

Medieval PILGRIMAGE

In his 'Canterbury Tales' Chaucer tells us about a pilgrimage from London to Canterbury. He tells us very little about the religious aspects of the pilgrimage, but we learn about how people from every walk of life are making this journey.

In the medieval period, there was no such thing as holidays or travelling for pleasure. Instead, the only interruptions to labours were Sundays, Holy Days and going on Pilgrimage.

The rich and powerful travelled to Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago on journeys that could take a whole year.

In Britain, people who had time and money travelled to Canterbury in Kent and later to Walsingham in Norfolk or other major shrines. However, the large majority of pilgrimages would have been of only a few days to local shrines.

Pilgrim routes with stopping points at priories and "hospitals" became established. Badges, ampula and other "souvenirs" were sold at the shrines. Pilgrims bought these as proof of their journey and the more shrines visited the greater the absolution of their sins and the less time spent in purgatory.

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The first page of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tale"



Peter Bruegel's "Dance around the Maypole" 1627



Major pilgrimage routes of Christendom in early medieval period



Pilgrim badge from the shrine of Our lady of Walsingham (British Museum)



Edmond Oliver's
Pilgrimage



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Hallaton's PILGRIMAGE

In about 1250 Richard de Martival built a chapel on the hillside above Hallaton which was dedicated to his favoured – Saint Morrell. This became the destination of Pilgrims for over 300 years for both local pilgrims and long distance pilgrims on their way to Walsingham.

Morrell – or Maurillius – was made Bishop of Angers in 423. As a Saint he was revered for his healing skills. Pilgrims visited his chapel in Hallaton in the hope of being healed in this life or getting a faster journey though purgatory in the afterlife.

Pilgrims who visited the chapel could buy a badge like this one found at the chapel site. The badge which is known as a “pieta” – meaning our lady of sorrows - shows Mary holding the body of Jesus after he was brought down from the cross. The Hallaton pilgrim badge is similar to ones found in a cluster in Northamptonshire.

The large number of pilgrims also lead to enlargements to the village church of St Michael's. These included the north and south aisles, a spiral staircase leading to an external pulpit for addressing pilgrims that could not fit into the church, and a vault under the Church called the “great Charnel House”.

The bones of Pilgrims and local inhabitants were placed in this vault, unfortunately these were removed during the Victorian period so we could not analyse these bones to learn more about their lives.



Saint Morrell's Chapel on Hare Pie Bank

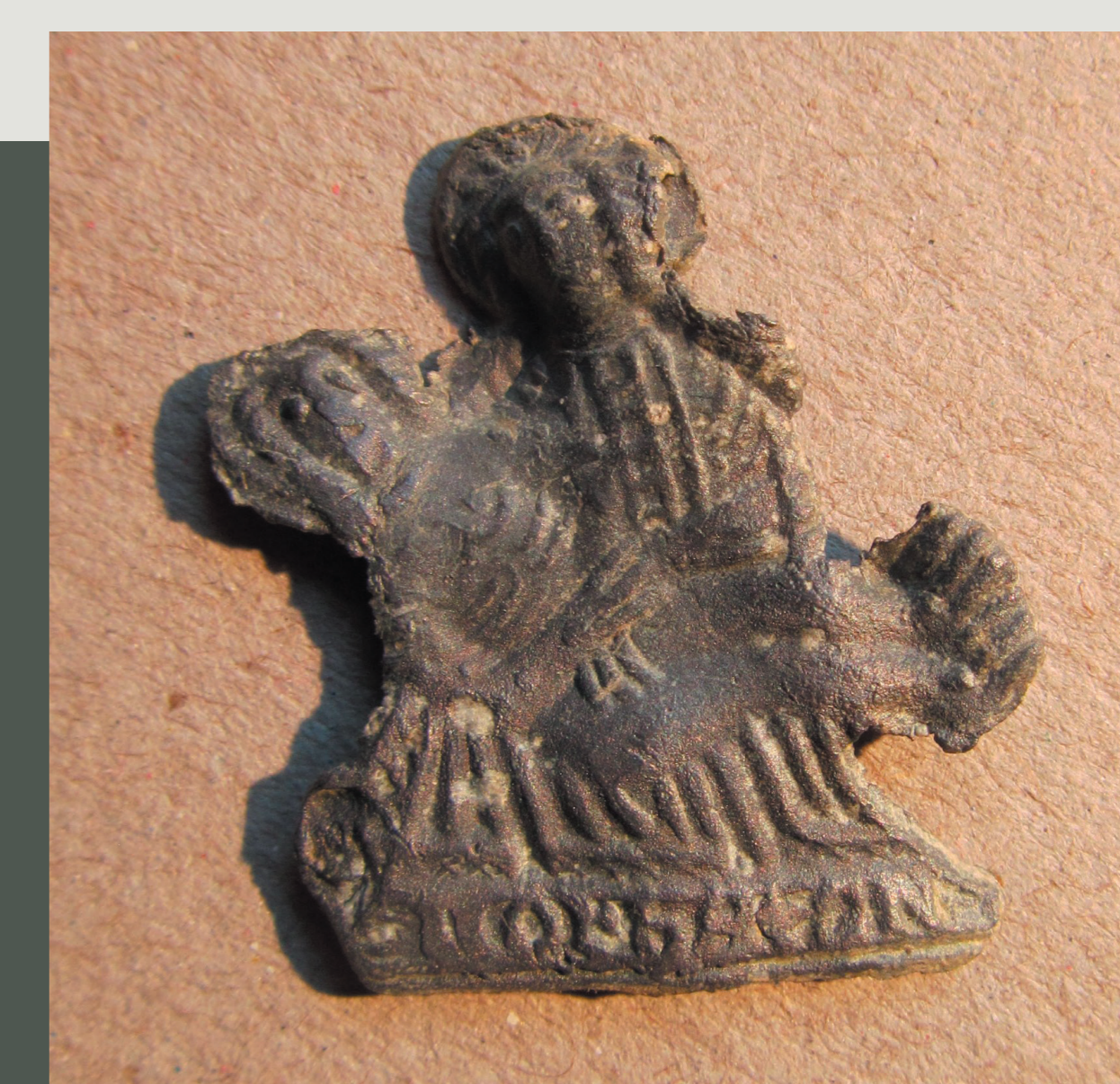


Morrell as Bishop of Angers



The crypt under St. Michael's church Hallaton

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Pilgrim Badge found on Hare Pie Bank

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Pilgrim Skeletons ANALYSED

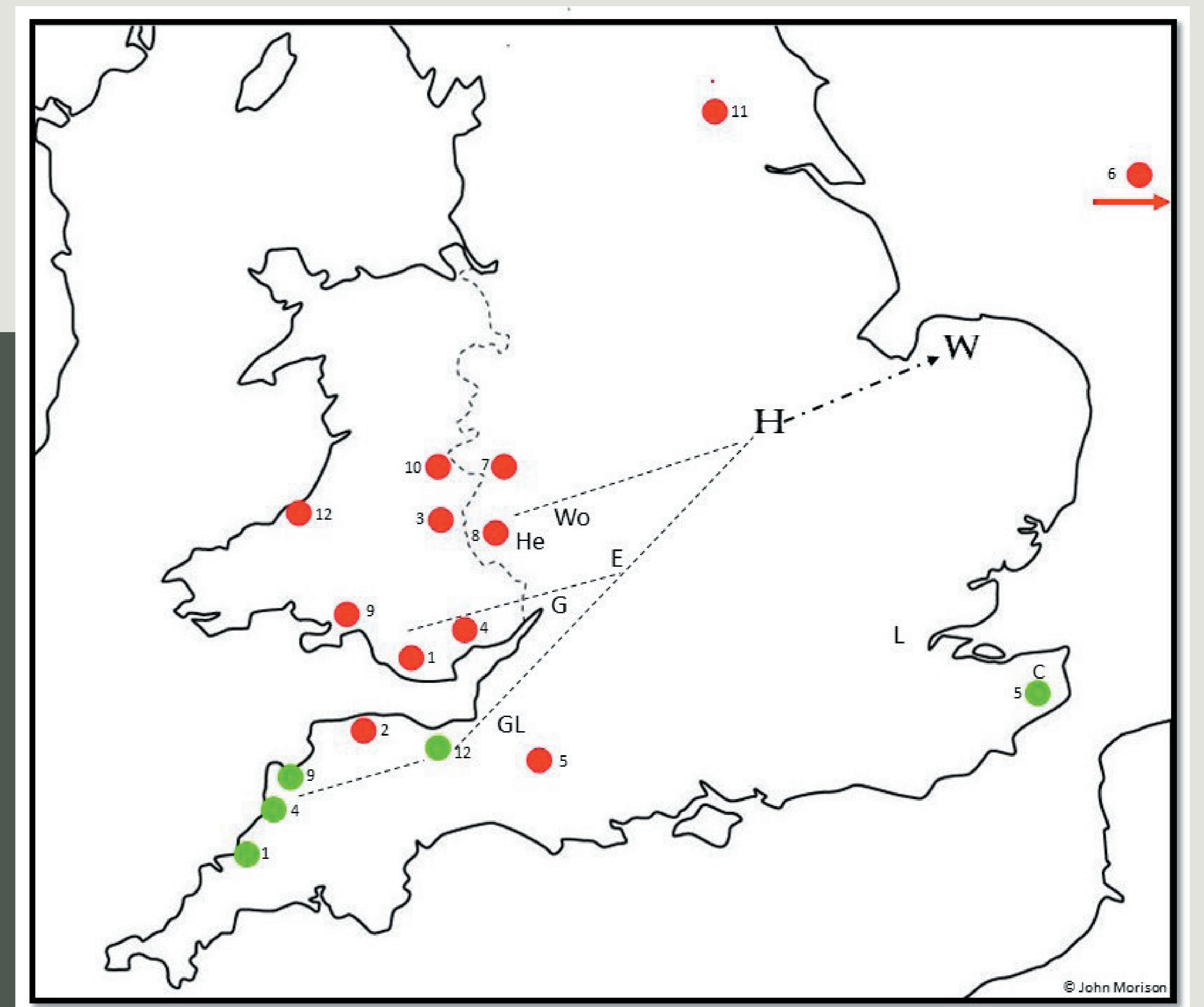
During the 2011-18 excavations, twenty-two skeletons of Pilgrims were found in and around the site of St. Morrell's Chapel at Hallaton. These had been buried with their feet pointing to the east in the traditional Christian manner. Twelve of the skeletons were subject to isotope analysis to determine where they lived at the different periods of their life.

The results were very significant because they showed that none of the pilgrims ever lived in Hallaton or the surrounding area, at any time in their lives. All were visitors. So where did they come from?

The skeletons were analysed for the ratios of different isotopes of Carbon, Nitrogen, Oxygen, Strontium, Sulphur, and Lead and these can be matched to possible locations where the same ratios occur in nature. The red dots and green dots show the most likely and second most likely respectively locations where each pilgrim (with their number) came from.



Excavation of Chapel site on Hare Pie Bank



Pilgrim routes to Hallaton from the West

The dotted lines show the line of the pilgrimage route from their homes to Hallaton (H) and (if they had survived) on to the important shrine at Walsingham (W).

There are other major shrines on, or close to the route that they might have visited:-

GL = Glastonbury (St. Dunstan & St. Edgar); G = Gloucester (St. Oswald);

E = Evesham (St. Egwin); H = Hereford (St. Gulthac); Wo = Worcester (St. Wulstan & St. Oswald);

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Francis Butler's WILL

In 1998 the Will of William Butler, Hallaton's priest, written in 1532 was discovered in an archive.

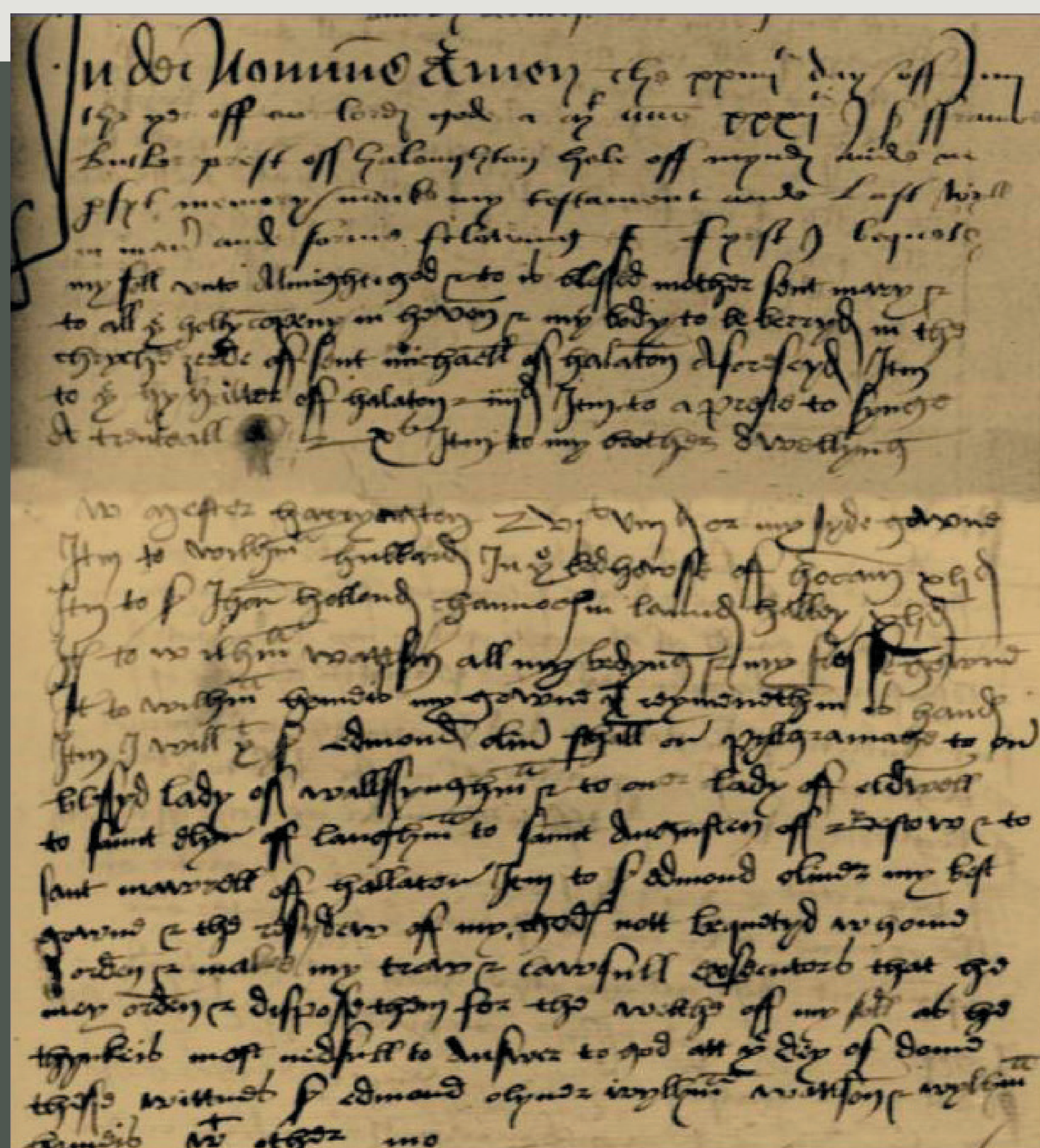
The will is written in Latin and medieval English and would have been dictated on his deathbed and later transcribed on to vellum by a professional scribe, working from notes or mental recall.

Although the original script is difficult to read, once translated into a modern font, it is quite legible. We can also see from the multiple spellings of known placenames (e.g. Hallaton, Halaton, or Haloughton) the kind of phonetic variations and possible errors introduced in transcription.

It[e]m I will y' s[ir] Edmond oliu[er] shall on Pyllgrimage to ou[er] blessyd lady of Wallssyngham & to ouer lady off oldwell to saunt elyn of Langham to saunt Augesten off Bestow and to sant mawrell off Hallaton.

In the will we read that Edmond Oliver is requested to go on a surrogate pilgrimage for Francis Butler. Five specific saint's shrines to be visited are listed.

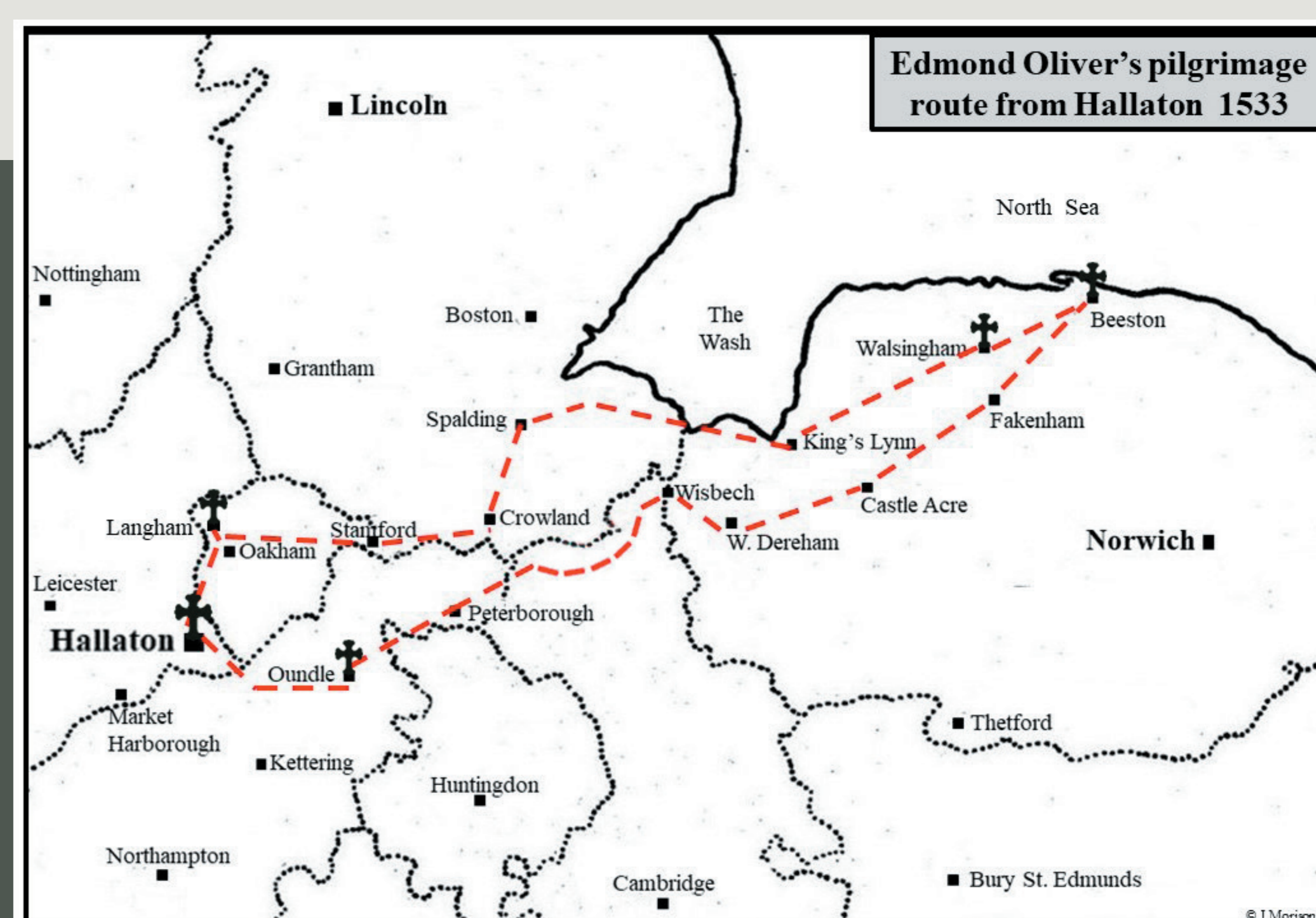
- Saint Morrell of Hallaton and Our Blessed Lady of Walsingham are easily recognised.
- Saint Helen (Elyn/Elen) of Langham (in Rutland) is also identifiable and there is a record from around 1320 regarding a Chapel dedicated to her being there.
- Saint Augustine was widely revered. There are many Augustine priories in the region, but the only one with a name similar to the will is Beeston in Norfolk which is a short distance from Walsingham.



The Will of Francis Butler written in 1532

- Our Lady was very, very widely revered, but few places have a dedication to her in this style. However, in 1499 a royal licence was granted to found the Guild of Our Lady of Oundle, which became a fashionable shrine in the early 1500s. Francis Butler would have known this local shrine and so instructed Edmond to visit it in Oundle in Northants.

This sets out a circular route from Hallaton for the Surrogate Pilgrims to follow and based on a typical walking day of 14 miles, the likely shrines to visit and stopping places along Edmond's route have been identified too.



1533 Pilgrimage route of Edmond Oliver and companions

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