



# Local Saints

## St Cuthman

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It is said that Cuthman was born about 681 A.D., probably at Chidham.

Diana Beale tells me St Cuthman actually set off from Cullimers Field at Cobnor, by the pond, with his mother in the wheelbarrow, to found Steyning Church (about 25 miles away). The name "Cullimers" is derived from Cuthman.

If this is so, his parents would have heard the preaching of St Wilfrid, the Apostle of Sussex (680-685), and no doubt became Christian.

The story of St. Cuthman is told in the Acta Sanctorum of the Bollandists (1658), from an anonymous source.

Cuthman was a shepherd, who after his father died, had to look after his crippled mother. They fell on hard times, and Cuthman was forced to beg from door to door. He set out from his home, perhaps at Chidham near Bosham, going eastwards, pushing his mother in a one-wheeled cart or wheelbarrow which he made. A rope from the handles over his shoulders took part of the weight. The rope broke. and he improvised a new one from withies. Some haymakers who were watching laughed at him, but a heavy rainstorm ruined their hay and taught them a lesson.

Cuthman decided that when the makeshift rope of withies gave way he would take it as a sign from God that he should stop at that place and build a church. It happened at the place we call Steyning His biographer gives us his prayer: "Father Almighty, you have brought my wanderings to an end; now enable me to begin this work. For who am I, Lord, that I should build a house to name? If I rely on myself, it will be of no avail, but it is you who will assist me. You have given me the desire to be a builder; make up for my lack of skill, and bring the work of building this holy house to its completion." After building a hut to accommodate his mother and himself, he set to work to build the church. The local people helped him, and those who did not found themselves in trouble. As the church neared completion, Cuthman had difficulty with a roof-beam. A stranger showed him how to fix it. When Cuthman asked his name, he replied "I am he in whose name you are building this church."

Did Wilfrid himself baptise the child Cuthman? Some authorities give him a date later than this, but at least it can be said that Cuthman's church was in existence in 857, for we know that King Ethelwulf was buried there in that year. Cuthman was venerated as a saint before the Norman Conquest, and Cuthman's name and exploits were not forgotten. There is a German engraving of him with his "cart" dated about 1450 and a choir seat carving at Ripon Cathedral dating from a few decades later. And at Chidham, where he was born, there was a Guild of St Cuthman, which was subject to a tax in 1522 under Henry VIII. Finally in 1658 the Bollandists transcribed and printed his Life, giving his feast day as February 8th.

### **Cuthman of Steyning, Hermit (2)** (also known as Cuthmann)

9th century. Among the ancient Anglo-Saxon saints was Cuthman, a native of Devon or Cornwall (judging by his name; some ancient documents seem to indicate that he was possibly born at Chidham near Bosham, c. 681), who spent his youth as a shepherd on the moors. A grey and weather-beaten stone high



among the heather is said to mark the spot where he used to sit, and around which he drew a wide circle in the gorse, outside which his sheep were not allowed to wander. When his father died and his mother was left poor, Cuthman proved himself a good son and worked hard for their joint livelihood, but when she fell sick he was unable to leave her and they became destitute.

Cuthman, at his wit's end, made a wooden two-wheeled barrow in which he laid his mother, and with its two handles supported by a rope round his neck, begged from door to door. But the dream of his life was to build a church, and though he had no idea how this could be done, he resolved to leave Cornwall with its bleak and windswept moors and travel eastward.

Putting his mother in the barrow along with their few belongings, he pushed it day after day across the breadth of England until he came to Steyning in West Sussex. There the rope which held the barrow broke, and this he took for a sign that it was here where he must settle. He prayed by the roadside: "O Almighty Father, who has brought my journey to an end, You know how poor I am, and a laborer from my youth, and of myself I can do nothing unless You succor me." Here by the River Adur, in a lonely and quiet spot among the Downs, he built a hut to shelter his mother, and then measured out the ground on which to build his church. The local people were kind to him; they watched him dig the foundations single-handedly, cut the timber and build the walls, and they provided two oxen to help him. One day, however the oxen strayed and were carried off by two youths who refused to return them, whereupon Cuthman was angry. "I need them not," he said, "to do my own work but to labor for God." and he yoked the two youths themselves to his cart to draw it. "It must be moved," he said, "and you must move it."

So Cuthman built a church and preached and stirred up the people. And there where he worked, he died, and was buried beside the river, and they called the place Saint Cuthman's Port, for the river in those days was navigable.

Cuthman's name occurs in several early medieval calendars and in the old Missal that was used by the English Saxons before the Norman conquest (kept in the monastery of Jumièges, in which a proper mass is assigned for his feast), a German martyrology clearly indicates a pre-Conquest cultus, and the church at Steyning seems to have been dedicated to him in the past. Saint Edward the Confessor gave the Steyning church to Fécamp, which monastery built a cell of monks on the site of his old wooden church and built a new one dedicated to his memory, although Cuthman's relics were translated to Fécamp. The information on Cuthman preserved there may contain some genuine material. The memory of this once forgotten saint was revived by Christopher Fry in his one-act play *The boy with a cart* (1939) (Attwater, Attwater2, Benedictines, Farmer, Gill, Husenbeth).

In art, Saint Cuthman is always shown among sheep because he was a shepherd of Steyning (Roeder). His feast is kept at most Benedictine monasteries in Normandy (Husenbeth).

## St Wilfrid (Walfridus, Willferder) of York

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Born in Ripon, Northumbria, 634; died at Oundle, in 709. Son of a thane, Saint Wilfrid joined the court of King Oswy of Northumbria when he was 13, and became a favorite of Queen Saint Eanfleda, who sent him to Lindisfarne for his education. There he became a monk during the Celtic régime. He studied in Canterbury under Saint Honorius and became an adherent of Roman liturgical practices.



Then he left England for Rome in 653-654 in the company of Saint Benet Biscop. After a year at Lyons, where he refused an offer to marry Bishop Saint Annemund's niece, he arrived in Rome, where he studied under Boniface, Pope Saint Martin's secretary. Wilfrid's studies here convinced him that his own Christian formation, rich in traditional learning and spirituality, was in some respects bereft of some important religious wealth.

He then spent three years at Lyons, where he received the tonsure, Roman instead of Celtic style, but escaped with his life when Annemund was murdered by Ebroin at Châlon-sur-Saône, because he was a foreigner.

He returned to England in about 660, he was appointed abbot of Ripon monastery where he introduced the Roman observance, and was asked by King Alcfrid of Deira to instruct his people in the Roman rite. When the monks at Ripon decided to return to their native Melrose rather than abandon their Celtic customs, Wilfrid was appointed abbot. He introduced the Roman usage and the rule of Saint Benedict to the monastery, was ordained, and was a leader in replacing Celtic practices with Roman in northern England.

The Synod of Whitby was convened at Saint Hilda's monastery at Saint Streaneschalch (Whitby) to determine the practices of the Church in England. A primary question was the dating of Easter, which had troubled many humble Christians in Britain because the Celtic and Roman churches differed in how the date was determined. King Oswy opened the synod by saying that all who serve the one God ought to observe one rule of life.

Bishop Saint Colman of Lindisfarne argued in favor of the Celtic way. He pointed out that they derived their method of calculating the date of Easter from Saint John. Saint Wilfrid countered: "Far be it from me to charge Saint John with foolishness." Then he added that the Roman method derived from Saint Peter.

When he concluded, King Oswy said, "I tell you, Peter is the guardian of the gates of heaven. Our Lord gave him the keys of the kingdom. I shall not contradict him. In everything I shall do my best to obey his commands. Otherwise, when I reach the gates of the kingdom of heaven, he who holds the keys may not agree to open up for me."

When the Roman party triumphed at the council held in 664, largely through his efforts, Alcfrid named him bishop of York, but since Wilfrid regarded the northern bishops who had refused to accept the decrees of Whitby as schismatic, he went to Compiègne, France, to be ordained.

Delayed until 666 in his return, he found that Saint Chad had been appointed bishop of York by King Oswy of Northumbria; rather than contest the election of Chad, Wilfrid returned to Ripon. But in 669 the new archbishop of Canterbury, Saint Theodore, ruled Chad's election irregular, removed him, and restored Wilfrid as bishop of York. He made a visitation of his entire diocese, restored his cathedral, and instituted Roman liturgical chant in all his churches.

Oswy was succeeded by King Egfrid, whom Wilfrid had alienated by encouraging Egfrid's wife, Saint Etheldreda, in refusing the king's marital rights and becoming a nun at Coldingham. At Egfrid's insistence, the metropolitan Theodore in 678 divided the see of York into four dioceses despite the objections of Wilfrid, who was deposed.

Wilfrid went to Rome to appeal the decision in 677—the first known appeal of an English bishop to Rome. He spent the winter in Friesland making converts, and when he arrived in Rome in 679 he was restored to his see by Pope Saint Agatho.



When Wilfrid returned to England in 680, Egfrid refused to accept the pope's order and imprisoned Wilfrid for nine months. When freed he went to Sussex. From Selsey he energetically evangelized the heathen South Saxons, converted practically all the inhabitants, and built a monastery at Selsey on land donated by King Ethelwalh.

On the death of Egfrid in battle in 685, Wilfrid met with Theodore, who asked his forgiveness for his actions in deposing him and ordaining the bishops of the newly formed dioceses in Wilfrid's cathedral at York.

In 686 Egfrid's successor, King Aldfrid, at Theodore's request, recalled Wilfrid and restored him to Ripon, but the peace lasted only five years. Aldfrid quarreled with Wilfrid and exiled him in 691. Wilfrid went to Mercia, where at the request of King Ethelred he administered the vacant see of Litchfield.

In 703 Theodore's successor, Saint Berhtwald, at Aldfrid's instigation, called a synod that ordered Wilfrid to resign his bishopric and retire to Ripon. When he still refused to accept the division of his see, he again went to Rome, where Pope John VI upheld him and ordered Berhtwald to call a synod clearing Wilfrid. Only when Aldfrid died in 705, repenting of his actions against Wilfrid, was a compromise worked out by which Wilfrid was appointed bishop of Hexham while Saint John of Beverly remained as bishop of York.

Wilfrid died at Saint Andrew's Monastery in Oundle, Northamptonshire, while on a visitation of monasteries he had founded in Mercia.

Saint Wilfrid was an outstanding figure of his time, a very able and courageous man, holding tenaciously to his convictions in spite of consequent embroilments with civil and ecclesiastical authorities. He was the first Englishman to carry a lawsuit to the Roman courts and was successful in helping to bring the discipline of the English church more into line with that of Rome and the continent. His vicissitudes and misfortunes have somewhat obscured his abilities as a missionary, not only among the South Saxons but also for a brief period in Friesland in 678-79; his preaching there may be taken as the starting point of the great English mission to the Germanic peoples on the European mainland (Attwater, Benedictines, Bentley, Colgrave, Delaney, Duckett, Encyclopedia, Webb).

In art, Wilfrid is presented as a bishop either (1) baptizing; (2) preaching; (3) landing from a ship and received by the king; or (4) engaged in theological disputation with his crozier near him and a lectern before him. Venerated at Ripon, Sompting (Sussex), and Frisia (Roeder).

## **St Wilfrid 2**

St. Wilfrid's first visit was unpremeditated; he was shipwrecked while returning from a visit to France, where his consecration had taken place in A.D. 665. His reception was so hostile that after getting safely away he decided to return at some future date and convert the Barbarians to more gentle ways. Not for fifteen years did his opportunity come. Then, despoiled of his northern bishopric, for Wilfrid was a turbulent Churchman, he came prepared, we must suppose, for the reception usually meted out to the saints in those days. The heathen Saxons, however, were now in a different mood, for "no rain had fallen in that province for three years before his arrival, wherefore a dreadful famine ensued which cruelly destroyed the people.... It is reported that very often, forty or fifty men, being spent with want, would go together to some precipice, or to the sea-shore, and there hand in hand perish by the fall, or be swallowed-up by the waves." (Ven. Bede.)



The efforts of the missionary saint met with success. The unprecedented sufferings of the people had been ignored by their tribal deities and the offer of a new faith was eagerly accepted. The King had been converted, possibly in secret, before this. The baptism of the leading chieftain was followed by the breaking of the terrible drought. The fruits of the woods came to feed the bodies of those who had accepted the food of the spirit, and "the King being made pious and gentle by God, granted him (Wilfrid) his own town in which he lived, for a bishop's see, with lands of 87 houses in Selesie afterwards added thereto, to the holy new evangelist and baptist who opened to him and all his people the way of everlasting life, and there he founded a monastery for a resting-place for his assembled brothers, which even to this day belongs to his servants." (Eddi's Life of Bishop Wilfrid.)

The monastery site was probably the same as that of the cathedral, now beneath the waves, about a mile east of the present Selsey church.