The Worcester Pilgrim

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ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

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1. Plan of the cathedral at Worcester showing the site of the Pilgrim's grave.
THE EXCAVATION

IN 1986 an excavation was begun inside Worcester Cathedral at the base of the south-east tower pier, the last of four excavations carried out to enable the architect to examine the state of the tower's foundations (Fig. 1). Early on in the excavation, not far below the present floor level, the top of a grave appeared and we began to remove what we expected to be a routine grave-fill above the bones of a skeleton. To our surprise, the first indication of a body was the appearance of two leather toe-caps poking up through the soil. We continued to excavate with great care and finally revealed the body of a fully clothed person wearing woollen garments and knee-length leather boots (Figs. 2 and 3). He was apparently lying as buried, except for the neck and skull which had been destroyed by a later disturbance at the west end of the grave. Beside the body lay a long wooden staff, with a double-pronged iron tip, and we wondered if this might be a pilgrim's staff. When a cockle shell was uncovered alongside it, deliberately pierced for attachment as a badge, and reminiscent of the scallop shell pilgrims' tokens associated with the famous shrine of St James at Compostela, in north-west Spain, it did indeed look as though we had discovered the burial of a pilgrim. If so, then this was of considerable historical importance for no burial of a clothed pilgrim, complete with staff, had previously been uncovered in Britain. Many pilgrim burials have been excavated in Europe but none with such well preserved textiles or so much of the staff surviving.

2. Photograph of the Pilgrim burial as discovered
   (Photograph: Philip Barker)
3. Plan of the Pilgrim burial (Drawn by Helen Lubin)

- Remains of horn
- Pierced cockleshell
- Grave cut away by later feature
- Thread from shroud

Legend:
- Brick
- Stone
- Mortar
- Textile remains

Stone Wall of Monastic Choir

N

1m.
3ft

6
THE GRAVE

The grave was 1'10" (56 cms) deep with well-defined vertical sides, and 1'11" (58.5 cms) wide by 6'3" (190.5 cms) long, although disturbed by a later brick structure across the west end. This had removed or destroyed the head of the skeleton, along with any other attributes of pilgrimage, such as a hat, or a knob from the top of the staff, which may originally have been present at that end of the grave. Otherwise, the skeleton was undisturbed, lying on his back with his arms crossed on his chest. The grave followed the normal east-west alignment for a Christian burial, and had the head at the west end, which is more likely to indicate a lay-person than a priest. There was no coffin but there was some evidence for a shroud. Fragments of willow and bay leaves were also found in the burial. The grave lay alongside the south face of an east-west wall (Fig. 4) that had formed the back of the choir, which in monastic times was situated under the tower-crossing and extended into the first two bays of the nave. The grave, therefore, would have been in the aisle outside the choir, against the wall. The wall in question was a rebuilding of an earlier choir wall and was built later than the 14th century tower. Since the grave post-dates the wall this means that the burial cannot be any earlier than 1374, which is the date of the tower. In fact, the grave was cut from high up in the archaeological strata and is probably a good deal later than that; specialist reports on the textiles and boots point to a date in the late 15th or early 16th century. On the other hand, it is unlikely to be any later than 1540, which is the date when shrines and pilgrimages were officially proscribed by Henry VIII.
5. The Pilgrim's remains being studied in the Laboratory of the York Archaeological Trust (Photograph: York Archaeological Trust)
THE BODY - ANATOMICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SKELETON

As a result of the disturbance of the grave at the west end, the skull, the cervical spine (neck) and two upper vertebrae of the spine were missing, together with the left collar bone and first rib. Otherwise, the skeleton was intact inside its clothing and undamaged. There were also remnants of soft tissue, skin and spinal cord and some residual remnants of ligaments and muscle, now very friable, attached to bones of the spine and pelvis.

Pelvic features and robust long-bones (e.g. thighs and collar bone) indicate that the skeleton was male.

He was elderly when he died, probably over 60 years old, for the skeleton shows extensive signs of degeneration associated with old age, e.g. widespread and advanced arthritis, at times causing joints to fuse together in parts of the spine, coccyx and sternum, and calcification of some of the cartilages.

Before these arthritic conditions assaulted him in later life, however, the pilgrim seems to have had a strong physique, with robust long-bones and a well-developed musculature. He was probably a stocky, thick-set individual of moderate height - about 5' 7 1/2" (171.5 cms) tall, according to leg bone measurements.

The anatomical findings accord well with the supposition that the man was a pilgrim, for there is evidence that he had done a great deal of walking and had been a vigorous person who could well have undertaken lengthy and arduous journeys.

The degree to which muscles have been developed can be assessed from bones by examination of the muscle-tendon attachments. Wear and tear through heavy use of particular joints, often resulting in arthritis, also gives an indication of a person's activities. In the case of the Pilgrim, the calf muscles had been particularly powerful, and the extensor muscles for the knees had been well used. All these are characteristic of someone who does a lot of walking. The feet were also strong and the long flexor tendon to the big toe, vital to the take-off thrust of the foot in walking, had formed an unusually deep groove in the bone, accentuated by calcification in the tendon sheath, both indicating hard use of the feet over a prolonged period of time.

A number of factors can also be interpreted as showing that he habitually used a staff as an aid to walking and climbing on his journeys, carrying it in his right hand. The shoulder muscles were well developed, particularly on the right side, and evidence of an inflammation of the right shoulder joint would have been due to repeated upward thrusting movements of an outstretched arm. The forearm rotator muscles and the elbow extensor were also stronger on the right side. The main joints of the arms are free from arthritis, but in the right hand there is arthritis in the joint underlying the pisiform bone in the palm and this would probably have been caused by repeated direct pressure on the heel of the palm of the hand, such as might have been the case when grasping and using a walking staff. The tendon grooves of the thumb are also particularly marked in the right hand, suggesting a strong grip.

The pilgrim seems to have suffered two injuries which left their mark on the bones. It is quite feasible - though not proven - that both these injuries were arrow wounds. On the left thigh bone there is a curious bony outgrowth, 3.5cms long, at the back of the lower end of the bone, (Fig. 6). No muscle attachment occurs at this point and there is nothing comparable on the other leg. It seems most likely that this abnormality was the result of a narrow, penetrating injury by some sharp object, mainly damaging the outer part of the bone and not fo-
allowed by infection. A second penetrating wound may have injured the hip bone, again on the left side. Here there is an unusual flat polished facet on the bone due to some abnormal friction. A possible explanation for this is that it was caused by scarring on the overlying muscle or, more probably, by a penetrating foreign body left lodged between the muscle and the bone, such as, for example, the tip of an arrow-head.

If our man did indeed spend much of his life making arduous pilgrimages through difficult terrain it is perhaps not surprising that he ended up in later life with severe arthritis and was probably in quite frail health towards the end of his life. Extensive diffuse arthritis, affecting joints in the spine, ribs, pelvis, pectoral girdle, legs and toes, must have caused him considerable pain. The resultant fusing of some of the bones of the spine, coccyx, ribs and sternum would have had a crippling effect, making it unlikely that he could have been walking long distances in the last decade or so of his life. There is total fusion of the thoracic spine between the 5th and 10th thoracic vertebrae, and further partial fusion and arthritis elsewhere in the spine. The 5th and 9th ribs on the right hand side were also fused to the spine and several rib cartilages were calcified (a typical ageing process). There would have been complete rigidity in the upper spine and this was associated with a moderate degree of deformity in which the back would have been bowed and slightly bent to the left. He would also have walked with his right shoulder raised. He was unable to rotate his trunk at all but could bend forwards and backwards from the lower spine.

The cause of death is of course a matter of speculation but two observations can be made. Firstly, his efficiency in breathing would have been much reduced by the bone fusion and deformity of his spine and by the rigidity of the fused and calcified ribs. Secondly, we know that it was necessary to cut his boots in order to get his feet into them, so it may be that his feet were swollen. It is reasonable to consider that he may have died from congestive heart failure. Nevertheless he lived to a good age first, after an apparently active life.

6. The Pilgrim’s left thigh bone, side view, showing possible arrow injury (Photograph: Dr. Leonard Wilkinson)
The Clothing -
Analysis of the Textile Remains

The Pilgrim is most unusual in having been buried fully clothed. Normally a medieval Englishman would go to his grave in nothing but his shroud. Exceptions to this are high-ranking clergy, who might be buried in their liturgical vestments and monks who were often interred in their habits or with their hair shirts. (An example of such a hair shirt was found in another burial in the Cathedral). Discoveries of fully clothed laymen, however, are much more rare. Only one other example has been found in England, that of a man buried in the south aisle of Winchester Cathedral, but he was of a much earlier date than the Worcester pilgrim, being of the 12th or 13th century. The Worcester find is therefore of considerable interest to textile and costume historians.

Both fabrics were made from Z-spin yarn. Light-weight 2/2 twill: 20-24 x 36-50 threads per cm. Medium-weight 2/2 twill: 14-18 x 18-20 threads per cm.

Photographic enlargement of hemmed edge of garment of fine wool twill tucked inside Pilgrim's leather boot (cm. scale) (Photograph: Penelope Walton)
In neither fabric was any dye detected during analysis and no extra finish had been given to the texture of the wool. Nevertheless, the quality of both twilled cloths indicates someone of reasonable affluence, although the absence of any silk clothing or embroidered decoration would normally suggest that he was not from the highest social classes. In the case of a pilgrim on a penitential journey, however, rich clothing would have been inappropriate and undyed cloth was the norm. The Pilgrim’s outer garment had full, loose, vertical folds, perhaps more fully gathered at the front than at the back or sides and it fell without a waistline to just below the knee. There are also traces of some sort of sleeves. The undergarment was less full but covered a similar body area. In places it was found in direct contact with remnants of human skin, so no other underwear was present, perhaps because he was dressed after death.

In addition to the actual clothing, several lengths of yarn were found lying on top of the body. They were uniformly twisted as though once used in stitches. The thread was not part of the stitching of the garments, but occasionally passes through several folds of cloth at once. This could easily have occurred if the thread were used to stitch together a shroud which enveloped the body and its clothing. Shrouds were normally made of linen and linen fibres rarely survive as well as wool in burials since linen is particularly prone to destruction by fungus. The sewing thread was waxed with some kind of coating and has survived, but it is perfectly possible for the rest of the shroud to have decomposed without leaving any trace. Since the body was buried without a coffin it would be surprising if he had not had a shroud.

(2) Two Z-spin yarns plied together in an S direction, with a coating showing transverse cracks (possibly wax).

8. The Pilgrim’s boots, reconstructed
   (Photograph: K. Buck)
THE BOOTS

The Pilgrim was wearing good quality leather boots — well made and practical, (Figs 8 and 9). They were knee length, with a single straight seam up the back and with the vamp of the foot section joined by a straight side seam, plus an additional small triangle of leather stitched to either side of the vamp to complete the top piece. There was also a reinforcing triangle of leather added to the inside of the back of each ankle. The boots may have been slightly higher at the front, above the knee, than behind and possibly had turned over tops, a feature most common between the 1470s and circa 1510. The toes were a comfortable square with rounded corners. The soles (24.5cms long) were shaped for left and right, with a comparatively narrow waist and show only slight signs of wear. As is usual for the period, there were no heels.

The tops of the boots' feet had been slit along the centre line, probably to make it easier to get the boots on after death. Skin fragments adhering to the leather indicate that the boots were placed directly onto the feet, without any kind of hose, when he was dressed for burial.

Very few boots survive from the medieval/early Tudor period. The thigh boots from the "Mary Rose" (1545) have a similar toe shape, although the upper part is different. Paintings and manuscript illustrations show that the typical medieval pointed toe was giving way to a rounder, more practical shape by the last quarter of the 15th century and the extremely wide square toes of Tudor shoes began to be worn after 1485. The Worcester toe shape continued to be worn alongside the wider shape and was most common in the 1490s. The most likely date for boots of this style is from the later 1480s to circa 1510.
Lying alongside the pilgrim, on his right side, was a wooden staff, 3cms in diameter and 155cms in length. It would have been a strong length of timber since it had been shaped from a larger piece of cleft ash, with the grain cut on a radial axis, rather than being simply a slim coppice pole. At the bottom of the shaft is an iron collar and a double pronged wrought-iron spike, 6cms long, which is attached to the timber by another spike driven into the base of the shaft, (Fig. 10). The prongs, although not heavily worn, show signs of having been in use. At the top end of the shaft the wood is cut into a narrower peg, 4.3cms long, presumably for insertion into some kind of knob or finial and there are three small holes and a wedge in the top of the peg for some means of attachment. A white accretion remained around the peg and has been identified as horn. Pilgrim staves normally had a knob at the top and often a double one, which a peg this long would have been strong enough to support.

The wood of the staff had been painted with a brownish purple colouring. This pigment has been analysed as a red lake called Kermes, mixed with bone-black to produce a purple colour. This particular combination of pigments is unusual, but can be paralleled by paint used on a bust of Henry VII (circa 1510) by Torrigiano, which is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Bone-black (made from burnt bone) was a common, inexpensive pigment but kermes, known as "grain" in the Middle Ages, was much more expensive. It was an imported dye, derived from the dried bodies of an insect, Kermes vermilio, which is a parasite of the kermes oak, a shrub found in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions. It was most commonly used as a red textile dye but was also sometimes used in making paint for illuminating manuscripts (as, for example, in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Durrow and other, later, examples) and could be precipitated with alum for a purplish red or with acetic acid for an orangy-red. The binding medium for the pigments has been analysed as a fish or animal glue distemper. The question of whether or not paint of this composition could have withstood outdoor conditions will be discussed later.
The Cockleshell

The cockleshell (Fig. 11) was found at the bottom of the grave, lying against the southern edge, close to the top of the staff and also beside a bronze lace end. It was approximately 5 cms across and pierced by a small round hole at the central point at the top from which the ribs of the shell radiate. This hole had not occurred naturally but had been deliberately manufactured, probably by abrasion since there is a small area rubbed smooth around the hole.

The shell was worn and had probably been collected from a beach rather than when it was living. It is of the species *acanthocardia (rudicardium) tuberculata* (Linnaeus 1758). It is not uncommon and may have been more abundant in the past. Its distribution stretches primarily from the south west of England southwards to the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean and Atlantic coast of Morocco, although there are records of it as far north as the Wash, Solway and Fastnet sea areas. It is most common in Europe. The species is uniform throughout its range and so it is difficult to say whether it was collected in Britain or in Spain or from some other location in Europe since all of these would have been possible.

The Plant Remains

Small fragments of plant remains were retrieved from the soil of the burial fill, close to the body. These have been identified as fragments of leaves of bay laurel (*laurus nobilis*) and three twigs of willow (*salix*) but it was not possible to determine the subspecies of the willow. The twigs had been picked in the Winter or early Spring.

Having examined and analysed the finds, how reasonable is it to interpret them as evidence of a pilgrim? Before going on to discuss the arguments for this hypothesis it may be helpful to set the question in context by giving a brief account of medieval pilgrimage.
Conjectural reconstruction of the Pilgrim's dress and staff.
(By Helen Lubin)
PILGRIMAGE

THROUGHOUT the Middle Ages, pilgrimage was a well-established practice, endorsed by the church and, in the case of the major pilgrimage routes, attracting large groups of people and generating a thriving industry for group guides, shipowners, provision sellers, guidebook writers and a network of hostels along the way. These served the main destinations, such as Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, Cologne and Canterbury, but there was also an enormous number of lesser shrines throughout Christendom, where the relics, holy well or image of a saint were venerated. In many cases particular shrines were held to be especially efficacious for the cure of particular ailments and the shrine of St Wulstan, at Worcester Cathedral, was itself a focus for many pilgrims in search of healing. Many of the lesser shrines had a relatively localised fame, but they enjoyed considerable popularity within their own vicinity and people expected the local saint to respond to local needs. Many people found it easier to call upon the intercession of a saint, or the Blessed Virgin Mary, as the route for their petitions than to make a direct approach to the majestic figure, seated in judgement, who was so often the image of Christ presented to them in medieval church art and teaching. The veneration of relics and images of the saints, plus a belief in their miraculous intervention, was deeply ingrained in popular religion and closely bound up with pilgrimage, for although a saint’s help could be invoked from a distance, and no-one doubted the omnipresence of God, it was much more reassuring to go to the actual site of the shrine and physically touch the relics. There was a belief in the efficacy of physical contact which often bordered on the magical.

It was not only the pilgrim’s destination which was important, however, for the effort of making the journey was also a major part of the spiritual exercise. To accept and endure the rigours of a pilgrimage journey - and the hardships could be considerable - was a recognised form of penance and the exercise would be undertaken under the auspices of one’s confessor. In extreme cases a pilgrimage could also be imposed as a judicial sentence, being both a penance and a form of exile. Linked to the penitential aspect of pilgrimage was the aim of acquiring indulgences. Originally indulgences had related to a penance imposed in the confessional. There was a graded system of ascetic penances in operation, but the length of these could be reduced by substituting a form of ‘good works’ (of which pilgrimage was one option) as an equivalent penalty instead. After a time the concept of indulgences was expanded and no longer referred primarily to penance following confession of a particular sin, but came to be a means, through the power of the Pope, of obtaining remission from the final sentence of purgatory awaiting sinners in the next world. Purgatory was a fate which everyone expected to suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, and so the possibility of reducing the length of time spent there, by acquiring a number of years’ remission in advance, was obviously an attractive proposition. Pilgrimage was one way of amassing these indulgences and their acquisition became a major incentive for pilgrims.

The number of days or years to be acquired by visiting a particular shrine and performing the appropriate acts of devotion was systematised and the list was given in every pilgrim’s guidebook of the time. It was the abuse of indulgences, especially when exploited by Rome for financial gain, that was one of the initial criticisms of the Church made by Luther.

Pilgrims also took home with them more tangible souvenirs, in the shape of a variety of mementoes and relics, which were believed to hold some of the holiness of their origins. The motives of pilgrims, however, were not wholly acquisitive, they were also inspired by a great deal of genuine piety and many writers of the period describe highly emotional scenes of fervour exhibited by devotees at the shrines. Jerusalem and the Holy Land were the
highest goals to which a pilgrim could aspire and, as they made the rounds of the Holy Places, they consciously recreated the biblical events which had taken place at each site, commemorating them in hymns and liturgies and in imitative acts such as dipping in the River Jordan at the site of the Baptism. People set out, then, for a mixture of reasons: as a penitential exercise and in pursuit of indulgences and spiritual benefit; out of devotion to a particular saint or a desire to see the Holy Land; and in the hopes of having their prayers granted, not least their prayers for healing. In the latter case, the pilgrim might come to the shrine to make his petition and touch the relics, or he might vow a pilgrimage to the saint in a time of sickness or peril, which he would fulfil later, if spared, taking with him votive offerings to donate in thanksgiving. In some cases he would not actually go himself but would pay a 'professional' pilgrim to go in his place. Undoubtedly some pilgrims also travelled out of curiosity and a desire for adventure or to escape responsibilities at home, but such motives were considered reprehensible and a pilgrimage was not normally undertaken lightly, for the journey was often long and arduous and the perils great - indeed, many people died on pilgrimage, both at sea and on land.

Throughout the Middle Ages there were writers and preachers who warned against the dangers of idolatry, fake relics and superstition, but the basic concept of shrines and pilgrimages was not seriously challenged until the Reformation in the 16th century, when the Protestant churches rejected all images, relics, indulgences and pilgrimages. On the continent the practice continued among Roman Catholics and Christians of the eastern churches, but, here in Britain, pilgrimage was officially at an end.

**PILGRIMAGES TO WORCESTER**

Worcester was one of the places affected by the new dispensation, for the Cathedral had housed the shrines of two saints, St Oswald and St Wulstan, and a popular image of the Virgin Mary, and throughout the Middle Ages, particularly in the 13th century, these attracted many pilgrims and people seeking cures. At the Reformation, as well as the fundamental act of dissolving the Benedictine Monastery, which had always encompassed the Cathedral, the reformers also destroyed the images and shrines of the saints, and the bones, reputed to have been buried secretly somewhere in the Cathedral, were lost to future pilgrims.

Before this, however, Worcester had flourished as a place of pilgrimage. St Oswald first set up a shrine here in the 10th century. As both Bishop of Worcester and Archbishop of York he had had the opportunity to recover some bones of Saxon saints from the ruined minster at Ripon and these he brought to Worcester where he housed them in a silver reliquary in the Cathedral. Oswald died in 992 and, when he was canonised in 1002, his tomb was opened and his own bones transferred to the same reliquary that he had made for the Ripon relics. In 1089 Wulstan, who was then Prior and Bishop of Worcester, completed the first stage of a new Cathedral and translated the shrine to the new building, further embellishing the reliquary to the cost of 72 marks of silver, a considerable sum of money. It seems most likely that Oswald's shrine was sited at the high altar which, in 1218, was dedicated to St Mary and St Oswald, and that it was there both in the time of the Romanesque church and the later Gothic one.

Wulstan died in 1095 and was placed in a tomb, perhaps in one of the transepts, which was described as being between two "pyramides" with a beautiful stone canopy above and an iron "spider-web" grill over the whole, supported from a wooden beam. The tomb was opened in 1198 with the intention of enshrining the bones but this was delayed until Wulstan's canonisation in 1203, although miracles were already being claimed by pilgrims to the tomb. The shrine of St Wulstan was finally situated at the "medium" altar, which was dedicated in 1218 to St Peter and St Wulstan, but the exact location of the altar is disputed. At the translation some of the bones were dispersed as relics to other custodians and, as well as the main shrine in the Cathedral, there was also a separate shrine for the head. Behind the high altar was a stoup of holy water associated with Wulstan and "Wulstan's Water" was much sought after for purposes of healing. Much diluted, it was put into the little lead ampoules, stamped with the names and images of St Mary and St Wulstan, which were the tokens of the shrine sold to pilgrims. One of these ampullae was discovered in Dublin and is in the National Museum there. (fig 12). Nothing
of the shrines survived the Reformation but the usual arrangement for a shrine was to have the relics housed in an ornate casket, or “feretory”, which was portable and could, on occasion, be moved to safety or carried in procession. This was raised up to view on a stone base and there were often niches in the base into which pilgrims could insert themselves for maximum contact with the shrine. We know that mats were provided around Wulstan’s tomb for the sick to lie on, and probably this was also the case around the subsequent shrine. Some spent many days and nights, even months, there, waiting for a cure. The scene must have been far from peaceful, with some of the sick in extreme conditions of physical and mental distress and an eye-witness of the mid-12th century records that “some shouted in exultation, others in sorrow, but all together clamoured in prayer”. Numerous cures, believed to be miraculous, were attributed to St Wulstan’s intercession and many of these were collected together into a book, compiled about 1240, the “Miraculi Sancti Wulstani”, which tells the touching stories of some of those who sought Wulstan’s aid. Some were healed at the shrine, or by means of the holy water, others invoked his help at a distance, “bending a penny” as an offering or vowing to donate a candle. Votive candles were made to the same length as the part of the body cured, or, in the case of a disease of the whole body, a wick the length of the person would be coiled up first, before being waxed to form a candle known as a “trindle”. Not all pilgrims who came to Worcester were sick, but, undoubtedly, Worcester’s reputation for healing was a major factor in the popularity of the shrines as a place of pilgrimage.

As well as the shrines of St Oswald and St Wulstan, Worcester Cathedral housed a statue of the Virgin Mary which was also reputed to work wonders and which had, by the later Middle Ages, become more popular than the relics of the saints. A pewter token dredged from the River Severn in Worcester, which depicts the crowned head of the Virgin Mary, could perhaps be a pilgrim badge of Our Lady of Worcester, (fig 13). The shrines provided a considerable income for the Cathedral, attracting gifts from Kings and noblemen as well as the offerings of ordinary pilgrims, and these donations were divided equally between the Bishop and the Monastery.
THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BURIAL

To go back to our burial, can we conclude that the man buried at Worcester was a medieval pilgrim? With the exception of some priests and monks buried in ecclesiastical vestments, it was unusual for people to be buried fully clothed and with possessions, so the manner of this man’s burial must have had a deliberate significance. The most likely explanation is that he was buried as a pilgrim. It is by no means unique for a burial to contain attributes of pilgrimage, seen as an allegory of the soul’s journey through death, and objects such as scallop shell pilgrim tokens, brought home from the shrine of St James at Compostela in Spain, and considered holy and protective talismen, have been found in numerous burials in Europe, although similar finds have so far been rare in Britain.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF A PILGRIM

A pilgrim displayed several characteristics of dress and equipment which were recognised throughout Christendom as the outward signs of a pilgrim. He wore simple garments, often a tunic and cloak, marked, if he were bound for Jerusalem, with a red cross. He had a broad-brimmed hat, which was the favourite place for displaying souvenir badges bought at the shrines he had visited, and his hair and beard remained uncut for the duration of the journey. He carried with him a “scrip”, which was a small satchel for provisions, a letter of safe conduct from the church authorities and a water bottle, sometimes called a “calabasse” and made from a gourd. He also carried with him a substantial walking staff or “bourdon”, both for support and for defence, commonly with an iron spike at the bottom and a single or double knob at the top. From about the 16th century onwards there was also sometimes a hook (a “bague”) near the top from which to suspend the water bottle. The scrip and staff, in particular, had biblical connotations and were blessed for the pilgrim’s use at the church service commissioning the pilgrims to go out on their journey. On returning home, the scrip and staff would be cherished, along with other items brought back from the shrines, and might be presented to the pilgrim’s parish church or kept safely until finally placed in his grave. A “James schell of silver”, for example, was one of the offerings made to the Coat of St Sishe in the Bridge Chapel at Bridgnorth, presumably by a pilgrim returned from Compostela.

Every pilgrim wanted to bring home mementoes of the shrine he had visited and these were more than just tourist’s souvenirs, being considered holy objects by association with the shrine, and having healing and protective properties. These might include personal items, or devotional trinkets bought at local stalls, which the pilgrim had had blessed at the shrine, or had brought into as close physical contact as possible with the relics, in order to acquire some of the holiness of the saint. Ampoules of holy water were popular and some pilgrims also clipped off fragments of stone or earth from holy places. A few even acquired actual relics of saints, particularly in the early Middle Ages — or at least were deceived into thinking so, for many were fraudulent. In addition, most pilgrimage centres of any importance sold small souvenir badges depicting the relevant saint or symbol of the shrine and these were collected in much the same way that modern tourists buy badges of places they have visited. Most commonly these were stamped out of lead, but perhaps the most famous examples were palm fronds from Jerusalem, giving the name “palmer” to pilgrims bound for the Holy Land, and the natural scallop shells from Santiago de Compostela. By the Middle Ages, Compostela had become the most important pilgrimage destination after Jerusalem and Rome, and St James’ scallop shell was such a well known pilgrim badge that it came to be used as a symbol of pilgrimage in general,
frequently found in art and literature and capable of a broader application than denoting completion of a journey to Santiago de Compostela. In the same way St James became the patron saint of all pilgrims and is normally portrayed dressed as a pilgrim with one of his own scallop shells in his hat. Despite its wide use in art, the sale of actual scallop-shell tokens was the jealously guarded monopoly of Compostela. However, the frequency with which the Archbishops of Compostela attempted to limit its use suggests that they were not entirely successful in preventing other shrines from making use of the symbol, nor travellers from wearing it as a general badge of pilgrimage.

Shells have been found in numerous pilgrim burials throughout Western Europe, dating from the 9th to the 17th century. Some 210 pierced shells have been recorded from 160 sites in 80 different places in Europe, ranging from Sweden to Spain, 90% of them from burials. In all cases these have been the greater scallop (*pectens maximus*), or its variant (*pectens jacobaeus*), the correct shells for Santiago de Compostela, and the burials are therefore presumed to be of people who had made the pilgrimage to Spain. Finds of pierced scallops in Britain have so far been rare, although a few scallop tokens made in lead have been found which are undoubtedly from Compostela. Examples of natural shells are known from the foundations of a 13th century well in Perth but, apparently, the only example connected with a burial comes from Keynsham Abbey, Bristol, where it was associated with the remains of a man, aged about 25 years, buried soon after the foundation of the abbey in 1167. Bristol was one of the principle ports of embarkation for English pilgrims travelling to Compostela. The Worcester shell burial is therefore a rare find in Britain, but, since the shell is a cockle not a scallop, parallels with European pilgrims buried with shells are ambiguous. Since the cockle was deliberately pierced it is not a random shell, present in the grave by accident, and, given that it was found in conjunction with a staff, it is almost bound to be a pilgrim badge of some kind, but a direct connection with Compostela is by no means certain.

Pilgrim burials in Europe containing staves and other items are less common than those with shells alone, although this may be due, in many cases, to the natural decay of wood from a staff or leather from a scrip when buried in a grave. A few of the iron points from staves have been found, remaining after the wooden shaft has decomposed, but the Worcester staff is the only example so far discovered where the wood has survived virtually intact. Besides shells and staves, pilgrim badges other than scallops have also been found in graves and traces showing that clothing and hats were also present. A grave at St Sernin de Brive, in France, probably dating from the 17th century, disclosed a good set of pilgrim attributes: beneath the pilgrim's head were a number of scallop shells, together with three "Bourdonnets" (badges in the form of miniature pilgrims' staves) in turned bone, and several lead scallop badges. All these had probably been attached to a hat, now lost. Other pilgrim medals, indicating visits to shrines in Rome and Alexandria, had apparently been contained in a scrip or wallet, also now perished, while to the left of the pilgrim were found the iron point and hook for a water bottle which were all that now remained of his staff. The iron point of a pilgrim staff, together with two scallop shells, was also found in a 14th century pilgrim's grave at Agen, France. Some evidence of pilgrim's clothing was found in an undated medieval burial in the church of St Pierre, Louvain, Belgium, where a piece of brown textile was found with a pierced scallop attached to it.

The presence of the staff and the shell badge, in the grave of a man suitably dressed for a journey, therefore place the burial at Worcester well within the context of a number of other burials in Europe, and it seems reasonable to conclude that he is dressed and equipped as a pilgrim. The Worcester burial is an unnamed and undated (but apparently late medieval) tomb slab in Llandyfodwg Church, near Bridgend, Glamorgan, depicting a pilgrim with an unadorned staff in his left hand and a scallop on his left shoulder. His scrip is also shown and a number of other pilgrim badges, including the crossed keys of St Peter which signified a visit to
Rome. At St Helen's Church, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, is another effigy, of a mutilated figure in alabaster, probably circa 1500 and said to commemorate a member of the Hastings family. This depicts a pilgrim with a scrip and a staff with a single knob at the top and scallop shells attached to a broad-brimmed hat laid under the figure's head. Similar effigies are also recorded in Europe, notably two 14th century gravestones from Denmark, now lost, which depicted pilgrims with staves and scrumps decorated with a scallop shell, who are dressed in hat, gown and boots and carry palm fronds.

The hopes of pilgrims were in many ways directed to the next world, with much of the emphasis on indulgences and salvation, and in some respects a pilgrimage was a preparation for death. Pilgrims might collect items from holy places specifically with the intention that these should eventually be placed in their graves - and an extreme example of this mentality was the practice of some Orthodox pilgrims of bringing their shrouds to be blessed at the Holy Sepulchre. Any burial of someone with the attributes of a pilgrim would be seen as having symbolic connotations, signifying penitence and hopes for the journey of the soul on its final pilgrimage from this world to the next, and although many pilgrim burials were of people who had also made a pilgrimage at all and that his burial as a pilgrim is entirely symbolic, perhaps in association with the funeral practices of a fraternity, or perhaps because he had wished to be a pilgrim, maybe having made an unfulfilled vow to go on pilgrimage, perhaps even on his deathbed, for vows to go on pilgrimage were often made in times of sickness and peril.

At this distance we can do little more than speculate about the motives that underlie the burial. There is some evidence in favour of our man having been a genuine pilgrim, but there are also anomalies that may indicate otherwise. Whether or not the cockle-shell is connected with a pilgrimage to Compostela, or has some other significance, is also uncertain.

Supporting the theory that he was a genuine pilgrim are the facts that the staff, boots and garments are all sturdy, practical, well-made items which need not have been so serviceable if required only for a funeral. The staff was shaped from a larger piece of timber, cut on a radial axis, which gave it a stronger grain structure than would have been the case in a coppice pole of comparable size. A coppice pole, however, would have been simpler to obtain and perfectly adequate had a merely ritual staff been required, where strength was irrelevant.

In the monks' graveyard at Sandwell Priory, for example, several graves have been excavated in which each of the monks had been buried with a mere decoration, and shows some evidence of wear, suggesting use. The wear, however, is fairly slight, less than would perhaps be expected from use on a prolonged journey over rough terrain. Incidentally, there is no likelihood of the staff being the shaft of

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**AN ACTUAL OR SYMBOLIC PILGRIM?**

The question then arises as to whether the Worcester pilgrim was buried in such a manner simply as a pious burial practice or whether the choice of this particular symbolism was based on the fact that he had been a real pilgrim. There are three possibilities which we might consider:

First, that he was buried in the clothes and with the objects, which he had actually worn and used on the road, in which case he could either have died on pilgrimage or (probably more likely) could have kept the articles safely in his possession from a pilgrimage many years before.

Secondly, that the clothes and articles are wholly, or in part, symbolic substitutes for pilgrim attributes, but were gathered together by his relatives, or perhaps provided by a fraternity, because they wanted to commemorate the fact that he had once been a pilgrim, even though his original pilgrim's attributes were no longer all available.

The third possibility is that he had never been on a pilgrimage at all and that his burial as a pilgrim is entirely symbolic, perhaps in association with the funeral practices of a fraternity, or perhaps because he had wished to be a pilgrim, maybe having made an unfulfilled vow to go on pilgrimage, perhaps even on his deathbed, for vows to go on pilgrimage were often made in times of sickness and peril.

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a bishop's or abbot's crozier, for, if this were the case, the body would have been dressed in quite different ecclesiastical vestments and a chalice and paten might also still have been in the grave. It is just conceivable, since we do not know what is missing from the top of the staff, that it could have been the staff of office of some lay person holding a position of authority, but the most plausible identification remains that of it being a pilgrim staff. As with the staff, the boots show some signs of wear, on the soles, but not a great deal. However, it is quite probable that he should have been wearing a more recent pair of boots if his pilgrimage had been made a long time before his death. There is no reason to suppose that the boots were acquired especially for his funeral. The undyed textile of the garment is also compatible with the cloth a pilgrim might use, but is not, in itself, conclusive.

The fact that the cockleshell was pierced suggests that it had been adapted for actual use as a badge, either sewn to a hat or cloak or suspended on a cord. Conceivably it could have been pierced for attachment to a funeral garment but this seems less likely than its having been made earlier as a genuine token, which would have given it more value.

The fragments of plants found in the grave may also be indicative of pilgrimage, although this is not certain. Sweet smelling herbs were sometimes put into graves, as a funerary practice, and have sometimes been found preserved. Both the traces of bay laurel and of willow (if their presence is not accidental) may therefore have a simple funerary significance, since laurel is symbolic of honoured achievement and willow of mourning, and willow (salix) was also found in another Worcester grave by the north-west tower pier. However, as regards the willow, there may be further possibilities. The subspecies of the willow (salix) was impossible to determine, but if it was goat willow (salix caprea) it could carry connotations of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The emblem of a pilgrim to the Holy Places in Jerusalem was a palm frond (recalling the palms of the palms low, "palmer" or "English palm" and has connotations to Jerusalem were known as "palmers". In England, salix caprea is also known as "palm willow", "palmer" or "English palm" and has commonly been carried in Palm Sunday processions (also commemorating Christ's entry into Jerusalem) as an easily available and traditional substitute for imported true palm. If the willow in the Worcester grave is indeed "English palm" then it is possible that it was placed there as another attribute of pilgrimage and may signify that the pilgrim had been to Jerusalem.

Finally, the anatomical report gives us evidence that the man had done a great deal of strenuous walking in his life and may even have made frequent use of a walking staff. Whilst this need not, in itself, indicate that he had been a pilgrim, taken in conjunction with the other evidence from his burial, it is tempting to suppose that much of his walking had been done in the course of pilgrimages. Such journeys could be long and demanding and if, perhaps, he was a "professional" pilgrim, carrying out journeys to fulfill other people's vows, he might have spent much of his life on the road. However, further questions of interpretation arise with regard to the staff and the cockleshell. A possible problem with the staff, as an object that was actually used in the open, is the composition of the purple paint on the wooden shaft. Analysis shows that the pigments were held in a fish or animal glue medium and there is a possibility, so the analyst believes, that paint of this composition would be soluble in water. Indeed, the colour was first discovered when water used as a rinse, during an early stage of conservation, turned purple. If the paint was soluble then obviously it would be very impractical for an outdoor journey, exposed to rain and river crossings, and the argument for its having been a 'genuine' staff is weakened. However, there is some diversity of opinion as to how vulnerable the paint would have been originally. One view (the conservator's view) is that the glue would have required considerable heat, as well as water, to swell and dissolve it, and that the glue on the staff is only now in a readily soluble state in water, due to degradation during its long period buried in the ground. If this is the case then there is no particular reason to discount the staff as a genuine article, although the lack of wear on the prongs may suggest that it was scarcely put to use. Since we know, however, that ceremonial staves were sometimes used, and were part of the regalia of fraternities, the possibility of a symbolic staff must remain open to some degree.

A further possible explanation of the paint on the
THE QUESTION OF THE COCKLESHELL

The problem of the cockleshell is not so much whether it is a pilgrim badge, which seems likely, but whether it is associated with St James, either as a token from Compostela or symbolically, or whether it had a quite different origin. A scallop (pectens maximus), or (pectens jacobaeus), not a cockleshell (anachocardiad tuberculata), is the standard symbol used for Santiago de Compostela and all the shells found in European burials have been scallops.

A pilgrim who reached Compostela would have had no difficulty in taking home a scallopshell. They were easily obtainable, either from the nearby beach, if arriving by sea, or from stalls set up for the purpose in the cathedral precincts. Token shells were also sold, made from lead or silver or engraved on items of jet, and some of these have been found in Britain.

A cockle shell, for instance, is the nearest visual equivalent to a scallop and a species much easier to obtain in Britain. Even if our pilgrim had once owned a scallopshell, this could have been lost on the journey. In thanksgiving for a safe voyage, a pilgrim, by the time of the burial, for Compostela shells were widely credited with supernatural powers and were often used for healing or magical purposes. Shells have been found, for example, buried in the foundations of buildings, apparently deliberately, as in the case of a house excavated at Deansway in the City of Worcester. Token shells, as tokens from Compostela or as substitute for a lost shell, however, could only have been scallops.

The cockleshell is unusual, in comparison with scallop shells, as tokens from Compostela or as symbols of St James, but a cockleshell might, perhaps, have been used symbolically to denote a pilgrim's grave, since it is the nearest visual equivalent to a scallop and a species much easier to obtain in Britain. Even if our pilgrim had once owned a Compostela scallopshell, this could have been lost by the time of the burial, for Compostela shells were widely credited with supernatural powers and were often used for healing or magical purposes. Shells have been found, for example, buried in the foundations of buildings, apparently deliberately, as in the case of a house excavated at Deansway in the City of Worcester. Token shells, as tokens from Compostela or as substitute for a lost shell, however, could only have been scallops.

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The Abbey would certainly have known of the scallop as a symbol of St James, but we have no direct evidence of them selling shell tokens and the more usual symbol of the shrine was a hand. However it does seem that British shrines sometimes made use of shell motifs, for a number of small lead ampullae, (the miniature holy water flasks sold at shrines), have been found in England made in the shape of scallops or cockleshells. The shell motif was easily adapted to the usual water-flask shape of ampullae. Far more of these shell ampullae have been found in Britain than in Europe, with the majority of them having been found in East Anglia. In several examples other symbols are also inscribed on the ampullae, in conjunction with the shell motif, and some of these same symbols also occur on plain ampullae, presumably from the same shrines. Only tentative suggestions have been made as to the shrines to which these symbols refer, Walsingham being one of the most likely, but it seems almost certain that they would have been in Britain and that the shell motif was being used simply as a standard symbol for a place of pilgrimage. Such a practice is indicated by the one example whose origin can be definitely located: a 13th century ampulla with a scallop shell on one side and a scene of Thomas à Becket’s martyrdom on the other, which can only have come from Canterbury and has no reference to a cult of St James.

Another group of British finds may also suggest a local use of cockleshells, these being small spheres of lead tracery which seem to have been made as reliquaries to enclose a natural shell. Ten have been found in Kings Lynn and ten in London, but none outside England. The one specimen which was intact retained fragments of its shell and these fragments were of a cockleshell, not a scallop.

Outside Britain the only other shrine known to have used shells as badges is that of St Michael the Archangel at Mont St Michel on the coast of Normandy, whose devotees decorated their clothes with shells collected from the adjacent beach. The species favoured, and depicted on surviving metal pilgrim badges, was the variegated scallop (chlamys varia), which is quite distinct from both the Compostela great scallop (pectens maximus) and our Worcester cockleshell (acanthocardia tuberculata). One rather suspect source from the 16th century, however, states that St Michael’s pilgrims wore “sordons”, which are a kind of cockle, so there is a possibility that the Worcester shell might have been acquired by a pilgrim to Mont St Michael. The Abbey was in fact in English hands from about 1420 until the reconquest of Normandy by the French during the 1440s but the shrine is not known to have been popular with late medieval English pilgrims and the documentary evidence connecting “sordons” with the shrine at Mont St Michel is of an unreliable nature. The origin of the Worcester cockle therefore remains elusive.

**British Pilgrims to Compostela**

If the Worcester pilgrim had visited Compostela then he would have been one among many British men and women who had made the journey to Northern Spain. There is a considerable amount of documentary and literary evidence for late medieval pilgrims travelling to Compostela from Britain. The ‘middling wealthy’ (according to historian Dorothy Owen) were the princely English patrons of Compostela, but pilgrims came from all classes, from noblemen like Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales, who visited the shrine in 1477, to members of the merchant classes like Margery Kempe, the religious enthusiast from Kings Lynn, who recorded her many adventures and made the journey to Compostela in 1417. Chaucer also makes his fictional ‘Wife of Bath’ a seasoned pilgrim who had visited Compostela:

“At Rome she had been, and at Boulogne
In Galicia at St James, and at Cologne”.

In Scotland, the Stuart dynasty, many of whose kings were named ‘James’, had a particular allegiance to St James as a patron saint, and even claimed legendary connections with the town of Compostela itself. At the other end of the scale, poorer members of society would also attempt the journey. Pilgrims included clerics as well as laymen and the Worcestershire diocesan records preserve several pilgrimage licences issued to local clergy, including one of 1339 granted to Brother Ralph Tetbury, Master of St Mark’s Hospital, Billeswick, near Bristol and another of 1512 to Master Richard, Rector of Hindlip, Worcestershire and his chaplain, William Wheler. The poorer pilgrims, and those whose piety aspired
to greater efforts, crossed to France and made the rest of the journey by land — a lengthy and often dangerous journey. Brother Ralph Tetbury, for example, had vowed to visit the shrine "in a state of humility" and his licence allowed him to be absent from his cure for a whole year. The English physician, Andrew Boorde, writing in the 1540s, declared, "I assure all the world that I had rather go five times to Rome out of England than once to Compostela: by water it is no pain, but by land it is the greatest journey an Englishman may go". Apart from the perils of wolves and robbers along the road, he declared, both Spanish fruit and Spanish water were deadly: he himself had lost no fewer than nine companions who insisted on consuming them. Pilgrims who wanted a speedier journey, and could afford to go by boat, went by sea to the shrine's own port of Corunna, embarking at Bristol, Plymouth, London or the Cinque Ports. In exceptionally good weather, such as Margery Kempe enjoyed, the voyage from Bristol could be as short as a week, but not all found that "by water is no pain": William Wey of Eton, returning home in 1456, was tossed about in the Bay of Biscay for six days before being blown back to Corunna. Indeed, the horrors of a sea-sick voyage across the notorious Bay were well-known and were described with feeling in an anonymous mid-15th century poem:

"Men may leave all games
That sail to St James...
For when that they have take the sea
At Sandwich, or at Winchelsea
At Bristol, or where'er it be
Their hearts begin to fail.

And some would have a salted toast
For they might eat neither boiled nor roast
A man might soon pay all their costs
As for a day or twain
Some laid their books upon their knee
And read so long they might not see
"Alas, my head will split in three"
Thus sayeth another certain

To have a sack of straw were good
For some must lie them in their hood
I had as soon be in a wood
Without all meat and drink
For when that we shall go to bed
The pump was nigh to our bed head
A man were as good to be dead
As smell thereof the stink".

A pilgrim returning from Compostela would regard himself as remaining a pilgrim of St James for life and many pilgrims banded together to form fraternities in order to continue their devotion to the Apostle. Many of these fraternities, or "confreries", sprang up in Europe, particularly in Germany, France and the Low Countries, during the later middle ages, with the high point of their development in the 15th century. In some Roman Catholic areas they continued up until the 18th century. Originally membership was confined to those who had been to Compostela on pilgrimage or had vowed to do so, but, by the 16th century, the descendants of pilgrims and other pious applicants were also sometimes admitted. Among the duties of members were the maintenance of lights before images of St James in local churches, the provision of assistance to poor pilgrims (the famous pilgrim hospice of St Jaques-aux-Pelerins, in the Rue St Denis, was maintained by the Paris fraternity) and, in nearly every case, the endowment of, and attendance at, masses for the souls of deceased brethren. The statutes of many European fraternities also stipulated that the funerals of members be conducted with great ceremony and attended by the whole fraternity. At Liege, for example, the corpse was carried to the grave by the four most recently enrolled members, who were dressed in pilgrim's attire. On other ceremonial occasions, too, fraternities wore a distinctive livery and carried banners or ceremonial staves adorned with scallops or the image of St James. It may be a clue to interpreting the Worcester burial to recall that the European pilgrim burials are generally associated by historians with the practices of fraternities, especially as we know that some kind of a fraternity existed in Worcester. Very much less is known about the activities of Fraternities or Guilds of St James in England, whose existence came to an abrupt end with the Reformation, than about those in Europe. Most of our information about them comes from the incompletely surviving returns made to a Royal commission in 1389 when Richard II's government seems to have contemplated taxing all guild assets. Eleven guilds are listed as dedicated to St James, but only one of these is overtly connected with pilgrimage to Compostela. This was the fraternity of St James at Burgh-le-Marsh, Lincolnshire, founded in about 1365 by five pilgrims who had vowed to build an altar.
to St James in their parish church if the saint intervened to save them when they were in peril of shipwreck on the voyage home from Compostela. They kept their vow and were the nucleus of a guild that maintained the altar and also obliged its members to contribute an annual measure of barley towards the upkeep of the parish church. No mention of liversies or burial practices is made in the return. The other ten Guilds of St James on the list had no apparent pilgrimage connection but seem to have been parish guilds of the usual English type. Their functions were to maintain a light before an image of St James in the parish church, celebrate his feast day with more than ordinary ceremony and pray for the souls of past members. Some English guilds, however, did provide for their members to go on pilgrimages. Sixteen of the nineteen Lincoln City Guilds listed in 1389 ceremonially saw off brethren on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome or Compostella, sometimes made donations to their travelling expenses and welcomed them on their return. None of these Lincoln Guilds, however, was specifically dedicated to St James.

The Worcestershire section of the 1389 Guild returns is lost and only one surviving record is known that refers to a Fraternity of St James at Worcester. This occurs in the Latin will of Robert Sutton, a dyer and prominent citizen of Worcester, made in October 1454. The relevant sentence reads, in translation,

"Item, I leave to the Friars Preachers of Worcester for the same purpose [i.e. to celebrate his memorial mass, for which he also bequeathed money to other Worcester religious houses] 20 shillings; and to the new cloister of the same house 40 shillings; and likewise to the Fraternity of St James there, 20 shillings".

It thus appears that the Fraternity was based at the Dominican Friary of Worcester, or "Blackfriars". Elsewhere in his will, however, Sutton requests burial in Worcester Cathedral, "before the image of St James there" ("coram ymaginem Sancti Jacobi ibidem"), so it is possible that this image may have been particularly venerated by the Worcester Fraternity. Without more documentation, we can only speculate on the nature and activities of the Worcestershire section of the 1389 Guild returns is lost and only one surviving record is known that refers to a Fraternity of St James at Worcester. This occurs in the Latin will of Robert Sutton, a dyer and prominent citizen of Worcester, made in October 1454. The relevant sentence reads, in translation, "Item, I leave to the Friars Preachers of Worcester for the same purpose [i.e. to celebrate his memorial mass, for which he also bequeathed money to other Worcester religious houses] 20 shillings; and to the new cloister of the same house 40 shillings; and likewise to the Fraternity of St James there, 20 shillings". It thus appears that the Fraternity was based at the Dominican Friary of Worcester, or "Blackfriars". Elsewhere in his will, however, Sutton requests burial in Worcester Cathedral, "before the image of St James there" ("coram ymaginem Sancti Jacobi ibidem"), so it is possible that this image may have been particularly venerated by the Worcester Fraternity. Without more documentation, we can only speculate on the nature and activities of the Worcestershire section of the 1389 Guild returns is lost and only one surviving record is known that refers to a Fraternity of St James at Worcester. This occurs in the Latin will of Robert Sutton, a dyer and prominent citizen of Worcester, made in October 1454. The relevant sentence reads, in translation, "Item, I leave to the Friars Preachers of Worcester for the same purpose [i.e. to celebrate his memorial mass, for which he also bequeathed money to other Worcester religious houses] 20 shillings; and to the new cloister of the same house 40 shillings; and likewise to the Fraternity of St James there, 20 shillings". It thus appears that the Fraternity was based at the Dominican Friary of Worcester, or "Blackfriars". Elsewhere in his will, however, Sutton requests burial in Worcester Cathedral, "before the image of St James there" ("coram ymaginem Sancti Jacobi ibidem"), so it is possible that this image may have been particularly venerated by the Worcester Fraternity. Without more documentation, we can only speculate on the nature and activities of the Worcestershire section of the 1389 Guild, and so may also have been a Fraternity of St James at Worcester in 1389. Secondly, it is described as a "Fraternity" rather than a "Guild", the latter being the usual term for the associations listed in 1389. It is, therefore, at least a possibility that the Worcester Fraternity of St James was a Compostella pilgrim association of the European type. Such a fraternity could have implications for the interpretation of our information, but we have no direct evidence on which to base a connection. That at least one person in Worcester had connections with Compostella is implied by the discovery of the Compostella jet rosary bead, with its carved scallopshell motif, which was found on the Deanway dig. This bead was found in the same medieval graveyard rubbish pit as sherds of a Spanish lustreware plate, of a decorated type of pottery known as the 'Fula' group and made in Valencia or possibly Malaga, which dates from around the mid 14th century. Incidentally, this excavation was sited not far from either Blackfriars or the Hucksterstreet property of Robert Sutton, in the parish of St Andrews.

**ROBERT SUTTON**

It is intriguing to consider whether Robert Sutton himself has any claim to be identified as our pilgrim. He seems to have been a member of the local fraternity of St James, and so may also have been a pilgrim, and he requested burial in Worcester Cathedral. He died at about the right age and not far off the date suggested by the style of the boots and archaeological stratigraphy. Sutton, also known as 'Robert Dyer' appears only fleetingly in surviving public records. In 1433, as 'Robert Sutton, dyer' and as one of two ruling bailiffs of Worcester, he witnessed two City Charters. In the following year, with other members of the City Council, he witnessed an agreement allowing the Prior and Convent of Worcester Cathedral Priory to pipe water along the town ditch to the priory gate. He may also have served a subsequent term as bailiff in 1436. Most of our information, however, comes from his will. This was made in 1454, some two decades after his service as bailiff, an office he is unlikely to have obtained before the age of thirty years or more. He must, therefore, have been well on in years when he made it, at which time he was 'sound in mind although sick in body'. The exact date of his death is not known, but it must have occurred before his wife made her own will in 1457. His testament indicates that he was moderately prosperous, presumably because of his connection, as a dyer, with the very thriving Worcester cloth trade during this period; and, as we have seen, he was a respected...
member of the local community. His upper middle class status accords well with the quality of the pilgrim’s clothing and his trade as a dyer could account for the unexpected presence of expensive kermes dye on the pilgrim’s staff. He was also undoubtedly pious, leaving a total of £21 to various religious foundations in Worcester and taking elaborate steps to ensure posthumous masses for himself and his wife. Most interesting for our purposes, however, are the indications in his will of his devotion to St James. He clearly hoped that his funeral would be attended by the entire Cathedral Priory establishment, and left an unusually large sum of money to secure his burial place in the Cathedral, which was to be situated 'before the image of St James'. Unfortunately, the position of this image cannot now be established and presumably it was destroyed at the Reformation. In addition to his choice of burial site, there is his bequest of 20s to the Fraternity of St James at the Dominican Friary in Worcester and he must surely have been a member, or at least a supporter, of the fraternity, which could have had some bearing on the manner of his burial. Nevertheless, there are some negative factors to be taken into account which cast doubt upon identifying Sutton with the pilgrim. He does not make any request for burial as a pilgrim yet specific instructions as to the mode of burial are not uncommon in late medieval wills and, in view of the unusual nature of a 'pilgrim' interment, might have been expected. Perhaps if he were a member of the fraternity he might have been able to expect such a burial without specific mention, but he makes no mention in his will of the Fraternity taking any part in his funeral or memorial masses. In fact, Sutton’s bequest to the Fraternity was comparatively modest, especially when compared with his much greater legacies to St Andrew’s, his parish church. There is also no direct mention of pilgrimage in either his will, or that of his wife, Joan. Without further documentation, therefore, the verdict on Sutton’s identification with the Worcester pilgrim must remain “not proven”.

**Burial in Worcester Cathedral**

Whoever the pilgrim was, he merited burial in Worcester Cathedral, a prestigious place for a grave. One line of speculation is that he may have been buried here because he died whilst on pilgrimage to the shrines at Worcester Cathedral, either that of St Wulstan or, more probably, to the working image of Our Lady of Worcester, which had outstripped the older shrine in popularity by the later Middle Ages. However, there is no particular evidence to indicate a sudden death and burial, such as being buried in the clothes in which he died without further preparation, for he was almost certainly re-dressed before the funeral, given his lack of undergarments and the fact that the boots were slit to get them back on his feet. However, the fact that he was undressed, either before or after death, and then re-clothed does not necessarily rule out his having died unexpectedly whilst on pilgrimage. More convincing is the fact that he was unlikely to have been capable of much walking, in the later years of his life, since he was crippled with arthritis and probably quite frail. Nevertheless, infirmity does not rule out the possibility of a pilgrimage, since he may have struggled or been carried to the Worcester shrines in the hope of a miraculous cure. Some pilgrims came to Worcester in search of healing under conditions of great difficulty, as, for example, the paralysed priest from Melksham, in Wiltshire, who “dragged his half-dead body round all the holy places in England” before being finally healed at Worcester, as told in the 13th century “miracles of St Wulfstan”.

Nevertheless, it would be much more usual for the Cathedral authorities to grant burial to someone known to them, of local residence, and it is more likely that the Worcester pilgrim’s journeys had been made in the days when he was a vigorous walker, perhaps to places much further afield than Worcester, which was his home. As far as can be ascertained, the classes of people normally privileged to be buried in the Cathedral comprised members or upper servants of the Cathedral Priory establishment; inhabitants of certain manors belonging to the Priory; aristocratic laymen of the diocese and prominent citizens of Worcester. In the first category it is unlikely that the pilgrim was an ordained priest, since there are none of the attributes normally found in medieval graves of priests, but his being an important lay servant of the priory is not impossible. The case of the 14th century Danish pilgrim, Jonas, might be cited, who was a servant of the Abbot of Soro and apparently undertook his pilgrimages on behalf of his Abbey. The pilgrim might have merited burial in the Cathedral as an inhabitant of a priory manor - in 1409, for example, the Priory successfully claimed that all inhabitants of its manor of Claines should be buried in the Cathedral or its cemetery unless they had specifically requested otherwise. Or he could have been buried in the Cathedral due to his importance or
social status in the diocese or City. The plain quality of his clothes (no silk or embroidery) suggests a prominent citizen rather than an aristocrat, unless this was due to their being pilgrim garments. An analysis of the surviving Worcester wills, between 1450 and 1530, shows that a considerable number of citizens were buried in the Cathedral. Of the forty-two recorded testators, ten were buried in their parish churches, twenty-two in the Cathedral cemetery and no less than ten, nearly a quarter of the sample, in the Cathedral itself. Those buried in the Cathedral had often held high office in the City administration. The exact site of their burial in the Cathedral is not usually specified, but John Grafton (died 1484) requested burial "before the image of St Christopher" and Robert Sutton, as we have seen, "before the image of St James".

We shall probably never know for certain who our man was, and many questions surrounding his status as a pilgrim remain unanswered. Nevertheless, he is a unique and important archaeological discovery in Britain, who has provided a challenge for both conservator and historian. The staff and shell badge probably place him in the tradition of pilgrim burials known from European excavations, but none of these has yielded boots, clothing or a wooden staff in such a complete state of preservation as those found in Worcester. Such tangible remains of an individual pilgrim give us a remarkably direct link with the thousands of pilgrims of medieval Christendom and, not least, with the many Christians who came on pilgrimage to this Cathedral in which he is buried.

The Pilgrims bones have been re-interred in the Cathedral and the finds from the grave are displayed there.
FURTHER READING

PILGRIMAGE


Seara and Liebaers (ed.): *Santiago de Compostela - 1000 Ans de Pèlerinage Européen.* Ghent, 1985. [fully illustrated catalogue of a major exhibition, containing several articles.]


PILGRIMAGE TO WORCESTER


Michael Craze: *St. Oswald, St. Wulstan and King John:* in Lectures on Worcester Cathedral. 1988. (available from Worcester Cathedral Bookstall)

PILGRIM TOKENS

I. Cox (ed.): *The Scallop Shell.* Shell Ltd. 1957
