactions with local people and communities are central to the understanding of religious tourism in creating community-based sustainable development. What constitutes heritage for one group is conversely a religious

place or artefact for another, and there is potential for serious conflicts of interests and priorities.

Yet, religious tourism and the visiting of religious sites, such as churches in rural England, is important, with synergies to many aspects of heritage leisure and historical tourism in both urban and rural areas and the bringing of economic benefits. Tourism is recognized as important to many economies: an industry with potential to impact significantly on local communities and the environment (Beard *et al.*, 2000; Rotherham *et al.*, 2005), and religious pilgrimage offers established economic benefits in other parts of the world.

The Breadth and Importance of Religious Tourism

A typical image of religious pilgrimage is tourism associated with Lourdes in France. This small town (population 16,581 in 1990) in Hautes-Pyrénées, south-west France, lies at the foot of the Pyrenees. Famous for its Roman Catholic shrine where 'Our Lady of Lourdes' is believed to have appeared repeatedly in 1858 to St Bernadette, millions of people today make the pilgrimage each year, drawn by their faith in miraculous cures attributed to the waters of the shrine.

Similarly huge numbers of Muslims (over 2 million in January 2006) visit Mecca every year (*The Guardian*, 2006). Woodward (2003) notes the importance of the hajj for example, to the economy of Saudi Arabia. This is worth around US\$1.5 billion, with 40% being spent on the rental of rooms to pilgrims, and so a major input to local economies. Yet, as discussed later, there are serious conflicts of interest over this impact, and considerable damage to the resource has resulted. Both the breadth of the topic and of associated research are important. Bhardwaj (1998) notes that research has neglected non-hajj pilgrimage in studies of Islam and of tourism, and it is the same scenario for other faiths. Much focuses on better-known sites and bigger events, while lesser-known activities are neglected.

Tourism associated with religions, sites and pilgrimage is recognized as ever more important. This is for both religious reasons *per se* and economic impacts. The small village of Epworth in north Lincolnshire, UK, was the birthplace (1703) of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Hundreds of thousands of tourists come from around the world, especially from the Far East and the USA, to visit the site or to take part in celebrations. These visitors are the cornerstone of an emerging tourist economy in an area of severe economic and social decline (Smith, 2004).

In the Western world, we live in an increasingly secular, often non-religious society. Whether this lacks spirituality is a different question. Harvey (2000) and Blain *et al.* (2004) consider these issues in terms of diverse religions and religious experiences. In the UK, for example, the diminished role of the organized Christian church is paralleled by a growth in multiculturalism and moves towards other sources of spiritual enlightenment and fulfilment.

In some cases, these include a return to paganism such as the Druid movement. This re-emerged in the Victorian era, influenced by both the

Romantics and the work of antiquarians such as William Stukeley, whose research associated ancient Druids with places like Avebury and Stonehenge. In some cases – such as Stonehenge (Jenkins, 2006) and Stanton Moor in the Peak National Park (England) – there are major conflicts over spiritual ‘ownership’ of these heritage sites.

Jenkins (2006) raises interesting points about the heritage issues and about the cultural ‘ownership’ of sites such as Stonehenge by neo-ancients and Druids. The numbers of visitors, both religious and secular, can be huge (817,981 in 2004 for Stonehenge). For instance, visitors to Stonehenge may be secular, non-practising Druids; many Western tourists visit Mount Fuji, Japan (the latter has over 25 million day visitors per year).

The search for spirituality may include extreme sports such as mountaineering, and many visits to beautiful locations, both cultural and natural, have a degree of spirituality whether conscious, overt or hidden. Tresidder (1999) and Aichison *et al.* (2000) discuss these, and Woodward (2003) addresses broader roles of visits to sacred sites in the wider context of tourism products.

Inspection of UK visitor data provides insight into the importance of visits to sacred sites (see Table 5.1). The UK has 61 cathedrals which, excluding worshippers, attract around 19 million visitors per year. Taking data from the year 2000, 19 of the UK’s 50 most visited buildings were cathedrals York Minster receives around 1.6–2.2 million visitors per year, the city having over 1 million leisure visitors and 2.5 million retail tourists. This is part of a tourism economy in the city worth over £250 million per year, supporting 9000 jobs.

Lincoln Cathedral has nearly 250,000 tourism visits per year. In 2000, it began charging £4 for entry; income is vital in maintaining the fabric of the buildings and the quality of facilities and experience for visitors. Tourists and their spending are major contributions to a regional tourism economy based on 3 million staying visitors and 18 million leisure day visitors to the county (Lincolnshire) per year, and worth around £800 million.

There is a challenge to spread benefits more sustainably throughout the community and to sustain the more remote, but often historic, rural churches. Around 12 million people annually visit nearly 17,000 churches and chapels across the UK, though the real importance to tourism is undoubtedly much greater. Miller (2001) is actively promoting the wider church network in the context of places to visit and recreational walks around Lincolnshire. A typical

Table 5.1. Position of sacred sites in top ten most frequently visited historic properties in the UK, 2000 (from ICOMOS-UK, 2000).

Site	Position in top ten sites	1999 visits (<i>n</i>)	2000 visits (<i>n</i>)
York Minster	2	1,900,000	1,750,000
Canterbury Cathedral	3	1,320,000	1,260,000
Westminster Abbey	4	1,260,000	1,230,000
Chester Cathedral	6	1,000,000	1,000,000
St Paul’s Cathedral	7	1,070,000	940,000
Stonehenge	9	840,000	800,000

English village church location may reveal settlement and significance extending back beyond Christian cultural use, having drawn visitors from distance for millennia. Increasingly now, these places attract secular visitors, tourists being the new economic if not spiritual lifeblood of village and community.

Furthermore, the Church of England, for example, has other agendas. With falling congregations, particularly in rural areas that may suffer depopulation, visitors to churches present opportunities to draw new people to the faith, or to claw back those that have slipped away. This additional benefit involved in providing a visitor experience was noted in the assessment of church visiting by the English Tourist Board (1984). The pilgrim and the tourist offer financial and congregational opportunities and benefits in exchange for a leisure experience and a spiritual encounter. Research by Keeling (2000) helps give some insight into the motivations of visitors. Taking a survey of visitors to English churches, motivations included:

- Spiritual motivation.
- Impulse visiting.
- Family connections.
- Connections with famous people or literary connections.
- Interest in architecture.

The difficulty is in marrying the potential conflicts. The pressure of visitors can damage an important heritage site, and the spirituality, whilst sometimes enhanced by sheer numbers in the case of mass pilgrimage, can be lost in the crowd. A site or location (such as Stonehenge) can be both a cultural and secular heritage site to one audience, with rules and concerns, and a religious place of spiritual significance for another.

Extreme conflicts of this sort have occurred with Islamic sites of tourism and of pilgrimage in Iran, Afghanistan and – especially – in Saudi Arabia. Mashhad is Iran's holiest city and its name literally means 'place of burial of a martyr'. Over 12 million pilgrims annually visit the shrine of the eighth Shiite imam and direct descendent of the prophet Mohammed, Imam Reza, who died in AD 817, and these numbers have increased with the conflicts in Iraq (Cochrane, 2004).

This creates opportunities, but problems too. The recently established London Middle East Institute (LMEI) aims to help the preservation of Middle Eastern and North African cultural heritage, including religious buildings and artefacts. The Taliban's destruction of non-Muslim sites in Afghanistan, including the well-published destruction of ancient Buddhist statues, is an extreme example (Rathje, 2001). Fundamentalist groups are also destroying many Islamic sites in Saudi Arabia (Howden, 2005). These actions not only destroy heritage, but they remove forever the potential social and economic benefits of both pilgrimage and secular tourism.

The two types of function of the site or experience, religious and secular, are not always compatible. Reflecting the trends in trying to maximize benefits, while recognizing the potential problems, is the emergence of literature to both promote visits and to guide owners and providers in visitor management. Both the potential and the challenges are considerable. The Arthur Rank Centre has published a guidebook for Church of English parishes to help in the promotion of

tourism and to help support the management of visitors to rural churches (Francis and Martineau, 2001). This method of engaging the religious community with the visitor is relatively low-cost and eminently transferable.

Opportunities and Drivers

For many people and communities, tourism provides huge opportunities for economic development, but there are major obstacles and potential problems. In an increasingly multicultural, secular and globalized world, there is enormous potential for tourism associated with religious sites and heritage. Visits related to religion and sacred heritage can be in the form of either mass tourism in the industry mainstream or low-key, related to sustainable tourism and local sustainability.

The focus may be a long-standing or permanent attraction, or a one-off or sequential event or events. The public display of the Turin Shroud is an example of a major tourism happening (Shackley, 2001). Interestingly, this has involved careful management of artefact and visitor to allow free access to the religious devotee, while at the same time offering a major paying, touristic event. The proposed Sea of Galilee Theme Park (Urquhart, 2006) is an extreme example of a mass tourism initiative. Low-key examples include attempts in the UK to promote visitors to regional networks of rural churches such as in Essex (Essex Tourism, undated), in Derbyshire (Tomkins, 2000) and the Hidden Britain Project, discussed later in the case study section.

Drivers for mainstream religious tourism and pilgrimage are deep within a faith and outside this discussion. However, for religious heritage tourism and low-key rural tourism, the motivation is often financial and/or social. In rural parts of the UK, for example, the rural economy has suffered badly, and initiatives to promote rural church tourism are often attempts to support the community through economic benefits of tourism spend. Additionally, it may help to re-establish the church at the core of rural communities.

Problems and Issues

Religious and heritage tourism based on religious sites or artefacts faces difficulties and raises controversial issues. These include competition between faiths for a location and heritage, and conflicts between pilgrimage and secular, commercial tourism. The building, shrine, or artefact may have great spiritual value, but a commercial value too. As such, and often in an openly accessible situation, it is vulnerable to theft and to vandalism. Furthermore, as with other specialist or low-key tourism assets (Rotherham, 2006), financial benefits associated with, say, church visiting do not pay for the resource and its management. The church may be the attraction, but the money is spent in the local cafe, pub or gift shop and, with little reinvestment in presentation or conservation of the site, building or artefact, the situation is not sustainable.

There are aspects of sacred site visiting and management already noted that render some problems particularly important. There can be serious conflicts between a desire to keep facilities freely open to religious visitors, a need to raise money to maintain the fabric and the vulnerability of often-remote sites to vandalism, theft and desecration. According to the English Tourist Board survey (English Tourist Board, 1984), more than half the churches assessed had suffered from theft and almost as many from vandalism, with up to 80% of sites affected. There were problems of wear and tear, damage to buildings, noise, disturbance and litter. A more recent study (ICOMOS-UK, 2000) considered the problems of cathedrals and churches, but with a smaller sample (around 100 sites) than the 1984 survey (see Table 5.2).

Visiting of Churches in Britain as a Case Study

That rural communities and their economies depend more on tourism spend is increasingly recognized (Countryside Agency, 1998a; Countryside Agency and English Tourist Board, 2001) and is a key consideration of this case study. In the UK, the situation has become particularly acute in recent decades. Declines in farming and forestry over the 1990s were paralleled by increases in leisure day visits and tourism to countryside areas. This came to a pitch with chaos over foot-and-mouth disease and the economic impacts of advice given to the public not to visit the countryside. Incomes plummeted and businesses closed (Countryside Agency and English Tourism Council, 2001). In the aftermath of the crisis and in response to other problems of rural areas (BSE etc.), many organizations considered ways of responding to and supporting these hard-pressed communities.

For churches of various denominations, but perhaps for the Church of England in particular, the rural economy and the rural community of England pose serious problems, considered in research by such as Binney and Burman (1977) and English Tourist Board (1979). However, there are related issues too, affecting mainstream secular and tourism interests. In a socio-economic environment in which it is felt imperative to promote leisure visits to the

Table 5.2. Visitor-related problems for cathedrals and churches (from ICOMOS-UK, 2000).

Problem	Problem level (%)	
	ICOMOS-UK study (2000)	ETB ^a study (1977)
Insufficient parking for cars/coaches	54	46
Wear and tear on fabric	27	33
Occasional congestion or overcrowding	20	33
Theft	10	–
Vandalism	10	–
Noise	9	–
Disturbance to services	9	–

^aEnglish Tourist Board.

countryside for both tourists and day visitors, for much of England the parish church is hugely important. It has a significance of place in the rural setting beyond almost anything else other than the landscape itself. Church towers or spires on the highest ground reach out across the rural landscape, and churchyards are sanctuaries of historic depth in the core of the rural settlement.

The cultural relationship of church and community is embedded deep in the fabric of village and town. Old buildings, lanes – trees, even – giving character and distinction, are often a part of this attachment. St Helens Church at Darley Dale in Derbyshire has elements from AD 950, a wealth of objects and artefacts from over 1000 years of worship and a 2000-year-old yew tree in its churchyard. The site is visited by Christian pilgrims, by historians interested in artefacts and by people fascinated by the ancient, pre-Christian tree. Custodians of sites such as this have responsibilities and liabilities for maintenance and upkeep of a unique heritage resource. In most cases – and this applies to different situations and faiths around the world – they have little expertise, and often no finance even for necessary recording or conservation.

In the rural areas in England there is a serious problem of falling congregations and perceived lack of relevance of church to society, making related issues of heritage management – often in secluded and remote locations – problematic. The potential costs of maintaining and perhaps staffing a site, building or facility, and of conserving or protecting the heritage resource, are considerable. Many, including the remaining congregation and religious visitors, expect the village church to be open and available, its artefacts, artworks and treasures on view, but free of charge. These pressures and responsibilities combine with obvious vulnerability to vandalism and theft in an increasingly secular society.

The church has a complex role as provider of spiritual experience and guidance, but also as curator and custodian of a unique heritage for a wider community than its congregation. This is a problem is faced by many churches around the world. Where these buildings, locations and artefacts become the focus of an increasing tourism industry too, the problems come sharply into focus. It is surprising that so little has been done to consider the visiting of rural church in the wider context of tourism.

Relationships between religion and pilgrimage to sites, artefacts and tourism raise important issues of resource and community sustainability. Some have been raised by Shackley (1998, 2001), considering the management of heritage sites and specific issues of sacred sites. However, the broader issues of sustainable development and local economies have not been considered in detail. Researchers such as Busby (2003, 2004) have looked at church visitors in detail, in a particular region (Cornwall in England) and considered definitions, issues and difficulties in relation to tourism. He raises issues of definition of churches as heritage attractions, and this crosses national and cultural boundaries. With over 4 million visitors to Cornwall each year, he discusses visitor attractions (mostly heritage sites), and places the visiting of parish church in context (Busby, 2002). This details visitor age profiles and social status, raising important issues about long-term sustainability and challenges to growth in this sector.

Perhaps the church, too, has been reluctant to accept the mantle of tourism provider. According to Busby (2003), churches in Cornwall are very much a part of the regional heritage and tourism experience. Data extrapolated from church visitor books indicate numbers from 2000 visitors per year to over 40,000 in some cases visiting individual, smaller churches in Cornwall. The 1984 survey (English Tourist Board, 1984) suggested that at least £2 million was spent by at least 10 million visitors to English parish churches annually. Many of the 974 churches surveyed indicated that this income was important – and in some cases vital – for their survival. The more recent survey by ICOMOS-UK (2000) examined cash flows at churches and cathedrals in more detail (see Table 5.3).

Increasingly, publications and guides link rural churches together and to their mother cathedral in the urban core. In rural Essex, for example, *A Guide to Essex Churches* (Essex Tourism, undated) brings together key information on a selection of the county's churches, with notes on location and access, history, facilities and a contact point; there is website support too. Information is distributed through the usual tourism outlets, but particularly via major visitor sites in the urban centre, such as Chelmsford Cathedral. Books that are more ambitious are also available, for example *Derbyshire Churches and Chapels open to Visitors* (Tomkins, 2000). This again presents a substantial selection of churches and chapels, in this case from a number of denominations, with comprehensive information on access, facilities and history.

It is clear that these initiatives recognize the importance of smaller – and especially rural – churches in today's tourism; Hidden Britain is one such initiative.

There are a number of typical approaches in providing information and support to church and cathedral visitors across the UK. Woodward (2003) notes the following, and the levels of use for each approach, from ICOMOS-UK (2000):

Table 5.3. The varying income streams from a sample of charging cathedrals and churches (from ICOMOS-UK, 2000).

Site	Annual visitors (n)	Gross revenue (%)					
		Admissions	Donations	Food and drink	Sales and gifts, etc.	Events/ activities	Other
Canterbury Cathedral	1,350,000	53	1	1	40	–	5
Westminster Abbey	1,270,000	61	3	6	27	2	1
St Paul's, London	1,075,000	65	1	2	30	2	–
St Mary the Virgin, Oxford	300,000	60	5	10	25	–	–
Lincoln Cathedral	200,000	50	15	10	15	–	10
Oxford Cathedral	175,000	90	5	–	5	–	–
St Mary's, Rye	170,000	45	19	–	28	2	6
Glastonbury Abbey	120,000	77	6	–	11	1	5
St Patrick's, Armagh	10,000	10	10	10	30	40	–
Mean for all sites	n/a	57	7	7	23	9	5

n/a, not available.

● Guided tours	47%
● Recommended routes	36%
● Guide books	31%
● Foreign language guidebooks or leaflets	30%
● Displays or exhibitions	26%
● Volunteers or stewards to welcome visitors	24%
● Education programmes	16%
● Children's programmes	15%

What do we know of rural church visiting? The answer is: frustratingly little. There have been some studies, but these are generally not up to date, and leave many questions unanswered. Much research is on urban sites of historic importance, particularly on cathedrals. The English Tourist Board (1984) published a detailed assessment of English churches and visitors. This survey assessed important aspects of church visiting, including: (i) access; (ii) location and relation to tourist board areas; (iii) numbers of visitors recorded in church visitors' books; (iv) features of interest to visitors; (v) relationships to other tourist attractions; (vi) interpretation, guided tours, events and concerts; and (vii) community group uses. It also examined publicity and marketing, visitor management issues, wear and tear/damage and gross visitor revenues. This was a comprehensive overview, with substantial recommendations.

However, much of the work required updating, so the ICOMOS-UK (2000) study is important but, for rural churches in particular, critical questions remain. The 1984 report relies almost entirely on the visitor books for visitor numbers. Yet observations in and around churches suggest that most visitors do not 'sign in', and rural church visiting is much higher than these estimates. Work by Busby and colleagues in Cornwall demonstrated the importance of detailed local and regional studies.

English Tourist Board research in the 1980s suggested the importance of visitors for the survival of small churches in rural areas. Busby (2003) notes the importance of the church to the cultural regional heritage and to tourism and economy. Again, data from visitor books underestimate numbers. Furthermore, visitors to churchyards only, or the importance to visitors of the church in the landscape, are not considered.

The Hidden Britain Approach

There is evidence of 'low-key projects' around the UK that promote visitation to rural churches. The problem is often how to embed these within a local community and to develop maximum economic benefit. The Hidden Britain Project aims to encourage tourism and to help people discover lesser-known countryside areas. The intention is to provide a different and more meaningful visitor experience.

The project, developed by the Arthur Rank Centre based in Warwickshire, works with a range of denominations. It works with and through local communities, focusing on local business promotion, local employment and local

community life. This approach, developed through the church – especially the Church of England in rural areas – seeks engagement with communities to help them face problems of declining rural economies and industries.

In the UK, the past 20 years has witnessed massive declines in the traditional rural economies of farming and forestry and, in some regions, the increased economic importance of tourism. This major impact of tourism has been seen only in areas with established attractions and infrastructures, with other areas missing out and benefits bypassing many in the rural community.

Hidden Britain has developed low-key tourism projects embedded in local, rural communities across England, engendering many aspirations of sustainable rural development. Whilst not attempting to grow mainstream or mass tourism in these areas, the project has quietly and effectively evolved a niche market. If this brings economic benefit so that local shops, post offices, petrol stations and village pubs remain open, then for these communities the urban drift may have been halted.

The project is 'not for profit', with a national membership and supported by a 'How To' handbook, with advice and support, regional and national marketing and literature, a national website, a support network and quality assurance monitoring. Monitoring of economic impacts is limited to positive feedback from participants. Whilst not focused specifically on churches or religion, it is led and coordinated by religious organizations, seeking to engender projects that maximize benefits for religious buildings and sites and their communities and congregations. This approach potentially re-engages churches with communities, and re-awakens local pride in history, culture and heritage.

It is too early to judge long-term effects, but the aspirations make it an exciting contributor to rural development through sustainable rural tourism. Publications such as *Beating the Bounds* by Terry Miller (2001) on Lincolnshire show church visiting as a part of rural tourism and leisure day visits.

This approach is transferable to other providers and other regions. It is low-key and relatively low-cost; as each project grows within the community, it demonstrates the benefits of sustainable rural tourism. The local initiative, supported by a national framework and based on particular local interests, character and distinctions, is easy to follow and modest to resource. This initiative, led by rural church communities in England, demonstrates how low-key rural tourism, centred on religious sites and their congregations, fosters sustainable rural development. It highlights faith and facilities stimulating sustainable tourism, with social and economic benefits.

Summary

Tourism offers religious sites more than visitors and financial opportunities: it brings a wide and potentially receptive audience. The English Tourist Board report (1984) quoted the vicar of Little Walsingham, Norfolk, who stated that: 'I feel strongly that parish churches have tremendous potential for proclaiming the Christian faith to visitors, who are often impressionable and have time to look and think. I am most anxious to develop this potential here.'

Visitors to religious sites may become 'converts', and this is important to many faiths. There is also opportunity to extend understanding and awareness of faith and heritage to a wider audience, and there are also pragmatic issues, with religious tourism and secular visiting of sacred sites generating social and economic development opportunities. Whilst modest in the case of the English parish churches, these are vital; however, managing these visitors whilst minimizing damage is a challenge. Case studies in England suggest that local community ownership of process and opportunity is important in the sustainable provision of this visitor and tourism experience.

The basic needs for sustainability are similar to tourism generally, ranging from trying to make large-scale mass tourism less socially and environmentally damaging to developing low-key, sacred visits to support rural communities. Many ideas and lessons are transferable between faiths and across national boundaries. Where religion has struggled to find contemporary relevance, initiatives can help re-establish faith within the community. If this is not effective, then many buildings, artefacts and heritage sites will not be sustained.

With 'sacred' visitation to historic towns, approaches are often through holistic town planning such as in York and Durham in the UK, with Woodward (2003) suggesting micro-level responses tailored to local circumstances reflecting cultural traditions and market opportunities. Within rural communities, provision of opportunities to embed 'sacred' visitation and religious tourism more fully within sustainable models has emerged through initiatives such as Hidden Britain to establish sustainable development in practice.

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