

The Whitby Pilgrimage July 2014



Session 1 An introduction to Pilgrimage

A few years ago we had a Lincoln pilgrimage to Durham, based at St John's College. I think a fair number of you were there. I gave an extended introduction to the concept of pilgrimage then, so I don't want to repeat myself too much today, except to begin with a slightly cynical but I think quite wise quotation from a ninth century Irish Abbot, which has always amused me:

Who to Rome goes
Much labour little profit knows;
For God on earth though long you've sought him,
You'll miss in Rome unless you've brought him.

Nevertheless, so often the meaning is discovered while on the journey; and as we know, the Bible is full of journeys where what is discovered on the journey is as significant in many ways as getting to the journey's end.

Abraham's journey is pretty well the first and finest example of this and, in the New Testament, we find that Jesus himself has no permanent earthly home. We are told that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. He is constantly on the move in Galilee and then makes his single-minded journey to Jerusalem not to be a religious tourist and admire the amazing Temple and the architecture of the great city, but to sacrifice his life for the human race..

But the Apostolic Church was also called out into a journey; to the uttermost ends of the earth. And Hebrews sees us travelling in faith by faith, seeking a new Jerusalem, not built with human hands, while having on earth no abiding city.

In our own Islands, the old Celtic sense of pilgrimage, of journey, was always something driven by the Holy Spirit, not necessarily seeking any specific destination, or even a specific Holy place, but simply discovering afresh Christ in the journey and sharing that discovery and knowledge wherever the Spirit had blown you. After all, in St John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life and that we are called to walk in his way to discover his life and truth.

The great Irish missionary St Columba is credited with putting it this way:

The path I walk, Christ walks it.
May the land in which I am be without sorrow.
May the Trinity protect me whenever I stray,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Bright angels walk with me –
dear presence - in every dealing.
In every dealing I pray them
that no one's poison may reach me.
The ninefold people of heaven of holy cloud,
the tenth force of the stout earth.
Favourable company, they come with me,
So that the Lord may not be angry with me.
May I arrive at every place,
may I return home;
may the way in which I spend be a way without loss.
May every path before me be smooth,
Man, woman and child welcome me.
A truly good journey!
Well does the fair Lord show us a course, a path.

When we truly go on pilgrimage, I believe we are simultaneously making two types of journey.

The first is an outward journey, travelling in good company, sharing the journey with each other, the Good Shepherd our companion. On this type of journey, we enjoy each other's company. We learn together; we share insights with each other; we pray together; we celebrate together, we might face dangers together; we break bread together, at the table of hospitality and in the Eucharistic sharing. And together we begin to feel stronger and bolder in faith, more ready to witness, more willing to become an evangelist. We gather together so that we may find Jesus in the midst of us and then go out in his name. Thus we become Church together. We become God's people together, the Body of Christ together, the Temple of the Spirit together.

But there is also likely to be a **second type of journey** going on, sometimes even when we seem to be journeying outward together. Sometimes we need to draw apart for a little while to enable this journey to take hold or progress.

It is the interior journey.

On this journey, our hearts and souls, each one of them, is being drawn into the heart of God, is being called to experience the love of God in a particular and personal way. It is being drawn by Jesus, who, out of his love for us, died for us, and who seeks to bring us into the presence of our heavenly Father. It

is about being held in the hand of God, it is about glimpsing something of the beatific vision. It is entering into a deep down silence, answering the call of one who speaks to us as he spoke to Elijah of old, in the voice of perfect stillness.

These two journeys, outward and inward, are complementary, together they help us to become what God is calling us to be, corporately, because we are a people; individually, because each one of us is a person, made in the image of God.

Well, now for **one or two more quotations** to help us on our way:

The first comes from one of my favourite poets, the great Welsh poet R.S. Thomas who, having observed the activity of bees, describes the purpose of pilgrimage this way:

The point of travelling is not
To arrive but to return home
Laden with pollen you shall work up
Into honey the mind feeds on.

Then there are those verses from the Pilgrim Psalms 120 and 134:

I was glad when they said to me,
'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'
Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Psalm 134 offers us reassurance and protection on our journeys:

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

Of course, at times in the high Middle Ages on the **Eve of the Reformation**, some pilgrimages had become corrupt jollies, or encouraged superstition through the buying and selling of relics and pardons; and had lost something of their spiritual innocence and humble expectations. This caused Martin Luther to condemn them out of hand:

All pilgrimages should be stopped. There is no good in them; no commandment enjoins them, no obedience attaches to them. Rather do

these pilgrimages give countless occasions to commit sin and to despise God's commandments.'

There is an element of this form of Protestant suspicion and negativity about pilgrimages, even to the present day. But the allegorical significance of pilgrimage was powerfully rediscovered in the heart of the more evangelical Protestant tradition itself by John Bunyan.

As you probably know, Bunyan was an itinerant tinker and Baptist preacher, who was imprisoned for preaching without a licence. While in prison in 1672 he wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress'. And we all no doubt remember the famous hymn based on it. This is it in its original form:

Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.

Whoso beset him round
With dismal stories
Do but themselves confound;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright,
He'll with a giant fight,
He will have a right
To be a pilgrim.

Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
Can daunt his spirit,
He knows he at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies fly away,
He'll fear not what men say,
He'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim.

I'll finish with one more poem. It is anonymous but I think quite contemporary:

To the Pilgrim

Set out!
You were born for the road.
Set out!
You have a meeting to keep.
Where? With whom?
Perhaps with yourself.

Set out!
Your steps will be your words –
The road your song,
The weariness your prayers,
And at the end Your silence will speak to you.

Set out!
Alone, or with others –
But get out of yourself!
You have created rivals -
You will find companions.
You envisaged enemies –
You will find brothers and sisters.

Set out!
Your head does not know
Where your feet are leading your heart.

Set out!
You were born for the road –
The pilgrim's road.
Someone is coming to meet you –
Is seeking you
In the shrine at the end of the road –
In the shrine at the depths of your heart.

He is your peace.
He is your joy!

Go!
God already walks with you!

Session 2

A History Timeline, Hilda, and an Introduction to the Themes

A Brief Introduction

In your Pilgrimage folders I have included a very brief summary of the coming of Christianity to Britain, with some relevant dates, so that you might have a ready reference to the context for some of our thinking and for Wednesday's visits. Those who went to Lindisfarne last summer would have received a similar list then, so there is no need for me to go over all of this in any detail.

But I would like to remind us of one or two things. For example, **Christianity came to our region in three ways**, one of them illustrated by my present appointment.

One of the curious things about my present appointment is that I am Vicar of a United Benefice with notionally three Churches: St Mary Magdalene on Castle Square; St Michael on the Mount, which is part hotel and part the Lincoln School of Theology; and St Paul in the Bail, which is simply an outline marked on the ground with paving stones. Well, on Ascension Day this year we sort of reclaimed the location and celebrated the Eucharist in the open air on the site of the old chancel of St Paul's, using the Victorian altar table from the last of the churches on that site.

There was a wonderful atmosphere, not least because of the fact that Christianity had been celebrated on that site for at least 1700 years. It had come to Lindum Colonia, the Roman Empire's regional capital. It had its own Romano British Bishop, who attended the Council of Arles in 314 AD. We even know his name, Adelphius.

So this is the first way: through the Roman Empire, just a couple of hundred years, if that, since the writing of the Gospels. Hardly 300 years since the birth of Jesus, Christianity was flourishing in Lincoln.

It had not completely disappeared when the 2nd of the great Christian Missions was sent by Pope Gregory the Great in the 6th century, eventually represented in our region in the early 7th century by St Paulinus, who baptised many in Lincoln and York.

And then the third of the great Christian missions came from early British Christianity with its origins in Wales, through the conversion of Ireland and what is now Scotland, through Lindisfarne and Bishop Aidan in the early 7th Century. In Anglo-Saxon days the major kingdom of Northumbria became solidly Christian, while the minor kingdom of Lindsey, along with the major

kingdom of Mercia, had its Christianity restored after the pagan King Penda's death.

A Question of Authority

I have sketched in this historical background to bring us to one of the most important and dramatic events in the history of the Church in the British Isles, the Synod of Whitby in 664AD. To get the full flavour of this Synod you need to read Chapter 25 of Book 3 of Bede's *History of the English Church and People*.

At first sight the debate between the Roman way on the one hand and the Celtic/Irish way on the other, seems obscure and tedious. For example, calculating the dating of Easter and the shape of the tonsure. But the real debate was not about this sort of detail, although it proved to be the trigger; the real debate was about authority. And here there were significant differences between the Roman and Celtic approach.

But first, the trigger. King Oswy of Northumbria was baptised and brought up in the Northumbrian Church, after the teaching of Lindisfarne. But his Queen, Eanfled was from Kent. Her chaplain, ironically, was named Romanus. Things came to a head when one year Oswy was celebrating Easter, when Eanfled was still celebrating Palm Sunday. The King was feasting, the Queen was fasting. Not unreasonably, the King felt that as they were all Christians they should be united about these of things.

The great teaching monastery of Whitby, under its distinguished Abbess Hilda hosted the Synod. Bishop Colman put the Northumbrian case. Abbot Wilfrid put the Roman case. There was only one member of the jury and that was the King. He would decide.

Colman traced his authority back to St John the Evangelist and the lives of Columba, the Irish saints and the holiness of the Celtic mission and the monastic life.

Wilfrid's was to show how all of Western Europe kept the Roman date of Easter – in fact he incorrectly claimed the whole church everywhere except in the North of Britain and Ireland kept the Roman discipline. Why should Northumbria follow the teachings on the date of Easter of some obscure monks from the edge of the known world, while Rome and the whole of the Western world did differently. Of course Wilfrid's ace card was Peter and Rome and 'on this rock I will build my church.'

Colman was flummoxed by Wilfrid's aggressive debating style and the sheer contempt Wilfrid had for the Irish tradition. It is typified in this paragraph:

Concerning your father Columba and his followers, whose sanctity you say you imitate, and whose rules and precepts you observe, which have been confirmed by signs from heaven, I may answer that when many, on the day of judgement, shall say to our Lord, 'That in his name they prophesied and cast out devils and wrought many wonders' our Lord will reply 'That he never knew them'.

What a sneering argument, an insufferable retort from one man of God to another, it is a glimpse of the pride and arrogance of spirit of Wilfrid. You can see the curl of the lip against the Church which had first trained him before he went to Rome.

I guess this would have shocked Hilda and probably the King also; and so Wilfrid backtracked a little with a rather clumsy apology. But Colman was no debater and anyway I think the King had already made up his mind, even before the debate, that his decision would go in favour of the adoption of Roman practices and with his Queen.

Now it wasn't all bad. The Roman Church was to give to the English Church something of the strength of the old Roman imperial administration at its best. But it was top down. Rome granted sainthood, organised geographical dioceses, appointed monarchical bishops, built great stone churches and cathedrals, and reorganised monasteries according to the Benedictine Rule. And Rome provided a universal authority. Of course, these were all organisational aspects, which during the course of history were themselves to prove capable of corruption and distortion.

But the Celtic way had been about the Llan, the local, the tribe, the community, the monastery rather than the diocese. It was bottom up in recognising the saints and acknowledging holiness. There was an attractive simplicity in the life style of Illtud, Bridgit, Patrick, Columba, Columbanus, Aidan, Hilda and their followers. There was real joy and humility in their missionary journeys and their openness to the warmth and wind of the Spirit. The Abbot or Abbess was the administrator. The Bishop was the man of prayer, the holy hermit or the brave but gentle leader of the mission.

We might keep some of these things in mind when we get closer to some of the pilgrimage themes. But we might also reflect on the fact that the Church of England will be in General Synod in York this weekend and will vote on the consecration of women to the Episcopate. How does the Church handle debate and controversy today? Will there be modern day Wilfrids with curling lips and clever rhetoric? Will there be naïve and flummoxed Colmans who will sadly retreat? Will there be powers behind the throne determined to get their own way?

Two Pilgrimage Themes

1 Leading the Vowed Life

We are guests of a Religious Community. We will worship with the community in their Chapel. The real roots of this Community and its chapel lie within the revival of the religious Life in the Church of England in the latter part of the 19th century and the beginnings of the 20th. But, of course, there are deeper roots still, back into 7th Century Northumbria and the double monastery of the great Abbess Hilda. And so we will continue to draw on aspects of this early way of living the vowed life as our time together develops.

But we will remember that there is also a ruined medieval Benedictine Abbey on the site of Hilda's original abbey which was destroyed by the Vikings. The Rule of this Abbey was that of St Benedict. And we too are inheritors in some way of the Benedictine Rule, especially in regard to the shape of Anglican daily prayer. The Morning and Evening Prayer of the Book of Common Prayer is a masterpiece in Benedictine style writing by Thomas Cranmer and is the Prayer Book at its best.

There is the ordered reading of the scriptures and the reciting of the whole Book of Psalms, with a selection of morning and evening canticles. The Seven Monastic Offices have been edited beautifully into two Offices and include more scripture than the old Breviary. eg Vespers and Compline became Evensong. This Benedictine spirit has been carefully carried over into Common Worship and makes accessible aspects of the Benedictine Rule to all Christians, not just the clergy.

Tomorrow, Sister Heather Francis, will lead us further on this theme of the vowed life.

St Hilda

But, of course, we cannot come to Whitby without spending a few moments looking more closely at St Hilda.

Sixteen or seventeen years ago in the parish of St Peter, Stockton on Tees an old friend and very devout parishioner died. She had been a teacher and had trained at the College of St Hild in Durham University. Her husband, mindful of her love of teaching and of her old college, commissioned a pair of new windows for the Church and it seemed right to both of us to portray St Hilda in some way.

We commissioned Bridget Jones, a Newcastle artist and together we read Bede's account of the life of Hilda and then and sat and looked at the bare windows together in silence. Out of this discussion and contemplation came two beautiful windows one of Hilda and the other of her mother, Breguswith. We had been taken, not only by the story of the mature Abbess Hilda, but with Bede's account of her mother's dream.

According to Bede, Hilda was born in 614, the second daughter of Hereric, nephew of Edwin of Northumbria, and his wife Breguswith. She was born in Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland. When Hilda was still an infant, her father was murdered by poison while in exile at the court of the British King of Elmet in what is now Yorkshire. She was brought up at King Edwin's court in Northumbria. In 627 King Edwin was baptised on Easter Day, April 12, along with his entire court, which included Hilda, by Bishop Paulinus

And now to the dream:

In this dream Breguswith fancied that her husband was suddenly taken away, and although she searched everywhere, she could find no trace of him. When all her efforts had failed, she discovered a most valuable jewel under her garments; and as she looked closely, it emitted such a brilliant light that all Britain was lit by its splendour. This dream was fulfilled in her daughter, whose life afforded a shining example not only to herself but all who wished to live a good life.

Bede resumes her story at a point when she was about to join her widowed sister at Chelles Abbey near Paris. At the age of 33, Hilda decided instead to answer the call of Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne and chose to return to Northumbria to live as a nun.

After a year Aidan appointed Hilda 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, Hartlepool.

In 657 Hilda became the founding abbess of Whitby Abbey, then known as *Streonshalh*; she remained there until her death. 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.

Bede states that 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. Five men from this monastery later became bishops.

Bede describes Hilda as a woman of great energy, who was a skilled administrator and teacher. She gained such a reputation for wisdom that kings and princes sought her advice. She also had a concern for ordinary folk such as Cædmon, a herder at the monastery, who was inspired in a dream to sing verses in praise of God. Hilda recognized his gift and encouraged him to develop it. Bede writes, "All who knew her called her mother because of her outstanding devotion and grace".

In the end, Hilda suffered from a fever for the last six years of her life, but she continued to work until her death on November 17th, 680AD, at what was then the advanced age of sixty-six. In her last year she set up another monastery, fourteen miles from Whitby, at Hackness. She died after receiving the viaticum, and her legend holds that at the moment of her death the bells of the monastery of Hackness tolled. A nun there named Begu claimed to have witnessed Hilda's soul being borne to heaven by angels.

We are getting to the close of this talk, but I suppose I ought to include a popular legend which tells of a plague of snakes which Hilda turned to stone, supposedly explaining the presence of ammonite fossils on the shore; heads were carved onto these 'petrified snakes' to honour this legend. In fact, the ammonite genus *Hildoceras* takes its scientific name from St. Hilda. It was not unknown for local "artisans" to carve snakes' heads onto ammonites, and sell these "relics" as proof of her miracle.

The veneration of St. Hilda from an early period is attested by the inclusion of her name in the calendar of St. Willibrord of the 8th Century.

And finally, I'd like us to note that she had been on the side of the Celtic tradition in the debate at the Synod of Whitby, that she had been saddened by its conclusion, but accepted the decision with grace and continued to work for the unity of the church throughout the land.

Tomorrow we will hear of another who coped with great grace at this time of triumph of the Roman over the Irish traditions in Church life and government.

Session 3: Whitby, Rosedale and Lastingham

Whitby

Tomorrow, after we have walked through Whitby's famous quayside, the quayside from which the great navigator, Captain James Cook, set out on his voyages to Australia and New Zealand. We will ascend the 199 steps. At the top of the steps, with a fine view over the harbour, we will see three significant things, relevant to our story and pilgrimage:

The first, is Caedmon's Cross. It was erected in 1898, funding for it having been raised by Canon Rawnsley, the founder of the National Trust. An open air service was held and the poet laureate, Alfred Austin, also attended, claiming to be no Viking invader,' but a Northumbrian through and through'.

The cross is a copy of the famous Northumbrian carved standing crosses and tells something of Caedmon's story and that of Hilda. There is also a translation of Caedmon's hymn. The former monastery herdsman, turned lay brother, composed and sang his poems and hymns in a Northumbrian dialect and might have been of British origins. Bede writes:

There was in Hilda's monastery a brother known to be favoured by God because of his practice of composing songs specifically about his belief and faith. Whatever he learnt from the Holy Book, by hearing it read aloud, he quickly and spontaneously rendered as poetry – particularly sweet and moving poetry – in his own language of English. Many were influenced by his songs to reject materialism and seek a Christian life.

So when we get to the top, have a close look at this very fine standing cross in the old Northumbrian tradition.

The second thing we see is the Parish Church. It was originally commissioned by Abbot William de Percy in about 1110. He was Abbot of the male Benedictine monastery that succeeded Hilda's monastery destroyed by the Danes in the 9th century. St Mary's Church is thought to be built on or near the site of St Peter's Church which served Hilda's monastery.

From the outside, it looks like a pretty decent medieval church, progressively enlarged from a Norman rectangle to the typical cruciform shape with a chancel nave and transepts.

But when we enter the Church, everything has changed. There is a wonderful three-decker pulpit, box pews, a balcony with the Lord of the Manor's pew and its own outside staircase. It is a classic Reformation interior, slightly rebalanced in more recent times to reveal more of the chancel, altar and other earlier features.

What are the positives of this interior?

I would suggest that it reflects a major Reformation rebalancing of Christian worship in favour of the Bible and a form of worship understandable to the people. In other words, worship and teaching is in English with a powerful rediscovery of the Bible at the heart of daily life and discipleship. The high medieval emphasis on largely non-communicating Masses in Latin, round a distant altar, has given way spectacularly to a Ministry of the Word in English, in your midst. The desire was to move from something increasingly obscure and potentially superstitious to a transparent and demanding Biblical clarity.

This interior reminds us of the importance and indeed priority of the Ministry of the Word, and the Book of Common Prayer, in the story of English Christianity and especially in the character of the Church of England. No ten-minute happy homilies in this tradition, but real Biblical teaching.

What are the negatives?

They can be both spiritual and social. Spiritual, in that the balancing toward the Word meant in practice a diminution of the ministry of the Sacrament. Cranmer, of course, wanted regular Communion, but he had reduced the sacramental mystery and the sense of the numinous and the altar had been pushed into the background, often hidden and neglected. The appeal of art and sculpture, colour and movement, had been replaced by something inclined to be over wordy, over intellectual, worshipping God with your mind, but what about your heart and soul and emotions?

The other negative is social, class-ridden. The Lord of the manor is separated from the people and lords it over them in church as well as daily life. The Cholmley pew was built in front of the chancel arch between 1600 and 1625, completely disrupting the eye-lines of the church, which formerly would have led to the high altar. Who is now worshipped in this church? God or the Lord of the Manor? And as for you, you pay pew rent, at gallery or floor level, if you can afford it, to secure a decent seat for you and your family, within hearing distance of the pulpit. If you cannot afford it, you are left with a harsh bench

near the door, or where you can hardly see or hear. Church reinforces and sanctifies the class system rather than challenging and softening it.

However, the Reformation church is not without charity, there being a charity bread cupboard through the door from the vestibule into the nave.

The third thing we see is the ruined Abbey. This of course is the second Abbey to be ruined on this site. The first was Hilda's double monastery, destroyed by the Vikings. It was made of simple buildings chiefly in wood and wattle, of which nothing really is left behind. The second is the ruined men's Benedictine monastery, founded by a follower of William the Conqueror and dissolved by Henry VIII in 1540. This was no Viking pagan conquest, but the work of a Christian King, Defender of the Faith, and supreme Governor, head of the English Church. Was this Reformation or Rapacity? Christian renewal or thinly disguised theft, a way of grabbing much land and a great deal of historic treasure and artifacts?

Since then the abbey fell into ruins, became a useful landmark for sailors, inspired Bram Stoker to write *Dracula*, and was badly shelled by German Warships in the 1st World War, before being taken over by English heritage.

Rosedale Abbey

When we arrive at Rosedale Abbey, we will discover a pleasant Yorkshire Village, but where is the abbey or to be more accurate, the Priory? All we have is the remains of the 13th century stair turret, and a parish church in which bits of the priory have been included. Most of the priory buildings have been pillaged over the years and much of its stonework is incorporated in buildings and farms in and round Rosedale.

Rosedale priory was founded in the late 12th century as a Benedictine House for nuns. It was always small and relatively poor, a great many of the women's houses were. In addition to some income from managing their endowed lands, new nuns would usually be expected to bring a dowry to help pay for their keep.

The priory was founded for prayer, study and hospitality. A former Vicar of Lastingham put it this way:

A daily rhythm of prayer, once known as Opus Dei (the Work of God) formed the backbone of the religious life. In this way the community celebrated the joy and gladness of the world, expressed sorrow at its present pain and prayed for its healing, joining itself with the continuous cycle of prayer of the one Universal Church.

Study, primarily about interpreting the scriptures, asking what the Word of God was saying to them and their world.

Hospitality, for both friend and stranger, including the sick, the needy and the elderly.

The element of study might also include providing a little education in the local community. The nuns were often spare unmarried aristocratic women, or widows. The nobility would expect convents to take in aging and ill relatives. The King would sometimes levy heavy taxes on religious houses (eg in paying King Richard's ransom).

We must not have an over-romantic view of the medieval convent. Yes, the daily office and life of prayer and the giving of hospitality would be carried out to the best of the nuns ability, but times could be harsh. At least four times the convent had to cope with the plague, and once they were scattered by a marauding and pillaging Scottish army. Aged relatives of the aristocracy would be imposed on the nuns generosity, often not being reimbursed. The land would have to be managed, lay workers employed, a chaplain or chaplains engaged for the sacraments; some lay brothers and sisters recruited to help with the heavier work and so on.

The Archbishop of York in his Visitations recommended Friar Preachers as chaplains, since these men 'shone in the church as the brightness of the firmament'.

The prioress, as well as being a person of prayer under religious vows, also had to be a shrewd manager of people, both religious and lay, and competent at managing what in practice would be a quite complex business.

For most of its history, Rosedale Priory was relatively and sometimes miserably poor and small, usually a prioress and eight or so choir nuns. In 1413 the prioress was twice taken to court for debt owed, and one prioress was demoted for mismanagement. The annual income of Rosedale was about £37.

There are some amusing footnotes to some of the Archbishop of York's formal Visitations, for example, in the 14th Century:

- Rosedale nuns were forbidden to wear mantels or garments of gay colours
- The prioress and sub-prioress were told not to allow their puppies to enter the Church and impede the devotions.

Lastingham

I first visited Lastingham when I was a Leeds University student in the early 60's. At first you see a fine village medieval parish church well restored in the late 19th century by the eminent physician Sydney Ringer, who invented the famous saline drip. Some of the windows refer to his family.

But down a flight of stone steps you enter a Norman crypt, containing within it some carved stones which take us straight back into the Anglo Saxon era and echoes of the first monastery there of the Abbots, St Cedd and his younger brother, St Chad.

I was quite blown away by the experience and have had an affection for this Church and those two brothers ever since.

Cedd and Chad were two of four brothers, children and spiritual heirs of St Aidan's monastery at Lindisfarne. They were both well-travelled missionary monks in the spirit of St Aidan. If I remember rightly, Cedd converted the Middle Angles and East Saxons, including parts of Essex, remembered by the early Saxon Church at Bradwell. They both spoke Anglo Saxon, Irish and Latin and so were used as translators at the Synod of Whitby. Both loved the Lindisfarne way and like Hilda were on Colman's side of the debate. But again, like Hilda, when the decision went against them they conformed, made the best of it, and got on with the life of prayer, service and mission as before. We are told that throughout their lives they 'followed the monastic life together very strictly - in prayers and continence and in meditation on Holy Scripture'.

As well as studying at Lindisfarne, Chad went to Ireland to deepen his education. Bede tells us that the Irish monasteries gladly taught them and fed them and even let them use their valuable books without charge. This was real apostolic and monastic generosity.

Cedd died shortly after the Synod of Whitby from the plague and was succeeded as Abbot by Chad. But just a little side note here. Chad taught a young monk, called Trumbert at Lastingham. This same Trumbert, later went on to teach Bede at the double monastery of Jarrow and Wearmouth. This shows just how close Bede was to much of the history of which he wrote.

It wasn't only Cedd who died of the plague shortly after the Synod of Whitby, so did some of the bishops. So the King invited Wilfrid to be bishop of York, but he went off to Compiègne to be ordained and lingered there. Meanwhile, the people of Northumbria were without a bishop and needed to be cared for. So the King invited Chad, who was consecrated by some British, that is, 'Welsh' Bishops, and ministered to the Northumbrians.

Eventually Wilfrid came back and of course claimed his bishopric. There was a new Archbishop of Canterbury, sent by the Pope, the very energetic administrator, Theodore of Tarsus, a Greek bishop – sent to sort out the English Church and make it conform to best Roman practices. He instructed Chad to stand down and Wilfrid to take over. However, according to Bede, Theodore was so impressed by Chad's humility and grace in accepting this ruling, that he confirmed his ordination as Bishop, while letting him return to his monastery at Lastingham. Theodore also noticed that like Aidan, the generation before, Chad would not ride a horse, insisting on walking everywhere. Theodore went so far, not only to insist that Chad rode, but he even helped lift him into the saddle. – and he, Theodore, was a man in his 70s.

So it is no surprise that when the King of Mercia wanted a Bishop for his kingdom and the sub-kingdom of Lindsey, now under his control rather than that of Northumbria, Theodore invited Chad to take it up, making him in fact Bishop of what is now Lincolnshire and so directly associated with us. A monastery was established in Litchfield, eventually becoming Litchfield Cathedral. After a complex series of journeys, Chad's relics are now in the high altar of Birmingham's Roman Catholic Cathedral.

A significant feature of the medieval cult of St Chad is the ministry of healing, one of the reasons for us having the laying on of hands and anointing for healing in the crypt at Lastingham.

A Sermon for Lastingham

Over this last day or two I have been chiefly outlining some of the relevant history and story of the Church in Northumbria and Britain. In it we will have seen Christians disagreeing, debating, and at the Synod of Whitby getting close to a more aggressive confrontation, at least on Wilfrid's part. There was bound to be debate: Celts, Irishmen, Angles, Saxons, Romans and even a Greek Archbishop sent by a Roman Pope. We've heard them debating the tonsure, the date of Easter, and even apostolic authority: Peter or John, who comes first in the Kingdom of Heaven? And whose authority transfers itself to kingdoms on earth? These sound to me like very worldly ways of thinking.

But these peoples weren't the first to disagree, fall out, or be confrontational. What about Paul and Barnabas, that gentle soul, known as 'the son of encouragement' or 'the son of consolation'? What about Paul and the young man, Mark? What about Paul and? A pattern is beginning to develop here!

Well, what about Paul and Peter. Peter at first was generous to Paul and the desire to make the mission to the Gentiles less Jewish and more straight forward. And yet Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, roundly and quite crudely verbally attacks Peter for moral cowardice and backtracking. It seems that it was OK for Paul to be all things to all men, but not for Peter. So Wilfrid, with a sneer on his lips, wasn't the first apostle to play it rough.

And then we saw how the church reformed itself in a later age. It threw monks and nuns out of the cloister, sequestered monastic land and stole monastic contents. It left religious houses, whether larger at Whitby or small at Rosedale to be pillaged for building projects and left ruinous. What happened to monastic hospitality, health care and education, and a real caring for the land with good agricultural practices typified by the large Yorkshire Cistercian Houses. What happened to the disciplined life of prayer and the regular celebration of Holy Communion?

And throughout we have seen the church having to adapt to the rule of princes, whether princely prelates or Anglo-Saxon Kings or Protestant Lords of the manor. Squires build high pews even at the east end of churches, while Henry VIII goes so far as to make himself head of the Church. Kings and Queens and bigoted priests torture and burn their opponents at the stake on both sides of the religious divide. The Reformation debate descended into the

crudest and most violent and at times most manipulative disgrace. On all sides. Who can forget the Spanish Inquisition? With Monty Python coming back for an encore?

Today of course it is militant Islam which adopts violent jihad, and it is militant Sunni and Shia who carry out violent conflict with each other. But the churches still only pay lip service to Christian unity, in a genteel sort of way, while never quite rising to the challenge of Christian unity. The Anglican Communion does not know how to cope with gay and lesbian Christians; and in a few days' time the General Synod will revisit the making of women bishops. I hope our representatives find grace and generosity in their decision-making.

Faced with Iraq, Syria, South Sudan, the Ukraine, Israel, Palestine, Nigeria, Egypt and more, internationally - on the one hand. And, on the other, the need for food banks in England, while the rich grows richer and the Church Commissioners pull the rug out from under the Archbishop of Canterbury and invest in Wonga: --

We know that this world needs a powerful Christian message of repentance, reconciliation and healing, but so does the Church which is called to witness to that message.

In all of this, I think we have something to learn from Cedd and Chad and Hilda; and to be fair, from Theodore of Tarsus and Bede.

Bede was adamant about the date of Easter and the tonsure, and the rectitude of the Roman position and authority, but his heart melted before the stories of the transparent holiness, simplicity of life, missionary zeal, discipline in prayer and Biblical knowledge of Aidan and of the Irish monks and their Saxon students on Lindisfarne.

Theodore of Tarsus came to England to regularise the English Church, to encourage discipline and bring order after the manner of the Western Church. But his heart melted when he met Chad. He had rarely seen such monastic humility and grace, and a willingness to serve, wherever called or sent. Theodore was faced with a form of genuine transparent Christianity, even if Chad's orders and traditions were Irish and British; and not given by the Pope.

There's a beautifully illustrated book called *'Britain's Holiest Places'* by Nick Mayhew Smith, a Reader from South West London, which I can heartily recommend. I think he has something very useful to say:

‘What seems most striking, given the Church’s subsequent history of dispute resolution, is the respectful way in which difference was handled, before, during and afterwards (after the Synod of Whitby). There were no excommunications, no charges of heresy, no trials, and no fighting. There is no record of someone being attacked or killed because of the Celtic/Roman dispute, which went on for nearly 70 years before the Synod, and centuries after.

As church governance goes it was an impressive and respectful exercise. I can’t help but wonder if St Hilda’s presence helped keep tempers and egos in check. She was especially keen on the maintenance of peace and charity, according to Bede. (He writes), Because of her wonderful devotion and grace, all who knew her called her Mother’.

Yes, as we heard, even Wilfrid of the eloquent aggressive rhetoric and the curling lip, drew back and sort of apologised. Perhaps he’d caught Hilda’s eye, or the King’s, but he knew when he had gone too far and pulled back.

We are ministers and disciples first of all in the Church of God, not the Church of England, or of Rome, or of Geneva. Godliness comes before churchliness. Reconciliation rather than self-justification is a primary building block. Our key words are such as grace, agape, charity, forgiveness and thankfulness. To be fair to Paul, whom I have criticised, we have that marvellous list of fruits of the Spirit, also from Galatians: ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control’.

We heard how the heart of Jesus melted to the Samaritan leper who came back to give thanks for healing. And in our religious dialogue there is something more important than being right or winning the argument. There are deeper truths, based on Christ’s mercy and on a living hope, even when our faith is tested by fire.

We are called, in the words of St Peter, to rejoice with an indescribable joy in what God has done for us in Christ, not in what the General Synod may or may not do.

We live by the healing, saving grace of God, we pray for the healing of nations and Churches, and we pray for our own healing; thanking God for what he has already done for us, even before we ask.