

## 10 Things You Need to Know about the Role of Pilgrimage in Medieval Lives

1. **Everyone** in medieval England would have been expected to go on a pilgrimage, a meaningful journey to a holy place, at least once in their lives.
2. There were many reasons why people undertook a pilgrimage. Medieval medicine was very basic, and sick and disabled people would often go to a holy place to seek a **miraculous cure** by praying at and touching a saint's tomb or holy well.
3. More common was for those who were ill, in trouble, or seeking a favour to pray to a saint with the **vow** that if their prayers were answered they would go on pilgrimage to a particular holy place as a thank-offering.
4. Others went on pilgrimage to **save their souls**. Church courts would often sentence sinners to barefoot pilgrimage as a penance. In the later Middle Ages holy places offered '**indulgences**' to pilgrims, promising to reduce the time spent in the fires of Purgatory after death to those who visited and gave an offering.
5. Medieval Christendom was full of **Holy Places**, from major sites such as Jerusalem, Rome, St James at Compostela and St Thomas Becket at Canterbury, to the numerous holy wells and statues with a more local appeal. Some saints had specialities and would attract particular pilgrims – St Blaise cured throat problems; St Margaret (who had a number of holy wells) healed eye infections.
6. Now we think of pilgrimage as a long **Journey**, but in medieval England a pilgrimage could be as short as a couple of miles or last the many months it would take to get to Jerusalem and back. Poor and penitent pilgrims went by foot, but those who could afford it would ride.
7. Some particularly devoted pilgrims would take the journey alone, often going to many holy places on a long-distance trip and wearing a recognisable 'uniform' of hat, staff, bag, and badges showing the shrines they had visited. Yet it was far more common for pilgrims to go a holy place in organised **groups**, often from the same town or village, travelling together for safety and companionship.
8. On reaching their destination, the pilgrims would approach the shrine, statue, or other holy place, which they would want to touch or kiss while praying to the saint. Central to the pilgrimage was the giving of an **offering** as thanks or in the hope of favour. This would often be a silver coin, or a 'votive' candle or wax image

symbolising the pilgrim's reason for being there.

9. The number of offerings given meant that particularly popular **Shrines** became extremely wealthy and were reconstructed in grander settings and with vast amounts of precious stones and metals. Increasingly pilgrims came to see these beautiful artworks as much as for pious reasons.
  
10. Before returning home, pilgrims would often purchase a **Pilgrim Souvenir** such as a badge showing the holy place they had visited. This would allow others to identify them as a pilgrim, and the badges themselves were thought to have some of the saint's miraculous and protective powers.