



FROM LEFT The vaulted ceiling of Great Malvern Priory. Worcester Cathedral overlooks the River Severn

# Walk this way

KEEN TO GET HER WALKING BOOTS ON AGAIN, **PAMELA GOODMAN** EXPERIENCES THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL REWARDS OF A MODERN PILGRIMAGE FROM GREAT MALVERN PRIORY TO WORCESTER CATHEDRAL

**I**n 2014, Guy Hayward co-founded The British Pilgrimage Trust, a charity with the goal 'to make pilgrimage in the British landscape attractive and open to all'. This summer, just as the UK was emerging from lockdown, his book *Britain's Pilgrim Places*, co-authored by academic and fellow pilgrim Nick Mayhew-Smith, was published. My introduction to Guy, through mutual friends, seemed like a fortuitous coincidence - not just because my feet were twitching to get walking again, but also because our collective focus as travellers has, as a result of the pandemic, been unexpectedly redirected to home shores.

We meet in Malvern, the Worcestershire spa town that hugs the eastern flank of the eponymous range of hills, with the simple aim of walking the 12-mile pilgrimage route from Great Malvern Priory to Worcester Cathedral. I am a little wary of any religious input that might be required of me along the way, belonging to that lapsed Christian category where faith comes and goes a bit. 'Pilgrim' feels like a loaded word. But as we walk and talk, Guy, who is no religious nut himself, describes pilgrimage as a physical renewal as much as a spiritual one, which can be undertaken by both the faithful and faithless. 'Bring your own beliefs,' he says, quoting the motto of The Pilgrimage Trust, occasionally bursting into song with a professional mastery that hints at his choral scholarship to the University of Cambridge and his alter ego as one half of the cabaret duo Bounder & Cad.

Great Malvern Priory - once a medieval Benedictine monastery, now an Anglican parish church - is still encumbered by Covid-19 regulations when we visit. But Reverend Rod Corke gives us a private tour, taking in the magnificent 15th-century stained-glass windows (second only to those in York

Minster in terms of survival and national importance), the finest collection of medieval floor tiles and the tomb of Walcher of Malvern, a renowned mathematician and astronomer who was Prior here from 1091 until his death in 1135. CS Lewis, who was educated at Malvern College and allegedly took inspiration from the town's gas lamps for his opening description of Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, describes the Priory as the first beautiful building he saw.

When Guy and I stop for a picnic in the Old Hills, having walked out through the town, past Madresfield church and court, over stiles and across fields of cows and dwindling asparagus, it is the only moment in the day when we can see the priory behind us and Worcester Cathedral ahead - a goal we reach by mid-afternoon just as the doors are closing. But there is time enough to absorb the intense loveliness of this mighty cathedral, to pay homage to St Wulfstan - the last of the Anglo Saxon saints, the first Bishop of Worcester and (appropriately for modern times) an early abolitionist of the Bristol slave trade, whose remains lie somewhere unknown within the building. King John is buried here, too, as well as the skeleton of a 15th-century pilgrim, discovered during excavation works in 1986.

There has been a gentle rhythm to the day - a blend of walking and easy conversation overlaid with a greater awareness that so much of Britain's rich culture and history is rooted in its sacred places. Perhaps it is easier than I thought to be a pilgrim □

*The British Pilgrimage Trust: [britishpilgrimage.org](http://britishpilgrimage.org). 'Britain's Pilgrim Places: The First Complete Guide to Every Spiritual Treasure' by Nick Mayhew-Smith and Guy Hayward (Lifestyle Press, £19.99) is an illustrated compendium of holy places in England, Scotland and Wales, plus the routes and pathways linking them*