

## Walsingham – from Ruin to Restoration

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Let us begin with an ending, with the haunting Tudor lament for the destruction of the Shrine of our Lady of Walsingham.

In the wrackes of Walsingham  
Whom should I chuse,  
But the Queene of Walsingham  
To be guide to my muse?  
Then, thou Prince of Walsingham,  
Graunt me to frame  
Bitter plaintes to rewe thy wronge,  
Bitter wo for thy name.  
Bitter was it oh to see  
The seely sheepe  
Murdered by the ravening wolves  
While the sheephardes did sleep.  
Bitter was it, O, to view  
The sacred vine  
(Whilst the gardeners played all close)  
rooted up by the swine.  
Bitter, bitter, O, to behold  
The grass to grow  
Where the walls of Walsingham  
So stately did show.  
Such were the worth of Walsingham  
While she did stand;  
Such are the wrackes as now do show  
Of that so holy land.  
Levell, levell with the ground  
The towres doe lye,  
Which with their golden glittering tops  
Peased once to the skye.  
Where were gates no gates are now,—  
The ways unknown  
Where the press of peers did pass  
While her fame far was blown.  
Oules do scrike where the sweetest himnes  
Lately weer songe;  
Toads and serpents hold their dennes

Wher the Palmers did thronge.  
Weep, weep, O Walsingham,  
Whose days are nights,  
Blessings turned to blasphemies,  
Holy deeds to despites.  
Sin is where our Lady sat;  
Heaven turned is to hell.  
Satan sits where our Lord did sway;  
Walsingham, O, farewell.

That poem is often attributed to St Philip Howard, which would mean it was written late in Elizabeth I's reign by a man who never saw the shrine in its heyday: but it seems to express a sharper outrage at a recent destruction, and it's been plausibly suggested that it may in fact be the work of an eye witness writing earlier, perhaps in the 1540s.

The shrine it laments, and which Henry VIII's commissioners destroyed in 1538, had been established early in the twelfth century, by a wealthy woman, Richeldis de Favrache, the widow of a local Norman landowner, Geoffrey de Favrache, mentioned but not named in the pipe-rolls for 1131, from which we learn that she was about to remarry, and that she had an infant son. This son must be Geoffrey junior, the founder of Walsingham Priory, established in 1153, to administer his mother's chapel, which had by then evidently become a shrine of at least local celebrity.

So much can be documented from a handful of surviving contemporary records. Everything else that is normally said about the origins of the shrine, and especially its alleged foundation in 1061, is derived from a single and, I'm sorry to say, extremely unreliable late fifteenth century source, a very bad 140 line poem in rhyme royal, originally displayed for the benefit of pilgrims on a panel in the Holy House, and printed for the shrine authorities in 1496 by the London publisher Richard Pynson: it survives in a single copy, as it happens in the Pepys Library of my own Cambridge College, Magdalene. Rediscovered and re-published in the nineteenth century, this ballad is the source for the elaborate story of Richeldis' visions of our Lady, for the account of the miraculous relocation of the Holy House from the site on which Richeldis' workmen had first tried to erect it, and, crucially, for the foundation date of 1061.

But no medieval document before the Pynson' pamphlet offers any date for the foundation of the shrine, nor of any vision of Our Lady at Walsingham, and we can only speculate what Richeldis had in mind in building her chapel. That said, there is no reason to doubt that she did indeed build a chapel to the supposed measurements of the Holy House at Nazareth. At least since the sixth century, pilgrims to the Holy Land had measured the Holy Places using pieces of knotted string, so that they could build replicas to the same dimensions for the benefit of those unable to make the long and dangerous journey across land and sea: these replicas were believed to convey the same blessings as their originals, and the stations of the cross, for example, grew out of a similar urge to provide the spiritual benefits of following the *via dolorosa* for the folks back home.

So what distinguished the shrine at Walsingham from every other Marian shrine in the country, and helps explain why it became THE leading English shrine of our Lady, was that it was centred on a replica of the Holy House of Nazareth, the location of the annunciation, and the moment when the eternal word of God took human flesh in the womb of Mary.

For the shrine's first century or so pilgrim numbers remained small, to judge by the poverty of the Priory. What changed that was the favour shown to Walsingham by the royal builder of this Abbey, Henry III. Starting in 1226, he made a dozen pilgrimages there, showered the shrine with lavish benefactions, including in 1241 the gift of wax for 3,000 tapers to burn at the shrine on the feast of the Assumption.

And where the king led, courtiers and the fashionable followed, the "press of peers" mentioned in the Tudor lament. Edward I, Henry's son, was even more devoted to the shrine than his father, and thereafter, till the break with Rome, every English monarch except Richard III made at least one pilgrimage to Walsingham, and signs of royal favour accumulated, not least in Henry VIII's reign, when Catherine of Aragon donated the triumphant English battle standards after the battle of Flodden. Though we have no way of measuring statistically, by the early 15<sup>th</sup> century Walsingham's religious celebrity was exceeded only by Becket's shrine at Canterbury, and perhaps not even by that. The priory, throughout the twelfth century the poor cousin of other Augustinian houses, had become one of the richest monasteries in England, and the shrine itself gloriously decorated not only with the usual wax *ex votoes*\*, but with the accumulated wealth donated by grateful pilgrims – as Erasmus saw for himself in 1511 "you would say it was the abode of saints, so dazzling it is with jewels, gold and silver". (\* *offerings made in fulfilment of a vow*)

But of course, all that came to an abrupt end with the dissolution of the shrine in July 1538: the shrine image was carted off to Thomas Cromwell's house at Chelsea and burned alongside other famous images - our Lady of Worcester, our Lady of Ipswich and Our Lady of Willesden - the gold and silver *ex votoes* were despatched to the king's jewel house, and the priory unroofed.

There is no way of measuring the psychic and emotional impact of the sudden destruction of England's greatest Marian shrine, though even before the shrine itself had been dismantled, an abortive rising, the so-Walsingham plot of 1537, led to the execution for treason of a number of Walsingham men, including the sub-prior of the monastery. But resistance did not last. The memory of Walsingham's reputation as England's Nazareth, a "Holy Land", lingered till the end of the century, and is reflected in a cluster of (occasionally disreputable) Elizabethan love poems, including Ophelia's song in the mad scene in Hamlet.

And then the shrine effectively disappears from English consciousness till the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An amateurish excavation of the Priory grounds in 1854 however correctly identified the site of the Holy House, but the first comprehensive discussion of the shrine did not appear till 1879, with the publication of the Roman Catholic antiquary Edmund Waterton's *Pietas Mariana Britannica*, an idealised evocation of medieval England as "Mary's dowry". Waterton's romantic medievalism had more than a touch of Ye Olde English Tea Shoppe about it – he insisted on spelling our Lady's name and title with a terminal "e": Marye",

"Ladye". But he devoted 54 pages to a detailed account of the medieval shrine and its similarities to the more famous shrine of Loreto, with copious documentation from the Priory's cartulary, the Pynson Ballad, records of royal and aristocratic benefactions, William of Worcester's 1479 measurements of the Holy House, Erasmus' satirical account of his 1511 pilgrimage, and from the official records of the Priory's dissolution.

*Pietas Mariana* attracted a very wide readership, Anglican as well as Roman Catholic, and those readers included an outstanding Tractarian priest, Arthur Wagner, Vicar of St Paul's Brighton for fifty years. Wagner was an archetypal eminent Victorian, who used his considerable personal wealth to build housing for the poor of Brighton, founded a religious order for women working with charity schools and reformed prostitutes, and he built a series of vast and spectacular chapels of ease in the town, which all became flagships for advanced Anglo-Catholic ritual and teaching. Wagner was a voracious reader with a long-standing interest in Walsingham, which the publication of *Pietas Mariana* focussed: in 1886, he built a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary on his country estate at Buxted in Sussex. Its Lady Chapel was built to the measurements of the Holy House at Loreto, and an internal screen marked off the dimensions of the Holy House at Walsingham as reported by William of Worcester. There was no statue, and no attempt to revive pilgrimage, but within a decade of its construction, this Buxted Walsingham chapel would exercise a decisive influence on the revival of Roman Catholic pilgrimage to Walsingham itself, and in the longer term, on the creation of the Anglican shrine.

The link between Buxted and Walsingham was Fr Philip Fletcher. In the early 1870s Fletcher had been one of Wagner's curates at St Bartholomew Brighton, and though he soon after became a Roman Catholic, Fletcher remained grateful for all he had learned from Wagner, and he was interested in the creation of the Walsingham Chapel at Buxted. In 1887 Fletcher was one of the two co-founders of the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom, a RC organisation dedicated to the conversion of England, but which also offered financial aid to impoverished Roman Catholic parishes. In 1896 the Catholic priest at King's Lynn, George Wiggelsworth, issued a public appeal for funds to replace his ruinous Pugin church: on behalf of the Guild, Fletcher went to see how they could help. King's Lynn had been one of the stopping points on the northern and overseas pilgrim route to Walsingham, and had a famous fourteenth-century chapel said to be associated with the shrine, Our Lady of the Mount. Fletcher suggested that the new church in Lynn should include a Lady Chapel built to the dimensions of the Holy House, like the chapel at Buxted. Wiggelsworth, who had made the pilgrimage to Loreto, eagerly took up this suggestion. In 1897 he obtained a papal rescript from Leo XIII re-establishing the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham: according to Fletcher, the Pope had declared that "*When England comes back to Walsingham, Mary will come back to England*". On August 19<sup>th</sup> that year a new statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, carved at Oberammergau, was processed through the streets from the railway station via the Chapel on the Mount, to the new church: a crowd of hundreds, led by thirty little girls dressed in white, sang an adaptation of the Lourdes hymn, and the preacher at Benediction that afternoon underlined the significance of the re-established shrine for a resurgent Roman Catholicism in England - "*All past Christian glories are ours: renew them, create others. The future of the church in this land depends on the seeds which are now sown*".



The King's Lynn chapel was to remain the official Roman Catholic Shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham for another forty years. But both Wiggelsworth and Fletcher aspired to re-establish pilgrimage in the village itself. And the means to do so seemed providentially to hand. In 1894 another wealthy Anglo-Catholic philanthropist, Miss Charlotte Boyd, had crossed the Tiber to become a Roman Catholic. One of her many Anglican enterprises had been the purchase of former monastic sites to return to charitable and religious purposes. In 1893 she had begun negotiations to buy a medieval wayside chapel in the village of Houghton, just outside Walsingham: tradition had it that this so-called Slipper Chapel, which till recently had served as a barn and cow byre, was the place where pilgrims shed their shoes to walk the last stony mile to the Holy House. By the time she actually got hold of the chapel, however, she had changed churches, and was now eager to see the chapel become the base for a revived Roman Catholic pilgrimage. So the day after the enthronement of the new statue in the shrine in King's Lynn, Fr Fletcher, Fr Wiggelsworth, Miss Boyd and a party of fifty members of the Guild of Ransom took train to Walsingham, and processed from the railway station with cross and banners to the Slipper chapel, singing the Litany of Loreto and the *Ave Maris Stella* - the first public pilgrimage to Walsingham itself since the reformation.

But at this point, Fletcher's and Boyd's residual Anglican romanticism came into head-on-conflict with pastoral realities and the constrained finances and manpower of a struggling Roman Catholic diocese. There were no Roman Catholics in Walsingham, and very few in north Norfolk, which was part of the vast diocese of Northampton, under Bishop Arthur Riddell. Though not blind to the imaginative appeal of Walsingham, Riddell's priority was the provision of pastoral care for the larger centres of population in the region. He was willing to consider establishing a mission priest at the Slipper Chapel, as a basis for outreach to nearby towns like Dereham, Fakenham and Wells. But Miss Boyd mistakenly believed that the Slipper Chapel had been run by Benedictine monks in the Middle Ages, and dreamed of re-establishing a monastic community there: an increasingly exasperated correspondence resulted in her offering the Chapel to the diocese for the unrealistically large price of £2,000: on the bishop's refusal, she donated the chapel to Downside Abbey. Riddell however withheld permission for any public cultus at the chapel, including the celebration of Mass, and when the priest of the Suffolk Benedictine parish of Beccles broached the possibility of organising a parish pilgrimage to Walsingham, told him that *"There is only one pilgrimage approved by me, that to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham at Lynn. I cannot approve of any other."* In fact, Bishop Riddell did not rule out the idea of a revived pilgrimage in Walsingham itself, but considered that *"The only reason to my mind for translating the Shrine from Lynn would be the recovery of the exact spot of the ancient shrine and the reconstruction of the old Loreto ... We must wait patiently for better times in north Norfolk"*.

And in fact, the aspiration to get hold of the original site of the Holy House very nearly materialized: the heir presumptive to the Lee Warner estates, which included the priory site, became a Roman Catholic in 1907, and made a solemn vow to restore the Holy House as a Roman Catholic shrine when he came into possession. In the event, however, the desperate finances of the estate meant that it passed instead into the hands of the Lee Warner's bankers, the Gurney family, originally Quakers, and the dream of a restored Roman Catholic Holy House evaporated.

And it's at this point that Fr Alfred Hope Patten enters the story. Hope Patten was a charismatic but complex character who has always divided opinion. Dogged by recurrent bouts of ill health, real or imagined, and quite probably dyslexic, Hope Patten had a phobia about examinations, left school at sixteen, and never went to university. Though he subsequently acquired a remarkable stock of specialist ecclesiastical learning, like many autodidacts, his mind was narrowly focussed, and he found it almost impossible to see other people's points of view. But he was handsome, charming, austere, devout, and when enthused, hugely energetic, and his charm, energy and single-mindedness enabled the creation and preservation of the Anglican shrine we are celebrating today.

Hope Patten was that rare and exotic creature, an Anglican-Papalist. Raised in the advanced ritualism of Brighton's Anglo-Catholic churches, he came to believe that the Church of England was neither an autonomous body, nor a distinct branch of the Universal church, but an integral part of western Christendom, owing obedience to the pope though sadly separated by tragic historical circumstance from visible communion with the Holy See - he preferred to speak of the provinces of Canterbury and York, rather than the Church of England. Anglican clergy were therefore obliged to obey the laws and liturgical norms of the wider western church, including celibacy of the clergy, and any local canons, formularies or episcopal dictats in conflict with those wider norms could and should be ignored or circumvented. Some Anglo-Papalist clergy followed the logic of this and used the entire Roman liturgy in Latin, and after 1912 most probably used the English Missal, a translation of the Roman Missal into Tudor-style prose, with a few modifications to permit the inclusion of some elements of the BCP. Anglo-Papalists dismissed more genteel, self-consciously English forms of high-churchmanship as "British Museum religion", and favoured fiddle-backed vestments, birettas and Baroque church architecture. They were militant, self-consciously transgressive and opposition-minded, effectively congregationalist in their ecclesiology, and constitutionally suspicious of bishops, whom they were prone to view as troublesome, dubiously Christian agents of the secular state.

Travels in France and Belgium gave Hope-Patten a vision of what English parish churches might have looked like if there had been no reformation, and models for how they ought to look now. A series of curacies in Anglo-Catholic parishes, including a year at Buxted, consolidated all this. He discovered a life-long fascination with relics, developed a strong Eucharistic piety, and, at Buxted in particular, fell in love with the idea of Walsingham. Public devotion to the Blessed Virgin had never been a dominant feature of main-stream Tractarianism, but the Angelus, Rosary and Litany of Loreto featured large in Anglo-Papalist piety, alongside the service of Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, for most other high-churchmen a bridge too far along the road to Rome, and in the late 1910s and 1920s a particular red rag to the majority of the episcopate.

In 1921 Hope-Patten was offered the post of vicar of Walsingham, an impoverished living with three churches, which, after months of indecision, he accepted with an explicit determination to restore the pilgrimage, and with it devotion to the Blessed Virgin within the Anglican Church. Within a year of his arrival he had found in the British Museum a seal depicting the medieval shrine image, and commissioned a replica (carved by a Roman Catholic Carmelite nun) which was solemnly blessed and installed in the Lady Chapel of the parish church in July 1922, and the practice of daily recitation of the Rosary before the

statue was begun. The first pilgrimage was advertised through the Anglo-Papalist League of Our Lady for late October the same year. It was a catastrophe: only two of the expected 40 pilgrims for whom food and accommodation had been provided turned up: with characteristic resourcefulness, Hope Patten marched into the village rounding up anyone not bed-bound or out at work, formed them into a procession, and the pilgrimage went ahead as a parish event.

But soon a more successful pattern emerged, with several residential pilgrimages a year recruited initially from Anglo-Papalist networks in London and the South Coast, eventually extending to include parties from Anglo-Catholic parishes in the Midlands and North. These jamborees were soon given additional weight by the presence of Mowbray Stephen O'Rorke, former bishop of Accra, who became rector of nearby Blakeney in 1924, and who (despite remonstrances from the Bishop of Norwich) cheerfully presided at High Mass and Solemn Pontifical Vespers and Benediction as part of the pilgrimage liturgy, wearing a mitre a good deal taller and more impressive than the Pope's. Houses in the village were acquired to serve as pilgrim hostels, nuns recruited from Yorkshire to assist the pilgrims, an association of priests formed to promote interest in Anglo-Catholic parishes, and a journal, *Our Lady's Mirror*, created to inform and promote the growing network of supporters. Gradually the parish church was transformed into an ever more appropriate setting for pilgrimage, as it filled up with statues, lamps, reliquaries and side-altars.

Remarkably, Hope Patten seems to have managed all this without alienating his conservative Norfolk parishioners, at least in his early years in Walsingham: a steady stream of local lads was recruited as altar-boys, attendance at the Sunday High Mass was regularly in three figures, and stolid north Norfolkers even queued for the confessional, though Eustace Gurney, the local squire and owner of the priory grounds, remained hostile.

All this eventually aroused the vigilance of the Bishop of Norwich, Bernard Pollock, a conservative low-churchman who viewed the promotion of Mariolatry in his diocese with a distaste amounting to horror. In 1930 he came to see what was going on for himself, and was aghast at the confessional in the north aisle, tabernacle and reliquaries in the Lady Chapel, and most of all, the candle stand before the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham under its canopy: it was all much worse than he had feared. Bishop Pollock asked Hope Patten to replace the statue with a picture or icon, and the vicar meekly agreed to remove it from the parish church altogether. But this was not the victory the bishop might have imagined, for Hope Patten had already acquired a plot of land near the Priory grounds on the Holt Road, and now determined to build a separate shrine chapel there. Quite apart from the symbolic significance of the restoration of the Holy House, a shrine based in private property would be less vulnerable to interference, far more likely to endure. And to ensure that, Hope Patten founded a college of lay and clerical guardians under a Master to govern the shrine, and insulate it against episcopal meddling or change of incumbent in the parish.

Though the site of the original Holy House had been established by the excavation of 1854, Hope Patten convinced himself that this new building was in fact on the exact site of the original, a conviction clinched when a sealed-up Saxon well was discovered in the course of digging the foundations. Walsingham, like Lourdes, would have its own healing waters.

From this point on he would insist on the absolute continuity between the old and the new buildings. The robed and crowned statue was solemnly processed to its new home by a crowd of hundreds led by white clad maidens on October 15<sup>th</sup> 1931. The preacher that day was one of Hope Patten's mentors, the uncompromising Anglo-Papalist Fr Alban Baverstock, whose sentiments on the occasion were apocalyptic:

*"On all sides attacks are being made on traditional Christian doctrine and morals....And too often the Anglican trumpeter gives an uncertain note, or even seems to sound on behalf of the Enemy. We learn to our sorrow that our Bishops cannot be depended upon to defend Christian doctrine or even Christian morals. But we must not lose heart on this account. Put not your trust in princes, not even in princes Ecclesiastical. The Enemy is coming in like a flood. But surely here in Walsingham, with the re-erection of England's Nazareth, with its shrine to the Incarnation, the Spirit of the Lord is lifting up a banner. Faith will rally in those whose hearts are His round this banner. And where there is faith in the Holy Incarnation, faith in the Word made flesh of Mary's flesh, there victory is assured".*

Though the 1920s and 30s were in fact the heyday of Anglo-Catholicism, there is an air of defiant beleaguerment about the sermon, and those most involved with the shrine in those years undoubtedly shared Baverstock's sense of belonging to an enlightened but embattled remnant. There are accounts of some of the pilgrims in those years sallying out in small groups to recite the Rosary in some of the more conventional parish churches in the Walsingham area, buoyed up by the sense that in doing so they were striking a blow for the full faith. But while Hope Patten himself shared all that, he did also see the shrine as a powerhouse for the rest of the Church of England, an instrument of the Anglo-Papalist project of reunion with the Holy See by transforming Anglican practice Rome-wards from the grassroots up. And he was anything but apologetic about his Papalism. The Latin inscription on the dedication stone of the shrine chapel read

*This Shrine, founded in the year 1061 at the will of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God in honour of the mystery of the sacred Incarnation....and afterwards utterly overthrown by the King who raged with the most foul love of gain (on whose soul may God have mercy) now for the first time in the year 1931 and the ninth year of the pontificate of our most holy Lord Pius XI. P.M. was restored, Bertram Bishop of the Church of Norwich, and Hope Patten parish priest of Walsingham holding office. A.M.D.G.*

Bishop Pollock was not amused and insisted his name be removed from what became known as the "stone of offence", despite Hope Patten's explanation that the inscription was intended -

*"as a witness to the claim of Anglicans, which claim our English Roman 'friends' will not allow, namely that we (the donors) believe that in this year of grace 1931 the rightful parish priest of Walsingham is Hope Patten, not Fr Grey (sic) of Fakenham—and that the true bishop of the diocese is Dr Pollock and not the Bishop of Northampton."*

The paradox was of course, that devoted as he was to Roman ways, and from the late 1930s incorporating more and more of those ways directly into the shrine's worship, he never in fact much liked English Roman Catholics, "our brethren of the Italian mission", and, it must be admitted, with some reason. In 1925 the Abbot of Downside had refused permission for

Anglicans to recite the Rosary in the Slipper Chapel, and when in 1932 Hope Patten asked the monks of Prinknash to print some prayer-cards for the shrine, he had been rebuffed by the Abbot, who wrote, insufferably,

*You see, dear Sir, we Catholics naturally feel that the Pre-Reformation Shrine should be in our (sic) hands, from which it was torn at the Reformation. While we rejoice sincerely at the revival of devotion to the Blessed Mother of God among Anglicans, we feel that her official cultus belongs to us.*

And by the mid 1930s the brethren of the Italian mission had arrived on Hope Patten's own doorstep. In 1931 Downside Abbey, discouraged by the continuing episcopal prohibition of public worship at the Slipper Chapel, donated it to the diocese of Northampton. But in 1933 Laurence Youens, a former Anglican enthusiastic about the idea of a Roman Catholic presence at Walsingham, became Bishop of Northampton, and immediately set about restoring the Slipper Chapel. A statue, modeled, like the Anglican one, on the Walsingham Priory seal was installed there under a painted canopy, and on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1934, Cardinal Bourne, a sick man with only months to live, accompanied by eight of the bishops of England and Wales, led a huge open-air pilgrimage of 12,000 people in the meadow beside the Slipper Chapel, and designated the Chapel England's National Shrine of Our Lady. In the following year, Youens appointed a newly ordained priest, Bruno Scott James, as custodian of the shrine. A former Anglican monk, Scott James had in fact spent some time living under Hope Patten's tutelage, and had made his decision to become a Roman Catholic at the deserted Slipper Chapel itself. He now began an unconventional and, to Hope Patten's eyes, provocative ministry at the Slipper Chapel.

Despite the huge numbers at the inauguration in 1934, Roman Catholic pilgrimage to Walsingham was slow to build: rank and file Catholic devotion to Mary was more likely to express itself at European shrines like Lourdes or Fatima than in a remote village in North Norfolk. But Scott James's charismatic personality soon made its mark: from the middle of 1935 numbers began to build, and he took to preaching in the open air from the steps of the Slipper-Chapel, sometimes up to eight times a day, often with his elegant Siamese cat perched on his shoulder. He also exercised a powerful ministry to students and working men through the confessional, and by 1938 he estimated that at least 50,000 pilgrims were coming to the Slipper Chapel annually, though numbers that year must have been boosted by a 10,000 strong National Youth Pilgrimage of Reparation, led by Cardinal Hinsley, to commemorate the fourth centenary of the destruction of the original shrine. These kinds of numbers, significantly larger than those who could be attracted from the much smaller constituency available to the Anglican shrine, made expansion at the Slipper Chapel necessary. Scott James bought the meadow next door and built an open air altar for large events, added a new sacristy and chapel of the Holy Spirit, as well as a lavatory block. These signs of Roman Catholic temerity were resented, and letters of protest flowed in, including a remonstrance from the Dean of Norwich, to which Scott James replied sweetly that he quite understood that when the Slipper Chapel had been in Anglican hands and used for animals and crops no building work had been needed, but now that it was in Catholic hands and once again being used for worship "*some development was necessary*".



For both shrines the years leading up to the Second World War were a boom time, and both were enlarged to accommodate expanding numbers, and the Anglican shrine took on its present rather exotic appearance. But the outbreak of war put an end to any expansion: Walsingham, surrounded by Battle of Britain airfields, was in a high security zone and effectively closed to pilgrims. So both shrines had to start again in 1945.

The story of Walsingham since the end of the Second World War is a story of a slow broadening, and emergence from different kinds of ghetto. Both shrines, like their medieval predecessor, had been founded to bear witness to the foundational truth of Christianity, that the word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us. The Holy House and the Slipper Chapel were each meant to be images of that larger house of God in which the whole of humanity is invited to find its home. But being the product of human fallibility, they were each also fortresses of exclusion – outposts on the hostile front line between the two churches and, in the case of the Anglican shrine, of divisions within a single church, a badge of party.

And the Anglican shrine experienced a period of drift immediately after the war. Fr Hope Patten was ageing, and many of his projects, like the creation of a college of canons at the shrine following the Augustinian rule, were to end in failure. And although the number of parishes linked to the Anglican shrine continued to grow, the shrine's appeal was still very much confined to a self-defining constituency of advanced Anglo-Catholics, easily dismissed as high camp, the resort of the gin, lace and biretta brigade – that is how it is affectionately satirized as “The Walsingham Way” in Andrew Wilson's blackly comic novel *The Healing Art*.

But the very foundations of the Anglo-Papal movement which had given birth to the shrine were about to be shaken. Roman Catholic Mariology reached its high point in the decade after the war, with the definition of the doctrine of the Assumption in 1950, and the Marian Year of 1954, when the Apostolic Delegate came to Walsingham and crowned a new statue for the Slipper Chapel before a crowd of 20,000 pilgrims in the grounds of the Priory. But already there were signs of thaw in the apparently immovable ice-berg of Roman Catholic teaching and practice. This was manifested liturgically in the 1950s in the revival of the Easter Vigil, and papal encouragement of dialogue and evening masses. This trickle of change would turn into a tidal wave with the calling of the Second Vatican Council and its much more drastic reforms. Hope Patten did not live to see that, but he strongly disapproved even of Pius XII's modest reforms, and put a notice up in the shrine church forbidding congregations to make the responses at Mass.

The fact was that the revolution that was Vatican II cut the ground from under the whole Anglo-Papalist project, which had been to prepare the Church of England for reunion with Rome by bringing Anglican theology and practice into exact conformity with ultra-montane Catholicism, which seemed beyond any possibility of change. But now the Catholic Church itself seemed to be turning its back on the theological and liturgical flagpoles to which Anglo-Papalism had nailed its colours. I recall my own callow amusement when in the late 1960s, after the introduction of the stripped down *Missa Normativa* of Paul VI, the Anglo-Papalist vicar of St Clement's Church in Cambridge put a notice up in his porch “*The Bishop of Rome is no longer prayed for in this Church*”. Had the Anglican shrine at Walsingham remained similarly entrenched in the old ways, it would surely have withered.



But both shrines were about to experience transformation. Hope Patten died, dramatically in 1958, immediately after officiating at Benediction in the shrine church: his successor, Colin Stephenson, a more ebullient personality and a brilliant communicator, saw the need to integrate the shrine more firmly within the Norwich diocese and the wider Church of England, and he brought a more open and less beleaguered ethos to the shrine. That integration was assisted by the fact that many aspects of Anglo-Catholic practice had been assimilated into mainstream Anglican worship, and by the growing number of appointments of Anglo-Catholic clergy to bishoprics. A high point in that process came when David Hope, Master of the College of Guardians and a former Principal of St Stephen's House and Vicar of All Saints, Margaret Street was appointed Archbishop of York in 1985. A wider range of parishes was affiliating with the shrine, a larger and more mixed constituency turned up for the annual pilgrimages. In 1980 Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, preached at the annual pilgrimage, a precedent followed by all his successors.

The Roman Catholic shrine underwent equally profound change. One of the consequences of the conciliar changes was a significant diminishment of the dominant place of Mary in catholic piety, a move towards a more Eucharistic focus. That may well turn out to have been a temporary swing of the pendulum. It has affected Western European and British Catholics much more than churches in Africa and Asia: it's significant that in recent years ethnically based pilgrimages to the Slipper Chapel, by Tamil and Philippino Catholics resident here in Britain, form its largest groups, coming sometimes up to 20,000 at a time.

But unquestionably the most remarkable and momentous development has been the transformation of Anglican-Roman-Catholic relationships in Walsingham. Down to the end of the 1950s, Roman Catholics had resolutely refused any "*comunicatio in sacris*", with Anglicans or protestants, hence the prohibition of Anglican prayer in the Catholic shrine. The more open ecclesiology and active commitment to ecumenism of the Church after Vatican II meant that Catholics, in most cases with a huge sigh of relief, came down off the barricades and began to pray with and learn from their Christian brethren. This was facilitated by the move of the post-conciliar church towards a different kind of Mariology, away from the exclusive emphasis on Mary's uniqueness and privileges, which in the pontificate of Pius XII had seemed likely to culminate in a theologically suspect and ecumenically disastrous definition of Mary as Mediatrix of all graces. Instead, the Council proposed a Mariology of inclusiveness, in which Mary is understood as Type of the church and pattern of discipleship, concepts far more easily appropriated within the churches of the Reformation.

All this brought about a drastic transformation of relations between the two shrines. In 1968 the newly founded Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary hosted a joint meeting of Anglicans and Roman Catholics associated with Walsingham, including the two shrine administrators and the future bishop of East Anglia, Alan Clarke: they pledged themselves to encourage joint pilgrimages, to regular shared worship in both shrines, to promote each other's shrines in their literature, and to establish a permanent forum for cooperation. Bishop Clark and the Anglican suffragan Bishop of Lynn led the first ecumenical pilgrimage in 1970, and from then on collaboration has built steadily, a process that culminated a year ago in the Ecumenical Covenant signed by the custodians of both shrines. There were notable landmarks along this road. When in 1982 Pope John Paul II celebrated

mass in Wembley stadium, the custodians of the Anglican and Catholic shrines together carried the image of Our Lady of Walsingham to the altar. The year before, when the Anglican shrine celebrated its jubilee, the Director of the Catholic shrine had preached, recognising Hope Patten as a prophet, an instrument of unity in God's hand, and in the hand of Mary, who is the archetype of the listening disciple:

*"She is here to heal those wounds of sin and divisions. She has used Fr Patten and indeed many other faithful workers. She has taught us to listen, to understand, to tolerate and to grow in love ... Our future seems to point towards ever-closer unity. We must learn not only to pray together, which we do regularly ... but to accept each other's differences and work together for a united future. We pray that we may be instruments in Mary's hands..."*

It has to be said that when those words were first spoken, the possibility of institutional unity between the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches seemed closer to realization than it does today. The ordination of women, and differing approaches to issues of human sexuality and gender, marriage and the family, issues which exist in both churches but are more overt and insistent within Anglicanism, have created new and not easily resolvable barriers between the two communions. Within the Anglican Communion, the same issues pose difficult problems for Anglo-Catholics, and one controversial outcome of those difficulties was the creation of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham.

And the growing openness in the culture at large to material and more sacramental forms of religious expression like pilgrimage comes at a price. It has been accompanied and perhaps enabled by a corresponding haziness about the precise meaning of such forms of expression: pilgrimage may work for more people because it is much more loosely integrated into the Catholic and Anglican orthodoxies that it once articulated. Make of it what you will, but Monsignor John Armitage tells me that the Slipper Chapel is now quite possibly the largest venue for Hindu pilgrimage in Britain, and that gifts of gold from Hindu pilgrims will help pay for new mosaic work there.

But when all that has been said, there remains the glorious fact that the *wracks* of Walsingham have been rebuilt: the door into the household of Nazareth opened nine centuries ago by Richeldis is open once more to welcome pilgrims from every nation and tribe and tongue and, it would seem, creed. An unhealthy zeal to collect the scalps of other Christians has been transformed to a new, more generous and outward-turned evangelization, in which both shrines seek to witness to the human heart of God open for our salvation, and to the nurturing care of his Mother and ours. Long may it be so.

Our Lady of Walsingham, Pray for Us.

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*The lecture incorporates information derived from the works cited below, but no-one apart from myself is to blame for the opinions expressed.*

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