



### **THE SAINTS OF OUR ALTAR SCREEN**

**All these saints played a very important role in the early development of the church. Britain, at the time of these Saints was very different from today. The country was divided into small kingdoms or settlements of different tribes. The Romans had left and it had become a very traumatic and hostile place to live; the Vikings were regular raiders and many disputes were settled by physical violence. Christianity, introduced by the Romans, was becoming more widespread, taking over from the Druidic and pagan religions. More monasteries were being built and becoming centres for learning and literacy. However, many of the early Christians of Britain followed the Celtic tradition and there needed to be a greater unification in the church if it were to survive. In order for this to be achieved The Synod of Whitby was called in 664, both St. Hilda and St. Wilfrid were present. It was agreed that from then on the Roman tradition was to be followed. Each of these saints spread the word of Christianity in their own ways, some as missionaries, others builders of monasteries and advisors to the king, and thanks to St. Bede their lives and history of the early church has been documented for the understanding of future generations.**



The earliest saint recorded is **Saint Columba**, (December 521 – June 597) also known as Colum Cille (meaning “Dove of the Church”). He was an outstanding figure among the Gaelic Irish missionary monks.

Columba studied Latin and Christian theology at Clonard Abbey. At this time the early Druidic tradition had collapsed due to the spread of Christianity. The number of scholars under instruction at Clonard was in the thousands. It was during his time at the Abbey that Columba became involved in a dispute with Saint Finian of Moville over a psalter he was copying. The trouble escalated into a pitched battle during which 561 men were killed. As a result of this, Columba was threatened with excommunication, but Saint Brendan of Birr spoke on his behalf and he was allowed to go into exile instead, working as a missionary in Scotland.

In 563 he was granted land on the island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland. This became the centre of his evangelizing mission to the Picts. Apart from the services he provided guiding the only centre of literacy in the region, his reputation as a holy man led to his role as a diplomat among the tribes; there are also many stories of miracles which he performed during his work to convert the Picts.

He is credited with writing several hymns, transcribing 300 books and founding the monastery at Durrow. Columba died on Iona and was buried by his monks in the abbey he created.

His legacy lasts; he is the Patron Saint of Derry in Ireland and through the reputation of its venerable founder and its position as a major European centre of learning, Columba’s Iona has become a place of pilgrimage. A network of Celtic high crosses marking processional routes developed around his shrine at Iona.

His shield shows a ship in full sail, a symbol of his journey to Scotland to spread the word. He hold in his hand a dove, his namesake.



**Saint Hilda of Whitby** born c. 614, venerated by the Roman Catholic Church, The Anglican Communion and the Eastern orthodox Church. She is a Christian Saint and founding abbess of the monastery at Whitby, which was the chosen venue for the Synod of Whitby. She was an important figure in the conversion of England to Christianity, the abbess of several monasteries, she was recognised for the wisdom that drew kings to her for advice.

She was brought up at King Edwin's court in Northumbria. In 627 King Edwin was baptised with his entire court, which included Hilda, in a small wooden church hastily constructed for the occasion near the site of the present York Minster. The ceremony was performed by the monk-bishop Paulinus, who had come from Rome with Augustine at the request of the pope.

After this event, very little is known of Saint Hilda until 647 she decided to answer the call of St. Aidan, Bishop of Lindisfarne and chose to return to Northumbria and live as a nun.

Hilda's original convent is not known, but we do know that she learned the traditions of Celtic monasticism, which Aidan brought from Iona. After a year he appointed her as the second Abbess of Hartlepool Abbey. No trace remains of this abbey, but its monastic cemetery has been found near the present

**St. Hilda's Church.**

In 657 Hilda became the founding abbess of a new monastery at Whitby, then known as Streonshalh; she remained there until her death in 680.

Archaeological evidence shows that her monastery was in the Celtic style, with its members living in small houses, each for two or three people. The tradition in double monasteries, such as Hartlepool and Whitby, was that men and women lived separately, but worshipped together in church. The exact location and size of the church associated with this monastery, is unknown.

According to Bede, the original ideals of monasticism were maintained strictly in Hilda's abbey. All property and goods were held in common; Christian virtues were exercised, especially peace and charity. Everyone had to study the Bible and do good works. He also wrote of her "All who knew her called her mother because of her outstanding devotion and grace." The Synod of Whitby.

Hilda suffered from fever for the last six years of her life, but she continued to work until her death on 17<sup>th</sup> November 680 at the age of sixty-six.

A local legend says that when sea birds fly over the abbey, they dip their wings in honour of St. Hilda. Another legend tells of a plague of snakes which Hilda turned to stone – thus producing the ammonite fossils on the shore. In fact the ammonite genus *Hildoceras* takes its scientific name from St. Hilda. *Three snakes in circular form appear on her shield.*



**Saint Wilfrid** born in 633 to a wealthy Northumberland family, a second generation Christian. It was a time of conflict between Celtic Christianity and that of Rome. Wilfrid initially went to study in Lindisfarne, a centre of Celtic Christianity, under St. Aidan. He later set out to further his education by travelling to Rome, but was waylaid in Lyon by the Archbishop who took him under his patronage and where he enjoyed living the high-life. He eventually arrived in Rome 654 aged 20. He stayed there but a short while then returned to Lyon. However jealousy among the secular powers of the Archbishop's great wealth resulted in his death along with many of his entourage. Wilfrid escaped with his life because he was a foreign nobleman.

By the age of 27 Wilfrid, back in England was setting up a magnificent new abbey at Ripon in Yorkshire. He used skilled men brought over from France to create the fine stonework.

The division between the Celtic and Roman Church threatened to break into violence so in 664, the newly ordained Wilfrid took his seat as an 'expert' at the Synod of Whitby and championed the cause of Rome. Rome won. A year later the Pope appointed Wilfrid Bishop of York. However he went to France for a proper Episcopal consecration because he did not trust that ordination from the Celtic tradition would be valid. One example of which is that he was carried to his consecration ceremony on a throne supported by nine bishops. He remained in France for some time and the result of this delay led to another man (Saint Chad) was put in as bishop of York. Wilfrid returned to Ripon an angry man. Three years later, Theodore, a learned Greek who had just been appointed Archbishop of Canterbury said that Chad had been ir-

regularly ordained. Chad went away meekly to be an abbot and Wilfrid took up York. He immediately set about restoring the Cathedral and other churches in the diocese. He provided funds for their upkeep and soon amassed a great fortune for the Church.

Wilfrid loved a good show and although he lived modestly himself, he presided over many magnificent celebrations and feasts. His fortune and power attracted jealousy and fear of the secular powers. Egfrid, King of Northumbria, had taken a dislike to Wilfrid when he had taken the side of his wife over a marriage dispute. Egfrid's chance for revenge came in 678, when he called upon the Archbishop of Canterbury, while Wilfrid was away on missionary work, to suggest that York was too large a diocese and for its better running it should be split up. The Archbishop agreed. On his return, Wilfrid, finding his diocese now shrunk, went off to Rome to complain.

It was two years before he was to return to England, but vindicated by Rome he was accepted back into his somewhat smaller diocese. This was to last but a short while as Egfrid banished him, so Wilfrid, not a man to waste time in lamenting his misfortune, went off to do missionary work with the Saxons.

After the death of Egfrid in 685, Wilfrid returned to York. However, five years later he was yet again banished, this time by the new King who felt that Wilfrid was getting uppity. In 703 Wilfrid, now aged 69, again travelled to Rome to complain and again he was vindicated. Three years later he took up the Archbishopric of York for the last three years of his life. One commentator has said that Wilfrid "came into conflict with almost every prominent secular and ecclesiastical figure of the age".

Looking at his statue on the Altar screen, we see the crossed keys of Peter and the crown on his shield to represent his loyalty to Rome. His Bishop's crook in his left hand and his Mitre on the floor (does this represent the fact that his role as Bishop was not consistent) He also has a large bag/purse – could this represent the great wealth he accumulated or his many journeys?



**Saint Cuthbert** born in 635, the reputed son of an Irish King is more than likely to have been born in the vicinity of Melrose (present day Scotland) of poor parents. From an early age, it is believed that he was influenced by the monks at Melrose, however, he spent several years as a soldier and was involved in the conflict between the king of Northumbria and King Penda of Mercia. When the conflict ended he entered the monastery at Melrose where his devotion earned him high praise. When the monastery at Ripon was founded, it was Cuthbert who acted as master. After the Synod of Whitby in 664, where the differences between Roman and Celtic Christianity were settled, Cuthbert accepted the Roman tradition. He was then sent to Lindisfarne Priory to ease the transition in that house. He stayed for a short time there as he was wanting a life of peace and contemplation. In 676 he was granted leave and he retired initially to live as a hermit possibly on the rocky islet of St. Cuthbert's Island, near Lindisfarne or as some believe to St. Cuthbert's Cave, near Howburn. However he did move later to Farne Island, opposite Lindisfarne.

In 685, he was consecrated Bishop of Lindisfarne at York. A year later he resigned his see and returned to Farne Island as he was aware that his death was near. He died on March 20th

687.

Cuthbert was buried at Lindisfarne Priory, where his tomb soon became a focus for pilgrims. Numerous miracles were reported. In 875, the monks, fearful of a Danish invasion fled the island taking with them the relics of St. Cuthbert. Homeless, these monks wandered for a full seven years bearing the relics of the saint with them, until in 883 when they were given a church at Chester-le-Street, near Durham.

One hundred years later a fresh Danish invasion threatened, to Cuthbert's remains were moved yet again, this time to Ripon, over 300 years after he had first come as the Master of the Abbey. Ripon was not to be the saint's final resting place. Further moves were made, in Durham, on route to Chester-Le-Street, Lindisfarne again and then finally back to Durham (new Cathedral) where during the move his body was found to be incorrupt, still perfectly preserved, as was the head of St. Oswald, which has been placed with Cuthbert's body for safe keeping. It was at this point that the head of St. Oswald was adopted as the symbol of St. Cuthbert.

During the Middle Ages, the shrine of St. Cuthbert was a popular place of pilgrimage. The saint is also associated with the Lindisfarne Gospels. This illuminated manuscript produced by Eadfrid, Bishop of Lindisfarne in the 8th century is one of the best surviving examples of traditional Celtic calligraphy and illustration.



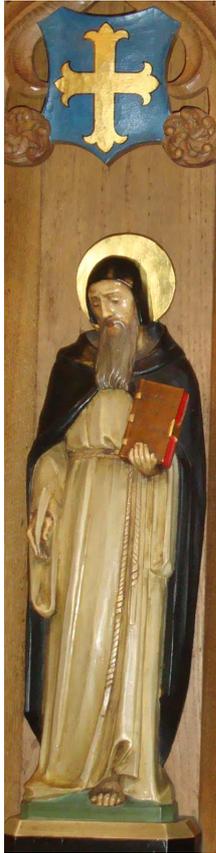
Known as **Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne**, St Aidan the Apostle of Northumbria was founder and first bishop of the monastery on the island of Lindisfarne. He was a Christian missionary and is credited with restoring Christianity to Northumbria. He came originally from Ireland but later became a monk at the monastery on the Island of Iona in Scotland. It was a time of religious instability, but thanks to King Oswald of Bernicia, who was a baptized Christian, Aidan was called upon to act as a spiritual guide to help convert the people to Christianity. In 635, when Aidan arrived from Iona he was assigned to the episcopal see, Lindisfarne (Holy Island), off the Northumberland coast, a few miles north from Oswald's fortress, Banburgh. According to the Venerable Bede, "The King, humbly and willingly giving ear to the Bishop's admonitions, most industriously applied himself to build and extend the Church of Christ in his kingdom; and when the Bishop, who did not perfectly understand the English tongue, preached the Gospel, it was most delightful to see the King himself interpreting the Word of God to his commanders

and ministers; for he had perfectly learned the language of the Scots during his long banishment,"

Aidan understood the value of education and took twelve English boys to train at the monastery, to ensure that the area's future religious leader would be English. He was an inspired missionary, caring nothing for the World or for the things of the World, his own life was a better lesson than any that he could teach by his sermons. In him, men saw one whose only thought was how to serve God himself, and how to win other to him.

Aidan died on 31st August 651, the same year as the then King, Oswine with whom he had become a close friend. His body was buried at Lindisfarne, but partly transferred to Iona in 664. Relics which survived the Viking invasion of 793 were recovered and eventually moved to Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset.

His attributes are of a monk holding a flaming torch. Here his shield shows a Celtic cross with three towers—could they represent Iona, Lindisfarne and Glastonbury?



**Saint Bede**, also known as *The Venerable Bede*, is widely regarded as the greatest of all the Anglo-Saxon Scholars. His scholarship covered a huge range of subjects, including commentaries on the bible, observations of nature, music and poetry. He wrote around sixty books, mainly dealing with theology and history. His most famous work, which is a key source for the understanding of early British history and the arrival of Christianity, is 'Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum' or 'The Ecclesiastical History of the English people' which was completed in 731 AD. It is the first history in which the AD system of dating is used. It is thanks to Bede that we know so much about the early Celtic saints.

It is believed that he was born in Monkton, Durham. Very little is known of his family background, other than at the age of seven he was entrusted to the care of Benedict Biscop, founder of the monastery of St. Peter at Wearmouth. This monastery was later moved to Jarrow, where Bede spent the rest of his life. He was ordained Deacon at the age of 19, much younger than the usual age of 25. This may well have been that his abilities were already recognised as being exceptional. At the age of 30 he was ordained Priest. In 701 Bede wrote his first works, these were for use in the classroom. In 708 a number of monks at Hexam accused Bede of heresy because his work, *De Temporibus* offered a different chronology of the six ages of the world theory from that commonly accepted by theologians. This is the first occasion when Bede came up against S. Wilfrid. There was a second occasion when Bede asked Wilfrid for more details about the life of the Abbess of Ely, as Wilfrid had been her adviser when she was alive—one can assume that not much was forthcoming. Bede was an avid letter writer, and it is from this correspondence that we learn that he was also much travelled and knew his correspondents from meeting them face to face. He died on 26th May 735 and was writing even on his death bed. Initially he was buried at Jarrow. His remains were transferred to Durham Cathedral in 11th century; his tomb there was looted in 1541, but the contents were probably reinterred in the Galilee Chapel. One question remains, was Bede married? From his own writings, it would seem so, although some historians claim that the references are rhetorical.