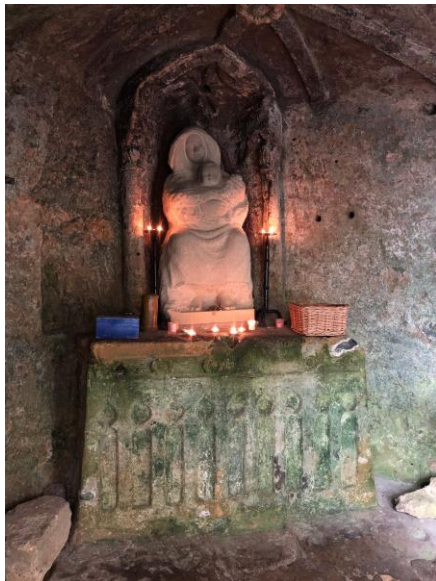


Small Pilgrim Places Journal 22: Our Lady Of The Crag, Knaresborough

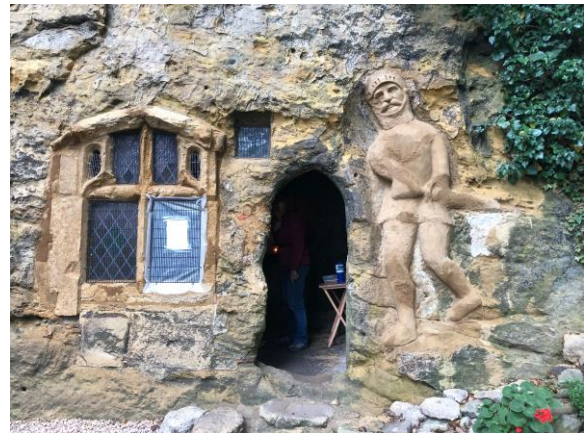
Of the thirty-odd Small Pilgrim Places I've visited so far, the tiny chapel at Knaresborough, North Yorkshire is unique in two respects. It is not built, but is carved out of the sandstone cliffs beside the River Nidd; and it is a Marian shrine, appropriately known as the Chapel Of Our Lady Of The Crag.

The Grade 1 chapel was created, with permission from Henry IV, by John the Mason in 1408, maybe as a wayside shrine. It was probably visited by pilgrims en route to a nearby priory. It is accessed by a steep path and steps leading up through a patch of woodland from a narrow lane on the valley floor.



John displayed his considerable skills in the carving of the altar, the roof bosses on the vaulted ceiling, and the carved figure of a knight by the little entrance door. A much more recent figure is the Madonna with her Child, providing a central focus on the altar. This was carved in 2000, and when I visited it was bathed in the gentle, mellow glow of several votive candles, giving a homely feel to the tiny rock interior.

Now owned and cared for by a charitable trust, the chapel is usually open only on summer



Sunday afternoons, but Julie, one of the trustees, had offered to open up specially for me, and as I arrived I found her tending the medicinal herb garden sloping down from the chapel. Julie told me that she had received several visitors in the few minutes she had been waiting for me, and that over the years the chapel had hosted a broad range of pilgrims, from bishops to Buddhist monks and a band of Hell's Angels.

Just a mile or so down the lane is another interesting historic rock feature, the cave of St Robert. Never officially canonised, Robert is revered as one of the great saints of the early thirteenth century. He lived much of his life as a hermit, based at the cave by the river. From here he served the local poor by farming land and attracted many followers and visitors who were impressed with his piety. Today the visitor can see the small cave and various rock features that give an indication of how he lived.

Ali Green