

Local heritage - Fishlake St Cuthbert – Fishlake in South Yorkshire

Tucked away close to the tidal river Don and in the centre of Fishlake village is a very fine old 12thC Church dedicated to St. Cuthbert. The Grade I listed Major Parish Church is an important part of Doncaster's local heritage and dates from circa 1170. It is open to visitors every day of the year.

With the support of the Chapter of Durham Cathedral, in March this year Fishlake St Cuthbert is holding an exhibition focused on the life of St. Cuthbert. The exhibition will include a replica of St Cuthbert's famous wooden coffin, a copy of the original now on permanent display in Durham Cathedral. With many high-quality images and illustrations of the treasures found in the Saint's coffin, sculpture by Fenwick Lawson, and connections to the history of Lindisfarne, including the Lindisfarne Gospels, the exhibition promises to appeal to both young and old.

Early historical accounts make it clear that the area near the Church known as the Fishlake '*Fysshlake Landing*' and '*Cuthbertehaven*' was said to be the most southerly place at which St Cuthbert's coffin was, sometime in the 9th Century, allegedly carried by faithful monks from the boat bearing him to a temporary resting place of safety from the then current Viking raids on Christian communities in the north-east of England. "The Journey" as it is known, allegedly included places right across the north of England stretching from Lindisfarne Island in Northumberland to Fishlake in South Yorkshire.

The earliest known written record of this event was a document compiled by Prior Wessington in circa 1416, in his own handwriting, in which he recorded the journeys of St Cuthbert's coffin over a period of seven years, which included visits to 'Pesholme', 'Fysshlake' and 'Acworth'. The document was originally recorded as being placed over the door of the choir in the monastery of Durham and its whereabouts today is unknown.

Nobody today can be certain that the body of the Saint actually visited these places but for some reason the record was made and there is every certainty that Eardulf and his companions did wander across a large area of the land encompassed between the Humber and Tweed in the 'Northumbria' of those times. Whatever happened, something took place that gave rise to the legend of the visit of the Saint's coffin to the settlement of 'Fysshlake' or '*Fiscelac*', the name given to the village as recorded in the Domesday Book.

In the Registry of the Dean and Chapter of Durham, there is a document dated 22nd September 1438 in which it records that in an "*Agreement between the Prior and Convent of Durham, and Richard Wryghte of Fysshlake, yoman, the latter becomes a tenant under that body of a piece of ground forming a portion of the garden of the Rectory of Fysshlake*" and refers specifically to "*Cuthbertehaven*" A copy of the document will form part of the exhibition.

'*Fiscelac*' was part of lands owned by the de Warenne family, granted by the Conqueror post 1066 to William de Warenne as part of his rewards for fighting at the Battle of Hastings. To give context, the 'Fee of Conisborough' was a Royal Manor comprising 28 townships which extended over a wide area of South Yorkshire, certainly past Conisborough and along the river Don to Hatfield, and included the large area of land then known as Hatfield Chase.

As would have been natural for these times, if the alleged visitation of the monks carrying St Cuthbert's coffin on to dry land at the Fishlake Landing actually happened, the site became famous. Thus, apparently having become such an important historical site, it helps to understand why the

establishment of a significant church at Fishlake dedicated to St. Cuthbert was so well supported by the landowners, the de-Warenne family.

Fishlake Church, already famous for its remarkable south doorway architecture, has been a Viking trading settlement, an inland port of the river Don, a centre of shipbuilding and agriculture, and now is opening up its interesting heritage to a wider audience.

The exhibition opens on March 18th at 10:00 AM and will be open daily from 10:00AM to 5:00PM closing at 5:00PM on Saturday 24th. Admission charges in support of the restoration of the Church apply; Adults £4.00; Children £2.00, school parties and other groups also welcome. A programme of daily events including evening lectures will be announced during January and for more information please visit the website, see...<http://www.fishlakestcuthbert.org.uk>

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