

**CONFRATERNITY of
PILGRIMS to
ROME**



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Cover Photo. Stained glass from the Trinity Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral. Recent research identifies this as the earliest known image of pilgrims travelling to Canterbury. See page 36

Editorial

Welcome to the 2021 annual newsletter.

Once again this has been an unusual year. Our innocent expectations that the pandemic would come to an early end proved unfounded and we have come to realise that we are in it for the long haul. Being forced to alter our plans for pilgrimage can be disappointing and frustrating though of course this pales into insignificance compared to the medical consequences for such a huge number of people worldwide.

And yet there are faint stirrings of hope. A small trickle of hardy pilgrims have crossed in the past few months from Calais to Dover, despite the present complication that none of the ferries is taking foot passengers. We have enjoyed reading of their experiences. There are grounds for optimism.

It has been heartening to note how many of our Confraternity members have stayed with us over the past year, and we continue to welcome new members. We are committed to regular communication and have extended our offering on social media. We believe we have built community and our zoom meetings have allowed fruitful contact with members outside of the UK who would never be able to attend a meeting in person.

The e-newsletter has the function of keeping members up-to-date with current issues. The annual newsletter allows for longer and more reflective pieces on culture and history. Each has its place.

This has been my first time to edit the print newsletter and I want to thank my predecessor Mary Kirk for her generous help and encouragement. She has set a very high standard for our publications, with steadfast dedication to the interests of our members. Happily for the Board she is now bringing her skill and dedication to the role of secretary. I am especially appreciative of her suggestion of 'pilgrimage and creativity' as a theme and I believe it has proved very fertile.

I hope you will find much to interest you in these pages. Your contributions to future publications would be most welcome.

Tim Redmond

A Creative Pilgrimage

Poet and artist Alexandra Le Rossignol tells how she combined her gifts while on pilgrimage in her home county of Kent.

In November 2019, I set off with six other artists to walk the Augustine Camino from Rochester to Ramsgate. Our aim was to walk this as a 'slow pilgrimage', breaking the stages into bite-size pieces in order to take time to look, photograph and draw the landscape and the holy places within our home county of Kent. The 70-mile Camino travels from Rochester Cathedral via Aylesford Priory and Canterbury Cathedral to the shrine of St Augustine, Apostle to the English, in Ramsgate.



The idea of attempting a pilgrimage began to surface during an icon exhibition I was taking part in, to celebrate finishing three year's training with iconographer Peter Murphy in Canterbury. We were holding it in the undercroft at Eastbridge Hospital which has welcomed pilgrims since its founding in 1190. Spending two weeks welcoming visitors, we met pilgrims from all over the world, some doing the Via Francigena, some walking the Pilgrims'

Way from Winchester or Rochester, some talking of their experiences on the road to Santiago or the shorter route, the Way of Augustine, which follows the Stour Valley from Canterbury to Ramsgate. At the time I had back trouble and a walking pilgrimage seemed unlikely for me until fellow artist Liz Garnett invited me to help her lead a group of artists on a 'creative pilgrimage'.

The seven artists all worked in different disciplines and we hoped to record our journey and exhibit our finished work. I decided to keep an artist's journal using concertina sketchbooks, and where possible to write an icon of the saints we met on the way. Back trouble being likely without warning, I visited the St Augustine's Cross before we started and completed the first icon of St Augustine to use as a prayer card to hand out on the route.



As an iconographer I like to set my icons in the landscape and this first icon of the pilgrimage [on page 7] set the saint against a background of fennel that I saw on the roadside as we approached the sea and I painted a green parakeet flying in as we heard and saw them in the trees near the cross. In my head I mapped out other key saints, Mary for Aylesford, St Jude for Faversham, Becket for Canterbury and St Mildred for Minster. After a lot

of work Augustine and Mary were complete before the pandemic put us on hold. Mary at Aylesford reflected our walk from Rochester on the North Downs Way with angels inspired by Adam Kossowski's ceramics at The Friars, beech woods catching fire and a sense of swirling November mists. A goldcrest records my fleeting sight of one in the Aylesford gardens, barely moving the air.

The links between pilgrimage and icons continued during lockdown. Although I was unable to walk, research in my art journals gave me other possibilities. We had walked past Boxley and the remains of Boxley Abbey and I had found in research a pewter pilgrim's badge in the Museum of London that was worn by visitors who came to see the miraculous rood cross in the abbey. The head was supposed to move but this was later discovered to be a fraud with puppet-like wires causing the movement. It was a budding crucifix and during the dark times I worked on producing a crucifix of wayside spring flowers and skylarks, a cross of hope. We had begun to find primroses and crocuses on our last very wet walks that stopped in March.

In many cases visiting a famous icon would be a pilgrimage in itself, often seen as a door or gateway leading us to the communion of saints. It has been interesting as an iconographer to paint the saints encountered through the pilgrimage and to go on my own personal journey using traditional materials of egg tempera, pigment and gold. On my way I have sought, as St Maximus the Confessor said, to unlock 'the unspeakable and prodigious fire' that is hidden in the essence of things. Glimpses of this can be seen in the wayside flower, or a building of ancient stones, the pattern of a landscape and the fellowship of people.

Primarily the icon in church has a liturgical function rather than being an art 'installation'. I paint each icon on gesso on a linden board using clay bole as a base for the gold and egg tempera, using dried pigments and egg stock for the paint. Some Orthodox theologians have referred to the icon simply as 'the first fruits of redemption'. They are considered nothing less than redeemed matter, reflecting both the outpouring of God's love for his creation and the iconographer's reciprocating love for their Creator. An offering, in love, of all the material elements of creation, the wood of the tree, the rocks of the earth, eggs from hens, fur from a squirrel, all reverently assembled and offered back to their Creator.



Alongside the icons I have been keeping illustrated journals of our pilgrimage and the rhythm of walking has encouraged me to write poetry. I was invited to take my journal to The Road to Rome event setting out from Canterbury and to respond to the blessing of the Pilgrim's Staff that was to be carried to Dover by Carlo Laurenzi, chair of the Confraternity. I joined the walk at the Cathedral and accompanied the staff to Patricbourne church. I had given Carlo a small card with my Augustine icon printed on it linking the two pilgrimage routes of Via Francigena and Augustine Camino, stopping en route at Augustine's Abbey and Queen Bertha's church of St Martin. He called it an 'imaginezza', printed objects hugely popular in Italy produced for a religious event. It is bad form to discard them! So my mini icon set off on its own pilgrimage.

In response to this day I wrote the poem 'Solvitur ambulando' - solved by walking, which was published in the CPR e-newsletter no18 [available on the website]. My poems are now bound in a simple, hand typeset book called *Sole Space - Poems of Pilgrimage*. The book is printed on a vintage press by Work and Turn Press based in Deal Kent and the imprint of the typeface reflects the imprint our feet leave on the land as we walk. I was asked to write about iconography and pilgrimage and I leave you with this poem that links the two. It is said that St. Augustine set foot at Ebbsfleet with a cross and an icon. I hope you enjoy it.

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Augustine

Did you want to come here?
Another migrant,
emerging storm tossed and sea sick,
seeking rock
and solidity.

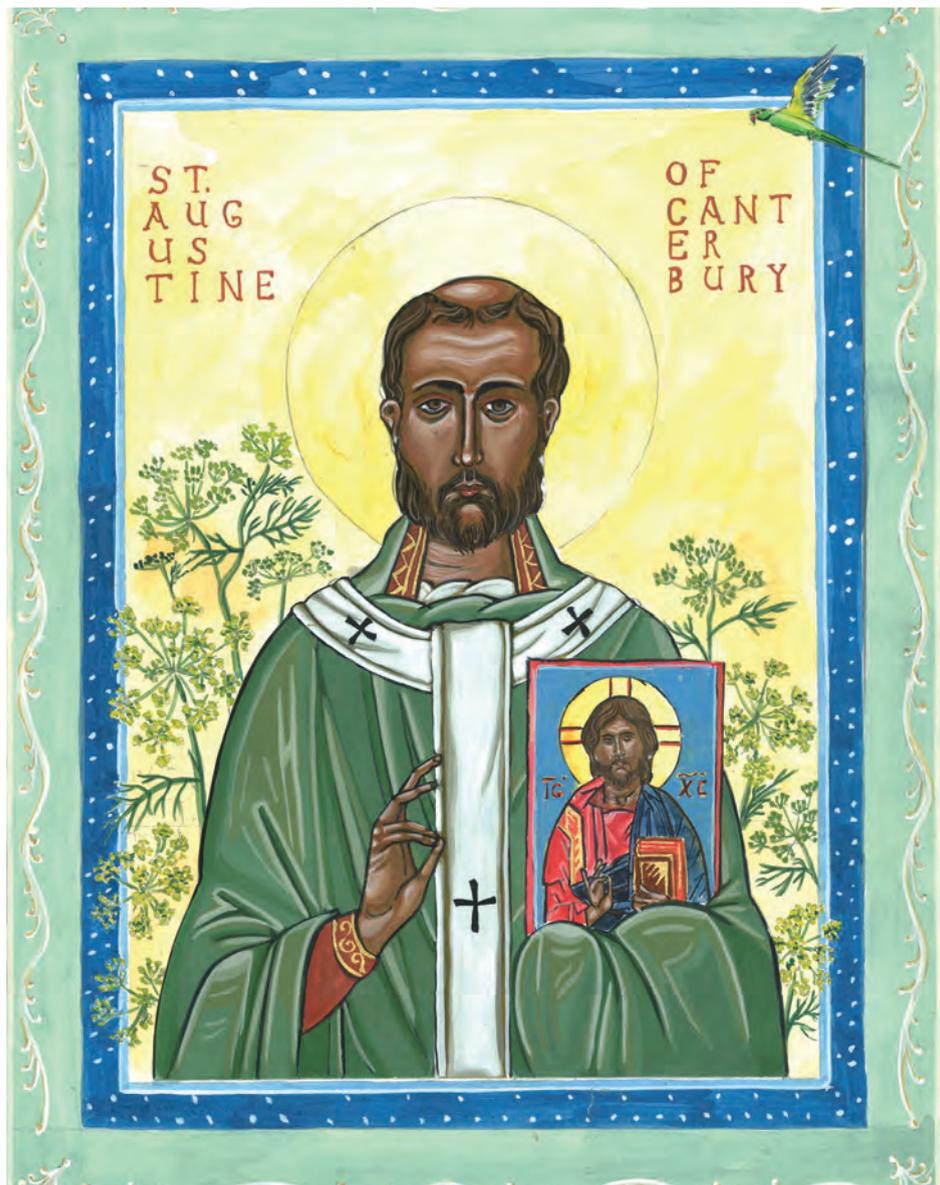
In your luggage
a cross
reminding you of your calling
and an icon,
your talisman.

Colours of your King
Vermillion
Azurite
and Gold,
clasped safely as
your feet make contact with earth.

Terre Verte
Yellow Ochre
Burnt Umber,
tide swept land
leaving borders to be crossed
with each ebb and flow.

Posted like a letter through
the franking machine
of difficulties,
bearing good news
and compassion.

A glint of 'other'
in the grey cloud smudged sky.
Lightening the land.



Angels whisper...

CPR member Andrew Dennis reflects on his own experience of pilgrimage and creativity.

If you are seeking creative ideas, go out walking. Angels whisper to a man when he goes for a walk. Raymond Inmon

Not far from the Musée des Beaux Arts on a little lane off the Rue des Jongleurs a small picture gallery was running a postcard designing competition. Coloured crayons and card had been provided for this purpose and a large carousel had been set up at the back of the shop on which the entries were displayed. Arras was *en fête* and I was having a rest day. With time to spare I sat down at a table and let my imagination fly. I had no idea what I was drawing and what emerged – bright lozenges of rainbow colour – surprised me. Maybe the experience of walking across northern France - where I'd encountered The Field of the Cloth of Gold and sculptures of Jeanne d'Arc - had sunk in after all? Looking at my efforts now these coloured lozenges hint at a knight in armour with vizor, gauntlets, breastplate and crown.



Ste Jeanne D'Arc

This minor creation is but a speck in a great sea of creativity inspired by pilgrimage down the ages. There would seem in fact to be a tradition of creativity attached to pilgrimage which takes many different forms - sacred architecture, music, poetry, stained glass, painting, church liturgy. Why, I wonder, should this be?

Why, when making my way to Rome, and later to Istanbul, did I learn to play the penny whistle, or begin photographing love notes, snippets of graffiti inscribed on walls, trees and pavements in colours to rival the wild flowers of Switzerland? What prompted Belgian Anne, a solicitor from Brussels, to write a poem each day and then bury it beneath a stone? Is there a common thread, perhaps, a leitmotif?



Automatic drawing, Arras

The Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Gustav Jung, proposes that creativity is an impulse found in everyone and not exclusively reserved for artists. When one considers the great Romanesque churches along the VF, many of them embellished by passing monarchs and wealthy businessmen, this is borne out. These individuals were no more artists than I am, and yet they were moved to celebrate and beautify what they saw. They commissioned frescoes and paintings, intricately wrought reliquaries were fashioned by goldsmiths and jewellers, new buildings were put up and stonemasons were employed to adorn them. During the medieval period it was as if pilgrims of every hue were in the grip of an inner-creative force, what Jung called the *daimon*.



From the author's Ti Amo Collection

This momentum of creativity has continued right up to our own time. Lord Byron's great epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* inspired works by Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt, Emily Bronte's masterpiece *Wuthering Heights* arose

from pilgrimages made across the Pennine moorland of West Yorkshire, while Franz Schubert's Lied *The Pilgrim*, based on a text by Friedrich von Schiller, takes as its theme a pilgrim walking towards a new destiny. I'm only scratching the surface. We can add Vaughan-Williams' opera *A Pilgrim's Progress* based on the book by John Bunyan, the lovely sacred music of the contemporary Estonian Composer Arvo Pärt, and the recordings of the Tenebrae Choir. All these artworks were inspired by pilgrimage in some way. Of course, there are deeply-held faith-based reasons for this creative outburst rising from a wish to glorify God's creation. However, there may also be reasons which have to do with the *conditions* of pilgrimage, and more specifically with the act of walking. I can speak only from personal experience and tell you that when walking something inside me changed, some lock was unbolted and I experienced a sudden kinship with the world, a sense of rebirth.



Franz Schubert (1797-1828) composed his Lied, *Der Pilgrim*, based on a text by Friedrich von Schiller:

*All my inheritance,
all my possessions
I cast away in cheerful faith,
and with childlike heart
set off with my light pilgrim's staff.*

Jung again *'The process of creation entails both construction and destruction...a certain previous condition must be destroyed in order to produce a new one'*. I'd reached Arras after being on the road for four weeks and with each step it felt as if facets of my former life were evaporating. First my identity as an organic farmer dissolved and then, after crossing the Channel, my identity as a white Anglo-Saxon male fell away too. *'Emptiness is fullness,'* the author PL Travers reminds us. The sense of emptiness this gave rise to led to a sharpening of the senses, an openness, and an experience of joy. Imperceptibly I slipped into a more creative gear.

Could this be the state of mind to which the land artist Herman de Vries refers when he writes *'When I breathe nature enters my lungs. Sometimes I have*

the feeling that I am not breathing, but the outside world is breathing me...' Or what Emily Bronte means when she observes how 'Each leaf speaks bliss to me, fluttering from the Autumn tree?' Evidently, just as for Rousseau, Blake and Wordsworth (who is said to have walked 175,000 miles in his lifetime) their creativity depended upon some loss of self achieved through the experience of walking and pilgrimage.



*Author's photo A line made by walking 2015
(on the way towards San Miniato Alto)*

But if pilgrimage has the capacity to be a *source* of creativity, might it also be a *form* of creativity, an art work in itself? Richard Long and Hamish Fulton are two contemporary artists for whom walking is an artform in its own right. Like the pilgrim, both practise a minimal 'leave no trace' approach to their work, such as in Long's case the carrying of a stone from one place to another, whereas Fulton is concerned almost entirely with his movement through the landscape. *'It needs to be said right at the start that my art is about physical movement,'* he explains. He records his walks in photographs, diagrams and texts.

It's intriguing to note the way Long's works*consisting of straight lines created by walking echo the path of the VF as it makes its way across Europe. Equally, there are similarities between the way pilgrims carry a shell, or a *credencial* from one place to another and Long carries a feather or a stone.

Andy Goldsworthy, who makes structures that are intentionally ephemeral, as if designed to disintegrate, has this to say. *'When I make something, in a field, street or altering the landscape, it may vanish, but it's part of the history of those places.'* Like a series of footprints, perhaps; like a flock of pilgrims?

Goodness, how like a poem or a painting or a piece of writing pilgrimage often seems. All are usually preceded by periods of preparation and reflection as equipment is purchased and a vague route is conceived, as paints and brushes and notebooks are acquired and sketches roughed out. Then the walk, the work itself begins, taking shape gradually as layers are added represented by places, sunsets and chance encounters, or in a poem by lines and colours, step by step, line by line. Occasionally the pilgrim loses his way like a musician stumbling over a score until eventually, after a phase of patience and effort the pilgrimage-artform emerges. To me this is very wonderful.



Archbishop Sigeric A line made by walking 990

Sitting on the steps outside the elevated church in Porcari a short distance from Lucca I came across a figure who from a distance might have been either a chap wearing a jellabiya, two men playing backgammon or possibly a street vendor selling watches and bangles. The apparition turned out to be an Estonian friar named Jean-Luc who belonged to the Brothers of Saint John

in Montpellier. Dressed in a long, grey, lightweight cowl, a pair of leather sandals, a string of crosses and prayer beads dangling from his belt, he was walking the VF alone. Jean-Luc, the 35 year-old son of a chemist with five siblings, one of them a nun, had just taken his final vows of poverty, obedience and chastity. In the tradition of a mendicant friar he was carrying no money (and no mobile phone), just a small rucksack on his back and a bedroll. Thus far he had received over two hundred euros in donations along with a larder full of food.

I was very much struck by Jean-Luc's approach to pilgrimage, by his abnegation of self and the trust he placed in the *caritas* and goodness of others. Through the taking of vows he had left a previous value set behind in order to embrace a new one.

We walked together on and off for a couple of days, begging a bed and a meal here and there and as we made our way to Altopascio I couldn't help pondering whether he was pilgrim or an artist, or whether they are one and the same?

To my mind his Australian hat was a telling feature. It was decorated with a sprig of lavender, a symbol of carefree tranquillity, and a jay's feather. The jay is noted for its creative intelligence.

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*Editor's note. Richard Long's work, *A Line made by walking* mentioned by Andrew is still in copyright and so we cannot reproduce it here. You can see it by following this link <https://qrco.de/bcMeXg> or by scanning the QR code.

Of it, Long says: My first work made by walking, in 1967, was a straight line in a grass field, which was also my own path, going 'nowhere'. In the subsequent early map works, recording very simple but precise walks on Exmoor and Dartmoor, my intention was to make a new art which was also a new way of walking: walking as art.

Kairos on the Via Francigena

Mary Kirk gives a personal account of how, walking from Canterbury to Rome, a conjunction of experiences created new ways of thinking, and thus changed her life.

*My eyes already touch the sunny hill,
going far beyond the road I have begun,
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;
it has an inner light, even from a distance-*

*and changes us, even if we do not reach it,
into something else, which, hardly sensing it,
we already are; a gesture waves us on
answering our own wave...
but what we feel is the wind in our faces.*

(Rainer Maria Rilke translated Robert Bly)

It would be difficult to write anything on how a walking pilgrimage creates new ways of thinking without citing the oh-so-often-quoted Nietzsche, who wrote “All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking.”

Current research puts his observation on a solid footing. Many studies demonstrate that walking increases creative ideation. The effect is not simply because of the greater perceptual stimulation of moving through a particular environment, but the result of walking itself.

But thoughts are one-offs, however “great” they may seem to be at the time. They can be here and then gone - evaporated - in an instant. When I walked the Via Francigena my experiences provoked thoughts that persisted, and so evolved into patterns, leading to new ways of being. Maybe my previous walks to Santiago de Compostela had done the groundwork for this, for all walking pilgrimages inevitably involve repetitive and prolonged thought about one’s self, one’s concerns and one’s experiences.

In recent decades the concept of neuroplasticity – the physiological changes in the brain that happen as the result of our interactions with our environment – has become familiar. From the time our brain begins to develop until the day we die, the connections among the cells in our brains reorganise in

response to our changing circumstances. This dynamic process allows us to learn from and adapt to different experiences. Enriched environments (those saturated with novelty, focused attention, and challenge) are critical for promoting neuroplasticity, and can provoke growth and positive adaptation long after childhood. And a solo trek from Canterbury through northern France, Switzerland and Italy is certainly one “saturated with novelty, focused attention and challenge”!

And this process opens up the possibility to reinvent oneself and move away from the status quo.

For me it began with fear. When I set off in the spring of 2016 the notorious Jungle camp of refugees near Calais had not long been demolished, dispersing its sad and often desperate occupants into and around the town. This was the febrile time before the Brexit referendum, and alarm about migrants ran high in the popular press. After the 31km walk to Dover, I crossed the Channel and arrived in Calais in the evening sure I should be mugged, and my money and passport snatched. I had made a sort of naive plea bargain with Providence - if I raised money for refugees as I walked, please could that be offset against my safety?

Any pilgrim who has walked through and out of the fortress that is Calais knows - retrospectively - that it is completely safe. You simply do not see the hundreds, often thousands, of poor souls who live hidden and hounded by the police along the coast of northern France.



But my fear set me thinking. I was wearing expensive new boots; I had a top-of-the-range lightweight American rucksack; I had euros in my pocket and in the bank. As I walked south, hundreds of thousands were trying to come

north towards what they hoped would be a better life: Syrians, Somalis, Eritreans, Kurds, Iraqis, Afghans, people from sub-Saharan Africa, were fleeing war, famine, régimes that threatened their existence. Many are being pushed deeper into poverty by the changing climate They were constantly on my mind throughout this privileged pilgrimage, especially in Italy, which at that time was taking in more than its fair share of migrants, for many landed in Lampedusa and Sicily. I remember watching gangs of Africans working on community jobs and queuing to access community accommodation.

Daily as I walked the question of refugees and migrants (it's not for me to judge who is which) kept revolving, and became part of the pilgrimage.

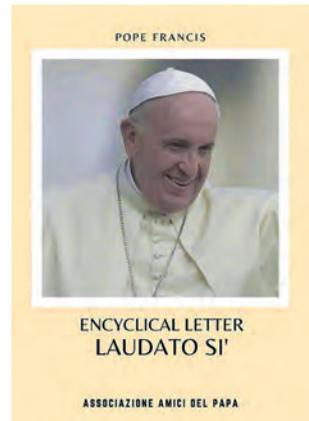
The next existential issue that confronts the pilgrim as they cross the rolling plains of Picardy is the waste and tragedy of war. For me that first week or so on the Via Francigena was perhaps the most poignant and the most formative (it was also the driest, as rain dogged my footsteps much of the rest of the way). The rows of war graves white like bones in the sun, the tiny cemeteries lost in fields, the dark crosses of the locked German cemeteries, the age of the dead - mere children - and the fact that 2016 was the centenary of the start of the terrible slaughter of the Somme, all combined to have me in tears much of the time. The sobering effect of the horror of that war made for a sombre walk, a dissonant note contrasting with the beauty of the weather and the song of larks and nightingales that accompanied me.



“Take nothing but pictures; leave nothing but footprints”. The quotation, possibly by Baden-Powell, should be the watchword of every walking pilgrim. Each living being has an impact on the environment, be it a human, plant, or animal, and it is the duty of all who walk to tread as lightly as possible, in a metaphorical sense, so that their passage has no detrimental effect. So far, the Via Francigena - with the possible exception of some parts of Tuscany - has not seen the mass influx of walkers that has turned the latter stages at least of the Camino Francés in Spain into a stinking rubbish dump. However, it is not unfair to say the further south one walks through Europe the more you see local laissez-faire attitudes to trash, with the concomitant pollution of land and water.



The year before I walked to Rome Pope Francis had published his encyclical letter *Laudato si'* on 'care for our common home'. It was a document which was praised in secular circles as well as Church ones. Walking through 'nature' and man-made landscapes it was impossible not to recall its themes. The document calls on everyone to reflect on the world around us, and to respond to the signs of the times, rejecting the contemporary 'throwaway' culture, and to open our eyes to the realities of consumerism, big business, and their influence on global and local politics.



The Via Francigena passes through some of the most beautiful and magnificent landscapes of Europe, inspiring awe and wonder (that which I was able to see through the frequent cloud and deluging rain), but it is hard to escape the evidence of agri-industry. In parts of Kent and northern France the fields are vast, stretching to the horizon, with equally vast annual inputs of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. In the beautiful misty water lands of the Po plain, rice and tomatoes are grown on an industrial scale, and huge fossil-fuel-consuming machines tear up and down the fragile terrain. And even the scenic dairy cattle of the Jura and Switzerland with their quaint cowbell tintinnabulation emit 250-500 litres of methane every day.



All this turned in my head during the daily rhythm of walk, eat, sleep. The days passed in tranquillity and solitude, and - when not soaked - breathing in the beauty of farmland, the Jura, the Alps, the Aosta Valley, the mighty Po, the Apennines, Tuscany and Lazio. But the questions kept forming, and with them the inescapable fear that the planet, and thus humanity, were doomed unless things could change. And the old counselling cliché: “you can only change yourself” kept coming back to me.

The intimation of how that change should take shape came with a phenomenon most walking pilgrims will recognise: the extraordinary

kindness of strangers. There were so many examples, but one stands out. Somewhere on a back road between Piacenza and Fiorenzuola d'Arda I was - yet again - lost. It was hot, humid and the midday sun beat down. I sat down under a tree by the side of the road, and heard a man come along the road singing. He stopped, asked if I were all right; did I need anything? I said I was fine, just lost. "Are you hungry? Come home with me and have some lunch" (I need to tell the reader at this point that I am well past the age of being invited for nefarious purposes, and my questioner had been singing "Alleluia", so I adjudged I was safe). I said water was all I needed.

Within minutes I was in the bosom of his family. I use that expression because I was being embraced by mother, father and two teenagers. I was offered water, cooling melon, lunch, coffee. They asked me to stay but I had booked an hotel as the local parish hostel was full. They drove me to Fiorenzuola, picked me up to take me to Mass on my husband's anniversary, brought me back to their home for supper, and drove me back again to my hotel, with cakes and nuts for my onward journey.



There were others - many. The famous Soeur Lucie at the abbey in Wisques cared for me tenderly when I arrived, suffering for some days with stomach pains, nausea and a slight fever, and sent me on my way with medicine. We discovered that we had both done a trial in the same monastery at different times. A pilgrim host family in Ballaigues tended my broken body, provided a massage to rival any Brian Mooney may have enjoyed, and took me in the car to visit the glorious Romanesque church of Romainmôtier. All these examples were a gratuitous outpouring of care and charity.

Where am I going with all this? That, and countless other instances, showed me the way to a conversion of the heart. Back home I started to work for 'strangers' - refugees, and raise awareness of the dire situation in Calais, where migrants are harassed daily and their belongings destroyed. I organised annual collections of money and material goods, took them to Calais and stayed to work there with Help Refugees and their partners the Auberge des Migrants.



But I am no saint, and neither am I an eco-warrior. Nevertheless, the persistence of these trains of thought on the Via Francigena, repeated each day, **created** a process within me that led to change. In the year or so after my pilgrimage I gave my large comfortable car, which had never had a day's illness in its life, to be sold in aid of a refugee charity, and bought a small, economical, low-emissions vehicle. I installed photo-voltaic panels on my roof, and changed to a 'green' electricity supplier. I gave up buying meat for a year, and now eat very little farmed meat. Three years later, walking the Magna Via Francigena across Sicily in spring, I was so blown away by the food, the simple reliance on what was in season, and its creative and delicious use, that I renewed my intention to eat only what was local and in season. I was already a gardener growing at least 70 per cent of my own vegetables. It just takes time and imagination to use the produce...759 winning ways with courgettes.



Life changes are rarely the matter of a moment. Three months of contemplation and rumination walking through nature created this process which has taken root and has become a way of being. Would it have happened anyway? I cannot tell, but I do know that the conjunction of circumstances and environment, walking to Rome in that year, which the Pope had declared a Year of Mercy, opened my ears to what he has called “The cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.”

None of these patterns was in my consciousness as I walked south, it was only on return that they gradually made their presence felt.

*Al andar, se hace camino,
y al volver la vista atrás
se ve la senda*

Antonio Machado

Mary Kirk is secretary of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome and its former editor.

Reflective Writing, Poetry and Pilgrimage

Victoria Field works as a writer and poetry therapist and is researching pilgrimage and writing as tools for transformation for a PhD at Canterbury Christ Church University.

One of the great draws of pilgrimage is our desire to simplify life. When we walk, decisions are often reduced to where and when to eat and rest, and even those might be determined for us. That's often in complete contrast to the hundreds of options we are presented with in daily life. Sometimes my days seem to be filled with fielding email enquiries, all of which require microdecisions and that's not how I'd like to be spending them.

Recently, when I was feeling scattered and unfocused, I decided to step back and work out what exactly were my responsibilities, what it was that was taking my time and energy and where I would rather spend those resources. Simple reflective writing techniques offer a strategy for getting what might feel like a muddle in our heads into some order on the page.

I first listed my work duties, as a writer and poetry therapist and doctoral student. I'm freelance and self-employed and am involved in teaching, training, running community groups, writing papers and a regular magazine column. My PhD is exploring narratives of transformation and pilgrimage, and my creative writing, often the first thing to be neglected, includes poetry, prose and drama.

Then I listed what I called 'personal and spiritual tasks', such as being a daughter, wife, auntie, step-mum, friend, Christian, meditator, a volunteer, a reader-for-pleasure, a walker, an inept gardener and occasional cook.

You might want to do something similar and then organise the various activities into what is nourishing you and the world, what isn't and what can be changed.

Having made the list, and sorted my various tasks, I concluded that at the heart of everything that's important to me is a sense of being a 'pilgrim-writer' – in that order. It's definitely pilgrim-writer rather than pilgrim/writer as the two roles, when I'm happiest, are fused rather than distinct. How might you sum up your role in this lifetime in two words? Or, if it appeals to you more, what might be your mission statement? As a person? As a pilgrim?

That set me thinking about narrow and broader definitions of pilgrimage and how they relate to creativity, especially writing and poetry.

When we think about a 'classic' European pilgrimage route such as the Via Francigena, there are key elements. It's a route to Rome, a holy place. It is a path, that is, a journey as much as a destination. It's a walking route connecting countries, cities, towns and villages. It has meaning, or meanings, to do with history, ideas of the sacred and landscape, some of these collective and verifiable, some personal or constructed. Walking the Via Francigena as a pilgrim is different from, say, a hike along the Pennine Way.

But as soon as we begin to pin down a definition, we find it's more complicated. The word pilgrimage is applied to inner journeys as well as outer ones. Pilgrimages can be secular or sacred, or a combination of the two. They can be described in terms of historical engagement or contemporary practice. The motivations for embarking on pilgrimage are individual and yet the practice is part of a growing, global movement (literally).

This is where I think poetry can be helpful. In poetry, we can stay open to ambiguity and complexity and merge our individual responses with those of others. In poetry therapy, we usually read poems together to explore their depths and the questions they pose, and use these as a springboard for our own writing.

So, in what follows, I'm going to suggest some poems that you might like to explore and use as a basis to write your own about your pilgrim experience. The idea of a sacred journey is an archetypal one that has a particular narrative structure. We use the metaphor of a journey freely in our everyday talking about experience, and often life is likened to a journey. A pilgrimage is a particular kind of journey and may be seen as an embodied metaphor for living a life.

Pilgrimage and journeys can be broken down into stages and these might be useful for thinking creatively about our own pilgrimages.

Phil Cousineau, in his popular book, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (1998, Conari Press) lists seven stages as follows: The Longing, The Call, Departure, The Pilgrim's Way, The Labyrinth, Arrival, and Bringing Back the Boon.

A booklet sold in Canterbury Cathedral gift shop, *Pilgrim's Guide and Journal* (Kihlstrom, 2009), lists six stages as: The Yearning, Preparation, The Journey, The Arrival, The Sacred Experience and The Return. Perhaps a simpler structure is simply, Before, During and After.

You might identify different stages in your own pilgrimage, perhaps drawing on writers like John Bunyan who created topographical features like a Slough of Despond and Hill Lucre to stand for particular challenges of life.

I will look at the preliminary stages of pilgrimage and suggest some poems you might work with to explore your own pilgrim identity.

The Longing or The Yearning

Before we set off on our pilgrimages, there is a longing for something. Sometimes we don't know what exactly the longing is for but there's a sense of yearning for different horizons. We might harbour a desire to undertake a long walk to explore some besetting question or to process an event. Or perhaps we're just curious, having read a book or seen a TV programme, or met a pilgrim, to experience a pilgrimage for ourselves.

A haiku is a Japanese poetic form that has become popular in the West. The usual suggestion for an English-language haiku is to have three lines of five, seven and five syllables even though Japanese doesn't have syllables as such. The haiku should include reference to the seasons and a sense of fleeting time. It is in the present tense and often conveys an insight of some kind.



One of the most popular haiku writers, Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) is still read and translated today. Here is a haiku that has been translated by many different poets. This version is by contemporary poet, Jane Hirshfield.

In Kyoto,
hearing the cuckoo,
I long for Kyoto.

Cuckoo at crescent moon by Ohara Koson (1877-1945). Rawpixel

What is it that the speaker of the poem is longing for? The cuckoo suggests that we are in the season of spring, the classic pilgrimage season. Why, when we are somewhere we want to be, do we still yearn for that same imagined place? This poem speaks to the human tendency to be discontented, to always have unfulfilled desires.

Is there something, some sound or sight that triggers longing in you? For pilgrimage? For something else. Try writing a haiku or a very short poem expressing that longing.

The Call

Once that longing becomes unignorable, we might consider ourselves 'called' to go on a pilgrimage. We book the time out from our daily lives and begin to prepare for the journey.

A poem that speaks to me of calling is 'Variation on a Theme by Rilke' by Denise Levertov (1923-1997), a poet of Welsh and Jewish heritage who settled in the United States. It was originally in her collection *Breathing the Water* (New York, NY: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1987) and is easy to find online.

In it, she writes of 'sky, air, light:/ a being' descending one day and granting the speaker of the poem 'honour and a task'. The speaker of the poem then responds by 'saying and singing what it knew: I can.'

I recommend seeking out this poem and reading it aloud to yourself, preferably more than once, and seeing which line speaks to you. Use that as the basis to write about your own calling to pilgrimage. What do the words 'honour and a task' mean to you as a pilgrim?

I hope in a future article to continue on our pilgrimage with poems about the journey itself. Meanwhile, feel free to get in touch to share your writing or insights. I'd love to hear from you.

Victoria Field

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Via Michaelis – fact or fiction?

Confraternity Chair Carlo Laurenzi continues his investigation into the Via Michaelis



A few years ago I set out to discover for myself whether the Via Michaelis is a real pilgrimage route or something imagined by exhausted pilgrims chatting in a hostel dorm. In 2017 in San Miniato, I stayed at the Yellow House which was then a new hostel on the outskirts of town. Over dinner two local walkers joined the handful of pilgrims and the hostel owner's family, around an enormous table where, in whispered tones, the two locals who were about my own age, said that once all the European pilgrimage routes had been walked, then there was 'the Michaelis'. Like everyone else around the table I had absolutely no idea what this was.

I joined the British Library and over a period of two years, spent many an afternoon poring over ancient tomes, attempting to get a better idea of the Michaelis. I was also slowly talking myself into giving it a go, if only I could fathom a route.

My research revealed a few interesting facts. The VM is in honour of the Archangel Michael, the most eminent of those few saints who were never human. It is believed the saint/archangel, came to prominence at an interesting point in European history, after the collapse of the Roman Empire. The pagan eastern tribes slowly began to Christianise and one such tribe

we now call the Lombards (the name means those with long beards), were devoted to Michael and encouraged journeys between shrines dedicated to their patron. Their love of Michael is based on various somewhat conflicting legends of his support for Christians in battles against a variety of enemies. I read the theories of scholars that the Archangel Michael had inherited some of the features of the Greek god Apollo (the son of Zeus) and had perhaps succeeded him in popular understanding. But my endeavours were not getting me any closer to a walk.



The poster discovered in Troia

Lost in my research, I sought advice from our now editor, Tim Redmond, who mentioned seeing a map, described as the VM, or in fact 'La Via per Mi-Ka-El', on the wall of a pilgrim hostel in the Pugliese hilltop town of Troia while he was walking on the southern portion of the VF. Mi-Ka-El reflects the Biblical Hebrew word which translates as 'Who is like God?'. The hostel is run by Michele del Giudice, or Michael the Judge, and his name is apt as he is a man of great wisdom. He has evangelistic zeal for the VF and also the VM. Tim also found an obscure article written in Italian blending together history, myth, early Christianity, leylines and deep mysticism. Michele is the only other person I've found to date who has walked a large section of the route, from Mont Saint Michel, in France, to Monte Sant'Angelo in southern Italy.

The precise route was still a bit of mystery, and further research suggested that what appears to be a straight line from the Atlantic to Mount Carmel in modern day Israel, did in fact, go through some amazing landscapes and joined (well sort of joined) some astonishing sacred places. On further enquiry the spot in the Atlantic is in fact the now uninhabited island of Skellig Michael, about 20 miles off the Kerry coast, which apparently featured in yet another Star Wars film (will they never end?), which is where I began my journey... and it almost ended there!

April 2019, having flown to Kerry, I booked a boat to Skellig Michael, which had been occupied for centuries on and off by various monastic groups, not helped by periodic famine and rampaging Vikings. I say that my trip almost ended there, as no boats were prepared to leave the safety of Port Magee harbour, until one enterprising South African skipper announced he would

give it go, and rather foolishly yours truly decided to follow. To describe the sea as rough, would be a gross understatement. Needless to say my large Irish breakfast was generously shared with assorted marine life! Whilst the storm did quieten a bit, it was still too rough to dock by the imposing granite cliffs, whose steep stone steps have claimed the lives of a fair few tourists over the years. I got off lightly with seasickness!



Skellig Michael (picture by NakNakNak on pixabay)

The only section in the UK cuts across Cornwall from close to St Ives on the north coast, down to the beautiful St Michael's Mount, on the south, close to the town of Penzance. Whilst the Mount is privately owned, it is managed by the National Trust. On the day of my visit I was treated to insights about the Michael Line and its associated leylines. Fascinating stuff if not a little weird



Saint Michael killing the Devil in the Chapel at St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall

for my tastes. The walk across that narrow stretch of the peninsula was only 12 miles or so, but not one church was open, and no pilgrim stamps were made available. A day spent walking around Saint Michael's Mount more than compensated.



Across the Channel, a mirror of Cornwall's island gem, is Mont Saint Michel, stunning and vast in comparison to its sibling over the water. The old, grey, cobbled streets lined with souvenir shops of all descriptions, all lead uphill towards the Abbey, a vast structure built atop of an island outcrop, almost as a warning to potential invaders, more than a sacred site.

The next sacred pearl according to my researches was close to the northern Italian city of Turin, not far from the French border, the Sacra di San Michele. By bicycle I struggled up the Alpine pass at Mont Cenis, and down the other side to Susa, where a new branch of the Francigena now heads eastwards to join the main body of the VF close to Ivrea. The overnight storms were still raging when I returned the next



day by train and taxi, but as if by divine intervention, the rains stopped as I began my walk up the steep steps to what looked more a medieval fortress than an abbey. It was definitely imposing and awe-inspiring, but it was also truly beautiful, and felt very peaceful. From a distance it looks like the fortress featured in the film *Where Eagles Dare*.

Assisi and neighbouring Perugia, Umbrian cities close to where my father's family hail from, were mentioned in the sole article I found, or rather Tim found, but had few VM reference points. In fact, I never found the church dedicated to the saint in Perugia. However I did find myself marvelling at the Etruscan architecture still visible in places. At this point on my route I took a deviation along the Via Franciscana down to Rome. The direct route would have been from Perugia, through one hill top town after another over half of Italy along the Apennine mountains. Not for the faint hearted! And for a while that was the end of my journey. I freighted my bicycle back to UK and followed it by plane after visiting friends and family.

In 2020 I returned to Rome both to complete the Italian section of the Michaelis but also to explore the Via Francigena southern extension, known simply as the Sud. The main VM point of note was Monte Sant'Angelo on the Gargano peninsula, which sticks out stubbornly into the Adriatic sea in northern Puglia. It is a strange area with three towns dedicated to Catholic popular piety – San Marco in Lamis, San Giovanni Rotondo, and Monte Sant'Angelo. San Marco is famous for *le fracchie*, huge burning torches borne on trolleys in procession through the city every Good Friday. San Giovanni was the home of St Pio of Pietralcina, commonly known as Padre Pio, a 20th-century saint whose popularity is extraordinary. It is now his shrine and is said to attract seven million visitors annually. The profusion of statues to him throughout the area leave you in no possible doubt of his fame and reputation.

The Shrine to Saint Michael is both strange and wonderful at the same time. The basilica on top is like hundreds of other churches throughout Italy. But under the basilica is the original cavern where the saint is said to have appeared, now hollowed further to produce a cavernous church. While it is claustrophobic, it is moving to see the huge numbers of pilgrims who come to spend time there in this calm space.

The route thereafter goes down to Brindisi and from there through Greece and to the Holy Land. However, that section of the VM will have to wait until finances and Covid allow!



photo: Terry Feuerborn Flickr



photo: Nikater Wikimedia

So, is it a real pilgrimage route? Well, like many things it is true if it's true in its consequences. What I mean is that if people use it as such, then it will become one. I think of the Francigena as like a pearl necklace, the string being the route, and pearls places like Canterbury, Laon, Besançon, the St Bernard Pass, Lucca and the Vatican. The Michaelis without a doubt has an extraordinary set of pearls, as I've described, but as yet has no string to link them together! A project for someone I hear you shout?

Editor's note. The search for information on the Via Michaelis is hampered by a confusion in its naming – something which also applies to a lesser extent to the Via Francigena del Sud. In different places it is also referred to as La Via per Mi-Ka-El, and the Via Michaelica. Sometimes the name is applied specifically to the route section from Troia to Monte Sant'Angelo.

There is extensive historical and cultural documentation privately produced in Italian by Gabriele Tardio: <https://bit.ly/2XcOxFa>

Searching for Via Michaelis and Via Michaelica and Quis ut Deus? [the Latin translation of the Hebrew Mikael] will reveal a variety of websites and FB pages.

Becket's Glassy Bones

The editor considers recent groundbreaking research into the history of the stained glass in Canterbury Cathedral.

Some readers may have seen news of exciting discoveries about the stained glass of Canterbury Cathedral over the past summer. A quick review of the history of the Cathedral will help to put this into context.

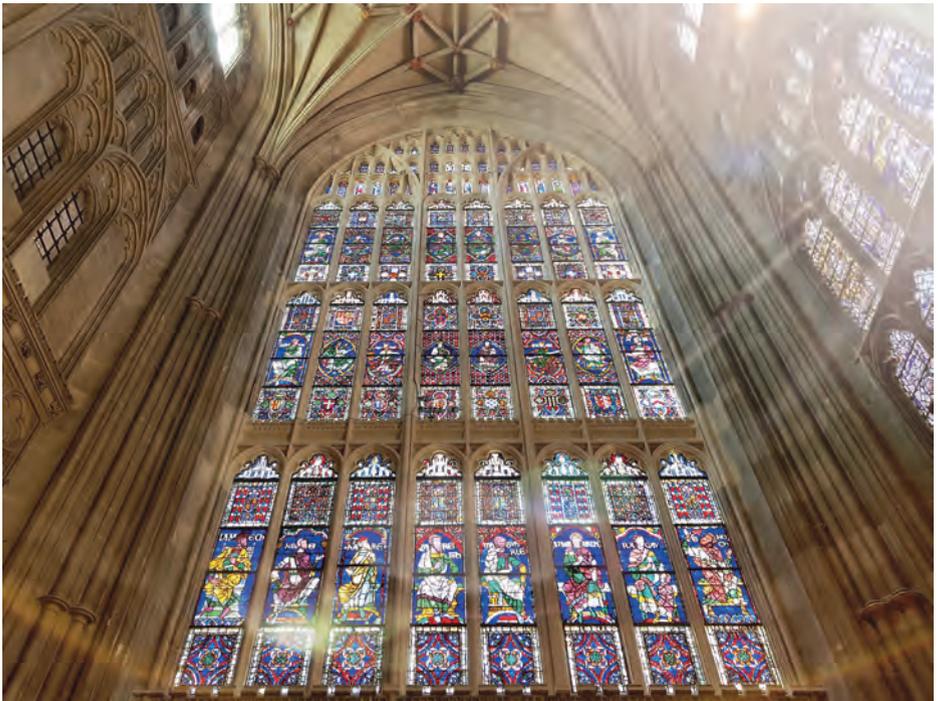
Canterbury Cathedral has a special significance for walkers on the VF as the place from which they depart. Most are able to take the time to explore it a little, even if the excitement of imminent departure may be distracting. There is of course much to see and those who can find extra time at the beginning of their pilgrimage will be rewarded. Although we are inclined to think of the cathedral as a point of departure, marked by the Zero km stone, it has over the centuries also been a point of arrival. For many generations it was the most important pilgrim destination in England.

The Cathedral itself dates back to 597, founded by Augustine who was sent to the Anglo-Saxon mission by Pope Gregory the Great. VF pilgrims will remember that Sigeric was archbishop from 990-994. A Benedictine abbey was added to the cathedral in the late 10 century. The fabric of the monastic complex was damaged in Danish raids in 1011 and the building was destroyed by fire in 1067 and thereafter was rebuilt commencing in 1070.

Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury was murdered in the cathedral in 1170 a result of his conflict with King Henry II. He was soon recognised as a martyr and canonised in 1173. His tomb in the cathedral was venerated and Henry did public penance there in 1174. The cathedral was again badly damaged by fire in 1174. Canterbury remained a centre of pilgrimage thereafter until 1538 when the shrine was destroyed during the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. Two historically important routes to Canterbury were the Old Road, or Pilgrim's Way, from Winchester and the route from Southwark taken by Chaucer's pilgrims in his Canterbury Tales.

One of the most striking features of the interior of the cathedral is of course the stained glass. It is a dominant feature in many great churches and the glass in Canterbury is on a scale to rival that of other great edifices, Chartres,

the Sainte Chapelle in Paris or York Minster. But by its nature glass is delicate and so over the centuries early works have often fallen to the ravages of attacks by the Vikings and others, fire and, in the case of Canterbury, the attentions of Richard Culmer. Culmer was a Puritan clergyman and was appointed by Parliament in 1643 to “usher in a Blessed Reformation” in Canterbury. This involved purging the cathedral of images of angels, the deity and saints. (Marshall & Walsham) These included both stonework and windows. “At one point he was personally ‘on the top of the city ladder, near sixty steps high with a whole pike in his hand rattling down proud Becket’s glassy bones.’” (Greaves)



The great south window after a renovation project 2009-2016

What all of this means is that while the stained glass in the cathedral has its origin over a thousand years ago its necessarily fragile nature means that much of it has been subject to extensive repair and restoration through the centuries, generally with an effort to restore it to what it would have looked like. So for instance after the fire of 1174, stained glass windows were created to replace those that had been lost. This process was repeated as the need arose and it means that the windows are often a mixture of original

work of different eras and restorations and the exact date of composition is hard to establish.



ca 1130 - 1160 1176 - 1180
1185 - 1220 1920s

The rest of the glazing is a patchwork of 13th - 15th century glass. All moved here in 1797.

Stained glass in the Great South Window, Canterbury Cathedral.

The stonework dates to the late 1420s.

This detail from the window on the previous page gives an indication of the mosaic of different aged panels within the window. Note the two indicated in yellow.

they adapted for their work and added an attachment they called the 'windolyzer'. This allowed for the analysis and comparison of glass from many windows.

The particular focus of attention was four windows from a large group, the so-called Ancestors of Christ windows. These were known to be of ancient origin and also known to have been largely destroyed during the Reformation. A few remaining panels from this large series had migrated to different sites within large windows in the Cathedral over the years.

The recent discoveries involve a mixture of detective work and careful study of old documents and cutting-edge scientific examination of the glass. The work was a collaboration between Leonie Seliger, the Director of Stained Glass Conservation at Canterbury Cathedral and a team from the University College London Institute of Archaeology. The team were following up a suggestion made in the 1980s by Madeline Caviness, a scholar from Tufts University, who suggested that four panels attributed with a date in the 13th Century were probably much older. This was based on analysis of archival records but could not be verified at the time. It is hard to examine windows in situ and obviously any destructive methods of analysis could not be employed.

The UCL team have developed a technique for analysing the different pieces of glass in a window which does not require the removal or destruction of physical samples. The team used industrial equipment called a portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer which

One window in particular was the subject of close attention. It depicts Nathan, This is presumably not the Nathan mentioned in the familiar coronation anthem *Zadok the Priest* by Handel, but should be the son of King David, and therefore an ancestor of Christ, mentioned in Luke 3:31. The results of the study were presented in a paper called 'Dating Nathan'. The discussion is very detailed and concerns the identification of different colours and composition of glass.

The clear conclusion supports the hypothesis that this window contains glass that pre-dates the great fire of 1174. This would make it among the earliest known stained glass in England. And the study has allowed the identification of other instances of old glass in other windows in the Cathedral. Stylistic features in the glass were also analysed, including looking at the clothing of the figures.

On one level this is a breakthrough in the use of scientific techniques to address an art-historical question. But more importantly for the 'common pilgrim' it means almost certainly that significant glasswork has been identified which pre-dates the fire of 1174 and so the windows were probably in situ when soldiers loyal to Henry II murdered Becket and later



The image of Nathan, (seen opposite in the yellow box, to the right)

when Henry came on his penitent pilgrimage. These windows are astonishing survivors and witnesses to over 800 years of history.



The window on our cover is another one of great interest to pilgrims. It is found in the Trinity Chapel of the cathedral. It had been catalogued in 1981 as the work of a late Victorian glazier. Recently another scholar, Rachel Koopmans of York University in Toronto, was working along with the Leonie Seliger at Canterbury to catalogue the ‘Miracle Windows’. After examining archived notebooks and photographs she felt this window was much older. In this instance the panel was removed to the studio for

close examination. The window contains over 250 individual pieces of glass and each was examined. The scholars were able to establish that while repairs have certainly been made, the bulk of the glass is medieval. They have established that this window dates from the mid 1180s. This was less than 20 years after the death of Becket and so the pilgrims depicted are making their way to his shrine. Close microscopic examination of the white road on which the group are walking shows original lettering PEREGRINI ST – Pilgrims of the Saint.



The editor gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Leonie Seliger and Nathan Crouch at the Cathedral in compiling this article.

All images reproduced courtesy of the Chapter of Canterbury

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The Traditional Pilgrim Staff

Michael Walsh from Tipperary explained to the editor how he crafts pilgrim staffs in the traditional manner.

Members will be aware of the Road to Rome (R2R) initiative of the European Association of the Via Francigena Ways (EAVF). This is a relay journey mainly on foot and sometimes by bicycle along the VF from Canterbury to Rome and then on to Santa Maria di Leuca along the VF del Sud. This was to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the EAVF and also to declare the road 'open' again after the worst of the pandemic.

The first walkers left Canterbury on 16 June and walkers reached Rome on 10 September and are expected to reach Santa Maria on 19 October. Ironically for walkers starting in UK there were still stringent rules concerning travel to France and while several members and friends of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome (CPR) walked from Canterbury to Dover none was able to continue to mainland Europe at that time. However, the CPR did make a unique contribution to the project with a specially commissioned walking staff which has been handed on to each successive team along the relay. In our e-newsletter no. 18 (available on the website) you can read of the special arrangements made to ferry the staff across the channel.

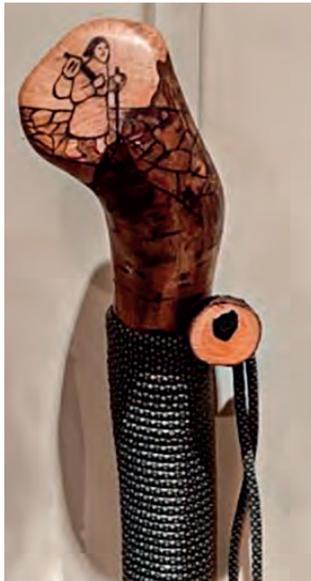
The staff was the work of veteran Irish pilgrim Michael Walsh and has generated a lot of interest so we spoke to him to find out more details. Michael has walked from his home to Santiago de Compostela and completed many other pilgrimage walks at home and abroad.



A pilgrim staff is very different from carbon fibre walking poles purchased at Decathlon, and making one is an art and a skill and also a labour of love. It is not something which can be hurried. The hazel staff Michael prepared for the R2R walk had been harvested three years previously and there was a long and complex process of preparation before it was ready for pilgrimage. This stick was



sourced near to Holycross Abbey, close to Michael's home in Thurles in County Tipperary in Ireland. It was steamed to straighten it, cleaned, sanded and shaped and seasoned and prepared with over ten coats of boiled linseed oil to get it ready for its journey. Michael also works with blackthorn and holly.



Holycross Abbey was founded as a Cistercian monastery in 1169 and in 1233 the abbey acquired a relic of the True Cross from Queen Isabella of Angoulême. Because of this relic Holycross became an important site of pilgrimage. The monastery was suppressed during the Reformation and fell into ruin. Starting in 1970, in celebration of its quincentenary the abbey was restored and is now again a functioning place of worship and once again houses a relic, pictured here with the staff. The staff was blessed by the Parish Priest of Holycross Fr Celsus Tierney before its journey began.



The finishing touches to the staff include artwork by a local artist, Julie Helen Sharp, and a cord grip which was made by a fellow stickmaker and friend, Declan O Shea. It is a very collaborative effort. And the ultimate one is a personal one - a hand-written label from Michael reading "The magic begins when you take the stick for a walk...*Ar Aghaidh Leat*". The Irish phrase means something like "Off you go!" or "Buon Cammino!"

As we go to press the stick is making its way with the pilgrims from Rome towards Santa Maria di Leuca, where Italy ends. It's a long way from Tipperary.....

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O Roma Nobilis

Alberto Alberti is the Honorary President of the Gruppo dei Dodici, which is a local group in Italy working to promote the Via Francigena del Sud, particularly the section between Benevento and Rome. He sent us information about this text, which he says is the most ancient Roman pilgrim song we have.

There are two manuscripts of this hymn, one in the Vatican and one at Monte Cassino. These date from the 12th and 11th centuries, so the claim that it is more than 1000 years old can be sustained. The text is in Latin

O Roma nobilis, orbis et domina,
Cunctorum urbium excellentissima

Refrain. Salutem dicimus tibi per omnia
Te benedicimus; Salve per saecula

Roseo martyrum sanguine rubea
Albis et liliis virginum candida. *Refrain*

Petre tu praepotens caelorum claviger
Vota precantium exaudi jugiter *Refrain*

Cum bis sex tribuum sederis arbiter
Factus placabilis judica leniter *Refrain*

Terque petentibus nunc temporaliter
Ferto suffragia misericorditer *Refrain*

O Paule, suscipe nostra precamina
cuius philosophos vicit industria *Refrain*

Factus economus in domo regia
divini muneris appone fercula *Refrain*

Ut quae repleverit te sapientia
ipsa nos repleat tua per dogmata *Refrain*

An Irish scholar Aodh De Blacam writing in 1941 suggested, though without specific evidence, that the hymn may have been written by an Irish poet. In the ninth or tenth century, Hiberno-Latin poets were plentiful and pilgrimage to Rome from Ireland was well established. He proposed a metrical and rhyming translation thus:

O Roma Nobilis

Queen of the earth, O thou Rome of nobility,
Thou the most excellent City of cities
Red with the rubrical blood of the Martyrs,
White with the Virginal garments and lilies:
 Thee we hail as we come to thy portal –
 Guard us, govern us, City immortal

Marching we come, O celestial Key-keeper
Hear the prayer of thy pilgrims, O Peter!
And when thou sittest as judge of the nations
Turn a favouring face on thy people
 That as accepted in Heaven we may to thee
 Come at the last, who here on earth pray to thee.

Hear thou also, O Paul our pleading,
Thou who patiently vanquished the heathen!
Grant, we beg thee, a share of thy benefits,
Thou, Dispenser of Heavenly teaching –
 That as pilgrims we find our guide in thee
 God at length may bid us abide with thee!

It is not taken from the Roman Catholic liturgy, but is more of a pious song, with a refrain. It has three stanzas, one addressed to Rome as the greatest of all cities, invoking protection for the pilgrim on their journey. The second and third stanzas address the two great foundational saints of Rome, Peter and Paul, each of whom was traditionally martyred there, and they are addressed in a way which fuses the notion of Rome with that of Heaven – the pilgrim drawing closer to Rome is simultaneously drawing closer to their eternal reward.

The song text seems to have been forgotten but reappeared in the 19th century and there are settings of it by Franz Liszt and by Don Lorenzo Perosi a priest who directed the Sistine Chapel Choir. It was adopted by the Vatican as the official hymn for the Holy Year, or Year of Jubilee, celebrated in 1950. Alberto points out the advantage of a hymn in Latin – allowing it to be sung in unison by pilgrims of many nationalities.



You can listen to a performance of the song on Youtube by scanning the QR code above, or go to <https://youtu.be/yk8ln5P7wl4>

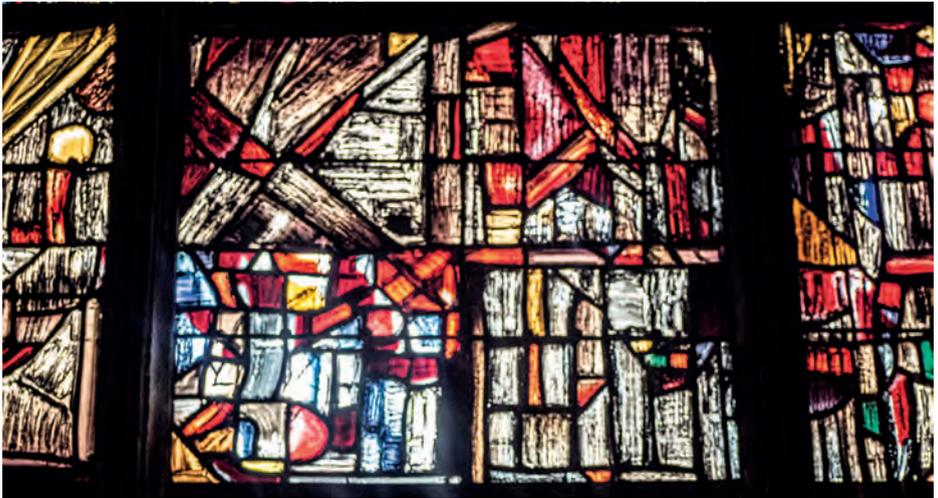
O Roma Nobilis

O Ro - ma no - bi - lis, or - bis et do - mi - na,
 Sa - lu - tem di - ci - mus ti - bi per om - ni - a, Te
 be - ne - di - ci - mus: sal - ve per sae - cu - la

Reference: De Blacam, Aodh. "O Roma Nobilis!" *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 69, no. 811, 1941, pp. 41–51. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20514830. 2021.

Stained Glass in Reims (1)

Stained glass has had several mentions in this issue and it goes back to the origins of the VF. Here is some 20 Century stained glass from Reims.

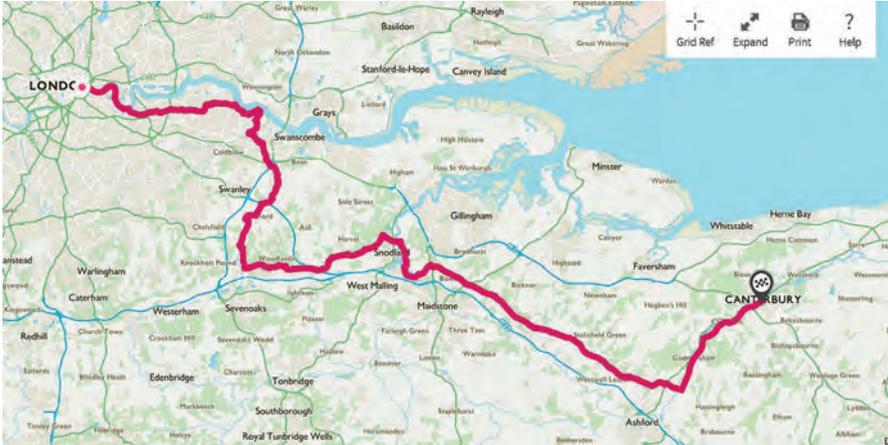


Josef Šíma (1891-1971) was a Czech artist who moved to France after the First World War. He was influenced both by Cubism and avant garde literary movements of the time. His work is largely abstract. The church of St Jacques close to the cathedral in Reims has a large collection of his work.



New VF Link from London to Canterbury

During the various lockdowns, the CPR has continued to develop a new walking route from London to Canterbury, with both boots on the ground exploration and an online survey of members. Brian Mooney reports on progress.



It's not every day that housing developers come to the assistance of long-distance walkers. But a new development of Peters Village in Kent on the east bank of the River Medway between Wouldham and Burham has done just that. The developers were obliged to build a new bridge across the river some eight km south of the traditional crossings at Rochester; the graceful triple-spanned structure is aptly named Peters Bridge, and it opens the way to a more logical and walker-friendly feeder route from London to Canterbury.

The original trail of Chaucer's imagined pilgrims to Canterbury follows the A2, but few are bold enough to take that route today. Many people do, however, want to walk to Rome from London, or through London if they are starting from home, and they are faced with a bewildering choice of alternative routes – each with their merits.

The CPR has invested time and money in seeking out the 'best'. The quotation marks are apt, because it is acknowledged that every walker will have his or her own ideas about what is best for them. Some seek speed and shorter distances and don't mind marching on asphalt and contending with light traffic, while others will prefer soft ground under foot all the way – however circuitous the route – and still others may wish to avoid slogging up hills,

even though eventually, as it nears the Jura mountains and the Swiss border, the VF will become a hilly walk with three big ranges to cross.

The link route the CPR is promoting from London to Canterbury follows in the main existing waymarked paths. These will be threaded together into a comprehensive guide.

Starting from either St Paul's or Southwark Cathedrals, the way will lead out of London as far as Greenwich along the Thames Path. Crossing Greenwich Park, the VF Canterbury link way will then snake through suburban Charlton to join the Green Chain Walk and track due east back to the Thames Path at Erith. From there walkers will again follow the Thames as far as the River Darent and they will then turn south to Dartford where they will link up with the Darent Valley Path.



Peters Bridge, Wouldham, Kent image: ClemRutter Wikimedia

The way south from the Thames is along the west bank of the River Darent which forces walkers to make an inconvenient diversion to cross another small tributary, the River Cray. Dartford Council, however, plans to build a footbridge over the River Darent and this will enable walkers to join the Darent Valley Path closer to the Thames and eliminate that diversion. The Darent Valley Path is the true gateway out of London, and it will take walkers through delightful countryside passing the sites of Roman villas and castles to the North Downs Way (NDW) at Otford. From there, the well-signposted NDW heads all the way to Canterbury, and our route will promote this as a good and viable option.

We will, however, also be offering some alternatives. For those who don't want to divert northwards to Rochester, we will recommend leaving the NDW at Birling shortly after Vigo Village in order to cross the Medway over Peters Bridge. Going east, we will also indicate where sections of the NDW that follow the high ridges of the Downs can be avoided by sticking to some pleasant routes along the valley floor. We will also suggest that walkers leave the NDW altogether at the village of Chilham to take the more scenic and shorter Stour Valley Way which leads to the very heart of Canterbury.

The estimated distance of the proposed VF Canterbury link route is 130 km, a four to five-day walk.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the CPR, Carlo Laurenzi, and Brian Mooney, have tried out every section of the proposed route, which was based on work carried out by Julia Lewis in 2020. The next stages will be to produce a guide to the route, along with information on accommodation and refreshments, and then to seek funding and permission to place a few Via Francigena information boards along the way. We will bring you updates in our regular e-newsletter.



The author and Carlo Laurenzi at the impressive ruins of Lesnes Abbey which lies on the edge of the Kentish hills some 20km from central London, and which will be one of the scenic steps of the proposed new route to Canterbury.

News Items

The Road to Rome (R2R)



We have covered this initiative of the European Association of Via Francigena Ways (EAVF) in our e-newsletters and our social media. A relay of walkers (and sometimes cyclists) left Canterbury Cathedral in June and arrived in Rome on 10 September.

On 12 September the walkers left Rome to follow the Via Francigena del Sud to Santa Maria in Leuca. They are due to arrive on 18 October. At the moment this is a 'road less travelled'. However it is growing in popularity and provides an interesting extension for those who have completed the VF between Canterbury and Rome. There are a number of enthusiastic local volunteer groups along the way maintaining the path and waymarking, though this can be patchy. Our social media continues to cover this and will give you a flavour of this route.

Canterbury Pilgrim Festival

There is optimism that the Canterbury Pilgrim Festival will go ahead next year. The date is *provisional* at the moment, 21-25 September 2022. CPR is happy to have been awarded the contract to deliver next year's festival events. It is hoped there will be events in Ashford, Canterbury, and Dover, and places along the way. The theme will be around transformative approaches for the individual, communities, and landscapes. It will feature walks, talks, therapies, visits, creativity workshops, and food. We will keep members informed through the regular e-newsletter.

Zoom Conferences

During the past 'pandemic year' we held our annual conference and several social/Q&A meetings with members by Zoom. It was a learning experience and like many others groups, we hope we got better over time! What was clear was that many members appreciated the chance to link up, and 'put a name to a face', especially those based outside of the UK. So we plan further meetings over the winter and will publicise them through the e-newsletter.

New Trustees

Three new members joined the Board of Trustees during the year and we are happy to introduce them here.



Paul Blackett joined the CPR in 2018 wanting to find out more about pilgrimage. He then took the plunge and walked the Via Francigena in 2019 whilst on a career break from the NHS. Now semi-retired, Paul has a couple of part-time roles for the NHS and for the Street Pastors in Preston where he lives with his family. He looks after social media for CPR and sees this as a powerful way to connect members.



Paulo Seth is originally from Brazil but has lived for many years in UK. He also has German ancestors, so brings quite an international perspective. He is an electrical engineer by training. He is a fervent advocate of cycling in general and cycling pilgrimage in particular, and has cycled several Camino routes, the VF, and the Pilgrim's' Way. www.EyeCycled.com



Tim Winn has recently returned from Australia to live in Blyth in Northumberland. He divides his time between walking pilgrim paths and 'agricultural landscape photography'. Tim is retired with a background in consulting with developing country transport sector government departments on how they should spend their development partner grants and loans.

Ecological considerations of our newsletter

Several members have contacted us suggesting they would be happy to receive the annual print newsletter in electronic form, to save on postage costs and indirectly to save the planet. Already most of our communication is electronic. We think the 'long form' of the print newsletter has value and is distinct from the regular e-newsletter. We will survey members in the new year to see how we can best offer a choice.

The editor is always happy to receive news items and articles. Send to cpreditor@pilgrimstorome.org.uk

For Fun



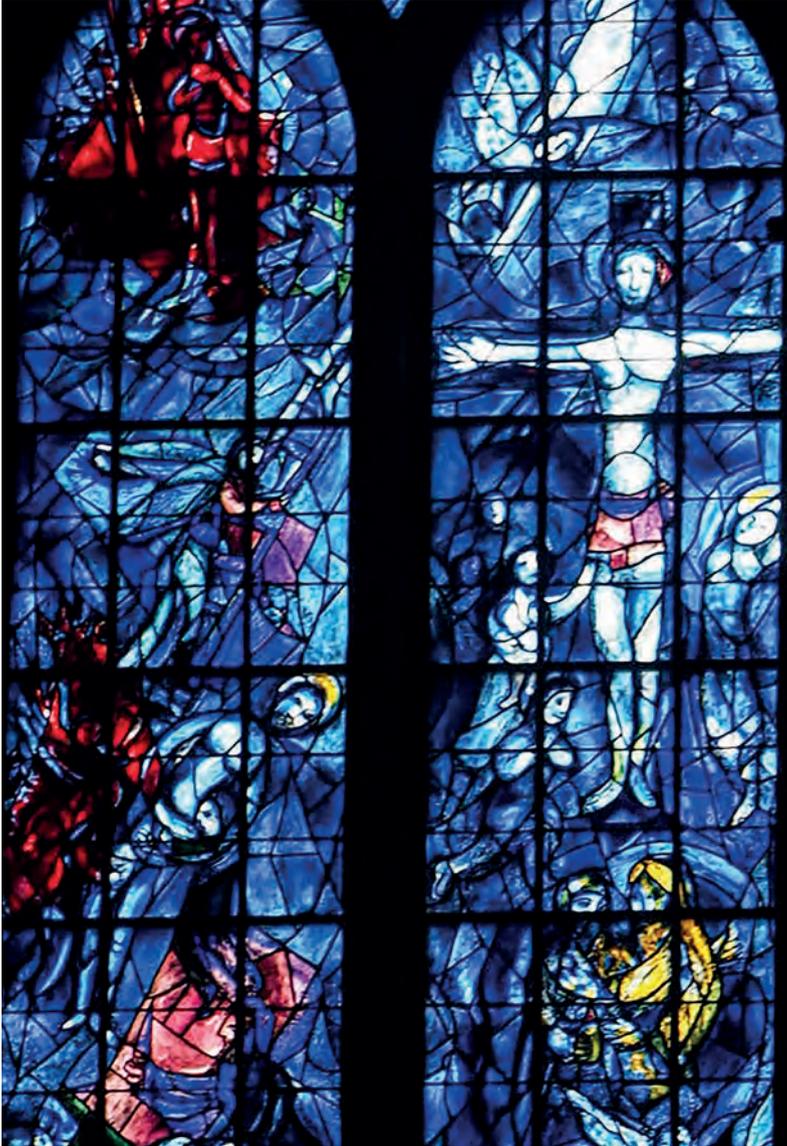
Alps	Rucksack
Auberge	LaManche
Blister	Lausanne
Boots	Lucca
Calais	Ostello
Canterbury	Piacenza
CisaPass	Reims
Credential	Sigeric
Dover	StMaurice
France	Suisse
GranSanBernardo	VaticanCity
Guidebook	ViaFrancigena
Italia	Walkingpoles

The evidence that doing word puzzles can help stave off dementia is conflicting. We cannot possibly comment!

But we hope that finding these words may bring back memories.

Words may go horizontally, vertically or diagonally, forwards or backwards.

Stained Glass in Reims (2)



Most visitors to Reims will *not* see the glass by Josef Šíma (p42). Surely very few will miss the work of Marc Chagall (1887-1985) in the Cathedral. This is a detail of the crucifixion, above the high altar.

CONFRATERNITY OF PILGRIMS TO ROME

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