

## **Summary of keynote speaker 3: Dawn Champion, Head of Community Engagement and Pilgrim Guide, the British Pilgrimage Trust (BPT)**

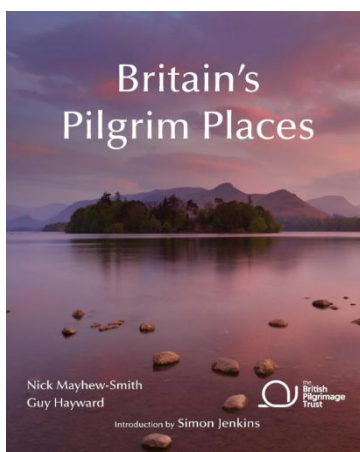
### ***Ancient Practice/ Modern Meaning: Pilgrimage in Britain Today***

On the last day of the conference, everyone gathered once again in the chilly cathedral for our last keynote address. We were delighted to welcome Dawn Champion, who has been involved in many community initiatives with the British Pilgrimage Trust (BPT), from the Sanctuary programme where pilgrims can sleep in churches on their pilgrimage journeys, to training pilgrim guides. She described how she has organized and led a wide range of journeys, from silent pilgrimages to walking festivals.

Dawn described three categories of pilgrim: the inner changers, the serial seekers and the conscious questers. She quoted a pilgrim who said pilgrimage is “the gentle practice of walking with intent...” but Dawn made it clear that what distinguishes a pilgrim, for her, is more about the heart than the head. Dawn celebrates the mix of pilgrims who come on the BPT journeys, including those "spiritual but not religious" people who are using pilgrimage to explore their relationship with nature and / or the church. There is a wide range of motivations which can trigger the desire to set out on a pilgrimage.

A recent BPT survey revealed some interesting statistics. We learned that 9.2% of the population have already made a pilgrimage of some sort. Last year, 19% had considered making one, which means approximately 8 million people in the UK see themselves as potential pilgrims!

The BPT has established over 250 pilgrim routes around the UK and organizes a wide range of pilgrimages, from day pilgrimage to longer journeys. One of these, led by Dawn, was designed for bereaved parents who had lost a child. This particularly moving example showed how a pilgrimage is more about a shared journey than a specific destination. Some of the parents found they were able to truly express their grief for the first time: “If not here, where? If not now, when?” and found the experience very healing.



Supported by some powerful images, Dawn’s presentation made a fitting conclusion to our conference about Journeys of Faith.

The BPT has published a book about Pilgrim Places in Britain.  
<https://www.britishpilgrimage.org/>

After our chair, Anthony Cane’s farewell and thanks to the Peterborough team, our delegates collected their packed lunches and set off, feeling physically chilled but professionally and spiritually inspired, on their own journeys home...

*Summary written by Jackie Holderness*

*February 2025*