



WALKING ST MAGNUS WAY

ORKNEY PILGRIMAGE 2021



Day 12 : Monday 24 May
St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall



On Saturday when we arrived in Kirkwall the cathedral was locked up, clean and sanitized in preparation for Sunday. I had to wait until this morning to gain entry. I was there at 10am, to sit silently in the empty cathedral space and pray.

The remains of Magnus are in a pillar to the right of the communion table (the worship here is that of the Kirk). There is a plaque on the pillar, as above. Neither date here is correct, but what is true is his slaying on Egilsay and the building of this fine cathedral by his nephew Rognvald. They have got the beginning and end of the final journey right. The stone masons who worked here are thought to be those who built Durham Cathedral. The stone is local and in two colours, brought in from the islands.

Many of the miracles that led to Magnus' canonisation involved people keeping vigil in prayer at the site where he was buried, so today I was hoping to be part of that tradition.

What I was aware of was the very great difference in my end of pilgrimage experience to that of pilgrims before the Scottish Reformation. Then the pilgrims would have arrived at a church which smelt of incense, where candles would have been lit throughout. The Mass would have been sung in Latin, and Magnus appealed to through prayers and antiphons. Here heaven and earth met in and through the remains of Magnus, but also through what was happening on the altar. All of this combined to concentrate the possibility of spiritual benefits, with a real miracle a possibility. These would have been the moments when the intentions carried in heart and mind for many miles were finally offered up to God.

Today there is no aroma of holiness. Only one candle is lit. The only priest/bishop present was me. There was no congregation, no intoning crowd.



Now I am Reformed enough to believe that God's mercy does not require work from me. The fact that I did not walk every mile to Kirkwall is not an issue. I know that the journey itself, especially the prayers and conversations on the Way, have brought significant spiritual benefits. Maybe God has done all that God wants to do in me.

And yet, I am sufficiently catholic to miss the Mass at the end. I was saddened by the ropes across the cathedral, coronavirus precautions to stop visitors and pilgrims touching the pillar or plaque. I wanted to be sent away with a blessing, one that I could hear and see. Like life, the journey is not sufficient in itself, there is the need for something else that speaks of our secure end in the love of God. And like many another pilgrim, I felt the need to be able to take something tangible (touchable) home to share with those I know to be in need.

As we recover pilgrimage, especially in protestant lands, we have more work to do on destinations and endings. And then we can go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.



And then finally – this is the end of my blogging. Thank you for your prayers, comments and encouragements. I hope to repeat the pilgrimage sometime – maybe next time you could join me.

+Anne



My happy face – on arriving at the cathedral on Saturday!!