

## **Cuddy's Corse – written by Ruth Robson**

### **Stop 1 – St Mary's and St Cuthbert's Church, Chester-le-Street**

This walk has been created for the 2023 Durham Book Festival, a Durham County Council Festival produced by New Writing North, with support from Durham University and Arts Council England. Durham Book Festival was established in the 1980s and is one of the country's first literary festivals.

The walk is along the waymarked trail from Chester-le-Street to Durham City, known as Cuddy's Corse and is symbolic of the journey made by the Community of St Cuthbert from Lindisfarne to Durham. As we journey along its route, we'll explore details from St Cuthbert's life and his influence, through the written word, including Benjamin Myers' recently published novel which takes its name from a nickname for the much-loved saint, *Cuddy*, and visits significant moments in the life of Cuthbert and story of Durham.

There has been much written about Saint Cuthbert. The earliest account was written anonymously by a monk at the monastery on the Northumbrian tidal island of Lindisfarne around 700 AD.

"I have written [only] what has been received on good authority and tested." The writer names some of his sources as having heard "from St Cuthbert's own lips."

The next to write about Saint Cuthbert is the Venerable Bede, the learned monk and scholar who lived from the 670s AD to 735 AD. First in metrical verse and then in prose. He cites his sources to be "trustworthy witnesses", and "others who had lived a long time with the man of God, and who were therefore, more conversant

with the details of his life.” He also drew from the earlier, anonymous account.

Saint Cuthbert lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. He was born around 635 AD and died in 687 AD. He came from north Northumbria, the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom that, at its peak, stretched from the river Humber, the southerly end of modern-day Yorkshire, north, to the Forth of Firth, in Scotland, and west, incorporating Cumbria. He joined a monastery in 651 AD, as a novice, and a monk. He became Prior of Lindisfarne, a hermit, then Bishop of Lindisfarne and was venerated in death, inspiring the cult of St Cuthbert. His body was enshrined on Lindisfarne in 687 AD, later removed and taken to safety as the monastic community of Lindisfarne fled following decades of Viking raids that started in 793 AD.

The community travelled around what is now Northern England and parts of Southern Scotland, settling at Chester-le-Street in 883 AD. They remained there for over a century, building an Anglo-Saxon cathedral to house the shrine of St Cuthbert. Today the church of St Mary’s and St Cuthbert’s sits on the very site.

England was slowly becoming unified. King Aethelstan, widely regarded as the first King of England paid homage to Saint Cuthbert in the year 934. He gifted the tomb of St Cuthbert vestments which are the earliest surviving pieces of embroidery from the 10<sup>th</sup> century in England. They are on display in the museum at Durham Cathedral. King Aethelstan also gifted a manuscript which incorporated Bede’s verse form and prose form of the life of Cuthbert. Its frontispiece is a miniature painting by an unknown artist of King Aethelstan presenting a manuscript to Saint Cuthbert. The painting is the earliest surviving portrait of a

reigning English King, and the manuscript is held at the Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

The community of St Cuthbert fled Lindisfarne with their archive and collection of illuminated manuscripts, the most famous being *The Lindisfarne Gospels*. It is considered the most spectacular manuscript to survive from Anglo-Saxon England, and was created around 700 AD. It contains the four Gospels from *the Bible*, depicting the life of Christ and is written in Latin. There are full page carpet pages, named because they resemble middle eastern carpets from the time; full page images of each of the saints who wrote a gospel book, and illustrated pages that mark the beginning of each Gospel.

It's known that a late 10<sup>th</sup> century priest at Chester-le-Street called Aldred added a translation from the Latin to Old English on each page, which is the earliest translation of the gospels into the English language. He also added an inscription at the end of the book, recording who had created *The Lindisfarne Gospels*. It's highly likely this knowledge was passed down from those alive at the time, via generations of monks to Aldred, who wrote:

Eadfrith bishop of the Church of Lindisfarne

He, in the beginning, wrote this book for God and St Cuthbert and generally for all the holy folk who are on the island.

And Aethilwald bishop of the Lindisfarne-islanders, bound and covered it without, as he well knew how to do.

And Billfrith the anchorite, he forged the ornaments which are on the outside and bedecked it with gold and with gems and also with gilded silver-pure wealth.

These words are from a translation from Aldred's 10<sup>th</sup> century Old English into modern English by Professor Richard Gameson, Professor (History of the Book) at Durham University.

A facsimile of *The Lindisfarne Gospels* can be seen inside St Mary's and St Cuthbert's Church, Chester-le-Street. The original is held at the British Library. A digital version can be seen on its website.

<https://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=fdbcc772-3e21-468d-8ca1-9c192f0f939c&type=book>

In spring 995 the Community of St Cuthbert was once again on the move, fearing Viking raids. They went south to Ripon, in modern North Yorkshire, where they stayed for around three months, before returning North, finally settling at what is now Durham City.

Cuddy's Corse takes us east in the first instance, towards Lumley Castle.

## **Stop 2 – Lumley Castle**

Defensive structures are commonplace in North East England, with over 70 castles across the region. Significantly more if all those within the boundaries of the ancient kingdom of Northumbria are included.

Lumley Castle was created in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when Sir Ralph Lumley extended and fortified the family's manor house. Sir Ralph had returned from fighting in Scotland and the Anglo-Scottish wars of the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were in full swing. Border reiving was also commonplace with family clans regardless

of nationality constantly stealing and hustling livestock from each other, eking an existence in what was in essence a war zone.

In Cuthbert's day Northumbria was relatively stable, with the period from the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, known as the Golden Age of Northumbria. This period was in the middle of what was known as the Dark Ages – a period of decline after the departure of the Romans in the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the arrival of the Normans in the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Historian Dan Jackson, author of *The Northumbrians – North East England and Its People, a New History* states, “The greatness of Northumbria in the Dark Ages was based less on its political power – although it was blessed with a succession of kings of outstanding ability (some were saints, some were warriors, and some, like Oswin, were both) – than on the distinctive Christian culture which flowered there in art and learning and religious piety.”

Anglo Saxon Northumbria was formed of two kingdoms, Deira to the south, what is now modern-day Yorkshire, and Bernicia to the north, loosely the area known today as North East England. They were first united in 604 AD and except for some occasional periods of sub-division, remained so for over two centuries. It was a period of sub-division that saw Oswald as a boy, exiled to the island of Iona off the West coast of Scotland. It was here where he converted to Christianity. In 634 Oswald raised a Northumbrian army to see off its Welsh overlord Cadwallon who had earlier killed Edwin, king of Bernicia, once again uniting Bernicia and Diera into Northumbria.

Historian Max Adams wrote a book called *King of the North* about the life and achievements of King Oswald. Chapter Nine begins,

“In 635 Oswald Iding, at the age of thirty, was undisputed overlord of all the lands north of the Humber up to the Firth of Forth. With an impeccably legitimate claim through his parents to both Northumbrian kingdoms and with a martial reputation to match his father’s, his political capital was immense. How would he spend it?”

One of the things Oswald did was to invite Aidan, a monk from Iona to evangelise in Northumbria. Iona, a remote island off the west coast of what is now Scotland, in turn had been evangelised by Irish monks. Aidan founded a monastery on the Northumbrian tidal island of Lindisfarne in 635AD.

The Very Reverend Michael Sadgrove, a retired Dean of Durham, writes in his book *Landscapes of Faith, The Christian Heritage of the North East*, “His choice of Lindisfarne as his base is highly significant. Aidan seems to have looked for a site where his monks could live in community according to their rule following his native Irish traditions, and from where he and others could travel across the kingdom preaching the gospel.”

The Very Reverend Sadgrove continues, “But there is another aspect to the island’s physical location. It is within sight direct sight of Oswald’s royal palace at Bamburgh, as if to say that not only was the king patron of the mission but that the politics of the court were accountable to the High King, God himself, whom the island community existed to proclaim. This pattern of holy place juxtaposed to secular power is common in medieval sites. It expresses the idea, fundamental to the medieval mind, that spiritual and temporal power belong together.”

The foundation of the monastery at Lindisfarne led to the creation of monasteries across Northumbria and an unprecedented era of scholarly learning and creativity.

Returning to Dan Jackson, author of *The Northumbrians* he states, “The Northumbrian church generated an embarrassment of riches, with *The Lindisfarne Gospels* and the *Codex Amiatinus*, the ancient churches and libraries at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, Hexham and Corbridge, the glorious sculptured crosses at Bewcastle and Ruthwell, and Caedmon’s *Song of Creation* – ‘Now we must honour the guardian of heaven, the might of the architect, the father of glory’ – all telling of the richness of Northumbrian culture.”

A little more about Lumley Castle before we take our next steps. The castle has connections with the Bishops of Durham and monarchs over the centuries. James VI of Scotland visited in 1603 on his way to London from Edinburgh to take up his throne as James I of England and Ireland. The castle was used a residence for a time by the Bishops of Durham after the creation of Durham University in 1832 and in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was used to accommodate students from Durham University. It is now a luxury hotel. The castle is still owned by the Lumley family, with the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Scarborough, known as Viscount Lumley, living in Yorkshire.

The walk continues, crossing the River Wear and heading south along its easterly bank for a while. The river turns and, as the route leaves woodland and crosses open fields rising towards the village of Great Lumley, look out for the structure on a hill to the east that looks like a Greek temple.

### **Stop 3 – Great Lumley**

The westerly side of the village of Great Lumley has views of Chester-le-Street, hills that mark the beginning of the North Pennines and views of more hills to the north. Anthony Gormley's statue, the Angel of the North, can be seen to the North, with its open arms facing Durham. It is beyond the view of the Angel where we next pick up the story of St Cuthbert.

We know from the anonymous account and from Bede that Cuthbert was a shepherd on the hills as young man. This was somewhere near his place of birth, believed to be near Melrose, now in the Scottish borders, but at the time, very much part of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria.

Bede's account of the *Life of Saint Cuthbert* describes a life changing moment on the 31<sup>st</sup> August, 651 AD.

"One night when his companion had gone to sleep and he was keeping watch and praying as usual, he suddenly saw light streaming from the skies, breaking the long night's darkness, and the choirs of the heavenly host coming down to earth. They quickly took into their rank a human soul, marvellously bright, and returned to their home above."

This heavenly vision was Saint Aidan rising to Heaven, and it prompted Cuthbert to present himself at the monastery at Melrose and become a monk.

Cuthbert spent some time at Melrose, then at the newly founded monastery at Ripon. He returned to Melrose when Abbot Wilfred of Ripon, who was schooled in the Roman way of Christianity, decreed the monastery follow the Roman way, rather than the Celtic Irish tradition taught by Aidan.



Cuthbert was appointed Prior of Melrose around 662 AD. During this time, he travelled around Northumbria evangelising and visiting priories. One such visit was to a double monastery, headed by Ebbe, an abbess, and sister of Oswald and their brother Oswiu who succeeded Oswald as King. The monastery was at Kirk Hill, between what is now Coldingham and St Abb's in South East Scotland. Bede tells of how Cuthbert went down to the sea to pray.

“One night one of the monks watched him creep out, then followed him stealthily to see where he was going and what he was about. Down he went towards the beach beneath the monastery and out into the sea until he was up to his arms and neck in deep water. The splash of the waves accompanied his vigil throughout the dark hours of the night. At Daybreak he came out, knelt down on the sand, and prayed. Then two otters bounded out of the water, stretched themselves out before him, warmed his feet with their breath, and tried to dry him on their fur.”

Bede's account continues with Cuthbert asking the monk not to tell of what he has seen, whilst he, Cuthbert, is alive. The monk agrees to this, but in Bede's words, “... after his death, took care to tell it to as many persons as he was able.” Cuthbert being warmed by otters is regarded as one of his miracles.

A monumental moment in the history of Christianity in Britain took place in the year 664 at the Synod of Whitby, at Whitby Abbey on the modern-day Yorkshire coast, but at that time part of Northumbria. Whitby was a double monastery, one for monks and another for nuns, both led by the Abbess Hild. It was common in the Anglo-Saxon period for women of noble birth to be such leaders. At this time the Northumbrian church was rooted in the

Celtic tradition and calculated the date of Easter differently to that of the Roman church, as practised by Pope Gregory who had sent Saint Augustine as a missionary to Kent in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Marc Morris book, *The Anglo-Saxons, A History of the Beginnings of England*, tells of ...”an absurd situation at the Northumbrian Court, because King Oswiu adhered to the teachings of Lindisfarne, whereas his queen Eanflaed , who was from Kent, followed the Roman tradition in which she had been raised. This meant that in some years Oswiu would be celebrating Easter Sunday and feasting with his courtiers while his wife and her circle were still observing their Lenten fast.” Marc Morris continues, “...what had been a doctrinal debate among monks became a political issue when his son Ealhfrith began agitating for the Roman Easter, egged on by his new adviser Wilfred.”

King Oswiu called the Synod of Whitby to settle the matter. Wilfred of Ripon made the case for the Roman tradition and Bishop Coleman of Lindisfarne made the case for the Celtic tradition. The decision went the way of Rome represented by Wilfred. Afterwards several of the monks from Lindisfarne, led by Bishop Coleman retreated to Iona and then to Ireland. The Synod of Whitby is often cited as being about the style of tonsure monks cut their hair, as well as the date of Easter. In reality, it was about power and the direction of the church.

Cuthbert was appointed Prior of Lindisfarne and was instrumental in the acceptance of the decision by the Northumbrian church.

Over time the monasteries in Northumbria adopted the Rule of St Benedict rather than the Ionian / Irish rule. Monasteries founded in the later part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century in Northumbria followed the roman tradition, such as the joint monastery of St Peter and St

Paul at Monkwearmouth Jarrow on the north bank of the river Wear in what is now Sunderland, and the south bank of the river Tyne, in Jarrow. Existing monasteries had to change their practise.

Bede says of Cuthbert that he, “was wonderfully patient and unsurpassed for courage in enduring physical or mental hardship. Though overwhelmed by sorrow at these monks’ recalcitrance he managed to keep a cheerful face.”

The Greek temple like structure you saw on the approach to Great Lumley is Penshaw Monument, sitting on a hill west of Sunderland. It was built to commemorate John Lambton, the first Earl of Durham and is modelled on the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens, Greece. In Greek mythology Hephaestus was the patron god of metal working, craftsmanship and fire.

Penshaw Hill is also associated with the story of the Lambton worm, a dragon like creature, though there is smaller hill close by known as Worm Hill. The story tells of a giant beast wrapping itself around a hill and being slain. There is continued debate as to which of the two hills the mythical worm wrapped itself around.

There are similar stories of worms across North East England, such as the Hylton Worm and the Sockburn Worm. It’s believed these stories date back to the coastal Viking raids of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and are derived from the dragon like beasts carved at the front of Viking longboats appearing to the east on the horizon.

Our walk continues south to Finchale Priory.

#### **Stop 4 – Finchale Priory**

Finchale Priory was built on the site of a hermitage by the monks of Durham. It served as a retreat house, giving monks a break from busy monastic life in a cathedral city, and seat of the bishop, enabling them to spend quite time in reflection. The priory was destroyed to the ruin we see today in 1538 during the dissolution of the monasteries, the period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, after King Henry VIII had formed the Church of England, breaking with Rome and the Catholic Church so he could divorce his first wife. The dissolution of the monasteries was an audit of the wealth of the church and a subsequent stripping of its wealth, into the royal purse.

Finchale first became a religious site in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, when Godric, a merchant and seaman asked the Bishop of Durham at the time, Ranulf Flambard if he could be granted land at Finchale for a hermitage. Godric's life at sea had taken him to Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago Di Compostela, visiting as a pilgrim.

Reginald of Durham was a 12<sup>th</sup> century monk who wrote an account of the *Miracles of Saint Cuthbert* and an account of the *Life of Saint Godric*. A passage about Godric says, "In his various voyages he visited many saints' shrines, to whose protection he was want most devoutly to commend himself, more especially the church of St Andrew in Scotland, where he most frequently made and paid his vows. On the way thither, he oftentimes touched at the island of Lindisfarne, wherein St Cuthbert had been Bishop, and at the isle of Farne, where that Saint had lived as an anchorite, and where St Godric (as he himself would tell afterwards) would meditate on the Saint's life with abundant tears. Thence he began to yearn for solitude, and to hold his merchandise in less esteem than heretofore..."

Godric was moved to be a hermit inspired by Saint Cuthbert who lived before him. In 676 Cuthbert retired as Prior of Lindisfarne to become a hermit. He had taken to spending nights of solitude on what is now known as St Cuthbert's Island, a small tidal island on the westerly shore of Lindisfarne, but he wanted to live completely apart in solitude. He chose to live on the Inner Farne, one of the group of islands south of Lindisfarne further off the coast into the North Sea.

Bede writes of the brothers from the Priory helping build his dwelling, digging a well through what is volcanic rock, and bringing him tools to grow barley. Bede says in *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, that Cuthbert, "served God in solitude for many years on this island and so high was the rampart that surrounded his dwelling that he could see nothing else but the heavens which he longed to enter."

In 684 Cuthbert was made Bishop of Hexham, and a year later Bishop of Lindisfarne. Cuthbert was reluctant to go back out into the world, but he relented after being collected from his solitude on the Inner Farne by King Ecgfrith of Northumbria, and brothers from the monastery. When Cuthbert was a young man and novice monk at Melrose his mentor was Prior Boisil. Bede states that Cuthbert, "... was chiefly prevailed upon by the words of Boisil the servant of God, who with prophetic insight had foretold all that was to happen to him and had predicted that he would become a Bishop."

Like Aidan before him, Cuthbert once again travelled around the length and breadth of Northumbria, which at that time included the westerly town of what is now Carlisle. Bede refers to Carlisle by its Roman name in both his *Life of St Cuthbert* and in *The*

*Ecclesiastical History* - Lugubalia, though other sources use Luguvalium as the roman name for Carlisle.

Cuthbert was met in Lugubalia by his friend Herbert, who also preferred to live a solitary life as a hermit. He lived on an island on Dewentwater, in what we now call the Lake District. The island still bears his name.

Herbert travelled specifically to see and speak with Cuthbert. Bede explains how Cuthbert tells his friend, "I am certain that the time of my departure and of laying aside my earthly tabernacle is at hand." Bede records Herbert's response, "I beseech you by the Lord not to desert me but to remember your most faithful companion and ask the merciful Lord that, as we served Him together on earth, we may journey together to the skies to behold his grace in heaven." Cuthbert prays and assures Herbert that he should, "... not weep but be very glad because the Lord in His mercy has granted what we asked of Him." Bede records that the prophecy came true. Herbert did die on the same day as Cuthbert, with their souls rising to heaven together. This prophecy is considered one of the miracles of St Cuthbert.

It was towards the end of the year 686 when Cuthbert sensed he was about to die. He resigned as Bishop of Lindisfarne and returned to Inner Farne, to live his final months in solitude.

Our journey continues south to Durham City. Durham Cathedral will reveal itself at our next stop. Take time to look around the Finchale Priory before you move on. It's managed by English Heritage and is free to enter. <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/finchale-priory/>

The route passes a disused World War Two ammunition depot to the right, as it rises away from Finchale Abbey.

There's a story of Cuthbert protecting Durham Cathedral during the Second World War. Nazi Germany was carrying out what were known as the Baedeker Raids, aerial bombing where targets were chosen from their description and location as described in a series of tourist guides first published in the 1830s in Germany by Karl Baedeker. On the night Durham was chosen to be bombed, the story tells of Saint Cuthbert creating a mist over the city to hide it from the bomber aeroplanes. This is depicted in the RAF Window at Durham Cathedral which was unveiled in 1948. It includes a bible passage, "As birds flying, so shall the Lord of Hosts protect Jerusalem."

Our route also takes us on a public footpath between HMP Frankland, a men's high security prison; and HMP Low Newton, a women's prison and young offenders' institute.

## **Stop 5 – A Pilgrim's View**

Tradition has it, that when a pilgrim sees their destination for the first time, they fall on their knees, giving thanks for their journey and their imminent arrival. Durham Cathedral has just revealed itself, sitting majestically on its hill to the south.

Cuthbert died on the Inner Farne on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 687.

An extract from Benjamin Myers' novel *Cuddy* reads:

Granted, death comes only once,

and they are alarmed,  
but I'm glad you're here now, dear friend,  
to join me in the amber of the moment,  
holding my cracked and callused hand as  
we stride forth into the fevered hinterland.

The anonymous account of the *Life of Cuthbert* describes how on his death, the body of Cuthbert, "... was carried by ship to our island, but first his whole body was washed, his head wrapped in a head cloth and an obley placed upon his holy breast. He was robed in his priestly garments, wearing his shoes in readiness to meet Christ."

Cuthbert was buried on Lindisfarne. Bede gives an account of what happened eleven years after his death when the monks of Lindisfarne opened Cuthbert's tomb to prepare his bones for placement in a casket as a reliquary, "On opening the coffin, they found the body completely intact, looking as if still alive, and the joints of the limbs still flexible. It seemed not dead but sleeping. The vestments, all of them, were not merely unfaded but crisp and fresh like new and wonderfully bright."

Cuthbert's shrine on Lindisfarne became a place of pilgrimage. The monks at Lindisfarne recorded his life, with one or a group of them, writing the anonymous account. *The Lindisfarne Gospels* were created, in his honour, becoming one of the greatest works of art of the Anglo-Saxon period.

All was to change in the year 793 with the first Viking raid on the east coast of Britain. Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin of York wrote "Never before has such terror appeared...as we have now suffered from a pagan race...The church of St Cuthbert is spattered with



the blood of the priests of God, stripped of all its furnishing, exposed to the plundering of pagans."

The monks at Lindisfarne held out on the island until 875. There was fighting between Northumbria and the Danes, with Northumbrian incursions into York, which was now held by the Vikings. In retaliation the Danes ransacked and destroyed the priory at Tynemouth and were likely to do the same to Lindisfarne.

David Willem's *Author of St Cuthbert's Corpse: A Life After Death*, describes how the monastic community on Lindisfarne, "... dug up and disinterred the bones of their founder... Finally, they prepared a great chest, a travelling coffin covered in hides to guard against the elements. This would transport the now antique coffin-reliquary, concealed within whose precious and revered essence: the miracle-working, sanctuary-granting, divine portal that was the incorrupt corpse of St Cuthbert."

The Community of St Cuthbert arrived in Chester-le-Street, in 883 making it their home for 112 years. This signified a delicate peace with the Danes. King Guthred, the then Danish King of York granted the community the ancient Roman Fort at Chester-le-Street and lands between the Tyne and River Wear. It created a buffer zone between Diera, modern day Yorkshire and the earl of Northumbria who didn't recognised the rule of the Danes to the south in York. The granting of the land was later confirmed by King Alfred of Wessex and King Athelstan, the first King of England.

Symeon of Durham was a monk whose life spanned the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. He wrote several works about the history of the church. He says of King Aethelstan that, "no king before held the church of St Cuthbert in so much affection".

The Diocese initially stretched from the river Tees into modern day Scotland, but the Scots took what is now Edinburgh in 954. In 995 the Community of St Cuthbert once again decided to move. There were continued raids and skirmishes between the Danes, the Northumbrians, and the Scots. The community felt vulnerable and decided to head south, seeking safety, this time at Ripon, in modern day North Yorkshire. Later the same year, they returned north.

Symeon of Durham wrote that the community was looking to return to Chester-le-Street, taking St Cuthbert's coffin 'back to its former resting place'.

Symeon records that at a place called Wrdelau, believed to be modern day Warden Law, a wheel of the cart carrying the coffin of St Cuthbert stuck and wouldn't move.

The monks rested for three days and offered prayers to St Cuthbert, who appeared in a vision instructing that the coffin be taken to Dun Holm. After this revelation, the monks discovered that the cart would move, but they did not know where Dun Holm was. Dun is old English for hill, and Holm is Norse for island. They needed to find the Island Hill.

An extract from Benjamin Myers' novel *Cuddy* reads:

I know where we are going  
To a wooded hill with a cow  
For there is a place fit for a Saint.  
I have seen it so many times.  
Where we will build a home.  
A home to house a holy man.

The community of Saint Cuthbert established itself on the wooded hill surrounded by its winding river - Dunholm, which we now know as Durham. They built a home for the shrine of St Cuthbert, in what was called the White Church. We will return to reference to a cow further on.

St Cuthbert continued to receive royal visitors. King Cnut of Denmark was King of England from 1016 to 1035. He too paid homage to Saint Cuthbert. John Field states, *In Durham Cathedral: Light of the North* that, "It suited Cnut also to foster an alliance with the Community to benefit from its status and influence in the north" Field explains how King Cnut, "made a barefoot pilgrimage from Garmondsay, near modern Trimdon, to Durham, a distance of five miles where he confirmed the privileges of the Community and presented still more lands."

It is said that modern day Trimdon gets its name because King Cnut had his beard trimmed before setting out on his pilgrimage.

A future king to visit Durham was William the Conqueror in 1072, following the Norman invasion of England in 1066.

We continue south towards our destination, Durham Cathedral. Our next stop is Crook Hall.

## **Stop 6 – Crook Hall**

Crook Hall was built by Peter del Croke in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, though it's likely it is on the site of an older building. There are 17<sup>th</sup> century and 18<sup>th</sup> century additions. Antiquarian James Raine and his family became tenants of Crook Hall in 1835 and lived there until his death in 1858. Today the Hall is owned by the National

Trust, with the gardens and the medieval part of the hall open to the public.

James Raine was an ordained priest in the Church of England and held a variety of positions. One was Librarian for Durham Cathedral. He was friends with fellow antiquarian and historian Robert Surtees, best known for his series of books, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham*. James Raine, along with others, founded the Surtees Society on the death of Robert, to honour his memory and continue publishing books and documents about the history of the North East region and the area once known as Northumbria.

One of the most significant publications by the Surtees Society is James Raines book with the title *Saint Cuthbert: with an account of the state in which his remains were found upon the opening of his tomb in Durham Cathedral, in the Year 1827*.

Raine draws from the various sources available to him as he tells the story of St Cuthbert, dating from the anonymous account, Bede, Symeon of Durham, Reginald of Durham and more. His account of Cuthbert's life and veneration in death includes descriptions of the occasions when Cuthbert's shrine was opened.

James Raine also tells of an occasion when the Shrine wasn't opened. Raine explains how the Normans had to fight their way to Durham and Northumbria, and how William the Conqueror, "... after a successful campaign in Scotland, thought fit, in the year 1072, to sojourn for a while at Durham on his way home, and lay the foundation of its castle." Raine explains how King William wanted to know if the body of Saint Cuthbert really was incorrupt.

It was agreed that on the festival of All Saints Day on 1<sup>st</sup> November the tomb would be opened after Mass. Raine says, “The festival of All Saints, the day appointed for the inspection, had arrived, and the Bishop had begun the Mass, when the King was seized with a violent fever, of so withering a nature, that he hastily rushed out of the church without having effected his purpose, and turning his back upon a splendid banquet which was awaiting him, mounted his horse, and never once drew his bridle until he had crossed the Tees, and had left behind him the territory of the Saint.”

Cuthbert was translated into his new shrine in 1104 when the Feretory of the Norman’s new Cathedral was ready to house the shrine of St Cuthbert. The saint’s body was once again found to be uncorrupt, meaning it still had sinew and flesh on the bones. It was at this opening that a pocket size book of the gospel of St John was removed from the coffin, now held at the British Library. It’s the oldest book in Europe still in its original binding, with its cover made from birch and goatskin. It is believed to have been made at the monastery at Monkwearmouth Jarrow and is known as *The Cuthbert Gospel*.

The next disturbance of the shrine was during the dissolution of the monasteries, with Henry VIII’s commissioners visiting Durham Cathedral late December 1539. An account of the opening is given in *The Rites of Durham*, or to use its full title *Rites of Durham being a description or brief declaration of all the ancient monuments, rites, and customs belonging or being within the monastical Church of Durham before the suppression*. It states, “... not only his body was whole and uncorrupted, but the vestments wherein his body lay and wherewithal he was accustomed to say mass, was fresh safe and not consumed.” The Kings Commissioners did remove many valuables and items gifted

to the Shrine of St Cuthbert, including *The Lindisfarne Gospels*. Around 50 years later the gospel book was accounted for in Jewel House at the Tower of London, and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was acquired by bibliophile Sir Robert Cotton, whose heirs gifted it to the British Museum. It is now cared for at the British Library.

*The Rites of Durham* was written in 1593, previously thought to be anonymous. A modern edition published in 2020 attributes 16<sup>th</sup> century antiquarian William Claxton as the author. Earlier speculation had attributed George Bates, the last Registrar of Durham, and Clerk of the Feretory before the Dissolution as its author.

The next time the tomb was opened is by James Raine on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1827. He was accompanied by the Sub-Dean, a Prebend, other observers and masons and labours. Raine considered the story of Cuthbert's uncorrupt body to be "... a tale of centuries, invented for interested purposes in a superstitious age." Upon the opening of the tomb, he described the skeleton of Cuthbert as being "disjointed and detached from each other... There was not the slightest particle of soil, or any other trace of human flesh in a state of decomposition."

Raine discovered items that the Kings Commissioners had failed to find in 1539 because they were tightly wrapped within the cloth bound around the saint. These include the pectoral cross that is part of the Treasures of St Cuthbert on display in Durham Cathedral's Museum.

James Raine wrote, "The cross is of gold – but the gold appears to have undergone some process, tending to deaden its lustre, for its dingy appearance can scarcely be the effect of time. There is a large garnet in the centre, one in each angle, and twelve upon each of its branches... I consider the above cross as a personal

relic of St Cuthbert himself. Its deep situation prevented the possibility of it being described by Reginald, as, during the operations of 1104, it must necessarily have been concealed from view ; but that the Monks of Durham were acquainted with the fact, that St Cuthbert had attached more than ordinary value to a cross of this very shape may be proved from the circumstance, that when once finally settled in Durham as Convent, in 1083, they adopted for their seal a similar cross, with the circumscription The Seal of Cuthbert The Holy Bishop.”

Other objects found include St Cuthbert’s Comb, his portable silver altar, and the stole, maniple and girdle presented to Cuthbert in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by King Aethelstan. Raine tells of how these, “... were not restored to the grave, but were deposited in the Library of the Dean and Chapter, where they are now preserved.”

The last time the tomb was opened was in 1899 on the instruction of Canon William Greenwell. In 1827 James Raine had removed most of the fragments of St Cuthbert’s Coffin that was made in 698 when the saint was buried for the second time, eleven years after his death. William Greenwell recovered further fragments that were missed in the earlier excavation. It is Greenwell who first attempted to piece together the fragments forming the coffin that is seen today. The 7<sup>th</sup> century wooden carvings include figures of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, apostles, and archangels.

The 1899 opening also included a full examination of bones of St Cuthbert, removing them completely from the shrine to do so. This was carried out by Canon Dr Joseph Fowler and Dr Selby Plummer. The written report of the examination includes the following, “It is quite possible that the remains existed for a long time in a mummified condition, and the adherence of a

membranous covering or layer still discernible on the bones is strong evidence of such a fact. The interment within a stone coffin in the sandy soil of Lindisfarne may be a sufficient cause of mummification.”

Our walk continues into Durham City and to a sculpture called ‘The Journey’ which shows six monks carrying the coffin of St Cuthbert.

### **Stop 7 – The Journey by Fenwick Lawson**

The story of St Cuthbert has been the inspiration for many artists and writers.

We are standing next to The Journey, a sculpture by Fenwick Lawson, a County Durham artist who studied at Sunderland College of Art, now part of the University of Sunderland, and then at the Royal College of Art, London. Fenwick Lawson’s website describes him as, “... a contemporary British sculptor with an international reputation who is based in the north-east of England.” After his studies Fenwick Lawson was awarded a scholarship to travel around Europe experiencing first-hand the work of Michelangelo and Donatello. When he was in Greece he saw Cycladic art for the first time, the ancient art form of figures often with a flat face, folded arms, and exaggerated features. The influence of Cycladic art can be seen in The Journey and other works by Fenwick Lawson.

The Journey in Durham is made of bronze and is a replica of an earlier version he made in wood that can be seen in St Mary’s Church, Lindisfarne. The sculpture depicts six monks carrying St Cuthbert’s Coffin.



Writing about Saint Cuthbert starts with the anonymous account of his life written on Lindisfarne around 700AD. His story has been depicted by monks, scholars, historians, poets, playwrights and novelists ever since.

Robert Hegge was born in Durham in 1599, going on to study at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He wrote a thesis on St Cuthbert in the 1620s which he called *Saint Cuthbert; or the Histories of his Churches at Lindisfarne, Cuncacestre, and Dunholme*, that is a history of his churches at Lindisfarne, Chester-le-Street and Durham. In 1663 a copy was published citing an anonymous author calling it *The Legend of St Cuthbert, with the Antiquities of the Church of Durham*. Further editions were published in 1777, 1816 and 1824 which did name the author.

In 2013 Durham based publisher Langley Press published a modern English version by Simon Webb. In its forward Simon Webb says, “Hegge admires many things about Cuthbert, but he can’t bring himself to believe in any of the miracles attributed to him either before or after this death.” Webb continues, “The acid of Hegge’s scorn does not, however, tarnish the reputations of the good and learned men and women he praises in his Legend. He also appreciates the literature, scholarship, art and architecture the church has handed down to us and laments the condition of what Shakespeare calls the ‘bare ruin’d choirs’; the remains of the mighty monasteries that once dominated the English landscape.” The late 18<sup>th</sup> century / early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw renewed interest in the Anglo-Saxon period. Several renowned writers and poets of the period reference St Cuthbert in their work.

Robert Southey was poet laureate from 1813 up to his death in 1843. He called two of his children after Herbert and Cuthbert.

On the birth of Cuthbert Southey writes in a letter to his patron Sir George Beaumont, “I mean to call him Cuthbert; you who know Wordsworth’s poems so well will understand why. From most people I keep such feelings out of sight, as if I were ashamed of them, and for them it is reason enough that it is a good Saxon name, still in use in Northumberland and Durham.” Sadly, the son Robert Southey called Herbert had died three years earlier, aged nine.

In his letter Southey refers to his friend William Wordsworth whose work was often influenced by stories of Anglo-Saxon saints. Wordsworth’s poem *Inscription* tells of the relationship between Herbert of Derwentwater, in the Lake District and Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, Northumbria. The poem concludes:

...and when he pac’d  
Along the beach of this small isle and thought  
Of his Companion, he would pray that both  
Might die in the same moment. Nor in vain  
So pray’d he: - as our Chronicles report,  
Though here the Hermit number’d his last days,  
Far from St Cuthbert his beloved Friend,  
These holy men both died in the same hour.

Wordsworth’s poem is a reference to the miracle as described by Bede of prophecy that Herbert and Cuthbert would die at the same time.

Another writer of the same period is Sir Walter Scott. He grew up in the Scottish borders close to Northumberland, England and includes the story of St Cuthbert in his epic poem *Marmion*. The second Canto includes this passage:

How, when the rude Dane burned their pile,  
The monks fled forth from Holy Isle;  
O'er northern mountain, marsh, and moor,  
From sea to sea, from shore to shore,  
Seven years Saint Cuthbert's corpse they bore.

In 1827 Sir Walter Scott was a guest of the Bishop of Durham at a dinner held in honour of the Duke of Wellington at Durham Castle. A number of Sir Walter Scott's works are inspired by stories of North East England, such as his epic poem *Rokeby*. Scott's words are also immortalised in stone on Prebend's Bridge, Durham, with a quotation from another of his epic poems *Harold the Dauntless*. It reads:

Grey towers of Durham  
Yet well I love thy mixed and massive piles  
Half Church of God, half castle 'gainst the Scot  
And long to roam these venerable aisles  
With records stored of deeds long since forgot.

19<sup>th</sup> century art critic and commentator, John Ruskin declared the view of Durham Cathedral and Castle as “the eighth wonder of the world.” A more recent version of this sentiment was penned by America travel writer Bill Bryson, who describes Durham as, “the best Cathedral on planet Earth” in *Notes from a Small Island*.

Geoffrey Moorhouse was a journalist and author. His book *The Devine Last Office, Henry VIII and the Dissolution of the Monasteries* was published in 2008 as an account of the consequences of the King's spilt with the church of Rome using material and resources written about Durham Cathedral. It includes an Epilogue that gives a glimpse of modern life at Durham Cathedral. Moorhouse explains how until 2001 The Dean

and Chapter of Durham Cathedral still functioned according to statutes dating back to Tudor period. He goes on to describe a significant moment in 2005, “Four years after the constitution and statutes were altered came another shift of emphasis, when Cuthbert’s name was restored to the dedication, so that 464 years after he was dismissed by Henry VIII, this again became the Cathedral Church of Christ, Blessed Mary the Virgin and St Cuthbert of Durham. That mattered a great deal to the people of the North, to the ones who worship here regularly, to those who attend services infrequently, to the many who enter this Cathedral only a handful of times in the whole of their lives but still feel that it belongs to them.”

Fictional accounts of the story of Saint Cuthbert include Katharine Tiernan’s trilogy *Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, Place of Respose, and New Heaven and a New Earth*. It begins with Cuthbert as a boy and ends in the year 1092 with the new Cathedral built around his shrine about to appear.

The most recent fictional account is Benjamin Myers’ novel *Cuddy*, which also journeys through time. Cuthbert’s influence is felt by fictional characters present at key moments in his saintly story and that of the Cathedral built in his honour; with profound consequence to each.

Our journey continues, turning south to Durham Marketplace and up, onto the Durham World Heritage Site and to Durham Cathedral.

## **Stop 8 – Durham Cathedral (on the Durham UNESCO World Heritage Site)**

Durham was settled in 995 by the community of St Cuthbert, also known as the 'Haliwerfolc' which is old English for 'folk of the holy man'.

Overtime the community of St Cuthbert had changed from a monastic community of celibate brothers to a community of married priests. The 'Haliwerfolc' were believed to direct descents of the bearers of the coffin of Saint Cuthbert, who first carried him across the sands off the island of Lindisfarne in 875.

There has been much speculation as to how the community of Saint Cuthbert arrived in Durham. There is Symeon's account of how the wheel of the cart carrying Cuthbert's coffin became stuck in the mud. Symeon doesn't mention the community following a milk maid, when the wheel of the cart does become free. However, legend has it, that when the community decided to go to Dunholm as instructed to by Saint Cuthbert in answer to a prayer, two milk maids were close by. One was looking for her cow and the other told her it had been seen wandering towards Dunholm. The whole community followed the milk maids and therefore arrived in what was to become Durham.

Durham Cathedral as we know it today was built as part of the Norman conquest of England, after William the Conqueror's victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The Normans arrived in Durham in the early 1070s, securing the area with the building of a wooden castle, which was then rebuilt in stone.

The Norman Bishops of Durham were awarded Prince Bishop status by William the Conqueror. This gave them the power to raise an army and mint their own coins. A steward to Anthony Bek, Bishop of Durham 1264-1311 is recorded as saying, "There are two kings in England, namely the Lord King of England,

wearing a crown in sign of his regality and the Lord Bishop of Durham wearing a mitre in place of a crown, in sign of his regality in the diocese of Durham.” In essence they ruled a semi-autonomous buffer state between Norman conquered England and lands that the Normans wished to conquer further to the north.

In 1083 the Normans replaced the ‘Haliwerfolc’ with a community of Benedictine monks. Most of the Benedictine monks came from the nearby joint monastery of St Peter and St Paul, in Monkwearmouth and Jarrow.

The Anglo-Saxon monastic community at Monkwearmouth Jarrow had been destroyed by the Vikings in the 860s. It had been reestablished in the early 1070s by Aldwin, a monk from Winchcombe, who travelled north specifically to reestablish the northern monasteries, bringing with him two brothers Elfwy and Reinfrid.

Symeon of Durham says of Aldwin, “He had understood from Bede’s History of the Angles that the province of the Northumbrians had formerly been peopled with numerous bands of monks and many troops of saints who while in the flesh lived not after the flesh but rejoiced in devoting themselves even while upon earth to a heavenly conversation.”

Aldwin was to become the first Prior of the Benedictine community of monks installed by the Normans. Symeon gives an account of how the married priests of the community of Saint Cuthbert, were told they could only remain at Durham if they became Monks. Only one chose to do so, whose son had already become a monk at the refounded monastery at Monkwearmouth Jarrow.

The building of the Norman Cathedral started in 1093, under the Bishop William of Calais, and was completed by Bishop Ranulf Flambard. A detail which is described a 1902 edition of *Rites of Durham* is that Bishop Ranulf Flambard, in accordance with the intention of Bishop William of Calais, "... did erect a monument of a milk maid milking her cow...in a thankful remembrance of that maid which so fortunately in their great perplexity directed them to Dunholm". This reference to the monument in the Rites of Durham is likely inserted into the document in the 1620s. The statue seen in relief seen today is a late 18<sup>th</sup> century replacement and is on the exterior of the north-west turret of the Chapel of Nine Altars at the East End of the cathedral.

A Benedictine monastery was refounded at Lindisfarne in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as a daughter house of the monastery at Durham. It is at this stage that Lindisfarne, becomes known as the Holy Island of Lindisfarne.

Cuthbert is regarded as one of the first environmentalists. He created a 7<sup>th</sup> century law protecting Eider ducks, a seawater duck, still found on the Northumberland coast and East coast of southern Scotland. They are affectionately known as Cuddy ducks.

An extract from Benjamin Myer's novel *Cuddy* reads:

"My repertoire is expanding. Fish and pheasant, cockle and pig, chicken and whelk, goose and oyster, winkle and partridge. Deer, boar and woodcock. All go into my pot.

Anything but duck that is, because the duck was sacred to Cuddy, and some, the biggest of them all, those that live on the rocks

around his old island home, are named in his honour, and for whom he created laws of protection.”

An extract from Benjamin Myers’ *Cuddy* toward the end of the book is a succinct summary of Saint Cuthbert’s life:

“I believe there once was a man called Cuthbert who they reckon tended sheep as a boy, and became a monk who lived on a rock, and his body was sometimes kept in a cave and then, when the Vikings came, carried all about the place. And then, later, when the folk who carried him got tired or saw a cow and received a sign, depending on what you believe, they built first a church to house his body, then a bigger church and then the cathedral, and Durham was born. And there his bones lie today, sealed beneath stone, where Japanese tourists kneel, and the café sells scones the size of your fist. And he is you.”

Pilgrims and tourists come from near and far to wonder at Durham Cathedral, which is here because of Saint Cuthbert. The East End houses his shrine, in the Feretory. The West End houses the shrine of the Venerable Bede, chronicler of Saint Cuthbert’s life, and learned monk and scholar.

Durham was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986, with Cuthbert’s Shrine at its heart. It incorporates the Castle, which has been part of Durham University since it was founded by Bishop William Van Mildert in 1832. Van Mildert was also the last of the Prince Bishops.

The summary description of the Durham on UNESCO’s website states, “Durham Cathedral was built in the late 11th and early 12th centuries to house the relics of St Cuthbert (evangelizer of Northumbria) and the Venerable Bede. It attests to the



importance of the early Benedictine monastic community and is the largest and finest example of Norman architecture in England. The innovative audacity of its vaulting foreshadowed Gothic architecture. Behind the cathedral stands the castle, an ancient Norman fortress which was the residence of the prince-bishops of Durham.”

Benjamin Myers’ novel *Cuddy* includes this passage:

“He explains to me that it brings him close to Cuddy, Cuddy

Who exchewed the comforts of the priory

Who prayed deep in the swell of the sea

Who ate only onions in his dying days

Who walked the wintered hills alone

Who prayed beneath a quilt of stars

Who cured the sick with a glance

Who shepherded all lost souls

Who moved the sand dunes

Who turned back the tides

Who preached only love

Who inspired devotion

Who bore all burdens

Who lived with grace

Who quietly suffered

Who sought silence

Who sought solace

Who found silence

Who found solace

Who entrusts us

Who becalms us

Who guides us

Who is sainted

Who sits upon

Our worthy  
Shoulders  
Cuddy o  
Cuddy  
o o o.