

### **St. Cuthbert**

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Saint Cuthbert was a Northumbrian in the Celtic tradition and is recognized by Roman, Anglican and Orthodox churches.



Cuthbert received as a novice by Boisil at Melrose Abbey. The horse and spear refer to the legend that he spent some time in the military before pursuing a monastic life.

## *Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (c. 634-20 March 687), Anglo-Saxon monk, bishop and hermit, “Wonder Worker of Britain”*

Cuthbert was raised near Melrose Abbey on the northeast coast of England. Nothing is known of his early life except through legends. It is said that his monastic vocation was sparked by a dream of St. Aidan founder of Lindisfarne Abbey and its daughter institution, Melrose.

It would seem that he was first received as a novice at Melrose Abbey by Abbot Boisil. And from there went to Ripon in 655 and became guest master and in 662 made prior. He went back to Melrose when Ripon fell to another bishop.

At Melrose Cuthbert began his missionary travels, making long journeys such as from Berwick to Galloway. He founded an oratory at Dull, Scotland, with a cell for himself and erected a large stone cross.

Cuthbert accepted the Roman usages enforced on the Celtic church at the Synod of Whitby in 664 and when his former abbot and mentor Eata, now at Lindisfarne, asked him to come to explain the new ways of doing things, he accepted and remained there to the end of his life. When Cuthbert became prior of Lindisfarne he continued his missionary travels while leading an ascetic life. In 676, however, he retreated to an island near Lindisfarne, to pursue a contemplative life, but soon after moved to Inner Farne Island where he could practice more severe asceticism.

But in 684 he was elected bishop of Hexham. No one knows how he did it but he managed to convince someone to make Eata bishop of Hexham and himself bishop of Lindisfarne.

Cuthbert was consecrated bishop of Lindisfarne by Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 685. However, Cuthbert knew he was ill and after Christmas in 686 he retreated once again to Inner Farne Island where he died in 687 after a painful illness. He was buried the next day at Lindisfarne. So ends the story of his earthly life, now begins the story of his remains. *Right: Cuthbert's deathbed.*



Eleven years after Cuthbert's death the monks decided to rebury him in a new carved oak coffin. They found his body incorrupt.

### *The Journey*

When the Danes invaded in 875, the monks left their beloved monastery, carrying with them whatever valuables they could, but most importantly, the remains of St. Cuthbert.

They had to do two things: find a new monastic home, and find a suitable place to erect a shrine for Cuthbert's remains. They stopped at Melrose, but went on Chester-le-Street.

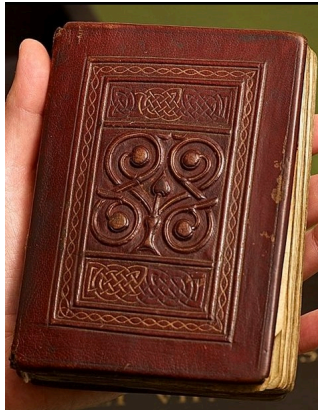


The life-size wooden statues of monks carrying Cuthbert's coffin stands in the church of St. Mary the Virgin on Lindisfarne. A copy was cast in bronze and can be seen on the street in Durham.

Another Danish invasion sent them off to Ripon. But they were to find their home at last in 995 when they arrived at the Hamlet of Warden Law in County Durham. A dun cow had wandered off and decided to rest in the road. (See right below) The monks took this as a sign that they had better cease their wanderings. They built a temporary chapel made of tree branches. This was later replaced with a white chapel later absorbed into the complex of the new stone cathedral being built by Bishop Aldhune.

Eventually a marble shrine was erected and pilgrim's flocked to Durham. Cuthbert was probably the most popular saint until the murder of Thomas Beckett.





### Cuthbert's, or Stonyhurst Gospel

Gospel of Saint John, tooled red goatskin binding, the earliest example of Western binding. Believed to have been made at Jarrow and placed in Cuthbert's shrine.

At the dissolution it passed from hand to hand until it arrived at the Jesuit Stonyhurst College.

The British Library purchased it for 14.7 million dollars in 2011.



St Cuthbert's Pectoral Cross, Gold and Garnets.  
Was it Cuthbert's?

### *The Disinterments*

Cuthbert's body was disinterred three times after it arrived in Durham.

1104 Tomb opened for translation of relics to a new shrine. Found: Gospel of St. John, set of vestments made of Byzantine silk the gift of King Athelstan (r. 927-939), a small portable altar, gold chalice and paten, a comb and a pair of scissors. Body was reported to be incorrupt.

1537 Dissolution of the monasteries. Shrine demolished. Body again appeared to be intact although a workman who opened the coffin roughly managed to break one of the legs. Same artifacts seem to have been found.

1827 Under a slab bearing a monk's name were found three coffins, all in bad shape, one on top of the other. The top contained a single burial; the middle had a skull and the bones of several people including children. The bottom coffin contained a skeleton without a chasuble, but with the Gospel, burse, stole, two maniples and a pectoral cross of gold with garnets. The cross is displayed in Durham Cathedral Museum.

### *The Mystery of Cuthbert's Burial*

Was the skeleton found in 1827 that of Cuthbert? It is possible that the body of a deceased monk was put in the coffin at the time of the Dissolution with a few artifacts. As to the cross, it was typical of many given to the Cathedral over the years, along with copes and other fine works. At this point it is hardly likely that the mystery, if there is one, will ever be solved.