

**FACT SHEET 340****ST OSWALD AND ST OSWALD****By Paul Spillane****The Steward, No. 32, 2024**

Earlier this year a group of pilgrims from St Peter and St Oswald's Church, Sheffield, came to the Minster. It was appropriate that they should start their visit by being welcomed by the Dean in St Oswald's Chapel, but the Minster's St Oswald was not the same as that of our visitors.

Our visitors' St Oswald lived from 605 to 642. In 616, Edwin seized the throne of Northumbria and Oswald, who was heir to this kingdom, fled to the monastic settlement on the island of Iona in Scotland. There he was converted to Christianity and baptised. Edwin married Ethelburga, a princess of Kent, who brought the missionary Paulinus to Northumbria.

According to folklore, Paulinus baptised believers in the River Trent and founded a church in Southwell. He went on to become the first Bishop of York. Edwin and many of his court were baptised in 627. Five years later, King Cadwallon of Wales and the pagan King Penda of Mercia invaded Northumbria and killed Edwin in battle. Queen Ethelburga and Paulinus escaped to the south and Christianity was temporarily suppressed in the north.

In 633, Oswald returned from exile to claim the throne. Though vastly outnumbered, his small army comprehensively defeated Cadwallon. Oswald was keen to convert his people to Christianity. At his invitation, St Aidan led a group of Irish monks from Iona to found a monastery and missionary bishopric for the kingdom at Lindisfarne. In 642 King Penda defeated and killed Oswald in battle in Shropshire. Oswald was venerated as a martyr of the Northumbrian church.

When Nostell Priory, near Wakefield, was founded in the early 12th century it was dedicated to "blessed Oswald, king and martyr". The priory was surrendered to Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. It is now a Palladian stately home, dating from 1733. It is the seat of the 6th Lord St Oswald and is owned by the National Trust.

There are echoes of the Northumbrian St Oswald at three places in the Minster. Firstly, three of the five carved figures on the pulpit represent St Paulinus, King Edwin, and Queen Ethelburga. Secondly, Paulinus is memorialised in the nave window nearest the font.

Thirdly, the red altar frontal in St Oswald's Chapel which was designed by John Piper features in its centre a black raven since the artist's research had revealed that St Oswald reputedly had a pet raven. Unfortunately, however, it was our visitors' St Oswald, not the Minster's, who owned the raven, so this striking bird is really an impostor.

This brings us to the Minster's 'St Oswald of York'. Born in about 925, he died on 29th February, 992. He was descended from pagan Danes who had invaded England in the ninth century and settled in the east and north of this country, the region that came to be known as the Danelaw. Oswald was born into a family of newly baptised wealthy Danish Christians. He rose to become Bishop of Worcester in 961 and transferred to the Archbishopric of York in 972, retaining the see of Worcester. He founded or ordered the establishment of several monasteries in England.

His predecessor but one at York was his kinsman Oskytel, who was Archbishop from 958 to 971 and who plays a key part in the history of the Minster. In about 956 King Eadwig granted

a charter to Oskytel, giving him the Manor of Southwell and surrounding lands. Oskytel established the Minster here, as an excellent place from which to administer the southern part of his province. Oswald of York may have contributed to the developing fortunes of the Minster. He appears to be most famously known for having died after washing the feet of the faithful in Worcester Cathedral on Maundy Thursday in 992.



*St Oswald with raven by  
Sir Edward Coley  
Burne-Jones Bt, 1875,  
in The Tate Gallery, London.*