

OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM

It is with great pleasure that I speak about the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham which I know so well.

Let me give you a brief history of the Shrine. In 1061 in the reign of Edward the Confessor, the widow of the Lord of Manor of Walsingham Parva, called Richeldis, had a vision of the Virgin Mary. Mary took Richeldis in spirit to Nazareth, to show her the place where the Archangel Gabriel had appeared to her. Richeldis was told to take note of the measurements of the Holy House and build a copy of it in Walsingham. Richeldis saw the vision three times, and so the Holy House was built and became a pilgrimage site.

King Henry III made his first of many pilgrimages in 1226, and most of the Kings and Queens of England followed suit up to and including King Henry VIII and Queen Katherine of Aragon until the Dissolution of the Priory in 1538.

The Pilgrimage revival began in the late 19th century with the first modern pilgrimage to the Slipper Chapel taking place on 20th August 1897 which had been restored by Miss Charlotte Boyd.

In 1921 Fr Alfred Hope Patten was appointed Vicar of Walsingham and he was determined to re-establish Walsingham as a shrine to Our Lady and set up a statue of her in the Parish Church of St Mary and All Saints, much to the dismay of his bishop!

By the early 1930's Fr Patten had built a new shrine containing a modern Holy House just outside the priory walls, and so began modern day pilgrimages by Anglicans as well as Catholics to Walsingham. In those days there was bitter rivalry but thankfully those days are passed and now there is great respect and co-operation between the two churches and both the Rector of the Catholic Shrine and the Administrator of the Anglican Shrine are honoured guests in each others churches.

Walsingham now boasts to be the most spiritual place in England and around 350,000 pilgrims of all ages and backgrounds visit the place each year. There is also the oldest Methodist Church in Norfolk in the village and the former railway station is now an Orthodox Chapel.

I made my visit by train in August 1964 and I was one of those who were probably the last to do so by that mode of transport as in the November of that year, the railway was closed down by that notorious Dr Beeching.

As an Anglican then, Walsingham made a great impression on me, and to this day, whenever I return I get the same feeling I did when I was 21 all those years ago. Now as a Catholic, I can visit both shrines and still feel at home in both places, as Our Lady draws thousands of Christians to her shrine, and though we are sadly still

separated by events from the past, we share more in common than that which divides us, and it is wonderful to see the two shrines and their clergy working together to promote devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham.

We have our own small shrine here in St Joseph's by Our Lady's Shrine, a small picture of the shrine and a wall plaque of Our Lady of Walsingham.

While there last year, I was privileged to attend the installation of Fr Philip Moger, the former Dean of Leeds Cathedral, by the Bishop of East Anglia, as the new Shrine Rector, and I was able to pass on to him, the good wishes of Fr Jonathan and our parish. He was delighted and sent us his good wishes and his prayers. I was also present for the live stream Mass which takes place every day at 12.00 noon of what should have been the Leeds Diocesan Pilgrimage, when our bishop, Marcus Stock celebrated the Mass on behalf of our diocese.

There is so much more that I could say, but time will not permit, so I will close by reading to you the Walsingham Prayer from the Anglican Pilgrim's Manual then one from the Catholic Pilgrim's Handbook.