

1536- The Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Henry VIII needed money for his court expenses and wars with Scotland and France. The rich monasteries were an obvious way by which wealth could be rapidly gained. Henry's disagreement with the Pope was far from settled following the ending of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon.

For many people the monasteries were resented because they had lost their relevance and were resented because of their wealth. Protestant ideas began to develop in Europe. Henry however retained his Catholic beliefs!

In 1538 the ancient shrine at Walsingham which had existed since 1061 was destroyed and its treasures seized. Thousands of pilgrims travelled long distances to venerate the Virgin Mary and as a result of their gifts the shrine had become very rich. Amongst other things, badges were sold, which showed that a pilgrimage had been made.



Pilgrims Hat Badge found on Sandy Drove c. Ron Morley

Henry VIII made three pilgrimages to Walsingham. Like other pilgrims he may have passed near Lakenheath on the old pilgrim path which went across the Warren to Walsingham via Weeting. In medieval times 'crosses' were placed at junctions of important paths. Village tradition says that a 'crossing' between Lakenheath, Brandon and Weeting could have been the original site of the pilgrim cross which later became Maidscross but this is unsubstantiated and it is likely that the pilgrim route lay further to the east, probably somewhere under the air-base.

Munday

Villagers along the pilgrim route could make money by providing accommodation for pilgrims who could afford it. Maybe some stayed in Lakenheath?

In 1539 Ely's wealth and land were confiscated and its feudal 'Liberties' passed to the Crown as did those of the Abbey of St. Edmundsbury.

These feudal Liberties gave legal control over large areas of land. Modern West Suffolk is similar in size to the old Liberty of St. Edmundsbury which shows just how powerful the Abbey was. Ely was of similar importance.

St. Edmundsbury Chronicle 2000

Wikipedia

In 1897 pilgrimages to Walsingham began again and still continue.