



# MEDIEVAL PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is an important part of every faith across the world. The word pilgrim comes from the Latin word *peregrinus*, meaning stranger or wanderer, and going on pilgrimage often meant a long, sometimes dangerous, journey on foot or horseback to the burial place or relics of holy people. In Britain, the practice of worshipping holy relics (the bodily remains or other items associated with religious heroes or saints) became firmly established by the 2nd century. Pilgrimages to the shrines of saints reached their height in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries.

As the spiritual home of the Order of the Garter, a chivalrous order established in 1348 by Edward III, and with its Royal connections, St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, became an important centre for pilgrimage.

This lesson uses visual and written documentary evidence held at St George's Chapel Archives and Chapter Library to investigate this medieval activity.

The evidence will help you to explore why pilgrims made the journey, reasons why the church encouraged pilgrimage and explores parallels with the modern world.

Why not visit St George's Chapel to take part in your own pilgrimage?

Details of opening times and access arrangements are available on the College of St George's website ([www.stgeorges-windsor.org](http://www.stgeorges-windsor.org)). Guided school visits to the Chapel may be arranged through the Windsor Castle Education Centre ([www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk))

## Source 1



Image of the Cross Gmeth boss in the South Quire Aisle, St George's Chapel

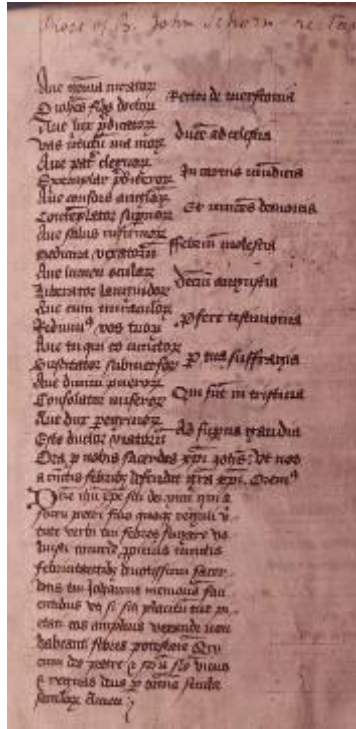
### **Cross Gmeth**

On its foundation in 1348, Edward III gave the College of St George a piece of the "True Cross", on which Jesus Christ was believed to have been crucified, taken from the Prince of Wales during the wars between England and Wales. It became known as the Cross Gmeth after Neotus who was supposed to have taken the piece of the cross from the Holy Land to Wales. The Cross Gmeth came to be regarded as the Chapel's chief relic and remained the focus for pilgrimage and devotion for over two hundred years. On the building of the new St George's Chapel by Edward IV in the fifteenth century, overseen by the Bishop of Salisbury, Richard Beauchamp, a stone boss (a carved decoration) showing the relic was installed in about 1480. It formed part of the vaulting on the roof above the altar and shrine dedicated to the relic.

### **Questions**

- 1) Who do you think the people kneeling either side of the boss could be?
- 2) Why might they have wanted to be represented in this way?
- 3) Why might the home of the Order of the Garter want to represent a victory over a neighbouring country?

## Source 2



Photograph of the hymn written in the Schorn Book of Hours, c.1430-1450

### **Schorn Book of Hours, LIB MS 6, c.1430-1450**

Another of the sites visited by pilgrims to Windsor was the tomb of John Schorn, who had been Rector of North Marston in Buckinghamshire. He was believed to be a very holy man who could perform miracles in God's name, both during his life and after his death. His body had been transferred to Windsor from North Marston by 1481 to mark the building of the new St George's Chapel by Edward IV.

Above is a handwritten hymn written into the front of the Schorn Book of Hours, a decorated 15<sup>th</sup> century volume containing the daily services to be read. Translated below are some of the lines from the hymn:

*Hail, companion of angels / who dost enjoy the heavens, / and conqueror of demons*

*Hail, help of the sick / medicine of those harassed / by the pain of fevers*

*Hail, light of the eyes / liberator of the weak / from the toothache*

*Hail, since the ox / restored to life / gives witness of your miracles*

*Hail, thou who art the / rescuer of all the drowned / by thy prayers*

*Hail, heavenly consoler / of wretched boys / who are in sadness*

*Hail, leader of pilgrims, / lead thou wayfarers / to the joys above*

### **Questions**

- 1) According to the hymn, what good deeds and miracles was John Schorn able to perform?
- 2) Why would Edward IV have wanted the body to be at Windsor rather than staying at North Marston?

### Source 3



Pilgrims in the South Quire Aisle c.1490, a reconstructive drawing by Rena Gardiner

#### **Drawing by Rena Gardiner showing pilgrims in the chapel in the 15<sup>th</sup> century**

Take a look at the picture above. It shows pilgrims at Windsor who have come to pray for healing and other help. The tombs of Henry VI (considered to be a saintly king) and of John Schorn were at Windsor, both having been moved from their original burial places to St George's Chapel and pilgrims came in their thousands to ask the saints to intercede (pray to God) on their behalf.

#### **Questions**

- 1) What indicates the importance placed on the tomb of King Henry VI?
- 2) Describe the costume of two of the pilgrims in the picture. What does it tell us about them?
- 3) Can you think of occasions today when people go on pilgrimage?



## Source 4



Pilgrims' money box in the South Quire Aisle, made c.1480

### **Money box made by John Tresilian in the 1480s**

In the South Quire Aisle stands this beautifully made iron money box for pilgrims to leave money offerings. It required four separate keys to open it, each held by a different person, and was watched over by a person hiding in an upstairs room.

### **Questions**

- 1) What letter can you see on the money box?
- 2) Who do you think this referred to (see source 3)?
- 3) Think back to source 2, question 2. Does this help you think of any reason why Edward IV would have wanted the bodies of holy men in St George's Chapel?
- 4) Why might they have wanted 4 different people to hold keys to the money box?

## Source 5

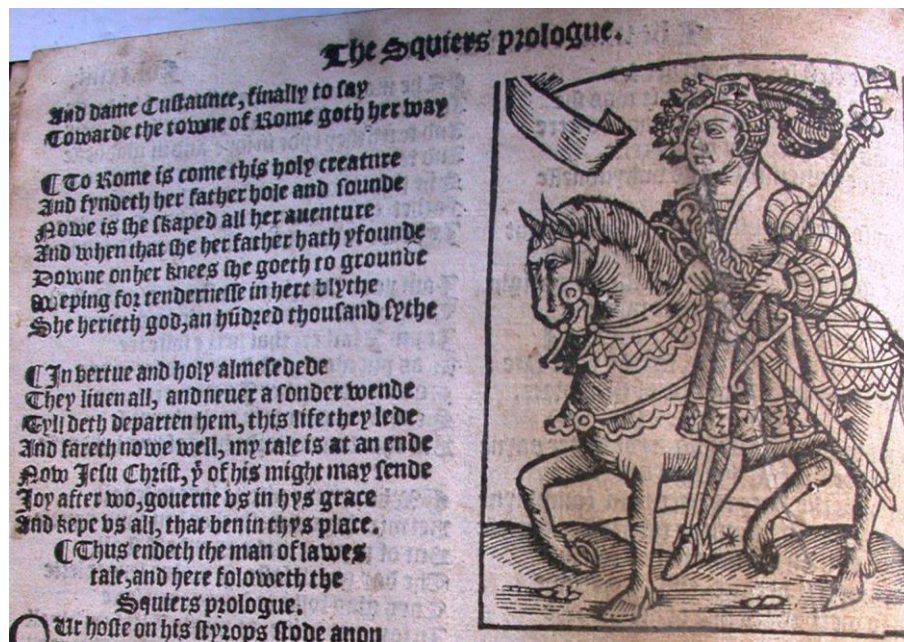


Illustration accompanying the Squire's Tale from the Canterbury Tales, SGC RBK C.185, c.1542

### Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer

One of the most famous stories of pilgrimage is the *Canterbury Tales*. Written at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century by Geoffrey Chaucer, it tells of a group of 30 people, from all classes of society, travelling together to Canterbury to pray at the tomb of the martyred Archbishop Thomas Becket, and the stories they tell each other to pass the time. The poem was originally written in Middle English, and first printed in around 1476. A 16<sup>th</sup> century copy of the text is held in the Chapter Library.

### Questions

- 1) The man in the picture is riding a horse. How else might people have travelled in medieval times?
- 2) Why would they have needed to travel together on pilgrimage?
- 3) What would their journey have been like?

## Source 6



Photograph of a Schorn Pilgrim Badge

### **Pilgrim Badge**

Pilgrim badges were mass produced in low grade lead or pewter, and were often worn on the pilgrim's hat or cloak. Records show that the most popular shrines were able to sell more than 100,000 badges a year. This one depicts John Schorn, preaching from the pulpit, surrounded by angels.

### **Questions**

- 1) Why would a pilgrim have wanted a pilgrim badge?
- 2) How do we know that the figures behind John Schorn are angels? Why are they included in the image?
- 3) Can you think of similar souvenirs collected today?