

THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM



Educational Resources

Experience England's Nazareth

THE HISTORY OF PILGRIMAGE
TO WALSINGHAM



THE STORY OF WALSINGHAM

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 given to Walsingham: England's Nazareth). Richeldis saw the vision three times

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 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, by which a spring of water rose. This is the Walsingham legend.



WALSINGHAM PRIORY

Walsingham quickly became a centre of pilgrimage and was the most popular in Britain, by the late Middle Ages it was held to be the duty of every Englishman that he should visit Our Lady at Walsingham during his lifetime. In the 14th century Augustinian Canons built a Priory next to the Holy House to look after the pilgrims and they encased the Holy House within a chapel of stone. Franciscan Friars arrived in 1347 and also cared for the visitors

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 miraculous cures being received after visiting the well. More and more pilgrims wanted to come and receive the water after hearing these stories.

DISASTER STRIKES!

In 1536 King Henry VIII, who had made pilgrimages here, dissolved the monasteries after arguing with the Pope, who was head of the Catholic Church.

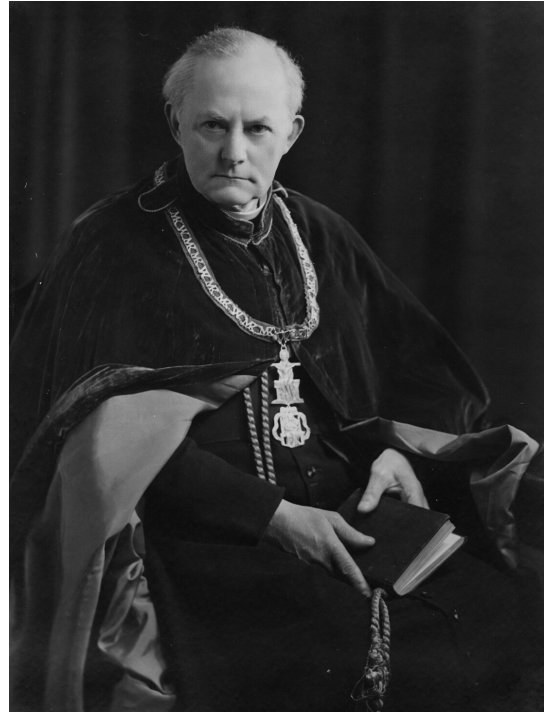
In 1538 his Commissioners came to Walsingham to break up the holy buildings and seize any valuable goods. They killed the Sub-Prior and the Shrine was destroyed.



A NEW SHRINE!

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.



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 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.



SRINKLING



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 receive water from the well.

The priest offers a sip to drink, marks the sign of the cross on the pilgrim's forehead and pours it into their hands. Water symbolises many things to Christians. Here it reminds them of the gift of life, of their baptism and of the constant generosity of God's love.

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.

