

CELTIC PILGRIMAGE

*“A journey can become a sacred thing:
Take time to free your heart of ballast
So that the compass of your soul
Might direct you toward the territories of
spirit....”*

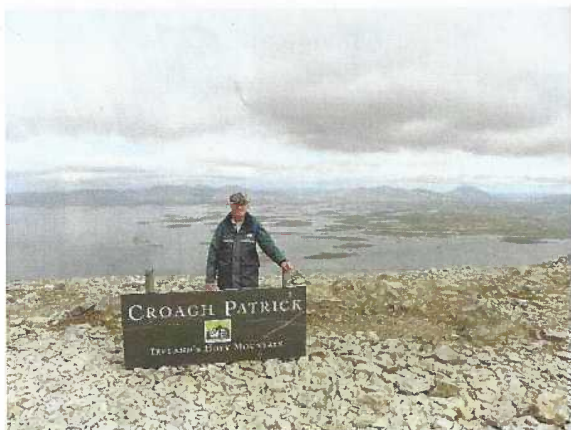


John Neal

On Thursday, April 12, some 26 pilgrims assembled at a hotel just off Tottenham Court Road in London to set off by bus for a 19 day trip including southern England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, finishing at Durham. Our tour leaders were John and Jenny Hornblow and our chaplain, Archbishop David (and Tureiti) Moxon.

We enjoyed travelling through the wakening glories of a Northern Hemisphere Spring as both sunshine and rain lit up the countryside with different lights, we appreciated the skills of our drivers as they negotiated the narrow, winding roads and we were uplifted by the lives of the saints who trod these same areas around 13 centuries ago. No one place stands out for me, for each had its attractions, ranging from the majestic grandeur of Canterbury Cathedral in Kent, to the story of William Walker, an early 20th century diver who, for over four years worked in underwater darkness to shore up the southern and western walls of Winchester Cathedral, to the stark simplicity and sloping floor of St David's Cathedral in West Wales.

We followed in the footsteps of so many old saints, including Augustine of Canterbury, Swithun of Winchester, David of Wales, Patrick of Ireland (of course), Colombo of Iona, Andrew of Scotland, Hilda of Whitby and Cuthbert of Lindisfarne. What the Church has made of these people would possibly horrify them, for it was not fame let alone fortune that impelled them into their respective ministries, but a simple yet complete devotion to God and a determination to fulfil the ministries He had set aside for each.



They were made of stern stuff. For example, I climbed Croagh Patrick, a 2,500 ft high hill on Ireland's west coast, the path, for that's what they called it, resembling a New Zealand creek bed before it degenerated into a scramble up a scree slope. While the view from the top was commanding, the weather was, to be kind, bracing, and I was glad to retreat after ten minutes on the summit. Patrick, after whom this hill is named, stayed up there alone for a month!

I ended our pilgrimage with the opening words of Hebrews 12 resounding in my spirit:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus....

Pam Neal

St David's Cathedral in Wales is set in a hollow so that it was not visible to Viking invaders. It is a lovely, light building, a welcome simplicity (to me) after some of the very ornate cathedrals we had visited. It was a freezing day but the fitter, hardier pilgrims walked towards to what is purported to be the birth place of David on a very bleak coast. David became renowned as a preacher and teacher and he and his followers lived a life of simplicity. On the reverse of leaflet with the "story of David" were the words "You may think this

building is beautiful. You may appreciate its history, its art and architecture ... But if you don't understand what is at the heart of it all, you've missed the point."

Something totally different was a ride on **Snowdon Mountain Railway**. We could not go to the top because of the weather conditions but could still enjoy the magnificent scenery.

Before leaving Wales we visited St Winefride's Well at Holywell and enjoyed the hospitality of the delightful sisters at St Winefride's Guesthouse. There are numerous legends around this 7th century Welsh woman, but Winefride herself was a real person and Holywell is a place of pilgrimage and prayer for healing.



Margaret Rodley

Whitby on the east coast of Yorkshire fascinated me.

In 657 AD a monastery was founded there by the king of Northumbria as an act of thanksgiving after defeating the king of Mercia. It was an Anglo-Saxon double monastery having both men and women, in different houses, keeping their own rules, but worshipping together at services.

A woman Hild (Hilda) was chosen as the first abbess. She was of royal birth and over her years as abbess she was held in very high regard. Royalty and others of rank sought her counsel and respected her wisdom. The Synod of Whitby 664AD was one of the most important gatherings of early Christians as the Celtic Christians western islands discussed matters of difference with the Roman influenced Christians of Europe. The Venerable Bede in his Anglo-Saxon classic 'The Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People' spoke highly of Hild. She encouraged education and the abbey became a great learning centre. She saw potential in all people as was evident with her encouragement of the cow herder, Caedmon, recognised today as a most wonderful Anglo-Saxon poet. Royalty were buried there. Vikings destroyed the monastery in raids between 867-870AD and it lay desolate for 200 years until the Norman invasion of 1066 when a Norman nobleman was given land for his loyalty and service and bequeathed some of it for the rebuilding of a monastery following the Benedictine rule. After 500 years it also suffered from dissolution during the reign of Henry VIII. Neglect again followed and in 1914 a German battle cruiser misfiring seriously damaged most of the western wall. Today it is a category 1 listed building with the National Trust.

Walking around the ruins of the abbey high above the town on perhaps the coldest day I experienced (official temperature 8°C, but with wind chill factor probably about 3°C) being careful not to be blown over by the wind and with each of us hugging a set of ear phones under our head coverings, we wandered around the ruins listening at each stop to the amazing history and back stories of the place.



Finally, the cold got to us and we carefully edged our way down to the town. Clinging to the rail against the wind and careful of the slippery rounded cobbles centre strip (which had been where the donkeys used to walk) we edged downwards for warmth and food. Also enjoying the town were groups of people dressed in the most outlandish clothes-elderly

punk rockers having a weekend festival we think! The book 'Dracula' was inspired by the abbey ruins and Whitby's other claim to fame was that it was the home port of James Cook. Driving off we detoured towards the sea front to see his statue. It was enveloped in construction paper and was being spruced up for the upcoming celebrations!

Fay Johnson

The origin of the Celts is uncertain; possibly they were an Indo-European people. The expanding Roman empire forced the Celts to flee north and west where they settled in a small area of north-west France, the Isle of Man, Ireland, Cornwall and the margins of Wales and Scotland. Here, an early understanding of the Christian faith was preserved and spread throughout Britain.

Our party of twenty-six people set off by coach from London on the 12 April bound for **Aylesford Priory**. Although it was a very cold grey day the trip was lovely with primroses in flower on waste ground and on embankments, and daffodils and tulips blooming everywhere.

We arrived about 3.30pm and put our luggage in our rooms. I shared a room with my sister in law Goldie Pask, which for me was an added bonus to the trip,



We then gathered outside to meet Father Michael who is the head Friar. He showed us around the extensive complex and many chapels, dressed in his brown worsted habit and white woollen cloak with hood. The monks are a Carmelite order and established in Aylesford in the 13th century. Dissolved in the time of Henry VIII, it became a private estate, and was bought by the friars in 1949 when building and restoration began. The tranquil gardens were reinstated. Today it fulfils its original function in welcoming pilgrims and visitors from around the world.

We attended Evening Prayer with Father Michael and two other monks. I chose to describe this, the first day of our pilgrimage as I found it very interesting and quirky.

I enjoyed the pilgrimage which was tiring with long days, however we had time for reflection and quiet, and a good measure of worship was included. Archbishop David Moxon, our chaplain, presented daily talks about local history and the lives of pertinent saints, as we travelled around on the bus.

At each site the challenge was to consider the following three questions:
What did God do in this place?
What is God doing in this place now?
What might God be saying to me or challenging me to do/be in response?

