

August 1 - Ethelwold - the Saint of Wessex

St Ethelwold (c.912 - 84) did great things for the church at Winchester, which in those days was the principle town of Wessex.

St Ethelwold began as a simple monk eager to restore the Rule of Benedictine in England, a major reform for the church of the time. After serving at the abbey in Glastonbury, he was sent on to restore the old abbey at Abingdon. The king thought highly of him, and used him to teach his son, the future king, Edgar.

When in 963 Ethelwold became Bishop of Winchester, he replaced the cathedral canons with monks, thus founding the first monastic cathedral in the land. This was a uniquely English institution, which remained until the Reformation. The monastic reform quickly gained momentum: with the King's support, Ethelwold restored old monasteries such as Milton (Dorset), New Minster and Nunnaminster in Winchester, while new monasteries were founded and richly endowed at Peterborough (966), Ely (970) and Thorney (972).

Ethelwold was austere, able and dynamic. Under his leadership, the monks surpassed themselves in music, illumination and writing. When Ethelwold set the monks to work with the masons in the cathedral at Winchester, he built the most powerful organ of its time in England: it was played by two monks, and had 400 pipes and 36 bellows. In music, Ethelwold's Winchester had the distinction of producing the first English polyphony in the Winchester Troper.

Ethelwold's monasteries also produced a surpassing new style of illumination, and his school of vernacular writing was the most important of its time: with accurate, linguistically significant translations. A major event of his episcopate was the consecration of Winchester Cathedral in 980.

August 4 - Oswald – a king with faith, courage & humility



Many Christians have indulged in fantasies from time to time about doing something spectacular for God, which would be remembered for centuries afterwards. Oswald, who lived from 605 to 642AD, was in a position to do so. He was a King, but in those times such a title exposed him to danger as well as power. His father Aethelfrith was a great warrior who laid the foundations of the great kingdom of Northumbria. But Aethelfrith was killed by a rival, and Oswald was only twelve years old when he was driven into exile with his elder sister and two younger brothers. For their own safety, all were taken to Irish territory in the West of Scotland.

The three brothers were educated by the Christian monks on Iona. Meanwhile, warfare raged in Northumbria, and in due course the time came for Oswald to make a difficult decision. Should he remain in safety, or return to claim his kingdom? In 632 his older brother led an expedition there to sue for peace, but instead he was put to the sword. It was a time of broken dreams and bitter grief for the young Oswald, who must have spent many hours in prayer before he decided to risk his life by following his brother south.