

My wife and I have recently walked St Cuthbert's Way from Melrose to Holy Island. It is 64 miles of beautiful Border countryside of rolling hills, rivers and woods. In the post-Brexit world it has been helpful to reflect on the life of this great Saint. Cuthbert lived in the 7th Century.

In that period, the Synod held in Whitby in 664 had far-reaching results for the church. The decision that the whole Church should use the Roman, rather than the Celtic calculation for Easter, expressed a desire for unity. It was a choice to be in line with most of Europe.

After the Roman ways had prevailed at Whitby, the Celts did not give up. They went back to Holy Island (also known as Lindisfarne) and continued their mission with humility and grace.

Meanwhile, Cuthbert was living quietly at Melrose while all these events were taking place, teaching and helping to run the monastery; going out in mission; continuing to preach and to heal.

He was then appointed as the Prior of Lindisfarne and was called in to help to reconcile the differences that still divided the community.

The Synod of Whitby had not resolved everything; there were still divisions over the 'Roman' and 'Celtic' practices.

Cuthbert knew he had to be a diplomat and avoid becoming angry with the dissenting brethren. He introduced a 'Rule of Life', taken from the best of the rules he knew, whether Roman or Celtic. Whenever a dispute among the monks about their way of life became overheated, Cuthbert would calmly rise from his chair and leave the room.

The next day he would return and ask the brethren to sort out their differences as if yesterday's troubles had never happened. If the argument again became overheated, Cuthbert would dissolve the meeting once more, and this would continue until a more peaceful settlement and agreement was found.

Throughout the area, Cuthbert became known as a healer and a man of God. The fame of his wisdom and holiness spread throughout the land.

Our journey with St Cuthbert made us richer. At one of the churches along the way we picked up a leaflet with prayers from Cheviot Churches, for visitors, pilgrims and seekers. It included:

"I pray for the health of this land
of beast and crop
for thoughtful care
that hill and vale, river and loch,
may continue to witness to your glory. Amen"

+Geoff