

Institution: University of South Wales
Unit of Assessment: D30
Title of case study: The Material Culture of Late Medieval Religion in Wales
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Much of Madeleine Gray's recent research focuses on the visual and material culture of religion in late-medieval and early modern Wales. This has led to invitations to work as a consultant on several major heritage and community regeneration projects as well as numerous public lecturing engagements, newspaper articles and appearances on network television, notably the BBC's award-winning 'The Story of Wales'. This media activity and heritage consultancy has repositioned the academic and wider public's sense of Welsh identity away from the traditional focus on nonconformist chapel culture and towards a wider awareness of Wales's European heritage.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Dr Gray's underpinning research into the visual and material evidence for late medieval religion in Wales led to the publication of <i>Images of Piety</i> (submitted for RAE in 2001). This provided an overview of the evidence, setting it both in the wider European context and in the context of the evidence of medieval Welsh vernacular poetry (a very rich and comparatively unexplored source for religious belief). Many of her more recent publications in peer-reviewed journals and academic collections (some submitted for RAE in 2008) have focused on the material culture of medieval religion and the impact of the changes of the sixteenth century, developing and expanding on themes initially discussed in <i>Images of Piety</i>. She has also further developed the use of vernacular poetry to interpret the material evidence, a subject on which she is currently supervising a PhD thesis. Her work in the heritage industry has fed back into the research, providing (for example) the context for the study of text in medieval wall paintings submitted for the current REF, and a more recent study of the art of the macabre in medieval Wales which draws on her work for the Llancarfan wall paintings project. Crucially and innovatively, this research links the physical and artistic evidence of surviving medieval churches (stained glass, wall paintings, carvings) with literary and documentary evidence in the National Library of Wales, the National Archives and other repositories. Much of the visual evidence is to be found in tomb carvings and this theme is further developed by Dr Gray's current project, an online analytical database of medieval tomb carvings in Wales and a parallel study of wider patterns of commemoration. This has produced a number of conference papers and articles in learned journals. These studies have significantly shifted perceptions of religion and national identity in Wales, and have contributed to the revaluation of its medieval artistic and ecclesiastical heritage.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>Peer-reviewed publications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Images of Piety: the iconography of traditional religion in late medieval Wales</i> (Oxford: BAR, 2000) • (with Salvador Ryan), 'Mother of mercy: the Virgin Mary and the Last Judgement in Welsh and Irish Tradition', in K. Jankulak, T. O'Loughlin and J. Wooding (eds), <i>Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages</i> (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 246-61 • 'Images of words: iconographies of text and the construction of sacred space in medieval church wall painting', in Peter Thomas and Joe Sterrett (eds), <i>Sacred Text – Sacred Space: Architectural, Spiritual and Literary Convergences in England and Wales</i> (Leiden: Brill, 2011) , pp. 15-34 • 'Sacred space and the natural world: the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Penrhys', <i>European Review of History: Revue europeenne d'histoire</i>, 18(2) (2011), 243-60

- 'Reforming Memory: commemoration of the dead in sixteenth-century Wales', *Welsh History Review* 26(2), December 2012, 4-52
- 'The "Dawns o Bowls" and the macabre in late medieval Welsh art and poetry', *Studia Celtica*, 47, 2013

4. Details of the impact

While working on *Images of Piety* Dr Gray was invited to become a member of the advisory panel on the reconstruction of Llandeilo Talybont church at the National History Museum, St Fagan's. Regarded as the museum's most popular site by most of the 600K+ visitors each year, the church has been refurbished as it might have appeared in the early sixteenth century. Her research was crucial to the design and interpretation of the furnishings and particularly of the completion of the remarkable but fragmentary sequence of wall paintings which were rescued from the original church. Her research and guidance helped the Learning Team devise a church tour which has been performed to over 8,000 pupils, plus widely-disseminated resources for self-led trails. All this has been informed by her research and has been rewarded by the award of an honorary research fellowship of the Museum.

As a result of the research outlined above, Dr Gray has also been asked to advise on numerous other church heritage projects and heritage trails including the Llancafarn wall paintings project, 'probably the most significant find of its type in a hundred years' according to the BBC; the Llantwit Major Galilee project which is rehousing the early medieval inscribed stones in the church and providing an interpretative strategy for later medieval art; the Penrhys Pilgrims project, a major community regeneration project in the Rhondda which was largely inspired by and drew extensively on the research on the history of the shrine published in *Images of Piety*; digital interpretation of the castle chapel at Oystermouth near Swansea. All these projects have received substantial HLF funding. Oystermouth has had 14,000 visitors since reopening this year and has had extensive praise for the computer visualisations (emails on file).

Dr Gray has been invited to serve on consultation panels for Cadw's Chapels, Churches and Monastic Landscapes of Wales interpretation plan and the Churches Tourism Network Wales's Faith Tourism strategy, and is a member of the Advisory Panel on Medieval Stone Sculpture in Wales. In all these activities, *Images of Piety* and subsequent research publications have provided a guidebook for the identification and interpretation of visual materials in medieval churches and associated sites. While it is difficult to quantify these impacts in financial terms, heritage tourism is recognised as one of the few growth sectors in the UK economy and is particularly important in post-industrial areas like Wales. It also makes major contributions to the regeneration of a community's sense of self and self-worth.

As well as academic publications, Dr Gray has a substantial record of publication of 'public history' informed by her research on the material culture of religion. As a member of History Research Wales she was invited to contribute articles on religious identity, Welsh tombs and the cults of the saints to the *Western Mail's History of Wales* series. Widely accessed on the Internet and praised by members of the Welsh Government, these are also being published in a popular series of volumes by Gomer. Working through the Welsh History Forum, she has arranged exhibitions on medieval Welsh tomb carvings at the Wrexham and Barry Eisteddfodau. She is also regularly invited to write for popular history journals and to deliver numerous public lectures on medieval art informed by her research. These have included lecturing at the opening of St Teilo's Church and speaking at the Hay Literary Festival as well as lectures to local and regional history societies. Community history and cultural organisations have a key impact on social regeneration and the fabric of civic society, and academic support is crucial to their continued vitality. In recognition of her contribution in south-east Wales Dr Gray has twice received the Gwent Local History Council's annual award for services to local history.

She has also advised on and appeared in numerous television and radio programmes. In the current assessment period and informed by her research, these have included advising on and

Impact case study (REF3b)

appearing in 'Bread of Heaven', the award-winning Huw Edwards series on the history of religion in Wales; Terry Jones's 'Great Maps Mystery', in which she discussed the spectacular carvings in the well chapel at Holywell; and another Huw Edwards series, 'The Story of Wales', for which she was asked to advise both on the series and on follow-up educational materials as well as being filmed commenting on the remains of the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Penrhys. 'The Story of Wales' was seen by over 300,000 people in Wales, had record-breaking appreciation figures and was awarded a Welsh BAFTA. It has also been broadcast on BBC2 and in Australia, South Africa, Canada and the United States. The sequence at Penrhys produced an identifiable increase in tourism to the shrine and surrounding area which has been of considerable benefit to the local community. Her advice on 'Bread of Heaven' substantially realigned the series towards a more positive appraisal of medieval Catholic religious culture in Wales; her contribution to 'The Story of Wales' was more geared to her research on the trajectory of religious change in the sixteenth century. All these programmes have attracted large audiences outside Wales and have contributed substantially to the revaluing of Welsh history and culture.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- (1) St Teilo's Project
- (2) Media for Heritage
- (3) Llantwit Major Galilee project
- (4) Churches Tourism Network Wales
- (5) Green Bay Media Limited