

2026 WALSINGHAM PILGRIMAGE GROUP OUR LADY & ST JOHN CHURCH, HESWALL

Walsingham – known as England's Nazareth, is many things, to many pilgrims from around the world. It has been described as a place of peace, calm, enchantment, reflection and devotion, to mention just a few.

We saw an increased demand for places on this year's pilgrimage, rising from 35 in 2025 to 49 in 2026.

Our pilgrimage began on the morning of Tuesday May 12th with the loading of our luggage and collection of our personalised envelopes which contained the Walsingham guidebook, various pilgrimage literature and our name badges which were all well received. We then took part in the 9am mass at Our Lady & St John Church in Heswall. A group photograph was taken in the meeting room, and we then boarded our brand-new

coach and departed for Walsingham under sunny skies.

Our trip went well with two stops, one for lunch and one for a comfort break.

During our travels we said two decades of the Rosary and were all rewarded with chocolates for saying them so well !

On arrival at Elmham House in Walsingham, we booked in with the assistance of the onsite staff, found our rooms and came together again for our first dinner in the dining room at 6pm.

At 8 o'clock we assembled in the Church of the Annunciation next door, for evening prayers hosted by Michael Kaveney, which was a perfect start to our devotions in Walsingham.

We then reassembled in the dining room for refreshments and to watch a DVD film on the history of Walsingham which explained in detail how the original Holy House came to

be and how the shrine came into existence and grew to the important Minor Basilica it is today. It was then time for bed as it had been a long day and it was going to be an early start the next morning.

On Wednesday we attended Morning Prayers at 8am followed by a good, cooked breakfast.

It was a sunny start with occasional clouds, and everything looked promising for our walk along the Pilgrim Way from Walsingham to the Catholic Shrine. We walked up the road past the Russian Orthodox church to the car park and from there began our walk led by the new Our Lady & St John. Everything went well till we reached the halfway point.

Clearly, it seemed we needed to do some penance prior to arriving - and it came in the form of wind and rain!

The banner seemed determined to take off on its own and it was clear we needed to take some shelter which we did behind some

trees and bushes, inadequate shelter but at least some relief. But it was soon decided to press on, and we finally arrived at the shrine a little worse for wear but spiritually ready for the day.

Some of our group had arrived at the shrine a little earlier by coach and we met up outside the Chapel of Reconciliation.

We took part in the Shrine's daily morning programme, which included Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Confessions. The weather brightened up by 11.15am and we all assembled outside to follow the Stations of the Cross, beautifully read by Joan Larkin and Frankie Wise. Holy Mass was at noon followed by a lunch break in the cafeteria, with time available to view the shop and to make our devotions and present our petitions in the Slipper Chapel. At 2pm a very quiet and peaceful Exposition began in the Chapel of Reconciliation, followed at 3pm by the Rosary and Benediction.

After a period of free time, some of us returned to Walsingham on the coach at 4.30pm whilst others decided to walk back to Walsingham in the brighter afternoon weather.

After dinner at 6pm, we enjoyed our evening meal followed at 8pm with Evening Prayers in church. After our spiritual renewal, we came together in the dining room for a bible quiz and bingo which was very enjoyed by everyone present, especially by those who won the chocolates!

All these activities combined to make our first full day in Walsingham, both memorable and spiritually uplifting.

Thursday was to be a day of choices.

Some of our group decided to have a relaxed morning and spend the rest of the day in Walsingham visiting the various sites and shrines in the village - including the Anglican Shrine, the Russian Orthodox Church, the

Priory and St. Mary's Parish Church. Others spent the morning at the Catholic Shrine, and after mass at noon returned to Walsingham for lunch and then went on to visit the Priory and other sites in the village.

The majority, however, chose to join the day trip to Cromer. Whilst there was a cooling breeze from the sea, everyone enjoyed their day out, with lots of fresh sea air, excellent fish and chips, ice cream, an assortment of beverages, walks along the sea front and along the pier, and visits to the shops and attractions. Overall, a very enjoyable day was had by everyone.

On Thursday evening after dinner, we came together for a final period of reflection and Evening Prayers in church. We then returned to the accommodation to play bingo. Later in the evening, we gathered in the Black Lion hotel next door for 'light liquid' refreshments. It was a delight to see everyone enjoying some casual time together chatting and

exchanging stories. Eventually the evening came to an end, and everyone retired for our final night in Walsingham.

On Friday, after morning prayers and breakfast, we signed out and loaded up the coach, departing Walsingham on schedule at 9.45am, making our way home via Kings Lynn where we visited Our Lady of the Annunciation Church.

We took part in mass at 11am, following which we enjoyed a detailed and interesting presentation by Canon Peter Rollings on the history of the Walsingham Shrine at Kings Lynn and its Lady Chapel, which is a replica of the Holy House within the Basilica della Santa Casa in Loreto, Italy.

A 'light lunch' followed and we were then back on our travels again at 1.15pm saying another two decades of the rosary and singing hymns.

We arrived home in the sunshine at about 6.45pm after a most enjoyable, spiritual and fun packed time together.

Response forms requesting feedback on various aspects of the pilgrimage were collated and returned a positive result of 97.8%, which compared favourably to the 96.5% we received last year.

Now that leaves us with an improvement target of 2.2% for next year – we will certainly be working hard to achieve it!

A lot of positive feedback was received relating to the amount of individual freedom which had been built into the agenda, which allowed for everyone to choose the activities they each engaged in. For example, walking or being transported to the Catholic shrine in the mornings. Also being free to choose what each pilgrim wanted do on Thursday. This freedom of choice will be a big part of the 2027 pilgrimage.

SO, WHAT ABOUT 2027?

The Pilgrimage is booked for Tuesday 11th to Friday 14th May

The agenda will certainly give as many options as possible for everyone to decide just how they wish to spend their time in Walsingham as well as on Thursday, the third day of the Pilgrimage.

It is anticipated that six new en-suite rooms at Elmham House will be available to our group by the conversion of non-en-suite rooms and the upstairs common room into en-suite bedrooms

Our day excursion is currently being discussed, and details will be announced once we begin our promotions in September. It will either be a day out or an agenda to include visiting the sites in Walsingham as this could be the only opportunity to do so for some guests, depending on what choices

each person makes during the previous days of the Pilgrimage.

We will be having another film, more bingo and bible quizzes, a social night of Thursday, a dedicated time to introduce ourselves to our fellow pilgrims on Tuesday. We will also take part in a candle lit procession and hymns after Thursday evening prayers to the Shrine at Elmham House.

We are delighted with the guests who have joined us in 2025 and 2026 and look forward to welcoming past and new pilgrims to our 2027 group.

Please look out for advertising posters and application forms in your church from September next.