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He has also written *Pilgrim Pathways: 1-2 day walks on Britain's Ancient Sacred Ways* for Trailblazer. In researching that book, he was surprised to find that the pilgrim route from London to Walsingham, by far the most important path pre-Reformation, was not on maps. When he discovered that the route had died out, he resolved to re-establish it. This book is the result.

Andy has also published two travel books on America: *Coast to Coast* and *Strange Angels*; guides for mountain bikers to The Lake District and The Ridgeway; and *Walking Charles Dickens' Kent*. He has written the local history books *Secret Isle of Wight*; *A-Z of Ealing* and *A-Z of Bexhill on Sea*. He is now working on a further guidebook: *Walking Cornwall's Myths and Legends*.

London to Walsingham Camino – The Pilgrimage Guide

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Photos – Cover and this page: Ruined arch of Walsingham Abbey Church (©BT)

Previous page: Through the fields of oilseed-rape after Godwick on Stage 12

Overleaf: Chalk track after Saffron Walden on Stage 5

Important note

Every effort has been made by the author and publisher to ensure that the information contained herein is as accurate and up to date as possible. However, they are unable to accept responsibility for any inconvenience, loss or injury sustained by anyone as a result of the advice and information given in this guide.

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Foreword



I have walked to Walsingham twice, both times with a large group of young people from south London. When I was a curate a group of parishes got together each year and made the journey.

It was the beginning of something important for me. Not only did I discover it was a brilliant way of doing youth work, I discovered the joy and challenge of pilgrimage as it is meant to be, not just arriving, but travelling well. After this, and as an incumbent, I walked with groups of young people to Canterbury, Glastonbury and York, and then eventually, a couple of years ago, I walked the Camino del Norte to Santiago.

Consequently, I am delighted that the route from London to Walsingham is now better established and therefore more available for other pilgrims and also drawn into the network of pilgrimages under the umbrella of the Confraternity of Saint James.

Walsingham is England's Nazareth, the place where we encounter in a fresh and homely way the truth of the incarnation that in Christ, God has come among us. When we walk to Walsingham this truth is amplified and magnified; we discover that the incarnate God is with us every step of the way.

Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York

Author acknowledgements

This project would have been impossible without three pillars of support.

The first is the account of the historic route, *Highway to Walsingham* by Rev Leonard E Whatmore, in which he gathers all available evidence of the medieval route taken to the shrine. That book, published in 1973 by the Pilgrim Bureau at Walsingham, is long out of print, but two very kind people, Isabel Syed, honorary archivist at the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, and Tim McDonald, archivist of the Catholic Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, gave me access to a copy.

The second pillar is that of the footsloggers: the volunteers, members of the Confraternity of St James, who took my initial mapping of possible routes and walked the options, giving me feedback that enabled the best path to be identified. They are: Jim Sollars, Carol and Derek Greening, Sarah Knight, Richard Powell, Tamasine Smith, and Paul McLintic.

Grateful thanks also to Freddy Bowen, general manager of the Confraternity, for supporting the project, along with Wendy Martin for putting me in touch with the volunteers. Also to Peter Doll, Canon Librarian of Norwich Cathedral, and Sarah Friswell at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds for their advice and help.

Standing atop the final pillar is my publisher at Trailblazer, Bryn Thomas, who allowed his heart to rule his head (and wallet) and agreed to publish this book. Much gratitude also to his team, including editor Nicky Slade, cartographer Nick Hill and indexer Jane Thomas.

Right: Ruins of the old shrine at Walsingham with the modern shrine in the background, its red-brick tower topped with a golden angel on the weather vane.

The only way is Walsingham

Let me tell you why I think you should walk from London to Walsingham. If you do, you will be journeying to a place that was by far the most important pilgrim shrine in England until Henry VIII outlawed pilgrimage and the veneration of saints in 1538. It was much more popular than Canterbury. Not only that: in the whole of the Christian world it was eclipsed by just three other places: Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela.

Those places have enjoyed an unbroken tradition of pilgrimage and veneration stretching back a millennium or more. Not Walsingham. It reverted to being just a village in Norfolk once the pilgrims stopped coming. The road from London ceased to be the most important route in England and faded into obscurity.

For 400 years, no pilgrims walked to Walsingham. Since the 1930s, when both Catholic and Anglican shrines were re-established





Above: Volunteers and members of the Confraternity of St James joined me to help research and re-establish the route in this guidebook.

here, Walsingham has undergone a revival. It draws around 300,000 pilgrims each year, but hardly any of them walk much more than the final Holy Mile, and only a few church and other groups trace the full route from London.

This *London to Walsingham Camino* guidebook is part of an attempt to change that: to re-establish a walking route which, while being as true to the original way as possible, takes account of the modern realities on the ground. A pilgrim path that offers a wonderful long-distance route, on footpaths and quiet lanes, across the glorious east of England. A truly pleasurable and uplifting walking experience.

As I explored the route, I experienced a revelation. I discovered the fundamental difference between simply walking, and walking as a pilgrim. It was as profound as the gulf between speech and song. To travel as a pilgrim made walking a celebration. On my journey I encountered a lost heritage, and experienced an older England: a lost land of saints, faith and observance; of wayside crosses, shrines and chapels.

When I first thought of walking to Walsingham from London, I was surprised to find that no waymarked, long-distance footpath existed that would enable me to do so. While I could easily trace the Pilgrim's Way to Canterbury, I had to refer largely to historical accounts to uncover the path to Walsingham, then apply the ancient way to modern maps.

I also turned to a pilgrim organisation called the Confraternity of St James, which supports British pilgrims who wish to walk to the shrine of St James the Great in Santiago de Compostela, northern Spain. The Spanish have very successfully created a hugely popular and well-supported network of pilgrim

routes, including one called the Camino Ingles, or English Camino, which British pilgrims traditionally followed from the Spanish ports of Ferrol or A Coruña to Santiago.

Volunteers, members of the Confraternity who live along the route I was uncovering in England, helped me walk it and, through trial, error, and a great deal of footslogging, we refined and improved it.

While the pilgrim routes that spider Spain on their way to Santiago are lined with hostels (*refugios*), pilgrim churches and shrines, that infrastructure is much patchier on the way to Walsingham. We are doing what we can to compensate for that. A range of churches on the route have agreed to host pilgrim stamps, and you can get a pilgrim passport, a *credencial*, from the Confraternity of St James ( www.csj.org.uk), in which to record your progress. Should you choose to continue your pilgrimage in Spain, you can continue to gather pilgrim stamps along the way, and finally – in Santiago – present your fully-stamped *credencial* to the volunteers at the pilgrim office to prove that you have undertaken the minimum distance to qualify you for a *compostela* (if you state a religious/spiritual motivation) or *certificado* (if you state cultural, sporting or touristic motivation).

In England, the pilgrim hosteleries run by religious orders that lined the road to Walsingham were snuffed out along with the monasteries. However, many country inns – a substantial number of which hosted pilgrims – survive, and you will find their details in this guide. We hope in time that a greater network of support and ser-



Below: The scallop shell, traditional symbol of the Camino, on a wall at the Anglican Shrine in Walsingham





vices will grow up along the route, as it has done in recent decades in Spain, with the resurgence of interest in pilgrimage there.

Recognition as a Camino Ingles

This *London to Walsingham Camino* path has been officially recognised by the Spanish pilgrim authorities as a *Camino Ingles* on this side of the Channel, and

an official feeder route for those who wish to hop across and walk on to Santiago, as many medieval Walsingham pilgrims will have done. So if you walk at least 25km of the route to Walsingham, and collect pilgrim stamps along the way in a pilgrim passport, it will count for 25km towards the total of 100km you must walk to obtain your *credencial* at the cathedral in Santiago. This then enables you to continue on the shorter version of the Camino Ingles, from A Coruña, rather than the longer one starting at Ferrol.

We also plan to waymark the route from London to Walsingham, to make following it as easy as possible.

For now, however, when you walk to Walsingham you will be something of a pioneer, helping to beat a brand-new path but, at the same time, reclaiming a pilgrimage tradition obliterated almost 500 years ago.

Other routes

In Spain, around 300,000 pilgrims annually walk, cycle or ride the web of ways to Santiago. Once, a similar network of paths existed to Walsingham. One of those routes, from Norwich, has recently been re-established, waymarked and recognised as a *Camino Ingles*. That is down to Revd Dr Peter Doll, Canon Librarian of Norwich Cathedral. Peter plans next to re-establish the route from Kings Lynn. I am liaising with him, and that route will join this one from London in the Norfolk village of Litcham.

There was also an important route from Ely, in Cambridgeshire. If this and the Kings Lynn path were waymarked, pilgrims would have an entire network of Walsingham Camino paths, modelled on that developed so successfully to St James the Great's Shrine at Santiago.

Buen camino!

In the following pages you can read more about the history of Walsingham pilgrimage, what draws pilgrims here, and how to use this guide.

I hope you enjoy your walk and wish you, as they say in Spain *buen camino!*

Why Walsingham?

The importance of Walsingham in medieval England

It is often said that Canterbury was the most important shrine in medieval England. By the time of the Reformation, that was not the case. As Leonard Whatmore writes in his *Highway to Walsingham*: ‘By the 16th century offerings at shrines appear to have fallen away. Walsingham, however, retained its popularity.’

He quotes David Knowles, late Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge: ‘In earlier centuries the body of a saint, real or reputed, or a celebrated relic, had often been a principal source of wealth; by the 16th century this had ceased; two of the most famous shrines of an earlier age, those of St Thomas of Canterbury and of the Holy Blood at Hailes [in Hertfordshire], now received only £36 and £10 respectively. Walsingham alone with an income in offerings of £250, recalled the generosity and faith of the past.’

That sum equates to £240,000 today, according to the Bank of England’s inflation calculator.

The medieval road

The road from London to Walsingham was the most important in the country. The Elizabethan chronicler Holinshed put ‘The waie from Walsingham to London’ first among the 20 main roads in England, which is remarkable for a route, as Leonard Whatmore notes, to a destination that ‘is as well off the map as most villages of England, situated in a remote corner of East Anglia, five miles from the sea. Yet the road once thronged with travellers.’

The largest number of pilgrims came from London,



Above: Castle Acre Priory, once a major pilgrimage place on the route to Walsingham is now in ruins and the busy town just a village.



Above: St Edmundsbury Cathedral still dominates Bury St Edmunds

up Roman Ermine Street, a route broadly in line with the modern A10 and A1010 out of the capital, before arcing east along the Icknield Way, a route that may be 3000 years old.

They didn't just come from London. Pilgrims from all over the country converged on Walsingham: from Norwich and Kings Lynn in East Anglia, and from Ely in Cambridgeshire. Those from the Midlands and North converged

on Croyland Abbey in Lincolnshire, or came by ship to pick up the route at Kings Lynn. From Kent, and the shrine of Thomas Becket, they crossed the Thames from Gravesend to Tilbury in Essex, approaching via Bury St Edmunds.

Few pilgrims had their sights solely on Walsingham, although it was the holy of holies. Many will have travelled via other important shrines – Bury St Edmunds key among them – as well as Waltham Abbey, Thetford and others. Along the way they will have taken shelter at inns, and the many religious houses on the route, established to give succour to pilgrims.

Then came the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the suppression of shrines, the outlawing of the veneration of saints, and a ban on pilgrimage. This hit Walsingham harder than most other pilgrim destinations. As Whatmore notes: 'Canterbury even without pilgrimage remained a city of ancient and historic importance. Without the shrine Walsingham was nothing, except for the growing of saffron, for which it was noted.'



Above: Saffron crocus on a gravestone in Ugley churchyard.

The Dutch philosopher and Christian scholar Erasmus, who wrote of his pilgrimages to Walsingham and elsewhere, said this Norfolk village was: 'almost entirely sustained by the resort of pilgrimages.' And although April was the most popular month, they came all year round.

Walsingham and the route from London, once thronged with pilgrims, fell into obscurity. While Canterbury has Chaucer to thank for keeping that city's pilgrim tradition alive in the popular consciousness down the centuries, Walsingham had no such advocate, promoter and influencer.

dered by knights loyal to Henry II, with whom Becket was in a power struggle.

But, as we have seen, the appeal of this first genuinely English clerical martyr became eclipsed, in the 16th century, by the appeal of Our Lady of Walsingham.

Walsingham today

In the 1930s, both Anglican and Catholic shrines were re-established at Walsingham, and you can read more about this development in Stage 13. The Catholic shrine is in the Slipper Chapel, a mile from the Holy House, where pilgrims would leave their shoes and continue barefoot. The Anglican shrine is in the centre of the village, alongside the ruins of Walsingham Priory, where the Holy House stood. There are both official and unofficial pilgrim hostels in Walsingham, and the village once again feels almost entirely sustained by pilgrimage.

How this London to Walsingham route was chosen

I have drawn on a range of historic sources to identify the most likely route from London to Walsingham. Leonard Whatmore did a wonderful job in the 1970s of collating all the available evidence and outlining the medieval route. However, he did not walk it, nor apply it to modern maps. He drew heavily on the work of Francis Blomefield, mentioned earlier, and other sources to suggest a route that ran north from London on Ermine Street to Waltham Abbey and Ware, both pilgrim destinations in themselves.

Today, that walk through the North London suburbs is not a pleasant one. However, shift a mile or so east and you find a wonderful alternative, via the Lee Valley. Here you can walk from London to Waltham Abbey and Ware, barely putting foot to tarmac. And, as Revd Peter Smith, rector of Waltham Abbey Church, assured me when I discussed this stretch of the route with him, the river was used by monks at Waltham, and by some pilgrims.



Above: The route passes Audley End House, near Saffron Walden

From Ware, Whatmore's route arcs east via Hare St and Barkway to take in Newmarket and Mildenhall. I have walked it and, while the first half is pleasant enough, the five miles before Newmarket are an unrelenting grind along the verge of very fast A roads, there being no footpaths following that section of the route, and hence no easy way to shadow it. Also, with

one or two exceptions, the pilgrim points along the way no longer exist, and hence the sustenance that the medieval pilgrim would have gained is no longer available to us today.

So I have chosen to take a slightly shallower arc from Ware, which takes in a string of pilgrim points that are still extant, and which offers a far finer walk. Key among them is Bury St Edmunds. It also takes in Saffron Walden, where Walden Abbey has morphed into Audley End House, Bishop's Stortford, and Thetford, another place that exerted a powerful draw to medieval pilgrims.

From Thetford I re-join the route outlined by Whatmore, still fine walking country today, with a little juggling to avoid restricted military zones, and the A roads criss-crossing Norfolk. I take in Brandon, where pilgrims from Ely, and from destinations in the Midlands and the North would have joined the main route; and Castle Acre, generally considered to be the last stop for many London pilgrims before Walsingham.

Our hopes for the future

Mapping the *London to Walsingham Camino* route, having it officially recognised as a Camino Ingles, and producing this guide form just the first stage in our efforts to make the route fully accessible to as many people as possible. Eventually, in conjunction with the relevant local authorities and with the permission of landowners, we hope to way-mark the entire route.

As the route develops...

As additional facilities become available to pilgrims, it may be necessary to make adjustments to the route. Such changes will be made to the online resources available to all who buy this book, and in future editions of it.



Overview – The 13 stages

1 London to Waltham Abbey

17.7 miles/28.5km

From the pilgrim church of St Magnus the Martyr, with its shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham, to the abbey of the Holy Cross, burial place of Harold, the king slain at the Battle of Hastings. This is a waterside walk, following the Thames Path downriver to Limehouse Basin, then joining the towpath alongside the Regent's Canal, the Hertford Union Canal, and the River Lee Navigation. The walk upriver from here is through a vibrant, regenerating swathe of the city past Hackney Wick and on via Lea Bridge and the nature reserves of the Hackney Marshes to Tottenham Locks.

The increasingly rural second half of the stage takes you out of the city and on through open country, via Stonebridge Lock and Rammey Marsh Lock to Waltham Abbey.

2 Waltham Abbey to Ware

13.2 miles/21.2km

(30.9 miles/49.7km from London)

From the church of Waltham's great Augustinian abbey to the medieval wayside memorial that gave Waltham Cross its name, then along the River Lee valley to the ancient pilgrim town of Ware.

The first half of this stage, to the village of Broxbourne, is through the peaceful, wildlife-rich, watery world

of the River Lee Country Park, a 1000-acre nature reserve. From Broxbourne the New River, actually a 17th century aqueduct built to supply London with drinking water, takes you to Rye House, childhood home of Henry VIII's sixth wife, Katherine Parr. Then it's another wonderful walk, bordered by flooded gravel pits and nature reserves, on a combination of New River and River Lee Navigation – via the beautiful village of Great Amwell, with its 11th century church – all the way to Ware.

3 Ware to Stansted

Mountfitchet *16.4 miles/26.4km*

(47.3miles/76.1km from London)

From Ware – its High St known in medieval times as Walsingham Way – via the tranquil River Ash valley to the delightful village of Much Hadham, with its former Bishop's Palace and church adorned with works by Henry Moore, a local resident.

Much of this stage follows the Hertfordshire Way long-distance path over the rolling hills to Bishop's Stortford and then up the Stort valley to Stansted Mountfitchet. Along the way are three very traditional English churches with soaring Hertfordshire Spike spires and a pair of delightfully unexpected Italian Romanesque and Renaissance-inspired gems.

The London to Walsingham Camino

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0 20km
0 10 miles



There follows a riverside and forest ramble – via the River Lark and St Edmund Way – to Thetford, the next key medieval pilgrim staging post on the road to Walsingham. In contrast to these two busy market towns, the path that links them touches just two villages – Culford and Barnham – and is otherwise through one of the most remote regions I encounter. Today’s walk provides a calming contrast to the bustle that bookends it.

9 Thetford to Brandon

10.5 miles/16.9km
(126.5 miles/203.9km from London)

The next staging post for medieval pilgrims headed for Walsingham was Thetford where, at the riverside Priory of Our Lady, a statue of the Virgin Mary was said to perform miracles. Henry VIII visited – and prayed at – this place, which had a particularly personal importance for him. For it contained the tomb of his illegitimate

T H E S T A G E S

STAGE NO	FROM/TO	DISTANCE (MILES/KM)	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
1	London to Waltham Abbey	17.7 miles/28.5km	17.7 miles/28.5km
2	Waltham Abbey to Ware	13.2 miles/21.2km	30.9 miles/49.7km
3	Ware to Stansted Mountfitchet	16.4 miles/26.4km	47.3miles/76.1km
4	Stansted Mountfitchet to Saffron Walden	14.2 miles/22.9km	61.5 miles/99km
5	Saffron Walden to Withersfield	13.8 miles/22.3km	75.3miles/121.3km
6	Withersfield to Stansfield	12.2 miles/19.7km	87.5 miles/141km
7	Stansfield to Bury St Edmunds	12.2 miles/19.7km	99.7 miles/160.7km
8	Bury St Edmunds to Thetford	16.3 miles/26.3km	116miles/187km
9	Thetford to Brandon	10.5 miles/16.9km	126.5 miles/203.9km
10	Brandon to Great Cressingham	15.6 miles/25.1km	142.1 miles/229km
11	Great Cressingham to Castle Acre	13.7 miles/22.1km	155.8 miles/251.1km
12	Castle Acre to Fakenham	15.9 miles/25.6km	171.7miles/276.7km
13	Fakenham to Walsingham	6.2 miles/10km	177.9miles/286.7km

*NOTE: Times include only the actual walking time.

and the site of a wayside chapel at Hilborough line the route, in a walk that combines forest stretches and country lanes with lively villages and good inns.

11 Great Cressingham to Castle Acre *13.7 miles/22.1km* (*155.8 miles/251.1km* from London)

The anticipation heightens as I join the ancient Peddars Way – in the footsteps of Katherine of Aragon – to walk via an isolated hill-top church rescued from satanists at Houghton on the Hill to Castle Acre, the last stop for many medieval pilgrims before Walsingham.

The ancient path I follow hugs the heights above the Wissey valley, guiding me to insular villages and unexpected treasure-houses such as the round-tower church at South Pickenham with its organ case designed by AWN Pugin, and St George's at South Acre with wonderful poppy-head pew ends depicting a snail, a frog, a dolphin and an otter with a fish in its mouth.

12 Castle Acre to Fakenham *15.9 miles/25.6km* (*171.7miles/276.7km* from London)

Castle Acre combines two gems: the substantial remains of the great priory where many pilgrims spent their last night before Walsingham, and a church dedicated to St James the Great.

The evidence of pilgrimage-past grows ever stronger on this, the penultimate stage of the Walsingham Camino. On my way via quiet lanes and lovely villages to

Fakenham, I encounter several more very solid survivors from medieval times, including another important priory beside the River Nar at Litcham, where pilgrims from King's Lynn would have joined the route, and a thousand-year-old round tower church at East Lexham that is among the oldest in the country.

13 Fakenham to Walsingham *6.2 miles/10km* (*177.9miles/286.7km* from London)

This short stage covers the final, glorious approach to England's Nazareth, passing through sacred ground where kings including Henry VIII walked barefoot for the final approach.

It starts at Fakenham's church of St Peter and St Paul, where many saints were venerated, and proceeds through quiet lanes and footpaths to the village of East Barsham. It is here, at All Saints, that many pilgrims prepared themselves for the final passage to the Holy House, and it is also where, at the orange brick manor house, Henry VIII stayed.

I continue over the fields to the Slipper Chapel, a survivor from medieval times which now houses the Catholic Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, where pilgrims traditionally removed their shoes to continue barefoot to the Holy House.

In Walsingham itself, I encounter Walsingham Abbey's ruins, where the Holy House stood, and the Anglican shrine, which contains a 1930s replica of the original shrine.



How to use this book

The information for each stage comes from two sources: this book and downloads accessible only to readers of this book from a web address given with each stage.

In the pages that follow, I recount my experience of walking the 13 stages; a descriptive overview designed to give you an idea of what each stage holds and to inspire you to walk it. When you are ready to walk a particular stage, go to the website page which has been created specifically to hold the downloads you'll find useful for navigation. The web page address is given in the practical information box of each stage in this book.

Downloadable practical information

On the website you'll find three files for each numbered walk:

- **.pdf file for paper-based walking instructions** This printable pdf file is a tabulated, step-by-step description, designed to be used in conjunction with the paper Ordnance Survey (OS) Explorer map listed in the book.

- **.gpx file for GPS route** If you have a smartphone with GPS capability (most modern phones have this) or a GPS unit (such as a Garmin) you can upload the relevant gpx file into the app used on it and follow that as you walk. Each gpx file was recorded as I walked a given route, so should keep you exactly on the route, which will appear on your screen as a solid line.

If you are using the gpx file on your phone you'll need an app to load it into. I use the Ordnance Survey's app but there are several other apps that use OS mapping. If you download the route to your phone, you can follow it even if your phone loses its signal at some point.

- **.kml file for use with GoogleEarth** The GPS file is also supplied in this format. You can import it into GoogleEarth on your computer and make A4-sized screenshots of each birds-eye section of the walk which you could print out.

Note that you don't need all of these files to do the walks. If you prefer just using paper maps simply print the pdf file to use with your OS map.

How to download the files from the website

These files on the internet do not appear on our public website as they are intended only for readers of this book. It is most important that you type the url directly into your browser. If you try to access it using a search engine (such as Google) it won't show up.

If, for example, you wish to get the files for Stage 5 you'll have seen in the practical information box the following:

- **Directions & GPS** 505.pdf, 505.gpx, 505.kml at <https://trailblazer-guides.com/press>

Open your browser and type: (SEE PRINTED BOOK FOR LINK) into the browser to replace whichever website address the browser usually opens with. This will take you directly to the list of files on our website. Click on the required files to download them.

As explained above, there are three files for each stage: the **printable pdf file** with the walking and map directions, the **gpx file** if you're using gps navigation and the **kml file** if you want to see the route on GoogleEarth.

Planning your itinerary

The 13 stages

The route is divided into 13 stages, averaging 14 miles each. Keen walkers will find they can accomplish each in around five to six hours. The whole 177.9 mile pilgrimage could be accomplished by a fit walker in a fortnight or less. But maybe you want to walk for fewer miles each day, or just at weekends, or on odd days when you have the time and energy.

Halving the daily walk or setting your own itinerary

For those who prefer to tackle a much shorter daily mileage, each stage can be divided roughly in half, meaning the route can be accomplished in 26 bites averaging seven miles each.

If you prefer to fashion your own itinerary and perhaps vary the distance you walk each day, we've listed details on where you can obtain refreshments and accommodation in many other towns and villages along the way. That means you can stop and start at numerous points within each stage.

Pilgrim points, stamps and passports

The route passes many pilgrim points – priories, cathedrals and churches – and you will find details on visiting them. A number of them have pilgrim stamps,

BUS ROUTES & OPERATORS (*cont'd*)

- Star Cabs ( startraveluk.com, ☎ 01440 712712)
- Stephenson's of Essex ( stephensonsofessex.com)
- The Voluntary Network community minibuses ( thevoluntarynetwork.org/community-transport) Pre-booking essential: ☎ 01638-664304, lines open Mon-Fri 8am-4pm, or email fhbookings@thevoluntarynetwork.org at least 1 day in advance). Routes vary depending on demand.

Bus routes

excel A/B/C Peterborough to Norfolk via Wisbech, Kings Lynn & Swaffham, Mon-Sat 2/hr, Sun 1/hr (First: Norfolk & Suffolk)

SE1 Newmarket to Haverhill via Withersfield, Barnham, Great Wrating, Hundon, Stansfield, Culford & Rede, Mon-Sat 1/hr. (The Voluntary Network)

X29 Yellow Line Fakenham to Norwich, Mon-Sat 1/hr (First: Norfolk & Suffolk)

12 Swaffham to North Pickenham, Mon-Fri 2/day (Go To Town)

13/13A Haverhill to Cambridge via Horseheath, Mon-Sat 1/hr (Stagecoach East)

14/15 Haverhill to Bury St Edmunds via Great Wrating, Mon-Fri 1/hr, Sat 5/day (Stephenson's of Essex)

32 Swaffham Flexibus via Litcham & Castle Acre, Mon-Fri 1-2/day (Go To Town)

36 Coaster Fakenham to Kings Lynn via East Barsham & Walsingham Mon-Sat 1/hr, Sun 5/day (Lynxbus)

40 Thetford to Kings Lynn via Mundford Mon-Fri 4/day OR via Brandon Mon-Fri 5/day, Sat 1/day NB: Check timetable for stops as routes vary. (Coach Services)

59/60 Audley End to Haverhill via Saffron Walden Mon-Fri 1/hr, Sat 5/day (Stephenson's of Essex)

84/86 Bury St Ed to Brandon via Barnham, Thetford Mon-Sat 2/hr (Coach Services)

200/201 Thetford to Mildenhall via Brandon Mon-Fri 1/hr, Sat 6/day & Santon Downham Mon-Fri 4/day, Sat 3/day (Coach Services)

301 Saffron Walden to Bishop's Stortford via Audley End, Newport, Stansted Mountfitchet Mon-Sat 9/day (Stephenson's of Essex)

310 Waltham Cross to Hertford via Cheshunt, Broxbourne, St Margarets, Great Amwell & Ware, Mon-Sat 3/hr, Sun 1/hr (Arriva)

332 Thetford to Bury St Edmunds via Culford, Mon-Sat 4/day (Coach Services)

351 Hertford to Bishop's Stortford via Ware, Great Amwell, St Margarets, Hunsdon, Widford, Much Hadham, Mon-Fri 10/day, Sat 4/day (Central Connect)

351 Great Bradley to Haverhill via Withersfield, Mon-Fri 2/day (Star Cabs)

374 Clare to Bury St Ed via Whepstead, Mon-Sat 3-4/day (Heddingham & Chambers)

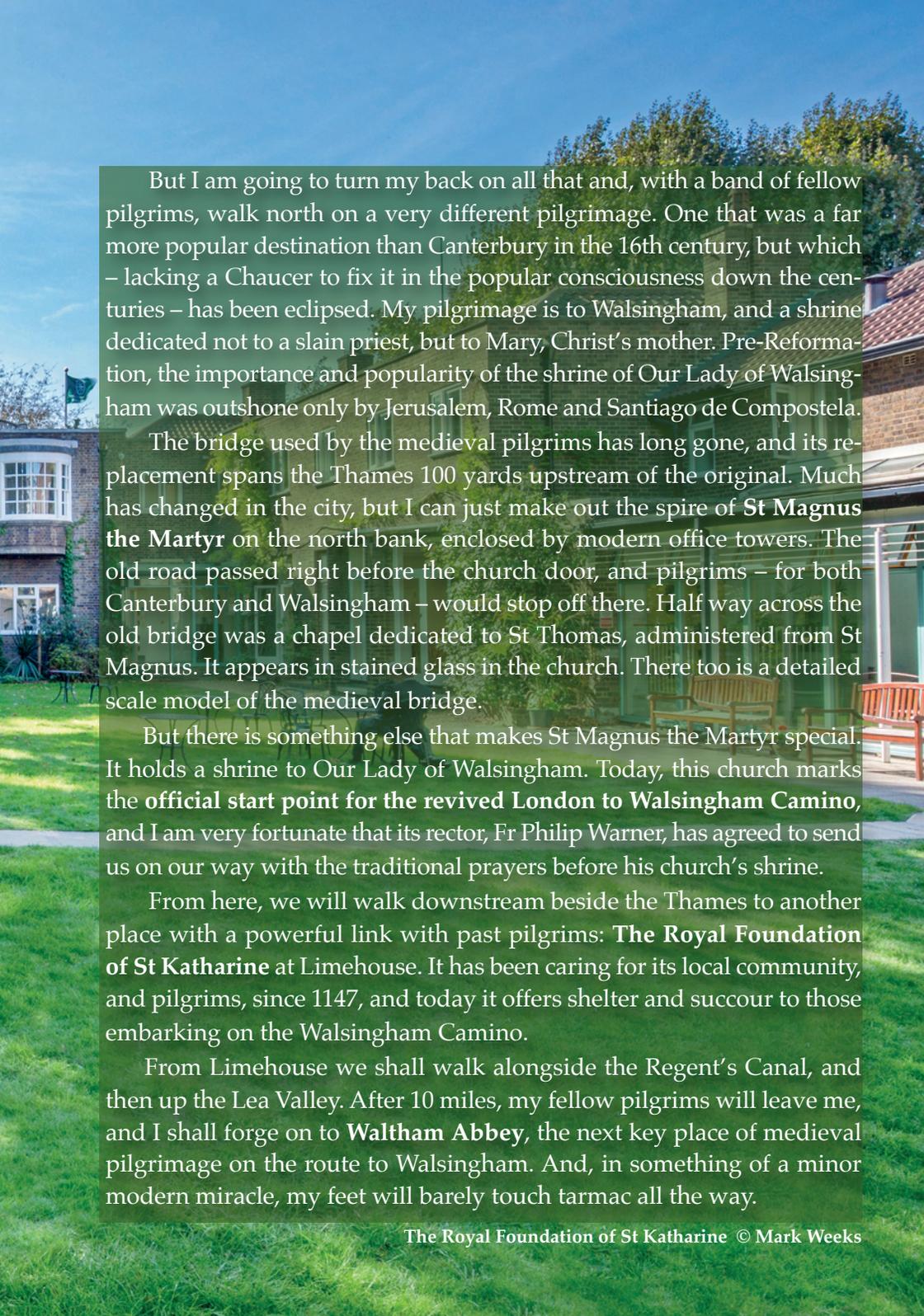


1

London to Waltham Abbey

From the pilgrim church of St Magnus the Martyr with its shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham, to the abbey of the Holy Cross where King Harold is buried

I am standing on the left bank of the Thames beside London Bridge. To the south is Southwark, where Chaucer's pilgrims began their journey to Canterbury and the tomb of the murdered St Thomas Becket. If I were to walk a little way south down Southwark Bridge Road I would find a galleried inn, the George, which is very similar to the Tabard, from which Chaucer's twenty-one departed.



But I am going to turn my back on all that and, with a band of fellow pilgrims, walk north on a very different pilgrimage. One that was a far more popular destination than Canterbury in the 16th century, but which – lacking a Chaucer to fix it in the popular consciousness down the centuries – has been eclipsed. My pilgrimage is to Walsingham, and a shrine dedicated not to a slain priest, but to Mary, Christ’s mother. Pre-Reformation, the importance and popularity of the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham was outshone only by Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela.

The bridge used by the medieval pilgrims has long gone, and its replacement spans the Thames 100 yards upstream of the original. Much has changed in the city, but I can just make out the spire of **St Magnus the Martyr** on the north bank, enclosed by modern office towers. The old road passed right before the church door, and pilgrims – for both Canterbury and Walsingham – would stop off there. Half way across the old bridge was a chapel dedicated to St Thomas, administered from St Magnus. It appears in stained glass in the church. There too is a detailed scale model of the medieval bridge.

But there is something else that makes St Magnus the Martyr special. It holds a shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham. Today, this church marks the **official start point for the revived London to Walsingham Camino**, and I am very fortunate that its rector, Fr Philip Warner, has agreed to send us on our way with the traditional prayers before his church’s shrine.

From here, we will walk downstream beside the Thames to another place with a powerful link with past pilgrims: **The Royal Foundation of St Katharine** at Limehouse. It has been caring for its local community, and pilgrims, since 1147, and today it offers shelter and succour to those embarking on the Walsingham Camino.

From Limehouse we shall walk alongside the Regent’s Canal, and then up the Lea Valley. After 10 miles, my fellow pilgrims will leave me, and I shall forge on to **Waltham Abbey**, the next key place of medieval pilgrimage on the route to Walsingham. And, in something of a minor modern miracle, my feet will barely touch tarmac all the way.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Route overview

17.7 miles (28.5km)

From St Magnus the Martyr, at the northern end of London Bridge in Lower Thames St, you pick up the Thames Path, diverging from it after **2.7 miles** for the Royal Foundation of St Katharine. You then walk past Limehouse Basin to join, after a further **400 yds**, the towpath alongside the Regent's Canal. You leave the canal at Victoria Park, after **1.5 miles**, walking through the park and then along the Hertford Union Canal, reaching the River Lee Navigation in a further **1.3 miles**.

You follow this waterway, reaching Lea Bridge after **1.9 miles**, and Tottenham Locks, where **the stage can be most easily divided**, after **2.2 miles**.

In another **0.7 miles** you reach Stonebridge Lock, where there is a café. Further refreshment points occur near Enfield Lock, after **5.4 miles**, and at Rammey Marsh Lock, after **0.6 miles**. Waltham Abbey is reached in a further **0.9 miles**.

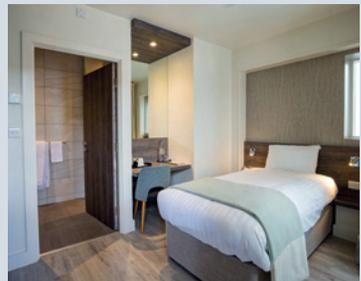
Public transport options

Setting off from central London means that this whole first stage is easily accessible by overground and/or underground **train** services. The starting point at St Magnus the Martyr is 200yds from Monument Underground station while the end of the stage, at Waltham Abbey, is 1 mile west of Waltham Cross railway station. Between the two there are stations at or near Limehouse, Victoria Park, Lea Bridge, Clapton, Tottenham Hale, Seven Sisters, Stonebridge Lock, Enfield Lock and Rammey Marsh. See also public transport map and table pp29-31.

Where to eat or stay along the way

● **Limehouse** (after 2.7 miles/4.3km) **Stay** at *Royal Foundation of St Katharine* (☎ 0300-111 1147, 🌐 rfsk.org.uk, 2 Butcher Row) our accommodation partner. **Eat** in their adjacent, eclectic, open-air *Yurt Café* (open daily 9am-9pm). Get to the start from nearby **Limehouse station**.

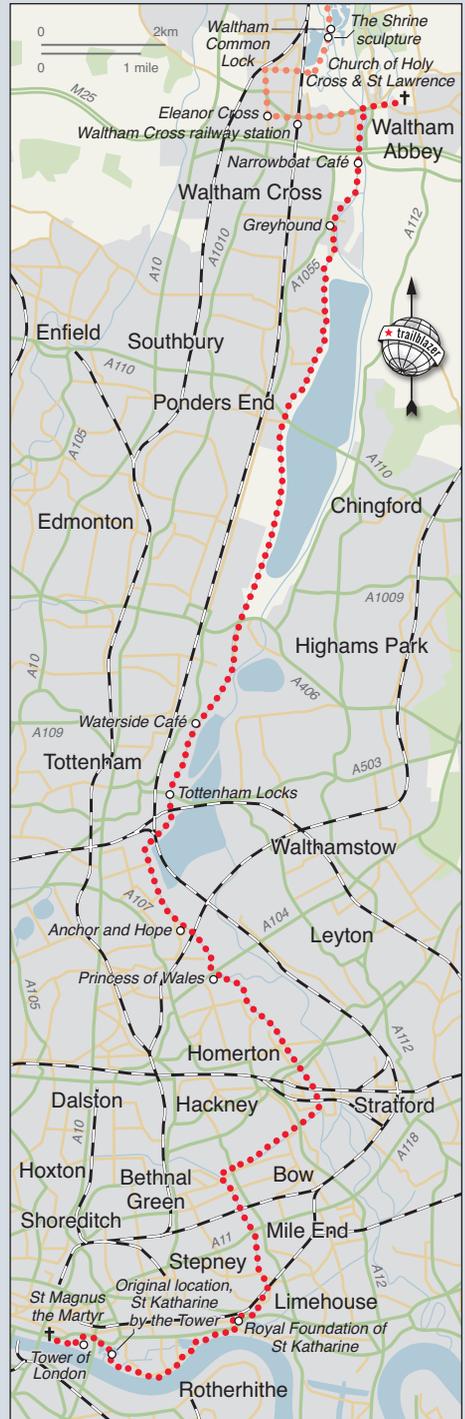
● **Victoria Park** (after 4.6 miles/7.4km) Pause for **refreshments** at *Park Café* (Tue-Fri 9.30am-3.30pm, Sat-Sun 9.30am-4pm, Mon closed).



A guest room at St Katherine's
© Mark Weeks

- **Terrain** Almost entirely flat, city pavements in early section, then gravel and sealed towpaths
- **Difficulty** Moderate in terms of terrain, challenging in terms of distance
- **Time** 6hrs 10mins actual walking time
- **Total ascent** 239m/784ft
- **Maps** OS Explorer 173 *London North*; 174 *Epping Forest & Lee Valley*
- **GPX route file & directions*** 501.pdf, 501.gpx, 501.kml at 🌐 <https://trailblazer-guides.com/press> * See pp27-8 for more information on downloads

- **Lea Bridge** (after 7.7 miles / 12.5km) Stop for **lunch** in the large, tented garden at the *Princess of Wales* pub (☎ 0208-533 3463, 🌐 princessofwalesclapton.co.uk, 146 Lea Bridge; open 11am-11pm, food 11am-10pm).
- **Clapton** (after 8.4 miles / 13.5km) Another **lunch** option is Fullers' *Anchor and Hope* pub (☎ 0208-806 1730, 🌐 anchor-and-hope-clapton.co.uk, 15 High Hill Ferry; open Mon-Fri 1pm-11pm, Sat noon-11pm, Sun noon-10.30pm, **food** Sat-Sun noon-9pm) which has riverside tables.
- **Tottenham Hale** (after 9.4 miles / 15.1km) If dividing up this stage, **stay** at *Premier Inn* (☎ 0333-003 8101, 🌐 premierinn.com; Station Rd), a reliable chain hotel 400yds from the route.
- **Seven Sisters** (after 9.4 miles / 15.1km, then 1 mile / 1.6km off route) Leave the route at Markfield Park to **stay** at *The Fountain* (☎ 0208-802 0433, 🌐 fountainhotellondon.com, 125 W Green Rd) a Victorian hotel with **pub** and Japanese **restaurant**.
- **Stonebridge Lock** (after 10.7 miles / 17.2km) Stop for **coffee** at *Waterside Café* (Wed-Sun 10am-3pm, Watermead Way), a community café with toilets.
- **Enfield Lock** (after 16 miles / 25.9km) The *Greyhound* (☎ 01992-711271, 🌐 mcmul lens.co.uk/greyhondenfield, Ordnance Rd; Mon-Fri 11am-10pm, Sat 11am-10pm, Sun noon-10pm) is a traditional **pub**.
- **Rammey Marsh Lock** (after 16.7 miles / 26.9km) *Narrowboat Café* (🌐 facebook.com/TheNarrowboatCafe, Rammey Marsh; daily 7am-5pm) is a licensed full menu **café** on a canal boat.
- **Waltham Abbey** The most convenient place to **stay** is *Premier Inn* (☎ 0333-003 8101, 🌐 premierinn.com; Sewardstone Rd) 0.6mile/1km from the route. Alternatively, Waltham Abbey Town Council has a list of



B&Bs on its website (walthamabbey-tc.gov.uk/business). There is a good choice of places to **eat** including *The Gatehouse Café* (☎ 07971-800727, 2-4 Highbridge St; Mon, Tue, Thur & Fri 8am-5pm, Sat & Sun 9am-5pm) for all-day breakfast, daily hot specials and sandwiches; the *Welsh Harp* (☎ 01992-711113, mcmullens.co.uk/welsh-harp, Market Sq; Mon-Thur 11am-11pm, Fri-Sat 11am-midnight, Sun 11am-10.30pm) for good pub grub; or *Royal Artisan Bakery* (tel 01992-700841, facebook.com/royalartisan.essex, 11 Sun St; daily 9am-5pm) for great cakes and coffee.

Services

● **Waltham Abbey** For picnic supplies there's Tesco **supermarket** on Sewardstone Rd (Mon-Sat 8am-11pm, Sun 11am-5pm) and Lidl on Cartersfield Rd (Mon-Sat 8am-10pm, Sun 10am-4pm). Should you need a **laundrette** try Pearl Launderette (☎ 01992-650650, 45 High St; daily 8am-7pm).

PILGRIMAGE HIGHLIGHTS

- *St Magnus the Martyr* (stmagnusmartyr.org.uk, Lower Thames St; open Tue-Fri 10am-3pm, Sun 10.30am-1.30pm, closed Mon & Sat; **Services:** Sun 10.30am Office for the Fraternity of Our Lady de Salve Regina, Sun 11am Solemn High Mass, Tue, Wed & Fri 12.30pm Low Mass). For organised groups, contact them to discuss the possibility of a welcome and prayers from Fr Philip Warner. **Pilgrim stamp in church.**
- *Royal Foundation of St Katharine* (☎ 0300-111 1147, rfsk.org.uk, 2 Butcher Row). Pilgrims receive a warm welcome – contact them to let them know you are coming. **Pilgrim stamp in reception.**

See Stage 2, p50, for pilgrimage highlights in Waltham Abbey.





The pilgrim chapel on the old London Bridge is commemorated in glass (above) at St Magnus's, while a plaque (below) records the church's location beside that bridge.

among robbers between here and Walsingham, but it is a timely reminder that pilgrimage was not always a safe journey to make, especially if you were going abroad. Say you were going to Jerusalem. No guarantee that you would get there or that you would get home but one made the pilgrimage in faith and trust.'

Then come the prayers:

'Heavenly Father, protector of all who trust in you, you led your people in safety through the desert and brought them to a land of plenty. Guide these, your faithful people, who begin

their journey today. Fill them with your spirit of love, preserve them from all harm and bring them in safety to their destination. We ask this in Christ our Lord'.

And then a second prayer:

'May our Lord Jesus Christ be with you to defend you, within you to keep you, before you to lead you, behind you to guard you, above you to bless you. We ask this of Him who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

'And may our Lady of Walsingham, St Mag-



ST MAGNUS THE MARTYR'S PILGRIM HISTORY

St Magnus the Martyr's connection to Walsingham pilgrimage, severed at the Reformation, was re-established when a new rector, who followed the Anglo-Catholic tradition, came to the parish in 1921. Henry Joy Fynes-Clinton was great friends with Alfred Hope Patten, who established the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham. Fynes-Clinton became a patron there, and organised pilgrimages starting at this church.

He also created a shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham in St Magnus's, as part of extensive work to beautify the building, transforming it into a baroque church in the Catholic tradition. Among the church's admirers was the poet T.S. Eliot who writes, in *The Wasteland*, of its 'inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold'.

The bond between St Magnus and Walsingham was a profound one. In 1928, Fynes-Clinton presented a votive candle to the shrine at Walsingham 'in token of our common Devotion and the mutual sympathy and prayers that are, we hope, a growing bond between the peaceful country shrine and the church in the heart of the hurrying City, from the Altar of which the Pilgrimages regularly start.'



The shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham at St Magnus's

nus, St James, and all the saints pray for you, and may almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.'

Then he sprinkles us with Holy Water and, now fully protected, we are on our way.

St Magnus the Martyr to Limehouse

The fog is lifting as we leave St Magnus, the Thames Path guiding us downriver, looping around the Tower of London, tunnelling beneath Tower Bridge Rd, then funnelling us through a narrow gap between towering wharves to reach an expanse of water. This is St Katharine Docks, today



harbouring expensive motorboats and al-fresco brunchers, but for six centuries the home to The Royal Foundation of St Katharine, a remarkable institution that has been caring for the poor and welcoming pilgrims since 1147.

All that was up-ended in 1825 when the religious house, its chapel, cloister, guesthouse, and the homes of 3000 people were destroyed and the 23-acre site dug out to create a dock: two linked basins accessed via a lock from the Thames.

It was an extraordinary act of wanton and pointless vandalism: the dock created was



Above: Immaculately restored Wapping warehouses (left) and the Bascule Bridge in Shadwell Basin (right).

from which the sailors could climb straight from boat to bar. I count off The Town of Ramsgate, the Captain Kidd, and the Prospect of Whitby on the way to Shadwell Basin, where the oxblood-red Bascule Bridge bares to the world the same mechanism that powers Tower Bridge's lifting roadway, but which there is sheathed in stone. The great counterweight mechanism stands, ready to raise the road in a salute to any boat that wishes to pass beneath it.

After King Edward Memorial Park, a sustained riverside stretch draws us to the start of that fallopian loop in the river seen beneath the credits on *EastEnders*. Here, a prospect opens up of the modern city downriver. The fog has cleared to reveal the cluster of towers at Canary Wharf beneath a soot-black sky that threatens a pilgrim-drenching downpour. But the rain holds off as, just before Limehouse Basin, we turn north up Narrow St for Butchers Row, and the second truly powerful place for pilgrims on this walk.

The Royal Foundation of St Katharine

We navigate the snarling traffic of the Commercial Rd to enter a remarkable sanctuary: the modern incarnation of The Royal Foundation of St Katharine. It stands on the site of the former church of St James Ratcliffe,

which was destroyed in the Blitz that devastated so much of the East End during the Second World War. Today its chapel, guest house, restaurant and meeting rooms form a protective ring around a green space which has the feel of an open cloister.

This is truly an oasis in the city; the thrum and grind of London almost completely shut out. Chaplain Carol Rider

Below: Pilgrims setting out from the Royal Foundation of St Katharine.



gives us a tour, starting in the chapel which was added in the 1950s. Not all was lost when St Katharine's original chapel beside the Tower was destroyed. Some of the choir stalls, with their intricately carved misericords featuring mythical beasts, were rescued, and grace the new chapel.

In the floor, a marble compass has at the centre a piece of orange marble from St Katharine's Monastery on Mount Sinai, the oldest surviving monastery in the world. Around it is written: 'We do not come to God by navigation but by love.'

Next comes the former vicarage, a lovely 18th century merchant's house, where the walls of the lounge are filled with the original painted murals of bucolic southern European scenes. We walk on from St Katharine's through its Yurt Café, passing



beneath the railway arches at Limehouse DLR station and skirting Limehouse Basin.

The Regent's Canal to Victoria Park

At Limehouse Basin we forsake the Thames for the Regent's Canal and walk alongside the run of locks that takes it gently uphill through Mile End to Hackney. We are walking through the heart of the

East End, but the combination of parkland to our right almost all the way, and the still waters to our left, make this feel like a far more rural stretch than it is.

At Victoria Park we turn east, emerging to walk through the green expanse of what is London's oldest public park, before dropping down to another towpath, this one along the Hertford Union Canal, which takes us to the River Lee* Navigation.

OTHER PILGRIM POINTS IN LONDON

If you have time in the capital before starting your pilgrimage, you might like to explore the following:

- **Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception**, better known as **Farm St** (☎ 020-74937811, 🌐 farmstreet.org.uk; see website for opening and mass times; 114 Mount St W1K 3AH) welcomes Catholic pilgrims setting out for Walsingham.
- Shrine of the Martyrs at **Tyburn Convent** (☎ 0207-7237262, 🌐 tyburnconvent.org.uk/martyrs-shrine; guided tours 3.30pm but call to confirm, 8-9 Hyde Park Pl, W2 2LJ) This was London's gallows, where saints and others were executed.
- **Westminster Abbey** (☎ 0207-222 5152, 🌐 westminster-abbey.org, SW1P 3PA) is a royal church offering daily services for all and a World Heritage Site with over a thousand years of history.
- **St Paul's Cathedral** (🌐 stpauls.co.uk, EC4M 8AD), designed by Sir Christopher Wren, is one of the most iconic sights of London.
- **Tower of London** (🌐 hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london; Sun & Mon 10am-5.30pm, Tue-Sat 9am-5.30pm, EC3N 4AB) See the holy marks cut into the walls by those about to be martyred, and the burial place of two murdered saints, two queens and Thomas Cromwell.



Above: There are working boats on the River Lee* Navigation.

The River Lee Navigation via Hackney Wick to Lea Bridge

The original pilgrim route up Roman Ermine Street, now the A10 and A1010, is clogged with traffic and smothered by swathes of London suburbia. Yet, barely a mile east of it is this fine waterway through open country: a green artery that the Walsingham Camino route follows all the way to Waltham Abbey, and on to Ware.

The Lea Valley is also a region of great renaissance. At the point where we join it, the London Stadium, built for the 2012 Olympics and now home to West Ham United, is just over to our right, with Anish Kapoor's Orbit sculpture, an *avant-garde* helter-skelter, peeping above it.

There are many floating enterprises: cafés, bars and vendors of street – or rather river – food. And houseboats, hundreds of them. With their stumpy chimneys puffing wood smoke, their roofs lined with mini allotments, sprawling bicycles and solar panels, they create a great linear city stretching all the way to Ponders End, and sporadically on to Waltham Abbey.

There are working boats, too: Lynx No 39 of the South Midland Water Transport Limited chugs past, its hold brimming with Calor gas and smokeless coal.

As we pass through Hackney Wick and on towards Lea Bridge, the grimy walls and bridges have been enlivened with art too bright and vibrant to be described as graffiti. And, all the while, the expanse of Hackney Marshes to our right gives me the sense of walking along the very rim of London. I'm not, of course, the conurbation spreads out on all sides, but the Lee River Navigation offers what feels like a timeless escape route. There is wildlife, too: a coot tramps down its mid-river nest on grey-rubber feet that would suit a much bigger bird; a pair of swans spread their wings around their gaggle of six cygnets resting on the bank.

Lea Bridge to Tottenham Hale

We have been walking along the right (east) bank of the navigation, but just before Lea Bridge we cross a footbridge to the left. At around the eight-mile mark

* Lea or Lee? You'll see this river and valley spelt with an 'a' or an 'e' but the convention seems to be that it's 'Lea' when referring to the natural river and its valley and 'Lee' for the widened navigation part of the river and its valley.

At Rammey Marsh Lock there is the final refreshment point: the *Narrowboat Café*, which offers a full service to river folk, including showers and a laundry, plus breakfast, lunch and dinner. Not long after it, I pass beneath the many lanes of the M25, and know that I have definitely left Greater London behind.

A mile further and I leave the towpath where the A121, Station Rd, runs over the water. Turning right here I can see Waltham Abbey Church in the distance, leading me on to my destination for tonight. As Churchill might have put it, I

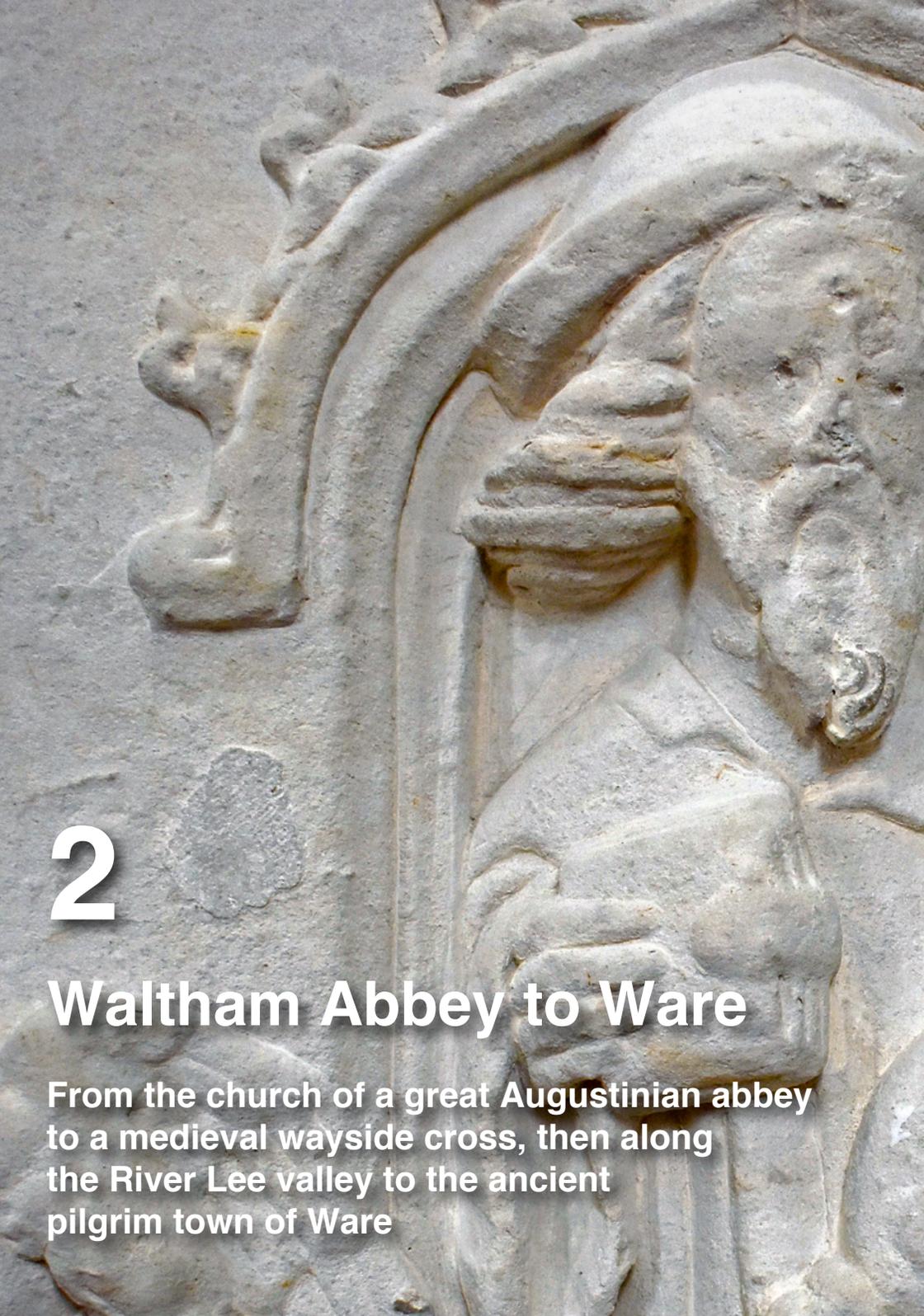


Above: Waltham Abbey; the end of Stage 1

have reached the end of the beginning of my pilgrim journey.



Beside the Lee as it passes by Warwick Reservoir



2

Waltham Abbey to Ware

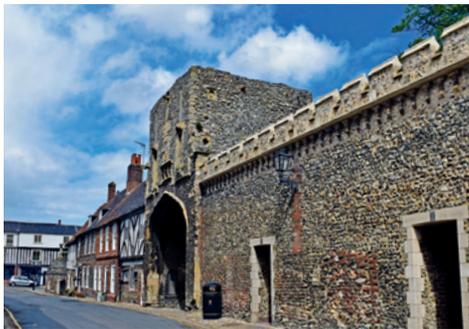
From the church of a great Augustinian abbey to a medieval wayside cross, then along the River Lee valley to the ancient pilgrim town of Ware



At Waltham Abbey I reach the first major place of worship for medieval Walsingham pilgrims after leaving London. They were drawn to this abbey because of a remarkable 10th century Holy Cross, an object of veneration for a string of kings including Edward the Confessor, Harold, and Henry VIII. This, the Montacute Cross, was lost at the Dissolution but, little more than a mile further on, a second medieval cross survives. It is the 13th century Eleanor Cross, and pilgrims paused to honour the romantic story behind it.

From Waltham Cross, riverside trails through reed-marsh and water-meadow will take me, via two lovely village churches, up the Lee Valley to the next important medieval pilgrim centre: the town of Ware.

St James with his pilgrim staff, depicted on the font at St Mary's church in Ware



Walsingham Abbey: Gateway (above) and ruins of the Holy House of Nazareth (below).



HISTORY OF THE HOLY HOUSE

The Holy House was built in 1061 and made of wood. In the 1500s, however, a stone chapel was carefully wrapped around the original. An account by Erasmus, the Renaissance scholar and Christian philosopher who came on pilgrimage from Cambridge, gives us a very clear picture of what pilgrims found here.

Within the stone chapel, he writes, ‘there is a small chapel built on a wooden platform. Pilgrims are admitted through a narrow door on each side. There is very little light: only what comes from tapers, which have a most pleasing scent... and if you peer inside... you would say it was the abode of saints, so dazzling is it with jewels, gold, and silver’.

Of the statue of Virgin and Child, he writes: ‘there was a dim religious light, and she stood in the shadows to the right of the altar... a small image... unimpressive in size, material and workmanship but of surpassing power.’

Erasmus says that pilgrims visited other points in the abbey, including holy wells. On the altar of the priory church was a crystal phial said to contain Mary’s sacred milk.

A contemporary ballad, *The Walsingham Lament*, expressed the sense of loss at the Dissolution:

‘Weepe, weepe O Walsingham,
whose days are nightes,
Blessings turn to blasphemies,
holy deeds to dispites.’

Right: Walsingham Anglican Shrine

to the soaring arch that once framed the east window of the abbey church. I pop round the corner to enter via the Shirehall, a pilgrim hostel in the 15th century, and pass through a belt of trees to reach a glade in which the ruined priory stands.

The greatest surviving element is that soaring gothic arch, defying gravity and its desecrators to frame the tranquil Norfolk countryside. A modest little board marks the place where the shrine of the Holy House of Nazareth once stood. Not a scrap of it was spared, an indication of the fear its power instilled in Henry VIII and Cromwell.

Two entries in the priory accounts for 1538 pinpoint the catastrophe. Those for

Lady Day, March 25, show that Henry VIII made his usual payment for the prior's salary, for a candle to be kept burning at the shrine, and for a priest to sing. When the Michaelmas payments came due on September 29, the entry reads: 'For the king's candle before Our Lady of Walsingham, and to the prior there for his salary, nil.'

It was the end.

The Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham

Around the corner in Holt Rd is the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, set within a glorious walled garden. It was built in the 1930s, so has no intrinsic history of its own, but enter and you find at its heart a remarkable





modern replica of the original Holy House.

This is a quite astounding place. I have never been anywhere so ornate, so richly decorated, so – in a word – Catholic. Such is the contrast to the simplicity of the Slipper Chapel that I wonder for a moment if I haven't got my Anglican and Catholic shrines transposed.

With its gold, jewels and deep lustrous colours the shrine church emulates the richness of the original Holy House and becomes a powerful sensory link to it. It is truly awe-inspiring, and I walk around it once in amazement, unable to separate the kaleidoscope of images that bombard me: a fragment of the true cross in a golden reliquary; the pierced feet of Jesus disappearing through the ceiling as he ascends to heaven; a statue of Richeldis in a gold cloak and blue dress, holding a replica of the original, simple Holy House in her hand.

During building work, a minor miracle occurred: they discovered a well (right), producing a steady flow of pure, clear water, and it was incorporated into the church. I reach it below ground, down steps beneath a brick arch, where it is covered with a glass disc and is watched over by a gold statue of Our Lady of Walsingham. Pilgrims drink, and are sprinkled with, its waters.

Beside it is a memorial tomb to Fr Alfred Hope Patten, the Anglican vicar of

Walsingham, who drove the re-creation of this shrine and whose great friend, Fr Henry Fynes Clinton, supported his efforts and created a shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham in his church of St Magnus the Martyr, where my pilgrimage began, 177.9 miles away.

Finally, I come to the replica of the original Holy House, enclosed within the shrine church, and a very theatrical space. It has no windows, and is lit solely by the hundreds of candles, burning here to mark the intentions, sent in from parishes all over the world, that line the walls.

All is darkness beyond these pinpricks of light, and the eye is drawn to the gold and piercing blue of the altar, above which a replica of the original statue of Our Lady of Walsingham shimmers in her finery, as if picked out by a spotlight.

I have arrived in time for Shrine Prayers and soak up one of the most remarkable services I have ever experienced. Fr Ben Bradshaw, the shrine priest, addresses us as 'Dear friends and fellow pilgrims'. Shrine Prayers takes the form of praying the Rosary, today focusing on the Sorrowful Mysteries on Christ's path to His Crucifixion. Built around the prayers are a whole string of intercessions.

There are dozens and dozens of prayers: for named individuals including Fr Hope Patten, for churches, for care homes, for



the departed, for those anxious about loved ones, for those seeking reconciliation, for spiritual health. Finally, Fr Ben addresses Mary directly: 'You are our mother, our life, our sweetness and our hope.'

My London to Walsingham Camino has been a remarkable journey. I feel as if my one set of footprints have left the very faintest of tracks here, all the way from London. Later, as I sit in the shrine's peace-

ful garden, I imagine other footsteps joining mine, a few at first, then more and more until the path of the London to Walsingham Camino is a wide and clear one. One that is waymarked and established as a true Camino. One of a web of routes leading to England's remarkable Marian shrine, from Norwich, Ely, Kings Lynn and elsewhere.

Below: The Holy House, Anglican Shrine



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