There is no university with a department of Bayeux Tapestry studies. Instead scholars write about the Tapestry from within history or art history departments, or as specialists in literature or archaeology. The Tapestry is likely to be only one element within our domain of scholarly interests. It may or may not be crucial to our day jobs. But as an interdisciplinary object the Tapestry is able to command a different range of significance for each of us. As we celebrate Gale Owen-Crocker’s long, energetic and collaborative career, I want to use this introduction as an exercise in thinking about the ways in which scholars and their subjects are brought together.

In his influential book and television series, *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger argues that, ‘We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach’. Looking, according to this interpretation, is individuated, active and results in an act of composition, since what we choose to see will form our world view. He goes on to make the point that in the act of grasping our own powers of perception we become aware that others’ viewpoints may differ from our own. Dialogue is a matter of attempting to explain and bridge that gap. Maggie Humm talks in similar terms about a form of selective listening:

Lectures only move us in relation to our own academic memories and academic desires and can then help us structure a sense of our academic identity. What I heard will not be what anyone else heard because everyone listens to lectures for clues about their individual academic existence.

We have moved from a representation of the way we encounter the world around us (for Berger is talking about art, but drawing symbolic insights from how we live our lives), to a representation of the way we make sense of our research identities, advanced by Humm. We infer in both cases that the subject is engaged in filtering and editing what is on offer in order to
make useful personal sense of it. Universalist assumptions of objectivity are obsolete to this conceptualisation. The active, intelligent, editing faculties of the subject are instrumental to the picture.

Berger’s work is part of a development in cultural theory which emerged from the late 1950s onwards in opposition to traditional highbrow/lowbrow categories and readings. The emphasis on subjectivity evident in Humm’s observations, which refer to a seminar series on autobiography and oral history held in 1996–98, is a logical outcome of the work of cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall, who emphasised the role of social positioning within the interpretive act. Taking inspiration from these insights my intention was to provide the opportunity for contributors to Making Sense of the Bayeux Tapestry to include the texture of individual experience within a discussion of their scholarly work on the Bayeux Tapestry, making connections both within and beyond their academic interests. I asked them to consider three related questions. First I wanted to know how they situated their interest in the Bayeux Tapestry within the broader picture of their research interests past, present and future, and encouraged them to make connections regarding how the Tapestry and their other scholarly pursuits cross-fertilised each other. Secondly I asked them about the scholarship they have found most useful and illuminating to their own work on the Tapestry. Finally I wanted to explore whether existing enthusiasms, accomplishments and idiosyncrasies beyond academia have had a bearing on engagement with the Bayeux Tapestry. What I was interested in here was investigating how our academic choices may be influenced by a more personal context. The introduction interweaves their responses with the more usual academic résumés and chapter guide. It seems fitting to begin here with Gale Owen-Crocker and end with my own observations, treating the other contributors in the order in which their chapters appear in the book.

Gale Owen-Crocker is Professor Emerita, previously Professor of Anglo-Saxon Culture, at the University of Manchester. She is editor of King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry and author of numerous essays on the Bayeux Tapestry, most recently brought together in The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers. She has been vastly influential in drawing together scholars with an interest in the Bayeux Tapestry through her conference activities. Most recently, in May 2015, after agreeing to take a ‘squawk-on’ part in a Bayeux Tapestry play written and directed by Daisy Black, a University of Manchester graduate, she ended up playing the Master Embroiderer and was on stage throughout. As Alexandra Lester-Makin has remarked, Owen-Crocker has been a one-woman movement in engaging postgraduate students’ enthusiasm with the Bayeux Tapestry (even in the face of resistance). And she continues to popularise the Tapestry beyond the academic community: at the end of 2014 she gave a stitching workshop at Leiden’s Textile Research Centre, and she was involved in planning a continuing
education study weekend in Oxford for 2016, entitled ‘The Bayeux Tapestry and the Year of Four Kings’, to mark the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings. Her own research also continues unabated: she is currently putting together ideas for a book called The Design of the Bayeux Tapestry for a very patient publisher, and feels compelled to develop her lectures on dress in the Bayeux Tapestry into an article.

For Owen-Crocker, the Bayeux Tapestry provides an evidence base as well as a subject in its own right. Having first drawn on it for her PhD and subsequent book Dress in Anglo-Saxon England, she later returned to it as textile when collaborating with Elizabeth Coatsworth on the compilation of a database of surviving early medieval textiles of the British Isles. As a teacher of Old English literature, she also has an interest in the structuring of narrative in the Tapestry, which she has explored in several articles.

I became gradually aware of the Tapestry as I was doing my Anglo-Saxon dress research at PhD level, and of course used it along with other visual sources. I didn’t see it first hand until years later, with husband and small children in tow, though I was sufficiently involved with it by then to be allowed back after the first pass through to wander alone along its length. I asked for the Wilson facsimile for Christmas at some point in those ‘young family’ years, and poring over that produced many insights. Later I spent more hours with the original, both alone and with Shirley Ann Brown, when I was in Bayeux for several days for the 2007 conference, where, with a great deal of background help from good friends, I gave a paper in French for the only time in my career.

She has found Bernstein’s book particularly inspiring, and the work of Francis Wormald (and those who built on his work) on the importance of manuscript models has also provided a productive resource. Her own work often makes the case that the reuse of particular manuscript images by the Tapestry’s designer is more than just formal appropriation:

I found that if you read the text around the image in the manuscript you may be tapping into the designer’s train of thought. For example, is it just chance that the artist models the seated William and Odo on the two Sodomites who should have married Lot’s daughters in the Old English illustrated Hexateuch, or is the designer being subversive and calling the Conqueror and his brother a couple of sods?

She was an undergraduate student of English language and literature at Newcastle during the 1960s, but because she went up a year early she initially enrolled on a general arts degree, which opened her eyes to Greek and Roman art and culture and encouraged an interdisciplinary approach from the very beginning. She is aware too that her approach to the Bayeux Tapestry is influenced by schooling in the close reading methods associated with the New Criticism. Reflecting on this, and on her enjoyment of her own embroidery projects, she comments:
I think the thing that has been very important is my eyesight. I originally—and for most of my life until recent surgery—had one very close-sighted eye and I found that I was noticing things in the Wilson facsimile that other people simply were not seeing, such as one digger at Hastings dropping a sod of earth on the head of the man working below him and the man opposite almost smiling at his misfortune. When such details are pointed out to people who thought they knew the Tapestry well they are delighted. That is encouraging.

Her chapter for this book is concerned with an aspect of how we look at the Bayeux Tapestry. It reconsiders the idiosyncratic use of colour, with particular reference to the light green which is revealed by photographs of the reverse to have faded from light blue, and which she suggests has been used at certain points to depict silver.

The book’s opening chapter is provided by Alexandra Lester-Makin. This is the first detailed study of the embroidery of the Bayeux Tapestry using the photographs of the reverse taken during the 1982–83 conservation programme. Focusing on embroidery carried out around the seams, Lester-Makin’s analysis enables her to deduce working order and elicit information about the embroiderers’ workshop practices.

Lester-Makin trained as an embroiderer at the Royal School of Needlework (RSN) and then took an archaeology degree at Newcastle University. She is now specialising in embroidery of the early medieval period for her PhD at the University of Manchester. This is the first time a professionally trained embroiderer has analysed the needlework of the Tapestry with the benefit of access to the photography of the reverse, and thus marks an important moment in Tapestry scholarship. Lester-Makin sees her chapter as the initial step in constructing a technical biography of the textile, laying the groundwork for a more detailed production history which would benefit from scientific and archaeological testing and more intensive analysis of the stitch-work.

Lester-Makin admits to having felt a certain reluctance towards active engagement with the Bayeux Tapestry. This was due in part to its well-established status within scholarly disciplines that have little or no interest in its textile qualities. By contrast, much of Lester-Makin’s research involves small, little-known textile fragments. However, with the encouragement of Gale Owen-Crocker as PhD supervisor, and Sylvette Lemagnen, the Tapestry’s curator—who was looking for an expert with the ability to decipher the stitch evidence offered up by the photographs of the reverse—she changed her mind. The Tapestry comes at the end of the period on which her PhD research is focused, and is important principally as a point of contrast:

It is the only surviving piece from its period on that scale and gives us a completely different view of how embroideries were used. It is quite coarse when compared to other key pieces such as the Cuthbert vestments or the Kempston fragment in terms of materials used and the fine work they exhibit.
This is a function of the difference in viewing audience and context: the Bayeux Tapestry is not a piece of clothing designed to be viewed up close. And although it is majestic in scale, the materials render it almost homely: we can imagine people stitching with fibres and fabrics like this for their own homes (although linen as fine as this would have been beyond the reach of many).

Lester-Makin’s embroidery-oriented focus led her to seek out scholarly works that have analysed the technique and materials of the Tapestry, of which there are few. After George Wingfield Digby’s contribution on technique in Frank Stenton’s volume, and Simone Bertrand’s work of the same era, there is nothing prior to the 1982–83 study. The removal of the Tapestry from its display cabinet and the partial unpicking of the back cloth made possible Isabelle Bédat and Béatrice Girault-Kurtzeman’s groundbreaking article describing the technical attributes of the Tapestry, to which Gale Owen-Crocker responded in ‘Behind the Bayeux Tapestry’. These works provided a useful starting point for Lester-Makin’s own in-depth study, prompting her to undertake a week of intensive research examining the photographic facsimile of the reverse held on CD-ROM at the museum in Bayeux in 2012. Aside from close work at Bayeux and using the Wilson facsimile, she has found discussion of her ideas with Owen-Crocker, and in Bayeux with Lemagnen, of most use in piecing together working practices.

Lester-Makin trained as a teacher and has taught special needs education for several years. She views her creative interests – she paints, knits and makes clothes in addition to embroidering – as tempered by practical and analytical skill. Her work involves understanding how to choose and deploy a set of processes that will achieve a desired outcome:

It’s about a way of thinking, of planning, of being interested in the logistics behind things: looking for the principles of organisation. For my teaching job, lesson planning involves assessing the pupils’ abilities, setting a (realistic) target and focusing on how I am going to get them there. A large-scale project such as the Bayeux Tapestry is a production that involves practical building blocks as well as creative skill, and my interest lies in deciphering working practices from the textile evidence using my own experience of professional commissions at the RSN.

Christopher Monk works on the history of sexuality, with a particular focus on the Anglo-Saxon period, and on adaptations of the Old Testament, both literary and visual (again in the Anglo-Saxon period). His doctoral thesis explored the discourse of sex and sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England and he is now working on his first book on the same subject. His chapter for this collection re-examines the naked men and women of the Bayeux Tapestry borders – and by extension, the role of the borders themselves – in relation to the main register of the Tapestry’s narrative. His argument is that naked genitals in the borders work metonymically to amplify the theme of overt masculinity in the main register, and that the depiction of
the naked figures draws upon Anglo-Saxon use of gestures and movement in manuscript art in order to comment on this theme.

Monk completed his BA, MA and PhD at Manchester, taking several interdisciplinary MA modules taught by Gale Owen-Crocker:

I came to the Bayeux Tapestry through Gale, who cross-referred between the Tapestry and manuscript images in her teaching, and then I continued to draw on it as part of my own manuscript research. The particular parts of the Tapestry that I am interested in here have analogues in manuscript art – particularly Junius 11 and the Hexateuch. I am not necessarily suggesting they are direct sources for the design of these particular images, but they are definitely analogues. A key part of my argument is that looking at these manuscripts helps in the interpretation of the gestures in the Tapestry.

Monk finds C.R. Dodwell’s study of gesture in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts particularly relevant, and he sees his own work in this chapter as a logical development of Dodwell’s readings. Catherine Karkov’s important study of the relation between text and image in Junius 11 also informs his work. There has been little scholarship exploring sexuality in Anglo-Saxon art, so Monk’s chapter builds on the research undertaken for his thesis. He gravitated towards Anglo-Saxon studies partly in response to finding that the subject unexpectedly allowed him to play to his own strengths:

I remember being dismissive of the idea of studying Old English – a dead language – during my English degree and then discovering that Anglo-Saxon literature – and manuscripts – felt relevant after all: I hadn’t appreciated how much medieval literature is informed by the Bible, and my knowledge of the Bible was pretty extensive. I found myself understanding the allusions immediately, and discovering a long tradition of understanding and interpreting the Bible on different levels. I also became aware of the discrepancies, or dissimilitude, between the Bible itself and visual and textual treatments of its narratives.

The Bible’s accounts are often written quite sparsely – the skeleton of a brilliant story. Poets and artists expand and amplify, sometimes by introducing new elements, sometimes building on previous ideas, for example developing details relating to sex or God’s acts of destruction, in the Old Testament. I find this to be something worth exploring. Possibly, working with evidence of creative appropriation on the part of others is my way of accommodating my own problematic experience of religion.

Michael Lewis is Head of Portable Antiquities and Treasure at the British Museum and is an expert on archaeological small finds, particularly those of the medieval and post-medieval periods. Lewis studied the Tapestry for both his MA thesis and his PhD:

I was very fortunate to have Richard Gameson, who I approached because of his work on the Tapestry and manuscript art, as my PhD supervisor. Richard really helped me through my PhD – he was an excellent supervisor. Gale, with whom I shared an interest in detail, has been a mentor to me, providing much guidance when I was studying dress and clothing in the Tapestry.
Lewis cites a paper by Martin Carver (specialist in the early medieval archaeology of Europe) on the extent to which manuscripts borrow from each other, and the scholarship of Francis Wormald, Cyril Hart and Wolfgang Grape, as having been particularly useful when developing his own ideas. He is best known for his work on the extent to which the Tapestry reflects the material world and has written a number of books and articles, including *The Archaeological Authority of the Bayeux Tapestry* and *The Real World of the Bayeux Tapestry*. He was also co-organiser of the British Museum’s international symposium on the Tapestry in 2008 and co-editor of the resulting publication. While Lewis relates his interest in the depiction of detail and the Tapestry’s representation of the material world to his archaeological background, there are other aspects to its appeal:

I enjoy cricket, not that I am very good at it. It might appear not to have much to do with the Tapestry, but I am interested in cultural identity and how that is expressed – cricket (like castles) travelled with conquest. So I think the fact that the Tapestry shows a political event that was to have a profound impact on England adds to its appeal for me.

I also enjoy art. As a youngster I hated reading and writing but I loved drawing. It infuriated my mother who once flew into such a rage she threw all my art stuff (I had rather a lot) on the floor. I was a pretty good artist, and went to technical college to do art (by then my mother had given up on me). So, I guess my interest in detail and imagery (which is relevant for small finds as well as for the Tapestry) probably explains some of my choices within academic study.

In a tribute to Owen-Crocker’s own interests, Lewis’s chapter considers the attire of the ecclesiastical figures in the Tapestry, exploring potential sources for what the viewer sees, and the significance of these figures to the narrative.

Maggie Kneen is a professional illustrator and collaborates with architectural historians and archaeologists on reconstruction drawings of Anglo-Saxon buildings in their earlier phases. She originally trained as a graphic designer at Central School, London, and simultaneously studied palaeography at an evening class taught by Julian Brown at University of London. The coming together of professional and personal interests encouraged her to enrol on the MA in Medieval Studies at the University of Manchester on which she studied medieval archaeology, palaeography and art. Kneen took Owen-Crocker’s MA module on the Bayeux Tapestry and wrote her dissertation on the Tapestry’s castle architecture, but the course also provided a catalyst for future research projects:

My eyes were opened … having been a designer for thirty years or thereabouts, I suddenly saw what the Tapestry had to offer – not only did it depict a story, it had elements that can be related to comic strip or film, and it had lettering. It had everything that I wanted: this piece of art is replete with information about the working methods of its designer.
Her contribution to *Making sense of the Bayeux Tapestry*, which draws on her dissertation research, is a detailed analysis of how the Tapestry can be used as evidence for locating the site of Hastings in 1066. She has also collaborated with Owen-Crocker on the matter of the design of the Bayeux Tapestry, using her expertise to research evidence for use of stencils and templates. Kneen finds she is able to draw upon her practical experience in graphics as well as her knowledge of Anglo-Saxon art, archaeology and architecture:

I suppose they are two quite different ways of looking at the Tapestry, but because I have both capacities I didn’t immediately realise the idiosyncrasies of the way I relate to it.

In addition to Owen-Crocker’s influence, the observations of castle archaeologists, including the seminal *Timber Castles* by Robert Higham and Philip Barker, inform her work. She finds Shirley Ann Brown’s work on the historiography of the Tapestry invaluable as context while Bédat and Girault-Kurtzeman’s technical article has provided an important jumping-off point for some of her own research questions.

Elizabeth Carson Pastan is Professor of Art History at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. She has written numerous articles dealing with the interpretation of monumental art – including the Bayeux Tapestry – which have appeared in a wide variety of journals and anthologies. Her most recent book, *The Bayeux Tapestry and Its Contexts: A Reassessment*, is co-authored with Stephen D. White. Their experiences teaching a graduate Medieval Studies seminar together, where the Tapestry was tailor-made for thinking about interdisciplinary issues, offered them the opportunity to get to know the textile and its historiography more intimately.

For her part, Pastan grew up in southern California, where, she observes, anything ten years old is considered really old. She remembers going to the Huntington Library (San Marino, CA) with her father and gazing appreciatively at the Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript there. Having studied monumental painting in previous projects on medieval stained glass, she learned a lot about textile hangings and the ways they contributed to the celebration of the feasts of the medieval church in seeking to contextualise the embroidery. She is in fact thoroughly hooked on the study of the Tapestry, as she notes:

After the book was completed, I was asked to contribute to a project about representations of medieval dogs. As I started thinking about what a great case study the Tapestry would be, I realised that I wasn’t ready to stop working on it, and maybe I never will be.

She cites a wide variety of influences:

Gale’s scholarship of course: her rhetorical skill, close looking, and she’s effortlessly original and thoughtful … But one of the most rewarding things for me
about working on the Tapestry is how many different kinds of studies from
different fields felt relevant. I’ll mention four in particular: Richard Gameson on
‘English manuscript art in the late eleventh century: Canterbury and its context’,
in the Eales and Sharpe volume on Canterbury;²⁹ William St John Hope on the
early twentieth-century excavations at St Austin’s (Augustine’s) in Canterbury
in Archaeologia;³⁰ Maren Clegg Hyer’s work on the recycling of Anglo-Saxon
embroideries;³¹ and Laura Weigert’s Weaving Sacred Stories: French Choir Tapes-
tries and the Performance of Clerical Identity on the hanging of real tapestries in
church settings.³² Well, five: I think the English Heritage volume on St August-
ine’s Abbey³³ is just bursting with all kinds of interesting material.

Her contribution to the book is a piece that asks what we can learn about
the hanging from its first documented reference in the entry in the 1476
inventory of Bayeux Cathedral, and how this context sheds light on the
contemporary reception of the embroidery.

Shirley Ann Brown is Professor Emerita of Art History at York Univer-
sity, Toronto. Her publications include The Bayeux Tapestry: History &
Bibliography and a recently published revised and updated second edition,
published as The Bayeux Tapestry: Bayeux, Médiathèque municipale: Ms.
1, A Sourcebook, as well as a multitude of articles on the Tapestry. Like
Owen-Crocker and Pastan, she has taught classes on the famous artefact.
In 2007, she was Visiting Professor of Medieval Studies at the University
of California at Berkeley, directing an upper-level seminar ‘The Bayeux
Tapestry: Then and Now’.

Brown has always been interested in history and how it is constructed.
As an art historian, the creation and manipulation of visual imagery and
its deployment in the construction of history intrigued her from graduate
student days onwards. More recently, she has become actively interested
in visual culture as propaganda. This has led her to look at the views and
prejudices that have been brought to the study of the Tapestry since its
rediscovery in the 1720s. She is currently researching the Nazi interest
in the Tapestry through examination of the documents that have survived
from the 1939–45 period:

In my research, I was always frustrated by commentators who had not read the
literature, and by writers who did not footnote their work. This is what led me
to compile my bibliographies, in an attempt to move Bayeux Tapestry studies
forward. I get tired of repeatedly reading the same interpretations. There is
also the problem of speculation, which seems to be allowed because of the
absence of early documentation. One of the reasons for my concentrating on
the ‘recent’ history of the hanging is that there is documentation available.

That said, if I were allowed one book on the Tapestry to take to a desert
island, it might very well be Carola Hicks’ book.³⁴ Although it has some errors
and unsupported suppositions, I find that it satisfies my desire to know more
about the people, scholars and otherwise, who have been captivated by the
Tapestry. It is interesting that when I first met Hicks in 2004, we realised that
we were working on very similar projects, but that hers was more advanced
than mine. I diverted my efforts into my new bibliography and the story of the Tapestry during World War II.

Brown first became familiar with the Tapestry through direct contact as a young graduate student:

I had not studied it beforehand, so my reaction was visceral and immediate. It was when I studied it in the context of history, as well as visual imagery, that its greater relevance started to become apparent to me. I am intrigued by how a work from the medieval period could become a cultural icon with meaning for so many different peoples.

There are parallels between the ways Brown and Pastan talk of how they came to medieval studies:

Living in Canada, a country with a relatively short 'history', I developed a rather romantic interest in the Middle Ages following my first visit to Europe. I love travelling and living in Europe, and am particularly comfortable in France and Germany. Through its wonderful imagery, the Tapestry offers a view into medieval life: it is an integral part of the attraction this part of Europe holds for me. The easy access to the Tapestry and the willingness of its 'keepers' to share their knowledge and enthusiasm makes study of the Tapestry a great pleasure.

Her chapter for this book examines the purposes and significance of the numerous facsimiles of the Bayeux Tapestry.

Sylvette Lemagnen trained as an archivist and librarian and became Director of the municipal library at Bayeux in 1989, taking over the curatorship of the Tapestry at the same time. She has written on the Tapestry for a wide range of academic and popular journals and has acted as its representative at conferences around the world. She was joint organiser of the international symposiums on the Tapestry at Cerisy-la-Salle: ‘The art of embroidering history’ (1999) and at Bayeux: ‘Following the Vikings’ footsteps: The Viking heritage in the Bayeux Tapestry’ (2007).

The character of Lemagnen’s relationship to the Tapestry is, of course, quite different from that of the ‘remote worker’, a circumstance of which she is deeply conscious:

The Bayeux Tapestry has been part of my daily life for over twenty-five years – a unique experience. I am always struck by the number of academics and artists who engage in work on the Tapestry without ever having seen it. Their excitement is palpable on the day when they can finally come face to face with it!

My enthusiasm in the job never dulls thanks to the richness of human interaction. For instance, while I am proud to have achieved UNESCO World Heritage status for the Tapestry, I take equal pleasure in replying to letters from students.

It may be surprising to Anglo-American readers to learn that in the course of her education Lemagnen had never studied the Tapestry, not even during her history degree at the University of Caen, where she was
taught by Lucien Musset, himself a Bayeux Tapestry scholar. Instead she discovered it for herself one day in the winter of 1978: ‘a dazzling revelation which has never dimmed’.

Over the years she has obtained detailed knowledge of the Tapestry from the host of manuscripts, books, articles, prints and photographs that form an expansive collection gathered by several generations of conservators:

It was apparent to me that there was a lot of repetition, but that some subjects had been poorly addressed or not addressed at all. I saw it as my role to question these silences, and supplement those parts of the archive that were incomplete.

She also began to trace the Tapestry’s wider cultural influence. In the course of the last two decades she has made it her mission to collect material evidence of the interest the Tapestry provokes around the world. She now has an impressive archive relating to representations in all forms and in every conceivable media. Of particular interest to Lemagnen are the numerous wall hangings which emulate the style of the Bayeux Tapestry. Bayeux has played host to several of these over the years, most recently, the Prestonpans Tapestry from Scotland (2013), and the Bayeux Tapestry Finale from Alderney (2014). Lemagnen’s chapter discusses for the first time the little-known Norman examples of the genre, examining the motives for their production and assessing their relative merits.

This dovetails neatly with my own doctoral research, which is an exploration of the cultural significance of largescale commemorative embroidery projects of the British Isles. As Lemagnen points out in her piece, the British examples are less faithful to the Bayeux model in stylistic terms than their Norman cousins. The greater physical distance from Bayeux appears to facilitate a loosening of visual constraint. My work utilises oral testimony from stitcher-participants and project organisers in order to delineate the influences expressed through these cultural productions. The research grew out of my MA-level study of the Bayeux Tapestry with Gale Owen-Crocker alongside Maggie Kneen.

I first met Gale Owen-Crocker at Leeds International Medieval Congress in my capacity as a publisher. We were discussing a book she was editing on Anglo-Saxon manuscripts for the Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies series.35 When I decided to return to higher education a few years later, it was Owen-Crocker’s presence that tipped the balance in favour of Manchester. While studying the Tapestry, I became sufficiently enthralled to elect to write my MA dissertation on it. What interested me was the idea of subjecting its Victorian reception to closer scrutiny through the lens of the replica embroidered by Elizabeth Wardle and the Leek Embroidery Society in 1885–86.

What were the influences that led me to such a subject? Certainly, Carola Hicks’ book on the Tapestry’s afterlife raised questions that invited further research. In addition there was something about the way I operated
as a publisher that chimed with the research opportunities this project offered. A publisher mediates between authors and audiences. She needs to be attuned to changes in readership and in the interests and enthusiasms of that readership. My cognisance of the role the audience plays as co-constructors of such projects (and in their success or failure) prompted the character of my initial research questions.

A further set of observations also contributed to my interest. Like Shirley Ann Brown (see chapter 7, p. 145) I have always been struck by the limitations that book-format reproduction imposes on facsimiles of the Tapestry – breaking its flow, bisecting scenes at inopportune points, and physically flattening out the all-important texture of needlework. These effects change the nature of how we relate to the Tapestry. An embroidered replica has the capacity to redress the balance. So the publishing process, the limitations it imposes, and indeed, the considerations involved in any process of making a cultural production public are thus an important context to my work. As I examined the differences between the Bayeux Tapestry and its replica and considered the interim production stages, the procedural choices made by the Leek embroiderers and the context in which they worked became routes to understanding the ways in which the replica differs from its ancestor. A substantially revised and distilled version of my MA dissertation forms my own chapter for this book.

Berger’s description of the evolving role of the image in society, which draws on Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility’, serves as an illuminating commentary on the variety of frameworks used to interpret the Bayeux Tapestry within this book:

Images were first made to conjure up the appearance of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked – and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people. Later still the specific vision of the image-maker was also recognized as part of the record. An image became a record of how X had seen Y.

This passage helps to explain why making sense of the Bayeux Tapestry works in a variety of different ways in this book. For some of us it is about the relation between the representational function of the Tapestry and the real world, thus Michael Lewis argues that the attire of clerics is drawn from real world models (as well as manuscripts) and Maggie Kneen is concerned with the correlation between the Tapestry’s representation of a group of built structures and the location of William of Normandy’s defences at Hastings. And for Gale Owen-Crocker the relation between colour and representational intention is under scrutiny. But the way in which the imagery of the Tapestry’s narrative was understood by contemporary audiences – its reception – is also an object of enquiry. Thus Chris Monk discusses depictions of masculinity and Michael Lewis considers...
the functions played by clerics within the Tapestry’s narrative. For those of us interested in the Tapestry’s reception in later eras, the objective is to assemble a picture of how it was perceived at specific periods in the past — for myself this is the Victorian age, for Elizabeth Pastan it is the period leading up to the compilation of the 1476 inventory. My work, along with that of Shirley Ann Brown and Sylvette Lemagnen, sits within a further subgroup of enquiry, from within which the Tapestry’s significant afterlife is tracked with reference to the cultural productions that it has inspired. Finally, we may seek to understand the artefact better through enquiry into the decisions involved in its production, and the effects thereof. Alex Lester-Makin’s examination of the Tapestry’s embroidery and Gale Owen-Crocker’s of its colour, together with mine regarding the copying procedures involved in creating the replica, are the representatives here.

While for those contributors interpreting evidence from the Tapestry’s narrative there is a recurring emphasis on the importance of close reading, it is always close reading in context. Chris Monk grounds his interrogation of nakedness within the borders in the work of Dodwell on gesture and other art historical scholarship. Maggie Kneen analyses a single section of the Tapestry centred on the construction of Hastings castle, but brings to bear on it dense supporting evidence in order to examine its potential historical significance. Gale Owen-Crocker draws on contemporary material culture and manuscript evidence to guide our readings of gold and silver. Michael Lewis also deploys manuscript evidence, but finds that absence of supporting evidence for certain aspects of the clerics’ depiction is as significant as the corroborations. The careful use of context reflects a concern with avoiding the sort of speculation that Shirley Ann Brown attributes to paucity of documentary evidence. Alexandra Lester-Makin echoes Brown’s disquiet when she observes that the Tapestry’s representational subject matter brings with it an emotive charge that has sometimes caused scholars to see what they wish to see.

With the exception of Lester-Makin, contributors’ interpretative strategies, while diverse, are all engaged with deciphering aspects of the reception of the Bayeux Tapestry. This involves answering questions concerning how we think its creators intended the narrative, or certain elements therein, to be read, but also the way the Tapestry and its narrative have been perceived by audiences over the course of its history. Part I is concerned with interpreting the Tapestry’s internal ‘textual’ evidence. The contributions from Owen-Crocker, Monk, Kneen and Lewis focus on accessing meanings for audiences contemporaneous with the period of the Tapestry’s production. These readings may be presented as synonymous with the Tapestry creators’ intended meanings — a form of authorised version with an implied audience. Alternatively, the Tapestry’s imagery may be used as a springboard for discussion of the audience’s terms of reference, as in the instance of Chris Monk’s discussion of
masculinity. Later chapters in the book (Brown, Henderson, Lemagnen) explore aspects of the Tapestry’s reception during its long ‘afterlife’ – the period of time subsequent to the era in which it was produced. The way an audience interprets a text in a given period is a function of the cultural preoccupations of that period. Pastan’s chapter at the start of Part II has features in common with both the earlier and the later chapters. The textual evidence of the 1476 inventory is used to build a picture of a late medieval reception context (an episode in the Tapestry’s afterlife). But Pastan suggests that the late medieval context provided by the inventory is potentially the residue of a much older context of production and can thus shed light on the original purpose of the Tapestry. In summary, the book begins by asking what we can learn by interrogating aspects of the Tapestry’s physical characteristics, proceeds to questions regarding literal and symbolic representations within the narrative and then moves on to consider matters relating to the Tapestry’s status and meaning in later periods, with a particular focus on its creative offspring.

To end, I want to return from broader conceptions of audience, to the personal reflections provided by contributors on how the Tapestry engages them. Each has provided an individual purview encompassing the personal and the academic. Whether it be as an art historian with a fascination for medieval artefacts, an embroiderer interested in process, an expert in biblical exegesis, an artist, a curator, a publisher, or a dress and textile specialist, we all bring to the Tapestry a specific way of seeing. The analogy is neatly borne out by Gale Owen-Crocker’s reflection on an eyesight abnormality that accentuated close vision and endowed her with a facility to spot details missed by others.

At the same time, the Tapestry’s interdisciplinarity demands of us a high level of cross-disciplinary literacy. Chris Monk observes that a careful scholar will start from one perspective but that the process of scholarship involves testing one’s own ideas against those of others along the way:

Take Ælfgyva: a historian may be preoccupied with trying to establish historic facts in order to identify Ælfgyva. I feel it’s more fruitful to understand what’s going on via gesture and movement. But historical information is not necessarily irrelevant here, rather, the two approaches can complement each other.

The Tapestry is a work of embroidery, artistry, design, storytelling and chronicle. It is also a construction of audiences and their contexts – tourist and curator; student and scholar; embroiderer, antiquarian and historian. Rigorous and original engagement with the interdisciplinarity of the Tapestry involves drawing on a body of expert insight while remaining receptive to the complexities of alternative perspectives. An interdisciplinary artefact needs interdisciplinary dialogue. Our hope is that the book fosters future cross-disciplinary research and interpretation.
Notes


3 The ESRC-funded seminar series ‘Autobiography and the social self’, held at the Universities of Lancaster and York, 1996–98, out of which the book *Feminism and Autobiography* grew.


7 International Congress on Medieval Studies, West Michigan University, 2015.


10 The conference was entitled, ‘Following the Vikings’ footsteps: The Viking heritage in the Bayeux tapestry’, and was published as Sylvette Lemagnen (ed.), *La Tapisserie de Bayeux: Une chronique des temps Vikings? Actes du colloque international de Bayeux 29 et 30 mars 2007* (Bonsecours: Éditions Point de Vues, 2009).


12 Her forthcoming thesis is entitled ‘Embroidery and its social context in the British Isles during the early medieval period (AD 450–1100)’.


23 Lewis, Owen-Crocker and Terkla (eds), The Bayeux Tapestry.


26 Isabelle Bédat and Béatrice Girault-Kurtzeman, ‘Technical study’.


33 Richard Gem (ed.), Book of St Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury, English Heritage Series (London: B.T. Batsford, 1997), with contributions by T.A. Heslop, Ann Williams, Tim Tatton-Brown, Margaret Sparks, and others.

