PILGRIMS TO ROME

NEWSLETTER no. 29 2023

ISSN 2633-7193

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Cover picture: our new logo designed by Bridget Tann

EDITORIAL

'Isn't it extraordinary that walking with our own thoughts and in our own "world" in the same moment we are connected to everyone and everything - painful and glorious both...'

Just as I came to write this brief editorial I found the quotation above in a Via Francigena forum on social media. It was written by Jan Griffin (and reproduced with her permission), an authorised lay minister and former churchwarden attached to St Andrew's Church in Shepherdswell, on the Via Francigena between Canterbury and Dover. This is a church which understands pilgrimage and pilgrims, and welcomes them - part of our Via Francigena community.

The sentence encapsulates this year's 'theme' of our print newsletter - pilgrimage and community. It is the paradox of these journeys: we may walk alone, but we encounter others on the way. We may be accompanied by a spouse or a friend, but each makes their own pilgrimage. All are part of a greater community - of pilgrims past, present and future, of the settlements and cities through which we pass and of those who inhabit them, of those who lost their lives fighting for the ground on which we tread. And, as Jan Griffin discerns, we are connected, to others, to our environment, to the universe, and - as it might be - to God.

The theme was suggested to me by CPR's new chair, Nick Dunne in a year that has seen considerable change and growth, symbolised by our new logo, which Julia Lewis explains in these pages. The fact that we have dropped the rather old-fashioned, cumbersome and non-inclusive word 'Confraternity' (henceforth to be 'Pilgrims to Rome') in no way signifies that we are abandoning our tenets of companionship, comradeship, pilgrim family, and support - in a word 'community'.

The following pages demonstrate just how vital this concept is to pilgrims, and how wide, varied and beautiful their interpretation of it is.

Mary Kirk
Editor

The Canterbury Pilgrims From The Granger Collection © Alamy stock photo

A REVIEW OF 2023 BY OUR NEW CHAIR, NICK DUNNE

I have been a member of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome since 2013 and have always known it was a UK-based organisation. However, I did not realise just how international we are until I joined the Board of Trustees as Chair this year. Over the last two years, our members have come from 25 different countries, and of the 327 active this year, 43% are from the UK, 29% from USA and Canada, and 20% from Australia and New Zealand, with 25 individuals from 11 other countries including India, Ireland and Brazil! It is a wonderful example of how pilgrimage can connect us individuals into something far greater than ourselves.

2023 has been a year of consolidation for our charity. We have welcomed three new trustees, Dr John Godfrey, Alex Knox and Vince Rollason to increase to 13 the number of unpaid volunteers and trustees active in the Confraternity's work. After three years as Chair, Carlo Laurenzi has taken on the new role of President with lead responsibility for relations with our European partners and for developing the new route between London and Canterbury, the Francigena Britannica. This new route is currently being "road tested" before we publish a guide, and we are in discussions with the European Association of the Vie Francigene (EAVF/AEVF) to have the Francigena Britannica formally recognised as an extension of the Via Francigena.

In May, we organised a small one-day pilgrimage between Canterbury and Dover, after which four trustees continued on to Calais to attend the EAVF conference. There we were proud to receive a Via Francigena International Award for our work on the Kent Pilgrims Festival in 2022. We have also been developing our new website to be launched later this year and you will see our new logo published for the first time in this magazine.

I am most grateful to our team of just 13 volunteers and trustees for all that they do to promote the Via Francigena and to support fellow pilgrims on their journeys. We all share a love of the Via Francigena and the pilgrim experience, and our 2024 Conference will be an opportunity to celebrate with as many of our members from across the world as possible. The date is booked for Saturday 2 March at St George's RC Cathedral in London (see following page). I hope to see you there!

Nick Dunne, Chair of Trustees

SAVE THE DATE!

Our 2024 Annual Conference will be on Saturday 2 March, 2024 in the Amigo Hall of St George's RC Cathedral in London.

The conference will start at 1pm and finish by 4pm, and we hope to organise a guided walk during the morning that will finish at the Cathedral in time for the start of the conference. More details will follow.

Entrance: St George's RC Cathedral

St George's RC Cathedral is close to Waterloo Station and opposite the Imperial War Museum and Peace Garden. Designed by Augustus Pugin, the Cathedral was opened in 1848 but badly damaged during the Second World War. Now restored, it features a shrine to St Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of El Salvador who, like St Thomas Becket in Canterbury, was murdered for opposing his country's leaders. www.stgeorgescathedral.org.uk .

PILGRIMS TO ROME - A FRESH LOOK

Julia Lewis explains our new logo

In this publication, the trustees and volunteers of the CPR are delighted to present our new logo.

While maintaining three of the distinctive features of the previous logo – the vibrant red, the circular shape and the crossed keys of St Peter – the additional symbol of a labyrinth has been incorporated. Labyrinths have long been associated with pilgrimage. Unlike in a maze, there is only one path to the centre of a labyrinth. Similar to a long-distance pilgrimage, the act of following the route of a labyrinth engages the body in a rhythm of repetitive movement, freeing the mind to engage in contemplation. The two elements of the new logo, the labyrinth and crossed keys, represent both the journey to Rome and the destination.

For the logo, we have also shortened the name of The Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome to, simply, 'Pilgrims to Rome'. This is consistent with our web address: pilgrimstorome.org.uk. The initialism 'CPR' has long been used to avoid spelling out our name in full, but initialisms and acronyms are not immediately obvious and, of course, 'CPR' also has a well-known alternative meaning. It will be a difficult habit to break, but we shall endeavour to use the name 'Pilgrims to Rome' in future publications.[1]

As a note of interest, there are three historic labyrinths on the Via Francigena. There are two finger labyrinths: one is in the small church of San Pietro in Pontremoli, and the second,is at the entrance of the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca. There is also a partially surviving floor labyrinth mosaic in the Basilica of San Michele Maggiore in Pavia.

1. The registered name under the Charity Commission will remain The Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome.

CHAUCER THE PILGRIM

'The Canterbury Tales' describes the community and companionship of pilgrims as they exchange their stories. Here Richard Owen, a former Times correspondent in Rome, explores Chaucer's link with both the Via Francigena and the Camino de Santiago

'Whan that April with his shoures soote the droghte of March hath perced to the roote....Thanne longen folk to goon pilgrimages'. So begin *The Canterbury Tales,* in which Geoffrey Chaucer himself appears as a pilgrim as well as the narrator. So far, so familiar – but did Chaucer also know something of other pilgrim routes, in particular the Via Francigena and the Way of St James?

Chaucer chose Canterbury as the destination for his varied group of travellers because of the tomb of St Thomas Becket, which had become an instant shrine once pilgrims gained access to it in April 1171. Just two years later, in 1173, Becket was made a saint, and the following year Henry II performed an act of penance at the shrine for having – knowingly or not – caused Becket's murder by asking 'Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?'

There was a fire shortly after this act of remorse, but in 1220 a magnificent new tomb was unveiled (no longer there, alas, thanks to Henry VIII). Chaucer himself is said to have made the pilgrimage to Becket's Canterbury shrine in April 1388, around the time he began *The Canterbury Tales.* Although the *Tales* end shortly before the pilgrims actually arrive at their destination, a bronze statue of Chaucer

was unveiled in Canterbury High Street in 2016, facing the Eastbridge Hospital of St Thomas the Martyr (now an almshouse), where the pilgrims would have spent the night.

The pilgrims set off for Becket's shrine from the Tabard Inn in Southwark, just across the Thames from where Chaucer was born in what is now Lower Thames Street, the son of a 14th-century wine merchant. The bearded, older Chaucer is depicted in a miniature in Thomas Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes* with a rosary in his hand, a pen case round his neck, and a finger pointing at Hoccleve's remark that Chaucer was the 'firste fyndere of oure faire langage'.

What is perhaps less well known is that Chaucer was closely connected to Italy, and travelled there on at least two occasions. As far as we know he never got to Rome, but he spent many months in Italy, and got to know the terrain well – including the routes taken by travellers and pilgrims. As a vintner, Chaucer's father traded with Europe, mainly Gascony, the wine country on the French border with Spain, but also with Italy. And like his father, and like many other Englishmen of the time, Chaucer was also deeply involved with Europe, in his case in war and diplomacy.

As a teenager, Chaucer fought in the Hundred Years War and was captured at Reims – a key stopping point on the Via Francigena, then and now. Later, he helped to arrange a royal marriage in Milan as he rose in the hierarchy of the royal court, and he subsequently made two visits to Italy as a diplomat that had a huge impact on his writing. He almost certainly went to Pavia, another stop on the Via Francigena, not least for the burial there in 1378 of his Italian patron,

Galeazzo II Visconti. And the hill town of Certaldo, the home of Giovanno Boccaccio, whose *Decameron* Chaucer appears to draw on extensively, overlooks the Via Francigena as it runs through the Val d'Elsa.

Then there is Santiago de Compostela. In 1366 – the year of his marriage to Philippa de Roet – Chaucer was granted 'safe conduct' by Charles II of Navarre in Spain, originally the Kingdom of Pamplona, from February to May. The reason is unclear: it may have been his first diplomatic mission on behalf of Edward III and John of Gaunt, but quite possibly it was to make a journey to Santiago, Chaucer's first experience of pilgrimage: it is striking that in *The Canterbury Tales* the Wife of Bath describes having been along the Way of St James ('In Galice at seint Jame'), something Chaucer may well have had first-hand experience of.

Two years later, in 1368, Chaucer was involved in arrangements for the marriage in Milan of his patron, Edward's son Lionel of Antwerp, now aged 29, to Violante Visconti, aged just 13. Violante Visconti was the daughter of Galeazzo II Visconti, who, as lord of Milan and head of the powerful Visconti clan, and together with his brother Bernabò, controlled much of northern Italy. Galeazzo's wife – Violante's mother – was Bianca of Savoy, and it is thought that Amedeo, the Count of Savoy, played a role in negotiating Violante's marriage to Lionel.

Violante Visconti and her brother (source: Wikipedia)

Four years after the royal marriage in Milan, Chaucer found himself drawn back to matters Italian. As the historian Wendy Childs has noted, ‘England’s Italian contacts were regular and longstanding, particularly through Church links with Rome, but also through political, intellectual, and commercial channels.’ The Crown’s economy under Edward III largely depended on Italian financiers, especially Matteo Cennini (Matthew Cheyne) and, above all, Walter (Gualtiero) de Bardi, or de Bardes, who became Master of the Mint and a Freeman of the City of London.

Chaucer, who would have known both Cennini and de Bardi in London, was sent in 1372–3 on a mission first to Genoa and then to Florence, where the Bardis were based, to negotiate new loans for the king, despite the fact that Edward III had defaulted on earlier debts. Chaucer was absent from England for six months, travelling to Genoa and Florence from 1 December 1372 until 23 May 1373; the reason for his journey this time was a combination of trade and royal diplomacy.

Quite why Chaucer set off to Italy – a difficult journey in the Middle Ages at the best of times – in the icy depths of winter is not clear. But King Edward badly needed funding from Italian banks both in Genoa and in Florence, where he had defaulted on loans from the powerful Bardi banking family, and needed someone to mend fences. As a consequence, the 1372–3 trip involved not only Genoa but also Florence – and it was there that Chaucer again came into contact with Italian literature.

As the American medievalist John Tatlock noted more than a hundred years ago, Chaucer had plenty of time to see both Petrarch and Boccaccio as well as deal with Genoese trade. It had previously been thought that Chaucer’s journeys to Italy took two months there and two months back. But this was ‘far too large an allowance,' Tatlock wrote, since the historical records show that clerics took only a month to get from Dover to Aosta on their way to Rome. Altogether, Chaucer had over four months in Italy. Tatlock wrote: 'These four or five months mean familiarity with the language, and that familiarity with the country (at various seasons, late winter, early spring, midsummer) which many travellers find stimulates an interest in its literature; they mean perhaps seeing his own countrymen with new eyes when he got home; they mean opportunities for procuring books.'

Picking up on Tatlock’s point nearly 40 years later, the historian George Parks agreed that Chaucer’s journeys must have taken no more than five weeks each way, leaving considerably more time for the sojourn in Italy than had been supposed. More recently, Wendy Childs, Emeritus Professor of Later Medieval History at Leeds University, has pointed out that the journey by sea with Genoese or Venetian trading fleets would have taken no more than eight weeks in good weather, but ‘the risks of adverse winds, wreck and piracy, and the well-attested cramped and smelly conditions of medieval ships made the quicker and more reliable land routes more attractive to all who could choose.'

Chaucer had to cross the Alps in winter when he left England for Italy on 1 December 1372. In travelling from London to Genoa and Florence, he would almost certainly have thought of following the route taken by Prince Lionel to Milan in 1368 by way of Paris, Savoy, and Mont Cenis. But England's war with France had revived in 1369, so the route through France was almost certainly closed to Chaucer's party.

In December 1372 therefore Chaucer presumably went via the Low Countries and Germany – that is to say, the merchant route from Calais to Bruges, Ghent, Maastricht, and Aachen, to the Rhine at Cologne or Bonn, then to Basel and south to Lake Geneva at Lausanne. He then had three choices – Geneva and Chambéry to Mont Cenis; the Great St Bernard Pass to Aosta and then Turin or Chivasso, 'one of the oldest and most frequented routes to and from Italy'; or the Simplon Pass across the Alps to Lake Maggiore and Milan, though this was less likely because of conflict between Savoy and Milan.

The Alpine passes were kept open in winter despite ice and snow, freezing cold, and howling winds, with travellers praying to Saint Julian, the patron saint of hospitality, to help them find refuge and avoid dying from exposure to the elements, as Chaucer himself notes in *The House of Fame.* The distance was about 1600 km, which took merchants and pilgrims up to a month, though some took longer.

So Chaucer probably left on 1 December 1372 and arrived sometime between 1 and 10 January 1373. For the return journey in April and May, he probably took the same route back, given that Milan was still under attack from Savoy and papal armies. He left Genoa between 13 and 23 April to arrive back in London on 23 May. France would still have been closed to him, since John of Gaunt was preparing to march from Calais to Bordeaux.

But the journey in the 14th century was not exactly the Tuscan idyll of today: Chaucer would have been very aware that Northern Italy was torn by local conflicts in this period. One of the leading protagonists, after all, was the English mercenary John Hawkwood, said to be one of the models for 'The Knight's Tale', whom Chaucer may have met at the 1368 Milan wedding, and whom he certainly met on his next Italian trip.

He almost certainly would also have met Giovanni Boccaccio: several of the *Canterbury Tales* seem clearly to be based on stories in Boccaccio's *Decameron,* even though Chaucer gives no credit for them to the Italian writer. Boccaccio had been about 55 at the time of the Milan wedding in 1368, and he was thus nearly 60 at the time of Chaucer's visit to Florence in 1373. Boccaccio spent his last years in the small Tuscan town of Certaldo, 35km from Florence, surrounded by rolling hills, cypress trees, and olive groves - and as we have noted, close to the Via Francigena.

Certaldo – which is nowadays twinned, appropriately enough, with Canterbury – is divided into lower and upper towns, with a statue of Boccaccio in the main

piazza in the lower town. But his home, the Casa Boccaccio, is in the medieval upper town, Certaldo Alto, which retains its fortified walls and is reached by a funicular railway. Boccaccio set one of his Decameron stories in the town, noting in the opening to the story that 'Certaldo, as you may possibly have heard, is a little town in the Val d'Elsa, in the hinterland of Florence', adding that, although it was small in size, Certaldo was 'once the home of wealthy and noble people' (*Decameron* 6:10).

Boccaccio's house, in what is now Via Boccaccio, was largely destroyed in the Second World War by Allied bombing but has been faithfully reconstructed in local red brick. Its features include a library and an exhibition of Boccaccio's life and work, with views from the house's tower across the Tuscan landscape of the Val d'Elsa towards San Gimignano. Other nearby sights include the medieval Palazzo Pretorio, its facade decorated with ceramic coats of arms, which in Boccaccio's time was a prison and court of justice, and a former Augustinian convent which is now the Museo di Arte Sacra ('museum of sacred art'). Boccaccio is buried in the nearby church of Santi Jacopo e Filippo.

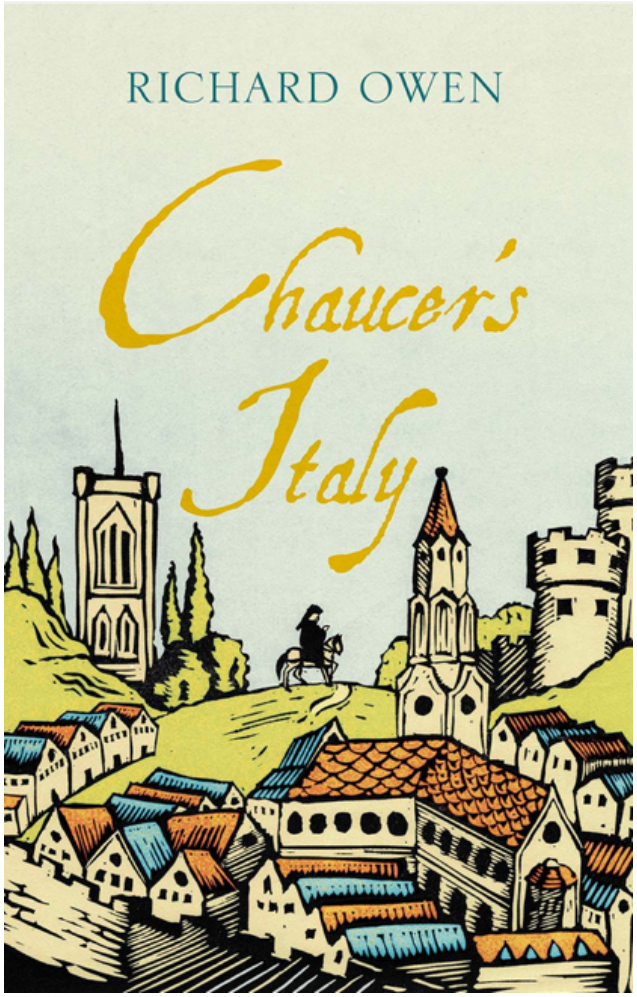
Five years later, Chaucer was again sent to Italy, this time by Edward III's successor, Richard II, on a diplomatic mission to Lombardy. Like the earlier journey to Genoa and Florence, the Lombardy mission took him across the Alps. But then, as David Wallace of the University of Pennsylvania writes of Chaucer's travels, 'The London culture in which Chaucer spent most of his life was so heterogeneous, so multilingual, so much part of a greater European milieu that the passage to the Continent can hardly have struck him as a journey from familiarity to foreignness.'

Chaucer set off for Italy on 28 May 1378 'de civitate Londonie' - his destination this time was Milan - and returned to London on 19 September. His knowledge of the Italian language, his likely involvement in the 1368 Milan Visconti wedding, and his previous trip to Italy in 1373 meant that he was clearly considered the man to deal with matters Italian, far more than the leader of the mission, Edward de Berkeley, one of the 'chamber knights' or 'knights of the body' who were close to the king in his household and attended to his daily needs.

Almost certainly, Chaucer and de Berkeley again followed the well-worn route to Italy, crossing the Channel and then following the Rhine and crossing the Alps into Lombardy, and taking a month to complete the 1200-km journey to Milan. Chaucer therefore arrived as Italy was basking in the heat and light of summer, probably at the end of June – a contrast with his 1372–3 journey, in which he would have crossed the Alps in icy winter conditions.

Chaucer did not return to Italy, and died in 1400 at his apartment in Westminster Abbey, where he became the first writer to be buried in what became Poets' Corner. But he was certainly aware of the Via Francigena: the Wife of Bath after all tells us she has not only been to Santiago de Compostela but also to Rome itself, presumably following the pilgrim way. Moreover Chaucer was – despite his often racy and bawdy storytelling – a man of faith: in his afterword to *The Canterbury Tales* he asks the reader 'to pray for me, that Christ have mercy on me and forgive me my sins.'

Pilgrimage for Chaucer was a means of telling tales, the reward for the best tale (never claimed, as far as we know) being a free meal back at the Tabard Inn. But pilgrimage for the father of English literature, as for many others in his lifetime, was also a spiritual pathway through life.



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***Chaucer's Italy* by Richard Owen is published by Haus Publishing in their *Armchair Traveller* series:**
https://www.hauspublishing.com/product/chaucers-italy/

Richard Owen was Rome correspondent for The Times newspaper for 15 years. He was previously the paper's correspondent in Moscow, Brussels, and Jerusalem. Owen has written several works of non-fiction, including *Crisis in the Kremlin* and, with Haus, *Lady Chatterley's Villa*, *DH Lawrence in Italy* and *Hemingway in Italy*.

SEEKING COMMUNITY

Nick Dunne discusses how pilgrims belong to the community of past, present and future

From our guest house high in the hills above Besançon we watched as dusk began to fall and the city lights sparkled far below us. Just a couple of hours earlier we had been in the bustling, noisy city, but now there were only bats flashing past our bedroom window, and there was deep silence around us. This was the Franciscans' Chapelle des Buis perched on its ridge at the edge of the forest, and our welcome there remains one of the richest memories that my wife, Fiona, and I have of our Via Francigena journey. The following morning, we were welcomed to Mass in the friars' small chapel and afterwards joined them and half a dozen parishioners for breakfast. Our French was limited, but we had enough to feel part of a community of friends who, together, were creating something special here that was in harmony with the forest around us.

The Franciscan Tau cross in the Chapelle des Buis

'*We believe that everyone who journeys along these ancient paths, and for whatever reason – spiritual or secular – is a pilgrim. Part of the pilgrim journey is the companionship with others on the road, and the CPR wishes to actively encourage and foster a sense of community among its members, of being part of something greater than a repository of information and guidance.*' These words define the purpose of our Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome and it is striking how central the word 'community' is in this mission. "Community" has many definitions – a group of people in a geographical place or who have a common purpose, for example – and, whilst it may include friends and family, it is a concept that is broader than either.

One of the attractions of walking long-distance pilgrim routes are the moments of camaraderie and community that come when strangers of different

backgrounds discover a connection inspired by the common purpose of their journey. The stamps we collect on our credential identify us, however tenuously, as 'pilgrims' – not just walkers, visitors or tourists – who are travelling on a *pilgrim* way that is not just a long-distance walking or cycling route. This pilgrim identity can give permission for conversations at a deeper, spiritual level beyond the shared meals, drinks and laughter. These 'pilgrim conversations' provided us with some of the most profound moments of our journey.

Seeking to belong to a community of fellow pilgrims is, I suggest, one reason many people are drawn to the pilgrim routes at a time when, in the West, formal religious observance is in decline. As we set out on the road, we open ourselves to becoming part of the fleeting communities we will meet on the way. However, as well as being drawn to these 'communities of the present' the decision can also come from a desire to find our place in communities of the past and future too.

On the Via Francigena, we are conscious that we are walking in the footsteps of countless others who have made journeys of spiritual purpose across the centuries. Whether hoping for physical or mental healing, seeking answers to mysteries of faith, or giving thanks for blessings received, these ancient pilgrims prepared the way we now follow, leaving clues and insights that can guide us in our own search for wisdom and meaning.

Notre Dame de Lorette battlefield site

The Via Francigena provides a thread through modern history too. During its early stages in France the route coincides with many places made famous by the First

World War. Here many of the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of today's pilgrims spent weeks and months of their young lives in circumstances that are unimaginable to most of us now. With some background research and by taking detours not far from the official Via Francigena route, Fiona and I were able to walk literally in the footsteps of her grandfather, Albert, who had served on the Somme during 1916. Albert lived long enough afterwards to marry and have a family, and our pilgrim journey deepened our relationship with this community of our past to whom we owe so much.

Sunken Road Cemetery, Boisleux St Marc, on the Via Francigena. Photo: M. Kirk

So, as pilgrims on the Via Francigena we connect with communities of the past as well as those of today. However, there is a third dimension to this community of pilgrims that calls us, consciously or subconsciously, to find our place in it - the community of the future. Many pilgrims make the journey at a time when their future is uncertain, perhaps because of advancing age, weaker health, or changed work or family circumstances, and the pilgrimage can provide a platform, a new base from which this uncertain future can evolve. For many of us there is also the desire for the story of our pilgrimage to be told to those who might follow us - why else, I ask myself, do I take so many photographs, write diaries, and publish books? Yes, they are for my own memories but I also hope

that they may help to inspire future communities of pilgrims just as I have been inspired by those who have gone before.

Thinking of that future, how might the pilgrimage experience change us when our wandering ends and we return to our home, our base, our place of belonging? Yes, we may long to go wandering again but might we also see our familiar surroundings in a slightly different light? During the Covid pandemic, when travel was restricted for all of us and isolation affected many in new and different ways, many of us discovered the importance and value of the community that exists within a quarter mile radius of our homes. As pilgrims, we have relied on the stability of the communities we have passed through and experienced as an outsider – sometimes warmly welcomed and at other times feeling excluded and ignored. What would a visiting pilgrim say about our home community – our town or village, our parish church or community centre? What duties do I have as a returned pilgrim towards the settled community of which I am part? How might I make it more welcoming to those who are on its edge and how might the story of my pilgrimage be of value to others?

A walking or cycling pilgrimage, by its very nature, is tangible and rooted in time and place. This is also true of the concept of community, and there are moments and places when all three communities of pilgrims – past, present and future – weave themselves together as if time itself, diverted from its linear progression, becomes an unbroken circle.

For me, one such moment was in Rome's great Santa Maria Maggiore church where I stood looking up at the famous mosaics on the upper walls of the basilica. As I focused my camera to try to capture a scene for the book I planned to write, I realised with a sudden clarity that, in this moment, I was looking at the very same mosaics that our guide to the Via Francigena, Archbishop Sigeric, would have gazed upon in AD 990. Even to his eyes, these mosaics created in the fifth century AD would have been ancient and, for a moment, we two pilgrims, he from my past and I from his future stood together contemplating their beauty. In Santa Maria Maggiore the community of pilgrims, past, present and future came together.

Nick Dunne and his wife, Fiona, walked the Via Francigena in stages over several years from 2014 to 2022 and his memoir *Walking on Holy Ground: A Pilgrimage on the Via Francigena and the Western Front, from London to Laon* is available from the CPR Shop and as an e-book from Amazon.

'THE COMMUNITY OF THE DEAD'

Alex Knox, Pilgrims to Rome's youngest trustee, visits the battlefields of northern France along the Via Francigena, and finds an intimate connection to those who lost their lives

This article reflects on the Via Francigena's route through the First World War battlefields, which I walked as part of my journey to Rome in 2022.

In Via Francigena terms, Ablain Saint-Nazaire marks something of First World War gateway - where the course of the pilgrimage first intersects with the Western Front. The war immediately makes itself known. To reach Ablain Saint-Nazaire, you must first skirt the perimeter of France's largest military graveyard, Notre Dame de Lorette, which occupies the raised plateau above the town, and where more than 40,000 graves stand in serried files. German forces captured Lorette Spur early in the war, in October 1914, and held it for months, before the French seized it back in May 1915. Ablain Saint-Nazaire itself was destroyed in the melée. Its church bears witness to this, left to stand as a ruin.

Notre Dame de Lorette French cemetery

You have become so used to the flatlands of northern France by this stage of the Via, and so can better appreciate why a hill like Lorette - innocuous enough, perhaps, to the naked eye - should have featured so prominently in the war. Just three miles to the south-east, and clearly visible from Lorette, rises another infamous hill, which although not directly on the route of the Via is easily reachable from the path: Vimy Ridge. Like Lorette, Vimy Ridge was also taken by the German forces early in the conflict, yet here it took the majority of the war for the Allies to gain it back. The French suffered more than 100,000 casualties attempting to do so, before the Canadians successfully smashed their way up it in April 1917 during the Battle of Arras. Much is made of the pitifully small distances that defined the losses and gains of the First World War, but this was

the first time I could appreciate it for myself. The following morning, and back on the path, it would take me just over an hour to cover the same ground that Allied forces accrued over two years.

The Via Francigena's association with the First World War is concentrated between Ablain Saint-Nazaire and Reims, an area of fiercely contended land. Much of this was slowly won back by the Allies over the course of 1916-17, then lost during the German spring offensive of 1918, before being regained in the final months of the war - the final Allied push that led to the Armistice. You face up to this in a town like Bapaume, which changed hands multiple times throughout the conflict, as well as in the dates marking the gravestones: many soldiers here died in the final throes of the war.

In Arras you discover a city that was virtually obliterated by the conflict, much of it by shells that were fired from the vantage of Vimy Ridge. Eighty percent of its buildings were destroyed, and lovingly reconstructed following the conflict. A tour of Arras's Carrière Wellington reveals the astounding work of 500 New Zealander miners, who hacked out a 12-mile network of tunnels beneath the city, capable of billeting 20,000 soldiers. During the Battle of Arras, mines were detonated and these soldiers poured out from the ground, overwhelming the German forces and forcing them back. This offensive was in fact a distraction: an attempt to draw German forces so that the French could force a breakthrough further south at Chemin des Dames. You discover this for yourself when you pass the Chemin des Dames ridge several days later, the site of the Second Battle of the Aisne. This, however, was a bloody failure for the French, the carnage so hellish that it resulted some of the most significant mutinies of the war. The Battle of Arras, too, failed to accomplish its goals. After initial successes, the German forces were able to regroup; casualties mounted and the offensive was abandoned. Again and again along the Via, you are left wondering what it was all for.

Whether you intend to engage with the war or not on your pilgrimage, it is difficult to hide from it. For me, the experience was heightened by the circumstances of my own journey through northern France, which, in February 2022, took place

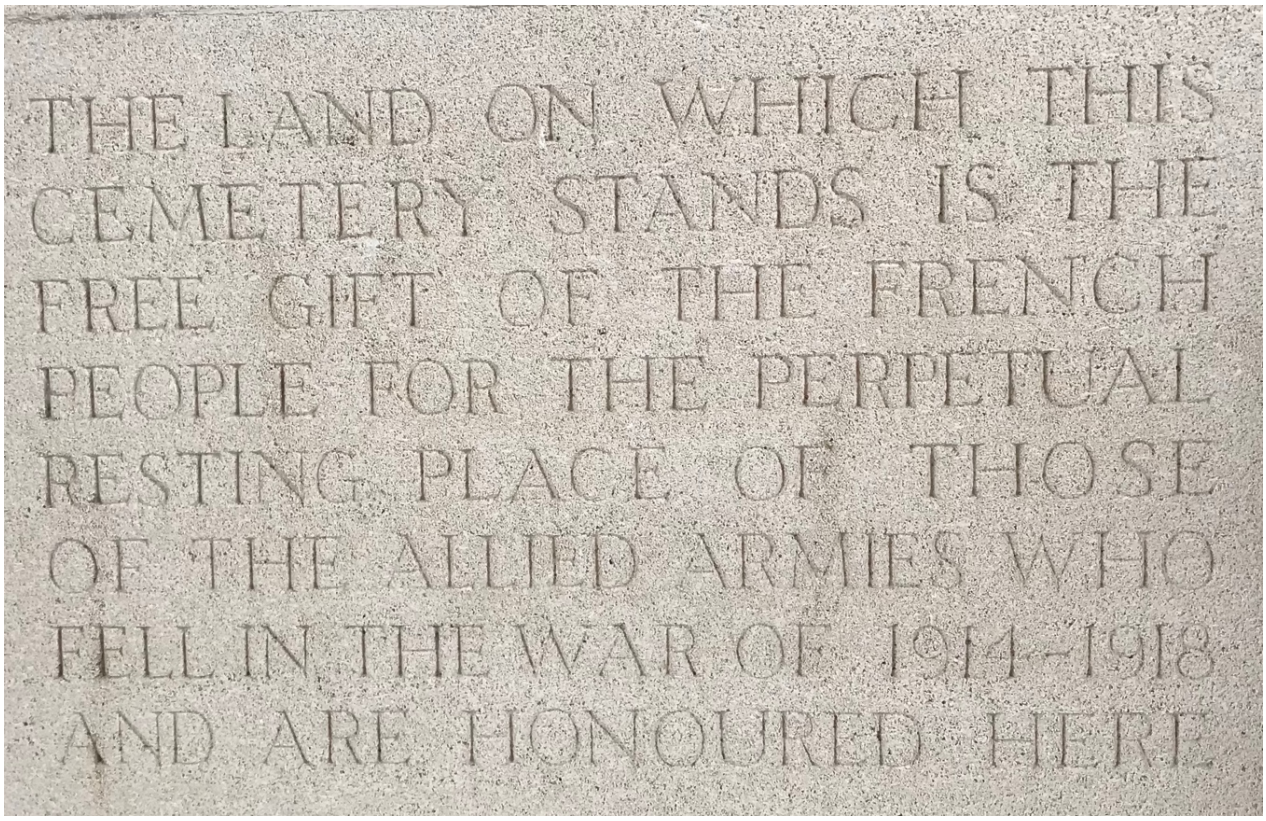
against the backdrop of Storm Eunice. The worst of the storm had blown itself out by the time I reached Ablain Saint Nazaire, but more rain and gales were on their way. Mud was unavoidable and I became familiar with its many forms. The storm had wrought serious damage, particularly in the numbers of fallen trees. So many had been torn from the ground that it was hard at times to distinguish them from the images of mangled forests I remembered from school textbooks of First World War battlefields. Many of the villages I passed through were eerily empty. I encountered few locals in the course of each walking day, and come the evenings would often find myself dining alone in hotel restaurants. Lonely as I often was, the war cemeteries, when they appeared along the route - and I tended to pass three or four each day - left a significant impression on me.

It was a British policy to bury soldiers close to where they fell, in contrast to the French, who favoured mass cemeteries such as Notre Dame de Lorette. For this reason, the majority of the Commonwealth cemeteries that you encounter along the Via are set in quiet, out-of-the-way places. Removed from towns and villages, they seem part of the landscape that they inhabit. Entering them, I would encounter the familiar-sounding names of soldiers and regiments: Isherwood, Bryant, Brennan, the Royal Scots, the London Regiment. I hesitate to admit it but, starved of human contact as I was during that winter leg of the Via, I grew to find these 'meetings' with the dead oddly reassuring. The cemetery walls offered a measure of protection from the elements, and their neat lawns and tended flowerbeds, so beautifully kept by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, represented a welcome change from the brown fields I was otherwise walking

through. I often found it difficult to tear myself away from them, and instead traced the files of graves for extended periods, taking in a name here or an age of death there. As the days wore on, I realised the morbid truth: that I was beginning to feel at home amongst this community of the dead. They offered, in an uncomfortable way I still struggle to articulate, a sense of connection.

It is not unusual to meet Via Francigena pilgrims who speak less than fondly of their time walking through Northern France, and given much of what I have written above, you might expect similar sentiments from me. Certainly, there are beautiful gifts awaiting pilgrims along the Via, many of which cast these 'northlands' firmly into the shade. Anyone who has walked the route will attest to the magic of Champagne, the Jura, Alps, the Aosta Valley and Tuscany, to name a few. Yet I have spoken to three separate pilgrims who, reflecting on their journeys from Canterbury to Rome, claim it is the north of France which they now feel the most affection for. It is a view I share. There is a beauty and quiet simplicity to this phase of the journey, and one which casts its own spell. The war enters the story of the Via at a time when you are still getting used to the daily rhythm of the walk, and before you are yet to settle on your own views about the pilgrimage.

It is a formative phase of the journey to Rome, and one in which the reflections you form about the war, and your relationship to it, inform and colour the walk to come. You emerge changed from your encounter with the battlefields and cemeteries: humbler, certainly - and perhaps more open to what is to come.



THE PILGRIMAGE COMMUNITY - AND TAROT

Andrew Dennis, a lifetime member of Pilgrims to Rome and a regular contributor to these pages, offers a surprising and original take on pilgrimage and community

The more people that meet each other, the better it is for all of them.
Fletcher Pratt, *Tales from Gavagan's Bar*

I am now quite cured of seeking pleasure in society, be it country or town. A sensible man ought to find sufficient company in himself.
Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*

Some birds are more gregarious than others. Gulls such as those which pilgrims encounter on Lac Léman congregate in flocks; pelicans form themselves into pods or squadrons; the penguin lives in a waddle, while robins hang out in bobbins. Budgies are not considered gregarious by ornithologists and nor intriguingly are love birds. The dotterel too is regarded as solitary by nature, except during the mating season.

We find this mixed pattern of behaviour repeated in most areas of life. In the Christian church the Discalced Carmelite nun who embraces a life of prayer separates herself off from the world behind a grille; the Benedictine monk takes a vow of stability which obliges him to remain within the curtilage of his monastery unless permitted to leave by the abbot, while the Franciscan friar and the Augustinian canon go out into the community to practise their ministries. Much to the irritation of the established Church, the Gyrovagues (perpetual nomads) were medieval monks who spent their entire time on the open road begging. In the end they were denounced.

What of the pilgrim? Are you a penguin or a budgie? Maybe you are both? I submit that the answer to this question is determined by our psychological type, notably whether we are introverted or extraverted by nature, and by the purpose and motivation for our journey. For example, a pilgrim searching for a change in his career path is likely to place more value on participating in community where ideas can be easily exchanged with others than the pilgrim set upon an inward-based journey of self-discovery.

I must confess at this stage that I am not a penguin. As an introverted sort of fellow my inclination is to look inwards and then to project outwards, to observe from the sidelines rather than to mingle too closely with others, to walk alone when making my way along the pilgrim path. *Individuation*, Jung's term for self-realisation, was and remains my focus and given that at the time of my pilgrimage to Rome I was feeling in a state of flux this was especially true of my journey. From the outset it felt to me as if the disparate parts of my psyche, especially those aspects I had neglected or worse still ignored or denied during a busy farming career needed re-appraising and integrating into a meaningful whole,

into what I came to perceive as an ‘internal community’. It was my hope that as this happened I might begin to make more sense of the world and find meaning in it.

Sallie Nichols, the author of *Jung and Tarot, an Archetypal Journey* presents the journey towards individuation as a pilgrimage through the trump cards of a tarot pack, each one of which she presents as a projection holder symbolising an archetype or facet of the self. She uses the tarot trumps to illuminate the stages of this journey in much the same way as I came to treat the characters I met during my pilgrimage. As we shall see, in my case some of these characters were actual, others dreamt and still others imagined; however collectively they formed an internal community and it was through the lens of this community that I dealt with what lay before me.

There are 22 trump cards in the tarot pack, these being named picture cards which do not belong to any of the four suits, the first of which, the spontaneous fun-loving Fool, or Joker, is the only card surviving in our modern pack of playing cards. To my immense joy I didn’t need to wait long before bumping into this chaotic and likable individual. We met late one evening at Ealing Abbey when, at around midnight, there came a loud rapping at the heavy wooden door. The way ‘Rainbow Andrew’, as I called him, fell into the hallway once the door had been opened reminded me of a king’s jester, whereas his costume of orange, purple and green bore an uncanny resemblance to the brightly attired fool’s motley in the tarot pack. He was what Sallie Nicols calls a constant reminder that the urge to anarchy exists in human nature and must be taken into account, otherwise he’ll play jokes on us and trip us up. On the positive side he was animating too. Rainbow Andrew’s gusto awoke

my playful side which had a deliciously energising affect. Here was a traveller - as epitomised in the tarot pack by the little dog running by his side - who was innately friendly and in tune with his instincts. Bravo!

The Fool would appear to me many times during my pilgrimage - in the guise of an Italian cyclist in Langres (everything about Georgio was back to front; had I not been ready for him he might easily have turned my carefully conceived itinerary on its head) and a purple-bearded minstrel outside the Abbey of Saint-Maurice d'Agaune in Switzerland. In common with all the archetypes I discovered that the more I came to know him the more easily I could recognise and welcome him into my internal community.

Sallie Nichols takes us though the tarot trumps progressively one by one, and as we travel with her and consider the meaning of the cards theoretically we evolve and our self-knowledge deepens. A literary analogy might be Dante's *Divine Comedy* or possibly Lewis Carroll's *Alice though the Looking Glass* both of which may be interpreted as journeys towards individuation. This being said, I must admit that my journey was more haphazard and random. My tarot trumps appeared out of sequence, not that I feel this matters. After all no two journeys are the same.

Let us skip to another trump card, card number nine known as the Hermit, who manifested himself to me one day in the grounds of Clairvaux Abbey.

In the tarot pack the Hermit is depicted as the archetypal wise old man carrying a lantern, a symbol of illumination, and like the Fool and many pilgrims he walks with a stick. 'By his simple presence,' Sallie Nichols writes, 'He illumines fearful recesses of the human soul and warms hearts empty of hope and meaning... He offers us a light, as represented by the lantern, with which to dispel spiritual chaos and darkness.' I suspect every pilgrim has need of such a guide from time to time. For Dante this role was performed first by Virgil and then by Beatrice, and for me by Pierre, a Cistercian monk and prison visitor at the high security goal at Clairvaux, whose sensitivity and compassion had ignited the creativity of the prison inmates. Some of their paintings were displayed in the prison chapel - great swirls of spectacular light, colour and darkness. I don't suppose we spoke for more than a minute but in that time Pierre's simple generosity left a lasting impression.

Of course, dramatising one's connection with an inner figure is hardly revolutionary. Pilgrims often refer to their guardian angels, those unseen presences that watch over them as they go. Like the puzzling characters which pop up unexpectedly in our dreams, to borrow a phrase from Jung, they seem to cry out for our attention. The alchemists called this practice *Meditatio,* defined by Ruland the Lexicographer as 'an inner dialogue with someone who is invisible... with one's good angel'. To which Alan McGlashan, author of *The Savage a Beautiful Country*, suggests should be added the phrase 'and with one's dark angel' .

In order to contextualise what is meant by this addition, let us turn first to card number two, the High Priestess, who has been likened to Christ's mother, or to Sophia, the Goddess of Divine Wisdom. The High Priestess is an archetype who rules by love and patience. She is the artist's muse, the inspiration of troubadours

and poets and was personified for me by the beautiful Ceylonese nun I met in La Storta and by a young Belgian poet I spent time with in Lucca. Both these women helped unlock my creativity.

Statue of St Thérèse de Lisieux in Reims Cathedral

Card number three, The Empress, epitomises another aspect of the feminine principle. She is Madonna and Queen, the Elizabeth I of this world in whose orbit the arts flourished. Here I'm reminded of my hostess at Fontenelay who animated a court of blue-collar workers then renovating her home, and the mesmerising statue of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux in Reims Cathedral. But let it not be forgotten that these two aspects of the feminine principle have their dark sides too, albeit not of the kind we find symbolised by card number 15, the Devil.

What pilgrimage, what life-journey does not incorporate his influence? How often have we been misled by our shadow-side, by Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr Hyde, by this dark angel whom Shakespeare cast as Iago and who was represented for me by a shady Bavarian, who after a dubious business career, had retired to live in Monte Carlo. Being confronted by an archetype will always evoke an emotional reaction of some kind, and by exploring these reactions we can integrate them. I met this individual on several different occasions and initially my hackles bristled. However, as I came to recognise him for what he was, a part of my self, my resistance to him weakened and I was able to channel the strength of my reaction into other areas.

When walking the Western Front the historian Sir Anthony Seldon talks about gently breathing his way into each new community. This, to my way of thinking, is a lovely way to proceed, to inter-react with others almost invisibly and with humility, to remain a little detached and by doing so to give them space. Perhaps for those of us of an introspective disposition this is the only way, given what we are by nature. It allows us time and space with which to explore the community of characters within us while allowing us to stay in touch with the outer world whose existence it would be meaningless to deny.

'Solitude helps me to appreciate company and company helps me to appreciate solitude, but there's a time for speaking and a time for being silent,' Gerard Hughes[1] reminds us. To my mind this notion of equilibrium is portrayed in the final trump card of all which is The World, the quintessence of wholeness and meaning, that state of awareness which we can only glimpse but which deep down seems to flow from holding one's inner and outer community in harmony.

[1]. Gerard Hughes *In Search of a Way: Two Journeys of Spiritual Discovery*

LONELY CONNECTIONS

Brian Mooney, serial long-distance walker, vice-chair of Pilgrims to Rome, and author of 'A long way for a pizza' about his walk to Rome, offers a personal view of the pilgrim paradox of solitude and community.

Long-distance walkers are in the main loners. To achieve our goals – to saddle up day after day for big hauls – we need to be self-sufficient and self-reliant; nobody is going to walk for us. But herein lies a paradox. Walkers also depend on the communities through which they travel. Even though we are often alone, we are not isolated from our surroundings, and we have to be aware of the impact we make, and it's not always positive.

I have often been struck in France, for instance, at the number of times I hear the click of door locks as I walk past a line of cars at traffic lights. Away from the hills, lone walkers are viewed by the French as SDFs - *sans domiciles fixes* (people of no fixed abode, tramps). Even in Switzerland, on the southern shores of Lac Léman, I recall an elegantly dressed horse rider asking me what all the people walking his way were doing. When I explained that they were pilgrims making their way to Rome, he laughed (at himself). "Good heavens," he said, "I thought they were tramps."

We are first and foremost ambassadors. The best walkers I have come across – and I am not one of them – are those with infinite patience who accept every adversity with equanimity. They bring goodness with them and transmit goodwill, even when confronted by barking dogs!

For me, there are certain rules of the road.

Accepting hospitality is one thing; expecting it is quite another. I have always opposed the ploy of turning up somewhere at dusk and hoping that shelter and a meal will be provided as if by providence. This is subsidised middle class holidaying, subsidised by people who are generally less well off than we are. Pilgrim hostels are another matter. They are set up expressly to welcome all comers, and – especially on the way to Santiago de Compostela – they provide a wonderful opportunity for volunteers to give back. The CPR has long had an aspiration to set up and run a pilgrim hostel of its own – perhaps at the halfway mark of the first stage from Canterbury to Dover.

Walkers following waymarked pilgrim routes such as the Via Francigena and the Camino to Santiago de Compostela are also dependent on volunteers, whom in all probability we will never meet. It takes a lot of work to devise, signpost and maintain a route; every waymark is a gift from an invisible hand.

In many intangible ways, we depend on each other as well: above all we reap the kindness left by those who have gone before us. I am sure all of us have felt a certain kinship with the way – the footfall of prayer, hope, and joy.

'THE BLEND OF SOLITUDE, FELLOWSHIP AND ENCOUNTER WITH STRANGERS'

Dr Philip McCarthy, former CEO of CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network) describes how walking to Rome - and beyond - changed him, and led him to found Pilgrim Ways, in order to share the distinctive spirituality associated with walking pilgrimage

In 2008 I set off alone from Canterbury to Rome. When asked 'Is it a pilgrimage?' I obfuscated, unsure what it means to be a pilgrim in a secular age and reluctant to be pigeonholed. On the road I became a pilgrim because of how others saw and welcomed me. I remember staying in a hostel in Italy where the woman who ran the place insisted on washing and kissing the feet of the pilgrims staying overnight. This was a challenge to my English sensibilities, but there was no doubt about how she saw us!

I wrote a book about the journey, called *Rome Alone*. After leaving my role as a GP in 2015 I tramped on to Istanbul via Mount Athos and Gallipoli and wrote another book, *The Dusty Roads of History*.

The experience of these two pilgrimages changed me, and so in late 2015 I felt called to take up a role as CEO of Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), the domestic social action agency of the Catholic Church in England & Wales. In 2021, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, I returned to the NHS to help with the vaccination programme.

At the same time I started to reflect on my next steps and realised I was suffering from what the Jesuit Gerard Hughes called the ‘hardening of the oughteries’: struggling to fit into my preconceptions of what I ‘ought’ to do.

I have always loved long distance walking. Over half a century ago, aged six or seven, sitting in the back of the family Morris Minor, I glimpsed a gaunt man striding along bearing a haversack: weather-beaten face, dishevelled white hair and beard, and long flapping coat. My father said he might be an ex-soldier, scarred by war, who had taken to the road. To me the 'tramp' looked brave, independent and free. I wanted to walk like him, with nothing except what I could carry, so I pestered family and friends to hike with me.

The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote:

> *Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it. But by sitting still, and the more one sits still, the closer one comes to feeling ill. Thus if one just keeps on walking, everything will be all right.*

Now retired, I was able to walk more, in the hope that everything would be all right, and found that my way did indeed become clear.

Readers of this newsletter know that walking pilgrimage is a great way of experiencing our physical environment, exercising, encountering people different from ourselves and of promoting local tourism; all much needed after the Covid 19 pandemic. In an age of global warming we should avoid air travel, so walking pilgrimage in our home nations is a greener option. In my view there is also a distinctive spirituality associated with walking pilgrimage because of its closeness to the earth, the slowness of travel and the blend of solitude, fellowship and encounter with strangers it involves.

But how to share these benefits with others? The plan I came up with is a three-year project to promote walking pilgrimage in England and Wales by developing Pilgrim Ways, starting at each Catholic cathedral and ending at a shrine within the same diocese, welcoming people of all faiths and none. My hope is that they will be an opportunity for Christians to deepen their faith and for everyone to share the experience of walking a pilgrimage in a Catholic context. The Pilgrim Ways take in churches along the way and places of relevant historical interest. They are off-road as much as possible and incorporate existing pilgrim routes and long-distance footpaths. The cathedrals, shrines and churches along each Way will be encouraged to provide a simple welcome, for example by keeping the church porch open during some daytime hours and providing a stamp for pilgrim passports.

Glastonbury Tor, an ancient place of pilgrimage

In most Catholic dioceses there is no existing way, but the Diocese of Leeds has the two-day St Wilfrid's Way, and the Diocese of Lancaster the six-day St Mary's Way. In Southwark there is the Augustine Camino and in Arundel and Brighton there is an annual ecumenical walking pilgrimage: Pilgrims Live! Nationally there is Pilgrim Cross (formerly Student Cross) to Walsingham in Holy Week. These walks provide models and inspiration for this project.

Pope Francis has said of pilgrims:

> *Whoever they may be — young or old, rich or poor, sick and troubled or curious tourists — let them find due welcome, because in every person there is a heart in search of God, at times without being fully aware of it.*

We are all on a search, often without being fully aware of what we are looking for. The phrase 'heart in search of God' inspired the title of my project.

Key to the project is a new website, www.pilgrimways.org.uk. There are GPX files for all the Pilgrim Ways and walking directions for those I have walked to date. There are downloadable pilgrim passports, certificates for pilgrims who complete the Ways, as well as spiritual resources. I have drawn heavily on the *Pray as You Go* website, a project of the Jesuits in Britain, and I am grateful for their collaboration. The Hearts in Search of God project is volunteer-run, and I act as Project Lead. I have recruited an expert advisory panel and the project is supported by the Sisters of the Holy Cross CIO.

2025 will be a Holy Year with the motto *Pilgrims of Hope*. Holy Doors in the four great Roman basilicas will be opened and it is anticipated that 30 million people will travel to Rome to pass through them. But will there also be Holy Doors in our cathedrals too. Why not walk a Pilgrim Way to one?

So please visit the website and have a look at the Ways. I welcome your feedback, comments and advice. If you would like to be involved in the project, please contact me at: pilgrimwaysew@gmail.com.

Buen Camino!

Details of how to buy Phil's books can be found at www.pilgrimways.org.uk/people. All proceeds go to St Joseph's Hospice, which provides palliative care and end of life support for the people of East London regardless of faith and background.

THE COMMUNITY OF THE VIA FRANCIGENA

SOEUR LUCIE

Anyone walking from Canterbury to Rome will encounter people whose mission is to serve pilgrims. These form part of a memorable community, and an encounter with them forms some of the indelible memories of the journey. Here we start an occasional series on these figures who are waymarks of welcome. There are many: Soeur Lucie, Colette Gévas, Jo Bonnal, Carlo on his bicycle in Tromello, Danilo Parisi, the ferryman of the Po... and many others. We invite our readers to send in accounts of their own encounters.

We start with Soeur Lucie, the soeur hôtelière of the Benedictine Community of Notre Dame in Wisques, two or three days into the way from Calais.

Soeur Lucie is reticent about the path that led her to Wisques and the Benedictines there, though she tried different communities when she was younger. She insists that - although she is the welcoming face of the abbey - it is the whole community which offers hospitality to pilgrims on behalf of Christ.

I can attest to her faith in action. I arrived after three days from Canterbury with severe stomach pains, nausea and a slight fever. Soeur Lucie took charge and ministered to me, made me rest, and provided me with some vile powders which were to be mixed with water and taken three times a day. They were disgusting but did the trick, and I was able to walk on.

Pilgrims can join the community (outside the monastic enclosure) for Vespers at 4.30pm. The Gregorian chant will add another dimension to your pilgrimage.

Mary Kirk

Abbaye Notre-Dame 24, rue de la Fontaine 62219 Wisques. Reception: Tel. +33 [0]3 21 95 12 26 preferably between 11h00 and 12h20 - 14h45 and 16h20 - 17h40 et 19h00. Email contact form on their website. Sœur hôtelière: Tel. +33 [0]3 21 95 57 30

THE MODERN VIA FRANCIGENA, A STEP TOO FAR ?

How to save time and distance on the Via Francigena - an English guide writer's view

Paul Chinn, author of the Lightfoot Guides, expands his article first published on our website, showing how the Via Francigena has evolved, and how you can save precious time and kilometres to beat the Schengen 90-day rule.

When Sigeric the Serious set off on his return journey to Canterbury with pallium in hand he was no doubt a man in a hurry. Religion and politics were intimately intertwined, and leaving your seat for any length of time was a risky business.

We have learned that he made the journey through Italy, Switzerland and France in 79 or maybe 80 stages and given the urgency of his return this may have taken a similar number of days. The *submansiones* or stopping places mentioned in his chronicle lie along the vestiges of the ancient roads that led straight as a die from Rome to the English Channel and enabled the invasion by emperor Claudius and the ultimate enslavement of Britannia and so it is a good guess that he followed these roads.

Following the renewal of the Camino de Santiago and its many tributaries, it was only a matter of time before the routes to Rome would also come back to life including the vie Francigene. Indeed, I hope that the Lightfoot Guides, as the first complete end-to-end guide, may have played some small part in this.

As with the Camino there was never a single route that was followed by early pilgrims, but rather a network of trails each used depending on the pilgrim's starting point, prevailing weather, levels of disease, brigandry or even warfare, and the pilgrim's association with the shrines dedicated to saints and martyrs along the way. Over the 20 years I have walked the Italian trails I have stumbled on Via Francigena signs and monuments associated with the route dotted throughout the country.

In deciding to extend the via Francigena beyond Italian borders there were clearly many routes that could be developed but with limited resources the sensible decision was to focus initially on a single route and with Sigeric's chronicle safely preserved in the British Library and predating any other complete route then this was a good call.

So how has the Sigeric route - completed in 79 or 80 stages (excluding the leg from the Channel to Canterbury) and probably covering 1400 km - grown to 2200 km in 103 stages and does this matter? If we were to travel by car or even by bike we can get very close to the Roman roads that we think Sigeric used. In my late 60s on my trusty mountain bike I managed to pick out and follow a route that led me from Canterbury to Rome in 22 cycling days covering around 1600 km.

However, the modern pilgrim reasonably expects safety and quality of experience and the highways that I followed do not offer this to those on foot.

There is now a political dilemma in that since Brexit there is no anglophone country that has automatic visa access to the countries on the route for more than 90 days out of 180. Because we have seen a 50+% growth in the route length since Sigeric (who, we think, used a horse) which non-Schengen pilgrims need to complete on foot in just ten percent more days. It is clear that many pilgrims have accepted and conquered this challenge; what is less clear is how many have found the challenge too great and have opted to walk yet another Camino route in Spain or Portugal or perhaps lower their ambitions and choose to exclude the UK, or maybe French and even Swiss sections of the route.

In France the GR© network is a fabulous asset with the benefit of signposting, route maintenance and provision of hiking accommodation. Not unreasonably, the Fédération Française de la Via Francigena (FFVF) in conjunction with the European Association of the Vie Francigene (EAVF/AEVF) elected to define a route which would be adopted by the Fédération Française de la Randonnée Pédestre (FFRP) as a GR©. However, the implementation of this decision did not come without cost to the prospective pilgrim.

Pre-existing GR©s were preferred, rather than establish new rights of way and install and maintain new signposting. Perhaps the best example is the section between Châlons-en-Champagne to Brienne-le-Château where a direct route following the Roman road, probably used by Sigeric, is bypassed, despite there being no material safety risks, in favour of a much longer route via Vitry-le-François. This alone adds 48 km (two hiking days), while bypassing two Sigeric locations.

In the second graphic (see below) I have shown a section of the route in Hauts-de-France, the orange lettering indicates the Sigeric stopping place with the light orange line showing the Roman road and therefore his probable route. The brown line is the "Official Route" and the blue line is the Lightfoot Guide short cut. You will see that the blue route is both closer to the probable Sigeric path and also 11 km and three walking hours or perhaps one overnight stay shorter. The south-west route from Saint-Quentin towards Martinwaeth (aka Seraucourt-le-Grand) is a pre-existing GR© reached by a major diversion following tarmac and gravel roads as well as a former railway track.

GR© status requires the minimisation of the use of tarmac, regardless of the level of traffic or existence of adequate pavements. The stage from Besançon to Ornans (not a Sigeric location nor on his probable route) completes three sides of a rectangle where a section of quiet road followed by a woodland track would reduce the stage from a challenging 36km to a reasonable 23 km.

Having now established GR© status as the GR©145 the route in France is 400 km longer than the route that was probably taken by Sigeric and there is significant procedural resistance to modify the route.

In Switzerland we encounter resistance again in the modification of route 70. It is accepted that the route taken by Sigeric was via Antifern which is now understood to be the border town of Jougne. However, the Swiss route was designed when there was an inaccurate association of Antifern with Yverdon-les-Bains. Nonetheless, the route 70 signposting and the EAVF app continue to follow a route sweeping a wide arc bypassing Jougne.

In Italy, a more relaxed view of rights of way coupled with a richer network of farm tracks and footpaths have allowed a closer following of the probable Sigeric route, while more investment has been available to tackle safety issues including the installation of a number of footbridges. It is nonetheless interesting to see that in a number of situations, for example Monteriggioni, Colle di Val d'Elsa and San Martino al Cimino the 'Official Route' now passes through tourist centres deviating from the probable Sigeric route and creating a serpentine and significantly longer route.

In the eight (shortly to be nine) editions of the Lightfoot Guides I have sought to allow the pilgrim to walk the route that suits them best. From my own experience I have reproduced as accurately as possible the “Official Route” but also highlight approximately 100 options to shorten the route or pass more closely to the Sigeric route. When taken together these options will reduce the journey by more than 200 km or more than 7 normal hiking days bringing the whole route comfortably within the scope of more non-Schengen residents. The options work hard not to use busy roads but do not slavishly bypass all tarmac.

I recall my former CPR board colleague, the late Alison Raju, insisting that when you have been on the road for some weeks the thing that matters most is 'just getting there.'

THE MONT TO MONTE….ALMOST

Paul and Kaye Gilhooly, CPR members from Tasmania, describe how they (almost) walked the entire Via Michaelis from Mont St Michael to Monte Sant' Angelo

This story is the confluence of ideas both known and unknown that led to our epic walk and adventure we called the Mont to Monte.

In September 2019 a few days after arriving in Rome at the end of the Via Francigena we visited Monte Sant'Angelo in Puglia Italy. It was a place of interest to Paul given the important role it played in the story of the Norman knights in southern Italy and Sicily back in the 11th century. During our visit to this magnificent place, we started to understand the link between Monte Sant'Angelo, the Archangel Michael, the Norman knights and Mont St Michel.

Dreaming of our next big walk, we came up with the idea of walking from Mont St Michel in France to Monte Sant'Angelo in Italy. The seed was planted. We had no idea if such a walk was possible, how far it was, or how we'd find our way planning this from the other side of the world. Looking at a map is no substitute for what the trail will be like underfoot.

Covid put the brakes on our original timing of 2020, but by late 2021, a couple of months after completing the 1100km Heysen Trail in South Australia our feet were itchy. We started researching in earnest, aiming to walk in 2022, assuming we could escape from late Covid Australia.

By February 2022 we were well advanced in our planning, working out a route across France, over the Alps via Montgenèvre pass and down through Italy to Monte Sant'Angelo.

Coincidentally, we received the printed version of the Confraternity newsletter 27, 2021 (takes a while to get to Australia) and were amazed to read Carlo Laurenzi's article 'Via Michaelis - fact or fiction?'.

Studying the map and reading about the semi-mythical ‘straight’ line going through our start and end point plus the Sacra di San Michele spurred our imagination. Perhaps we’re onto something, we thought.

On 27 May 2022, a cool, misty, drizzly day we took our first footsteps from Mont St Michel to Monte Sant’Angelo, a huge 3100kms away. Our route southeast across France took us along 14 different GR routes through Alençon, Tours, Clermont Ferrand, le Puy en Velay, Grenoble, the Alps and over the Montgenèvre pass into Italy.

The 1418 kms walk from Mont St Michel to Montgenèvre pass took us 79 days, with a few rest days and a short bout of illness for Paul. The walk across France like the Via Francigena is rural, relatively flat (until the Massif Central and Alps) with many small towns and villages along the way often devoid of people and services. We didn’t carry a tent so finding accommodation at times was difficult but, luckily we avoided the al fresco experience of sleeping on a park bench.

The weather was mild for the first two to three weeks but by the time we arrived in Tours mid-June the mercury hit 42C. We walked many a hot day, starting early and aiming to be at our destination before it got unbearable. Even Grenoble in the foothills of the Alps temperatures reached the very high 30C’s.

It’s almost a cliché to say the Alps are spectacular - but they are. The 253km walk from Grenoble to Torino took us 13 days, up and down and up and down. Hard on the legs, but worth every step.

The magnificent Sacra di San Michele, surely ranking in majesty with Mont St Michel and Monte Sant'Angelo, perches like a sentinel 500m above the valley floor guarding the exit from the Susa valley. A strenuous climb up an old mule track rewarded us with views up and down the valley and a visit to the abbey itself.

Leaving Torino heading to Genoa we followed the little-known GeMiTo Trail. A path devised some years ago linking **Ge**noa, **Mi**lanoand **Torino**. Without any way markers on the ground, without the GPS trace and some basic maps we couldn't have followed the path.

Five days on the Montferrato hills got the better of us. Days walking in the hot August sun through endless vineyards with no shade hit us hard. With Kaye on the verge of heat exhaustion, we skipped a couple of days walking and took a train to Genoa. We decided we needed a rest and trained it 30kms down the coast to Chiavari to rest for a week.

Somewhat recovered, we walked south down the coast and along the Cinque Terre to Riomaggiore, which is a popular section of coastline with thousands of sunseekers crowded into the five small towns of this World Heritage site and many day walkers on the narrow coastal trails. Originally we'd planned to walk towards Sarzana and pick up the Via Francigena to Lucca. But on a walk as long as this, plans change. We'd walked most of this section in 2019 so took the train to Lucca. En route we stopped at Pietrasanta to catch up with our friend Rita whom we'd met walking here on the Via Francigena in 2019. She had called to us as we were passing and invited us into their garden plot for a cool drink, a chat and a gift of 'pilgrim' tomatoes, a heritage variety which is a tomato version of a bunch of garlic, and which was ideal for carrying and eating on the trail.

Leaving the familiar city of Lucca, the Cammino di San Jacopo guided us along the four-day, 110km walk through country and urban areas to Florence - not the most inspiring or picturesque part of the walk, but had surprises including the 'Pinnochio' village of Collodi. Florence was crowded with tourists as we were now into mid September

Our route southeast from Florence along the Way of St Frances took us in a wide 420kms arc to Assisi and Poggio Bustone, a fantastic, spectacular, hilly walk into and along the Apennines. It provided us with beautiful quiet walking through deep forests and rural landscapes. We stayed a night at the Franciscan Monastery of Santuario della Verna perched 1283m up on the side of Mount Penna; through the national park, numerous old towns and villages such as Pieve Santo Stefano with its unique 8000-volume diary archive, ancient Gubbio and on to Assisi, the resting place of St Francis.

We left the Way of St Francis at Poggio Bustone, six days' walk past Assisi. Heading southeast picking up the Con le ali ai Piedi or Wings on His Feet trail for the last 520kms to Monte Sant'Angelo. We walked the first and ultimately last day of this trail to Cittaducale. Arriving in the town's huge central square late in the afternoon,

totally without people or open facilities we were exhausted. Not the tiredness of a long day walking, but fatigue - more mental than physical, labouring over the simplest decisions.

The Franciscan Sanctuary of La Verna

On 10 October, 137 days after leaving Mont St Michel, we decided we'd walked as far as we could. With heavy hearts we made the decision to stop. It was getting late in the season, we were heading into the southern Apennines, unsure of finding accommodation and food, and concerned fatigue would lead to injuries if we pushed on.

Reaching Cittaducale we'd walked 2250km of the 2618kms from Mont St Michel and were less than 500km short of Monte Sant'Angelo, hence our title Mont to Monte...almost. At 64 and 61 years of age we figured we'd given it a good crack. Right from the start we were never sure we could walk the full 3100kms in a season, so getting to Cittaducale was for us a great achievement.

Did we follow the Via Michaelis? Who knows. If such a route had existed in the past, it would have been more of a way than an exact route, changing as the political dynamics along the route changed. Somewhat like the Via Francigena.

For us this was a huge adventure, particularly planning the route ourselves from the other side of the world - a first for us. We've created a practical walking route from Mont St Michel to Monte Sant'Angelo. The Via Michaelis may be lost in the mists of time but the Mont to Monte is alive and well for anyone with enough time, grit and tread on their boots.

'THE JOYFUL SENSE OF COMMUNAL ENDEAVOUR' - WALKING THE LONDON TO WALSINGHAM CAMINO

Andy Bull reflects on his inaugural walk along the full 178-mile route of the newly re-established medieval pilgrim path from the capital to England's most important holy shrine. This means there is now a mapped route from Walsingham to Rome using this trail, and CPR's new Francigena Britannica.

It was Sunday morning as we stepped out from the Suffolk village of Withersfield, on the sixth day of our pilgrimage. As we walked down the peaceful, early-morning lane to Great Wratting, Sarah, who was walking with me, mused: 'Wouldn't it be nice if we came upon a church service in one of these villages.'

Almost immediately, as if it had been ordained, I heard the faint sound of organ music wafting from the 14th-century church of St Mary. I beckoned our small pilgrim band forward and we hurried up the path to the porch and the great oak door. Pushing it open, a rolling swell of music and song spilled out. To the closing verse of *Thine Be the Glory* we heaved off our packs and shuffled into the pews at the back.

It turned out this was the final hymn, and as the congregation turned to file from church they gave us slightly puzzled smiles as if to ask: 'Where did you spring from?'

We sprang, as I told them when invited to introduce ourselves, from London.

I explained that for the past three years I had been working on a project to re-establish the pilgrim path from the capital to England's greatest Holy Shrine. And Great Wratting, and this church, were on the route.

Three of us – me, author of *London to Walsingham Camino: The Pilgrimage Guide*; Sarah Gunn, a deacon at St Mary's in Bury St Edmunds; and Antonia Moffat, who works for the Catholic Shrine at Walsingham – were walking the full route for the first time, joined for stretches along the way by a few who accompanied us for a week or so, and others from the many churches that welcomed us along the way, and who kept us company for a morning or afternoon.

It had been Antonia's idea to walk the full route, I told them, and a very good one.

As she had pointed out to me, it was all very well to have re-established the pre-Reformation walking route from London to Walsingham, and fine that I had walked each stage four or five times in the course of researching the path… but. To truly bear witness I had to walk the whole thing in one go.

'I'll walk it with you,' she said. So how could I refuse? We became three when Sarah also signed up for the full slog.

The three who walked all the way

Tell people you are walking from London to Norfolk and you get a range of reactions

'I think that's great' was one.
'That's not possible' was another
'Haven't you got cars?' was a third.

Gratifyingly, variations on the first were the most common. But when I told the many people we met along the way that this was a pilgrimage I got a fair few blank looks. Yet, if I said this was a Camino, 'like they have in Spain', I almost always got nods of recognition. Often they knew of the film, *The Way*, in which a character played by Martin Sheen walks to the shrine of St James in Santiago, in honour of a son who died on the first day of his own Camino journey.

From there I was playing to a receptive audience. They loved the idea of doing a Camino in England. Mention Walsingham as the destination, however, and eyes

dimmed again. Even when we got to Norfolk, Walsingham's recognition factor was low.

Indeed, my understanding of the significance of Walsingham was poor until I started this project. I didn't know it was England's most important shrine, pre-Reformation, with offerings five times those at Canterbury, which placed Walsingham behind only Santiago, Rome and Jerusalem as pilgrim destinations. And I didn't know that the road leading there from London was the most important in the country. I learned these things from Leonard Whatmore, a Catholic priest whose 1973 book *Highway to Walsingham* gave me all the historic context, and traced the medieval route. Yet Whatmore never walked the route, nor applied it to modern maps.

I did that, with the help of many volunteers, members of the Confraternity of St James who lived along the route and – if not for lockdown – would have been off to Spain.

One reason for re-establishing the London to Walsingham Camino is to seek to raise awareness of the significance of Walsingham, and to make it easy for the 300,000 who go there annually by car or coach to do so on foot, if they are able. Walking the whole route in 13 days (plus a rest-day at Bury St Edmunds, the half-way point) was a revelation. Walking each day set up a rhythm in which the awareness of being a pilgrim grew. As day followed day, the ordinary, everyday world and my life in it shrank in significance, and the life of the spirit and the joyful sense of communal endeavour grew ever stronger. You quickly form a bond with your fellow pilgrims. It is as if you have been friends for years, rather than having met just a few days ago.

We were welcomed at many points along the way. Many of the 22 churches in which we have so far placed pilgrim stamps invited us to join them for Morning or Evening Prayer, for Mass or Evensong.

There were many joyful encounters. At the church of St Magnus the Martyr, alongside London Bridge, where the pilgrim path starts, we were welcomed by Fr Philip Warner, Cardinal Rector of a church with a powerful connection to Walsingham. He sent us on our way with prayers before the shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham, and the first stamp in our pilgrim passports. From here we were able to walk the first two days, covering the first 30 miles of the route, right out of London into the Hertfordshire countryside, barely putting foot to tarmac. We did that by following towpaths along the River Lea and New River.

Pre-Reformation, most pilgrims would have headed north from St Magnus up Ermine Street, now the A10, and out through Tottenham. By shifting the path a mile or so east we avoided all that but, I was glad to learn from Peter Smith, rector of Waltham Abbey church, were still on a true pilgrim route. He told me that monks at this once vast abbey – a key pre-Reformation pilgrim point in its own right – used the river, as did more affluent pilgrims, and Henry VIII, who came

regularly to hunt and converse with the abbot. This was our first-night stop from which, next morning, we walked on with prayers and a second pilgrim stamp.

In Ware we walked down a High Street once known as Walsingham Way, past a string of former inns that housed the many pilgrims, to St Mary's, where the pre-Reformation font bears the image of St James, patron saint of pilgrims. As I reached out to touch it I thought of all those pilgrims who, centuries before me, might have made the same gesture.

In Saffron Walden, at yet another St Mary's, we admired the statue of a pilgrim and a remarkable bronze of Mary at the moment of the Annunciation, and we collected a further pilgrim stamp, and walked on through the increasingly bucolic countryside.

In Bury St Edmunds we enjoyed a richly ecumenical rest-day, starting with Mass in St Edmund's church, in a chapel created in secret during penal times, when Catholic worship was outlawed. Next came a guided tour of St Edmundsbury Cathedral, which began life as a church, dedicated to St James by a 12th-century abbot who was unable to go on pilgrimage to Santiago. A walk around the ruins of the abbey followed, with prayers at the site of St Edmund's shrine, and the day ended with Evening Prayer in the cathedral.

One of the great joys for me, a Catholic, was to discover the beauty of Anglican Morning and Evening Prayer. They read like meditations, and we started and ended most of our days with them.

Approaching Walsingham (Photo: M. Kirk)

As we progressed through the glorious east of England we came to appreciate the quiet beauty of a whole swath of this country overlooked by many long-distance walkers. It may not offer rugged hills, let alone mountains, or rocky coastlines, but this felt like the true heart of England. We found a string of wonderful Anglican churches, and in many of them we got a warm welcome. But in most the congregation was very small. Often, the three or four who fed us a pilgrim lunch of soup and sandwiches, and walked with us for the rest of the day, were the only regular worshippers. In one we asked the churchwarden, as we tucked in, how many there were in the congregation and he replied: 'Me.'

This was a tradition hanging by a thread.

In Catholic churches, fewer and further between, the story was no better. Two churches where priests had enthusiastically responded to my news about the Camino had since moved on, and weekday Masses were no longer said.

But, in contrast to the churches, the village inns were packed, and we stayed in a number of them. They all seemed to have surged back after lockdown, and were the true heart and social centre of the village.

Something significant occurred in a number of those pubs.

Sarah wore her collar at all times. I had wondered how people would react to it, but the reception couldn't have been friendlier. In several they thought they were meeting the vicar (for the first time, given hardly any of them went to church) and came over to chat. One local asked Sarah if she was a Catholic priest. Another, who was completely unchurched, began in a challenging vein, a sort of 'what's it all about then', but then spoke movingly of his life, his fears and his challenges. You got the sense that he might just pop into a church for the first time in his life, after this.

In the Crown, in Fakenham, a pilgrim inn pre-Reformation, we went the full Chaucer. This was our last night before Walsingham, and a little roistering seemed allowable. It was Karaoke night, and each of us took a turn. One pilgrim, Steve, had such a good voice that he was asked if he was a professional. My rendition of *I am a Cider Drinker* by the Wurzles went down less well. 'Should've done *I've Got a Brand New Combine Harvester* - it's easier,' the MC muttered as he grabbed the mic back off me.

Our final day was truly sublime. We began by joining the vicar, Tracy, for Morning Prayer at St Peter and St Paul. We had been welcomed in this church the previous afternoon, gratefully hoovering up the remains of a fine St George's Day spread of sandwiches, pork pies and quiche. We walked in silence for the six miles to Walsingham, the bell at the Slipper Chapel, the Catholic Shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham, tolling for us as we made our final approach. After Mass here we walked on to Walsingham Abbey, and the site of the Holy House, the spot venerated so profoundly by countless pilgrims down the centuries, until Henry

VIII destroyed the shrine. That evening we were invited by the Anglican Shrine to Guardian's Day prayers, followed by drinks.

In all, this was a wonderful climax to our two-week walk, an ecumenical day never to be forgotten, and a fitting end to a true, English Camino.

Andy signing books at Walsingham

My hope is that, in the future, the London to Walsingham Camino will be as well-established as the Via Francigena to Rome and the various Ways of St James to Santiago. The route is recognised as a Camino Inglés by the Confraternity of St James, under powers deputed by the Cathedral authorities in Santiago. This means that if a pilgrim walks at least 25km along it, and collects stamps in an official pilgrim passport, that distance counts towards the 100km minimum required to receive a Compostela in Santiago.

One thing seasoned Santiago pilgrims point out is that while in Spain they can stay in refugios or albergues for around €10 a night, and get a pilgrim supper for about the same, in England there is no equivalent. So I point out that there was this chap called Henry VIII who, 500 years ago, destroyed our network of pilgrim hostelries, and that it will take us a few years to replicate them. A big task, they point out, but one I am committed to.

We have already made a start. The British Pilgrimage Trust has a scheme, called Sanctuary, under which they give all the advice and assistance a community needs to decide whether it has premises where pilgrims might be welcomed. A number along the route from London to Walsingham are actively engaged in that process.

Re-establishing the route was just the first step. Making walking pilgrimage to Walsingham accessible to as many people as possible is the second. Wish me luck!

- Pilgrim passports are available from the Confraternity of St James (free to members, £5 for others) www.csj.org.uk
- The British Pilgrimage Trust's Sanctuary scheme is outlined here: https://britishpilgrimage.org/sanctuary-network/

Andy Bull's *London to Walsingham Camino: The Pilgrimage Guide* is available from Trailblazer at £17.99 www.trailblazer-guides.com or any bookshop or online retailer. Purchasers have access to full GPS mapping, which means you can follow the route on your phone, also KML mapping if you prefer to use Google Earth, plus printable step-by-step written instructions to use with paper OS Explorer maps.

LABYRINTHS - SEND US YOUR PICTURES!

Julia Lewis explained the significance and symbolism for pilgrims of the labyrinth in her article on page 4 of this publication. In England there are many, and below are a picture of the porch of Alkborough church in north Lincolnshire, and of the indivdual labyrinths for each station of the London Underground by Mark Wallinger 2013.

We should like to invite readers to send in their own pictures.

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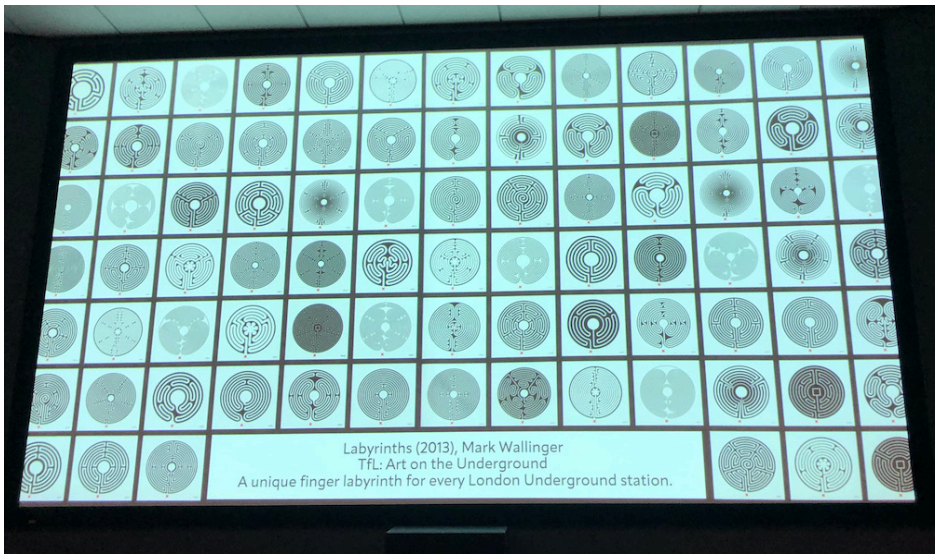

Labyrinth designs on the London Underground (one for each station) by Mark Wallinger

A MODERN PILGRIM'S PRAYER

Why go on pilgrimage, dear friend,
Now that doctors, not saints, heal our ills?

I walk, I reply, in the footsteps of the saints To disturb my complacency
And open my heart afresh to life's adventure.
In the spirit of those holy people, I seek time to give thanks to God and blessings to those whose love has nurtured me.

On this journey, Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.
May I be a worthy guest for those who host me, And generous to the holy places which welcome me. May my journey inspire others on their spiritual path,
And my greetings brighten some other person's day.

So, when I return to the security of my home, I will remember when the days were long, church doors were closed and conversation hard to come by.
Then fnay I appreciate more deeply those who are my life's foundations,
And pause to greet the strangers passing through our settled lives.

I go on the pilgrim road, my friend, to be reminded that we have the grace
To heal each other in some small way
Whilst the world rushes by.

Written by the canal lock at Vraux, on the Via Francigena March 2016

Nick Dunne

Classical labyrinth design

Design of the Chartres labyrinth

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