

Marian Pilgrimage: Day Three: Saturday 9 May 2020

The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, England



The **Basilica of Our Lady of Walsingham**, informally known as the **Slipper Chapel** or the **Chapel of Saint Catherine of Alexandria**, is a Roman Catholic Basilica located in Houghton Saint Giles, Norfolk, England. Built in 1340, it was the last chapel on the pilgrim route to Walsingham.

Pope Pius XII granted a canonical coronation to the venerated statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Walsingham presently enshrined within the chapel on 15 August 1954. Pope Francis raised the sanctuary to the status of a minor Basilica via an Apostolic Decree on 27 December 2015.

You can see something of the Life of the Shrine in the link below:

<https://www.walsingham.org.uk> Welcome Page – Catholic National Shrine of Our Lady

The story of the Walsingham Shrine begins in Saxon times. In 1061, the Lady of the Manor, Richeldis de Faverches, was taken in spirit to Nazareth, shown the house where the Annunciation took place and asked by Our Lady to build a replica in Norfolk. She was promised that *'Whoever seeks my help there will not go away empty-handed.'* The simple wooden house that she built soon became the focus of special devotion to Our Lady. The 'Holy House' was later encased in stone to protect it from the elements.

In 1153, the Augustinian Canons founded a Priory to care for the spiritual needs of the pilgrims. Their magnificent Priory Church was added in the fifteenth century. Only the ruin of the Priory arch remains, and archaeology has placed the site of the 'Holy House' in its shadow.



Walsingham became one of the foremost shrines of medieval Christendom. Among the pilgrims to the 'Holy House' were many royal visitors. Henry III in 1226, Edward I (eleven times), Edward II in 1315, Edward III in 1361, Richard II in 1383, Edward IV in 1469, Henry VI in 1487 (and many other times) and Henry VIII in 1511, in thanksgiving for the birth of his son, Prince Henry.

In 1340, the Slipper Chapel was built at Houghton St Giles, a mile outside Walsingham. This was the final 'station' chapel on the way to Walsingham. It was here that pilgrims would remove their shoes to walk the final 'Holy Mile' to the Shrine barefoot.



Erasmus, the Dutch scholar, visited Walsingham in 1513 and was impressed by the splendour of the Shrine. He wrote:

'When you look in you would say it is the abode of saints, so brilliantly does it shine with gems, gold and silver ... Our Lady stands in the dark at the right side of the altar ... a little image, remarkable neither for its size, material or workmanship.'

This was soon to come to an end. Henry VIII ordered the dissolution of the monasteries and in 1538 the Priory was closed, the 'Holy House' burned to the ground and the statue of Our Lady taken to London to be destroyed.

In 1896 Miss Charlotte Boyd bought the Slipper Chapel, which had seen centuries of secular use. She devoted herself to its restoration. The statue of the Mother and Child was carved at Oberammergau and based on the design of the original statue - a design found on the medieval seal of Walsingham Priory, an imprint of which is in the British Museum.



The Walsingham seal: around the edges
Ave Maria gratia plena dominus tecum.

The first Mass since the Reformation was offered in the Slipper Chapel on 15th August 1934 and a few days later Cardinal Francis Bourne led a pilgrimage of 10,000 people to the Chapel and declared it to be the Catholic National Shrine of Our Lady.

Built in 1325, the Slipper Chapel was the last and most important of the wayside chapels that pilgrims would stop at on the numerous pilgrim routes to the pre-reformation shrine in Walsingham.



Pilgrims stopped here to go to Mass and confess their sins, before slipping off their shoes and walking the final Holy Mile to the Holy House in Walsingham. The chapel is dedicated to St Catherine, the patron saint of pilgrims.

The name may come from the fact that pilgrims removed their shoes for the final mile, or it may come from the word *slype* meaning a way through or something in between, the slype or slip chapel standing as it did between the Holy Land of Walsingham and the rest of England.

After the Reformation (?) the chapel became successively a poor house, a forge, a barn and even a cow byre. In 1894 the ruin was bought by Miss Charlotte Pearson Boyd, restored and given back the Roman Catholic Church.



The **Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham in England and Wales** is a personal prelatue ordinariate of the Roman Catholic Church immediately subject to the Holy See within the territory of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, of which its ordinary is a member, and encompassing Scotland also. It was established on 15 January 2011 for groups of former Anglican Communion in England and Wales in accordance with the apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum coetibus* of Pope Benedict XVI.

The personal ordinariate is set up in such a way that "corporate reunion" of former Anglicans with the Catholic Church is possible while also preserving elements of a "distinctive Anglican patrimony". The Ordinariate was placed under the title of Our Lady of Walsingham and under the patronage of John Henry Newman, a former Anglican himself.

There is also an Anglican Shrine in Walsingham which has traditionally attracted large groups of Anglican pilgrims.

At Walsingham it is traditional to pray for the conversion of our British Isles to Catholic Christianity. It is appropriate to pray for a recovery of the fulness of faith within the Roman Catholic Church while recognizing the graces within the Anglicans and other Christians.