

THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF KING'S LYNN

Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation
London Road,
King's Lynn. PE30 5HQ

Church of the Holy Family
Field Lane, Gaywood,
King's Lynn. PE30 4AY

History

The Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation Founded in 1778 The Pontifical Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham 1897 - 1934

King's Lynn is located around 26 miles east-south-east of Walsingham. The first church of St. Mary built on the present site was designed by A.W. Pugin and opened in 1845. When Father George Wrigglesworth came to the King's Lynn Mission in 1887 the church, having been built on poor foundations, had deteriorated to such an extent that urgent action was needed. Every effort was made to carry out satisfactory repairs but it eventually became clear that more drastic action was required.

In 1888 Bishop Riddell of Northampton decided that the church should be demolished and a new one built. A subscription list was started and a public appeal was launched through the Catholic papers and magazines. Fr George Wrigglesworth and his small congregation (about 90 at the time drawn from the whole of North West Norfolk) had great difficulty raising the necessary funds. Bishop Riddell laid the foundation stone on the 29th September 1896.

The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII (7th)) had drawn Fr Wrigglesworth's attention to the discomfort suffered by royal guests at Sandringham when attending Mass in King's Lynn. Learning of the necessity of building a new church, the Prince gave fifty guineas towards the building fund and the Kings of Spain and Italy also made donations.

The church was opened for worship on the 2nd June 1897.

When the Catholic priest, Father George Wrigglesworth, came to the King's Lynn Mission, in 1887, he became keen to revive devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham. With the help of Father Philip Fletcher, co-founder of the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom, he petitioned Pope Leo XIII to incorporate a restored shrine to Our Lady of Walsingham (the replica of the Holy House of Nazareth) in the Catholic church at Lynn. His Holiness gladly assented and granted a Rescript on the 6th February 1897, restoring the ancient Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham at King's Lynn.

The Shrine Chapel is a reproduction, on a reduced scale, of the Holy House in Nazareth at Loreto. The altar, too, is a copy of that at Loreto.

Until the 1960's the Shrine was lit by fifteen hanging lamps representing the Mysteries of the Rosary and the ceiling was painted to depict them.

Since the likeness of the original Walsingham statue was not known at the time, the Pope directed that a new statue be copied from the picture of Our Lady venerated in the Roman Church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, the titular church of Cardinal Pole, who died in 1556, the last Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury. The statue was carved in wood at Oberammergau, and having been blessed by the Pope on the day the Rescript for the Shrine was granted, it was brought to King's Lynn on the 19th August 1897.

Not only were the Catholics of Lynn and district at the railway station to receive the statue, many had come from all parts of England and the whole route to the new church was lined by the people of Lynn, who were reported to be very respectful, even reverent.

A halt was made at the Red Mount Chapel (built in 1485) in the Walks where the people saluted Our Lady's return with the Salve Regina. An annual procession to the Red Mount commemorating this event continued until 1984.

On the following day, 20th August 1897, the first public pilgrimage to Walsingham since the Reformation took place, led by Father Philip Fletcher and Fr George Wrigglesworth. There was a procession from Walsingham railway station to the Slipper Chapel where prayer was offered and visits were made to the Priory Ruins.

The Guild of Our Lady of Ransom continued to lead pilgrimages to King's Lynn until 1934 when it was at last possible to restore the National Shrine to the Slipper Chapel at Walsingham. Pilgrims continued to visit the Shrine in King's Lynn. In the 1960s when the church was renovated, the Shrine was simplified and the lamps, ceiling paintings and screen removed.