

Pilgrims and Pilgrimages

**Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of
Walsingham**

**The History of Pilgrimage to Walsingham
and an outline of modern Christian
Pilgrimage at today's Anglican Shrine**

In the year 1061, in the reign of St Edward the Confessor a widow of the lord of the manor of Walsingham Parva, called Richeldis, had a vision of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary appeared to Richeldis and took her in spirit to Nazareth and showed her the place where the Angel Gabriel had appeared to her. Richeldis was told to take note of the measurements of the Holy House and to build a reproduction of it in Walsingham (hence the name give to Walsingham: England's Nazareth). Richeldis saw the vision three times.

Pilgrimage to Walsingham

THE STORY OF WALSINGHAM

Carpenters were given instructions to build the House, but where should it be built? During the night there was a heavy fall of dew, but in one meadow two spaces of equal size remained quite dry. Richeldis took this as a sign that the House was to be set up on one of these plots and she chose that which was close behind a pair of twin wells. The workmen attempted to build the House on that site, but found themselves unable to accomplish their task. Nothing went right. They therefore gave up in despair and consulted Richeldis. She spent all night in prayer. The next morning it was discovered a miracle had taken place. The chapel was found complete and standing on the other dry spot. It was concluded that Our Lady, with the assistance of the holy angels, had removed the House to the spot which she herself had chosen. This is the Walsingham legend.

Walsingham quickly became a centre of pilgrimage. Augustinian Canons and Franciscan Friars came to look after the visitors. The Augustinians built Walsingham Priory next to the Holy House. The Holy House was enclosed within a chapel. For five hundred years Walsingham was known as 'England's Nazareth'. Even kings and queens came to pray at the Shrine before its statue of the Blessed Virgin and her divine son, Jesus Christ. Pilgrims often took off their shoes to walk the last mile to the Shrine barefoot. This place is now the site of the **Slipper Chapel** (the Roman Catholic National Shrine).

PRAYING FOR HEALING AT WALSINGHAM PRIORY

In the legend of Lady Richeldis and her visions, we are told that a spring of water sprang up one day and that Richeldis had it made into a well. Medieval Pilgrims came to light candles and offer their prayers in the Holy House. They would then make their way to the well to drink some water and pray for healing. The Augustinian Canons would offer them water at the well and pray for them. Many pilgrims with terrible illnesses came to Walsingham to pray for healing. Pilgrims would also pray for loved ones back home who were ill.

The Canons at Walsingham Priory made lead containers known as **ampullae** for pilgrims to buy. They filled these with water from the well and took them home for sick relatives and friends in need of healing.

Walsingham became extremely famous because of stories of miracles cures being received after visiting the well. More and more pilgrims wanted to come and receive the water after hearing these stories.

DISASTER STRIKES! THE END OF PILGRIMAGE

in 1536 King Henry VIII, who had made pilgrimages here, dissolved the monasteries. In 1538 his Commissioners came to Walsingham to break up the holy buildings and seize any valuable goods. They killed the Sub-Prior and the Shrine was destroyed.

The History of the Present Day Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham (Anglican)

In 1921 Father Hope Patten became the Vicar of S Mary's Church, Little Walsingham. He wanted to revive pilgrimage to the village. He had a statue carved of Mary with the infant Jesus on her knee. The Statue was carved from wood and was made to look exactly like the original statue which stood in the Holy House before it was destroyed by King Henry VIII.

He put it in a side chapel in St Mary's Church. Parishioners were invited to light candles around it and offer prayers to Mary and Jesus.

He began to invite priests from parishes across England to bring pilgrims to visit this tiny shrine. This became popular.

The 1930s

A NEW SHRINE IS BUILT

Eventually Father Patten set about raising money to build a new shrine. He raised enough to buy some land in the village and plans were drawn up for a church to be built with a Holy House inside it. The Church was designed like this so that it would resemble the original shrine which had a chapel built over and around it by the Augustinian Canons. It stood next to Walsingham Priory.

In 1931 it was completed and a great Procession took place through the village the day it was officially opened and consecrated by Bishop O'Rorke.

The statue was taken from St Mary's Church and placed above the Altar in the new Holy House. It was made to look like the original Holy House inside and Pilgrims were invited to light candles in it as a sign of their prayers.

THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY WELL

When building commenced a Saxon well and water spring were discovered, along with the remains of a building. Father Patten really hoped he had discovered the original Saxon well which Lady Richeldis had built. Tudor shoes and pottery were dug out of it so archaeologists felt certain this was a well used by Pilgrims which was covered over when the Priory and Holy House were demolished in 1538.

We will never know for sure whether or not this is the original well. A Pilgrim Church was added to the building in 1937.

Sprinkling at the Well

Pilgrims still visit the well in the Shrine to drink its water and pray for healing just as medieval pilgrims did. Since 1931 many say that they have been helped in their lives or cured of illnesses after praying there. A **special service** takes place daily called **Sprinkling** when pilgrims are offered water to drink and are invited to offer their prayers. The pilgrims are signed with the sign of the cross on their foreheads. This reminds those who have been baptised of their closeness to Christ.

Mary is asked to pray for them to God so that they might receive healing and peace in their lives. Thousands of pilgrims of all ages every year visit the well.

Prayer

The Shrine is a place of constant prayer. There are many statues of Saints, crucifixes, icons and paintings to help pilgrims pray. Many find it helpful to focus on a statue of Mary or Jesus or a Saint when they pray. There are crucifixes and candles to help pilgrims focus on Jesus who died for them.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

In the garden are a set of 15 pictures and models which show what happened to Jesus when he carried his cross through Jerusalem to be crucified. Christians believe he rose from the dead and a model tomb with the stone rolled away from its entrance recalls this.

Many pilgrims walk round and stop at each one to think about what happened and to pray.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHAPEL

Upstairs in the Shrine is a Chapel where Orthodox Christians can pray or celebrate Mass. It has an iconostasis with royal doors and also a special Icon of Mary, Our Lady of Walsingham. There has been a special friendship with the Russian Orthodox Church since the Shrine was built in 1931.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY CHAPELS

Around the inside of the Shrine are fifteen Chapels. Each one commemorates events in the life of Jesus. They are known as ***The Joyful Mysteries*** which follow the story of Jesus' early years, ***The Sorrowful Mysteries*** which focus on the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion and ***The Glorious Mysteries*** - these commemorate Jesus' Resurrection, Ascension, the sending of his Holy Spirit to the Apostles at Pentecost, and the Assumption and Coronation of Mary.

WHAT DO PILGRIMS DO?

Modern Day pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham

Pilgrims come as individuals, or as small or large parish groups, usually accompanied by their Parish Priest. Groups come for a day or weekend visit, some times for longer.

National Pilgrimage Day – the last Bank Holiday Monday in May each year is our biggest pilgrimage event. Up to eight thousand come for that. There is a long procession which accompanies Mary's statue as it is carried through the village into the Abbey Grounds. Here **Mass** is celebrated.

Between February and December, there is an organised weekend and weekday pilgrimage programme for pilgrims.

The **Ministry of Healing** plays a great part in any pilgrimage to the Shrine. Many come to receive the water and pray for healing.

In August each year there is a day **pilgrimage for the sick**. People suffering from specific illnesses, problems and disabilities come to the Shrine on that day to worship together and pray for healing. They receive the laying on of hands and anointing from priests here.

What happens on a Pilgrimage?

Pilgrims always make a **First Visit to the Holy House** to pray together and to offer prayers for others back home when they arrive. Medieval Pilgrims did this too when they visited the Holy House next door to Walsingham Priory.

They usually celebrate **Mass** each day in the Shrine.

They take part in **Sprinkling** at the Holy Well at least once during their pilgrimage.

They take part in a special **Procession** on a Saturday evening. Mary's statue is carried around the grounds. Each pilgrim holds a lighted candle. This is a celebration to honour Mary and to worship her son, Jesus.

Many pilgrims follow the **Stations of the Cross** in the grounds whilst they are here.

Pilgrims also attend a service of **Benediction**. At this ceremony the 'Host' or consecrated communion wafer (which pilgrims believe has become for them the

Body of Christ at the Mass) is taken out of the **Tabernacle** by the priest and is displayed in front of them in a Monstrance. This is a very special way of being close to Jesus.

Prayer Pilgrims light prayer candles in the Holy House and Church. Many pilgrims say their **Rosary** whilst they are here; it is said each evening in the Shrine.

Confession Many pilgrims will make their **Confession** whilst they are at the Shrine. Priests are always willing to hear confessions or to sit and talk to pilgrims.

Peace and Quiet... coming on pilgrimage is a **retreat experience** for many people. It is an opportunity to leave their hectic routines behind, reflect and re-charge their spiritual batteries. Many people tell of how coming here has helped them at crisis times in their lives when big decisions have had to be made. Many describe being **drawn** here at such times. Many pilgrims just use their pilgrimage to relax and get closer to God.

Shrine Prayers are a key part of the life of the Shrine. Many write prayers and post them in the intercession box in the church. Each evening at 6.00 p.m. prayers are read out. **PRAYER is at the heart of everything at the Shrine.**

A Social Gathering Pilgrims also have a **good time** socially during their pilgrimage as did pilgrims of old. They go out on trips into the countryside or visit the coast. They go to pubs and enjoy meeting other Christians.

Parish Mass They usually attend Mass at St Mary's Parish Church in the village on the Sunday morning of their pilgrimage.

Last Visit Before they depart on a Sunday afternoon they all gather in the Shrine Church for a last visit service to say goodbye in the Holy House. This marks the end of their pilgrimage.

At Home Pilgrims often describe their pilgrimage as **COMING HOME** ... coming home to the house which represents the home of Jesus in Nazareth. This is what the Holy House symbolises and all are welcome in it. Pilgrims seek to get closer to Jesus through his mother, Mary and to honour her. Many say they leave with renewed strength to face the problems of their daily lives back home.

Is Pilgrimage popular? The answer is Yes! Thousands come on pilgrimage each year. There is a special pilgrimage for young people aged 12 and over – the Youth Pilgrimage every August. There is a Children's Pilgrimage each Spring. Pilgrimage is growing in popularity all the time.

