

OUR WALSINGHAM PILGRIMAGE

Background: Walsingham has been venerated as one of the holiest places in England, and countless people have visited the village to ask Mary to pray to Jesus on their behalf. It was in the late Middle Ages, that it was the duty of every Englishman at some time during his life should visit Our Lady at Walsingham. Today around 250,000 pilgrims visit Walsingham each year, as individuals or as parish groups accompanied by their priest.

Legend has it that in 1061, a widow of the Lord of the Manor of Walsingham, called Lady Richeldis, had a vision of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary appeared to her and took her in spirit to Nazareth and showed her the house where the Angel Gabriel had appeared to the Virgin Mary. Richeldis was told in her dream to make a note of the measurements of the Holy House and to build a reproduction of it in Walsingham, hence the name 'England's Nazareth' which has been given to Walsingham.

Our Walsingham Pilgrimage

Eight of us were up at the crack of sparrows on Monday 19 August for our 8.30 am flight from Alicante to Norwich. Everything was on time. Frs Paul and Rodney signed for the two hire cars and off we went. Peter and Diana with Frs Rodney and Robin. Myself together with Gail and Dennis with Fr Paul. Approximately 45 minutes later we arrived at Little Walsingham and The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. We were not able to check in until 3pm so, leaving our bags and cases in the Green Room, Fr Rodney took us on an introductory tour. We looked inside the beautiful little chapel - the 'Guild of All Souls'.[\[Photo 1\]](#) Nicknamed 'The GAS Chamber' because of the shape and initials. On Thursday we had a Mass there, together with St. James's, Haydock Then across a pretty little courtyard into the Shrine Church. We gathered at the Altar of the Annunciation for prayers. Then we headed to the Norton Room where we purchased lunch. We were full board from the evening meal. After lunch, a wander to the high street browsing in a beautiful little shop - The Pilgrim Shop. We were then able to check in. My room overlooked the gardens, the Stations of the Cross and the outside Altar of the Mysteries of Light. [\[Photo 2\]](#)

At 5pm we met with 30 pilgrims from Fr Rodney's previous parish of St James's, Haydock for Mass in St Augustine's Chapel inside the Shrine Church. After Mass we were all - and I mean all - invited to a Haydock member's room for G&T. It was not all serious! We straddled the corridor, sat on window seats and the room too was full. It was great chatting to many of them. Mid way through, the clergy went to their daily Sacristy for a meeting, then joined us again. Outside of Rome I don't think I've seen so many clergy in cassocks! Quite a lovely sight. After dinner, a number of us retired to The Bull pub, which was opposite and the conversations continued. A nightcap was well received!

Tuesday: My greatest fear greeted me at 6am. I woke to see a spider staggering

towards me on the ceiling. Every few steps it fell a few centimetres and hung on it's web before climbing up to continue. So, my pillow went onto the chair so that I could carry on writing this blog, well, that didn't work because I couldn't take my eyes off him. After no more than five minutes (that felt like an hour!) he turned around and curled up in the corner. So, I got back into bed, then before breakfast, I enlisted Peter's help to dispose of him for me so I would be able to sleep that night!

Tuesday Continued: Breakfast from 8am. Followed by Mass together with St James's at the High Altar. Peter served at this Mass and others. This was followed by a walking tour of Walsingham. Myself, Peter and Diana were Walsingham Virgins (even at this point, I thought, this will not be my last time). On our walkabout [\[Photo 4\]](#) we visited Little Walsingham's Parish Church, St Mary & All Saints. Fr Rodney told us about Father Alfred Hope Patten who was the Vicar of St Mary's & All Saint's Church in Walsingham. [\[Group Photo 5\]](#) He started raising money to build a new shrine. He bought some land in the village opposite the Priory and plans were then drawn for a church to be built with the Holy House inside it. A well was discovered when building started and is now part of the new church. This was used in the Service on Tuesday. In 1938 that church was enlarged to form the Anglican Shrine. St Mary & All Saints is a late English Gothic Church. Fire gutted the church on the 14th July 1961. It was re-consecrated on the 8th August 1964. Only the extreme west end was spared, that is the tower, the south porch and the font. There is a beautiful stained glass window behind that altar, the bottom section tells the story of the **Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham**.

I took copious notes as Fr Rodney told us about the fascinating font. Around the bowl are depicted the Seven Sacraments of the church in the 14th century. Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation (Penance), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Marriage. The Crucifixion is the eighth depiction. Most of the figures have been damaged and have bits missing. Although from the outside the impression of the church is that it could be dark inside, however, it actually took my breath away, the new windows are clear which is making everywhere is bright. [\[Group Photo 5\]](#)

We saw the ruins of a 14th-century Franciscan Friary in the distance and then visited the New Church of the Annunciation built in 2006. The year is picked out in red brick and flint on the front of the church. MMVI . The church is designed to be Britain's first carbon-neutral church.

After lunch for our 'time out' the eight of us set off to visit Wells-next-the-Sea. [\[Photo 6\]](#) The rain was heavy but by the time we arrived, the sun was out and we had a good mosey around and a cup of tea. All the clergy then had a meeting followed by our supper. (The food was excellent)

At 8.15pm for the 'Liturgy of Healing and Reconciliation' for everyone. During the service with a large congregation, we filed round the Shrine Church for "sprinkling at the well". The Sprinkling was administered by a number of priests in the various

areas in the Shrine courtyard but I chose to go down to the well. For me it was like going down the steps for my own baptism by total immersion. I was delighted to discover that it was Fr Paul down at the well where I went. [\[Photo 7\]](#) We sipped the water offered on a ladle, we were blessed with the sign of the cross and following this it was poured onto our palms for us to place wherever our personal needs might be. A whole new, emotional, special experience for me. We moved on around the church for the laying on of hands. Moving round further we were blessed with holy oil by Fr Rodney. The whole emotional process was carried out in complete silence. Later, the evening was rounded off, anything but silence in the bar!

Wednesday - 2 birthdays. Fr Paul and Dennis. Immediately after breakfast it was our turn to follow the 14 stations of the cross starting at 9am in the nave then moving outside. This was quite a strict timetable as there were so many groups of people. I quote from The Pilgrim Manual... "Walking the fourteen Stations of the Cross is a work of the heart. We see the God who came to share in the reality of the suffering world, who came to take our cross in order to transform our hearts of stone. He wants to give us a heart of flesh instead, so that we can care in the sufferings of others." We followed the path, with deep reverence, led by Fr Rodney. The reading and reflection at each station was emotionally read by each of us in turn. A verse or two of a hymn was sung *a capella*. Station 6 Veronica.... According to legend, Veronica wiped the sweat from Christ's brow with her veil as he carried the cross to Calvary and, miraculously, an image of Christ's face became emblazoned on the cloth. The name Veronica is of Greek origin and means Truth; derived from the Latin, "vera icona" meaning "true icon". I have walked the stations of the cross many times in our area...La Nucia Calvary and also Polop but I have never felt the emotion that I felt that morning, that effect will stay with me for a long time. A short coffee break then straight into the Shrine Church for Pilgrim Mass.

We had free time after lunch and drove to Thursford, to a Wurlitzer show (amazing). [\[Group Photo 8\]](#) There was a couple of rides. I wouldn't, couldn't, go on the merry-go-round but was somehow persuaded to go on the Gondola - not the best idea!!! It was a unique afternoon out, thanks to Fr Rodney also thanks to him and birthday boy Fr Paul for driving us there along narrow country lanes.

To round Wednesday off at 8.15pm - Address, Procession of Our Lady and Benediction in the Shrine Church. The procession was special, holding candles and singing the many verses of Ave Maria, on the circuit in the gardens, Peter was asked to join with another person to carry the very heavy statue of our Lady of Walsingham on their shoulders. [\[Photo 9\]](#). While we were processing the Walsingham Pilgrim Hymn was sung. There are 37 verses each with the refrain *Ave Ave Ave Maria! Ave Ave Ave Maria!* I didn't know the tune but I did by the second verse! This procession was hard work, walking very slowly, holding candles and The Pilgrim Manual to sing from but a unique experience. Peter found it hard because the Statue of Our lady was very heavy. The path we walked around is called the Serpent Path due to the way it snakes around the grounds.

The mood changed dramatically [\[Photo 10\]](#) as, St James's Haydock held their Last Night Party in the Orangery and we eight were invited. It was a brilliant, fantastic, hilarious evening, there was lots of laughter, in fact, non-stop laughter thanks to Fr Rodney, in spite of being exhausted did us proud.

Thursday: We had Mass at 10am in the Guild of All Souls Chapel, [\[Photo 11\]](#) This mass was private, together with members of St James's, Haydock. Peter was the server. We then drove to the Slipper Chapel. [\[Group Photo 12\]](#) .The 'holy mile' between here and Walsingham, pilgrims would take off their shoes or slippers and walk the final mile. The last monarch to walk it bare foot was Henry VIII.

We returned for lunch. Another free afternoon - we drove to Cromer. [\[Photo 13\]](#) Memories of my childhood holidays - even the weather was reminiscent of some 60 odd years ago. We would place ourselves against a groin huddled against the wind. My sister and I in jumpers and anoraks, armed with buckets and spades would build sandcastles to then jump on. Well, we didn't have buckets and spades and we didn't venture down to the sand or the pier (if we'd gone down we'd have had to get back up!!!). A short meander and an expensive Cromer Crab sandwich before heading back to the car park. A brief sojourn in our rooms before meeting for the evening meal.

Yes, you will now have realised, we ate a lot, walked a lot, prayed a lot and laughed a lot! The food was excellent. Two choices at each meal, served piping hot. Fr Rodney then took us to the library in St Augustine's college - a phenomenal room with several thousand theological books. [\[Photo 14\]](#) After a very comfortable lounge in plush leather settees we took off again for a stroll up to the Black Lion for our last evening drinks [\[Photo 15\]](#). I think we all must have collapsed into bed. Gosh, did we pack a lot in? We certainly did. The programme was full and the free time each afternoon we happily filled. My watch told me that we managed to walk an average of 9,000 steps each day. I thought this would help to counteract the three meals a day but I am still working on that!

Friday, our last day. Beds stripped and cases taken to the Green Room. 8am breakfast. 9am private Mass in the Holy House. Free time then until the Pilgrim Refectory opened at 12.30 for lunch.

Next year....yes there will be another trip, I will take warmer clothes! I'd forgotten how ccccold the English wind can be - yes even in August.

A huge **THANK YOU** to Fr Rodney for organising the whole experience, booking our personal worship time slots and our free time excursions. It was all very special and an emotional experience. We certainly did as a priest once said "**prayer and party**"

That sums up our 5 days in Walsingham – Laughter, Amazing, Brilliant, Emotional and Prayerful.