

# THE PONTIFICAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM

## THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF THE ANNUNCIATION, KING'S LYNN



***A Gothic Revival design of 1897 by William Lunn, incorporating elements from an earlier (1845) church on the same site by A.W.N. Pugin. The present building is of some architectural and townscape interest, lent added significance by the stained glass, rood and font from Pugin's church, and by the presence of the Pontifical Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, established here in 1897, and the main focus of Catholic devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham until 1934.***

King's Lynn has two great medieval parish churches. In the middle ages many pilgrims came ashore here, bound for the Marian shrine at Walsingham, stopping at the late medieval wayside chapel at the Red Mount before continuing on their journey.

In the early nineteenth century Mass was celebrated by two successive French émigré priests. Fr le Goff arrived in 1802, and was followed by Fr Dacheux, who built a chapel in Coronation Square in 1822. In 1839 a six-acre plot fronting the newly-laid-out London Road was purchased as a site for a church. The Revd John Dalton was appointed rector of the mission and commissioned designs from A.W.N. Pugin. The original proposal for a church with a tower and spire was not realised and initially only the nave and chancel were built, with a north aisle added later. The foundation stone was laid on 10 May 1844 and the church, dedicated to St Mary, was consecrated by Dr Wareing, Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District, on 8 May 1845. The church sat about 200 and cost £1,500. A presbytery was built alongside in 1849.

Towards the end of the century, St Mary's was in a serious state of disrepair, its poor foundations causing settlement and cracking. This was of sufficient concern for the Prince of Wales (future King Edward VII) to complain to the Revd George Wrigglesworth that his

Catholic guests at Sandringham were being greatly inconvenienced while attending Mass at Kings Lynn. The prince financed a report from the architect William Lunn, which concluded that the building was beyond economic repair. It was taken down and rebuilt under Lunn's supervision, re-using some parts of the old building and some furnishings, including the rood, the font and stained glass. The prince contributed fifty guineas towards the cost. The foundation stone was laid on 29 September 1896 and the church was opened by Bishop Riddell of Northampton on 2 June 1897. The builder was W. Hubbard of East Dereham and the approximate cost £3,000.

The rebuilt church included a Lady Chapel built as a replica of the Holy House of Loreto. This housed the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, which had been revived by Fr Wrigglesworth; an image of the Virgin was brought from Oberammergau and blessed by Pope Leo XIII. According to *The Tablet* (1957) the statue was painted in England by Mr Charles Rock, and was based on an ancient image of Our Lady in Santa Maria in Cosmedin, Rome. The shrine was set up in August 1897, immediately after which Fr Wrigglesworth led a pilgrimage of about 40-50 people from Lynn to Walsingham, the first manifestation in modern times of the revival of that ancient popular pilgrimage. The altar in the shrine was consecrated by Bishop Riddell of Northampton on 15 May 1900; *The Tablet* reported that the shrine had been 'tastefully decorated' by J.A. Pippet of Solihull, and the altar privileged by Pope Leo XIII. This remained the official shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham until 1934, when the national shrine was established at Walsingham; at that point King's Lynn became a pontifical shrine.



The interior of the church was refurbished several times in the twentieth century and the sanctuary reordered in 1969. The most recent redecoration was in 2014. An organ gallery was installed in the 1990s and in c.2010 a new set-back addition was built on the liturgical south side, providing a meeting area, kitchen WCs and step-free access from the London Road (architect Richard C. F. Waite).

## Description

The church is not orientated; the liturgical east end faces west. All directions in the following description are liturgical, i.e. assuming an altar to the east.

The church is in a simple Gothic style. The walls are faced with carrstone, with dressings of dark red sandstone and window surrounds of Bath stone; the roofs are covered with slate. The plan comprises a nave and chancel under a continuous pitched roof with a lean-to north aisle, a north porch and a small northwest tower. On the south side of the chancel is a Lady Chapel, which is also the shrine. The east end of the church abuts the presbytery, and the south side is enclosed by other buildings.

The west front to London Road has a central pointed doorway with a wide four-light pointed window above with idiosyncratic tracery, and a pair of small cusped windows in the head of the gable. To the right of the main front is a modern carrstone wall with a pointed doorway approached by a ramp, providing step-free access to ancillary facilities added in c.2010. To the left of the front is the northwest tower, rectangular on plan and topped by a pitched



tiled roof with a spirelet. The north aisle has a mixture of double and single cusped windows; the clerestorey windows are alternately double and single lights.



Internally, the nave and chancel have a continuous open timber roof with collars and tie beams. The walls are plastered, the floor is woodblock. The nave has a five-bay north arcade with pointed chamfered arches on octagonal stone columns with moulded capitals. The clerestorey windows above are set in deep reveals. The nave is seated with modern benches. At its west end is an octagonal stone font with quatrefoil panels, re-used from Pugin's church. Above is a modern timber organ gallery, the organ

(assembled in 1990) with pipework from Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Now placed on the gallery front are painted panels of the Annunciation in a carved timber surround, originally part of the 1897 reredos designed by William Lunn and made by Charles Beajart of Bruges. At the west end of the south wall is a modern rectangular door opening; further east is a large three-light traceried window with good stained glass by William Wailes (Virgin and Child, Thomas Becket and St George), re-set from the earlier church; further east again is a wide pointed arch leading to the shrine.

The transition between nave and chancel is marked by the rood beam and rood, also re-used from the earlier church. The chancel is of two bays, with clerestorey windows on the south side and sedilia in the south wall. In 1923 the chancel walls were covered with a scheme of painted decoration, later hidden by a simpler decorative scheme; a fragment of the older scheme (showing a phoenix) survives in the tympanum of a door in the north wall. The sanctuary has been reordered and the stone altar, which was introduced in 1947, cut down and brought forward. There is no east window on account of the presbytery beyond; hanging on the blind east wall is a crucifix by Michael Clark, installed in 1969.

The Lady Chapel, which is also the Pontifical Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, is a narrow rectangular space with walls faced with irregular courses of carrstone and a blue-painted timber barrel-vaulted ceiling. The image of Our Lady is incorporated in a neo-Baroque altarpiece, possibly that supplied by J.A. Pippet in 1900. The shrine also contains brass memorials to the Revd William Poole (d.1867) and the Revd George Wrigglesworth (d.1900) 'who rebuilt this church and set up the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham'. The entrance to the shrine was originally enclosed by a carved and gilded timber screen, only fragments of which survive.

The church and presbytery were listed Grade II in November 2022.

List description at

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1481880?section=official-list-entry>

### **Acknowledgement:**

**Extract from : Taking Stock, Catholic Churches of England and Wales.**

<https://taking-stock.co.uk/building/kings-lynn-our-lady-of-the-annunciation>