

SAINT AIDAN

Aidan was an Irish monk who was part of St Columba's community on Iona.

When Oswald was exiled from his kingdom, he had contact with this community of Columba – perhaps living on or near Iona and became a Christian. When King Oswald was restored to his kingdom, uniting the sub-kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira, he sent to Iona for monks to establish – or in fact re-establish – Christianity throughout his land.

After a false start led by the monk Cormac, Aidan volunteered to come to Oswald of Northumbria and established both a Church at Bamburgh and, with 12 other missionary monks from Iona, a Columban style Community on the island of Lindisfarne. This was in the year 635.

The little that we know of St Aidan's life is given us by the Venerable Bede. Aidan is remembered as being a gentle, patient and generous shepherd of souls.

Two of the stories that Bede gives us are these:

- In the beginning Aidan could not speak the language of the people, and so in this partnership between King and Bishop, Oswald himself – who had learned the Irish language whilst in exile – would act as interpreter as Aidan proclaimed the Gospel.
- Aidan was a great believer in walking the lanes and roads and in this way was able to meet people and engage in conversation with them. On a number of occasions he declined the King's offer of a horse, preferring to be on the same level as the people he met in the way. However, when Oswin was King, for some reason Aidan eventually accepted the offer of a horse, but quickly realised that he was not comfortable with such a fine gift. When a beggar stopped him on the road looking for a small gift, Aidan gave him the horse. This act of generosity confused and annoyed the King. Aidan simply responded, is the child of a mare of more importance than a child of God?

What Aidan achieved was the establishment of a centre of learning on Lindisfarne which was to become renowned throughout Europe as the cultural, spiritual and religious hub.

Many such communities already existed and were subsequently created. The difference with Aidan's community was that it was deliberately established as a place of mission. From this Community of Lindisfarne founded by Aidan came Eata, Cedd and Chad, Wilfrid, Hilda and Ebba and Cuthbert and the subsequent history of Christianity in this land.

Aidan died in the year 651 at Bamburgh – and the spot where he died, leaning it is said, against the pillar or outside wall of the church, is marked within the present day church building (dedicated to St Aidan) by a simple shrine. His body was taken across to his community on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne and there it was laid to rest.

Everlasting God,
you sent the gentle bishop Aidan
to proclaim the gospel in this land:
grant us to live as he taught
in simplicity, humility, and love for the poor;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.