

Know your Church 2

St Cuthbert who was born c 634 became a monk in the monastery of Old Melrose at a time when three different traditions brought challenges to the Church. Christianity first came to Britain during the Roman occupation. Hadrian's Wall proved no barrier to the early missionaries and by the end of the 5th century Christianity was well established in the Lothians as well as central and southern Scotland. St Mungo (also known as St Kentigern) and St Serf were two of the early missionaries who established churches. Bede, who wrote about the foundation of the English Church, had little time for the Britons and so they tend to be written out of our history.

The coming of the Angles (English) brought a powerful pagan tribe into our region. They captured Edinburgh a few years after St Cuthbert's birth. King Oswald invited monks from the Celtic Church (Iona was its chief monastery.) to set up a monastery on Lindisfarne to convert the Angles.

During the early years of the 7th century the Roman Church sent missionaries into the north seeking to convert the English. After the Synod held at Whitby, the Angles of Northumbria accepted the traditions of the Roman Church. St Cuthbert became prior at Old Melrose before becoming Bishop of Lindisfarne. He retired to the isolated island of Inner Farne. However, at this time the island was far from being a lonely outpost as it was only a few miles from Bamburgh, the northern capital of Northumbria. Eoforwic (York) was the southern capital.

St Cuthbert became a popular saint long after the kingdom of Northumbria had disappeared. I was baptised in St Cuthbert's, Darlington. My College at Durham was St Cuthbert's Society and now I am a member of St Cuthbert's Colinton. His body was eventually laid to rest in Durham with the head of St Oswald. The small window in the chancel shows St Cuthbert with the head of St Oswald.

(St Oswald's Head: Look out of the next article from the archive.)