



THE CHURCH OF SAINT CUTHBERT

EMBLETON

CUMBRIA



Pre-Norman Site Dedicated To

ST. CUTHBERT

OF

DURHAM

A Short History

By

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I L L U S T R A T I O N S

FRONT COVER:
The Pectoral Cross of St. Cuthbert

BACK COVER:
The Embleton Sword

In this church you will not find time-hallowed stonework. There are no ancient carvings to enthuse over. No brasses to rub. No effigies to contemplate.

But you will find yourself on a site that was hallowed long years ago by the love of a company of dedicated monks who rested here from their travail when carrying to safety the body of St. Cuthbert.

You will also, if you try, find something more abiding than the handiwork of man, which those monks left behind wherever they went - the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Take with you this peace and the blessing of our congregation.

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1. THE ANTIQUITY OF EMBLETON

Embleton was a Norman Manor but also existed as an organised community in pre-Norman times. There was in fact a flourishing Brigantian community even before the Roman invasion.

The name is probably derived from "Eanbald's tun", an old English name meaning a farmstead or land holding belonging to Eanbald. In pre-Norman times the valley of Embleton embraced several hamlets each of which consisted of a farm and a group of workers' cottages, mainly of wattle and daub construction.

The sites of some of these hamlets survive in local names and places such as Beckhouse, Highside, Shatton (old English "Sceat-tun" meaning a farm at a corner of land, or in a wood). Stanger is another site (old Norse "Stang-ra" meaning a boundary post) which was once described as Stanger Spa because of a strong mineral spring in the vicinity reputed to heal diseases of the skin. A crude stone axe head, pointed at each end, with a central shaft hole was found at Stanger in 1931. Another hamlet was sited around Stanley Hall, an ancient dwelling identifiable through documentary reference with the early fifteenth century and possibly the early thirteenth century, and still inhabited.

At the eastern end of the Vale of Embleton is Dubwath (from old Norse meaning a ford over a pool) and Setmurthy (old Norse "Saetr-Murdoc" meaning Murdoch's seat or high place).

These hamlets together with several others suggest the existence of a sizeable community.

More ancient still is the lakeside hillock of Castle How close to the Pheasant Inn, around the top of which may be seen ancient British earthworks, subsequently used by the Roman Army as an intermediate station. Roman weapons have been found in the vicinity.

In the Middle Ages Embleton was one of several places which had a fulling mill, indicative of a thriving woolen industry.

The prized relic of Embleton is unquestionably the renowned Embleton sword, a magnificent iron blade in a copper scabbard, decorated with coloured enamels. It is of Brigantian origin and speaks highly of their craftsmanship. The date of the sword has been put around the time of the Roman invasion. At first kept in the Keswick Museum it was subsequently purchased by the British Museum in whose safe keeping it remains.

2. SAINT CUTHBERT

There is a wealth of information about St. Cuthbert but for those visitors who are not familiar with his life the following very brief outline might be helpful;

Cuthbert - pet name Cuddy as in Cuddy's Crag - was born around the year 634. In 651 he became a monk at old Melrose Abbey which lay about 2½ miles east of the existing ruins. Six years later the Abbot Eata was given the additional charge of a new monastery at Ripon and took Cuthbert and others with him. Here, Cuthbert was appointed to the important office of Guestmaster. Subsequently a difference of opinion between Eata and King Althfrith, their patron, who wanted the monks to renounce the Celtic practices in favour of the more satisfactory Roman administration, caused Eata and his community to return to Melrose. A few months after their arrival the Prior Boisil died and Cuthbert was appointed to his place.

After the Council of Whitby in 663 Cuthbert, now 30 years of age, accepted the Roman customs and was transferred by Eata to be the Prior of Lindisfarne where he introduced the Columban rule although not without some opposition from his brethren. It is a point of historical interest that Cuthbert's insistence on a chapter of the rule being read every day led to the name

"Chapter" being given to an assembled body of clergy and their meeting place being called a Chapter House.

By example and practice, Cuthbert converted his brethren and earned from them, and from the neighbouring population, a respect to which was added genuine affection. Gradually, however, he withdrew from active life and in 676 retreated to the largest of the Farne Islands to lead a life of ascetic contemplation.

By now his fame had spread nationwide and he was visited frequently by people seeking spiritual comfort and needless to say, looking for the miraculous in regard to which history informs us, they were not disappointed.

Nevertheless, life, or God, did not permit Cuthbert to live long on Farne for in 685 he was prevailed upon to accept the Bishopric of Lindisfarne, which he did with great reluctance. It was, however, a short lived office. On the 20th of March in the year 687, worn by the frugal life he had led, Cuthbert died and was interred the same day in Lindisfarne.

3. SAINT CUTHBERT AT EMBLETON

St. Cuthbert's body lay in peace for 186 years. A Danish invasion in 793 caused disturbance without upheaval, but in 873 a massive invasion compelled the monks to leave the island taking with them the body of St. Cuthbert, the head of St. Oswald, together with the bones of St. Aidan and other bishops.

For the next seven years they wandered on both sides of the Border seeking refuge and a final resting place. By tradition, wherever they stayed for any length of time, they erected a chapel for their use and these chapels were dedicated to the honour of St. Cuthbert. Forty three chapels are said to have been dedicated in this manner, sixteen of them being within the boundaries of Cumbria.

Wessington, Prior of Durham from 1416 to 1446, cited by Monsignor Charles Eyre in his history of St. Cuthbert, confirms a tradition which identifies these sixteen chapels and among them are Embleton and Lorton. It should be noted that Graham and Collingwood (Note 1) hold Wessington to question on, for example, the grounds that there should be evidence of pre-Norman stonework in these chapels and that Embleton and Lorton were in countryside that was too wild. This overlooks, however, the use of perishable wattle and daub construction in the pre-Norman churches and that Embleton and Lorton offered precisely the type of country in which fugitive monks would wish to seek refuge, i.e. difficult but not impossible and populated with sympathetic communities. This latter point is emphasised in another ancient document which states that the monks "rested for some time in the mountain environed haven of Lorton and Embleton". Wessington's confirmation of the tradition must therefore stand firm as the only satisfactory explanation of the origin and distribution of the Cuthbert churches until some better argument shakes it.

By the year 883 the monks with their revered burden settled at Chester le Street. In 995 their successors moved to the site which is today known as Durham and the cathedral they erected there was sufficiently advanced by the year 999 for the body of St. Cuthbert to be interred in it.

It is a matter of local interest that St. Cuthbert made an annual visit to his friend Herbert the anchorite of Derwentwater (St. Herbert's Island). He is known to have preached locally on such occasions.

4. THE ANCIENT CHURCH AT EMBLETON

Reference is made to a church at Embleton around the year 1210 in a deed of gift from Odard, son of Adam de Crosstwat, to John, son of Sir Thomas de Irebi, in which the scope of the gift is defined as - "A piece of land in Embleton in Langfite, bounded thus: from the church land up to the great fence which surrounds the vill, and from

the fence to the upper spring, through the middle of the great marsh to Bircherhevd, and by the river of Bircherhevd to the aforesaid church....." (note 2)

There are traces of ancient foundations in the fields around the farm known as Brook House close to the southside of the church and an old well is still visible in the farmyard. If this is the site of the ancient village (vill) it places the site of the ancient church precisely where the present one is since the boundary defined in the deed from Odard would follow a line from the present church to Brook House farm, up Tom Rudd Beck to the source, then across Wythop Moss to Wythop Beck, then down Wythop Beck and back to the church, thus encompassing Ling Fell.

A study of dates assigned to the oldest known parts of the ancient churches in Cumbria shows that 90% of them were built or rebuilt during the 12th century. These churches were normally of sandstone construction, the favourite material of the Norman masons, but if evidence of this type of stonework exists at Embleton it has been masked by cement facing and must await the revelation afforded by future repair work. It is most likely that the Norman church was built around the same time as others in the area, i.e. about 1130. The 1884 church (section 6) and the 1806 church (section 5) are built on the foundation of the church which preceded both and it is probable that this remains the original Norman plan except perhaps for the chancel area.

Any church of pre-Norman days could very likely have been of wattle and daub construction although the use of random stonework cannot be ruled out. Whether a church existed as early as this is a matter for speculation but if Prior Wessington is accepted as a reliable commentator, there are reasonable grounds to infer that a church, however crudely built, could have been at Embleton as far back as c.880.

The early church at Embleton was administered from the mother church at Brigham, but consequent upon the

creation of the See of Chester on August the 4th 1541, all Cumbrian churches south of the River Derwent were absorbed into the Archdeanery of Richmond. This situation existed until 1856 when the areas concerned were joined into the Carlisle Diocese.

5. THE 1806 CHURCH

By the year 1806 the church had become so dilapidated that the incumbent, the Reverend Lancaster Dodgson found it impracticable to conduct services in it. He therefore embarked on a scheme for rebuilding but met with a low response, notwithstanding a population of around 310, of which 103 were registered churchgoers.

The reconstructed church was, in consequence, of very poor appearance. It used the shell of the former one but had a low flat ceiling, square timber windows, ugly box pews and bell tower. There was no attempt at decoration except for a conventional painting of the Royal Arms, subsequently lost. The pews, pulpit, desks and general timberwork were of inferior character. The total cost was £428-8s-4d. This church leaked and creaked for 78 years.

6. THE 1884 (PRESENT) CHURCH.

In 1884 it was again found necessary to re-build the church and the incumbent at this time, the Reverend William Sampson Davies launched an appeal. Once again the response fell short of hopes but Mr. Davies used his private purse to bring the fund to a satisfactory level. Even so, the fund did not stretch to the complete rebuild he desired, although this might prove a blessing in disguise if repair work ever reveals ancient stonework.

The previous church was completely dismantled, except for the walls which were in good condition, and the building reconstructed as it is seen today. The resultant structure is sturdy and robust except for a troublesome junction between the roof and the bell tower. The internal woodwork of resinous pine has stood the test of

time. The south porch was an additional feature to the old ground plan. It should be noted that the date stone from the 1806 church appears over the bell tower doorway where it gives an erroneous impression of the date of the present structure. The cost of this rebuild was £703-8s-5d.

The interior of the church is comparatively unrewarding in its general interest but the following features may be noted:-

The vestry was added to commemorate the Reverend Edward Bellingham, curate and vicar from 1897 to 1946. The previous vestry was contained in the part of the old out-building formerly used as a hearse house.

The font has the traditional eight sides (the figure 8 being symbolic of the Resurrection and Eternity). The faded inscription reads "In memory of William and Isabella Winder 1851 - 1853". The dates are the dates of the deaths of the two people.

Of the several wall plaques two may be pointed out. One is the plaque on the right hand side of the sanctuary dedicated primarily to Joseph Fisher of East House. Its position above the credence table is appropriate because the lady referred to as his wife is the Anne Fisher who donated the handsome communion plate referred to in Section 7.

The other plaque, on the south wall, commemorating the Reverend W.S. Davies, deserves mention because this vicar gave generously from his private purse towards the rebuild of the present church and to the rebuild of the former vicarage.

The stained glass window in the east wall and the small one in the west wall, together with the mosaic reredos, were installed in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee and to commemorate Joseph and Mary Hutchison and their three daughters Margaret, Elizabeth and Ann. The

cost of this work was £100 paid for by the families. The predominant motif on the reredos depicts the pectoral cross of St. Cuthbert.

The tabloids showing the ten commandments are of unknown date but are mentioned in an inventory of 1710. They are very likely the original tabloids installed in 1664 in which year it became compulsory to display visibly a copy of the ten commandments.

In the sanctuary a flower vase perpetuates the memory of the Reverend F.J. Alsop, Vicar from 1960 - 1963.

The Estey organ was purchased in 1895 at a cost of £22.10s.

7. CHURCH PLATE & REGISTERS

No truly ancient plate has survived the ravages of time or the covetous hands of man. The earliest known mention of anything appears in a nationwide survey made in 1552 with the purpose of leaving only the bare essentials and appropriating all else for the Treasury. In this inventory St. Cuthbert's is shown as having "one chales of silver, two belles, two litill belles, one pare sensers, one pix". Alas! these too faded from the scene.

Happily, by the generosity of the local lady referred to above, the church today is well endowed with a handsome silver chalice (capacity half a pint), a patten and a flagon (capacity 4 pints) all of which are inscribed as "The gift of Mrs. Anne Fisher, widow, of East House 1790."

There is also a small silver chalice engraved "in memory of F.J. Alsop, Vicar 1960-63" and a matching but undedicated patten.

The altar brass consists of a Calvary cross and matching candlesticks engraved "In memory of Creighton J. Nesbitt 1862-1947"

There are two surviving ancient registers covering St. Cuthbert's church and the Wythop churches of Kelsick old church (now a ruin) and St. Margaret's new church. These registers commence in the year 1626.

The Church Council regret that nowadays no objects of historical value can be displayed outside Service times.

8. THE OUTBUILDING & CHURCHYARD

The exact date of the outbuilding is not known but it was in existence before 1771. The ground floor accommodated a hearse house subsequently modified to make a vestry, and stabling for two horses. The stabling has remained unaltered. Upstairs was a Sunday school room, still used for that purpose, inter alia.

The churchyard has been extended over the years and has always been well protected. A report in 1676 states "Our chapel is well fenced for keeping out swine etc." And not only were the swine kept out for the report continues "Nor any excommunicate person buried there."

We may be grateful for the good fencing because it has protected the lime trees which were planted in 1806 by the Reverend Lancaster Dodgson.

The oldest headstones are on the north and south side of the Church. One burial is of note - on the north side by the wall a pathetic headstone marks the body of Ann Sewell, a 26 year old servant girl, murdered by George Cass, a fellow servant, on March 26th 1860. The stone was erected by public subscription.

Another body that might have been interred around 1536-37 was that of John Jackson who was executed at Carlisle for taking part in the Pilgrimage of Grace.

The churchyard railings have been removed but the main gate fitted in 1895 survives.

9. CLERGY

In its early days, St. Cuthbert's church was one of several administered by itinerent clergy from the mother church at Brigham. In 1541 when the churches were brought under the Diocese of Chester, standing appointments began to be made, mainly from the sister church at Lorton but occasionally from Brigham.

DIOCESE OF CHESTER 1541

1548	First curate - name unknown
1674	George Messenger
1718	William Lancaster
1743	Leonard Rumney
1744	Thomas Fisher
1778	Joseph Gilbanks
1779	Joseph Burnyeat
1780	Oswald Head
1782	Humphrey Drape
1786	Thomas Irvin
1790	James Bell
1791	Thomas Brownrigg
1792	William Wright
1792 - 1796	Osborn Littledale
1798	Joseph L. Thornthwaite
1800	John Cape Atty
1803	Lancaster Dodgson M.A.
1812	William Pattinson
1813 - 1814	Samuel Sherwen
1815	George Coventry M.A.
1817	Anthony Watson
1819	John Messenger
1821	Joseph Lowther

DIOCESE OF CARLISLE 1856

(1841)- 1857	Henry Kitchin M.A.
1858 - 1860	Andrew B. Clarke
1861 - 1869	A.R. Perring
1870	R.S. Deane
1875 - 1899	W. Sampson Davies M.A.

1897 - 1946	Edward Bellingham
1947 - 1954	J.W. Humphreys
1954 - 1960	F.H. Robbs
1960 - 1963	F. J. Alsop
1965 - 1970	H.L.A. Lucas
1971 - 1975	H.L.A. Lucas
1977 - 1986	J.L.R. Crawley M.A. Rector*
1977 -	C.S. Fuller Vicar*
1986 -	S. Willcox B.A. Rector*

*The Parish of Cockermouth with Embleton & Wythop.

Several of the earlier appointments were held conjointly with Lorton.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Transactions: The Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian & Archeological Society.

The History of St. Cuthbert., Monsignor Charles Eyre (1858).

Cumbria County Council Archives Dept.

The British Museum for permission to reproduce the picture of the Embleton Sword.

Prelates and people of the Lake counties - A history of the Diocese of Carlisle 1133-1933. C.M. Lowther Bouch.

The author also expresses thanks to Mrs. Ursula Moss and Mrs. Joyce Scott for information supplied and to Mr. J.P. Godwin.

NOTES

1. Transactions, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archeological Society.

2. Cumbria County Council Archives Dept.- Embleton Parish Bundle reference D/Stan/1 circa 1210.

THE MIRACULOUS PRESERVATION OF THE BODY OF ST. CUTHBERT.

The remarkable state of preservation of the body of St. Cuthbert for several hundred years is a well known phenomenon. There was no decay during the long period and the joints remained completely flexible. Three inspections made in 698, 1104 and 1537, disclosed a body in an apparently fresh state.

It was, therefore, of considerable local interest when in 1984, the discovery was made at St. Bees church, of the body of Sir John Harrington in a similar state of preservation after some 700 years.

While this discovery might to some extent detract from the miraculous aspect of the Cuthbert preservation, it does on the other hand silence the critics of the Cuthbert legend and lends credence to the reliability of the ancient historians.

*Printed by Community Industry,
Distington Complex,
Toll Bar, Distington,
Workington,
Cumbria*