

Saints connected with Wimborne

Saint Lioba

St Lioba was born around 710AD as the only child of elderly parents and was named Thrutgeba Lioba (Lioba means beloved). Her mother promised that her child would be dedicated to the service of God and so Lioba entered the abbey at **Wimborne** as a child and then eventually became a nun. She was incredibly gifted and Abbess Tetta gave her every opportunity to study (unusual in those days) and the young woman became a wise scholar and was popular with everyone.

She was a relative of St Boniface, apostle to the Germans, and Lioba wrote to him expressing an interest in his missionary work. They corresponded for twenty years before he invited her to come to Germany and establish monasteries for women there. She became abbess of the monastery at Bischofsheim, leading a large number of women in the spiritual life as well as the practical details of earning a living as a community. She was known for her wisdom and kindness, moderation and compassion, hospitality and humility. She welcomed and gave advice to visitors including bishops who came to seek her counsel. In turn, she was the only woman allowed to enter men's monasteries to participate in



consultations with church leaders on issues related to the rule of monasteries. Under her advice and guidance, nuns from her abbey became leaders of other monasteries, continuing the work of evangelization begun by St Boniface.

She lived approximately 72 years and died on 28th September 782, now celebrated as her feast day. Miracles were attributed to her both during her lifetime and following her death. In fact, her remains were moved at least twice to protect them after miracles were reported at the grave sites. Eventually, they were buried in a church in Fulda in the German state of Hesse.

St Lioba did not neglect the practical necessities of life in community or of the administration of large enterprises. She was well-loved and respected by both ordinary folk and powerful leaders. Not a bad role model for today!

Saint Cuthburga

St. Cuthburga is venerated as the foundress of the famous double monastery in **Wimborne**. She was the daughter, wife and mother of kings. She was the sister of Ine, the King of Wessex and was married to the Northumbrian king Aldfrith. She left her husband to become a nun under St. Hildelitha at Barking, Essex. Sometime after 705, Cuthburga and her sister St. Cwenburga, founded the double-monastery at **Wimborne**.

This monastery, founded in honour of the Mother of God, was famous for the zeal of the nuns in the study of sacred and classic literature. As was the case with other double monasteries, it was predominantly a convent and was ruled by an abbess rather than an abbot. It served as a very important centre that trained many missionaries who travelled to Germany to work with St. Boniface and to evangelize the local inhabitants and build monasteries. The most striking aspect of this story is that most of those heroic missionaries were saintly women, highly cultured and educated with brave spirits, who did not fear the pagans in Germany. They would fell trees, build churches and monastery complexes, were in contact with local populaces, educating, instructing them in the faith and teaching them various skills.

Her biographers describe St. Cuthburga as very austere to herself, but kind to others and assiduous in fasting, prayer and spiritual life. Few facts from St. Cuthburga's abbacy survive, but we can judge it by its accomplishments, for **Wimborne** produced a host of saintly women, both abbesses and missionaries to foreign lands. Before her death, St. Cuthburga fell seriously ill and while the sisters were praying for her recovery, she revealed to them that it was the will of God for her to die. Her relics were buried on the north side of the presbytery and then later transferred to the east end of the High Altar of the Minster. Many miracles occurred at her tomb. The lame regained the ability to walk, sight was restored to the blind and hearing to the deaf. Her name can be found in a late Saxon litany.



St. Aldhelm of Sherborne addressed his *De Laude Virginitatis* (the prose *De Virginitate*), a Latin treatise on virginity, to the nuns of Barking (before 705), with St. Cuthburga among them. St. Cuthburga's veneration was not limited to **Wimborne**. In the late medieval period she was venerated at Thelsford Priory in Warwickshire, where a commissioner of Henry VIII during the Reformation came across a devotional image of the "Maiden Cuthburga" in 1538.

It is unknown whether St. Cuthburga and Aldfrith had children. Some historians conjecture that King Osred of Northumbria (705-716), Aldfrith's son, was born by the saint, though his mother may have been Aldfrith's next wife. At least St. Cuthburga did not act as regent after Aldfrith's death when his son was eight. St. Cuthburga had a brother named Ingild who was an ancestor of St. Alfred the Great.

St. Cuthburga's shrine was destroyed during the Reformation, and the same fate befell the silver reliquary with her head. She died on 31st August 725 which date is now kept as her feast day.