

Norwich Cathedral Pilgrimage Project

Norwich Cathedral is working with local and regional partners to encourage the renewal of the practice of pilgrimage in East Anglia through the establishment of a network of paths linking the major historic centres of pilgrimage in the region as well as local shrines and holy sites. The project seeks to bring together partners from both religious and secular bodies. The practice of pilgrimage is not confined to those with religious faith. Tens of thousands of people journey to Santiago da Compostela each year; by no means all of them are motivated by religious faith. While the aims of religious and secular bodies will not be precisely the same, they are likely to be united by a common interest in walking and travelling, in raising awareness of local history and tradition, in the environment, and in building community by bringing people together.

Religious bodies are united by a common interest in helping people to explore a spiritual dimension to activities many people enjoy anyway (walking and cycling) and through that to walk alongside them in the journey of faith. In many contexts, particularly around the revived shrines in Scandinavia (including those of St Birgitta at Vadstena, Sweden, and of St Olav at Nidaros Cathedral (Trondheim) in Norway), pilgrimage has become a powerful and effective tool for working with young people, with a focus on slowness, simplicity, freedom, not worrying about things, silence, sharing, and spirituality. The practice of pilgrimage can be a way for people of all ages to explore other key life issues, among them:

- Trusting God and other people.
- Renewing a relationship with creation and learning to live sustainably with the environment.
- Seeking wholeness and healing in mind, body, and spirit.
- Accepting the ups and downs of life: sun and rain; comfort and weariness; the varieties of people and in creation.
- Travelling through life with a goal, a purpose.
- Seeing oneself as the latest in a long line of pilgrims who have journeyed in faith.
- Embracing a liminal, transitional existence between past, present, and future.
- Taking risks with what is unknown.
- Rediscovering cultural and religious roots.
- Offering and receiving hospitality.

Challenges and Opportunities

Norwich Cathedral is seeking through pilgrimage to address both an historical burden and a neglected treasure. The burden is the legacy associated with '*St William of Norwich*', a local boy whose mutilated body was found on Mousehold Heath outside the city in Holy Week, 1144. Members of his family and later of the Cathedral Priory blamed his murder on the Jewish community of Norwich, accusing them of crucifying William. Fortunately, the accusation was not widely accepted at the time, but this 'blood libel' did become the model for other accusations which did lead to violence and persecution and which has remained an aspect of anti-Semitism to our own day. A small cult did develop around

William's tomb in the Cathedral, and healings were attributed to his intercession. We would like to use a pilgrimage route from the Cathedral to the site where William's body was found to encourage reflection on the themes of anti-Semitism, our society's treatment of the 'strangers' in our midst, and child abuse.

Our neglected treasure is the grave of Nurse *Edith Cavell*, a local woman who grew to become a leading nurse and educationalist in England and Belgium. Because she assisted Allied soldiers in occupied Belgium to escape to neutral Holland, she was arrested and executed by the Germans in 1915. Both in her living and her dying Edith consciously imitated Christ. The generosity and forgiveness she showed in death make her an important witness to the spirit of reconciliation. While she is justly celebrated as a nursing pioneer and patriot, we want to use the centenary of her death to encourage pilgrimage to her grave and a greater appreciation and understanding of her Christian witness.

Partnerships and Projects

A key partner in local government is *Norfolk County Council*. Through its 'Norfolk Trails' initiative it will work with us to map out and publicise pilgrimage trails within the county. We also work in cooperation with the *Centre of East Anglian Studies* at the *University of East Anglia*. Mediaeval historians and archaeologists working on pilgrimage history offer advice on pathways and the material culture of pilgrimage.

We are working with the *Diocese of Norwich* in a variety of contexts: with youth ministers to encourage young people to take part in pilgrimage; with the diocesan environmental officer, using pilgrimage to foster a greater awareness of and relationship with the natural environment; with the 'open churches' project, to enable parishes to discover their own pilgrimage histories and to consider offering hospitality to pilgrims.

The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham is one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in Britain and the largest in Norfolk. As the shrine administrator says, 'pilgrimage' is something that happens for most pilgrims when they arrive at the Shrine. He would like to work to encourage more of their pilgrims to value the journey itself and for more to make the journey on foot or by bicycle. We are exploring with the Roman Catholic *Cathedral of St John the Baptist* in Norwich to encourage joint pilgrimages to the Anglican and Catholic shrines at Walsingham.

The Shrine of Julian of Norwich is much nearer to hand and offers a much gentler challenge the pilgrims, but the two cathedrals are working with this shrine to devise a city pilgrimage trail between the three churches.

The Parish of Swardston is on the outskirts of Norwich and is the birthplace of Edith Cavell. As part of the preparation for the local and national celebrations of the centenary of her death in 2015, we are looking to identify safe walking and cycling trails (Edith was an early enthusiast for cycling!) between Swardston and the Cathedral.

The Parish of Barwburgh, also on the outskirts of the city, will be celebrating the millennium of its own local St Walstan (patron saint of agricultural workers) in 2016. An identified route between St Walstan's Church and holy well and the Cathedral (with which the parish has historically close ties) will be part of the legacy of this anniversary.

In addition, we are working jointly with *St Edmundsbury Cathedral*, the *Diocese of Chelmsford*, and *Westminster Abbey* to develop longer range paths and pilgrimages. St

Edmundsbury and Chelmsford are jointly sponsoring a pilgrimage this August to celebrate the millennium of the return of St Edmund's relics from London to St Edmundsbury. We are currently exploring a joint diocesan pilgrimage next summer from Norwich to St Edmundsbury to mark the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the St Edmundsbury diocese separate from Norwich.