

A Miscellany of Scottish Saints

In early autumn I asked members of the Archaeology and Heritage Group if they would like to research and write 200 - 300 words about a chosen Scottish Saint. We had intended it as a topic for 2021-22 but as our group is primarily outings to places of interest, it is unlikely we will be doing this soon.

Members responded with enthusiasm. Some of the articles are shorter and some longer than 300 words.

The results have now been collated and we hope you enjoy reading about them.

The contributors were:

Brian Tait, Adelaide Dalling, Kathleen Marshall, Margaret Hunter Chris Atkinson, Peggy Ferguson, Liz Johnson, Raymond Johnson

Putting Scottish Saints in Perspective

The cult of the Saints originated at the time of the early church. Important figures such as Peter, Paul and Stephen were venerated as were the trials and deaths of the first martyrs such as Perpetua. It needs to be remembered Christianity was initially a minority religion and martyrs literally died for not renouncing their beliefs. Saint meant “the faithful” in the 3rd century AD. Some of their images are represented in the catacombs in Rome. There were three different types of Saints i.e. martyrs as mentioned, universal church figures like St Peter and St Andrew and local Saints whose reputation grew locally from perceived miracles and acts of kindness. We have many examples in Scotland of local Saints and their places like St Fillan’s cave in Pittenweem.

As Christianity spread to western Europe the definition of Saint became broader and encompassed some pagan behaviours to encourage people to believe. Saints’ relics, tombs, places associated with them, symbols to represent them all developed. The keys to kingdom of heaven are St Peter’s attribute. Saints were worshipped to as the “intercessors” between man and God - hence the development of Saints for individual peoples’ names or patrons. Paintings were made showing Saints most commonly with the Virgin and Child, the patron and the name Saint of the patron was also represented.

Churches were built near martyr tombs. The Papacy began to canonise Saints from the thirteenth century. Originally it was just by popular acclaim and this was route to becoming a Saint still happens to this day. Queen Margaret was canonised in 1250 and her remains ceremonially transferred to Dunfermline Abbey. The period 1100 to 1300 was the height of the cult of the Saints until the Reformation (reform) changed beliefs dramatically in the development of Protestantism and scepticism about the greed and venality of the Catholic church as it became known. It is estimated in Scotland 95% of idols, statues, paintings, precious books items were destroyed.

Ireland, Scotland and Anglo-Saxon England became Christianised at different times mainly because Roman soldiers and their families brought the new beliefs in the 3rd century onwards to Anglo Saxon England and parts of Scotland but not to Ireland, which was never occupied by the Romans. The Picts were Christianised by at least the 8th century. Ireland established a particular form of Christianity in the Celtic church, which had an emphasis on place, flowers, birds etc associated with individual Saints. Scotland was Christianised by Ninian and Columba who came from Ireland and Scottish people tended to venerate saints of Irish origin at this early period of the 6th century. St Andrew was venerated by the Pictish kings as early as the eighth century and became, of course, our patron Saint with a magnificent cathedral in St Andrews to which many pilgrims flocked. St Andrew was mythically believed to have come to Scotland or, alternatively, that some of his relics were brought here in the 4th century.

There were many activities associated with the centuries old cult of the Saints over the early Christian period until the Reformation. These were the establishment of monasteries, originally founded by ascetics in the deserts with similar motivations as the martyrs - St Jerome is often depicted in religious paintings in the desert with a lion, whom he has tamed, and from whose foot he has taken out a thorn. St Cuthbert spent time alone as a hermit on a bleak Farne island. The development of monasteries from barren outposts in the desert to rich and often corrupt institutions is another topic but Saints were associated with them in many ways. The Cistercian order was founded by St Benedict. Melrose Abbey came under the far reaches of the Cistercians. Another activity was pilgrimage. Place pilgrimage is fundamental to the Saints' cult as people sought physical proximity to a body or relics (there was a thriving trade in so called relics like Saints' fingers etc) in the belief that connecting with the Saint would bring help and blessing particularly from illness. St Cuthbert had a role like this. Pilgrimages developed with people travelling sometimes short but also huge

distances particularly to Rome. There were even pilgrim badges like modern day tourist stickers! The Saints' lives were written about from truth and fiction to sustain and promote their virtues for their followers. This genre of writing is called hagiography.

The aggressive Crusades between 1096 and 1271 were initiated and supported by the Roman church with the ultimately unsuccessful objective of recovering the Holy Land from Islamic rule. Many of the Crusaders undertook pilgrimages en route and the language of pilgrimage was used almost indistinguishably from Crusader language for much of the period.

So the cult of the Saints was core to Christian life for centuries and a great deal of medieval activity is explained in this context.

WILLIAM OF PERTH

William of Perth was born in Perth, the actual date unknown, and died at Rochester in 1201, while on a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

His feast day is on the twenty third of May, and he is the patron saint of adopted children.

Williams first trade was as a fisherman, then after he became a Christian, he started work as a baker. It is reported that he gave away one loaf in ten to the poor and needy. Some sources also claim that he was a well-to-do Burgher of Perth.

One day on attending mass he found a foundling on the steps of the chapel. William adopted the boy and called him David.

Years later when David was grown William took him on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. On the way he and David stopped for the night in Rochester. On leaving the next day, on the final leg of their long journey, David murdered William and left by the roadside.

A mad woman came across the body and placed a wreath of flowers on William's head. She then put the wreath on her own head and was returned to her right senses. This seems to have been the only miracle attributed to William of Perth.

Once William was declared a saint a hospital, for the treatment of infectious diseases, was built on the site of his death. Subsequently a small chapel, called Palmersdene, was built nearby. So many pilgrims visited the shrine that the stone steps leading to the chapel were worn away and were replaced by wooden ones. The shrine became so popular that it became a place of pilgrimage second only to Canterbury.

In Rochester the coat of arms of the Bishop has a Saint Andrew's Cross with a scallop shell at the centre of the Cross. Scallops were a symbol of pilgrimage

In Kinnoull, Perth there is a stained glass window showing the saint.

In Frindsbury Church, near Rochester, the saint is depicted in a wall painting.

A primary school in Perth is named after the saint.

The Life and Times of St. Cuthbert

651 - 687

Our knowledge of St Cuthbert was collated by the Venerable Bede in 720. Bede (673 - 735) was the first historian of the English people. Towards the end of the 7th century, about 10 years after Cuthbert`s death, a monk on Lindisfarne, who does not leave us his name, wrote down his memories of St Cuthbert. Bede used this monk`s recollections together with stories by people who had known Cuthbert in their youth, to write his historical account:

Cuthbert was born at Lauderdale in the Scottish Borders, but spent most of his life in Northumberland. When he was 16 he felt a very strong calling to the ministry and as a consequence he visited the Old monastery at Melrose. There he was met by the prior, Boisil and Eata, the abbot. Cuthbert was thereafter admitted to the monastery and joined the way of life of the brothers, in prayer, study and work outside in the fields. Some time after, a `yellow plague` swept across Europe killing half the population. The plague entered the monastery. Cuthbert became afflicted and almost died. While Cuthbert recovered, the prior, Boisil succumbed to the disease. It was now well recognised that Cuthbert had considerable leadership qualities and after Boisil`s death, Cuthbert was appointed prior. As prior he travelled widely visiting the populace in the remoter parts of the Borders. He came to know the people and the area very well often sleeping in the hills. His reputation as an inspiring spiritual teacher grew and grew until he became known in the region as `The Fire in the North`. He loved the sea and the coastal landscape and spent some time at the monastery of St. Ebba at Coldingham. At

this time he also made a journey to the north of Scotland to spread the Christian word, but his destiny lay further south. It was to Lindisfarne he was encouraged to go in the footsteps of St. Aidan who founded the Holy Island monastery in 635 and died the year Cuthbert was born in 651. As prior at Lindisfarne, Cuthbert became even more famous. His saintliness and healing powers were known far and wide. However, such were the demands placed upon him he found he had less time for prayer and reflection. He needed a retreat where he could be alone for a while and moved onto a very small island adjacent to Lindisfarne. This proved to be still too near to the monastery and he needed to move further away and be less accessible. As a consequence he moved on to the island of Inner Farne, far out to sea off the Northumberland coast. His period of solitude there did not last. A great Synod was convened by an Northumberland king (King Egfrith) and attended by The Archbishop of Canterbury, at which Cuthbert was unanimously elected as a Bishop of the Church. Cuthbert was at first unwilling to take on what he saw as an extra burden on himself, but he was persuaded and duly became Bishop of Lindisfarne. As Bishop he continued to travel widely preaching the Gospel and healing the sick. Eventually, feeling his life on earth was due to end, he returned to Inner Farne where he died in 687.

His body was taken back to Lindisfarne but removed to the mainland in later centuries to prevent being desecrated during Viking raids. Cuthbert was finally laid to rest in Durham Cathedral where his tomb is regularly visited by pilgrims to this day.

St Magnus

St Magnus was born in 1075 the son of Erland Thorfinnson, Earl of Orkney. Magnus served as Chamberlain to the King of Norway. The King took possession of the Orkney Islands in 1098. Magnus had gained a reputation for piety and gentleness. When the King of Norway led a raid on Anglesey, Wales, Magnus refused to fight and stayed on board his ship singing psalms. Later another King of Norway granted Magnus a share of the earldom of Orkney and he and his cousin Haakon ruled amicably from 1105 to 1114. Eventually the followers of the joint Earls had an agreement. The two sides met at an assembly on Orkney Mainland armed for battle. Instead a rendezvous was negotiated and the Earls agreed to meet on the island of Egilsey each bringing two ships. On April 1116 Magnus arrived with his two ships but his cousin brought eight ships . Magnus managed to escape and took refuge in the island church overnight. The following day he was captured and killed by Haakon's cook who struck him on the head with an axe. Before he died, legend says Magnus forgave his murderers. His body was buried in the church at Birsay and over the years several miracles were associated with him.

Saint Margaret

Margaret was born in 1045, a Saxon / Hungarian princess, daughter of Edward Atheling of England. She was a devout young women brought up in the pious court of Hungary. She first met Malcolm III, then an illiterate Celtic prince down at Wearmouth where the Normans were trying to eliminate the influence of the Saxon Church by indiscriminately slaughtering young and old. The princess and her Royal party were fleeing England and the Normans and perhaps were making for Europe when a storm drove them off course and onto the Northumberland coast. The princess and her entourage sought refuge in Scotland at the Royal House in Dunfermline where Malcolm was now King of Scots. Margaret and Malcolm were married shortly afterwards. This was a love match and a political match uniting the King of Scots with the Saxon line. Malcolm proved himself to be a loving, gentle and understanding spouse. Perhaps Margaret realised that this was an excellent opportunity to influence Malcolm and his people into accepting the Catholic Church - whatever her thoughts she accomplished her desire by her personal piety, political wisdom and ecclesiastical knowledge and down through 1,000 years her name is associated universally with good deeds for ordinary people and especially orphans.

Margaret died at Edinburgh Castle in 1093 shortly after hearing that Malcolm and her son Edward had been killed at the battle of Alnwick - the news brought to her by Edgar, another son. The family consisted of 6 sons, 3 of whom became Kings of Scotland: Edgar, Alexander and David. There were also 2 daughters one of whom married Henry I of England and became Queen Matilda.

Bibliography : E. S. Towill " Saints of Scotland "

A. Moffat " Scotland"

Ritchie`s Guide "Scotland`s Kings and Queens"

l miraculous events occurred around the church. Margaret was declared a Saint in 1123.

SAINT TRIDUANA

According to one web site Saint Triduana is *'one of the most venerated female saints of Scotland'*. She *'lived between the 4th and 8th centuries'* but *'almost no concrete details of this saint's life survive'*. The one fact we have is that her feast day is 8th October.

Saint Triduana (also known as Trodline, Tredwell or, in Norse, Tróllhaena) was born in Patras in Greece or in Colossae in Southern Anatolia, Turkey, in about 320. She became a nun and in 347 sailed with St Rule (also known as St Regulus) to St Andrews with holy relics - some bones of St Andrew (some say this is a fabrication used to promote St Andrew rather than St Columba as patron saint of Scotland by proving that St Andrew's connection with Scotland predated St Columba's). Triduana settled in Rescobie near Forfar close to the site of the later Restenneth Priory. Her beauty attracted the attention of King Nechtan of the Picts so, to cool his ardour, she tore out both her eyes and presented them to King Nechtan. If she was born in 320 this doesn't work as the first King Nechtan that we know of reigned from 456 to 480. This story, not unique, explains why early Christians believed she could cure all sorts of eye complaints and blindness. She then moves to Restalrig in Edinburgh where she spent the remainder of her life. The original parish church of Restalrig has been rebuilt but the 15th century St Triduana's Aisle, built on the orders of James III in 1477, can still be seen and archaeologists have found a well there which some claim is the holy well of St Triduana.

Apart from Restalrig parish church, Triduana is the patron saint of Kintradwell in Caithness while there are chapels dedicated to her at Ballachly (Caithness) and Loth (Sutherland). The second most important shrine associated with her is on Papa Westray (Orkney) where the ruins of an old chapel, known as St Tredwell's Chapel, can be seen. She is depicted on a stained glass window in St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall. There is also a medical practice in Edinburgh called St Triduana's!

Whatever the truth may be about the life of St Triduana, claims of cures of blindness at her shrines continued into the 18th century.

St Columba (Colum Cille), Abbot of Iona, c.521-97.

Colum Cille, whose name means 'dove of the church', was born around 521 or 522 into the powerful family of the Ui Neill, whose multi-part dynasty remained overlords of much of the north of Ireland throughout the early Middle Ages. He was the son of Feidlimid, grandson of Conall Gulban, who was the eponym of the Cenel Conaill kindred whose main territory was Co. Donegal. Despite his royal ancestry he seems to have been destined for the church from early on, as he was fostered with a priest. He studied with various masters in both Leinster and the north, and as deacon with Bishop Uinniau either at Clonard or Moville. In 561, a battle fought between his own Cenel Conaill and their southern relatives involved the churchman in some act of partisanship, and he was subsequently excommunicated at a synod, a verdict that was later reversed. Nonetheless, subsequent to this, in 563, he left Ireland for the west coast of Scotland, in 'pilgrimage for the love of Christ'.

He travelled with twelve companions in a wicker currach covered with leather and landed on the Kintyre Peninsula near Southend. Being still in sight of his native land he moved farther north up the west coast of Scotland to the island of Iona which had been made over to him by his kinsman Conall mac Comgaill King of Dal Riata.

There he established a series of monasteries, Hinba, Mag Luinge on Tiree, and others, with Iona as the mother house. As far as we can judge the component houses of this monastic archipelago had different functions: Hinba was partly for anchorites, those well skilled in monastic discipline who wished to move further up the ladder of perfection; Mag Luinge was partly for lay penitents. Iona itself would appear to have been large and bustling by the end of Colum Cille's life, with major buildings, agricultural compounds, and scriptoria, as well as church and dormitories. During his life at least one monastery back in Ireland was also established, that of Durrow, and Derry may have been founded by him as well.

Colum Cille thus became head of a monastic federation, or *familia*, which would last through the Middle Ages, with subsequent abbots of Iona, and, much later, Kells and then Derry taking the title *comarba Coluim Chille* (heir/successor of Colum Cille). Most of these abbots continued to be drawn from Colum Cille's own kindred, the Cenel Conaill.

Part of the *familia's* success may be due to Colum Cille's royal connections - for part of his abbacy, his cousins ruled the Ui Neill - but much of it must result from personal charisma. His *Life* written by his relative and successor St Adomnan, presents Colum Cille as a stern negotiator with kings, ordaining the king of de Riata, Aedan mac Gabrain, only after heavenly pressure, and facing down the wizards of the Pictish king, Bridei, son of Mailcon. Some of these depicted relationships may reflect those of later decades, when Iona had indeed achieved virtual ecclesiastical mastery over Dal Riata and Pictland. That Iona, not consistently headed by a bishop, had authority over the monasteries and bishops of the Gaelic and Pictish parts of Scotland was noted by Bede, but Iona should not be noted as typical in this regard of the Gaelic or 'Celtic' church - certainly Bede did not think it was. Rather its authority must have arisen from its productivity of the clerics who converted and ministered to these regions. It was certainly not the only monastery working in such a vein - we may note the likes of Lismore and Kingarth, and later Applecross but it was certainly the most prominent.

The main source of information about Columba's life is the *Vita Columbae* a hagiography written in the style of saints' lives, narratives that had become widespread throughout medieval Europe. In book two of the *Vita* is contained a story that has been interpreted as the first reference to the Loch Ness Monster. According to the author Adomnan, Columba came across a group of Picts burying a man who had been killed by the monster. Columba saves a swimmer from the

monster with the sign of the Cross and the imprecation, "Thou shalt go no further, nor touch the man; go back with all speed." The beast flees, terrified, to the amazement of the assembled Picts who glorified Columba's God. Whether or not this incident is true, Adomnan's text specifically states that the monster was swimming in the River Ness - the river flowing from the loch - rather than in Loch Ness itself.

Columba's cult as a saint was actively fostered by his community in the century after his death, with poetry written in his praise, and collection of traditions about his holiness, which resulted in the now lost *Liber de Virtutibus Sancti Columbae* of Cumme Find in the mid-7th century, and finally Adomnan's *Vita Sancti Columbae* at the end of the century. The latter gives a good impression of the cult in its early decades, with both criminals and kings turning to Columba in times of need. Most importantly, Oswald, king of Northumbria who had been raised in exile partly on or near Iona, seems to have regarded Colum Cille as a patron, and it was to Iona he turned for churchmen to help him re-Christianize his kingdom. Much later, in the 9th century, the Gaelic dynasty who took over Pictland espoused Colum Cille as their patron. Kenneth mac Alpin's establishment of Colum Cille's shrine at Dunkeld is significant, as is the later use of the name Mael Coluim ('servant of Columba') in the royal dynasty. Although other saints grew in importance in the 12th century, Colum Cille remained a potent Scottish saint, with a new Augustinian house at Inchcolm established then, and later, Colum Cille's relic-shrine, the *Breccbennach* or Monymusk reliquary, was carried before the victorious Scottish army at Bannockburn. In recent decades, Colum Cille has become something of an ecumenical saint, uniting both Catholic and Protestant in respect for him as an 'apostle of Scotland', and forming a means of dialogue between Scotland and Ireland on issues such as religion, heritage, and Gaelic enterprise.

Text taken mainly from *Oxford Companion to Scottish History, 2001*



The Breccbennach or Monymusk reliquary may be seen in Edinburgh at the National Museum of Scotland

SAINT NINIAN

Ninian is a Christian saint first mentioned in the 8th century as being an early missionary among the Pictish peoples of what is now Scotland.

Born: 360 AD, [Scotland](#)

Died: 432 AD, [Whithorn](#)

Feast: 16 September

Attributes: Episcopal, Bell of St. Ninian

Major shrine: [Whithorn Priory](#)

Structures: [Candida Casa](#)

What is St Ninian the patron saint of?

In Scotland, Ninian is also known as Ringan, and as Trynnian in Northern England. Ninian's major shrine was at Whithorn in Galloway, where he is associated with the Candida Casa (Latin for 'White House'). It is built with stone which is unusual for that time.

St Ninian was British and studied Christianity in Rome. He was acknowledged as Scotland's first saint. 10 miracles were attributed to St Ninian

Venerable Bede, Northumbrian monk, in his ecclesiastical history of the English People (731) mentions Ninian. The Celts and Southern Picts received the true faith by the preaching of St Ninian.

It was also an important place of worship for the Scots royal family. In the 14th Century it is said a dying King Robert the Bruce went there to pray for a cure from leprosy.

King James IV was devoted to St N beliefs. Many churches are dedicated to him throughout Scotland and his missionary work prepared the foundation for later efforts of St Columba and St Kentigern

In 2010 Pope Benedict XVI visited Scotland on 16 September where a St Ninians parade more than 1000 pipers took part to welcome him to the city.

St Ninian is buried at Whithorn.

Places of interest

St Ninian's Chapel was first erected in the 1100s for the benefit of both local worshippers and pilgrims to St Ninian's Shrine at Whithorn. The chapel we see today is a rebuild dating to about 1300.

It was one of several stopping-places for the pilgrims, including [Chapel Finian](#) and the [Laggangarn Standing Stones](#). Today, pilgrims are invited to add stones to a modern Witness Cairn on the field.

St Ninian's Cave

Tales of St Ninian describe an ideal image of a saint, taking himself off to be nearer to God in 'a place of terrible blackness'.

Tradition holds that this cave was a place of retreat for the saint, who's said to have been active in Dumfries and Galloway in the late AD 300s. It may well have also been a hermitage from the monastery at Whithorn. Alternative interpretations are as a chapel or stone-carving workshop.

The cave today is a lot smaller than it once was, due to successive rock falls. Today it's 7m long and 3m high, and almost 3m wide at the mouth.

Excavations in the cave in 1950 revealed internal stone walls and pavements, along with the disturbed and undated burials of an elderly adult and two children.

The carvings

Excavations in the 1880s and in 1950 also uncovered a collection of early medieval carved stones. There were 18 in total, most of them built into a post-medieval wall, others lying loose in the cave's interior or at its mouth.

The carved stones can now be viewed at [Whithorn Priory Museum](#).

Ten crosses were carved into the cave wall itself. Eight are Latin crosses, seven of which all take the same form. The remaining two are simple incised crosses with barred terminals.

The carved stones and crosses provide the only certain evidence for early medieval use of the cave.

St Ninian's Cave remains a place of pilgrimage for the Roman Catholic church, likely an unbroken tradition since the early medieval period.

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