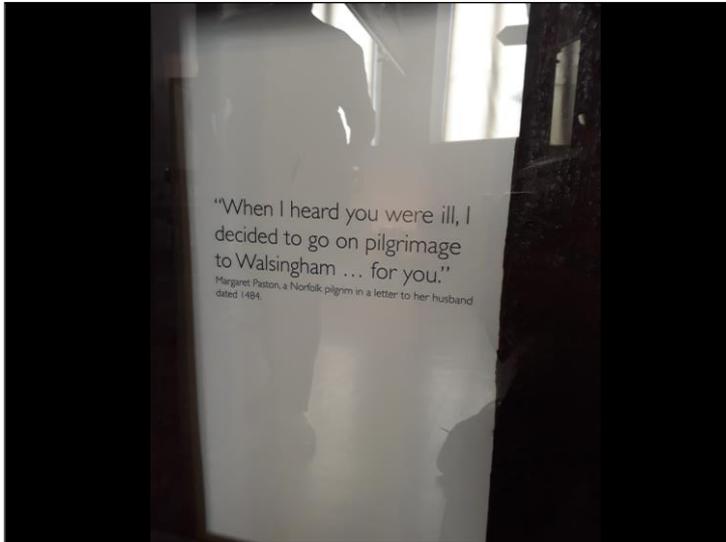


‘Healing Ministries at Walsingham’ – past and present

Revd Andreas Wenzel SSC, Shrine Priest at the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham,
Norfolk.



‘When I heard you were ill, I decided to go on pilgrimage to Walsingham ... for you.’¹

This beautiful short quotation from one of the best preserved family archives of late medieval England, the Paston Letters, gives insight into the spiritual practice of a Norfolk woman who set out on pilgrimage on behalf of her sick husband in 1484.

But interestingly enough, this quotation also features prominently in an exhibition on pilgrimage entitled ‘journeys’ at King’s Lynn Museum in 2019.² There are many reasons for us to make a journey these days: journeys of faith, journeys of trade and exploration, migration and settlement and journeys for fun, to name but a few. Journeys to express a desire for wholeness and healing are still part of the spiritual practice of 21st century pilgrims to Walsingham.

Illness and the hope of healing was one of the driving forces for pilgrims to make their way to Walsingham in medieval times. And, as we will see, this is still the case in our time.

A few facts to put the healing ministries at the Shrine into context:

- The healing ministries at the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham to which this paper refers attract approximately 12.000 residential pilgrims each year
- On top of that number there are countless day visitors who would join in the healing services on a Sunday afternoon and pilgrims who will seek individual appointments for the anointing with holy oil or the sacrament of reconciliation. And so, it is a conservative

¹ Margaret Paston, a Norfolk pilgrim in a letter to her husband, dated 1484.

² ‘The show looks at the many types of journeys people made and continue to make: journeys of faith, of trade and exploration, migration and settlement and journeys for fun.’ <https://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/lynn-museum/whats-on/journeys> 22nd June 2019.

estimate to suggest that at the Shrine, over the course of one calendar year approximately 15.000 pilgrims will come in contact with the healing liturgies offered at the Shrine.

- About 2 litres of olive oil, blessed by the Bishop at the Chrism Mass are used over the course of the year in the context of the anointing of the sick. The sacristans at the Chrism Mass make sure that our oil stocks here are filled first, because they know how much we rely on our reserves over the course of a pilgrimage season.
- Sprinkling at the Well, a service celebrated daily during the pilgrimage season at the Well which was rediscovered in the year 1931 attracts about 20.000 people each year as countless school groups book additional sprinkling services outside of the usual pattern of a 2.30pm Sprinkling service.
- Among the special visitors are approximately 2000 school children every year who on the whole book their own service of sprinkling or participate in the public service at 2.30pm.
- The service of Sprinkling at the Well is advertised in the Roman Catholic Pilgrim Handbook (2018), p. 53 and on the main notice board at the Basilica and on the High Street in Dowry House. A large number of ecumenical visitors attend the rite of Sprinkling during the season. Sprinkling and the healing ministries have a particular ecumenical and interfaith potential.



Shrine Prayers are another important aspect of prayer and ministry to the sick at the Shrine. It can take between three and five hours to write up Shrine Prayers, the weekly intercessions lists for the daily recitation of the rosary. Approximately 400 intercession slips and about 50 online requests are processed weekly and then fed into the list of names read out under specific prayer categories at 6pm. The first mystery every day is offered for the sick and all who care for them. It is important for many to know that they are included in this uninterrupted routine of daily prayer of intercession. Prayer needs an address and at the Shrine there literally is a letter box for exactly that purpose. People who can't yet address their prayers to God can simply write down a name and post their requests anonymously.

In the context of this paper, I would like to explore the Healing Ministries at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in three steps.

Firstly, a short historical summary of the medieval pilgrimage experience will be given. Secondly, I will explore of the revival of the healing ministries at the Anglican Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in the 20th century and thirdly I will suggest an outlook on contemporary issues around the ministries of healing offered at the Shrine and their unique potential.

1 Historical

Several historic documents outline the importance of healing for the medieval pilgrimage experience to Walsingham.

Pynson Ballad, 1485

Since then, Our Lady has performed many miracles here, too many to recount in a short space. [...] Many sick have been cured by Our Lady's power, the dead revived, the lame made whole, the blind have had their sight restored. [...] Deaf-mutes, lunatics and lepers have all been made well through Our Lady's intercession. People troubled by evil spirits have experienced deliverance. Also, souls suffering from inner problems have found comfort. Every human suffering, bodily or spiritual, can find remedy here by devoutly calling upon her...

There is, most famously, the Pynson Ballad. The Pynson Ballad is a late medieval text published in 1485 by Richard Pynson (1448– 1529), printer to King Henry VII (reign 1485– 1509) and King Henry VIII (reign 1509-1547). The literary genre is not strictly speaking a ballad but the text gives account of the events that took place in Walsingham around the year 1061 which lead to the erection of the Holy House of England's Nazareth. The text was aimed at pilgrims to Walsingham and

provided information on the Vision of the Lady Richeldis and Mary's appearing in North Norfolk.

All you spiritual people devoted to this place, coming to ask Our Lady's help in all kinds of trouble and need, you can learn how this chapel came to existence by reading the story of a miracle as recounted below.³

Following the legendary account of the miraculous construction of the Holy House some 200 feet away from the place where the builders had failed to erect the Shrine next to some Holy Wells, the Pynson Ballad mentions the healing many pilgrims experienced in Walsingham.

Since then, Our Lady has performed many miracles here, too many to recount in a short space. [...] Many sick have been cured by Our Lady's power, the dead revived, the lame made whole, the blind have had their sight restored. [...] Deaf-mutes, lunatics and lepers have all been made well through Our Lady's intercession. People troubled by evil spirits have experienced deliverance. Also, souls suffering from inner problems have found comfort. Every human suffering, bodily or spiritual, can find remedy here by devoutly calling upon her.⁴

The biblical reference to Jesus' response to John's messengers in St Luke's gospel is evident:

³ Pilgrim Handbook, p. 182

⁴ Ibid. p. 185

So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Even though the Pynson Ballad does not provide any historic proof for healing miracles at Walsingham, it is clear that the pilgrimage intentions and legendary accounts of healing formed an important, if not the most important reason for pilgrims to come to Mary's Shrine in Walsingham in the first place.

The great humanist scholar, Erasmus of Rotterdam, visited Walsingham twice in the early 16th century. On his first visit he left a Greek inscription seeking the intercession of Our Lady of Walsingham. In his text, he refers to the various pilgrimage intentions that were presented in Walsingham by the faithful:

some ask a guerdon of good health, some riches; others hope that by thy aid they soon may bear a father's honour'd name, or gain the years of Pylus' reverend age...⁵

Like the pilgrimage intention of Margaret Paston which I referred to at the beginning, healing miracles were an important driving force why pilgrims came to Walsingham in the first place. 'To all that seek me here, I will give my help.'

The pilgrimage to Walsingham was interrupted during the Reformation and the Shrine Church destroyed in the course of the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538. The image of Our Lady was burned at Chelsea and some of the Wells filled in with bricks, gravel and shoe soles.⁶

2 Revival

2.1 Early years and Sprinkling at the Well

In the wider context of the liturgical movement, the years after World War I marked a transition from the inherited patterns of worship towards the revival of liturgical forms which addressed a pastoral need explored during the War. This liturgical movement would eventually inform the council fathers of the Second Vatican Council and their reassessment of the healing ministries of the Church.

But way before any liturgical reforms were envisaged by the Church of England⁷ let alone the ministry of healing reintroduced into the pattern of its worship, Alfred Hope Patten, the restorer of the Anglican Shrine in Walsingham, practically anticipated a vital aspect of liturgical and theological reform, simply by reintroducing healing services at the wells in Walsingham.

The first pilgrim manual edited by Father Alfred Hope Patten dates from 1928, and is therefore three years younger than the restored Shrine Church, which was opened by the translation of

⁵ Sanctuary of Our Lady of Walsingham, p 11

⁶ This may be have been done to desecrate a holy site. Compare Exodus 3.5.

⁷ The ASB has no provision for healing services, anointing or laying on of hands. And Common Worship healing liturgies don't appear till 2012. (Ministry to the Sick).

the image of Our Lady of Walsingham from the parish church in Walsingham to the newly erected Shrine in the year 1931.

Even before the Shrine Church was built, the parish priest, Fr Alfred Hope Patten, was keen to restore the old pilgrimage devotions of medieval times. Even though we don't exactly know from historic documents how the holy water from the wells in Walsingham was used, the existence of the baths and the wells in the Abbey Grounds seem so suggest that medieval pilgrims were both bathed in the holy water and that the water was also offered as a drink.



Well Garden – Walsingham Abbey

The Well garden behind the ruined arch of the medieval Shrine Church still holds the pilgrim baths with steps leading into the ground water, and there are two separate well rings which may have been used to draw up water for drinking cures.

Early photographs and the early editions of the pilgrim manual prove that on Wednesday afternoons, when the Abbey grounds were open to the public, the parish priest put on regular services of Sprinkling at the Wells in the Abbey Grounds.



Sprinkling in the Abbey Grounds, pre 1931

On the whole the model of sprinkling at the Well and the associated prayer for haling seems to be modelled on the healing service which Fr Hope Patten may have experienced in Lourdes⁸ The whole question about the influence of the devotions at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes on Walsingham and its healing ministries remains a desideratum for future research.

⁸ Memories of Fr Patten by the Earl of Lauderdale (Patrick Maitland), a Guardian who died in 2008. In it he says: "Some have imagined that [Fr Patten's] devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham, and to the cause of the Shrine itself, became such a fixation that he could show interest in no other pilgrimage centre - aside, that is, from those like Lourdes, which he often visited."



The rediscovered well

By the time the well on the site of the modern Anglican Shrine had been rediscovered and Sprinkling at the Well had been formally reintroduced into the pattern of the pilgrimage to the Shrine, Fr Hope Patten had introduced a proper form of sprinkling which also allowed for the bathing of pilgrims:

This is the central act of pilgrimage, and consists of prayer and intercessions, and sprinkling of the sick. The water in the bath in the grounds (when used) is supplied from the Holy Well within the Sanctuary of our Lady of Walsingham.⁹

The bathing of pilgrims is only referred to in this manual, the 1949 3rd edition. There is no living memory of this particular practice and it may only refer to an idea of Fr Alfred Hope Patten. Nevertheless, the practice of bathing the sick in a bath must have been inspired by the custom Fr Patten would have observed in Lourdes.

The rite of sprinkling in the early pilgrim manuals was much more elaborate and complicated than what we are used to today. Many prayers and litanies accompanied the rite of sprinkling.

After a Trinitarian greeting, the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the 'Veni creator Spiritus', the Collect for Pentecost, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed, the priest prayed:

O Lord, Holy Father, Physician of our souls and bodies, who didst send Thine only Begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to heal sickness, and to ransom us from death ; heal these Thy servants from their bodily and mental infirmities, grant them relief from their anxieties and troubles, through the grace of Thine Anointed, and the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary our Mother, and quicken them so to perform Thy good pleasure, that they may in all holiness give Thee due thanks and adoration.... Through the same.

This continues with an equally extensive prayer for those unable to make their pilgrimage to Walsingham and finishes with a third collect ascribed to S Bernhard seeking our Lady's intercession for the sick.

⁹ Pilgrim Manual, 3rd edition 1949, p. 39.

Even the actual formula for sprinkling at the Well was quite extensive:

Sprinkling

I suppose, the restorer of the Shrine, Fr Alfred Hope Patten wanted to prevent any form of superstition around the Holy Water. It is not meant to be medicinal, and its not magical. It is a sign of God's grace. The water is a sign of his free gift to all, as stated in one of the many pamphlets circulated at the time.¹⁰

1948 Pilgrim Manual

Sprinkling formula:

"May it please Almighty God of his great goodness, and at the intercession of our Blessed Lady, to grant you health and peace, if it be according to His holy Will, and fulfil all thy desires for his honour and glory."

In the early days the way to receive the holy water was twofold. A sip of water to drink and then the water was poured through the pilgrims hands. In more recent years the practice is threefold: a sip of water, the sign of the cross is traced on the pilgrims' forehead and thirdly, the water is poured through their hands.

The 1960 pilgrim manual (7th edition) mentions the sprinkling of an individual body part if that was indicated to the priest¹¹, and also introduces the signing with the sign of the cross on the pilgrims forehead.

After Sprinkling the faithful recited a long litany. The rite of Sprinkling was concluded with a hymn.

Up until the 1980s, Sprinkling at the Well and the regular hearing of confessions, was the only formalised ministry of healing offered at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Probably in conjunction with developments in the Roman Catholic Church and the rediscovery of the Sacrament of Anointing there was a growing interest in other forms of healing ministries, namely the laying on of hands and the anointing with the oil of the sick.

2.2 Healing Ministries at the Shrine in more recent years

The sacrament of anointing the sick is the 'rediscovered sacrament'¹². The Council of Florence in 1439 had limited the rite of anointing to the dying, and it wasn't until 1972 that the Roman Catholic authorities following Vatican II had redefined the recipients of this sacrament to 'those who are dangerously ill.'¹³

¹⁰ The meaning of Walsingham, p 17.

¹¹ 7th edition 1960, p. 66.

¹² Andrew Davison, Why Sacraments, p. 120.

¹³ Paul VI, Sacrum Unctione Infirmorum.

The Shrine and its leadership developed a sense of urgency around the healing ministries around the same time. The Guardians grew concerned that not enough was being done for those with special needs: "We need to show the sick and handicapped a real welcome and to create an atmosphere where Walsingham is a place of refreshment and hope."

This led to the first dedicated "Pilgrimage for the Sick" on 3 July 1982 (held annually ever since). It was intended as "an act of devotion for the sick and all those concerned with their welfare". After a Mass at the Halifax Altar in the Shrine gardens there was Sprinkling, individual counselling, laying on of hands and Anointing. Soon after this it was decided to build accommodation specifically for disabled pilgrims. The site was blessed by Bishop Anselm Genders CR on 16 December 1984 and the completed St Joseph's Wing was opened on 4 October 1985 by the Duchess of Kent.

From 2003 the pilgrimage has been called the "Pilgrimage for Healing and Renewal" and remains one of the major pilgrimages of the Shrine's year.



The 1992 edition of the Pilgrim Manual (17th edition) reflects that change of appreciation of the healing ministries when it states:

The Sacrament of the Sick is very much for the living, not just for the dying or those in danger. It is appropriate for anyone to be Anointed who is suffering from serious or prolonged illness, whether this leads to physical pain or mental anxiety. The strengthening power of the Holy Spirit is given in this Sacrament of the Church.¹⁴

¹⁴ Pilgrim Manual, 1992 (17th edition), p. 49.

Also, in 2012 Pope Benedict encouraged the faithful on the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, to frequent the sacrament of anointing often. He noted that the sacrament, formerly known as extreme unction, may be administered in “various human situations connected with illness, and not only when a person is at the end of his or her life”.¹⁵

Since then, sprinkling, laying on of hands, anointing with the oil of the sick and the regular hearing of confessions have become vital ingredients to the pilgrimage experience in Walsingham.

The current 26th edition of the pilgrim manual (2016) restores the pattern of a distinctive healing service twice a week (Tuesday night and Sunday afternoon).

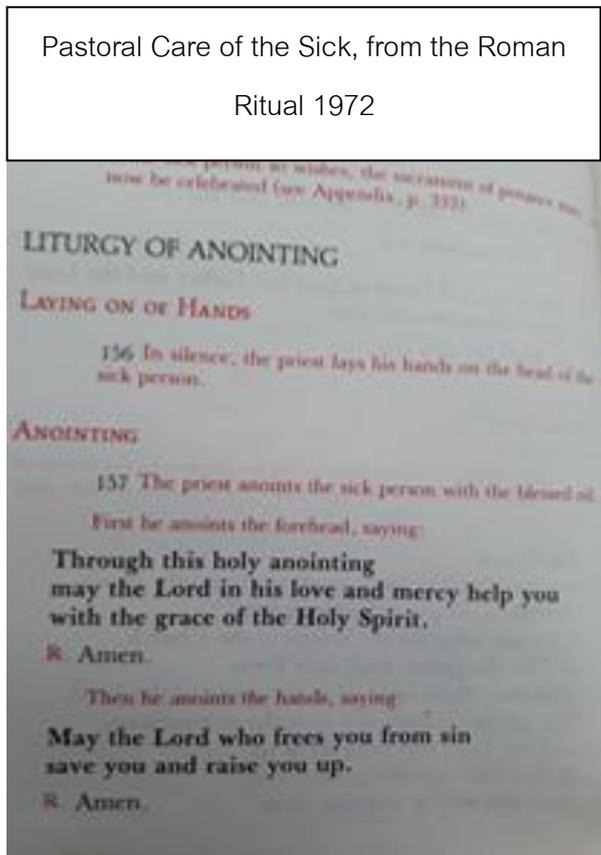
The Practice at the Shrine is to ‘simply do what the book says.’

The Laying on of hands is performed in silence, and the person praying with the pilgrim lays both hands on the pilgrim’s head.



Healing Pilgrimage 2018

All is done within the context of a liturgy of the word and the healing ministries are explained as a means of Christian discipleship. Whilst miracles may take place and people give thanks for prayers answered at the intercession of Our Lady, the focus is laid on growth in faith, hope and endurance.



In the rite of anointing, the forehead and the hands of the pilgrims are anointed with holy oil. The priest being vested with a purple stole for the anointing prays the twofold prayer for the anointing.



© Graham Howard

¹⁵ <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2012/01/05/pope-urges-priests-to-administer-sacrament-of-the-sick-more-often/>

3 Outlook – potential of the healing ministries

3.1 Current issues

Why is Walsingham attracting so many people to explore the charism of healing and wholeness?

One short answer is that this is simply part of the Shrine's reason to exist. When Our Lady appeared in this place is what so that those who are troubled or in any need would find her help.

At times, the sick and the invalid actually protected the restored Shrine from the threat of closure. When Bishop Bertram Pollock (1863 –1943), the then Bishop of Norwich, was trying to suppress Masses offered in the newly constructed – unlicensed chapel, what we know as the Holy House, altogether and was hoping to contain the sacramental life of the church to St Mary's Parish Church to which Fr Alfred Hope Patten was licensed as vicar, Fr Patten replied in a letter saying that so many invalids and delicate people were staying at the hospice, (i.e. the old pilgrim accomodation, Stella Maris), who were unable to get down to the parish church in the early morning.

*To such, a Mass is a great blessing and joy and it seems a very hard thing to deprive them of that privilege... To stop allowing people to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion in the Shrine seems to be definitely working against God – in view of all he has done and is doing.'*¹⁶

The sick somehow saved the Shrine and reminded Walsingham of its original calling.

Secondly, the Shrine as a holy place of pilgrimage attracts people who would otherwise not necessarily engage with religion or spirituality. The anonymity of Walsingham and the fact that you don't necessarily know the priest who will hear your confession lowers the threshold of seeking guidance in the sacrament of reconciliation.

There are very many first confessions. Over the course of the pilgrimage season there are up to 20 confessions a week and people make use of the opportunity to address feelings of hurt and failure that may go back a very long time.

At an audience for Shrine Rectors and Pastoral Workers at Shrines and holy sanctuaries Pope Francis said in November 2018: 'We must take care to ensure that each one feels "at home", like a long awaited family member who has finally arrived.'¹⁷ Hospitality and welcome can help people open up to the possibility of them opening up to the possibility of God healing difficult or hidden wounds in their lives.

Many pilgrims return to the healing ministries time after time. For some their prayers may have been answered and their ailment has been lifted physically, the many plaques at the back of the Shrine Church speak of thanksgivings for prayers answered in Walsingham.

¹⁶ Colin Stephenson, Walsingham Way, p. 195f.

¹⁷ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/november/documents/papa-francesco_20181129_convegno-santuari.html

But more often than that, pilgrims will go away with a deep sense of being seen, understood and valued in the eyes of God. Healing in that respect can be interpreted as a cooperation with God and a willing acceptance of our human realities, now re-evaluated and revisited through God's perspective.

Consolation, new courage and the assurance of prayer and companionship are just as important as the possibility of a miraculous healing.

Sprinkling at the Well, as we have seen, has developed from a service of healing to something much wider. Vocational themes, regeneration and refreshment on our pilgrimage through life have become part of the spiritual gifts explored in this liturgy.

3.2: How might the healing ministries develop in the future?

Firstly, as part of the Green Pilgrimage network, the Shrine OLW is exploring the benefits of walking pilgrimage. Green Pilgrimage, according to the European network, is the fastest growing trend in modern tourism. Pilgrimage centres like Santiago de Compostela attract hundreds of thousands of walking pilgrims each year. As well as making a positive impact on the local economy, walking pilgrims benefit physically and mentally from being active and in the outdoors. A



study into the benefit of walking pilgrimage on mental health and wellbeing is currently undertaken in conjunction with the Green Pilgrimage network through the University of East Anglia. The Shrine is committed to supporting these initiatives and will seek funding and spiritual support towards that goal.

Secondly, if we begin to think about the whole of our life as a pilgrimage and put it into the context of experiencing assuring rites of healing and wellbeing in this place, can this be translated into an 'art of dying well'? Can the Guild of All Souls be a place for people to think about death not as a threat that's lurking behind the next corner, but as a brother who awaits us at the end of our time who leads us to the divine Physician, who heals us of all our bruises and ailments? The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham can be a unique place to engage with this in a society which on the whole celebrates this life and is scared of 'eternal death' as the last enemy of humankind. Pilgrimage in general and the healing ministries in particular might play a part

in the new evangelisation to celebrate eternal life which begins now but is fully realised only after death.

In the meantime, the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham will remain to be a place of healing, renewal and regeneration through its unique charism bestowed through the intercession of Our Blessed Lady. One of the miracles is to simply let this work happen. We offer prayer and faithfully try and encourage people to come into closer relationship with God. Our Lady does the rest.



Fr Andreas Wenzel June 2019