

Michael Yelton, *Alfred Hope Patten and the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2022), pp. 313. ISBN: 978-1-78959-225-2.
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It is claimed that before Hope Patten became the Vicar of Walsingham in Norfolk in 1921, as many as 20 priests had declined the appointment. Patten had served four curacies in less than seven years, so perhaps he could not afford to refuse. Expectations of his ministry may not have been high. But, as Michael Yelton's well-researched and very readable biography illustrates, he became one of the most remarkable Anglo-Catholic priests of his generation. The creation (or re-foundation as Patten would say) of a Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham did not seem likely in the Church of England, despite the ascendancy of Anglo-Catholicism in the 1920s. The story of how it happened, and the ways in which the Shrine and pilgrimages to 'England's Nazareth' developed throughout the four decades of Patten's incumbency, is well told here. Almost 65 years on from his death, the Shrine is more appreciated within the Church of England than ever it was in Patten's lifetime, as pilgrimages by successive Archbishops of Canterbury testify.

None of this would have proved possible if Walsingham's new vicar in 1921 had not given initial priority to his ministry as a parish priest. Patten cared deeply for his people and visited them in their homes, and gathered the young around him, especially those he recruited as servers, who came to the vicarage on Friday evenings (with their girlfriends) for food and games. Yelton wonders whether Patten was dyslexic since he had great trouble with examinations, and could be anxious in intellectual company. Among the young he seemed able to relax. Patten was perspicacious in identifying and encouraging talent in young villagers, sometimes placing great trust in them at an early age. The son of the local baker, Derrick Lingwood, was one who was eventually ordained. At the age of 16 he was given charge of Patten's finances – and Yelton indicates that were it not for Lingwood's common sense and stewardship the whole enterprise could have collapsed early in bankruptcy and scandal.

Yelton describes how in the 1920s the spiritual life of the parish of Walsingham thrived. When the new Shrine Church was dedicated in 1931 it was well supported by local people who were committed to its success. Patten's vision of parochial ministry was inspired by continental Roman Catholicism, and he had little sympathy for English Roman Catholics. It could be said, however, that his own work prompted the creation of the Roman Catholic Shrine based at the Slipper Chapel – a building in Roman Catholic ownership well before Patten arrived in the village but which had previously not much interested the hierarchy.

Perhaps only a man so single-minded could have achieved what Patten did. His Catholic faith seemed to be an end in itself. Yelton writes, 'he did not concern himself with many of the preoccupations of the general population; he was uninterested in current affairs, sport, food, wine, and of course sex'. One wonders about the content of the conversations Patten had with parishioners.

He was worldly wise enough to negotiate effectively with the Bishop of Norwich, as some of his letters to his diocesan testify. Bertram Pollock was decidedly Protestant, although not much of a disciplinarian and avoided conflict if he could.

Even he could not let the foundation stone of the new Shrine pass, however, when he discovered that it claimed it was laid when Pius XI was Pope, Bertram was Bishop of Norwich, and Patten vicar of Walsingham. The bishop demanded his name be removed, but the plaster used to fill in the lettering has now fallen out, so the Shrine which Pollock never entered carries his name permanently. Neither Pollock nor Patten would have imagined that early in the twenty-first century the then Bishop of Norwich (and writer of this review) would become an Honorary Guardian of the Shrine. While Walsingham remains a place where traditional Catholics feel entirely at home, appreciation of the Shrine is now much more widely felt.

The postwar years saw Patten become anxious about the future of the Shrine – or even whether it had one – after his death. He believed his legacy would be assured if a religious community to run it was established – under his leadership, of course – but the Community of St Augustine never prospered. The demands of leading a religious life, even one of his own devising, did separate Patten from his parish, and his last decade had many frustrations, many of them the fault of his own incapacity to receive even well-meant advice. His sudden death in 1958, when surrounded by bishops who had been at the Lambeth Conference, was dramatic. It came only a year before Pope John XXIII's election. Once the reforms in the Roman Catholic Church began, it is likely that Hope Patten may have died not from a heart attack, but a broken heart instead. He was not a man to change his mind, but the fruits of his ministry, still considerable today, are the result of an obduracy lightened by genuine pastoral gifts and a clear vision. He deserves this fine and judicious biography.

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Recent years have seen a worldwide increase in the reporting of child sex abuse. With it has come a comparable increase in the horror expressed in the media and in the general public at this largely hidden cancer eating at the innards of even healthy-looking societies. The media have unsurprisingly given headline treatment to the position of Christian ministers in relation to such abuse, not so much because they may be abusers (a matter for a very different study), but because their commitment to observing the highest degree of confidentiality in spiritual counselling has been widely suspected of leading to concealment of matters which, if exposed, would be subject to prosecution. This carefully documented symposium traces the legislative trends (and conundra) of recent decades in various Western nations and