

NORWICH SCENES

The Julian shrine



Tucked away down an alleyway amidst blocks of flats and offices is a small, apparently medieval church. The appearance is deceptive, the whole area was extensively damaged by wartime bombs and the church itself was completely rebuilt. A plaque indicates that it is dedicated to Saint Julian (a woman despite the name), and attached is the Julian Centre and a centre for spiritual retreats. She is more familiarly known as Mother Julian and she lived here in a cell for twenty years during the late fourteenth century, her only contact with the outside world being to receive food and drink or give advice. What makes her famous is the fact that, after a serious illness, she claimed to have had divine revelations which she wrote down in a book entitled *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Today this obscure figure is widely revered. There is a Julian festival each May with a special mass and a lecture by a religious scholar. An Internet search revealed numerous references to her. She is claimed as a forerunner of feminism and as an icon for gays and lesbians, there are Mother Julian meditation groups in Australia and New Zealand, she is listed amongst mystics of all religious faiths, she is the subject of scholarly works not only by Protestant and Catholics but even by Jews. Why this popularity? The Bible has largely been rejected as God's revelation to man but many people look for some kind of belief to put in its place. Mother Julian appeals in two ways. Firstly she was a mystic, the religion of experience rather than truth, which appeals to many today. Secondly, she spoke of God as 'the divine mother' and Christ as 'our mother', leading people back to the old 'mother goddess' religion of paganism. Sadly, at a time when the Word of God is freely available, people hark back to the medieval world of Roman Catholic dominance and suppression of the Bible instead of seeking the Truth.—*Tony Benson*