

March Reflection

During the month of March, we celebrate the Feast of St Chad, Patron of our Cathedral, our Parish Primary School and our Archdiocese.

We are grateful to Maura Fitzpatrick, parishioner and one of our Cathedral tour guides for this window into the life of our Patron Saint which we also share with Lichfield Cathedral

St Chad - pray for us!



St Chad

St. Chad was born in Northumbria in 638. He was the youngest of four brothers, all four of whom became priests and two, Chad and Cedd, became bishops. All four had been educated in Lindisfarne, an island just off the coast of Northumbria by Aidan, an Irish Celtic monk. Aidan had come from a Celtic monastery on Iona, a remote island off the west coast of Scotland, at the request of King Oswald, a Christian, who wanted the help of the monks to re-establish Christianity in Northumbria.

The first thing Aidan did was to set up a school for twelve boys, with the intention, or the hope, that these young Anglo Saxon boys would, in the fullness of time, become the successors of the Celtic monks in Northumbria. The school must have been interesting. Naturally, the monks spoke only Irish, and the boys, of course, spoke, their own language. In time they would all have learned both languages. The boys had to learn to read and write, but all writings available were written in Latin, so the boys would have learned Latin. They learned to recite the Psalms and the Gospels by rote, also in Latin. The daily liturgy, with the celebration of the Eucharist, would have been central to their lives. The boys would have had the example of the monks who lived austere, simple holy lives. Thus Chad and his brothers grew in learning and in holiness.

Chad was only a young teenager when he left Lindisfarne to study in Ireland. He may have been chosen to do this because he was very academic. He was accompanied by another student, Egbert, and they are said to have studied at Rathmelsigi one of monastic glories of Ireland. They would have studied Holy Scripture, the Irish language, together with rhetoric and other academic subjects, all to the very highest standard. It is also probable that they would have travelled around Ireland, on foot, going from one monastery to another, preaching as they went, and developing their own Celtic monastic spirituality as they travelled. This was the normal way of life of many students at that time.

Meanwhile, in a very remote place called Lastingham, near the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors, Chad's brother, Cedd, with the help of another of the four brothers, Cynebil, had established a monastery. In 664 Cedd died of the plague, and he had requested on his deathbed that Chad should succeed him as Abbott. So, Chad returned from Ireland. Life as Abbott of Lastingham might well have been Chad's ideal way of life, after all, everything in his life up to this time had been a preparation for life as a monk. However, it was not to be. Soon he was asked to become the Bishop of York, and later, in 669, to become Bishop of Mercia. The story is told that Archbishop Theodore, who had made the appointment, was concerned about Chad walking long distances, and gave him a horse. Chad explained to the Archbishop that this was a religious exercise of the monks, who walked in order to preach to fellow travellers. But the Archbishop insisted and it is said that he physically had to place Chad on the horse.

Chad's ministry in Lichfield was very fruitful. However, within three years, he died of the plague, on March 1672. Following his death many miracles were attributed to him. During the centuries that followed a great devotion spread, Many pilgrims walked from all over the county to visit his shrine. However, during the Reformation King Henry VIII sent his soldiers to Lichfield to attack the shrine. Some of the relics were saved, lost for many years, and then found in 1839. On 21 June 1841 they were carried in a ceremonial procession for the consecration of the new St Chad's Cathedral. The story of the relics is portrayed in the stained glass windows in St. Edward's Chapel.

Over the years, to mark his feast day, there have been processions of the relics through the streets of Birmingham, at times with thousands taking part. In 1940, for example, during the second world war, a silent procession of 2,000 men took place through the streets, The processions continued for some years, but because of changes in the city centre, and the ever increasing traffic, recent processions have been to the Cathedral's own grounds.

The relics are now venerated in a casket above the tabernacle above the High Altar of the Cathedral.