CONFRATERNITY of PILGRIMS to ROME

NEWSLETTER no. 28 2022

ISSN 2633-7193

CONTENTS

Editorial

Foreword from the Chair - Carlo Laurenzi

News from Calendasco - Brian Mooney

Cover story: a pilgrim in search of healing - Karen Slade

The pilgrim road to healing - Professor Stephen Regel

Pilgrim typology - Andrew Dennis

Walking pilgrimages to healing and wholeness -

- Anja Bakker
- Lucina Silvers
- Faye Smith: Ambulation not medication

"Every day is now a blessing" - Sandy Brown

The Kent Pilgrims Festival 2022

- Two pilgrim poems - Victoria Field

The pilgrim sculptures of Fidenza - Gail Turner

The 2023 CPR calendar

Who's who in the Confraternity

Cover picture: Replica of the Pilgrim Tile by Karen Slade (Kate the Tiler)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the annual print newsletter of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome 2022.

In each issue, of recent years, a theme has emerged - pilgrimage and spirituality, pilgrimage and the environment, pilgrimage and creativity. This year our subject, pilgrimage and healing, developed naturally from an overview of the many events which made up the Kent Pilgrims Festival (see p. 35 et seq) in September, delivered by the Confraternity...transformation, wellbeing, health, wholeness, recovery.

After all, the quest for healing - for oneself or on behalf of another - was often at the heart of medieval pilgrimages, and many pilgrimage routes became established after miracles of healing took place at particular shrines. The tradition is maintained today with organised pilgrimages of the sick to shrines such as that at Lourdes, where there have been medically attested physical cures.

Our cover story, told by Karen Slade (aka Kate the Tiler), is the discovery of the condition that may have afflicted one pilgrim on his way to Canterbury in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

What is clear from other contributors to this publication is that they often undertook their first walking pilgrimage in the unconscious but instinctive knowledge that something in them, their past, or their current life was in need of change and of healing, and that this undertaking of maybe thousands of miles into the unknown could perhaps provide something that conventional treatments maybe do not - and cannot. Their stories are - simply - inspirational, and we hope they will indeed inspire others to take that first step. The Confraternity is here to provide information and advice on how.

Professor Stephen Regel, founder of the Centre for Trauma, Resilience and Growth, gives some of the scientific rationale for how the walking pilgrimage aids recovery and growth, and tells us how in his work he accompanies those whose lives have been shattered by traumatic loss at the start of their journey towards healing.

Members who contributed to our fund back in 2020 to help Danilo Parisi replace his boat which had been vandalised and sunk will be pleased to read of the party, attended by our Vice Chair Brian Mooney, to celebrate the new launch, and to see the CPR logo in pride of place on it.

I would like to thank Tim Redmond, who edited the 2021 newsletter, for his shining example, and wish him well as he cares full time for a family member.

Mary Kirk

A FOREWORD FROM THE CONFRATERNITY CHAIR, CARLO LAURENZI, OBE

I am still a little high on the back of the recent Kent Pilgrims Festival, which concluded on 25 September, a marvellous series of events which this newsletter covers in some detail.

We have welcomed back as trustee Julia Lewis, our Canterbury representative; and a new member Eamonn Mullally, who was introduced in the July e-newsletter, thereby strengthening the board. We are still short of people willing to become trustees, I am sure that there must four of you out there happy to dedicate some time to this great cause - if so, contact me directly, on chair@pilgrimstorome.org.uk.

The Via Francigena has been open all year, and the numbers coming through continue to rise, despite problems such as the foot passenger ferry services being temporarily withdrawn at Dover, extreme weather conditions which saw the drying up of the river Po, and the ongoing saga of Schengen area bureaucracy, limiting non-EU citizens to a maximum of a 90-day stay.

The Via Francigena is applying for UNESCO World Heritage Status via the European Association of Francigena Ways (AEVF). If successful it will add a large degree of kudos to the route, hopefully translating into more statutory funding to improve the overall quality of the pilgrim experience.

The new CPR London to Canterbury route continues to attract interest. Why not try it? You can find it at: https://pilgrimstorome.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2022/06/London-to-Canterbury.pdf.

You can download the pdf for free, but we just ask you in return to send us your feedback, so that we can refine and improve it in time for next spring. We are looking for a volunteer to work alongside me to process the feedback over the winter months - the northern hemisphere winter, that is - so it could a member anywhere on the planet. Let me know if you're interested.

Our planned new website launch has been delayed because of technical issues, but more on this in due course.

Calendasco throws a party for the Confraternity

The Commune of Calendasco threw a party in late September for the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome to thank its members and supporters for helping Danilo Parisi buy a new launch for his River Po ferry.

Filippo, Brian Mooney and Danilo with gifts they exchanged at the celebratory dinner. Danilo is, of course, holding a Confraternity mug!

Confraternity Vice Chair Brian Mooney and his wife Gail represented CPR, and were fêted with a concert of medieval violin, drum, flute and bagpipe music and a song-filled dinner at Danilo's house on the banks of the river. The event was coordinated by Calendasco's energetic young mayor Filippo Zangrandi, a keen supporter of the Via Francigena which passes directly through his commune. In addition to helping Danilo and planning for his eventual succession, Filippo is also promoting a project to convert an outer building of the partly-restored medieval castle in Calendasco into a pilgrim hostel. The celebratory concert was held there, attended by many who had come to support the mayor's initiative to promote local culture.

Danilo, 73, has no intention of retiring. He resumed his ferry crossings on 20 August after a lapse of nine weeks when the service was suspended because the Po had virtually dried up. It is now flowing again, albeit at a lower level than normal, as Brian and Gail saw for themselves when they took a ride across with Danilo to collect a pilgrim. Footfall has bounced back with more than 200 crossings since the service resumed.

The river launch carries the CPR logo as a testament to the generosity of members and pilgrims from all around the world; 148 contributed €6500 euros to help pay for a replacement after Danilo's boat had been vandalised and sunk during Covid lockdown.

Danilo, one of the most loved and best known characters on the Via Francigena, has ferried in excess of 11,000 pilgrims across the River Po since he reintroduced the service in the 1990s. The river crossing was part of Sigeric's itinerary. Danilo keeps a register of every pilgrim he carries. Their names, and details – their route, age, gender, nationality and occupation – are all inscribed in four magisterial books bound in leather and board.

This *Liber Peregrinorum* is a veritable treasure trove of the Via Francigena – an unmatched record of the early history and growing popularity of the reinstated pilgrim route. Each year Danilo mines it for an updated statistical analysis of long-distance pilgrim journeys to Rome which is published by the CPR (see previous CPR newsletters).

Danilo ferries both cyclists and walkers for the excitement of greeting and helping people, and for the love it. It is advisable to book your ride by calling him in advance on +39 0523 771607. He charges a modest amount – enough, if he is lucky, to cover his fuel costs and other expenses. The warm welcome in the shaded courtyard of his farmhouse, the friendly banter he shares with pilgrims from all walks of life, and the ceremonial signing of his book, and the stamping of the pilgrim passport make the encounter so memorable.

Brian Mooney

Danilo holding the paddle he uses to propel the launch up a narrow creek into the open river

Cover story: A pilgrim in search of healing

Karen Slade, also known as Kate the Tiler, describes how she came to believe that the pilgrim depicted on the medieval tile found at Canterbury Cathedral was in search of healing

Making, researching and demonstrating medieval tiles for the last 26 years has led me to some wonderful places, and I gather stories and information from the people that I meet, when I'm dressed in medieval clothing, demonstrating how tiles were made in the late 13th and 14th century.

One of my favourite examples of this came from a request by a team at Canterbury Cathedral to make a copy of a rare and remarkable tile showing the image of a pilgrim, bent over his staff, on his way to St Thomas Becket's shrine at Canterbury. This was found in 2014 by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, lying just ten centimetres below the stone paving slabs in the Great Cloister, on the edge of an area of a previously unknown intact medieval tiled floor. It consisted mainly of plain chequered tiles, with some fleur de lys, and was left intact and reburied so it is no longer visible to the public. The dig was part of a

project to try to improve visitor access and see whether it was possible to install a lift shaft there.

I was sent a photograph of the Pilgrim Tile in 2015 so that I could make a copy for the Canterbury Cathedral project team at 'The Canterbury Journey', to use for interpretation activities with the public. I recognised it as a match to one that I had seen some years earlier at Godmersham, set into a windowsill at St Lawrence Church, about eight miles from Canterbury, but it was not easy to make out the figure.

I carved a wooden pattern block and made replica tiles using the same methods and materials as the original tile makers, who were based just outside Canterbury at a place called Tyler Hill from the late 13th century up until circa 1325[1].Tiles from their kilns were set into church floors throughout Kent including at St Augustine's Abbey. Before I made a start on drawing out the design, by coincidence another example of the tile was recorded a few weeks later on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database in Northamptonshire. This is far outside the usual distribution area for Tyler Hill tile patterns and so far there is no other information about the context of this example.

Over the years while making and talking about medieval tiles I have come to realise that every tile pattern is put there for a reason. Often I don't know what that is when I start to make the pattern, but because I work with the public rather than alone in my workshop, I am lucky to meet people who have more knowledge than I do about medieval heraldry, warfare, symbolism or other disciplines which

they share with me, and help me to build up a fuller understanding of the patterns. Because of the Reformation much of our visual language in churches in England was lost, and it is harder for us to see these tiles in the way that the original medieval congregation would have known and understood them.

Some tile researchers disagree with this, but I see meaning and significance in their symbols and patterns. Many designs have numbers that are significant to the Church, such as three leaves to show the Trinity, four for the Gospels, or the twelve Apostles. Others are more obscure and difficult to interpret and for one or two there is a further meaning which becomes clear only when I meet someone from a completely separate discipline who can use their own experience to tell me what they see.

In September 2018 I met someone who transformed my interpretation of the Pilgrim Tile when she said, "You do realise that he's not just a pilgrim, don't you? That he's actually going to Becket's shrine in search of healing?" When I questioned her, she told me that she had worked in India, with patients who displayed the exact posture shown by the Pilgrim, including needing to use a staff to enable them to walk, otherwise they would fall forward because they could no longer stand upright unsupported. She was a doctor of osteopathy, treating bone conditions including fused vertebrae in the spine and that this condition is known as Kyphosis. In Britain doctors rarely have to treat anyone with such severe deformity of the spine because people get treatment much earlier, but in India the poor don't have access to medicine to prevent this.

Kyphosis

When I later looked for the words 'Medieval Archaeology Kyphosis', I found hundreds of references to medieval skeletons with the deformity shown by the Pilgrim, in most examples this was shown to be caused by a progression of the disease tuberculosis.

A few weeks ago during a church service we attended by chance while away from home, the sermon included the following passage from Luke, chapter 13 and I realised that the Pilgrim Tile could also be connected to this miracle:

> *10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. She was bent over*

and could not straighten up at all. [12] When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." [13] Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God
(Luke 13:10-17 New International Version)

My understanding of the relationship between medieval pilgrims and the saints is that they visited a shrine seeking intercession for their afflictions with Christ, rather than feeling able to communicate directly with God. The depiction of the Pilgrim on the tile made at Tyler Hill and placed in Canterbury Cathedral and other local churches shows this relationship, of someone seeking St Thomas's help in the hope that Christ will perform another healing miracle and cure the deformity.

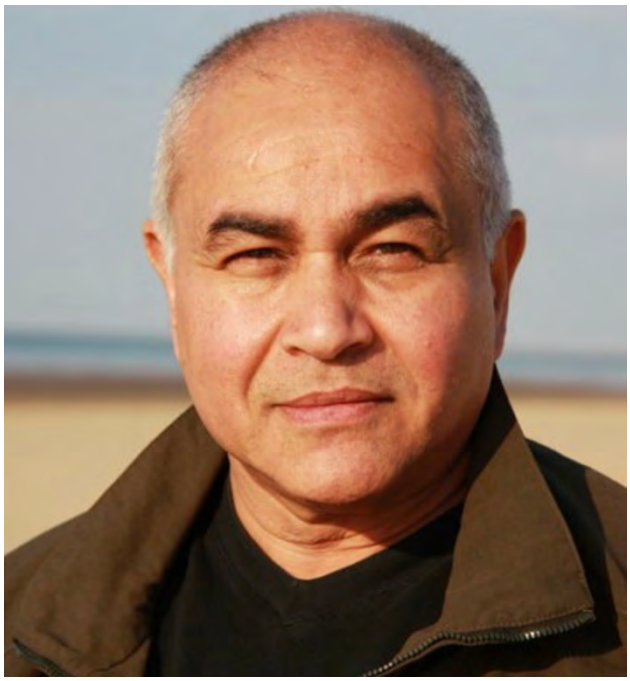
Pilgrim tile pictured in Canterbury Great Cloister
Copyright of the Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral Photographs of Great Cloister Lift Pit 2014 - Canterbury Archaeological Trust Limited Report No: 2014/104 Archive No: 3440

I am extremely grateful for the opportunities that have enabled me to interpret the Pilgrim Tile more fully. I hope that through demonstrating medieval tile making I am able to show people a glimpse of how ordinary medieval people saw their world.

Karen Slade, Company of Artisans. 2022

1. Horton, M.C., 2001, 'The Floor Tiles', in M. Hicks and A. Hicks, 'St Gregory's Priory, Northgate, Canterbury. Excavations 1988-1991', *The Archaeology of Canterbury*, New Series, Volume II , 187-211.

The pilgrim road to healing



Professor Stephen Regel, clinical lead and founder of the Centre for Trauma, Resilience and Growth, Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and Honorary Professor in the School of Education, Nottingham University, has been working with survivors of trauma and traumatic loss for more than four decades. Here he describes the road to recovery in terms of a journey, but also considers how a walking pilgrimage can readjust and recalibrate one's inner world after such an event.

There will be so many reasons that will prompt an individual to undertake a pilgrimage, but I would speculate that for many, there will undoubtedly be a 'spiritual motivation', but I use that phrase in the broadest sense. The physical act of movement will of course be beneficial, but the physical challenge and - by default - the expression of emotion that will often be released as the motive for undertaking the journey, accompanied by the resonance of an encounter, and tiredness and fatigue which begin to take hold, can be cathartic in many ways, perhaps releasing waves of memory previously held back, sometimes over many years. My firmly held view is that there is no shame in that very human expression of emotion. Many undertake a physical task of such magnitude to readjust and recalibrate their world after life-changing circumstances, a recent or long-past traumatic event and of course, in many cases the experience of loss.

It goes without saying that the last two or so years have been challenging for us all. Everyone has been impacted, either directly or indirectly, by the Covid pandemic. Our natural resilience has been tested, in many cases to the limit, and I am acutely aware that there will be many who make a pilgrimage for intensely personal reasons. The most significant of these may be because they have

experienced a loss or series of losses. Globally, the normal rituals which allow us to manage and cope with loss and the subsequent grief were inhibited, disrupted and prevented by the circumstances of pandemic, thus delaying, and complicating our natural responses to such losses.

The experience of traumatic bereavement can shake or shatter an individual's or a family's 'assumptive world'. As human beings, we hold three basic beliefs or assumptions about the world, others, and ourselves. These 'silent assumptions', of which we are not necessarily conscious, include a belief about our personal invulnerability; a sense that the world is meaningful and comprehensible; and a positive sense of ourselves and others. Yet, the experience of sudden, traumatic death can disrupt the basic scaffolding of everything that the person holds to be true about themselves and the world. It's why there is often a profound sense of violation, confusion, loss of identity, and meaning; as if the world had been turned upside down. Following the death of his wife, C.S. Lewis wrote that 'No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting.' He also wrote… 'Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape', this further confirming, for me at least, the metaphor of emotional journeys as pilgrimages.

Lewis also described a lack of social resonance with others, and his ambivalence about engaging in social interaction. Many who have been bereaved describe being disconnected or distanced from others and the social world, of 'observing everything from a distance', 'being in a bubble' or that 'life has stood still' and this implies a numbing, an inability to feel even the slightest intensity of emotion. Therefore, whilst the idea and experience of 'pilgrimage', having to connect and be with others may be daunting, it may indeed be one of the metaphorical 'cures'.

As I write this, the Queen's recent death has dominated the news, and inevitably so has the impact her death has had on the nation. Much was written about 'a nation's grief' and 'public mourning'. However, I could not help but also reflect on the notion of the 'the queue' as pilgrimage. The queue to see the Queen lying in state soon became the focus of the coverage. There was a journey to be undertaken. Much was made of the distance and the time taken to cover it. There was discussion of preparations made, food and other essentials taken, the physical demands of the journey. Emotion was expressed, friendships forged, but above all everyone spoke of and reflected on the meaning of the experience, which of course was different for all.

Over the past four decades my work has involved many metaphorical pilgrimages with those affected by trauma and traumatic loss. In my experience, there is an experiential difference between those of us who have experienced the loss of a loved one or friend suffering from a terminal illness and those affected by loss which is sudden, violent, and unexpected, such as suicide, homicide, or accidental death. It has been the latter that has predominantly been the focus of my work over the years. I also acknowledge that any loss, whatever its nature is traumatic. For those affected by a traumatic loss, there are no opportunities for preparation. It is comparable to being blindfolded and thrown out of a back of truck, late at night on a deserted road. That sense of terror, bewilderment, despair, fear, helplessness, hopelessness, and loneliness, whether you're an individual or a family is completely overwhelming. A guide for the journey ahead is required.

In such circumstances, therefore, my role is to accompany them on this pilgrimage. I may be an experienced guide who has walked the path many times before but I am not an expert guide, which implies little room for infallibility. Every journey is different, and I will always walk at their pace. There will be times when we will have to leave the path and change direction because of unforeseen obstacles; on some occasions we will have to stop, take stock or turn back; shelter from the weather, or find the river that we planned to wade across is in spate so we need to wait for the water to subside and accept that we may have to rest for a while. So, whilst I have walked this path many times before, every individual's journey is in a sense a pilgrimage, and it will be demanding, arduous and sustained, and the emotional and spiritual destination will be different for everyone. The challenges and obstacles will be many, but not insurmountable. Ultimately, we'll get to that point at the edge of the forest, and then I'll give you the map, discuss the route ahead, make sure you are prepared as possible, have appropriate supplies, then we'll wave each other goodbye, though hopefully our

paths may cross in time when we'll be able to share your experiences of re-engaging and reinvesting in life.

Many studies have shown that post-traumatic growth is common for survivors of events such as natural and man-made disasters, torture, refugee experiences, serious accidental injury, domestic violence, interpersonal experiences (early abuse), medical problems such as cancer, heart attack, HIV/AIDS, and other life experiences e.g., relationship breakdown, parental divorce and bereavement. Typically, 30-70 per cent of survivors will say that they have experienced positive changes of one form or another.

Positive change

The three broad domains of positive change which have been noted throughout the literature in this area mirror the benefits that pilgrims on, say, the Camino describe. First, relationships are enhanced in some way. For example, people describe that they come to value their friends and family more and feel an increased sense of compassion for others and a longing for more intimate relationships. Second, people change their views of themselves in some way, for example that they have a greater sense of personal resilience, wisdom, and strength, perhaps coupled with a greater acceptance of their vulnerabilities and limitations. Third, people describe changes in their life philosophy, maybe finding a fresh appreciation for each new day and re-evaluating their understanding of what really matters in life.

I also want to briefly share a simple activity which has the potential to enhance the experience of this pilgrimage, and which has shown fascinating benefits. I always suggest it to people that I support through a traumatic bereavement. Known as 'Expressive Writing', it allows the writer to openly share thoughts and unlock the potential health benefits of writing about emotional upheaval. Evidence has shown that writing about stressful or traumatic events and upsetting emotions can help the person process the event, which in turn can decrease stress and rumination.

Just write, when you can, and this journey may perhaps - like a walking pilgrimage - bring you to reflect on other life experiences, and the motivation that led you make the decision to perform this simple but perhaps potentially profound journey. The early studies of expressive writing found improvements in the immune systems of those who in the group who wrote of their experiences after a traumatic event. A relatively recent study asked individuals undergoing a simple but invasive medical test to write about their experiences either before or after the procedure. Participants were randomly allocated to an expressive writing or neutral writing group. Not only were there positive effects on mood on those who wrote before the procedure but there were also significant positive differences in their rates of wound healing compared to those who wrote of their experiences later.

The walking pilgrimage and wellbeing

'The heavens themselves run continually round, the sun riseth and sets, the moon increaseth, stars and planets keep their constant motions, the air is tossed by the winds, the waters ebb and flow, to their conservation no doubt, to teach us that we should ever be in motion.'

So wrote the 17th-century scholar Robert Burton in his classic treatise, 'The Anatomy of Melancholy', considered by a some to be one of the first 'self-help' books. Burton deals primarily with the causes and cures for melancholia - what we would all now know as depression. The first section is devoted to its causes and symptoms and the second is devoted to 'cures'. Among the many suggestions and remedies, from art, reading and writing, Burton espoused exercise. He wrote to manage his own struggles with his low mood, and offers in almost the last words of the book, 'Be not solitary, be not idle'. Burton is considered in many ways to be ahead of his time in advocating exercise as a 'cure' for a low mood, something that we now acknowledge brings about not just physical wellbeing, but mental health benefits. Whilst the popular and current focus is on the beneficial physical effects of exercise, Burton favoured exercise as something that was most beneficial in moderation and therefore its benefits were more nuanced and multifaceted.

This brings me to the core of this brief reflection about an activity, which is so simple, but so instrumental in the role it occupies in our lives and often central to our health and wellbeing, that of walking. It has played a role in the generation of ideas, philosophy, poetry and literature, having been the focus of many classic literary journeys. In its most energetic and extended form, it is at the heart of any pilgrimage. Those long-distance journeys that have become synonymous with spiritual, and often significant physical, effort. A pilgrimage by its very nature involves a goal, a destination and is not just an aimless stroll, but is purposeful and ultimately has personal meaning (of which more later).

However, pilgrim, from *peregrinus,* originally denotes a foreigner or exile, not someone heading somewhere, but one who is not at home where they are walking but passing through, and for many of us who have undertaken a long-distance walk, that will resonate in many ways. We all meet fellow travellers along the way, exchange greetings, pause and share experiences, discuss the vagaries of the weather, all in a pleasant but transitory way. The original aim of the pilgrimage was to augment one's devotion or bear witness to one's faith. It could also be undertaken as a penance or punishment often with painful privations. However, I would suggest that the modern pilgrim undertakes the journey for many reasons. These might be intensely personal, and the journey - whether alone or with companions - would be for reflection rather than focused on the destination, though of course reaching the destination will inevitably bring an enormous sense of achievement and purpose. So, in essence, the pilgrimage contrasts melancholic wandering with purposeful walking. Montaigne called this his 'proumenior': it stimulated his thinking, moved his reflections forward…..*'My thoughts sleep if I sit still; my fancy does not go so well by itself as when my legs move it.*' When we are

struggling to gather our thoughts or wrestling with a problem, we get up, we move, take a walk and the mind starts moving again.

My love of walking, especially along long distance paths, was inspired by literary journeys, beginning with Laurie Lee's 'As I Walked out One Midsummer Morning' - the title alone drew me in and captivated me. The notion of walking with only a violin and a few clothes from London, through Spain and into the Spanish Civil War at the age of 19 was heady and romantic. It is a book written with a poet's eye and is intoxicating in its evocation of pre-war rural Spain. Then there is Patrick Leigh Fermor's 'A Time of Gifts', an erudite description of his attempt to walk across pre-war Europe aged 18 from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople. Leigh Fermor followed this with a second volume, 'Between Woods and Water', describing the second leg of the journey from Czechoslovakia to Romania. More contemporaneously there is Rory Stewart's 'The Places in Between', an account of his solo walk across Afghanistan in 2002, as well as Nick Hunt's more recent description of trekking 2500 miles across Europe in the footsteps of Leigh Fermor in 2011, and of course there is Bill Bryson's attempt at the Appalachian Trail, 'A Walk in the Woods'.

I have had brief excursions into Rousseau's 'Reveries of a Solitary Walker', as well as the writing of the 17th-century Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho 'The Narrow Road to the Deep North and other Travel Sketches'. Basho acknowledges at the start, that he 'is filled with a strong desire to wander'. He also begins by observing... 'Days and months are travellers of eternity. So are the years that pass by.'

If contemplating a pilgrimage, I would recommend any of these as travelling companions for the journey, not just for the writing, but for the inspiration they may provide to reflect on the sights, sounds, smells, conversations, observations and chance encounters which enrich the experience of moving from place to place. In addition, time should always be allowed to stop, be silent and listen. In Rousseau's Eighth Walk, following feelings of despair, he writes ... 'I recovered my serenity, tranquillity, peace and even my happiness, since every day of my life brings me the pleasure of remembering the previous day's happiness and I desire nothing more for the next day.....I have learned to bear the yoke of necessity without complaining. It is that I was trying hard to hold onto a thousand different things at once and that, all these things having escaped me one by one and my being left only with my own self, I have finally regained a settled position. Under pressure from all sides, I keep my balance because, no longer clinging to anything, I lean only on myself.'

I have written this as someone who has completed nine long distance paths and always looked forward in anticipation of the journey, relished the planning, been mildly consumed by the packing and unpacking of the rucksack in preparation, enjoyed the search for guest houses or pubs, choosing the best guidebook and map, not to mention the numerous other inconsequential physical and psychological ephemera that accompany such adventures. I walked the last of those journeys alone. I found this solitary experience the most personally intriguing and enlightening. It may sound cliched, but being alone with one's thoughts, often only accompanied by birdsong, complete silence, or the sound of wind through trees, reflection was and is inevitable. Silences have a meditative texture and tone, sometimes depending on the time of day.

So, pilgrim, we are ending this brief journey, but whatever you do, pack that journal, your favourite pen and write - or draw! Keep those little mementos of places, people, and other encounters - a simple drawing, a receipt, a stamp, a dried flower, a snippet of a conversation. I find a theme emerging as I look back and that is one of reflection and hopefully constructive introspection. However, as I said earlier, everyone's journey will be unique - yours will be too.

Bibliography

Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy,
Laurie Lee, As I Walked out One Midsummer Morning –
Patrick Leigh Fermor, A Time of Gifts
Patrick Leigh Fermor, Between Woods and Water
Rory Stewart, The Places in Between
Nick Hunt, Walking the Woods, and The Water
Bill Bryson, A Walk in the Woods.
J-J Rousseau, Reveries of a Solitary Walker
Matsuo Basho, The Narrow Road to the Deep North and other Travel Sketches.
C S Lewis, A grief observed
Robert Macfarlane, The Old Ways, Penguin Books 2013.

Andrew Dennis: Pilgrim typology

Long-time Confraternity supporter Andrew Dennis recounts how his first long walking pilgrimage on the Via Francigena to Rome changed him profoundly, replacing anxiety and pressure with joy and acceptance.

There is no traced-out path to lead man to his salvation; he must constantly invent his own path. But, to invent it, he is free, responsible, without excuse, and every hope he has within himself. Jean-Paul Sartre

The 20 years I'd spent converting my farm into an organic enterprise had taken its toll, leaving me gasping for breath. I had no regrets. It had been for me a rewarding and enriching journey, and under organic management the farm had prospered. I'd set up a home delivery service, introduced rare breeds of livestock, won various awards and - as measured by the numbers of insects and birds - the farm was in good heart. But then quite suddenly and unexpectedly a light went out. What was the point in carrying on? I wondered. Why pursue an all-consuming path which suppresses all others? It was clear to me that I had reached an archetypal crossroads.

There was never any sharp-edged plan to go on pilgrimage in order to address the sense of profound physical and emotional exhaustion I was then feeling, what today might be called 'burnout'. Nor after radically simplifying the farm did I have any specific notion about what such an adventure might bring.

I hoped my pilgrimage might reawaken personal aspects I'd neglected during my farming career: my playful, fun-loving side, for example, or my capacity to demonstrate feeling. I hoped it might lead to new insights and a sense of renewal; and I hoped to find some answers signifying what I might do next, how I might

live more meaningfully. I suppose that in essence my pilgrimage amounted to an exercise in self-development, possibly what John Keats called ‘soul-making’:

> *Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways….Call the world, if you please, "the Vale of Soul Making". Then you will find out the use of the world….*

Keats

Then there were the external factors: the longing to wander free on the open road, to live spontaneously, to embrace adventure and, divested of responsibility, emulate the life of a merry vagabond. As a good friend once pointed out, ‘Why on earth would you not want to go on pilgrimage at such a stage in your life?’ Why indeed?

It is really remarkable how cathartic the simple act of walking can be. The placing of one foot in front of another in an even rhythm, the anchoring contact with the earth, the way the soil gives and yields, such actions to this pilgrim at least were magically healing, and almost at once it was as if a great weight had been lifted from me.

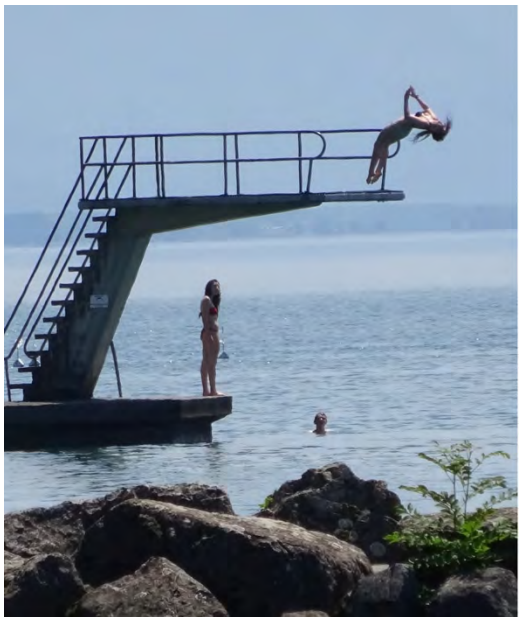
New perspectives emerged as, sandwiched between the immensity of the earth and sky, I felt a renewed sense of kinship with my fellow creatures . I would often feel inadequate when a hare shot past, or a squirrel darted towards a tree far faster than I could, and recognising my place in the world - for what was I but a single pilgrim, a microscopic atom constituting a much larger entity which is the Way? My anxieties evaporated. I simply let go.

It is seven years since my pilgrimage to Rome and looking back I perceive it now as a journey in four acts with an interval.

If Act One had to do with ‘letting go’ this heralded what for me epitomised Act Two, was an overriding sense of Joy. In Canterbury I recorded in my journal… *Everywhere I look I experience a sense of joy. It’s as if the process of letting go has created an inner-space in which lightly as thistledown infant-joy has landed,*

germinated and put down roots. Perhaps the French expression joie de vivre captures best what I am feeling, as in zest for living, joy of life. I've jettisoned my identity as a farmer, a son of Lincolnshire, an Englishman and soon, when I cross the channel, I shall leave behind my identity as a white Anglo Saxon male as well. I think this joyousness is affecting the way I respond to what I see, the people I meet, and the way they respond to me. When talking to a fellow guest at the hostel one evening, a homeless and penniless young Estonian, I needed to focus hard in order to recall which country I was in let alone which psychological area. A part of me, or rather most of me, was at that moment somewhere else. It was on the planet Joy, as indeed I believe was he.

This feeling of joyousness never left me. Joy became my valued companion and source of inspiration leading, as I see, it to Act Three, the stage where with my mind cleared and - cognisant of joy - I could fully embrace the externals: all those amusing chance encounters, the moments of play and hilarity, the delightful spontaneity of sleeping in a tree, or being given a French cooking lesson by a woman dressed in strawberry-shaped slippers.



High dive on the shores of Lac Léman

Such I believe are the kind of experiences most pilgrims share, and perhaps because pilgrims are often more alive inwardly they are also alive to what confronts them outwardly, entering into those experiences in an awakened state. This may well explain the profound pleasure I took from the spectacle of a figure executing a perfectly poised dive from a high board on the shores of Lac Léman (Geneva). Witnessed close to the geographical half-way point of my pilgrimage, this essay in harmony came to symbolise the ideal interval, as well as much of what I was aspiring to.

There was also the delight occasioned by the arrival of my old friend Chris then living in Chantilly. Initially I'd worried we might not connect, that he might feel

uncomfortable walking with a pilgrim. However, openness and playfulness prevailed and we truly did live like merry vagabonds.

When I was staying at Aylesford Priory on the way to Dover I ran into an elderly woman named Elizabeth. She was, she explained to me softly, the same age as the Queen. Almost at once I sensed that Elizabeth was depressed, possibly as a consequence of living as a widow in residential care, so when - after recounting her post-war hitchhiking days in Switzerland - she enquired about my journey, I answered with zest hoping the descriptions of my pilgrimage and the people I'd met might cheer her up.

"But won't all these chance meetings amount in the end to a blur?" she asked more as a matter of fact than a question. "How will you remember them?"

Elizabeth's questions affected me deeply. They had arisen, I guessed, from a place of despondency from where so much of what she saw was a blur. But rather than dampen my enthusiasm her pessimism had the opposite effect. I resolved that I would not allow those whom I met, including Elizabeth, to disappear into an amorphous morass, but that they should live in all their vibrant individuality, if not as actual friends then as aspects of the Self. Unwittingly she had opened up yet another dimension and in so doing given rise to Act Four. I would gather up and stitch the most appealing of them into a meaningful whole, a coat of many colours, into a new me perhaps. Thanks to Elizabeth my journey towards wholeness was underway.

Oh, and the characters! How diverse they were. Whether the charming Ceylonese nun I met in La Storta, or Georgio the Italian cyclist with his predilection for getting lost, the redoubtable Madame Lancelot whom I nicknamed Madame Pranc-elot, or the nuns of Clairvaux, I welcomed them home as part of the archetypal family that was me.

They were the letters and the punctuation marks, the words and the sentences which informed the story that was me and I noted them down faithfully, just as when in his marvellous *Self-portrait in the Clinic* 1909 the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch - then recovering from a nervous breakdown - sought to piece himself back together brushstroke by brushstroke.

So how did my pilgrimage help me? Did I return home with changed perceptions, with answers? Was I stronger?

It must seem to the spectator as though nothing much about my life has changed since my pilgrimage. I continue to live a low-key existence on my farm in Lincolnshire in the house I occupied before. I wear the same clothes and care for my trees and animals just as I used to, and I have forgone the chance to resurrect my proactive farming career. Perhaps the only visible change is the acquisition

of my beloved dog Echo, a pointer with white paws whom I rescued along the way. We are inseparable and I'm grateful to my pilgrimage for her, for awakening my feeling side in this life-enhancing way.

But of course I have been profoundly changed, inwardly and invisibly. Anxiety and pressure have ceded their place to acceptance, joy and detachment, and because I feel more centred, more integrated, I'm content to let things happen in their own time without reaching out for answers. There's no need to do so. The answers seem to find me.

Perhaps above all I am mindful of something Mother Theresa of Calcutta once said, a sentiment echoed by our late Queen: 'We cannot all do great things. But we can do small things with great love.' I think this beautiful insight was for me the greatest gift of all.

Anja Bakker: "I had walked through the entire thing...I wasn't angry anymore"

Anja Bakker is well known to Confraternity members for her contribution to our 2019 Members' Conference where she played the harp, and spoke about her pilgrimage from West Cork, through Wales and England, joining the Via Francigena at Canterbury, and walking on to Rome. Anja walks in the true tradition of pilgrimage, trusting to providence, often accepting food, her bed for the night or financial help in return for her music. Many follow her pilgrimages daily on social media, where she and her harp, Seán, are together known as the Flauting Harper.

Anja has set out to complete the three great pilgrimages of Christendom - Santiago de Compostela (2010), Rome (2018) and Jerusalem. Currently she is walking with Seán on her way to Jerusalem, having set off from West Cork on 2 April, determined to walk every step and perform for those she meets through England, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and on to Israel.

For Anja pilgrimage has been transformative in ways most of us could not dream of, helping heal the trauma of her earlier life and family. Walking these long distances, with 20kg on her back, has helped her come to terms with the rubbish thar life had dealt her, and clear it away. She says she felt called to be a pilgrim after she met a man who told her that if she did all three pilgrimages something would change in her which would be extraordinary.

In 2009 the Murphy Report into the sexual abuse scandals in the Archdiocese of Dublin was released in Ireland, which sparked off in her an enormous explosion of anger, because her mother, who died this year, had been abused as a child by a Catholic teacher. "We never spoke about the abuse. My mother would always brush things away. You can understand why as these things are very painful." As Anja started her first pilgrimage to Santiago the following year she spoke to many people en route both in Ireland and Spain about abuse.

"I realised this was not just me and my family or Ireland's history. This stuff is everywhere.

"There's a theory we imprint trauma onto the DNA of our offspring. If you have trauma in one generation and it isn't dealt with, it passes on to the next. Intuitively, that was what I was experiencing." At 17 Anja began working as a prostitute. "I don't know where that behaviour came from. I'm not like that at all. It's not something I'm proud of. It all started around the time my mother was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for the first time and was given electroconvulsive therapy.

"Because she had been abused her ability to look after herself had been harmed in a very severe way, and neither was she able to keep us safe.

"By the time I got to Santiago I was able to call my mother and tell her I had walked through the entire thing. I said I wasn't angry with her any more, and that I loved her. From that day I have never had a fight with my mother."

This will be Anja's last pilgrimage with Seán the Harp. There is no doubt she feels changed by her experiences. On her travels she says she has learned to overcome her fears and has a greater understanding of who she is. "My commitment now on the way to Jerusalem is to develop compassion and patience, and to answer questions people ask, tell stories and play music.

"I practise a lot of gratitude. The Italians said to me that I had to allow them to give me love. Money is part of that. I didn't want to take it, but I decided it was time for me to learn that lesson, and to accept what people are willing to give."

Lucina Silvers: "I was broken when I went. But I came back another person"

Lucina, 60, is Brazilian, but moved to the US in 1993 when she married an American. When I spoke to her she had just retired from her well-paid job in IT in order to travel the world - starting with walking to Rome.

Here she tells her story of pilgrimage.

"I was married for 19 years. At Christmas 2009 at a time when I had just been through a succession of deaths in the family, my husband was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. I had a young son to take care of, but at the same time I had to work to earn a living for us. I don't know what was worse: watching my husband die slowly, or watching my son watch his father die slowly.

"My husband died in 2012. I was in a bad way for years. I took anti-depressants.

"In 2016 I joined a group of four people and went trekking in Nepal and Tibet, and visited monasteries. As I walked I scattered my husband's ashes - and that was before I saw the film 'The Way'! I met amazing people, and learned you don't need the comforts you are used to be happy. It was the start of a change. Gerry the trip organiser said something similar had happened to him after his brother was killed in Iraq. With the help of my doctor I stopped taking the pills and I haven't looked back. I decided to be more open, and to keep myself physically active. I

"In 2017 I did the Camino (Francés) from St Jean Pied de Port, and it completely changed my life, and gave me a different perspective. I had had a big house, but now I downsized. I had had a good paying job. But now I don't see these as fulfilling. I started to change, and now I am as happy as I have ever been.

"On pilgrimage I love meeting and talking to people, and the Camino is very social. It is a different way to see life. On the Camino my sister came with me for ten days as she was worried about my safety, and when she left I met a young boy from Buffalo, and he asked if he could walk with me. He had had a bad relationship, and we sort of adopted each other, and walked all the way to Santiago de Compostela together. We supported each other.

"It was a healing experience. I was broken when I went, and I know my husband would not want that for me. But I came back another person. People could see that something had happened to me.

"I have just closed a chapter in my life by retiring. I am also starting a new one. I want to see the world and am starting by walking on Via Francigena . On this trip I am having the best time. The Via in France is very empty so I can spend time inside myself, thinking, and being grateful, especially being grateful.

"I don't think my experience is special, because I have met several people who have experienced the same through pilgrimage."

Lucina never did make it to Rome along the Via Francigena as she heard she had been accepted to work with the Peace Corps in Botswana alongside people with HIV/AIDS. She intends to come back to the Via Francigena in 2026.

Editor's note: I interviewed Lucina Silvers by Zoom in July when she was walking through France on the Via Francigena. As she passed through Dover on her way as a pilgrim her photo was taken and later used in the exhibition 'From the Camino to the Hajj' for the Kent Pilgrims Festival. MHK

Faye Smith: "Ambulation not medication"

Faye, who had been traumatised by multiple bereavements and losses, tells the story of how walking was a path to recovery and wholeness, and reflects on the benefits of pilgrimage, and how she now helps others on this same road.

Faye Smith

What do you do when your marriage disintegrates? You start walking. When your former husband dies at 48? You walk. When your daughter dies on the same day two years later aged 12? You walk. When your health hits rock bottom? You walk. When your engagement ends? When your life, business, world fall apart? You keep on walking, one step at a time, to find a new way forward.

For 15 years, award-winning Yorkshire businesswoman Faye ran a successful communications agency - until the sudden ending of her engagement and the death of her father a few months apart caused her to join a trauma recovery community in coastal Kent in 2020, just before the pandemic hit. There she launched her new business ‘Hope Walking’ this summer with the help of Visit Kent and the Kent Downs team. Through Hope Walking, Faye offers modern-day pilgrimages for men and women, and wellbeing walks for women experiencing times of transition and loss, utilising all the experiences and therapeutic techniques she has gained on her own recovery programme.

When her six-month programme turned into two years during the pandemic, Faye discovered the healing power of nature, walking and cold-water swimming alongside women she met along the way.

The pilgrimage towards wholeness.

"My new venture Hope Walking holidays for Women has grown out of my own experience of the restorative impact of walking – across fields and in woodland, among the hills and by the sea, alone and in company – as I struggled with and eventually came to terms with a series of challenging life circumstances.

Growing up on the edge of the stunning Peak District National Park, I always enjoyed walking in nature, but I only discovered the deeply therapeutic power of 'walking myself well' after my marriage broke down and I endured a succession of bereavements.

I was determined not to resort to medication, so walking became an increasingly important part of my life, and I was out pretty much every Saturday and Sunday. Several women friends were going through their own difficult experiences: some were separating or divorced and suddenly alone at weekends; some had other caring responsibilities; some were facing menopause and health issues. One by one, they asked to join me, and my first Sunday morning women's walking group grew and grew. As we walked, the natural environment and the rhythm of our movement would start to work its magic; we talked, sharing what and when we wanted to; we listened and supported each other both emotionally and in practical ways; we started to feel more resilient, able to cope and to know that we would come through safely and indeed stronger.

Time and again, walking has been the means to recovery of my own mental and physical health, enabling me to find hope, strength and a new belief in myself

and in life when so much that was precious had been lost. I have created Hope Walking to offer other women the same opportunity to find hope and their own way forward, utilising my own experiences and the therapeutic techniques which have helped me recover.

Alongside my discovery of the power of walking, has come my joyous discovery of the power of walking as pilgrimage.

Gabi on her first day at senior school

When my daughter Gabi died (aged 12 in 2013) I decided to keep a promise to her, that I would sell our family home and downsize after her GCSEs so we could travel to Australia together to see her friend Martha who had emigrated. In the long months after her father's death, talking about all the places we would see, animals we would encounter, experiences we would have, provided a welcome distraction from the pain of bereavement. When I could no longer keep that promise *with* her, I vowed to keep it *for* her. And so I set off on what I would now describe as my first pilgrimage of sorts in her memory, which turned out to be the best eight weeks of my life. Yes, there was a cost as a self-employed business owner: moving into rented accommodation to make time and finance available, releasing control of my business 'baby' for two months... But I can now say that experience was a 'kairos' moment which started my life in a whole new direction. The power of walking solo, eating alone, deciding each day what I wanted to do, going with the flow, touched by conversations with and generosity of the fellow travellers I met along the way, started to powerfully transform me.

The Celts believed that 'pilgrimage is whatever happens.' It is this precious journey through life.

Writing about Celtic Christianity and pilgrimage, American author Lynne Baab finds: *"Pilgrimage transforms us. A pilgrimage is a journey taken in search of the holy, and the Celts understood that it is impossible to encounter our Holy God without being changed in some way, perhaps as expected, or more likely, in a very unexpected way. In fact, the very nature of a pilgrimage enables us to expect the unexpected. Pilgrims give up their commitment to planning and control, and they allow God to lead and guide."* What a great description and one which resonates deeply with me and my developing experiences of walking as pilgrimage!

In the brilliant book, '52 Ways to Walk', author Annabel Streets ponders the power of such walking pilgrimages. She quotes a Yale-Columbia study which found that "spiritual experience involves 'pronounced shifts in perception [that] buffer the effects of stress', confirming earlier reports linking spiritual experience to greater resilience."

It is just such resilience which can help us endure one or a succession of bereavements, griefs, losses and transitions - singly or collectively the emotional trauma of which can cause us deep mental and physical ill health.

Streets goes on to reveal, "*Several [studies] found that a sense of the spiritual promoted higher levels of life satisfaction and well-being, a clearer sense of purpose and meaning, greater hope and optimism as well as lower levels of depression and anxiety."* She quotes Professor Marino Bruce who, in one such report on spiritual practices increasing longevity, explains how the feeling that *"You're not in the world alone, that you're part of a power larger than oneself, can give one confidence to deal with the issues of life. Biologically, if that reduces stress, then that means you're less likely to have high blood pressure or diabetes or things that can increase mortality."*

A 2008 study linked spiritual experience to a complicated cocktail of multiple raised neurochemicals including dopamine, melatonin, endorphins and the happiness transmitter serotonin," adds Streets.

So while every study going seems to prove what we instinctively believe, that walking in nature is good for the mind, body and spirit, now we have a range of reports concluding that a spiritual pilgrimage increases these benefits even further. And from my personal experience, when we go through traumatic life events, choosing to nurture ourselves in this deeply therapeutic way is a powerful means to take control of our own health and life in as positive, natural a way as possible.

I am not saying medication doesn't have its place. I know many for whom this support has been essential in the short or longer term.

Eighteen months after my daughter died, my body started to break down and I was diagnosed with anaemia, vitamin D deficiency, the autoimmune conditions hypothyroidism and adrenal fatigue, alongside a range of menopause symptoms which the hormonal surges caused by Gabi's death had started early. I was a

physical wreck. Taking control of my own nutrition, supplements, exercise, sleep, screen time, working hours, therapy and generally adopting a much healthier lifestyle have allowed me to fully manage my own symptoms without recourse to medication.

Let us review why the 'nature cure' of walking through any kind of grief and loss can help us so much.

In our minds.
By walking, we gain focus, take control back, and open the door to our emotions, the very motion is therapeutically allowing us to start processing. The very act of putting our feet down in repetitive motion brings a sense of stability and calmness, while literally 'grounding' our most traumatic emotions.

Dr Francine Shapiro, pioneer of EMDR trauma therapy, discovered that when we use 'panoramic sweep', scanning horizons, we experience 'optic flow'. This quietens anxiety and improves our ability to process, store and retrieve memories and organise difficult memories.

We can remember our loved ones by walking to meaningful locations and even reframe our grief by raising money for charity in their name. For the first two years after my daughter's death, my family and friends gathered to walk the Stanage Stumble for 'HomeStart' (the family support charity) in Gabi's name, and share our memories of her along the way.

In our bodies.
The physical movement - the very act of choosing to nurture ourselves this way - builds psychological strength. Walking improves our heart and sleep quality, regulates blood sugar, boosts our immune systems, eliminates toxins and increases endorphins, the happy hormones. All things which can be knocked for six by grief. Walking strengthens our bones and muscles, which increases feelings of resilience.

Annabel Streets cites many reports that walking in natural greenery has been shown to lower cortisol, stress and reduce the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease and premature death. Trees give off phytoncides, natural essential oils which have anti-bacterial and anti-fungal qualities to help them fight off disease. When we breathe these chemicals in, our bodies respond by releasing NK (Natural Killer) white blood cells which kill tumour and virus infected cells in our bodies.

Sunlight boosts our Vitamin D levels, guarding against multiple auto immune conditions and cancers - deficiency has been said to be as bad a smoking for us. And if you can walk by moving water - adding blue therapy to your green therapy - the negative air ions will boost your immune system and increase your antibodies, relaxing our primal brains who know we are near water and food sources!

Photo: Paul Blackett

In our spirits.
Listening to natural sounds makes us feel 30% more relaxed, reports suggest, and birdsong makes 40% of us feel happy.

Walking alone is an empowering act of self-strengthening, which allows us to nurture our relationship with ourselves. Our capacity to be alone is a valuable resource enabling us to access our deepest feelings, when removing ourselves from our habitual environment. It promotes self-understanding and connection with our inner being, boosting our self-reliance and self-confidence.

Walking in company side by side allows easier communication and counters the natural tendency to isolate after bereavement, which can ease feelings of loss and loneliness. It can also cause us to reflect, rather than the less mentally healthy act of rumination, the process of thinking the same sad, dark thoughts continuously. This habit can be dangerous to our mental health as it can prolong or intensify depression as well as impair our ability to think or process emotions.

Human beings have walked through the ages, droving, to market, to trade and on pilgrimage, seeking the safety, security and stimulation of numbers. Pilgrimage fosters relationships and cements friendships. The slow, familiar pace is inclusive which releases happy hormone dopamine and bonding hormone oxytocin. Studies of walking group members have shown reduced BMI, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and a higher sense of acceptance and belonging.

Streets opines that, “The pilgrims currently walking beside us may provide a collective sense of solace that other walks don’t.” She quotes science journalist Florence Williams who suggests, “If you are depressed or anxious, social walking

in nature boosts your mood. If you want to solve problems in your life, self-reflect and jolt your creativity, it's better to go alone."

My sabbatical by the sea led me to re-evaluate my work and lifestyle: Hope Walking is the result. Last year I took the first step in this new direction by being trained to guide pilgrimages with leading charity, the British Pilgrimage Trust. I started guiding modern-day pilgrims on 'Bring your own beliefs' experiences along the mother of all European pilgrim routes, the ancient Via Francigena from Canterbury to Dover, from where some continue the 1200 miles on to Rome. As we journeyed together, we set our intentions around an object. Something to pick up or lay down. Perhaps a change we wish to make or problem to solve. We press our foreheads on ancient stones, light candles, touch hedgerows, breathe sweet air, connecting deeply with nature, ourselves and each other.

Today there is a global renaissance of pilgrimage – 350,000 pilgrims walk the Camino to Santiago each year, 2.5 million make the Hajj. Pilgrim numbers, especially longer solo walks and among people without a specific faith motivation (60%), have seen a record increase since 2016. Since lockdown, pilgrimages have been described as the next post-pandemic trend as many people have started to engage- sometimes for the first time- in solitude, stillness, silence and spirituality.

I have found St Augustine of Hippo to be spot on when he reflected, 'Solvitur Ambulando', it is solved by walking!

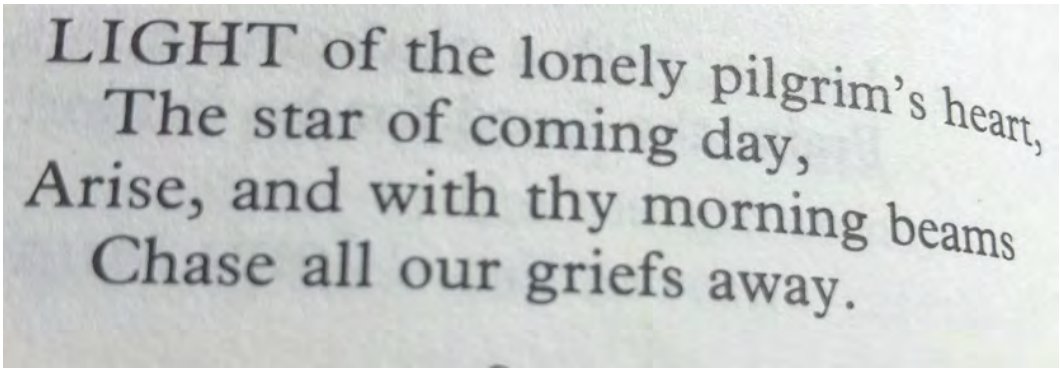


Photo of a verse from the anthem sung at the service at St Mary's Dover to mark the end of the Kent Pilgrims Festival 2022

https://www.walkingwomen.com/ww-holidays/11431-2/
https://hopewalking.co.uk/
https://hopewalking.co.uk/walking-tours-1
Facebook: Hope Walking

Sandy Brown: "Every new day spent on a pilgrim journey is a blessing"

The Rev Sandy Brown, whose guidebooks to the Via Francigena and other major European pilgrim routes are widely known among the pilgrim community and in particular to members of the Confraternity, describes the shock of diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease, and how the lessons learned through years of long-distance pilgrimage are helping him find a way ahead.

I stood up at dinner to raise a toast and immediately knew there was a problem. I couldn't form the words easily, and I stumbled and slurred as I tried to get the words out. When I sat down I was embarrassed and disappointed - and worried.

As I look back over the last couple of years before my diagnosis with a hopefully mild form of Motor Neurone Disease (MND), it strikes me how much of my involvement with the disease relates to my time on the Camino de Santiago and the Via Francigena, both projects of mine in my work as author of pilgrimage walking guides.

A beloved pilgrim friend had invited us to a banquet in Santiago de Compostela on the Feast of St James in 2021, and Theresa and I were in town for the festival and delighted to attend. After my problematic toast Theresa and I went to our room and began to strategise how we would deal with the worsening speech problem in the long term, and in the short term what to do about a live online interview scheduled for that same afternoon. We stopped at a café for a late afternoon espresso in hopes it would negate the effects of the wine I'd had at lunch – we already knew then that my speech deteriorated for up to 48 hours if I

had anything to drink. I survived the interview with only minor speech problems, and by the next morning we determined together it was time to seek medical help.

After returning to the Via Francigena to walk from Calais to Lausanne I began working with my primary care physicians and neurologists in both Italy (where I live) and the US (where I'm from) to get to the root of my speech problem, a milder version of which I'd first reported to my doctor in 2018. I underwent blood tests, physical examinations, an MRI of my brain, and nerve tests, all looking to see what was causing my symptoms. Motor Neurone Disease is diagnosed by ruling everything out, and by March my American doctor began labelling it Bulbar Onset Primary Lateral Sclerosis, a rare and mild version of MND that sometimes deteriorates to Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), but often allows a normal life expectancy but with severely reduced mobility.

Even a few months later it feels like this diagnosis is not happening to me, but to someone else. I'm working to integrate my self-care into my pilgrimage walking/biking passion. The words of my Italian *medico basso* (primary care doctor) ring in my ears – '*non allenarti troppo.'* 'Don't exercise too hard.'

For 14 years, long-distance pilgrim walking has been an obsession. When I walk I feel free, I'm in nature and feel real and whole, and I'm meeting like-minded people from around the world. Without fail, pilgrim walking puts me into a great spiritual space. However, as I look back over my 14,000-odd km past pilgrimage portfolio, I recognize that the long days of all-weather outdoor walking and cycling were sometimes tough on my body. Didn't have enough water? Soldier on, walking thirsty. Didn't have enough food? Tighten the belt. Didn't get enough sleep? You'll get it tonight instead. Have a steep hill ahead? Don't complain. It's good for your cardio.

On the Via di Francesco with a group of pilgrims

On my first Camino I lost 7kg in weight, and a similar figure is typical for me anytime I take my sofa-loving metabolism out for a weeks-long stroll. I'm coming to realise now that quick weight loss is a sign of deprivation, not health, and I need to put myself into a lifestyle in which my daily diet and exercise fit more smoothly with the pilgrim routine of long days of walking.

The lesson was brought home to me on a walk from Lucca to Siena earlier this year. Hot weather, long days, and inadequate attention to nutrition and hydration led to a first for me – heat exhaustion. I could hear it every night in my MND-affected speech when the slurring got extreme over dinner with my pilgrim friends. But this time, after three days of hot-weather walking, my body told me to stop and let it catch up. With two days' rest I was able to get back on the trail, but this time with a greater sense of appreciation for self-care as part of my routine.

Self-care while walking means always attending to nutrition and hydration, never pushing beyond my physical limits to make a distance goal, and truly listening to what my body is telling me. I long ago conquered blisters, but there's a deeper physical obstacle that looms ahead whenever I allow myself to blindly charge toward my objective while forcing my body to endure. If there's any gift of MND, it's that I can't hide my exhaustion when it comes. It announces itself in slurred speech. My mouth tells me when I'm at my limit, when I'm out of balance with the ingredients my body needs to maintain a healthy equilibrium.

In September I took a group walk from Florence to Assisi and Rome and I knew that then more than ever before, I needed to listen to my body. Take my time. Drink water. Eat well. Don't be afraid to take a rest or to send my bag ahead. Be grateful for every day on the trail, because I won't be able to walk forever, and every new day spent on a pilgrim journey is a blessing.

• Sanford "Sandy" Brown is a pilgrimage guidebook author and associate publisher with Cicerone Press. His guidebooks include the Camino de Santiago: Camino Francés (2020, 2021), Way of St Francis: From Florence to Assisi and Rome (2015, 2017, 2019), the California Missions Trail (2022), Via Francigena Part 2: Lausanne to Lucca (2021), Via Francigena Part 3: Lucca to Rome (2021, 2022) and due in February 2023, Via Francigena Part 1: Canterbury to Lausanne. He is a retired United Methodist minister from Seattle, Washington, USA and lives with his wife and two cats on the Via Francigena in Lucca, Italy. See his books at www.sandybrownbooks.com and www.cicerone.co.uk.

The Kent Pilgrims Festival 2022

Carlo Laurenzi writes:

The Confraternity was awarded the contract to help deliver the 2022 Kent Pilgrim Kent last summer; since that time we have been working solidly to create a memorable experience for visitors from across the world to enjoy.

That was the plan, what was the result? At the time of writing, in late September, I don't yet have access to all the data, but from what I saw on the ground, it was quite simply brilliant. The programme was comprehensive, inclusive, creative, novel, and deeply reflective. It was delivered at a time when much of the world faces extreme weather events, the cost of living is sky-rocketing, and the threat of military conflict which feels too close for comfort.

I am really proud what we have been able to deliver with such a small team. Would I do it again? Well, let's say that you ask me in a couple of years!

Our selection of photos from the Festival is prefaced by two poems by Victoria Field, a long-time associate of the Confraternity, which demonstrate the redemptive and healing power of the walking pilgrimage.

They featured in O Roma Nobilis, a music and poetry performance in response to pilgrimage created by Eduard Heyning and Victoria Field, and presented in five churches along the Via Francigena for the Kent Pilgrims' Festival. They are so far uncollected, but if you are interested in Victoria's latest book of poems or her memoir of walking the Camino in Spain, please visit www.francisboutle.co.uk .

Camino

This Camino is a church without walls.
Every other pilgrim's a priest willing to hear my confession,
absolve me and walk on.

This Camino is where God lives in the flowers,
the rain, the path ribboning over vineyards, houses, the mountain,
the sound of my boots tapping to His rhythmic song.

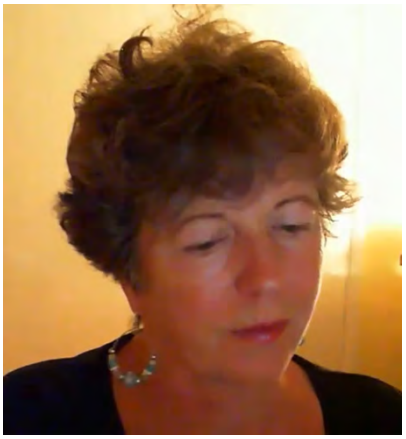
On this Camino, we're truly one body, walking on multiple feet.
We sleep in communion, fart and snore in our slumber,
someone's faint cry in their dream entering our own.

On this Camino, the language is love and it's scattered
at random: smiles, bread broken, wine shared,
the sweet tending of blisters in a dormitory of strangers.

Walking the Camino is a journey into the heart of ourselves
and out of ourselves. We merge into the air all around us,
disappear into a oneness we can't name, but all of us know.

Walking the Camino, taking step after step after step,
bearing our baggage of hopes and regret,
we rest in God's peace by our moving, arrive as we go.

Revised September 2022
Victoria Field



Victoria Field

Claimed

You don’t become a pilgrim.
Pilgrimage claims you

You don’t walk a path.
The path unrolls itself -

a green carpet of welcome
taking you well-ward.

Who is this you,
you think you are?

She’s walking beside you,
behind you, beyond you,
through you.

Listen she’s speaking
in the wind’s murmur,
the sun’s touch.

And there’s a bigger You.
He’s spreading the cloths of heaven
over your head,

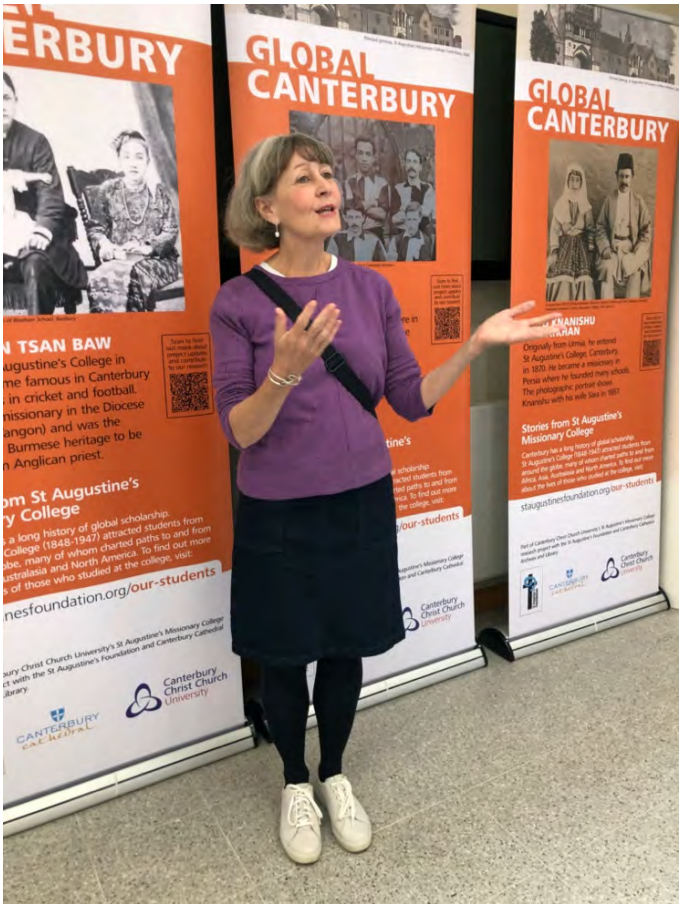
inviting the light to speak
in the fields of stars,
not letting you sleep
more than a wink.

Victoria Field

Part of the "From the Camino to the Hajj" exhibition in Dover Museum

The two pilgrim beers brewed for the Festival at Dover's Breakwater Brewery

On the way to sample the beers at the Dover Festival launch



At the Pilgrim Symposium, Christ Church Canterbury University

The accessible pilgrims' walk for carers
Photo: J. Eeles

Walking from Hollingbourne to Wye

Patience Agbabi reads from her "Telling Tales", a modern take on the Canterbury Tales

Icon writing with Alexandra le Rossignol

Pilgrims at the Maison Dieu, Dover

CPR trustee David Matthews talking at the Practical Pilgrim workshop

The Confraternity stall at the Canterbury Food and Drink Festival

The Pilgrim Sculptures of Fidenza – a worthwhile stop on the Via Francigena

Gail Turner MA is an artist, art historian, and independent lecturer with degrees from Oxford University and the Courtauld Institute. She is a pilgrim walker and is married to Brian Mooney, vice-chair of the Confraternity. Here she sheds new light on the famous pilgrim frieze on Fidenza Cathedral.

Fidenza Cathedral should be familiar to pilgrims on the Via Francigena because the official logo repeated on waymarks all along the route from Canterbury to Rome (and the CPR's logo) is based on one of the cowled pilgrims from a relief of the north side. This panel of pilgrims – some on foot and others on horseback – is justifiably famous but it is only a small part of the rich sculptural reliefs of the building which are notable for celebrating and depicting pilgrims.
The Cathedral is Romanesque and was built mainly in the 12th century on the site of an earlier fourth-century church, and today's pilgrims would do well to make time to look at it and marvel at its sculptures and reliefs. They are quite simply stunning.

The Cathedral is dedicated to San Donnino (Domninus), about whom little is known except that he was martyred by being beheaded in the early fourth century. Tradition has it that he was chamberlain to the pagan Emperor Maximian who objected to his becoming a Christian. If you look at some of the sculpted reliefs on the right side of the main portal of the west front you will find vivid cartoon-like episodes of the saint with the Emperor, then him being hunted down by soldiers near Piacenza, being decapitated, and finally angels rescuing his head before San Donnino picks it up himself and places it, according to tradition, on the site of Fidenza Cathedral. Inside

the cathedral is a graphic polychromed sculpture probably from the late 16th or early 17th century showing San Donnino in his Roman army uniform holding his head and a palm of martyrdom. He is apparently the saint for protection against rabies.

The West front is a wonderful mix of Christian iconography, mythological detail and above all, of pilgrimage. It has two distinguished and fine free-standing sculptures, with surprising touches of emotion and drama for this early period - King David and the prophet Ezekiel holding scrolls, on either side of the main porch. These have been attributed to a Lombard sculptor, Benedetto Antelami, who may have been an apprentice at St Trophime in Arles, and he possibly even travelled to Chartres as well as Parma. He certainly seems to have absorbed ideas from further afield than northern Italy. Above David is a relief of the Presentation in the Temple, and a group of pilgrims being led by an angel, and below from classical mythology is a centaur and a winged creature with long pointed ears. Above Ezekiel are carved more mythical creatures, a Virgin and Child and a second band of pilgrims being led by an angel. On the left side, over King David, is an impassive and stylised figure holding a scroll which says in Latin: 'I show you the way to Rome'. This is thought to be Simon Peter, and supposedly he points in the direction of Rome – perhaps one of the first road signs.

Other reliefs worthy of attention are Christ in Glory with two angels above the main arch; and to the left a vivid depiction of the Three Wise Men visiting Herod, as well as Joseph's Dream. On the inner side of the main porch is a lively relief of

Hercules and the Nemean Lion – sometimes Hercules is depicted in Christian architecture as a pagan personification of Christ's strength. There is also a delightful relief over the right portal of a solid-looking St Michael standing squarely on a dragon who is baring his teeth menacingly. Above the same right-hand portal there are again mythical creatures, a bishop with his mitre and crozier and above them sitting on top of the eaves of the porch is what appears to be another cowled pilgrim carrying a large barrel on his back – perhaps a supply of wine for the journey to Rome! (*See page 48*).

The West front also has a relief of pilgrims in which they appear to be wrestling with each other, and another portrays a lascivious pilgrim making a pass at a shocked woman in plaits, as well as a man with bow and arrows perhaps out to source his supper.

Hunting for food figures in several places. On the main north façade pilgrim relief, a leopard is journeying on horseback ready to be set loose to hunt for prey (poor peasants who got in his way) and on the outer wall of the apse a fierce hound is depicted about to bring down a deer.

The narrative skills and humour of the known and unknown sculptors of the 12th and early 13th century make Fidenza Cathedral and its various depictions of pilgrims, mythology and Biblical stories an important artistic stopping place on the Via Francigena.

The Fidenza Pilgrim (over the arch) with a barrel of wine on his back

THE CONFRATERNITY OF PILGRIMS TO ROME

2023 CALENDAR

Each month contains a selection of images from pilgrimages on the Via Francigena contributed by members and supporters.

Order from our shop at https://pilgrimstorome.org.uk/shop for £17.00 plus P&P.

WHO'S WHO IN THE CONFRATERNITY

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Carlo Laurenzi	Chair
Brian Mooney	Vice Chair
Robert White	Treasurer
Julia Lewis	Canterbury Representative
David Matthews	
Eamonn Mullally	

VOLUNTEERS

Stephen Bradshaw	Shop
Tim Greig	Membership Secretary
Mary Kirk	Editor
Jennifer Stearn	Vice Treasurer

---

email: info@pilgrimstorome.org.uk
website: www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk
Facebook: Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome
Twitter: pilgrims2rome
Instagram: pilgrims2rome