

Why go on the Glastonbury Pilgrimage?

It is impossible to divorce modern Glastonbury from its history. When England was Mary's dowry, Walsingham was England's Nazareth and Glastonbury was England's Jerusalem.

The story of Christianity in Glastonbury is steeped in myth and legend, some say that Joseph of Arimathea visited and brought the Holy Grail, others say Jesus himself came to Glastonbury and Saints Bride and Patrick both passed through. These stories are of course medieval tales, but it is irrefutable that when King Ina founded the Abbey of St Peter and St Paul in 658AD There was already a structure called, "The Old Church". The origins of this building were already lost to history, but we know it was dedicated to Our Lady. King Ina's charter, published in 694AD mentions, "the wooden basilica, the Old Church of the Most Blessed Virgin" and refers to it as "the foremost Church in Britain, the fount and source of all religion."

This ancient wooden building was destroyed by fire on 25th May 1184, the image of the Blessed Virgin miraculously survived the fire, and it was set up again when the rebuilt church was consecrated in 1188. The new church, which was still referred to as, The Old Church, was built on the same dimensions as the one it replaced, it was made of stone, but the stone was dressed to look like wood.

During the Middle Ages Glastonbury became the foremost Marian shrine in Northern Europe, the Abbey flourished and was one of the richest establishments in the realm, a fact not lost on King Henry VIII. In September 1539 Henry's commissioners stripped the Abbey of its valuables and the last Abbot, Richard Whiting and two monks John Thorne and Roger James were hung, drawn, and quartered on Glastonbury Tor on 15th November 1539. All three martyrs were beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1895.

With the demise of the Abbey. the Catholic Faith was almost eradicated in Glastonbury. The Society of the Sacred Heart set up a school in Glastonbury at the start of the twentieth century and there were only ten Catholic families in the area at that time. However, the emergence of the faith was gathering momentum across the country and in 1895 to celebrate the beatification of the Glastonbury Martyrs the first modern pilgrimage took place. It was the largest movement of Catholics in England since the Reformation.

The modern pilgrimage gained popularity and in the 1960's as many as twenty thousand people thronged into the town, however, despite the growing number of Catholics in England, the Glastonbury Pilgrimage has dwindled to less than a thousand in 2023.

So, we are asking that the whole of Clifton Diocese works to revitalise this event which links us literally to the earliest Christians in England, by sending pilgrims from every parish to celebrate Mass in the ancient Abbey.

As well as the pilgrimage walk, there is plenty to see in the Shrine of Our Lady of Glastonbury. The High Street has several quirky shops and some excellent pubs and cafés. Parking for cars and coaches is available, but pilgrims who prefer a more traditional method, can join the Walking Pilgrimage from Clifton Cathedral.

We have formed a 'Guild of Glastonbury Pilgrims' and set up a Facebook Group for pilgrimage coordinators in all parishes throughout Clifton Diocese. The Facebook Group is a networking tool for facilitating the annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Glastonbury by Catholics from Clifton Diocese and beyond. If you would like to join the Guild and be a contact point for the Glastonbury Pilgrimage in your parish, just search for 'Guild of Glastonbury Pilgrims' on Facebook. Alternatively, please email the Guild at: glastonbury.pilgrimage@cliftondiocese.com.

More information can be found on the following webpages:

<https://www.glastonburyshrine.co.uk/pilgrimage>

<https://cliftondiocese.com/pilgrimage/>

The Glastonbury Pilgrimage Committee